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

AMBASSADOR JAMES F. COLLINS

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy
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INTERVIEW PART II

Q: When we left off, the coup is over. Robert Strauss has arrived and had initial meetings with Gorbachev. We are now through the initial immediate post coup days. Let's pick up from where Strauss returns in mid September. You mentioned when we left off that there was a somewhat eventful first couple of weeks after he returned.

COLLINS: Yes, well we are going to be talking now about the last four plus months of the Soviet Union, August to December, 1991. It was a time of strategic decisions, major U.S. programs in support of the Soviet people, and the emergence of a new political and economic order for Eurasia.

Let's recall that Ambassador Strauss had come out to Moscow during the coup. He arrived on August 22, the last day of the putsch as an "envoy". Washington had not wanted to send him as ambassador to an uncertain regime and his arrival as we discussed was somewhat peculiar and strained. Afterward with Gorbachev back in Moscow and reinstalled as President of the USSR, Strauss became ambassador and as we described earlier presented his credentials, had his first lengthy talk with Gorbachev and then stayed on for a couple of weeks getting a feel for the lay of the land, what was emerging immediately after the coup, and who was who in the new post-coup world of Moscow He then returned to Washington to report to Bush and Baker and not incidentally to prepare in a more organized fashion for his move to Post. I, in turn, again took up responsibilities as charge until his return.

Strauss arrived with his wife Helen and his assistant Vera Murray on the morning of September 28th and this time had a warm official Embassy welcome and arrival at Spaso House to settle in. I recall him noting to me at the time that Spaso was significantly more appealing than the "basement" I had put him in the last time he was in town.

I was relieved to have the mission back to something like normal and looked forward to getting back to what passed as my normal job. That evening, however, did not quite allow the easy transition I anticipated. About 9:00 p.m. I awoke with chest pain like nothing I had experienced before. I called the embassy doctor Paul Grundy, who met me at the embassy clinic. His exam on the spot produced good and bad news. I had no heart problem, he said, but I did have a collapsed lung that would require immediate corrective

surgery. Fortunately, just days earlier Grundy had arranged with the Mecherinskiy Clinic, a part of the Kremlin medical system, to use the facility for American citizens requiring emergency treatment. And so, I was put in an ambulance and arrived at the clinic as their first American emergency patient.

I was admitted to the ICU, and we completed the surgery - insertion of a tube into the chest - in a matter of minutes, an unexceptional procedure with the exception of yours truly, the patient, having to interpret for the American and Russian doctors who had no common language. I then spent a quiet night and awoke well rested, without any further pain, but news that my lung had somehow become a major issue for both Washington and Moscow. In Moscow I hear that Strauss, not pleased that his DCM had ended up in hospital on the first day he hoped to have my support, in vintage Straussian fashion phoned Gorbachev to inform him that his "man" was in hospital and he expected nothing would happen to him. That call, l understood had its repercussions at the hospital and I was assigned as lead doctor for my cases the USSR's leading thoracic specialist Dr. Perlman, who subsequently became a good friend.

In Washington meanwhile, the hospitalization of the second most senior U.S. official in Moscow and having him under the care of Soviet physicians had rung alarm bells. The embassy was told to ensure I had round the clock American security present for my stay at the clinic which was arranged easily with the hospital. Further I got word that my lung was now a topic of discussion between the Secretary of State and the President. Strauss, in the meantime, as was his wont, had remembered the personal dimension of all this. He had been in touch with my wife Naomi and reassured her all was well and I was being well cared for.

The episode ended after a two week stay at the hospital. Subsequently, I found out I had received the treatment the clinic reserved for members of the Politburo. This included, of course, the best doctors and nurses available, but as well being housed after the intensive care in a six-room suite for the remainder of my stay. I also learned that I had apparently upset protocol by returning to work after the two weeks and declining the normally prescribed two to three week recuperation at a resort on the Black Sea Coast. I thought my ambassador might well have thought that excessive and politely declined with the promise to check regularly with my doctor in Moscow. I thus returned to work mended and I gather to the relief of Washington and Moscow. As a footnote, I found out later that the prior occupant of the suite I had at the clinic was Haidar Aliyev, the leader of Azerbaijan with whom I would have a subsequent relationship during my time back in Washington as Ambassador at Large.

Q: That's quite a story. I assume Strauss was pleased to have you back. This is certainly a turbulent time.

COLLINS: The country was in turmoil, and the economy was worsening. Shortages were increasing and there was a lot of talk about inadequate food.

Q: What was the food problem?

COLLINS: I guess the first thing to say is that it was very hard to judge, but the government was desperate. Somewhere in early fall they had come to us with grave concern simply saying, "The food supplies are short, and we don't have money to buy food." Now, in Russia any hint of a problem with food is a serious business, and particularly so when the political future of the nation was in the balance. The leadership was not sure they could get through the winter. At the time there was almost no food in the stores. Shelves were bare. Now, people were lined up in informal trading markets all over the city. Kiosks were springing up. There was a huge holiday market outside the children's department store. It was total retail and food distribution chaos.

I remember in late 1991, having lunch with Yuriy Luzhkov, who later became mayor of Moscow, but at that time in charge of provisioning the city, having adequate food supplies. He told me it was virtually an impossible situation. He could not provide adequate supplies to meet demand when people had no confidence that the supplies would be there the nest day and, therefore, were hoarding. He could bring in five trainloads of food, and they would be gone in a day. It was vicious cycle: it was partly a real shortage and partly a structural shortage: it was partly people hoarding and partly the distribution system breaking down. Uncertainty led to survival tactics.

Against this backdrop our food relief program began in earnest in the early winter of 1991. The embassy was heavily preoccupied in its launch from day one. The first emergency food shipment showed up in Moscow in December, and it was followed immediately by an extensive airlift of food assistance around the country. We did have something of an awkward PR moment with that first flight when the Ambassador with full press covered opened the first box of food supplies only to display a can of apple pie filling, hardly a necessity. But the next was a box of bagged rice, so a recovery was assured. This flow of food, were certainly important for those they supported. But I think they were probably more significant because they gave the Russian people confidence the Americans (and Europeans) were not going to abandon them or let them starve. This was the beginning of a major effort to get them through the winter that was ultimately an important psychological and physical success.

Q: Did we have a government that was willing to support this?

COLLINS: Yes, for sure. We had been following the emergence of the food situation and reported it back. Washington was committed to doing what was possible in the wake of the coup to prevent a collapse and chaos and food was clearly a priority issue as we came to the end of summer and a bad harvest. Washington responded with an extraordinary and massive effort with full bipartisan support so far as we knew and understood the situation.

Q: Let's take Leningrad or Kiev or any of these other places. They must have been having the same food problem, weren't they?

COLLINS: They were.

Q: What did you do with them?

COLLINS: We were mounting a highly complex and amazing airlift of food supplies that was organized over the winter and brought in food to a wide variety of places. It was distributed through different organizations that took on the responsibility. Many of the flights went to places that had not seen a foreigner in decades, and our pilots landed in places where they had almost no charts. I also recall a couple of them marveling about the problem of animals on the runways. So it was an extraordinary effort that was often as surprising for our crews as the people they dropped in on from the skies.

Q: Americans weren't the only ones?

COLLINS: No, there were others providing food supplies as well. Food came from Europe as well; and in addition to governments, private institutions (churches, welfare organizations, etc..) were sending supplies of food and clothing. There was a sense was everyone rising to the occasion, to the idea that it was time to help a people in need, people who were trying to rid themselves of the communist system, people trying to build a future of freedom and democracy. Americans couldn't let all this simply disintegrate. The response was motivated by everything from concern about four nuclear armed nations going belly up and disintegrating into chaos to the desire to see a peaceful transition without chaos or bloodshed; and there was a generosity of spirit that was very American in the entire enterprise.

In the end I think the food shipments did two things. They did provide food to a lot of institutions and locales that had acute shortages of food. Often these were distant and isolated regions and places like orphanages, prisons, or other state institutions, which just didn't have supplies or money to procure them. People on the private barter market were making their way: they were getting fed at work or had a network to get what was needed. But those people who had to depend on a government procurement system to supply them with adequate food, people who were in prisons, orphanages, boarding schools, the army, people - they just didn't have it.

For those sorts of institutions, I think the shipments not only met an actual need for food, but were also significant sign of support and hope. They let not only those who received the food but the broader public as well know that they had support they could count on. This instilled a degree of confidence that everything would not collapse, that there were outsiders prepared to help getting them through their very difficult time. And it was important in many ways that the food shipments came with expressions of support and good wishes and willingness to work together in support of a changed Russia

Q: We're after the coup now. Was there strategic thinking at the time? That is thinking that if things go the way we are thinking they are going and the Soviet Union begins to break up, it is going to be a whole different ball game and the cold war is over. Were we thinking that far ahead yet?

COLLINS: We're going back some at this point. Really into the end of the eighties and end of the Gorbachev era. As we do, let me say first that I think it important to make a distinction between the end of the Cold War and the end of the USSR. I subscribe to the thinking that Jack Matlock has put forth about this. The Cold War was essentially brought to a close by the negotiated revision of relations between the USSR and Warsaw Pact countries and the US and its allies. This took place over the Gorbachev-Reagan era and was brought to a close with the disintegration of the Warsaw Pact, fall of the Berlin Wall and all of the events that surrounded the emergence of a new order in Central and East Europe during the Bush presidency.

In regard to these events, or if you will, the ending of the Cold War, I think it fair to say the U.S. and its allies were thinking and responding strategically to events and to the changes overwhelming the Cold War structure in Europe. These were the days in which probably the largest issues centered on bringing about a peaceful reunification of Germany, determining the future of the North Atlantic alliance, and responding to the needs and interests of the newly liberated nations of East Europe. It was my impression that throughout these events, our leaders, our European allies, the Soviets and the former Warsaw Pact countries were shaping their strategic thinking, diplomacy and thinking about the future around a common and shared idea of what Europe was becoming. Central to that was a general acceptance until very late that a bi-polar system would continue and that two super powers would continue to shape the future security system of in the Euro-Atlantic region. What was absent from this picture was any idea that within a couple of years the USSR would no longer be a factor.

There are, of course, all sorts of people who in hindsight are quite prepared to say we were thinking ahead and planning strategically for the Soviet demise and the events that unfolded as a result. That was not my impression. My impression was that our thinking was most often behind the curve and playing catch up to events. I think we concluded only very late in 1991, after the coup in August and after a couple of months of failed efforts by Gorbachev to create a new union treaty that the jig was up. It took time before people came to understand and ultimately accept that Mr. Gorbachev wasn't going to prevail. I don't recall any discussion before that time about the fact that this is all going to collapse and we are going to have fifteen new states. Nobody I heard about thought of that until late in the post-coup period.

There was thinking about issues. If things got messy, what was going to happen with the nuclear capability which was spread all over the USSR? Nobody quite thought about what would happen to the Red Army beyond the issues raised by their requirement to leave East Europe. I think until the very end, it was assumed we would deal with a coherent unified Soviet army. I did not talk with people who said, well we are going to have a Ukrainian army or a Georgian army. This was not what people were thinking. Perhaps there are things I was unaware of. But my impression remains that until the last months of '91 there wasn't much planning or thinking about the implications of the collapse until events were was upon us.

I think the one major exception came from the work of Senator Nunn and those who moved rapidly to shape what would become the Nunn-Lugar initiative. To recall, Nunn had come to Moscow shortly after the '91 coup, and after conversations with key figures about the state of the nuclear forces went home to sound the alarm and produce legislation to make possible significant American involvement in ensuring the safety and security of the Soviet nuclear arsenal. This was a statesman's work at its most basic. But I have to say that from my vantage point, his perceptions and his foresight were well ahead of most. When the Red flag was hauled down by Mr. Gorbachev and the Soviet Union literally came to an end at the end of '91, I would say that our planning for next steps was minimal.

Q: Was there a death watch on Gorbachev? What was happening with him? What were we doing?

COLLINS: I am not sure I would call it a death watch. I think in Washington and Moscow, for a couple of months after the August coup attempt, there was a sense that the situation was manageable and that Gorbachev might hold the country together. Gorbachev had negotiated a new union treaty in early August, and it was supposed to be signed on the 20th of August, which is why the coup took place when it did. When Gorbachev returned to Moscow, he worked to revive that process. Our policy then was to support him in this, and a I think most back in Washington thought he had a real chance to make it work. But the coup had changed the context, and the strains and challenges to his effort were significant.
The nationalities issues were increasingly fraught. The most dangerous or troubling of these issues tended to come from the Baltics where efforts by Moscow to bring these republics back under Moscow's control were going nowhere. For us the Baltic issue posed a political problem. We had never recognized the incorporation of the Baltic states into the USSR, and Yeltsin, as President of the Russian Federation, in August, had recognized their sovereignty, further complicating the whole question.

More broadly the whole government system was wobbling. You had words flying around like "sovereignty" and "independence," and there was no consensus or common understanding about what these terms meant. The result was the beginning of something I mentioned earlier called "the war of laws." That meant Soviet law and republic law were at odds as often as not, and those enforcing the law were all at odds about whose writ prevailed. So there was ambiguity up and down the system about who was in charge and whose rules took precedence. In the case of Russia was it the Soviet authorities' writ or that of those from the Russian Republic?

Our people were in shock, too. I don't think our decision makers and analysts really knew quite what to think because, again, it wasn't as though the system had disintegrated. The framework was still all there. The coup had failed and its plotters were gone. One major shakeup had shocked the structure of Soviet governance. Gorbachev had ended the rule of the Communist party and closed down its authority and position of primacy across the country. But it took time to see the results of that change. It had not meant major personnel changes in many areas. The same guys, ministers, regional leaders, governors,

mayors and certainly the bureaucracies of the structure remained largely as they had been. In many cases former party bosses became CEOs, or governors. But with the exceptions of the ubiquitous presence of the Party and its discipline as the primary source of authority, it seemed that Soviet life and its institutions went on and a façade of Soviet normality, if you can use such a term, prevailed.

We at the embassy continued to deal with the Soviet government pretty much as we had done, working issues and business in areas like arms control, getting *refusniks* exit permission, and talking about reforms that seemed to have some new life after the coup's failure. But as the summer gave way to fall, it was becoming clear that Gorbachev's efforts to revive his negotiation of a new structure for the Union and to build a new foundation for a Union Treaty was running against a tide of ever growing forces tearing the empire apart. For us at the embassy the normal protocol of working with the Soviet leadership and ministries still went on, but the presence and authority of the Russian Federation and the Yeltsin government was ever more relevant to our mission. And we were watching the centripetal forces weaken the institutions that held the union together.

Q: Was there a significant exodus from the Communist party in this period?

COLLINS: Of course. When the party was outlawed many just disappeared. By early September the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) just didn't exist and its organization was deprived of any privileged position if not outright outlawed. Across the country where leaders had been Party members or the Party leader in a region or institution had been the de facto leader, some simply were removed or retired. Elsewhere these people resigned the Party membership and changed hats to assume new responsibilities within regional or republic organizations or took over those organizations now as government officials. One day, for example, Ivan is a regional Party first secretary: next day he is "governor" of the region - a newly defined position.

As I think we may have discussed earlier, there was a significant challenge associated with this change, however. In the Soviet system the government structures were always meant to be the managers of the system. The Communist Party was set up to be the leader, decision maker, and disciplinarian for the system. After the coup and evaporation of the Communist Party, this meant the remaining governmental institutions had to assume responsibilities for governing and leading they had never been given under the communist system. All of a sudden the skeleton didn't have the muscle, blood and sinews that made it function. This created a sudden vacuum in leadership that was ready to be filled by people who could represent new forces and bases of authority. In Russia and many other republics, it turned out, some of these were new faces, but for the most part they were those from the old elites who adapted successfully to the new reality and found the means to run the system through government institutions that had never been meant to govern, but were now in charge. Yeltsin was the prime example for this, but in places like Ukraine the emerging leaders likewise represented those who adapted successfully from the previous system for the most part. But elsewhere, where the nationalists had mounted a growing opposition to Soviet rule, their fortunes grew significantly.

Q: How did an apparatus work, such as the ministry of energy?

COLLINS: Well, frankly at one level the outsider didn't notice a great deal of difference. The formal structure of ministries and other government offices at the Union level was pretty much unchanged. And likewise at the Russian Republic level. As I remember, although there were some changes, particularly in the cases where senior officials had taken action in support of the coup, most people we knew remained at their jobs. Internally, of course, the disappearance of the Communist Party organization and its role changed much in the way business was conducted and what positions had real authority.

At the Soviet Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the personnel changes were quite significant, however. Minister Bessmertnykh and several of his deputies, including the Deputy - Obukhov - who had overseen the America portfolio, were replaced immediately. Their replacements were diplomats who had not acted in any way to support the coup leaders. The ambassador to Czechoslovakia Panin was brought back as Minister and my colleague Georgiy Mamedov, with whom I had worked when he served as head of the North America Department became Deputy Minister. Broadly across the government the general rule seemed to be that where officials had associated themselves with the junta or taken active steps to support them there were major changes. Elsewhere, the institutions went on largely as before and those with whom we dealt were still in place.

The change that did affect all the institutions was the abolition of the Communist Party and the end of its role in almost every Soviet organization from large to small. This, started at the center where the CPSU leadership had been the key institution controlling the government and its institutions. Symbolically and substantively this institution simply ceased to exist. As the coup wound down on its third day, I recall well watching a small group of men with a few rifles go up to the doors of the Party Central Committee headquarters at *Staraya Ploshchad'* (Old Square) and inform the people there that they were to leave; they then occupied the building, and put the Party organization's headquarters out of work and out of existence. Elsewhere, in the government institutions, enterprises, community clubs, almost any institution one could think of, the analogous action took place. Party organizations went out of business, the Party had no further official voice, and the institutions' leadership either from the past or new as a result of the changes carried on business pretty much as before. To the outside observer, however, there was little noticeable difference in the way business was conducted.

At the center in Moscow, meanwhile, with the Party out of the picture, the Soviet presidential administration and those around Gorbachev who had remained loyal gradually took over both physically and substantively the positions of former Communist Party leaders, and symbolically it was not long before the *Staraya Ploshchad*' offices that had been home to the Central Committee were occupied by officials of the Soviet Presidential Administration.

What was truly new and different about the new reality, however, was the growing confrontation between central authority represented by Soviet institutions and the institutions of the republics as they asserted authority over increasingly broader areas of

government responsibility. In Moscow this became the story of Gorbachev vs. Yeltsin. But more broadly it emerged ever more forcefully as a struggle between the Center and the republics for control over the Soviet republics and their assets.

Q: How did you find the security apparatus, the KGB and its offshoots? These were people who were probably more exposed to the West and conditions in the West than anybody else. Were they happy or what?

COLLINS: There was no question that the KGB, in particular was a major loser following the coup and Soviet collapse. But even before the collapse there had been some signs that elements of the services saw the handwriting on the wall. Following the coup the KGB and MVD were in disgrace for the role their leadership and cadres had played in the coup. At the time a lot of their number were getting off the ship if they could. Many of them resigned, others just disappeared into anonymity, and stories abounded about mysterious transfers of funds and former KGB people showing up as business people or security experts with less than clear credentials. As for the KGB leadership, it was replaced and the new leader Bakatin was entrusted with the task of cleaning house.

That particular change had one very important consequence for the Embassy. Bakatin was among the preliminary calls Strauss was making on officials and at that first encounter Strauss raised the status of our long stalled embassy construction project. The result was a subsequent agreement that brought a breakthrough that opened the way to a final agreement on our effort to build a new chancery. In essence that agreement provided for Russian access to their new chancery in Washington in return for Russia providing us with the details of what had been done to the bugged chancery construction project and a subsequent free hand for us to build our new structure without interference from the Russian side. My own most dramatic moment with getting that agreement under way came on a very cold, snowy dark December afternoon when I was put in a car by Strauss to call at KGB headquarters to receive the plans for the bugging project the Soviets had undertaken in our building. In a visit to the KGB I will not forget, I was met in a room by four very glum looking gentlemen each carrying a thick notebook. I confirmed these were the plans promised and departed with them after one of the more bizarre non conversations I had during my diplomatic tenure. In the event, however, the trip had been worth the effort and the agreement with Bakatin did ultimately unlock the chancery construction project about which we will talk again later.

Q: The party system used to put so much emphasis on the heavy industry worker. They were the vanguard of the future, the source of all progress. What did people think by this time?

COLLINS: As I saw it, ideology wasn't much of a motivator by this time, and I think it fair to say few saw it as a reason for the Party to be in charge. The Party, rather, had come to represent the self selecting, specially trained and educated elite that controlled the system, and that in itself was its justification. Yeltsin's point was that the party's ideology and experience was no mandate to run things any more. He said his authority

was coming from you, *grazhdanin (citizen)*. Since the non-party vast majority didn't think much of the job the party was doing for the country, he found his role in meeting that group's needs and aspirations. And he knew how to use the theater of the idea. He was at his best in '91, '92, early '93 when he would go down to visit a factory and schmooze with the working people on the floor. Or on the streets, he'd go into a store, talk to people - and he'd draw huge crowds instantly. For Russians he was clearly a different kind of political figure. And he had real charisma.

So, when the '91 coup came along, he already represented a different idea. He came out of the coup *the* figure who represented the new. Yeltsin also saw his power based in a way totally different from what the Soviets had used for seventy years. He saw it founded on the public, on the will of the voters. The Communists still claimed legitimacy from ideology and the party's possession of it. By '91, the idea and the Party were losing out, and Gorbachev as a figure from that party never really recovered

Q: Did the embassy monitor what was going on on the ideological side? What was being taught at the universities? Were ideas beginning to change?

COLLINS: I can't say that as I recall we spent a lot of effort on that. Frankly by the time I arrived, ideology was hardly at the forefront of what we saw determining very much about the direction events were taking. On the other hand, if we go beyond '90 into '91 when the Soviet Union is over, I believe one of the great challenges we would face was to bring a new way of thinking about the world to the Russian public, the Russian leadership and the Russian elite. From my perspective that was going to mean paying real attention to the education system. not just in the universities but down in the fourth class. And in this area if you ask how the United States and Europeans responded, I give us very poor marks; we simply never gave this area the priority it required.

Q: Was there a point when you saw the game up for Gorbachev?

COLLINS: I think that by mid-October, we concluded that Gorbachev's chances were going inexorably down. I am not sure there was a particular point I can recall where we all concluded the jig was up, but I do recall clearly that at the October Middle East summit meeting held in Madrid Strauss gave Jim Baker our view that Gorbachev was in deep trouble and was not making it.

The moment was the extraordinary meeting in Madrid of Middle East leaders, the first time Israeli, Palestinian, and Arab leaders had sat down in the same room ever. Strauss had been asked to attend. The Soviets were there, and I presumed Baker wanted to get his thinking on what was happening in Moscow. We had talked a good deal about what the message would be and concluded that Strauss had to convey our belief that Gorbachev was in trouble and that his efforts to hold things together were declining. It was the first time, I recall, that, we put that view on the table officially as the embassy.

Q: What was the reaction?

COLLINS: Well, I was not with Strauss, so I don't know the immediate reaction, and I don't recall what Strauss reported on his return to Moscow. But for most of the next month our official position remained unchanged. Washington still hung on to Gorbachev as the anchor for our relations with the Soviet Union and its constituent parts.

Were there any doubts about this?

COLLINS: Washington could deal with only one recognized government at a time on the international level. Gorbachev was still the head of state, and you still had a Soviet Government to work with until about the late weeks of December. We continued normal diplomacy with that government, albeit with a certain increasing air of unreality to the process. But in terms of our international commitments and such, the Soviet Government was the one we dealt with officially. At the same time, we were building relations with the Government of the Russian Federation, whom we had come to know very well in the course of 1991 as Yeltsin emerged as an ever more important leader. It was they to whom we began to turn when it was a question of how we would address shortages, how we would address needs, what was the plan for the city, etc. You more or less had a *de facto* federalist system emerge with the central government growing weaker all the time and the Yeltsin Government increasing its authority during the last months of '91 until Christmas Day when Gorbachev finally throws in the towel.

Q: When did this come to a critical point? When did our leaders see the writing on the wall?

COLLINS: I think there is no question that the change in Washington occurred as Ukraine voted in a referendum for independence from the Soviet Union. The referendum vote at the beginning of December reversed a decision voted with an almost equal majority in March of '91 to keep Ukraine in the Union. It had been against the background of this earlier vote, for instance, that Gorbachev worked up his new Union Treaty draft. It was also the foundation on which the famous or, in the eyes of many, the infamous speech by President Bush in Kiev at the beginning of August, 1991, had warned against extremist nationalism and urged Ukraine to keep working on the constitutional revisions that would have let Ukraine remain part of the Union. The coup, of course, changed much of the reality about how the future of the Union was seen outside Moscow, but until the Ukrainian referendum in December, there had been no defection by a major republic. Up to that point it had only been the smaller republics asserting that position.

Q: What had changed? I know there was a strong Russian element in Ukraine, but what changed within Ukraine to change the vote?

COLLINS: I think until the December referendum people weren't sure that there wasn't still majority support to keep Ukraine in the Soviet Union. That had been the outcome of the earlier referendum remember. Even after the coup in August, the establishment there continued to negotiate for the new Union treaty, even as many were also pressing to move forward with sovereignty or independence as the right option for Ukraine. These

forces, meanwhile, saw the weakening of Soviet authority and the collapse of the Communist Party as a chance.

In this regard, while most of our thinking about what happened during the coup and immediately afterward was Moscow focused, there is no question that the coup had a profound effect in regional capitals. It discredited the Communists and essentially left the field, by default to those who were associated with the nationalist sentiments that had always sought distance from Moscow or greater authority in dealing with their local affairs. The communists' demise opened the field to long suppressed forces of nationalism across the republic that after the coup's collapse had no effectively organized opposition.

After the coup, this trend was taking place to one degree or another across the Soviet Union. In Georgia, Gamsakurdiya was demanding independence. The Baltics were even further down the road in their insistence, and even in Central Asia there were some stirrings. But until the referendum in Ukraine, attention of the leaderships in the republics beyond the Baltics seemed to be focused on using their increased leverage to press for ever greater autonomy or authority in the negotiations that continued over the new Union Treaty. This was the case with Ukraine until the referendum. The negotiations over the treaty were very tough, and Kiev was insisting on a lot more autonomy and a lot more control over their local affairs. But until the referendum they were negotiating on the basis that Ukraine had voted to stay with the Union even though in key respects the independence train had left the station. But the referendum changed that and from that point forward, Kiev was negotiating the terms of independence.

Q: So it was sort of the same thing and yet a completely different thing. Did you find that you had officers that could sniff power?

COLLINS: Well I think there was no doubt that the best we had was Bob Strauss. He had an extraordinary feel for politics and power built from a lifetime of involvement in the game, and his model gave a number of our best officers a real edge in understanding the dynamics of just what was going on in Moscow and elsewhere. I remember that early on, and I think I mentioned this before, Strauss said to me that we were living in conditions just like a Democratic Party Convention. No one was talking to anyone else; no one was listening to anyone else; and everyone thought he was winning. It was the challenge to all our staff to sort out the realities in this environment, to find the key to reporting on a fluid, chaotic environment in which all the old rules seemed up for grabs, and we were in the midst of something new being born. It was a moment when, with Strauss' full support I made clear to my officers that their job was to report what they were hearing from their sources, provide their judgments about what that meant, and not fear making a mistake; they were to assume that whatever they concluded today would likely be changed by tomorrow. It was the challenge to report on revolutionary change from the inside, and I was very proud of what our people were able to do.

Q: How was your thinking received by the analysts in Washington? You were on the ground, but most were getting their impressions from afar, from reading something, or the media. What was happening with this community?

COLLINS: Well, from our vantage point it was clear that most of the thinking in Washington about Russia and the Soviet Union was behind the curve. The end of the Soviet system of communist rule as we had known it and the new opening up and transparency of the system, particularly in this early period, just made all the traditional thinking and methods of analysis about the region out of synch with the realities of the day. Kremlinology as it had been practiced went out the window, and the new availability of direct access to information and key actors changed all the rules about obtaining information and assessing its significance. There were, of course, some who kept saying nothing's changed, nothing's changed, but that line just couldn't last in the face of new realities. It wasn't credible.

So, as I saw it, we had three schools of analysis emerge. There was first a group who simply switched Russia in place of Soviet in their work and went right on writing the same analyses they had been writing for years. That group assumed Moscow remained Moscow and that whatever change was taking place was not altering the realities that were key for us and our interests. This was particularly the case for many in the military and intelligence worlds it seemed to me. And to an extent it was understandable. The nuclear weapons were still there. The Red Army still existed in some way. The Soviet navy continued to exist and to conduct operations. The strategic rocket forces were still targeting U.S. targets There was in that world a lot of inertia and activity that continued by habit.

A second group that showed up in droves were total babes in the woods. They had never dealt with or been engaged in analysis of the previous system. They brought no historical or cultural context to how they drew their conclusions. They had no experience. These people relied for their conclusions on analogy with other experience or models that had pertained elsewhere. Or in some cases, simply models they applied from theoretical research or study. I thought here the political scientists were particular problem. They had models for nearly any circumstance and tried to jam the realities of our world into the frameworks they brought to the analysis. Most were newcomers to our world and lacked any real understanding about the background to the system that was changing and the impact that past had on nearly every aspect of what was emerging. The professional assistance community, a lot of the NGO people, including those who arrived to build democracy, and a host of people seeking opportunities in the opening up of the region to our western ways or what they thought those should be fell into this group.

Then there was the third group of which I considered myself and most of my embassy people to be a part. We were uncomfortable with both these camps: we had lived through past and present events. We knew what the Soviet Union was like before; we also appreciated how different the new reality was from what it had been in the past; and we believed our task was to try to give people a sense of what was happening, that it wasn't the old world nor was it totally new. The old vocabulary didn't work. The old categories

didn't pertain anymore. On the other hand, it was still Russia, and there was still a lot that was familiar. It was very challenging to describe what was happening without crossing the line to imply change hadn't defined a new future with no relation to the past. It's still very challenging in many ways.

Q: In the administration in Washington, did you find that they understood what was happening?

COLLINS: It varied a lot. I think Washington didn't quite believe things were changing as fast as they were. Bureaucracy doesn't deal well with revolution. People in Washington did their work day to day. And in a way they could be forgiven for not seeing something bigger. One of the remarkable things about the Soviet Union's final days was that after the coup, nothing spectacular happened. The country just lost itself day by day. And then it ended. Gorbachev hauled down the flag. Yeltsin put up a flag. In the other republics leaders did the same. And through it all people kept going to work, buses ran, trains departed, stores were open. People just kept doing what they'd been doing.

Q: When did this come to a critical point? When did our leaders see the writing on the wall?

COLLINS: I think there is no question that the change in Washington occurred as Ukraine voted in a referendum for independence from the Soviet Union. The referendum vote at the beginning of December reversed a decision voted with an almost equal majority in March of '91 to keep Ukraine in the Union. It had been against the background of this earlier vote, for instance, that Gorbachev worked up his new Union Treaty draft. It was also the foundation on which the famous or, in the eyes of many, the infamous speech by President Bush in Kiev at the beginning of August, 1991, had warned against extremist nationalism and urged Ukraine to keep working on the constitutional revisions that would have let Ukraine remain part of the Union. The coup, of course, changed much of the reality about how the future of the Union was seen outside Moscow, but until the Ukrainian referendum in December, there had been no defection by a major republic. Up to that point it had only been the smaller republics asserting that position.

Q: So much of our government, our thinking, our teaching was predicated on the Cold War's continuing. For one thing, we were breaking one huge rice bowl in regard to think tanks, the academics, the mindset, military planning.

COLLINS: The time I would say it became clear the USSR was at an end came in December when Mr. Yeltsin, Mr. Shushkevich and Mr. Kravchuk signed their agreement at Belovezhskaya Pushcha. The Agreement among the three leaders of Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus created the Commonwealth of Independent States and defined a new arrangement among the newly sovereign and independent states the three represented. The agreement effectively ended the USSR. These three having agreed their own arrangements for what the future would look like in relations among Ukraine and the Russian Federation and Belarus then opened their agreed format to the remaining

republics who would sign on shortly thereafter. The essentiality here was independence. The Soviet Union was history.

Q: What was happening in Ukraine to cause this change?

COLLINS: I suppose the way I understood it was that Ukraine was developing its own momentum toward greater self-determination amidst the more general trend in that direction throughout the country. The republics of the USSR as well as some regions in the Russian Republic were challenging Moscow's central control. This trend had been building as the Gorbachev reforms developed. By the end of the eighties the republics had begun asserting "sovereignty" a term that seemed to have as many meanings as there were people to use it and to challenge Moscow's authority over many diverse aspects of regional business. So, this was the context within which Ukraine's building movement toward independence gained momentum.

Until August '91 this trend, with the exception of what was happening in the Baltic states and Georgia, in the main was not challenging the preservation of the Soviet Union or within its mainstream promoting independence as the goal for a new order. The politics of the process were playing out within the Communist Party and were focused mainly on the development of a new constitution for the Union. But as time went on, it was also the case that the issue of control over the economic dimension in relations was gaining a place of greater and greater prominence in the struggle for power between central and regional officials and institutions. And here Ukraine was hardly alone or even in the lead. Yeltsin's Russia was pressing for ever greater authority over the Federation's assets and even within the RSFSR (Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic) there were those pressing to move away from the authority at the center to greater control in the hands of regional leaders, normally the first secretaries of the communist party in the regions. So as the decade turned there was a sense of growing centripetal momentum. And it built almost steadily as the nineties began, bringing the overt call for independence from the Baltics and mounting assertion of authority from the leaders of the major republics. There was a dynamic pushing a variety of challenges to Soviet central authority even as that authority seems to be weakening.

The one significant institution with real power that stood against these trends was the Communist Party. It remained centralized and dedicated to preservation of a centrally controlled system. Unlike the constitutionally mandated federal governmental system, the Party had no such structure and remained a centrally controlled unitary structure. So, when the coup comes and fails, and the Party loses its position and power within the Soviet system, the momentum toward greater authority in the provinces simply loses any counterforce. The centralizers, the people who mounted the effort to oust Gorbachev had done so mainly to prevent this momentum continuing and to re-centralize control, to bring greater discipline into the system. That effort was now discredited and its advocates are out of the picture. So, what had begun as a reform and restructuring process largely focused on the political dimensions of the USSR's future came to its demise as the leadership began to upset the central controls of the command economic system. What really hit home was the challenge of who would get what and who would have control of

the economic resources of the country. That question proved beyond the Bolshevik model to reform and ultimately ended the experiment.

Q: Really back to basics.

COLLINS: Yes, this is back to basics. This got down to cars and apartments. This was where people's status, power and standing were really at stake. These people understood in their gut that if you began to lose centralized planning - lose control of resources, the entire structure of the Soviet economy was at risk, and with it the power the Party enjoyed in deciding how to allocate resources, value contributions, etc. would disappear; that is where they tried to draw the line. That is what the hardliners tried to stop in August.

They failed, and once they failed, that opened up other possibilities. People in charge of Ukraine said, fine we are going to be in charge of our own resources and we are not going to let Moscow dictate to us or exploit us anymore. This was going on in Georgia where Mr. Gamsakurdia was pressing his nationalist cause and was bent on independence. The Baltics, always seen as an exception in the USSR in any case, were pressing independence as well and their example was a contagion. The degree to which support for those seeking greater autonomy from Moscow had grown became clear in the coup in August, when there was nobody willing to stand up to defend the Marxist Leninist system. Once that was obvious, the old system just evaporated leaving, it seemed, only Gorbachev as the one interested in its survival. It just died with a whimper.

Q: What happens when Gorbachev leaves and the Union ends?

COLLINS: By the time Gorbachev signs the papers resigning as President of the USSR and the hammer and cycle come down from the Kremlin for the last time it is almost an anti climax. It was, of course, the West's Christmas day, and the televised final appearance of Gorbachev was almost something of a non event. Power had already flowed away from the Kremlin, Gorbachev himself was all but the last institution of the USSR with authority, and in a sense when he resigned no one really cared. It appeared to have little if any practical effect. In a word the USSR simply passed quietly without much notice. The Russian Federation was now sovereign and independent, no longer subject to any higher authority, and affiliated with the former republics only through the still to be defined Commonwealth of Independent States. It was a new era., and the man of the hour was Boris Yeltsin.

We were also relieved that the authorities in Moscow - Gorbachev, Yeltsin and the military command - had provided for continuity of command and control over strategic weaponry - the football - but this was a pretty limited standard, and there was a great deal of uncertainty about what was going to follow.

Q: You mentioned football. You might want to explain.

COLLINS: We call it the football here; they call it the suitcase. It was the equipment essential for the national commander to launch nuclear missiles. So long as the USSR remained it was in the hands of Gorbachev and the defense minister. With the end of the USSR this equipment passed to Boris Yeltsin and to the designated head of the CIS forces Marshall Shaposhnikov. That provided a sense of continuity and stability for a time. However, there were looming and unresolved issues. What was going to happen to the weapons in Ukraine or Kazakhstan or Belarus if suddenly Moscow no longer had physical control of them? What was to be the fate of the tactical nuclear weapons still left in Ukraine. We were aware that the Russian command and control authorities were pulling those back into Russia but the process was not completed until mid 1992. Our leaders were engaged in these issues as a critical priority. But I can't say our government as a whole had really prepared itself psychologically or bureaucratically for the broader dimensions of what we would be facing as the Soviet system disappeared. We were more than anything else, I think, reacting, responding, and trying to keep up with the unpredicted and unpredictable.

Q: Before we turn to the new era, I wonder if you could give an idea of what was motivating Gorbachev? He gets credit for this, but he's sort of like the Sorcerer's Apprentice. He began something that escaped his reach and he couldn't control it.

COLLINS: I think the conventional view in this case, is essentially right. He doesn't spring from nowhere. He comes to power in the mid 80s as a symbol and embodiment of a new generation. He comes to begin replacing the Brezhnev generation, men who were WWII veterans, who took over from the leaders of Stalin's time. He belongs to the generation known as shestideyatniki (people of the sixties) that, even though somewhat older than we are, Naomi and I knew when we were at the University in Moscow. And it always seemed to me that his ideas and thinking were heavily shaped by that background. In particular it seemed to me the way he looked at the world reflected much of what we saw in our colleagues and friends at the University in the mid-sixties.

These young people were restless under the new Brezhnev conservatism that replaced the Khrushchev era. They had a problem understanding why their government and leaders treated them as children, would not let them read what they wanted, travel where they wished, choose their fields of study, live where they wished. They saw themselves as citizens of a great and powerful county that had put a man in space, defeated the Nazis, and exercised the authority of a superpower able to challenge the Americans and shape the destiny of world politics and development. Yet their leaders behaved as though they were weak, vulnerable, unsure of themselves, and fearful of the very people who had stood by them through war and victory. From what I have read and what I knew of him, this spirit had its impact on what he brought to his new job and it was a different outlook from most of those who were around him.

He was also well aware of an issue that had been on the agenda since Andropov's brief General Secretaryship following Brezhnev's death . In succeeding Brezhnev for only a short period, he had brought to the fore the conviction that the Soviet Union could not survive unless it modernized and reformed itself to compete in a changing world. This

agenda was deferred by Andropov's early death and the non-leadership of his successor Chernenko. But when Gorbachev arrived he was ready to pick up the challenge, and he set about his effort to save the USSR by changing and reforming what he accepted as an atrophied, sclerotic system to become more competitive and capable of survival in the modern world.

Some other things I believe strengthened his conviction and determination. It has always seemed to me that the nuclear disaster at Chernobyl impelled him to greater openness for this system. Here he has a disaster that is supposedly manageable by the best brains, best scientists, top minds of his country; they demonstrate incompetence and produce a disastrous mess. They cannot deal with it, and so it always seemed to me he had to ask himself what does this disaster mean about our nuclear weaponry and capacities? How can these best people go about managing such issues when they cannot even manage a power plant. It must have been a very sobering thought.

And then the 1988 earthquake in Armenia provided another shock to the system. Gorbachev was here in the U.S. when that disaster happened. It cost untold lives and destruction, but perhaps more significantly, I thought, it demonstrated again the incompetence of those entrusted with responsibilities for securing the lives of their people. This was supposed to be a modern state with modern engineering and yet the government's chosen people couldn't even build a stable building in an area known for its earthquakes. These kinds of things kept on hitting him, and I think gave him the impetus to keep pressing his reforms.

So, as I saw it, the bottom line on Gorbachev always was survival of the USSR, but within limits he set for himself about the use of force and with the conviction that without profound changes that survival would not be possible.
Q: What went wrong?

COLLINS, Well, I think fundamentally what went wrong was the failure of his effort to restore faith among his people in the basic foundation of the Soviet system: the idea that the Communist Party could know what was best for the people and then perhaps even more basically could run a government system that would deliver on what it promised them. Things like Chernobyl and the Armenia earthquake highlighted the broader incapacity of the system. The decline in the economy and the inability of the system run by this crowd even to feed its population was eroding confidence ever further while the public as a result of Gorbachev's glasnost and perestroika came to know more about the realities of what was happening in their society. It was just a fact that people broadly were losing faith. You could see that in the electoral process Gorbachev opened up to elect a new parliament and where other elections further eroded support for those on whom he had to rely to carry out his reforms.

Q: The scientific socialism or something like that?

COLLINS: Yes: it's out the window. Not, of course, that everybody believed it, but it was an ideological framework that organized society. But its premises, that the Party

ruled by virtue of having the ability to select the right people, used its skills to make the right decisions, etc. were increasingly unreal to citizens who watched the results of things like Chernobyl, faced the reality of food shortages, or saw corruption eating away at the roots of the nation. As I returned to the country in 1990 it seemed to me that these shocks and the erosion of the social fabric showed that the emperor had no clothes.

Then, of course, by the late 80s the beginning of the information revolution and the eroding ability of the Soviets to control the information coming into the country further complicated their lives. The picture of the outside world that was coming in both discredited what people had been told for generations and highlighted dramatically the disparity between what the Soviet model represented and what was happening everywhere else. And this process was only highlighted by Gorbachev's reforms. The information available to his people was exploding, and it brought unprecedented exposure to the outside world. By the end of late '91 his limited opening of the political, ending traditional censorship, and freeing the intellectual environment has all but dissolved any ability to shape public perceptions using the old tools. Instead, it has created an environment in which public confidence in the system is eroding steadily as new revelations about the past, about what had been done during the purges, etc., seemed to undercut ever further the institutions the Soviet system had relied on to govern. More basically it undermined the very rationale by which the communist party claimed any legitimacy for its authority.

It was a situation just waiting for an alternative. It was into this milieu that Yeltsin stepped forward to run for the presidency of the Russian Federation, and after a resounding electoral victory, claimed that real political legitimacy comes only from having a direct electoral mandate, a claim Gorbachev, selected indirectly by the USSR Supreme Soviet, could never assert. Gorbachev, in almost a classic caricature of the tragic hero, unleashed forces that got beyond anything that he or the Communist Party could contain. Those forces consumed him. In late '91 those who mounted the coup were trying to use an arthritic finger to plug a dyke of sand to hold back the sea. But it was all over. The coup event demonstrated that there was just no one of any stature willing to stand up and defend the system.

Q: We're clearly entering a new time and world order. What was your impression of how Washington responded to the Soviet collapse? We have watched how things unfolded in other cases of a government collapse. But this was on an historic and unprecedented scale. Were there any lessons you took away to help you later?.

COLLINS: I think the most basic lesson was a simple one. I'd have to say that what shocked me most was how badly bureaucracies are equipped to deal with revolution.

Q: God. No.

COLLINS: Yes, I'm afraid it proved itself with great regularity. The way we did things just couldn't keep up. Processes that worked in Washington or Berlin to address an issue were just not up to dealing with the pace of change we lived with in Moscow. By the

time, let's say, Washington identified money to fund a particular program to address a request and they reacted to provide it, the issue addressed was already passed and we were into another set of problems. It seemed we were always behind. I also thought we and the Europeans didn't have the capacity we should have had to deal strategically with longer term questions. The tactical, the day-to-day, more often than not drove out any serious effort to think long term or define the long term objective. Then as is logical, in any number of cases, tactical or short term decisions de facto defined strategic goals. So in 'late '91, through '92 and into early '93 we Americans move into crisis management mode, something we are good at and the kind of environment we frankly excel at taking on. We do a lot of things that are very good in that time, but those early times and the decisions we make more often for tactical reasons begin to define a strategic approach that will have significant unthought-through implications later on.

Q: What were the most important decisions you saw us making at that point?

COLLINS: I suspect the largest of these decisions came early, As the Soviet Union disintegrated at the end of 1991 President Bush and Jim Baker moved quickly to recognize all the former republics, including Russia as fully independent nation states. It became U.S. policy that all would be accepted as new political entities in the international system, and that we would move forward to ensure that they enjoyed that status.

Q: Is there any rationale for not doing that?

COLLINS: Probably not, but at the time there were doubts about whether these new entities were really destined for full independence. And some of them had a question about that as well.

Q: But we were used to having Belarus and Ukraine having votes in the UN.

COLLINS: Yes, and nobody took that seriously. We had also never recognized the incorporation of the three Baltic nations into the USSR, but as a fact we lived with the reality of what Moscow did at the end of the War.

We have to remember that as the Union came apart there was a genuine question about the extent to which the proclamations of sovereignty and independence were for real? The Ukraine or Georgian cases had been pushing this idea, and the Baltics were far along, already recognized in August by Yeltsin as independent But for many of the others, it wasn't so clear; it was ambiguous. Just what would their status be. They were talking about a Confederation of Independent States - the CIS. Was this a new USSR? Was it to be a European Union of the East?

There was certainly no clarity at the time, and in that situation Bush and Baker basically made a strategic decision that would have the most profound consequences for the decades to come. They recognized each republic as an independent state and full member of the international community, and we began to treat them accordingly. In retrospect it was the final American reconciliation with the failure of Gorbachev's effort to save the

Union and the opening of a new era in American relations with greater Eurasia. But it also left unresolved very complex political, economic and social issues as former members of the Union had to begin from scratch the process of developing state to state relations in the place of ties among provinces of a single state that had governed their relations for centuries.

For us at the Embassy and in Washington, on a more parochial level, this also meant a great adjustment and challenge. Having recognized each of the states the next step was to develop the means to have U.S. representatives present in each and develop policies and programs that would promote the success of each new state in building its international presence. That meant establishing embassies in fourteen new capital cities, and equipping these new representatives to assist their new hosts in taking their place in the UN and in the other international systems and developing their economies and instruments of government. This was a heavy lift. The Europeans and others were slower to buy in fully, and the issues of managing Moscow's approach to this new world was to become central for the coming decade in U.S. relations with the region.

Q: I could see where politically this could be quite sensitive in the States. On one had you had national security imperatives that argued for ensuring good productive relations with Moscow. On the other were any number of communities pushing the cause of the new states.

COLLINS: Well, it was true that there were politically important communities pressing the cause of independence for several of the states, The Ukrainian Americans, the Armenian Americans, Baltic Americans, all these constituencies were pushing recognition. So the administration's decision about recognition of the new states had few if any critics. The issue that was going to emerge to complicate our strategy and policies was rather linked to what kind of relationships would develop between these new states and Russia. Put another way would American policies work from the premise that the Soviet Union's demise had brought a truly new Russia as well as new neighbors. Was the end of the Cold War and Soviet demise a defeat of Russia and the liberation from the Russian yoke of former colonial subjects. How these issues were seen both in the region and in Washington would have very significant implications for the development of U.S.-Russia relations and how our objectives in Eurasia would be shaped for the future. But as we began it was significant that Washington pressed the idea that we were working to establish relations and integrate into the international and European system 15 new, independent states who would be treated as such, including the Russian federation.

Q: How did this go over with the officer corps in Moscow? For one there would be opportunities opening up. But there would also be a reduced host nation and possibly fewer positions.

COLLINS: Well, let's remember that the Russia posts, Moscow and Leningrad, are in the midst of a revolution, and that revolution brings change to the posts as well as the society that hosts them. The collapse of the Union, of course, brought the loss of a third of the

Soviet Union's territory. But from the Embassy's perspective more profoundly it also brought political and socio-economic upheaval that dramatically changed the way the Embassy did business, conducted its representation, and what it had to try to make Washington understand.

Let's recall that in the Soviet era Embassy in Moscow and Consulate in Leningrad focused on Moscow or Leningrad. Other places were interesting, but the action that mattered was in Moscow. As we discussed, in the last years before the Soviet breakup, we began to take a greater interest in what was happening further afield. We had started the circuit rider program: Leningrad was following the Baltics more closely. But, we were still working in a highly centralized communist dominated single party political system and a centralized command economy where the issues that mattered to U.S. interests were decided or influenced in Moscow. And the issues of that system and its relations with the U.S. were what had defined the work and structure of the Moscow embassy and Leningrad consulate.

Now, suddenly that structure is gone and Moscow and Leningrad have to deal with a decentralizing political environment in which elements and people out in the provinces of Russia matter and have an influence on developments. Likewise, the centrally planned, command economy has become a chaotic, nascent market system allocating resources and economic authority according to economic forces, like prices, we had known as normal in the west but which were wholly alien in Russia. Then, of course, there was the shock of Russia's international position suddenly transformed as Moscow lost control over a third of the territory it had ruled for four centuries, found itself with fourteen new independent neighbors, the need to define borders it had never really had to recognize in its past, and a very different set of dynamics in its relations with all its neighbors and on the international stage.
Of course this changed the embassy. There were key elements of continuity so far as the U.S. was concerned. The Russian Federation was not the Soviet Union, but it was still the other nuclear super power, the other global power. It was still the other major military power in Europe. On the other hand, all of us who had come to Moscow before 1992 were scrambling to keep up and readjust our thinking in light of the upheaval we lived with daily. Suddenly we had to reckon with an economy in upheaval and transition that was heading in the direction of a market system with all the institutions and trappings of that. Politically it also seemed that suddenly the people of Russia mattered and needed to be more understood. We had to begin engaging the public no longer just the Party and its elite

So on the one hand the new Russia challenged us all to create and operate a new Embassy to work effectively with a transforming host government and people. It meant more travel, more contacts with citizens and officials, and most of all an explosion of Americans coming in response to Russians asking "what should we do?" It was the challenge of moving from an Embassy managing a relationship between two hostile powers to the engagement of Americans in the process of responding to the challenges of a society seeking U.S. support in a revolutionary transition; the issue of what no longer belonged to the Embassy, that third of the old empire that suddenly had split into fourteen

new states whom Washington had recognized and with whom Washington now began to establish relations was hardly our central concern. But this too had its impact on us in Moscow.

Q: How did it affect you. How did we handle this aspect?

COLLINS: The essential task was to establish fourteen new embassies following recognition and establishment of relations with the new states. This was a Washington based operation and I wasn't there. But having made the commitment to open representations as soon as we could, the decision was also made that we would do so without seeking additional funding for State to take on the task. I assume the thought was that in an election year to go to congress and ask for a huge budget increase for the State Department was not on. So the State Department was told to take it out of its hide. The whole process took a couple of years to get established. It was an unprecedented project. Only the opening to Africa in the sixties had been anything like it. It was done on a shoestring and was done remarkably well.

As part of the effort the department casting around for anybody who had the capability, background, language, and experience to be able to help setting up the new posts, and it drafted an extraordinarily talented cadre into beginning relations with these countries. The Foreign Service rose to the occasion: we assembled an interesting, talented group of people for each post, normally led by a chargé. Theys were sent out to find an office, set up shop and begin representation of the U.S. as a full embassy accredited to the new government.

Q: A good friend of mine was Mike Weygand. Mike was out there doing that all over.

COLLINS: Yes, it was unique, challenging and from those I heard from almost always exciting. The Department developed a package for those going out. It normally had a core group -an admin person, the political leader, usually a political/econ person, and a consular officer. They would go out and set themselves up in a hotel, or find an office. It was all on a shoestring. But in remarkable short order, we were represented in each of these capitals, and with few exceptions we were first and alone for a while. The one exception was Kiev where we already had a consulate advance team that could quickly pick up the new responsibilities. But this is a great Foreign Service story yet to be told well.

Q: Brand new by the way.

COLLINS: Yes, but something to work with. In places like Bishkek it was de novo

Q: In Bishkek they had a small house. I went there. They did a remarkable job.

COLLINS: That's right, and this was quite normal. We were opening 14 embassies. Nobody had ever done this in one year. Early on I had made certain proposals that never really were picked up even though I think they were sensible. Our circuit rider activity

had developed a few ideas that could have been used to make more efficient and less costly some of what we did. I had thought, for example, that having shared administrative support run out of one or two places (at least, for procurement and such) could have saved a lot of money and made it easier to get things up and running.

The idea was that the new posts were all going to be small except for maybe Kiev. No one thought at that time we would have 100 people in Bishkek. Looking back I think there was a good deal of fantasy about how all this would develop, and we in Moscow certainly shared some of it. But the fundamental point was that America put into place the infrastructure or recognition and representation that would support these countries to become viable independent nations, and I believe is one of the projects of which we can be most proud in that period. We did the right thing.

Q: How did Washington see Moscow's role in all this?

COLLINS: We had two issues with Washington as this early stage unfolded. First, as State and others in Washington were looking for resources to open up the new posts, we kept getting the question, " Well if you lost 14 provinces and a third of the territory you had to cover, why do you need so many people?" Of course in the meantime, we are becoming responsible for a rapidly growing set of programs and the budget to go with them. AID projects and the Nunn-Lugar program are beginning to develop new needs, the private sector from banks to companies in the retail business are showing up and need support, etc.

Strauss and I kept having to explain that territory was not relevant to staffing numbers and it was not the determinant of a mission's responsibility and accountability. Programming determines responsibility, and as programs grew exponentially, the idea of reducing staff was just ludicrous. You can't do it. Now, de-facto they didn't try to cut us, but there was a constant refrain from the Hill and from some bean counters in the State Department that Moscow just didn't need that many people any more. Meanwhile, we were starting to do crisis relief work, support a tidal wave of demanding visitors, and do so with an embassy more or less unchanged from the staffing it had for the Cold War. It taught me a lesson quickly. what sets the need for personnel is responsibility for program implementation and money, and it was that in the end that determined the major shift in the composition and shape of the embassy over the next few years.

Q: What were we doing for relief work? The Soviet Union or Russia is going through tremendous strain in its economic situation.

COLLINS: As it would evolve over the period after 1991, the assistance program came to include financial, technical, and military/security assistance over a broad range of fields. But initially in the winter of '91-'92, the focus was on emergency aid. After the aborted coup there was a genuine worry on the part of the leadership in Moscow and elsewhere that the Soviet government was not going to have enough food to feed the population. Both Europe and the U.S. received requests from Moscow for agricultural and medical credits and humanitarian assistance. And indeed, by fall it was clear that there were real

problems with the food supply. Part of the problem was economic. They had run out of money to buy grain and food. Part of it was just mismanagement, the inability of the system to distribute what existed. I recall the Moscow official in charge of food supplies at the time, the future mayor Luzhkov, telling me he could not keep food in the stores because people were hording against uncertainties. He urged help.

So one of the first really big American projects was provision of credits and an emergency relief effort to send food all over the USSR in the winter of 1991-'92. It had two goals: to serve a particular group of needy people and to make a symbolically significant gesture to show American support for the Soviet public at a time of when reforms were in the balance and political uncertainty made the future much in doubt. And so it was that the first support flights with food began delivery across the Russian federation and other Soviet republics. The target recipients were institutions supported by the government: orphanages, prisons, the military, places at which the government had been feeding people but had lost the capacity to do so. These were in a way the forgotten, the people who depended directly on the government to feed and house them, people with no other source of food. So it was that we began an airlift of emergency supplies that touched people from Minsk to Vladivostok. It was an American effort at our best and had C-5 and C-141 flights landing in places our pilots and Air Force had previously seen only from satellite photos to deliver supplies to people who in most cases had never seen an American. It was quite a beginning.

Q: The planes you mentioned are the largest planes.

COLLINS: Yes. I remember going out with Bob Strauss to meet the first support flight at Sheremetyevo airport in early December '91. It was snowing, cold and damp. It was a miserable day. But, we were welcomed warmly. There was only the one hiccup in the entire ceremony I noted previously. When we went up and symbolically opened the first box it had to be closed and another example chosen because we decided that a case of apple pie filling might not be the most appropriate initial symbol of American good will, even if it could not be more of a national symbol. The next box, powdered milk, better served to introduce the plane and its load of a huge consignment of bulk, dried potatoes, rice, and similar commodities that we delivered to orphanages and schools and hospitals in real need of support.

Now I would be the last to say that this resolved the problem of food shortages, but it did make a real difference for certain groups that were in fact in desperate need. And it symbolized U.S. support and assistance at a time people across the country needed a sense of support. I really believe that we got a lot of credit for it at the time. In retrospect, of course, there are a lot of people who are very cynical about those initial steps, but it was, in fact, a very welcomed and important moment.

So that winter and the program of emergency assistance was the beginning of our assistance program. It was a jump start in a way. And it lent urgency to what would be a rapidly developed system based in funding from the future Freedom Support Act and by the Nunn Lugar program, a system that would engage the U.S. in nearly all aspects of the

actions by Russia and its new neighbors to change their society, economy, political structure and future place in the world.

Q: What was your impression of Boris Yeltsin? Did he grow with the responsibility? How was he responding to things? It's quite complex.

COLLINS: It's a very complex and controversial subject, and I am going to give my personal view based in how I knew him, how I observed him, and the reactions of people to him. I, of course, was never that close to him and had very limited opportunities to engage personally. But he was a presence wherever he appeared and almost always seemed bigger than life.

I found him to be an extraordinary man. He had an idea, we might say a vision, for his country, and he was determined to pursue it. In historic terms he was also an unusual, perhaps unique, Russian ruler. He did not fit the mold primarily because he looked to support of the Russian public as the only basis for the legitimacy of his political power. If you remember his history, and I think I have it mostly right here, he comes up through the Communist Party rising to be head of the Sverdlovsk Communist Party organization. From there he was brought to Moscow to take up the position as the man in charge of the Moscow party organization, historically a significant and important party position. That job also brought him onto the politburo, the top Soviet ruling body, and it seemed he was following the normal path to leadership.

But, he had a falling out with Gorbachev and his Party colleagues that came to a head in - I think it was late 1987 - where he said essentially that Gorbachev wasn't getting the reform job done as fast or as honestly as needed. He wanted more rapid changes. He created a firestorm that ultimately brought his removal from the politburo and Moscow Party leadership. Uncharacteristically for Soviet practice, however, he did not go quietly: he got mad. Casting him into limbo, and subjecting him to humiliation engendered instead of resignation an abiding hatred for the Communist Party, which he saw as trying to destroy him and what he saw as the right thing to do. He decided to get his own back.

Cast out of the Party leadership, he looked for a new basis for authority and, as I noted, found it in his ability to appeal directly to the Russian people and get their support. For him it became the new basis for legitimacy. It made him, in a way, what I suppose we would now call a populist. And he used the newly emerging electoral process to build a new political life by running for and winning election to the Russian Federation's legislature and ultimately its leadership. He subsequently follows that victory by running successfully for the presidency of the RSFSR (Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic) in a direct popular election in June 1991.

All of this process gave Yeltsin, it seemed to me, a very different view about how you could gain and exercise legitimate authority, based in popular will, through elections. It wasn't through the party's blessing, and it wasn't through a blood line. The Russian people and their votes conferred political power and legitimacy. This experience, it seemed to me, shaped the way he then thought a normal country should work, that you

had to have the popular mandate and govern in a way that kept that as the basis for your power and authority.

I think he also came to have a very un-Russian but perhaps Siberian view about the public; he seemed to me to believe always that the public can be trusted, that they will know what's good for them, you can talk to them, and they will respond and let you know what they want through their support. From '89, '90, '91, that seemed to be what struck people about him. As he re-emerged as a political figure, he became a symbol of an alternative to the Communist system. This was a new kind of relationship between leader and people, and it showed in his approach to politics.

I remember being at some of his election rallies as he ran for president in the spring of '91. He would draw all kinds of people to his crowds. I remember in particular, a massive crowd that spring that must have been two hundred thousand-plus people marching in a political rally in support of him. For someone like me, used to traditional Moscow political rallies, it was an incredible sight. It was unlike any other political rally that I'd seen. The one thing I knew about Communist rallies; they were never spontaneous; they were always organized. Participants were given the order to show up; participants dutifully showed up. You did your speeches and everybody cheered or provided another appropriate response. But Yeltsin's crowd was different; there were families with kids of all ages; nobody was drunk; it was middle class and workers all mixed up, with a striking number (at least half) of the crowd women. It was the first time I'd ever seen disabled people in public, being part of things. This crowd just weren't the made up of people that showed up at usual Communist rallies. It was clear there was something going on with this man that was very different from any traditional Soviet politician I had known or watched. And he responded. He got energized from it, I think. By the time he takes office, he's got an idea about how you govern that's quite different from the traditional Soviet bureaucrat or Party leader.

Q: You mentioned earlier that economic reforms to begin building a market were an early step. Prices were freed. But where did they go for prices? In the past the State had set them.

COLLINS: When you get into the first months of Yeltsin's administration, the beginning of 1992, it's a very peculiar world. You have a very limited number of people, mostly very young people, to whom Yeltsin had turned for his government. They were trying to pick up the traces after the Communist collapse. The cupboards were bare, the institutions collapsing on them, and there was no real compass to guide them or even orient them in day to day governance.

But we also saw the emergence of some really tremendous people who got them through that period. There's Yeltsin, of course, the personification of a new Russia who projected a sort of father image and sturdiness for country. And then we had his team of young people desperately working to change the whole system. They were committed to revolutionary change and they brought it fast. I think it was January 2, 1992, just a week after the end of the USSR, when the planned economy's state pricing ends and market

prices appear. No price controls anymore, and nobody knew what would come next or how this change would happen.

On one hand in the very literal sense of the word, the market set the prices for much of the economy. But, you still had ministries of coal and other industries in place, and for quite some time these people simply kept the old Soviet prices, which had no basis in reality in the market, but also no real market to set them otherwise. It was a strange bifurcated system and people lived with it in the creative ways Russian people find to get through conditions others say are just impossible.

And this situation brought some very peculiar realities. On one hand almost the moment prices were freed inflation took off. Prices in the free market skyrocketed. At the same time all during 1992 and well into 1993 in many sectors and instances old Soviet pricing kept on. Huge fortunes were made by playing the arbitrage between the old Soviet state price and the world price, say, for oil. You could buy oil then for something like fifty cents a barrel and sell it abroad for $20. One trainload and you were in big money. Banks were founded. A lot of money was made in these ways by those taking advantage of a legal and customs system in total chaos. At the same time there weren't many, if any, generally accepted rules Much was ad hoc, and much was local. Individuals, public officials, new business people were making it up as they went along. It was truly in that sense a time of economic revolution.

Q: I can envision an economic consular in my embassy saying, "What the hell do I make of this. It doesn't fit the models? How so we describe this?

COLLINS: Yes, I remember saying to my econ section that they might as well forget the models they studied. This was a combination of political economy, politico-economic revolution, and a system that lived in two worlds. So, the best we could do was to describe reality as we saw it, be sure our readers didn't assume this had become New York and Wall Street, and try to provide a sense of ground truth for those making decisions in Washington. One case in point showed how long the strange bi-systemic system lasted. As late as October, 1992, I went out to Vladivostok to open - or more accurately - re-open our consulate there. Stalin had closed it in 1948. I did the round trip flight - about nine hours each way - in Aeroflot "business class." The ticket cost all of about nine dollars because inflation had completely eaten away at the value of the ruble, and the ticket carried the old Soviet price in rubles.

Q: How were we seen by your hosts at this point? By the government? More generally?

COLLINS: Yeltsin described what he wanted as a normal country. The job of his group of young people was to try to begin to fashion a normal country. In this environment for our embassy there were two or three special circumstances that were just unprecedented, I think.

First, we were seen as the agents of a country that "knew how to do it." We were looked to by almost everyone as the place to get the answer to how you took a Communist

Bolshevik command economy and turned it into a market. They thought we knew how to do that. Of course, this was somewhat naïve, but this was the view.

Second, we were seen as the people who held the key to Russia's survival. They were frustrated, weakened, and at sea; they didn't know what the outside world would do to them. They saw our attitude and support as vital. We were the other super power after all.

Third, we were seen as the agents of financial and other kinds of assistance. We were seen as those who could make things happen. This meant we were incessantly asked both what to do and to get the resources to do it. The Russian view of the American embassy's role at that time was in many ways focused on that question. And that meant we had some very strange conversations.

For example, I remember that when Yeltsin was going to come to Washington for his visit in mid-1992, we started negotiations over schedule and the usual details of planning. But I was somewhat nonplussed to be asked as the chargé, "Well, who should we have on the delegation?" They didn't mean which agencies. They wanted my view about which individuals should come to the U.S. This is not the normal question a charge, even of the United States, gets from the leaders of another major power. But it was indicative of the kind of role we were expected to be able to play. In another case I remember one minister coming to me and pressing me to tell him how to make a market economy. We were supposed to know these things. So Americans, and the American Embassy in particular, as the people on the sport, were in a very delicate, and I think, unhealthy position. In responding to questions like these, we were being given a kind of responsibility for what the Russians were going to do with their own people that was frankly uncomfortable. At the same time, it was very hard to say, "That's your business." They wanted guidance and they wanted to know that we would approve.

Q: I can almost envision sitting there during this time, saying: "That's an interesting question. I'll get back to you," and in the next room you pull out your Samuelson, which is a standard textbook in economics, and start thumbing through the pages. How the hell do you set up a market economy?

COLLINS: We at the embassy weren't the only people there, of course. Jeffrey Sachs was there. All kinds of advisers, experts, gurus, financial managers, etc. were showing up. Some were good and some were charlatans; some were very effective and some were a detriment. It was a mixed bag. At the early stages most of this influx was not actually government sponsored. The Russians, in fact, in many cases were paying these people to come. This was before the Freedom Support Act or the large program of official assistance. Institutions like the IMF and World Bank were involved early, and some others from Europe had already brought people in, and some initial programs of support from the U.S. and Europe were beginning to take hold. Remember, we talked earlier about the food aid at the end of 1991.

Looking back, I think we managed reasonably well overall for that first year in uncharted territory; we had limited resources, and no one had real experience in dealing with

anything on the scale of the transformation of Russia's economy. We had had a couple of years' experience with Poland and Eastern Europe, but these countries were not like the Soviet Union. In the world we inhabited there was no memory of anything but the communist system or any institutions or life before it. In Poland and other former Warsaw Pact countries the communist system was relatively new and had been modified to meet local reality. People remembered what private property was, for example. In this sense there were elements of historic memory that gave people more sense of where they were going with a transition. This memory and understanding was just absent in Russia.

Q: What about the security structure, the nuclear issues? What about the Red Army? Would part of it become the Ukrainian army, for example?

COLLINS: The issue of nuclear weapons, from the American perspective was high, probably highest, on our agenda for obvious reasons. The Soviet strategic nuclear arsenal was carved up among four now independent states (Russia, Ukraine, Kazakhstan, and Belarus), and some tactical weapons at the beginning remained in Ukraine. Simply put this was seen by the American Government as a critical proliferation threat and issue number one on our security agenda for the region. We were determined to get these weapons back into the Russian Federation or see them destroyed. The issues were compounded by the fact that you also had the peculiar situation in this early period of confusion about just what the Red army was and what was happening to its structure. Who had control of the weapons in Ukraine for instance?

For a time, there was a command structure linked to the Commonwealth of Independent States. We kept being assured that the central command system had full control over the nuclear weapons, and, in fact, it did not seem that the nuclear command system had broken down. But the writing was on the wall. We were convinced we were not going to be dealing with a single unified command for anything military, except for a very limited time. Then what would we do? Those kinds of preoccupations were very much front and center from the outset in the Bush administration. And stayed so in the first Clinton term. These issues were, perhaps the most vivid examples of what was involved in the process of trying to adapt to a totally new world. We'll have to talk about this later in greater detail.

Q: I suppose you had a lot of interest from Washington from new quarters that had not previously been involved with Soviet affairs?

COLLINS: That may be the understatement of the interview. Once the Soviet Union disappeared and our government decided we had to be involved deeply in Russia, including big money programming, everybody and his brother in Washington had to be in Moscow. Given the strictures on the embassy's staff, that almost immediately became a problem. Washington seemed to believe we had an infinitely expandable capacity to absorb new agencies, staffing, and demands from a growing family of agencies, private sector interests, and legislators without growing our support complement. They thought we had after all lost a third of the territory for which we were responsible.

Q: The Embassy must have been under a lot of pressure. From Department of State, Pentagon and others?

COLLINS: I think it's fair to say that we had people's attention. There were requests of us, but we were also able to ask for support in a variety of ways. I found the Department of Agriculture, State Department, and all those involved in these early days to be very responsive and very supportive. But this was also a mixed blessing. A problem arose almost from day one because we lacked adequate support staff to take care of the growing demands for new slots at the Embassy. As the Soviet Union collapsed almost every agency wanted to be part of building what was coming next. Everybody wanted to get in on the act.

Q: Were we still being inhibited by not being able to hire Russians?

COLLINS: Yes, well into '92 we still could not hire any Russians. The only Russians we used in what you might see as a traditional FSN role were drivers working for an independent company. They could not come onto the compound, but were available for transporting us around town. It was more or less a private car service.

Q: What were you doing? There must have been a fight with the security people or something.

COLLINS: Well if you are anybody in Washington, you have got to be part of this triumph of the West. The embassy, however, was simply not equipped to support the onslaught. The AID people, for example, began to show up, and we agreed they would begin with a limited number of assigned personnel to get started. But then they began sending people "TDY"(temporary duty). It got to the point for everyone where I no longer asked how many people they had assigned to Moscow. Instead, I would say, "Show me the phone book," Suddenly the AID complement, for example at one point was 40 rather than the four or so officially assigned. But we had to support all these personnel on the basis of a staffing pattern that belonged to the 1980s and the decision to have only cleared American personnel at the Embassy. It was untenable

In mid- '92 I finally sat down with Joe Hulings, Ambassador Strauss and our admin people and we agreed, "This just can't go on. Either we get more support staff or we cannot bring in more people." So Strauss sent a cable back to Washington that said, in essence, no more people can come to Moscow until we acquire support staff to manage their affairs. The initial request was for 50 slots. We then pointed out that we would accept either the introduction of Russian staff or the expansion of the American contract contingent. But we then pointed out that it cost about $200,000 a year in that day's money to have a cleared contract American or a foreign service professional come and perform this function. On the other hand we could hire a Russian or foreign national for the same duties and with the same qualifications for $5,000 a year. Your choice we said. A standoff ensued for a time. Strauss was very tough. He backed us up not letting anybody come, and that included most requests for TDY people, until this got settled.
Q: I gather that this was not a popular cable.

COLLINS: Oh, it wasn't at all. First just the idea of increasing the support staff by fifty was bound to cause problems at State. But the real issue was suggesting that the logical solution was to reintroduce Russian employees. You may recall that in the mid-eighties security breaches involving the marines at the embassy and the revelations about the bugging of the new chancery building had resulted in actions that removed all the Soviet employees from the Embassy. They were replaced by cleared Americans working on contract for a firm called Pacific Architects and Engineers (PA&E). The security and intelligence communities were adamantly opposed to reintroducing Russians to the compound.

As you can imagine our position caused major consternation in Washington because the pressure was on. We were hearing from any number of quarters, "We've got these important programs we have to get going," and so forth. Our answer was, OK, you talk to the intelligence community and the security community and you get it sorted out. When it is done, and we have the capacity to support your staffs, let us know. Our problem was that Russia had become another country at this point, and the embassy was having to adapt with it. Something had to change.

The fight went on for some weeks and it was bitter. But with Strauss' full support the Embassy did not budge. I understood we were not very popular with the DCI (Director of Central Intelligence) at the time, I think it was Bob Gates or with the security people. But this broke the dam. The counter intelligence/security community finally relented, or I suspect more accurately was overruled, and we began to rehire Russian nationals initially under circumstances.

The first Russian employees came in mid '92. We had our pick of Ph.D.'s and other talented professional people, because the embassy was a good employer, and as noted before we were paying hard currency salaries at that time. Initially because of the rules and restrictions that the intelligence community insisted we have, they had to wear badges and they couldn't cross certain designated lines on the compound. This did not last because it was an unworkable system at the outset. But we did succeed in making the point that we could bring back highly qualified local national employees to fill essential positions for support of an expanding staff. No one in Washington was willing to pay for cleared Americans to take up these places, so it was a simple dollars and cents decision. After that we were able to build up the local staff to deal with the things that had to be done to support the influx of Americans who were arriving and creating a qualitatively different and new embassy presence. For the new employees it was a life opportunity; we paid a salary fully and on time, we had food, and it was a regular life. In fact, some of those people who were initially hired are still there as of this session. It was also the beginning of a real change for the embassy, as our staffing became more like our embassies elsewhere, and we reengaged Russian society in a broader and more diverse way.

Q: How did things work out regarding security after the decision. Did you get the feeling that the KGB (or whoever it was at the time) was so overwhelmed that it probably didn't make a hell of a lot of difference?

COLLINS: The KGB had disappeared in its old form with the end of the USSR. Yeltsin had broken up its structure into a foreign intelligence service (SVR) the CIA equivalent I suppose, a domestic agency(FSB), analogous to the FBI but larger; the border guards structure, went to the Ministry of Defense. The military had the GRU (military intelligence) as previously. So it was not the old KGB structure after 1991. But had changing hats and titles really changed these guys? Were they all suddenly converted to democrats wedded to the rule of law? Well, not really. Their responsibilities were still what they were in certain respects. The counter intelligence elements were trying to do what they always did, approaching people who were employees of the embassy. They were gathering intelligence on us, in the ways they always had. It was admittedly less intrusive and obtrusive than it had been during the Cold War period for sure. It was different, but it was there.

Everybody understood this. We had dealt with it in the Soviet period. It was everywhere else in the world. I was very proud of many of the employees we had who would come and tell us if they were put under pressure, and as time went on they became comfortable resisting during that pressure. But we need to recall that this was a time when the role of the security services had been curbed drastically in terms of Russia's domestic population. The society was now far more open. Yeltsin had limited the role of all the services, and they themselves were under surveillance by the leadership. So bringing our FSNs back was a decision that again had paid great dividends because there was no way we could have done what the new embassy mission required without them. We built a very fine local staff who became essential in carrying out nearly all the programs the mission was undertaking. Some of them who were hired in that day are still there at the embassy as we speak (2013). They have been very loyal and they have stayed with it, even when it became much more attractive to go work for a law firm or a bank or a corporation. (Note: The substantial majority of these employees were let go in 2018 when the Russian authorities forced a major reduction in the number of staff permitted at the American Embassy in Moscow)

Q: I would think one of the things you're going to have would be real problems with every congressman worth his or her salt, and their staffs, all wanting to come and see the elephant,

COLLINS: We generally did want them to come and welcomed as many as we could get. We had several congressional delegations (CODELS) during that first year, and I think we benefitted from each one. Strauss was very good at getting them to come, and because he knew a lot of members, he was an excellent host and manager of their visits. He understood them and they him.

These visits were really quite beneficial. Being on the ground was an eye opener for the members. They came with no concrete feel for what was happening in Russia or the new

personalities. It was very good also for Russians to meet and talk to them. I remember one CODEL, in particular, a big group of people, led by the speaker Gephardt and minority leader Michael. That was a major and complex visit. We took them out of town; they met leaders and people on the street; and we arranged for them to have dinner at people's homes. They left with a sense they were part of something historic and a personal feel for how Russians saw their situation. It was a very successful visit and paid dividends for a long time. It was the kind of visit I very much favored. Arranging the visit and all its details, of course, was a pain, but they had a good program: they were treated well; and they went home as advocates. I was convinced it had a positive long term outcome.

Q: This is one of the things that's often forgotten in these congressional visits. It's a two edge sword. One, they're a pain in the neck to organize, but the other one the benefit they provide: where else can you talk to your paymasters and let them see what the problem is on the ground and talk to them one-on-one?

COLLINS: I always felt that anytime I could get members of congress to come, I wanted them. It didn't matter who they were, what their politics were. They usually left with a view different from what they had when they arrived. And you had time to talk to them in ways never possible in Washington. There were a couple of exceptions, but for the most part I had only the best things to say about the visits I had all this time. Another point by the way is that when they came, they worked hard. Trips to Moscow were never a boondoggle. The members who came were serious and it was taxing for them. Having many of them come in the first year was a big plus.

Q: How about society? As the DCM and charge during this transition period, how was getting together with Russians.

COLLINS: I think we've discussed how the coup and its aftermath changed almost all the rules about conducting business with our hosts. The same could be said about unofficial relations. After the coup and end of the USSR, and especially after the new Russian government took control in Moscow, I was able to see nearly any official at almost any level at my request. I had exceptional access. And much the same was true for my officers. They developed relationships with people in the ministries, members of legislatures, local administrators and city officials, and private citizens involved in the range of emerging social and economic activity. My attaches also had much greater access to the military. So the new openness meant an almost unlimited opportunity to meet, know, engage people at all levels. At the same time, at this point we were still much the same embassy we had been as I arrived in 1990 and had much the same responsibilities. But, I should note that the embassy and its mission are on the cusp of a monumental change that had a profound effect on our mission as an institution and the extent and breadth of our engagement with Russian society. It changed profoundly what embassy Moscow historically had represented and fundamentally changed the embassy culture and relationship with Russian society.

Q: Can you elaborate? I know the society is changing. But you're suggesting something just as profound about the embassy.

COLLINS: Yes, I am. The answer to your question has two parts. The first is linked to the traditional role embassy Moscow had been called on to play since the thirties: engaging Moscow's leadership and representing the U.S. Government to them, reporting on and analyzing developments of policy relevance, providing the minimal consular services Soviet citizens and the American community, and implementing a limited number of programs developed over the decades under bilateral agreements, including a limited program of public diplomacy, including student, cultural, and scientific exchange. It was a limited but traditional mission for an embassy in the circumstances of the Cold War that had prevailed in Moscow for half a century. And even as the old system dropped away the fundamentals of this mission remained. What changed were expectations, opportunities, and the scope of the demands those traditional functions imposed on the mission. We were now expected to engage the Russian public, provide Washington with broadly based coverage of the socio-economic and political changes the country was undergoing, and build connections with the society across eleven time zones now open to us.

The second change has to do with the transformation of embassy Moscow as it becomes the focal point for implementing an elaborate American program to support Russia's transformation and integration with the Euro-Atlantic system. This involved programs supporting Russia in building a market economy and democratic political system. It included as well major initiatives to assist in the reduction of Russia's nuclear arsenal, expand areas of cooperation between the two countries, including in space, and the support and encouragement for America's private sector as it participated in Russia's economic recovery and development. These dimensions of the embassy's responsibilities, unprecedented for Moscow, along with the changes brought from Russia's new openness for traditional areas of diplomacy reshaped the embassy almost beyond recognition.

So, over this period as we coped with an acceleration of change that affected nearly every institution and structure of government and society, the embassy too lived with a revolutionary internal transformation and pace of change that was rendered Embassy Moscow almost unrecognizable. It called on every one of us for flexibility, new patterns of thought, and resiliency in the face of the unknown. I used to tell visitors and staff: "Here every day is a week, every week a month, and every month a year". And that did seem to be our world.

Q: Can you give me a sense of how these changes showed themselves? What were you having to do differently?

COLLINS: Let's start with the traditional side of our job. As the pace of change accelerated toward the end of 1991, our physical plant, staffing, and security grew steadily less capable of meeting our needs. The physical set up we lived with at the embassy was designed for the Cold War. It was a fortress behind enemy lines with the structure, staffing and protocols one would expect. Gorbachev's perestroika had relaxed

some elements of the competition and some elements of the Soviet system of controls in the second half of the ‘80s. But, our staffing, security culture, and operations still worked largely by Cold War rules and standards that flowed in their most recent form from fallout from the Lonetree scandal and the bugging of the new chancery the skeleton of which stood untouched as a living reminder of the worst security debacles of the 1980s. Our staff. as noted earlier, was made up only of cleared Americans: our security protocols were designed to keep Russians out and limit engagement without hosts to the minimum required by professional needs. Any off line engagement with Russians was discouraged if not suspect.

So, from his arrival Strauss and our team faced the issue of bringing a new culture to an institution not staffed or set up to cope with the opening of Russia to Americans and the avalanche of demands for active involvement in Russia from Washington that followed the Soviet collapse. Rebuilding the embassy to deal with this new world became a critical priority for Bob Strauss’ first year. I can only say we were very fortunate to have him as the mover to do the job. But we will talk about that later.

A second element that required fundamental change had to do with how we did our reporting and analysis and how we engaged our host institutions and citizens. With the end of Soviet rule and the arrival of the Yeltsin era, the Russia we knew seemed to be turned upside down. As I think I noted, for example, suddenly public opinion mattered, but we were set up in a way that made it almost impossible for the public to visit or engage us. Suddenly we go from not enough contact with Russian citizens and officials to access that seemed to overwhelm. Where once we had a very limited set of contacts, we now found it hard to find time to speak with all who wanted to talk, and where earlier getting a Russian contact to talk about anything significant was almost impossible, it now became all but impossible limit the flow of personal views, opinions, news, and gossip.

This meant new challenges on the analytical side. It reminded me a bit of what happened in the Operations Center when we moved to the digital world and suddenly found ourselves overwhelmed with information. Now in Russia we had something the equivalent. During the Cold War the analyst’s problem was to take very limited information and construct something cosmic from a few disparate pieces. Now a fire hose was dropping floods of data into your inbox, and the requirement was to select the five that were relevant and make sense from those, without being diverted by less relevant facts. It was a totally different kind of analytical challenge from that required of the Kremlinologist during the Cold War. For people who had served in other parts of the world, this seemed normal. They were used to talking, say, to people in a central bank and getting the information they needed. That had not happened with Moscow officials in the Soviet period, but now it seemed to become the norm.

I didn’t have a problem accepting the new reality or understanding the problem of this adjustment. It was a challenge, but I had also done something similar in the OpsCenter. But the Soviet hands it was particularly disorienting. Fortunately, in a way, we had a big turnover in ’91, and many who came in, even if they had served in the embassy once before, grasped quickly they were working in a different culture. Not everyone, of course,

was ready for change or new thinking. The embassy security family, in particular, were skeptical about the idea that we were really living with changed circumstances, and were cautious. We had our tussles with them and with the counter-intelligence community. They just were reluctant to move from the tried ways or accept the need to adapt to the view we were living in a new or changed world, that we had to adapt, we had to get out, engage, travel, open up to exploit the new opportunities.

And so, I worked to get officers to go around the country, to meet and know people in the regions and regional officials, I reworked the system of circuit rider officers, assigning particularly our junior officers to specific regions. We also reopened the consulate in Vladivostok and established a new post in Ekaterinburg trying to establish regular connections between a U.S. official presence and key areas distant from the two major cities of Moscow and Petersburg. But, we still found our capacity to cover the vast expanses limited and certainly at the outset just not adequate to the job.

On the more traditional level the embassy expanded its entertaining and representation. We expanded the scope of those we sought to know. People in business and the private sector, others involved in exploring the idea and work of NGOs, previously underground cultural and journalistic personalities who were testing the limits of new freedom of expression, and others were all part of a vast cultural upheaval we had to monitor, assess and understand. The embassy became our government's only official, on the ground interpreter of revolutionary change critical to our interests. We were the one voice from the scene that consistently provided a day to day, on-the-ground, official perspective on the extent, pace, and scope of change that was transforming our greatest twentieth century adversary.

Finally, the third and perhaps most powerful, influence for change in the embassy came from the explosion of new programs and actors associated with U.S. support for Russia's transition. This all radically redefined our mission. I think we talked briefly about the emergency food assistance program that was launched in late 1991. That, it quickly turned out, was to be just the leading edge of a tsunami wave that began to swamp our limited ship during the early months of 1992. As I think I have mentioned, as Russia opened up, Washington awakened with accelerating speed to the dimensions of the issues we were going to have to address to restructure relations with Moscow and support Yeltsin's proclaimed intentions. As a result, everyone from Washington seemed to have an immediate need to be in Moscow.

Demands on the embassy to support visitors, staff proposed new programs, and provide oversight and administrative support for both was overwhelming the staff and de facto restructuring the embassy mission. Moscow had traditionally been a medium sized embassy in a hostile environment designed for official representation to the Soviet government, intelligence reporting and analysis, and implementation of a restricted number of bilateral programs of cooperation and public diplomacy. Suddenly, it was becoming a much larger enterprise called upon to support an exponentially growing number of American programs and their personnel as well as the interests of a mushrooming American private sector community. In sum, Moscow was becoming a

mission that seemed to combine elements of our largest European missions with many of the aspects of large missions in developing countries. It was a shock to the embassy and a challenge to all of us. Put succinctly, it seemed to me that as I left after my three-plus year tour as DCM, the embassy was just a different institution from that I arrive at in October, 1990.

Q: *Now we're talking about your reaching out to the public trying to say, "Hey, we're your friends," and all that. The Cold War is over. How did that go?*

COLLINS: Looking back, I'm not sure we did a very good job of it in many ways. I think we spent much too much of the 1990s working at tidying up the results of the Cold War as we thought they should have been arranged and not enough thinking about what the challenges were going to be after that war was over and its confrontational line was gone. In some sense the Moscow embassy embodied all these problems. We too, I think, were slow to adapt to the changes we lived with.

Through the 75 years of the Soviet Union, and for American diplomats once they arrived in Moscow in the early 30s the challenge was to know anybody that could provide authoritative information or help to understand what was going on in an extremely opaque set of institutions that we saw as the decision making structure of the USSR. The basic rules prohibiting Soviet citizens from having contact with American and Western diplomats without permission remained a constant challenge and usually meant any sustained contact was seeing one under guidance. And, while the discipline in that system was breaking down in the late '80s, it was still much in evidence as I got there at the beginning of the '90s.

With the Soviet collapse, that control largely disappeared. But having the entire structure of American diplomacy toward Moscow designed for dealing with the Soviet system almost immediately became a problem. In the past if you could just get the Party leaders who ran the place to think right, that's all we needed. They made the decisions and weren't beholden to any but themselves. If you had a Stalin-like figure, what you needed was to ensure the one man who counted would think right. Now, however, all of a sudden at the end of 1991, after the coup and the end of the Soviet Union, the system we were geared to work and influence imploded, a period of chaotic change began, and there was little if any certainty about who was in charge, how power was distributed or who would have a say over how the country would evolve and develop.

In this new Russia with new boundaries and devoid of an ideology, with governmental institutions which were never really designed to govern running the country, it was in no way obvious who had real authority or was in charge. For our officers it was suddenly a new world. From a time when knowing any Russian was problematic, by the beginning of '92 we had so many Russians who wanted to talk to us we hardly had enough people to go around to meet them. From having anyone from whom you could get to say anything worthwhile, we suddenly had so many we couldn't shut them up. The problem suddenly went from not having enough information to having too much. And in the larger sense, the entire western system that looked at our part of the world was unequipped to

shift to the new realities; to think not in Kremlinology terms (divining who was significant by where he stood on the tomb), but now assessing and making sense of a thousand different versions of reality from a thousand people all of whom would provide candidly their view of what was happening - each plausible, and each with a claim to access to good information.

This was a first line challenge for our reporting and analytical people. They suddenly had to be able to discriminate among people, among sources; they had to take on overwhelming amounts of information and try to make sense of it. They were ahead of their counterparts in Washington because they were on the ground, and they had a sense of reality and ground truth. The Embassy and consulate were the frontier posts. What became a challenge in this respect is that for those further away most of the images and ideologically constructed frameworks for looking at our part of the world were hopelessly out of date and yet they didn't die, while our officers and those resident in the midst of the change were seeing a new and evolving reality every day that no longer fit these old images. That was one challenge.

The second challenge was a more active one. Diplomacy is not just reporting and analysis. It involves bringing the hosts to understand and hopefully adopt views and positions Washington is seeking to advance. If all you had to do in the Soviet period was to persuade 12 politburo members what to do because they did not have to listen to their people or much of anybody else, all of a sudden that wasn't true anymore Now it was clear that we had to take seriously the views and positions of the broader elite and increasingly the larger population across the country as a factor in where this country was going, what its attitudes would be, how it would think about the outside world and, what its foreign policy would be. Foreign policy and more importantly I suppose relations with foreigners and foreign institutions was no longer the exclusive province of a few in the Kremlin.

This trend was accelerated because suddenly Russians were free to engage with the outside world in unprecedented numbers. They were either travelling abroad or they were engaging the foreigners showing up in their country. Russians' whole perception of the outside world was in turmoil. The bizarre worldview that was inculcated by the Soviet ideological education and media systems was giving way to one based in the experiences of growing engagement by Russian citizens with a world that had been closed to them. The result was a momentous realization that the world the Soviets had portrayed was unreal and an insatiable curiosity about what the world they were going to be living in was all about. For the embassy there was an incredible demand for access to us. "What's America up to? What do they do? Tell us how to do things." And this raised a monumental problem. When the Soviet Union ended, we were totally unequipped to deal with the demands we faced from our hosts. As I think we discussed, we were well structured to fight the Cold War. We had no Russian employees. We had only cleared Americans. I think our total compliment was just over 240. The only concession that had been made to this was that we could use Russian contract drivers and employ some third country (non-Soviet) national employees.

The security regime of the embassy, which was codified in a thick book of countless pages was designed to ensure that as few Russians as possible got into the embassy compound or had normal contact with employees. Access was strictly controlled not just to the chancery, but to embassy housing as well. The idea of facilitating engagement, of having people easily come in and talk to you was not part of the thinking. This was a fortress in a hostile environment, and the objective was to keep the enemy as far away as possible. Then, with the new reality we find ourselves on the frontier of what is now called public diplomacy, using whatever means we could develop to get the American message out to the public, doing what we could to engage them, and working to satisfy their demand for information.

At the beginning the lack of funds, programs, personnel, and strategy to meet the new demands was daunting. We had a number of Cold War era exchange programs, but these were limited in scope and mostly directed at traditional academic subjects - not at providing Russians with the answers to questions on their minds about their future

No less important, our representation around the country was limited. We had a consulate in Leningrad but nothing East of Moscow. Washington did respond with a decision that we should open two more posts, one in Vladivostok and one in Ekaterinburg. But this was to be a slow, bureaucratic process, largely in the hands of those who had designed the Cold War embassy model. The expenses involved were daunting: the security considerations made the outcome still like a fortress. And this, by the way, before terrorism became a preoccupation.

It was clear to me that we were going to have to find a different way to do business, find ways to make ourselves available to the public and have a relationship with the Russian people that went well beyond the Kremlin. So, when the Director of Library of Foreign Literature Ekaterina Genieva offered facilities where we could put an American center in Moscow outside the embassy, we grabbed the opportunity. It became a magnet for young people and an opening for Russians to engage us without security checks, having to show passes, or other such inhibitors. Then opening the consulate in Vladivostok gave people in Russia's Far East some chance to engage Americans for the first time since the Consulate was closed by Stalin in 1948. But Russia's a big country. Russians were going 5,000 miles to get an American visa, and we didn't have any capacity to serve or provide American services or information other than through these diplomatic facilities. Remember, there aren't any cell phones yet; there's no Internet. In Russia in fact we're still living in the world we knew in the 1960s or 1970s, not even the 1990s. At that time the best we could do was expand the travel and responsibility of our officers to get to know one or two provinces, give their constituents a sense America was interested in them, and provide whatever services or information we could manage with the limited staff we had.

Looking back on this time, I think we had reasonable success with this program. It was not all that easy to do. We had an initial problem in selling the idea to Washington which had its own priorities and its own views about what we should be doing. It seemed to us that they would have preferred to have us all sitting at a desk all the time, ready to take on

whatever questions they had. So for most of '92 reorienting the thinking of the embassy staff about what our job was to be was a challenge as agency representatives were caught between Embassy priorities and those of their home agencies. Added to this was the fact that conducting this kind of program had its very practical problems. Travel in Russia in 1992 wasn't easy. It was cheap, but demanding. The fact that old Soviet and new post-Soviet systems were far from reconciled meant all kinds of restrictions, problems of getting accommodations, managing *Inturist* rules, etc. It was also just physically difficult to go to a lot of places. Understandably, my officers were different in their views about how much they wanted to do this demanding work. Some thrived and wanted to be on the road all the time; others found it very burdensome to be away from family or the routine they had in Moscow. But, all took up the challenge, and I think our reporting and early efforts to make America something tangible for people who in most cases had never met an American served our country very well.

Q: Did you have the equivalent of a brain session or something like that, sitting around with the officers saying, "Things have changed. We have to think differently. How do we do this?" In other words, even the students or officers coming from whatever system it was in the States or in their education were all Cold war warriors.

COLLINS: We did. I don't remember how formal these sessions were, but we did sit down and think through our options to deal with this new reality. Sometimes it was the whole country team; sometimes just a few of us. It was a time when rank, specialty, experience in Moscow all made little difference as everyone seemed to join the discussion and feel free to put forth any ideas they had. The interesting part about this environment was that those who were at the embassy and were living daily with the tectonic shifts that changed the place every day did have a sense of how rapidly and deeply the change was altering the country, at least in the major urban centers. We also had, I think, a more realistic understanding about what was and was not changing or how the new was absorbed by the old and how Russians, faced with this upheaval were finding ways to survive what I think most thought a catastrophic upheaval in their lives. In a word, our team developed an appreciation for the fact that what we were living just did not have a precedent or fit any model we had been prepared to think might apply. And this was a problem as Americans and the West more generally now engaged this transformation and tried to make sense of it in terms that Washington, Berlin, or London would understand. I won't say we in Moscow had it right, but I think we at least understood the limits of our understanding.

Q: Cn you tell me about the Freedom Support Act. What was it?

COLLINS: The Freedom Support Act was in essence an Act to provide funding for programs the U.S. Government was developing to support the transition of Russia and the new independent states from the Communist model to democratic political and market based economic societies. Military and defense programs were funded under different legislation.

A bit of background here. In the Soviet period the conduct of bilateral business between our societies was closely controlled by the Soviet Government. Generally it was fair to

assume almost no activity from the Soviet side came without strict government control or at least authorization by the government. From the earliest openings to the USSR, Moscow also required some form of binding agreement to set and govern the terms of engagement between our institutions, citizens and governments.

The early version of what was to become the model for building such arrangements emerged in the late fifties when Moscow and Washington signed a general agreement to govern cultural, educational and scientific exchanges. Under this agreement a number of different exchanges from a very limited number of graduate students, scholars and scientists to exchanges of arts organizations and exhibits provided the first openings for Americans to explore the USSR and our counterparts to see the United States. And the model remained in place even up to 1991. Later, the 1972 summit meeting between Nixon and Brezhnev in Moscow used that model to begin building a web of bilateral agreements on everything from health to space to nuclear cooperation. Subsequent bilateral agreements thickened the web of joint activity through the late '80s. And as these programs grew in number each American department party to an agreement created a budget line to conduct the programs for which it had responsibility.

An arrangement similar to what we had with the USSR also existed for the Warsaw Pact states and governed our engagement with them so long as the Soviet Union had control over Eastern Europe. But, once the Warsaw Pact began to unravel and Central Europe's states threw off the communist system, this model was cast aside as simply no longer workable or desired by either side Instead as countries like Poland and Hungary opened up to the West and the old controls on engagement disappeared, governments looked to the U.S. for broad support of their liberation and rebuilding. The initial response from Washington to these requests was fairly chaotic. Agencies with funding for bilateral programs with these states worked to reshape their programs to respond, but the results lacked coherence and were far from effective. In response, the Department under Secretary Baker took a lead to get a hand on events. As the Berlin wall was coming down, Larry Eagleburger, then the Deputy Secretary , called a meeting in his conference room. He made clear his intent by saying, "I want everybody here who's doing anything in East Germany, who's spending any money in East Germany." It was an illuminating gathering just by its number of participants. You couldn't get them all in the door.

As the meeting proceeded, it was also clear the group's programs lacked strategic direction and coherence. The system on which they had been developed was on its way out. The whole world was changing and each agency had its own response the new realities. No strategy, no coordination. On the spot Eagleburger said "enough," and having called the group together took charge. He became the first coordinator for assistance for East Germany. that rapidly morphed into that responsibility for East Europe. Congress was asked then to appropriate money for a regional assistance program for East Europe that would provide appropriations to fund future programming in those countries. The response was the SEED (Support for East European Democracy) Act. De facto, the new act and funding replaced line item agency funding for the old bilateral agreements and set new priorities and objectives for programming. Going forward funds would come to the Secretary of State, who in turn would coordinate the funding of

different agencies and programs to support the purposes of the new program. AID under the direction of the coordinator, became the bookkeeper and administrator for the distributed funds, as well as one of the principal managers of their own programming .

So, when the Russian challenge came along after 1991, the SEED precedent provided a model to build on. The Bush administration moved ahead in 1992 to pass legislation that would apply the same principles and organization to fund programming for the transition in the former USSR. The result was the Freedom Support Act of 1992 that in place of the old bilateral agreements with the Soviets would now fund major programming for Russia and the new states in support of their transition. As with the SEED Act, the Freedom Support Act provided that State, with the lead on policy and determining priorities, would have the lead responsibility for the funding under the Act. The Secretary of State would , in turn, provide from the FSA funds to other agencies and programs (not including those to be funded under the Defense Department appropriation -the 050 Account).

When the Clinton administration took office, a reorganization of responsibilities for the former USSR, removed the region from the European bureau and created the position of Ambassador-at-Large for the Newly Independent States. Clinton appointed Strobe Talbott to be the Ambassador, and he in turn appointed a coordinator for assistance for the former Soviet Union. That position was given responsibility for the distribution of FSA funding and oversight of its use. Looking ahead, it is into this structure that I would move after leaving Moscow in late 1993.

Q: I would think that within the government if all of a sudden you're changing the allocation of money it would cause tremendous battles. "You're not giving enough money to my particular country." I would think that this battle would be never ending.

COLLINS: It was and it is! But the transition from one system to the other was made somewhat easier because the old bilateral agreements which had been the basis for funding earlier programs, in many cases had money left over to go into FY'92. That made possible an easier transition because temporary funding did not bring an abrupt end to ongoing projects. The issue was not really joined until fiscal '93 (the fall of 1992). At that point nearly all funding for agency-to-agency bilateral agreements came to an end, and funding under the FSA system took its place. At the outset the over all FSA appropriation increased funding for the region as a whole dramatically. It was a big pot of money to support many existing programs as well as newly authorized assistance and cooperative programming in all of the new states. Determination about how programs would be administered and who would get what funding to accomplish the objectives of the FSA would be in the hands of the President and his appointed representatives, in this case the Secretary of State. Initially, the reaction to this new system was largely positive because most agencies got the funding they wanted for existing, expanded or new programming.

For the remainder of the 1990s this system was overseen by the Ambassador-at-Large for the Newly Independent States and the coordinator for assistance who worked for him For just one example of how the system worked, let's take the Commerce Department which

had no budget for Ukrainian programs prior to 1992. What they received was a pot of money out of the FSA appropriation with which to open commercial offices, develop programs to train people in certain market economic skills and so on. Elsewhere, the number of exchange programs administered by USIA, State, and the Department of Education increased dramatically with expanded funding from the FSA. So, at the outset almost every agency was winning new or expanded funding, and that kept the bureaucratic squabbling to a minimum.

There was, however, competition for funding among the recipient states early on. Active lobbies in the U.S. also pressed for ever more funding or sought to use funding of assistance as a tool to advance their special objectives. So the funding process was regularly accompanied by competition over country allocations. The most intense lobbying came, in my experience, from the Armenian and Ukrainian communities both of which sought more funds for programming in their native countries and to use funding of other nations' programs to press for U.S. policy support on issues of contention. This was intense over the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict and Ukraine's ongoing search for leverage in dealing with Russia. Congress made its will know as well, of course, resulting in limitations on provision of assistance in cases such as Azerbaijan programming. But, nevertheless at the outset funding was plentiful and most programming was well supported.

Q: Where did funding for security programs fit into this system?

COLLINS: The Freedom Support Act was designed to support civilian development programming. It was the province in Congress of the Foreign Affairs authorizers and appropriators. In the jargon it was linked to the 150 account that funded such agencies as State, USIA, and AID. Funding for military programming came from a different community, the Armed Forces authorizers and appropriators, who funded and oversaw the 050 account. This money under the authority primarily of the Defense Department worked in parallel with that provided by the Freedom Support Act, but addressed a different set of objectives.

In the earliest period, issues centered on nuclear, chemical and other weapons of mass destruction in the hands of the Soviet Armed forces as well as the Soviet military industrial complex represented a priority concern for nearly everyone. As the Soviet Union was coming apart following the 1991 coup, there were several approaches to the problems this universe presented, but the most important was formulated early by Senators Nunn and Lugar. Alarmed by what he encountered on a visit to the Soviet Union as the coup was winding down Nunn came home and together with Lugar got their colleagues to provide funds for The Cooperative Threat Reduction Act, more generally known as the Nunn Lugar program. Based on the premise that the U.S. had a strong security interest in the safe and secure management of the Soviet nuclear arsenal, this program's objective was to secure the safe transport, storage, and dismantlement of Soviet nuclear, chemical, and other weaponry in accord with the treaty and other obligations the Soviet Union had undertaken as the Cold War wound down. Under its provisions a variety of programs were put in place: first to get nuclear weapons out of

Ukraine, Belarus, and Kazakhstan; second to assist in the elimination of weapons due for destruction under the START Treaty and other agreements; and third to assist in the development of new, effective security structures for the safe storage and management of remaining weapons and nuclear material. The latter, had become an imperative with the collapse of the KGB-managed security system that had focused almost wholly on ensuring the loyalty of personnel as opposed to the U.S. approach that gave no less priority to the technical dimensions of security systems and the facilities housing the weapons. These programs were in the hands of the Pentagon and were administered by elements of the bureaucracy there. But it was in my time taken for granted and was in fact the case that there would be close coordination with the programs overseen by State.

Q: As the USSR is breaking up, what were we trying to do regarding the Soviet military? to make it more efficient, or was that a priority?

COLLINS: Well, the objective as I saw it was to see its adaptation to a new reality in a way that was orderly and non-threatening to peace in a region in upheaval. Discussion about topics like modernization and structural reform of the Russian military was a topic for the future. As the Soviet Union disintegrated the critical issues revolved around what was to become of the Red Army Navy/Air Force/Strategic Rocket Forces. The forces began 1992 still under a unified system of CIS command, but signs that this system was unlikely to survive intact emerged early. What was to become of the components of these forces located in different parts of the former Union was still to be determined. Would the force split into fifteen national forces? Who would get control of what? Also, what was to come of the large numbers of demobilized soldiers or the soldiers returning from Europe in conditions of upheaval and economic chaos became a real concern.

On our side I saw three issues as highest on the U.S. agenda: first, ensure that the nuclear forces and their weapons remained safely and firmly under effective, responsible control and security; second, ensure the continued withdrawal of Red Army forces stationed in the former Warsaw Pact and Baltic states, and third keeping the peace among and within the states of the former Union. In short, what was going to become of the Soviet Armed forces, and how did their evolution take place peacefully. So, even though talk about reforming the military was current, what was really at stake was assuring the safe and secure dismantlement of the Soviet armed forces and the remaking of this institution to serve a post imperial Russia and the new states of Eurasia.

The challenge was profound. First, there was no general agreement among the new states about what parts of the military would belong to whom. The period began with the creation of the central command for the Confederation of Independent States (CIS). This kept in place a command structure to keep all the forces subject to one central command authority for a time, but it was clear early on that pressures to create national armies subject to national command in the new states were building. And that would mean finding a formula to resolve the complex problem of dividing up men, materiel, and assets that were distributed over the USSR at the end of 1991 without much regard to nationality, geography, or sense of political allegiance.

For Russia the issues were further complicated because any restructuring or reform that would create a new national military had to take into account that new Russia had only half the population of the old Soviet state and that much of the military and the military industrial complex Russia would count on was no longer in Russia or under Russian control. This dilemma emerged from the working premise accepted by all that any military unit or industrial facility would fall under the jurisdiction and control of the state on whose territory it was located. In this regard one interesting factoid emerged for me at least. I was told at one time - I don't know whether accurately or not - that by the middle of 1992, only 15% of the equipment for the Russian military was producible in final form using only Russian components. All the rest of it, 85%, depended on parts or components from the other former republics, now other independent states. It's probably pretty close to accurate.

The adjustment to the new order also posed immediate painful problems for military personnel. It meant either declaring allegiance to the new state on whose territory you were located or picking up and moving to the new state to which you felt you belonged. As the year went on this meant a large degree of dislocation within the military and its units. Many of the new states could not support the extensive military they inherited, and large numbers of soldiers became superfluous. For Russia, in particular, as the successor state to the USSR, this presented major challenges as units returned from the Warsaw Pact states and large numbers of personnel came "home" from the other new states.

So, at the beginning stages we were not dealing so much with military reform as the breakup of the Red Army, massive dislocation within the armed forces, the constitution of new armies in each of the New Independent States, and the survival of the Russian army as the Red Army's main successor. Our strategic interest in this was keeping the nuclear arsenal in secure hands, seeing continuation of the withdrawal of forces from East Europe, and making sure the trauma of the breakup of the Red Army did not contribute to any outbreak of hostilities.

Q: You have mentioned the military industrial complex. This was a major economic force in the Soviet Union. What happened to it when the USSR collapsed

COLLINS: Well, I suppose the simple answer is the market economy brought hard times. I think one just has to go back to begin with the idea that in the Soviet period the military industrial complex had a priority claim on resources and for the most part seemed to get what it needed or wanted. This was in the command economy so money, budgets, etc. had little to do with allocating resources. The same was true in Soviet dealings with client states. Where possible it was always a positive to be paid for selling goods or services. But especially in the case of arms sales the return was not monetary. It was as often as not seen in terms of keeping Moscow secure in a relationship with say Iraq or Syria and any expectation that the arms provided would be paid for was secondary. Remember that a lot of what they "sold" was credit. Money was secondary to the political objective of retaining a key client. To the extent money did have a role at that point, it tended to be seen as a form of leverage with a client.

With the end of the USSR, this entire edifice collapses. First of all, the principal client of the military industrial complex, the Soviet Government and its Russian successor, can no longer either provide unlimited resources for the complex nor serve as a paying client without limit. The government or now governments are broke. A secondary outcome is an end to the readiness of the Russian government or the industry itself to provide arms to others on credit. Now it has to be cash on the barrel head or no sale. This happened even with Cuba. Now this new norm applies to almost all clients.

In the broadest sense, the upshot of this development is three-fold. First, from the designers through the providers of resources to the manufacturers, the new imperative is to be paid for service or product: in short, money now determines inputs and outcomes. Second, the complex is itself now fragmented among the new states-national economies, and connections such as supply chains, access to resources, and so forth become uncertain as well as subject to new market forces. I was told at one point, as I noted earlier, that of the entire complement of military equipment the Russian military needed, only 19% was produced by entities located wholly in the Russian Federation. For the rest of it Russia had to get at least elements of the equipment from the other new states. That meant money as well as sound working relations between Russia and other supplier nations were essential. And third, for the entire complex the customer base, the government of Russia primarily, is largely broke and unable to pay to keep in business the complex as it is inherited from the USSR. And this includes procurement for both the Russian and other emerging national forces as well as procurement to support arms sales on credit to the clients.

The result was the military industrial complex came on hard times and its components were scrambling for any path to survival. For some the path included diversification of product: I recall visiting a titanium manufacturing plant that was proudly producing both new aluminum window frames as well as titanium garden shovels. Its principal client earlier had been the Soviet aircraft industry. Others sought partners abroad or new investors at home who could provide access to capital, markets, and new technologies more suited to the emerging new global market place. That's one reason that the space station project became a major success and attracted strong support from the Russian space community. It was the lifeline for Russia's space agency, and a cost effective and sound policy move for the U.S.

A third option was the one most problematic from the U.S. standpoint and a matter that became the source of some of our most difficult diplomacy during the decade following the Soviet collapse. This had to do with elements of the military industrial complex turning to find paying customers that gave Washington and others real concerns. This was particularly the case with the nuclear industry which, for example, turned to providing Iran with nuclear technology to build the power reactor at Bushehr, or on the part of the aeronautical industry working with nations that were developing what we considered problematic missile programs.

Q: So, the Soviet military was in difficult straits I assume as well? I seem to recall the fleet was practically immobilized, wasn't it, at this point?

COLLINS: Well, yes of course. In a sense, we have put the cart before the horse I suppose, because the key reason that the military industrial system was collapsing was that its main customer was in upheaval. At this point three main factors bring on the crisis. First, the Soviet military is having to withdraw large forces from the Warsaw Pact states and then from the Baltic states. These forces had to be provided quarters, retirement, or otherwise accommodated. This called for funds and a major upheaval in the disposition of troops. Second, the Red Army or Soviet armed forces were breaking up with the new states like Ukraine beginning to form their own armed forces from the military nationals in their territory. In the process they claimed the assets of the Soviet military on their territory, including elements of the military industrial complex. And finally, the governments responsible for the military, in particular the Russian government, were essentially broke and unable to pay to sustain the kind of military they were inheriting from the USSR. The result, in general, with the exception of certain branches such as the strategic rocket forces, was a military that fell into survival mode. Everything from procurement to training suffered. They didn't procure much of anything for nearly a decade, and nobody had funds for normal operations. We got many different stories and statistics. But over the decade the Air Force, for instance, just wasn't flying. The bomber training flights just stopped. The training hours or flight hours for a Russian pilot were dramatically cut back.

Q: I remember seeing pictures. I lived in Annapolis, so I had a feel for ships, and seeing these ships sort of keel over and looking at rust coming off them.

COLLINS: There was a lot of that but more importantly, they couldn't even keep the active fleet going to sea. They didn't have the funding to send it on patrol. I recall being told, for instance, that the strategic submarine fleet had one at sea at a time. The rest of them were parked because they didn't have the funds or personnel to send them on patrol.

Q: So, you saw that the Red Army breaking up. What were we doing in the context?

COLLINS: Yes, it was clear to us fairly early on that there was going to be a Ukrainian army, a Kazakhstan army, an Uzbekistan army, and so forth. Russia meanwhile was ending up with an unbalanced force that included a huge, top heavy juggernaut designed to run the Soviet military, the largest parts of the land, naval and air forces, and the strategic forces except for those elements located in Ukraine, Belarus and Kazakhstan.

As the process of disintegration proceeded, our critical objective, as discussed earlier, focused on ensuring the security of the nuclear and chemical arsenals, materials and facilities. Our early efforts had worked to ensure all Soviet tactical weapons outside Russian territory were pulled back to Russia. The Russians achieved that objective, I understood, before the end of 1992. We also did all we could to ensure that the command and control for the strategic forces, including those located in Ukraine, Kazakhstan and Belarus remained in Russian hands, and that these states adhered to their pledges to become non-nuclear weapons states.

Q: What were your military attachés doing?

COLLINS: Well, on the one hand, they were doing pretty much what they had done for decades: monitoring the military and where they could ,making contacts with counterparts. But in a sense the traditional priority was turned on its head. Now, they were more heavily involved in the development of military to military relationships, working to build them across a broader range of activities. This started almost right away in the '90s. They were having discussions on topics ranging from military reform and what the Russians hoped to do in restructuring their future forces, to developing joint units to deal with terrorism or emergencies. It was a much expanded agenda.

With the Russian military this was never an easy process, and it rarely made big breakthroughs. The military remained very skittish about cooperating with the Americans or engaging the Americans in their business. There were always very severe limits. But even so, the relationships became much broader than they had ever been. The other dimension derived from the beginning of the Nunn-Lugar endeavors. This program was not run by the attachés but by a special organization the Defense Threat Reduction Office (DTRO). They were also Defense Department and in many cases uniformed military, but became much more actively involved with their counterparts as the implementers of joint projects designed together with the Russians to improve the security of nuclear weapons and material, organize the destruction of weapons to be removed under the Start Treaty, and address issues of other scientific and technical urgency dealing with weapons of mass destruction.

In the other new states the attaches often established quite close relations with those setting up the new national armies. They helped them with everything from development of a new command and control structure to the most basic of needs for a military establishment. In one case, I remember, my attaché John Reppert was asked by a Moldovan commander to lend him his army uniform. The result? John's uniform with a couple of different insignia to distinguish it as Moldovan became the national uniform for the Moldovan commander and his forces.

Q: Were we talking to Russia and others about reform of the military?

COLLINS: In this environment military reform per se received secondary attention. In the new states the problem was coating and balding a new military establishment out of the elements the new state had inherited from the former Red Army and military industrial complex. The Russians themselves largely avoided the subject of reform even though they paid it lip service and produced any number of studies. In reality what reform there was seemed to proceed on what I called the Darwinian principal. Those people who commanded the privileged forces such as the strategic rocket forces were reasonably well off. Resource pressures on them for change were not significant. But if you were in charge of something like a rifle division out in Perm, you were lucky if you even had cigarettes. It was a patchwork. There were units that were well off. There were others that were not. There were cases where they were virtually without central government support in the Far East.

Was there reform? Everybody talked about it, but for the most part it was a topic too hot to handle. The American approach was tentative because our focus as noted was to deal with the strategic nuclear issues and the nuclear weaponry. We treated reforming the military *per se* rather gingerly mainly because nobody wanted to get the Russian military's backs up when we needed their cooperation to work with us on nuclear and strategic issues . The priority seemed clear.

Q: How were relations as you saw it between our military and their military? Were they seeing things as a mutual problem? Was it triumphalism or what?

COLLINS: My sense was that the American military basically respected the Russians, and the Russians tended to respect the Americans. We did quite well with things like strategic rocket forces and the nuclear industry. Relations were developed very early on. The guys who sat in U.S. bunkers and their counterparts in Russia knew exactly what each other did and they understood each other. Relations among these communities developed professionally and worked out quite well. Indeed, on the whole this was true for the broader nuclear community. The professionals and scientists in this community respected each other, understood their issues in similar ways and in the securing nuclear weapons and material came to work well together in support of politically mandated, shared objectives. When the professional soldiers were brought together to achieve agreed outcomes, particularly in the Nunn Lugar program or in conducting joint operations, they found common ground and worked quite well together.

The difficulties tended to come from the security services and the political community. They were suspicious, uncomfortable at the idea of letting guys in uniform get together to talk and work unsupervised. From my viewpoint there was plenty of obstruction from the security services on both sides. On the political side there were as well many who were skeptical at the whole idea of the end of the Cold War, people in Russia who continued to see Americans as the foe and their counterparts in the U.S. who saw Russia as the enemy. But in my experience these elements were not real impediments to cooperation between the militaries when agreed objectives were present.

Q: Did you get involved with the Black Sea fleet, which was Russian but in Ukrainian waters. Obviously they had all sorts of nuclear weapons and all.

COLLINS: Well yes and no is probably the best answer. The Black Sea Fleet was an element in the much larger picture of Russia defining its relations with its new neighbors, the broader management of the USSR's disintegration, and most specifically what was going to become of the Soviet armed forces. The fleet, not surprisingly, became a perpetual issue between Russia and Ukraine that touched not just the navy but the future of Crimea, a long standing neuralgic issue between Russia and Ukraine from the outset.

Q: Could you give a sense of how you saw the nuclear issue at this point. The USSR is breaking up. There must have been a lot of very nervous people in Washington.

COLLINS: Certainly the nuclear issue and what was to become of the Soviet nuclear arsenal and material stood at the top of the U.S. agenda. The context for these issues was set at the end of 1991 when Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus jointly established the Confederation of Independent States (CIS) joined not long after by the other republics with the exception of the Baltic states. It was a fraught endeavor from the beginning. The CIS members had differing ideas about what the new entity's powers would be, how the confederation would function, and who would have what voice within it. One theme was consistent: the new states were sovereign and independent and would own and control the laws, property and assets within their borders.

Amidst the general focus in the republic- soon to be independent, national capitals on giving substance and definition to the ideas of sovereignty and control of each new state's territory, at least at the outset, the fate of the Soviet armed forces and their equipment presented a complex and emotional issue. When the Union ended the CIS had established a military command under the leadership of marshal Shaposhnikov that was meant to exercise control over the forces both within the CIS and outside. Within this context the nuclear forces were under the authority of the Combined Strategic Forces Command, with the nuclear suitcase in the hands of the Russia's president. But the fate of the nuclear assets – warheads, strategic and facilities – was to become a subject of difficult, complex, and intense negotiations, particularly between Russia and Ukraine over the next two years.

At this early stage, the primary concern for the U.S. as I understood it was to prevent any proliferation of nuclear weapons or material, to ensure the security and secure control of the arsenal, and to achieve agreement that the newly "sovereign" entities of Kazakhstan, Belarus, and Ukraine would become signatories to the NPT. So it is within this context that what would become of the Soviet nuclear arsenal, naval ground and air assets and other military related assets would evolve. As the new states established themselves it was my sense that we saw it as critical for all these states to set the nuclear forces and structures apart from the rest of the military establishments over which they each would begin to assert national control as they year wore on.

The pursuit of these objectives, taking place as we were also working to achieve a new START agreement with Moscow became an exceptionally complex matter. The embassy itself was not heavily involved in the negotiations but was called upon to monitor and ensure clarity as possible about the twists and turns in Russian policy and the arms control negotiations. I cannot really go through all the ins and outs of the negotiations, mediations, and jawboning to which the U.S. was a party from the beginning of the post coup period through the next three years. But a couple of points are worth keeping in mind. First, it remained a fundamental premise that Russia alone would be the nuclear power in Eurasia. We were, as I saw it, relieved that as the Soviet Union grew more uncertain during 1991, Moscow began to pull back into the Russian republic tactical nuclear weapons located in areas, particularly the Caucasus, where they might become vulnerable. As the Union's problems increased this process was widened to include bringing these weapons back from all of the republics, and continued without significant interruption until by mid 1992 all the tactical weapons had been withdrawn into the

Russian Federation. There had been some to and fro between Moscow and Kiev over the removal of the last tranche of these weapons, but the final shipment of some 2000 such weapons took place in May 1992. But, as we discussed previously, these successful steps left strategic nuclear weapons in Kazakhstan, Belarus and Ukraine and their fate would become a central issue in U.S. engagement with these states and Russia for the coming three years.

Second, following the Union breakup, the U.S. pursued the negotiation with Russia of the START I Agreement. It was presumed that the Treaty would ultimately incorporate the fate of the remaining strategic weapons outside Russia and would thus facilitate each of the three new states with these weapons becoming signatories to the NPT. That treaty was brought to a successful conclusion at the end of the Bush administration, and thus became the framework for the incoming Clinton administration to pursue the reduction and restructuring of the former Soviet nuclear arsenal as well as the objective of bringing Ukraine, Kazakhstan and Belarus to join the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty.

Third, the U.S. had early on made clear its readiness to facilitate making it possible for Kazakhstan, Belarus and Ukraine to remove the nuclear weapons from their territories and join the NPT. Congress had authorized the Nunn Lugar program at the end of 1991, and there was much work done during 1992 to begin putting in place programs and agreements that would facilitate both the elimination of nuclear weapons and security for nuclear materials across the former Union. Subsequently, these programs would also play a significant role in facilitating our ability to bring about agreement, particularly between Ukraine and Russia on the removal of the nuclear warheads from the remaining strategic weapons in Ukraine.

Q: What was the status of all this nuclear material at this point? I'm told some people stored the stuff is in a sort of barn with a padlock on it.

COLLINS: As the Union was collapsing there were always questions whether the nuclear arsenal as a whole was under acceptable levels of control. And here it was not always just about weapons. There was a great deal of angst about nuclear material in a broader sense as well. This is the time we begin to hear worries about "loose nukes." And there is no question that this was justified. It was a worry not only on the American side but as well among the states and Russia as well as our allies. I certainly found that great numbers of Russians involved in the nuclear community were worried about the dangers of unsecure conditions for nuclear material.

It was a justified concern shared by many experts on both sides, and it remained so for most of the decade. Even as late as my time as ambassador at the end of the decade, I remember visiting Petropavlovsk Kamchatskiy with Secretary of Energy Richardson. We were given a tour by the Navy of the port where they moored their nuclear submarines. Pointed out to us was a rather dilapidated barn like structure that our hosts said housed the nuclear weapons for the boats. I don't know what might have been under the barn, but I was not reassured by a padlock on the barn door. But this highlighted a significant difference between the American and Soviet approaches to security.

The Soviet system of control was not like ours. We're always relying heavily on high tech, they relied on more on manpower control. Their security services controlled the personnel involved, their environment, and their personal livelihood to a very great degree, including the creation of closed cities and institutions that isolated those with nuclear responsibilities from the general society. In the Soviet closed society, the system worked. But as that system disintegrated it resulted in very great doubts about how much under control the nuclear complex, its weapons, and its material really were. There were constant reports and stories about loose nukes and missing nuclear material. In fact, as far as I'm aware, we never had a documented case of a weapon that went missing. On the other hand, there were documented cases when nuclear material of one kind or another was being transported or smuggled; but that seemed to be coming from civilian reactors or laboratories rather than from weapons themselves.

Q*: Did Ukraine or Kazakhstan show any reluctance with their denuclearization?*

COLLINS: Broadly speaking I would say the Kazakhstanis and the Belarusians never really were perceived seriously as resisting the idea of giving up the weapons or retaining status as a nuclear weapons state. Each of them wanted to get the best deal they could for surrendering the weapons, and they extracted concessions from the Russians and assurances from us that they would not have to pay the costs of getting rid of the weapons. But neither party really suggested keeping their weapons. The Ukrainian case was more complex.

From the beginning there were some in Ukraine arguing against giving up their nuclear capability. This group never prevailed, nor so far as I am aware did it ever represent the official Ukrainian government voice. But it was an influential force within the political elite that made its case and had to be dealt with. The predominant group rejected the idea of Ukraine retaining the weapons and were determined to adhere to Ukraine's declared position that it would be a non-nuclear weapons state. But, they too were intent on extracting maximum concessions from the Russians for surrendering the warheads and on ensuring that all the warheads removed from Ukraine could never be used and would be destroyed.

In working to extract as much as possible from the Russians they argued, for example, that even if Ukraine had no intention of becoming a nuclear weapons state, Ukraine owned the nuclear weapons on its territory just as it did other military equipment and facilities. They would surrender them only in return for adequate compensation and assurances. There were some as well who argued that Ukraine would become a nuclear weapons state temporarily until it disposed of the weapons and could legitimately join the NPT. There were any number of such positions put forth over the negotiations with Russia, and it was certainly my impression that they were seriously unsettling for Washington as it sought unambiguous commitment by Ukraine to giving up the weaponry.

Along with these positions Ukraine also argued the case for what might be seen as reparations for what they had endured under Moscow's subjugation. They argued in essence the pillaged victim claims: "We've been exploited for centuries. Now it's our turn to bargain back as much as we can." Those arguing this position, I think, never sought to have Ukraine become a nuclear power. But they were intent on using the weapons in Ukraine as a bargaining chip to extract money, agreements on nuclear fuel, and Russian concessions on other claims they had on the table following the breakup of the Union.

Finally, with Ukraine perhaps most deeply but also an issue with Kazakhstan and Belarus as well, was the insistence that Russia and others should provide what were normally characterized as "guarantees" for each nation's security and sovereignty in return for their giving up the nuclear option. This was a theme from the outset that was a complex issue for Washington where providing guarantees as opposed to something like assurances was a legal and political issue. The NPT itself provided assurances to signatories about protection from nuclear weapons in the hands of the weapons states. But in the case of the new states particularly in the case of Ukraine, these were not seen as sufficient and the issue of how to provide adequate assurances for Kazakhstan, Belarus, and Ukraine became of significant issue for Washington from the outset of the negotiations over the removal and destruction of the nuclear weapons outside Russia.

Q: Jim, we will come back to this issue later, perhaps when you get back to Washington. Now I want to turn to a different theme. Most people seem to think that the early nineties represented a honeymoon period for our relations. Do you agree? Were there any storm warnings?

COLLINS: Basically I do agree. There was an extraordinary openness from the vast majority of Russians toward Americans in the aftermath of the 1991 coup and emergence of new independent Russia. That certainly in the early days represented the majority view. Americans were seen as having helped the end of the communist regime and had allied with the new forces building a new Russia. But there were as well elements that tempered the honeymoon. For one thing, not everyone, to put it mildly, was in the winning camp and there was a strong part of the Russian population that opposed what Yeltsin stood for, what he had led, and where he was trying to take the country. In short those who lost out in 1991.

There were also things that Russians, even among our closest allies, saw as raising questions about U.S. intentions. For example, our intelligence collection continued and was in many ways intensified. As all the old walls crumbled the explosion of information that emerged after the end of the USSR was irresistible for those who had sought answers to questions about Moscow's workings, its technologies, its plans, its weapons, its propaganda machinery, etc.

Our activities in Europe also raised questions. Yes , we were withdrawing forces from Europe, but what was the future of NATO and what were we doing with Russia's new neighbors. From the very outset in these questions it seemed to me lay a problem with Yeltsin's assumptions about the future of relations with the United States and

encroaching disappointments associated with those assumptions. I have always believed that from the outset of his presidency , Yeltsin believed he had a deal with his American counterparts. I'm not arguing whether he was right or wrong, but that in his mind, the deal was, "I got rid of the Reds, and you won't take advantage of me while Russia rebuilds." That meant from his point of view, "You won't take advantage to alter the strategic balance, neither in the skies by altering the strategic balance away from parity, nor on the ground by moving to change the military balance on the ground in Europe" Added to this were two additional expectations: that Russia and America would remain the two superpower arbiters of Europe's future security system, and that America and our allies would assist in Russia's recovery and transformation into what Yeltsin regularly referred to as a "normal Country" , a model I always assumed meant some version of a European social democracy.

The problem was that almost from the outset, events would call into question these assumptions. On the strategic side most of the troubles revolved around two issues that kept feeding mistrust. First was the American preoccupation with ABM systems and what the Russians saw as a project that had the ring of Reagan era Star Wars. The second had to do first with the fate of NATO and once it was clear NATO would continue, what the Alliance's relations would be with nations outside its membership. From Yeltsin's point of view and that of his allies these Washington issues came up very early on. At the end of the Bush administration it was the discussion of revisions to the ABM treaty, a negotiation that suggested U.S. plans it seemed to me Russians were convinced would threaten or at least destabilize the system of parity. Likewise, decisions that made clear NATO was not going to go away with the demise of its enemy to the East raised questions about Russia's position and the place the alliance would have in future Europe.

As the Clinton era began the NATO questions became more significant as ambiguity emerged about NATO's role in the former Warsaw Pact region and what role Russia would play in defining the future security arrangements for greater Europe. The degree to which these issues were troubling Moscow were expressed most vividly by Yeltsin at the Budapest summit meeting of OSCE heads of state in 1994 in his famous "Cold Peace" speech. So, even at this time of honeymoon, the security balance and issues surrounding Russia's place in the future of Europe were a sources of potential friction.

Q: How were the Russians seeing the future? Were we on different wave lengths?

COLLINS: From the outset Russia's self perception, at least so far as I could understand it, were at odds with the American perception in key respects. The Yeltsin supporters and those who were happy to see the Soviet Union disappear were comfortable with the idea that Russia shared a victory over Gorbachev, the communists, and the USSR. But they certainly did not see Russia as a loser. Moreover, as successor to the USSR's international positions, Yeltsin and his colleagues certainly expected the U.S. to accept them as equal participants in shaping the future security system for Europe, and it is almost certain that few in Moscow saw the areas of the former USSR with the probable exception of the Baltic states as moving outside their basic area of predominant interests. Let's also recall that the key leaders of the Soviet dissolution at Belovezhskaya Pushcha

saw a future commonwealth of independent nations that implied future cohesion for the former Soviet region and an assumption about its shared future. Certainty there were those who saw it differently, but at the breakup at least this was not the attitude or mindset of "losers" in a war in any traditional sense.

With time the disparity between both variants in American thinking and what prevailed in Moscow would become a problem. Americans in one way or another became accustomed to seeing Russia as having lost a war. They expected Russia to accept the loss and behave like a loser. The Russians didn't see it that way. They began from the premise that the Soviet Union as an equal negotiated the end of the Cold War and Russia together with the other new states got rid of the communist system. In talking with the Americans - with Bush Sr. and then with Clinton - Yeltsin, it seemed to me, started with this premise. His point then was that we now are about to become a "normal" state, a term he used all the time. What we need from you Americans is to give us space and time to change, to take no advantage of what we are doing while we are making this transition. At the same time, we will work with you to reshape the Euro-Atlantic security system. It was in a sense two trains passing silently in the night.

Q: Well did you find yourself and others within our system monitoring to make sure we weren't rubbing it in that we won.

COLLINS: We tried but Yeltsin's conviction about the grand bargain he believed he had with the Americans raised one or two issues early on. His belief Russia would simply be welcomed into the western system, would retain their super-power partnership with Washington in defining future Europe, and continue their past status of parity with the U.S. as the other nuclear super power would be respected and retained. Well, this idea got into trouble early, as late in the Bush administration we raised the question of revising the ABM treaty, an issue that brought up a question of whether this amounted to an American move to shift the strategic goal posts. I remember pretty well having more than one conversation at that point in which Russians, perhaps for effect, but nonetheless sincerely, seemed to see our ideas as a return to Reagan Star Wars and an effort to reshape the strategic balance while the U.S. had the advantage. Missile defense and this theme, of course, will come up again and again as an issue.

Q: This is the ability to shoot down missiles before they arrive.

COLLINS: That's right. I was no arms control expert, but it seemed clear that the missile defense world was determined at this point to pursue its advances in technology to develop the capacity to protect either military forces or regions from missile attack. The American program had shelved strategic defense, but needed ABM revisions to pursue the more limited objective of a more limited capability. So, we were working to come to an agreement on a revision to the ABM Treaty that would allow more testing and research. The Russian side, clearly never bought into the arguments we made, and the effort failed as the Bush administration came to an end. But one of the things that the effort sparked was Russian suspicions that the Americans were not living up to Yeltsin's assumption about the grand bargain. Rather some were saying the Americans are trying

to change the ABM treaty to allow greater strategic gains, missile defense beyond what the ABM treaty allows. And before too long what this comes to mean, at least from the perspective of the people in the Russian military and security services is that the effort is just a first step by the Americans in trying to take advantage of the fact that we Russians are now weakened and disorganized. This becomes an issue at the end of the Bush administration in '92. It dies more or less when Bush leaves office, and it doesn't get taken up actively again until late in the Clinton Administration.

But meanwhile, it gets replaced or complemented by the even bigger issue of NATO expansion, the second major source of early neuralgia between us. After the collapse of the Warsaw Pact, this issue gets raised almost immediately by Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary. As Soviet forces begin their withdrawal these three nations begin talking about becoming part of NATO. NATO, meanwhile, is grappling with the question of what future if any the alliance will have. And, in fact, there was a debate at this time about whether NATO was necessary following the end of the Soviet Union. It was a debate that went from that extreme all the way over to the idea that NATO ought now to become the foundation for the new European security architecture and include everybody.

Q: Including Russia.

COLLINS: That was never ruled out, and there were those who went that far. The Russians at this point, by the way, were pushing the idea of using the CSCE forum as the basis for building the new architecture, the venue, unlike NATO, where they had a voice equal to the U.S. In the end , of course, the consensus in Washington and Europe by '92 accepted that NATO would continue. From where I stood it seemed that issue was more or less decided by default. Then, once NATO's continued existence was decided the question becomes what will it do about relations with all those states to its east who are not members. And this quickly evolves into the question of whether the alliance will get bigger and if so how. The fundamental debate about NATO enlargement is joined early on. Pressures from Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary, but Poland especially, were growing. People were mindful that expansion would raise real problems for Russia where there was a conviction that the U.S. had promised there would be no enlargement, a conviction based in Russian understanding of the famous conversations between Gorbachev and western leaders about German reunification.

So, even as I am still in Moscow, the signs of a divide between America and Russia over NATO begin to emerge. As the decision was taken that NATO would continue and in '92-'93 the U.S. began exploring ways for the alliance to develop relations with neighbors to the east the issue was growing more contentious.

Washington and the allies were aware of the tension and from their deliberations produced a creative compromise idea that to a remarkable degree defused the issue at least for the near future. The Partnership for Peace, an arrangement open to all the states to NATO's east, including Russia, created a formal framework for cooperation with NATO open to all the countries of the former Warsaw Pact and the new states, including

Russia.. It offered those who wished the opportunity to establish representation in Brussels, and participation in planning and joint work with the alliance. Partners, while having no vote in the NATO council, were brought into development of cooperative work on the range of issues on the NATO agenda.

The PFP initiative largely defused the NATO issue with Russia for the next two to three years. Yeltsin endorsed PFP and initially was fully supportive of it, He saw it as an alternative to expansion and membership for Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary. These views were clear when he saw Warren Christopher in late October 1993 when he came Moscow to discuss the idea of PFP with him. Against the backdrop of what had been growing tension over NATO's intentions in the East, Christopher explained to him that this PFP did not involve a list of countries destined for NATO membership: it was partnership. Yeltsin's response was all but ecstatic. This was an answer that Russia could fully embrace. Russia could be part of the partnership, and there was no movement of the NATO military structure closer to the Russian frontier.

So, by the end of '93, we began a brief honeymoon period in which much of the tension over NATO's future was deferred. The Partnership for Peace was successful in engaging the neighbors and new countries to the east. It brought them into a common structure; it gave them a relationship to NATO; and for a couple of years in building this structure, we were able to defer a lot of the tensions in the NATO enlargement debate. It was a very big step for us, and it would help me a great deal in future work with the new states when I came back from Moscow. As a final word I would have to say that no one deserved greater credit in bringing this idea along and giving it substance that John Shalikashvili, the Supreme Allied Commander in Europe as PFP was formed and then Chairman of the Join chiefs in the mid 1990s. He was in many respects the partnership's author and most effective advocate..

Q: I belong to a certain generation and when I think of NATO I obviously think of defense against the Soviet Union: but a main thing is also to keep France and Germany from getting tangled in each other's under-drawers. Maybe this has completely disappeared but these are two powerful countries sitting next to each other, and they got us into two big wars. Did that come up at all?

COLLINS: I never met a Russian who saw it that way. The Russians saw NATO as an anti-Soviet alliance. What they really saw it to be, and I don't think this changed as Moscow moved from Soviet to Russian thinking, was that NATO was the Americans' instrument to promote its interest in Europe. It was the American's instrument for countering the Soviet Union, and projecting the Soviet idea onto us saw NATO as our Warsaw Pact. In fact, I suspect they assumed that all the alliance paraphernalia, council meetings, summits, etc. was so much show. NATO, they saw as the American tool and power multiplier in Europe. That is how they saw it. and even after the PFP experience how they still see it.

Q: There is a perfectly solid case for that.

COLLINS: Perhaps, but NATO never worked like the Warsaw Pact. Nonetheless because they saw the alliance in their own terms, that was why they always thought NATO, and American talk about it as some kind of third force was nonsense. Their view was simple. We deal with the Americans; we are dealing with NATO. One of the interesting things that did emerge from their association with Partnership for Peace and their first encounters with the reality of NATO was some understanding at least by those involved about how complex the alliance was as an organization.

Additionally, by the way, there was another dimension of Russian thinking about Europe at this time deserving of mention- their view of the EU. What was striking at this time was the almost total disinterest Russian officials in the European Union. At the MFA or other agencies dealing with foreign trade or economic relations, the EU was just not seen as important for Russian interests. They didn't seem to pay attention to what the EU did or its authority in Europe. It was not seen as relevant or important. They had no real understanding of it, nor did they have the bureaucracy to deal with it. This survived all the way through my time in the 90s. Russia just didn't take the EU seriously. NATO yes. NATO was a four letter word, and it was the challenge. But it was almost like "real men" didn't do the economic dimension: that was not the stuff of real policy. It took a long time to build any understanding about the kind of authority. influence and power the EU brought to the table, and it took at least a decade or more to develop the experience and capabilities to deal with the EU. It really comes to life only under Putin.

Q: Well the EU really didn't solidify until it came up with the common currency did it?

COLLINS: Well the common currency was certainly a major step forward in building the community. But even before that the Union was developing ever stronger institutions. In the 90s, I recall much discussion about their defense policy and whether Europe should be developing its own capability independent of, or at least alongside, NATO. But from the Russian perspective the EU was not playing a significant role. It was the vehicle in many ways through which economic assistance and cooperation were developed with Russia, despite Russian preference for dealing bilaterally with EU member countries. But it remained my impression that for Moscow the EU just didn't rise to the level of importance that it should have, and the Russians in a way missed a lot of opportunities.

Q: I have heard a lot about disappointed expectations among Russians about the assistance the U.S. provided. Was this also a factor?

COLLINS: Yes, No doubt about it. Expectations on the part of the Russians, and I think this was from Yeltsin on down, about what it would take to transform the Russian economy were wholly unrealistic. Generally the Russians also had an otherworldly view about what the Americans could do to convert Russia's economy and other institutions from the Soviet model into what they had in mind.

I remember one minister in early '92 saying to me, " Can you send us a couple of people who can tell us how to make a market economy?" They were asking me for advice on domestic issues I thought beyond what we should have been involved in discussing. For

example, as mentioned, I was asked more than once to help in deciding who would be included in Russian delegations to meetings with our government. It was very uncomfortable. I thought it not sensible from the point of view of ensuring that their delegations would represent Russian views regardless of U.S. thinking. There was also a very broad based expectation, especially on the part of those who threw the communists out, that we had the keys, we had the money, we had the knowhow. "You guys know how to do this. You have a wonderful country and economy." It reflected broadly shared thinking that the hard work had been getting rid of the Communists and their system. Now it would be easy and fairly quick to convert Russia into a normal, modern state. In retrospect this seems almost childlike and naive, but the expectations and the early euphoria were very real.

I would also say that we and our allies in Europe bore some responsibility for these expectations. There were lots of Americans who agreed that the main point was the end of Communist power. There were likewise many who encouraged our Russian friends by saying directly or in more indirect ways that , "Yeah, we can do that. We know how to build you a western system." That Russians had almost no experience to help them distinguish who made sense from who didn't was a problem. Along with the truly dedicated and professional advisers, businessmen and NGO representatives there were all kinds of charlatans pedaling marketology snake oil, unreal models for democratic reform, or private business schemes who showed up in Russia at this point. That created a hard environment to cope with for Russia's expert community with its limited experience in the new models and inadequate manpower to manage the extent of the changes they faced. And finally the gulf between the realities of life for nearly all Russia's population and the expectations created for them by the leaders at home and abroad were building an ever increasing political challenge for those who had to make decisions about priorities. This factor increasingly would raise issues between those working to maintain political stability, support for the new governing group, and the program of reform they thought possible, and many of their supporters in the West, including in Washington, whose sense for what was needed in the way of economic, political, or social reform differed from what Russia's leaders thought the traffic would bear.

Q: Jim, we've talked a bit about the early reforms put in motion at the beginning of Were we observing that and did we feel this was important to us? Yeltsin's presidency. Can you talk a bit about what is going on, what were these early changes? What about the selling off of state enterprises and the rise of the oligarchs?

COLLINS: We were certainly observers, but rapidly became much more than that. By ’92 and moving into ’93, we were increasingly involved in working with Russia’s new leadership on nearly all aspects involved in conversion from the old command system to a market based economy as rapidly as possible. It is at this time that the slogan “shock therapy” starts to be applied to Russia. It conveyed the American conviction that nothing will be gained by prolonging the transition process or modulating its effects. That became a basic premise of policy for the Clinton team. And so as we move ahead in the nineties making a market system quickly in Russia was the goal of United States policy, and in a sense became seen as the lead prerequisite essential to establishing democratic institutions and the rule of law. So, we became very much involved in the Russian transition process. We had people working in the Russian treasury and central bank to establish a banking system; we helped devise new tax codes; our experts worked to help Russia establish capital markets; and at the micro level we were assisting in the turnaround process for enterprises or encouraging investors to found new businesses in a market that could use almost all goods and services supporting the consumer sector. There were all kinds of efforts to teach entrepreneurs the unfamiliar skills to set up and run new businesses. It was a heady time and an extraordinary undertaking that would last well into the late 90s, and we along with the Europeans were heavily engaged with the Russian government, at their request. All kinds of Russians - government officials, private business people, organizers for non governmental institutions - were coming to us with requests for expertise or support in trying to remake their entire economic system.

So you asked about privatization. This was a critical part of what Russia’s leaders were trying accomplish. The creation of private property and making private ownership the basis for the new economy were fundamental both to building the new market economy and to ending the economic basis for communist power. It was a breathtaking operation. There was a lot of controversy surrounding the goal and how it was accomplished (and much has been written about it). But some fundamentals were indisputable: no one had ever undertaken the privatization of an entire nation’s economy, particularly one the size of Russia’s. This was not even close to what Maggie Thatcher had done in England where she denationalized certain industries but did so in a society that had always had private property. In Russia, there was almost no private property other than what individuals owned for personal use. There was no private ownership of land, private ownership of industry, resources, mines, or real estate. All of this was in one way or another publicly owned. Which is to say nobody owned it. And now “private property” has to be created both as a thing and as an accepted idea in people’s minds.

There were two key names associated with this impossible process. Mr. Gaidar who was the acting prime minister and Mr. Chubais who was in charge of privatization were tasked with accomplishing this monumental goal. There were, of course, any number of ways suggested, but in retrospect none of them were up to getting the job done in anything like an orderly way. Yet, those in authority knew they had limited time and so the project was begun with a massive voucher program to give each Russian citizen a portion of the Russian national wealth. It was based in the idea that the total national wealth of the Russian Federation is X trillion rubles, and you have some 150 million

Russians. The program would divide this wealth and give a piece of paper to each citizen that would entitle the holder to a share of the total. Each voucher was to be worth 10000 Rubles. I have one I've kept. This was designed to give everybody a stake in privatizing enterprises by permitting them to become owners of shares or in some instances to purchase a piece of a business like a truck. In the end the vast majority of Russian citizens received vouchers, and many did use them to become holders of property, parts of businesses, or shareholders in their enterprises.

But, the program did not really succeed in accomplishing a broad distribution of privatized property/wealth. Over the course of the project there were those who amassed sufficient vouchers to gain huge assets, but the State - even up into the mid 90s - retained ownership of huge assets that had not been privatized. In the mid-nineties what came to be known as the "loans for share"' project resulted in an acceleration of the concentration of wealth in the hands of the emerging new oligarchs. It was a development that brought a great deal of discredit to the privatization process and concept, even as it did further the program of removing assets from government control.

So, all in all this was a complex story, but the long and short of it is that privatization had the political goal of preventing communism from ever returning or reestablishing control over an economy that was based in state ownership of the nation's property. It broke up the monopoly control by the government of substantial portions of the enterprises and businesses of the country. The project was only partly successful, and much of the nation's asset base remained in government hands. Nevertheless, this immense project did create the beginnings of a private manufacturing, retail, service and business economy. Nearly all the businesses begun after 1992 were in private hands, and a substantial part of the economy did come under private ownership and control.

Q: The subject that always interests me is that you have this wonderful soil in what was the Russian empire, in Ukraine, and elsewhere. Farming is a very basic element of the economy. It is also a very complex business as far as getting equipment to the farmer and crops to market. What was happening in this sector?

COLLINS: In '91 and '92 as we've discussed, there were very serious food issues for the Russian people and for a lot of the region. By the time of the Soviet collapse the agriculture sector was in desperate straits. But the countryside did not change rapidly. There was no early change in the prohibition of private ownership of agricultural land, and at the beginning the old collective farm system - whether state farm (Sovkhoz) or collective farm (kholkoz) -adapted to the new realities with minimal structural change. The farms became corporations instead of collectives, and most managers remained. The difference was that one day he was chairman of the collective farm; next day he wore a new hat as chairman of the board of a private cooperative company running the same farm-- same land, same structure, same equipment, same people.

The one big challenge for the sector was the lack of marketing infrastructure to replace the old command system. All of a sudden the farm had to deal with prices and profits to survive. Before the rule had always been simple for a farm; produce an amount of output

required by the farm's plan. To do so the farm theoretically received planned inputs from other suppliers: machinery, seed, fertilizer, etc. to meet the norm. The peasant provided the labor and in return received his house, private plot, and services of the collective. The state took the farm output except for the private production the peasants grew on their plots. Incentive pay for those who met their norms and penalties for those who did not supposedly defined the incentive system to keep the whole thing going. In the late '80s and early '90s, this whole system was collapsing. People were slaughtering livestock and herds shrank; the poultry industry collapsed; the USSR, unable to grow sufficient grain to feed itself, was the largest importer of grain in the world. Shortages of staples became the norm. Then suddenly the world turned upside down. The command economy based system of production to norms disappeared and farms suddenly found themselves in business, and dependent on a market they hardly understood to survive.

Q: Why were they slaughtering the herds? It would seem to be killing their own livelihood.

COLLINS: Because the farms couldn't get feed for their herds. Food was unavailable. In addition the system for marketing milk, meat and other products was in chaos. The whole system had collapsed, and the agricultural sector was in desperate straits. I remember visiting places that had had a huge chicken and poultry operation; by the end of '92 there was just nothing left. Elsewhere herds of livestock simply evaporated and the production of meat and dairy declined dangerously. And yet the countryside survived and weathered these changes in some ways with less trauma than the urban centers. The peasants, in many ways used to being neglected and exploited by the previous system, used their long developed survival skills. They continued to grow crops, pretty quickly adapted the skills they had honed to make their private plots a cornerstone of the Soviet consumer food market, and in their own way created a de facto market based system for their sector.

The shortages of the period also had a profound impact on the traditional urban dweller's approach to food survival. First, the traditional trade patterns between countryside and city changed dramatically. In the Soviet period people from the countryside traditionally brought food stuffs into the city and bought things available only in the city to take home. By '92 this pattern had reversed. People in the cities were going out in to the countryside with stuff to trade or barter to get food stuffs to bring home for the winter. People went out with suitcases full of urban goods and returned with potatoes, cabbages, or whatever food they could get.

A second response to the shortages was the conversion of masses of urban dwellers into part time farmers. During the Soviet era a limited community from the elite who had dachas joined the peasantry in producing garden products on their own private plots. Community garden plots also existed but were less significant, and most urbanites had no such property. But with the government's decision to permit private agriculture at the end of the Soviet period, it was possible for nearly anyone to establish a plot of land could be found. The shortages at the end of 1991 became a catalyst for major movement by city dwellers to provide for themselves. The result was a rush in the spring of 1992 as open land of all descriptions became sites for garden plots of every dimension. Railway

embankments, highway rights of way, unused land at factory sites: anything open and available was planted by a population worried that the coming winter's food supplies would be worse than the last. It seemed almost everyone became a farmer part time that summer as insurance against the coming winter. It was, in a sense, a testament to the entrepreneurial drive for survival that lay deep within the Russian tradition.

Q: I am looking at the farms. I come from a farming background and the complexity of getting equipment just in time to keep your harvester going and all the collective farms breaking up, dividing them into private plots, all so crucial, strikes me as almost impossible to put together.

COLLINS: Well, I share your farm background, and I made agriculture one of the sectors I watched. On balance I think our record in supporting agricultural and rural transition after '91 was mixed. Many of those who came to Russia to work with counterparts in the countryside either had experience in places that did little to equip them to work with an industrialized agricultural system or they brought ideas that were out of synch with the times. At the same time, our agricultural industries from machinery to crop development and our business practices, experience with market logistics, and agribusiness-agriculture partnerships played a significant role in providing models, know-how, and new technologies. Over time these contributions would make the ag sector one of the real post-Soviet success stories.

The one area where we had least success, I think, were off base came in our efforts to build the private family farmer as a bedrock for Russian agriculture. There were some initial successes, and some individuals did succeed. But the reality was the basic idea was out of synch both with Russian realities after collectivization and with the trends in our own agriculture at home. We talked about breaking up the collective and state farms, and our agriculture people thought private agriculture on individual farms was the way to go. But the reality was the countryside simply lacked the capacities, people, and entrepreneurs to do this. Sixty years of Soviet model agriculture had all but eliminated any basis for building a system of independent family farms, and there was neither the capital, nor the market and supply infrastructure, nor the historical precedent to support what our people had in mind. It was also the case that we were advocating movement in a direction when the trend in the U.S. is going in the exact opposite direction! We are moving toward large corporate farms or family owned farms operated at an industrial scale on the scale of the collective farms. So there was a certain dream world quality about some of the agriculture thinking--well intentioned but not very realistic.

At the same time, at the beginning of 1992, the farm system did change and fundamentally so. To begin the farmers said, yesterday we were a collective farm, today we are a private stock company. The stockholders are the farmers, and most often the old collective farm manager becomes the chairman of the board and the CEO. So on the surface it seems almost nothing changes. But it is now a private business and cold turkey operating in a market economy. The one major remaining Soviet holdover comes with the continued state ownership of the land. So the new businesses began as labor and business cooperatives dedicated to farming leased land, without the essential element most western

and certainly American farmers counted on to capitalize their business, private ownership of the land they farmed.
So, we had a rural revolution on paper but as was so often the fate of rural Russia, agriculture remained a backwater and the peasantry largely forgotten. It did not get a lot of attention from the reformers. Agriculture was not given significant resources, land reform remained a distant dream. and for some time farmers and peasants could not even define the boundaries of their land because the Soviets had seen no need for cadastral surveys or delimiting boundaries.

And yet even as times were hard, there were efforts to modernize, and the appearance of western companies and investors began to have an impact. I visited farms that were making a real effort to upgrade the herds of dairy cows for instance, and the Russian farm Project, a USG supported program, was successfully introducing new approaches to private vegetable and dairy farming targeting urban markets. On the Volga the Case farm machinery company had sponsored an entrepreneur who developed what amounted to a modern version of the early Soviet Machine Tractor Station. He provided seeding, tilling and harvesting services to local farms and made a substantial profit by using modern U.S. machinery. Compared with the old Soviet machinery the farms themselves that had his machinery nearly doubled the net harvest per hectare of land compared to what the farmers had been harvesting. It became a win win for all concerned.

The poultry industry similarly benefitted from our technologies and procedures. Following the first tariff battle over chicken imports in the mid-nineties, the American Egg and Poultry Association agreed to sponsor a joint venture to enhance Russia's industry that had fallen on desperate times. The result was Elinar Poultry, a highly successful chicken production facility outside Moscow. I had a certain personal sense of responsibility for that one given that I had been there at the groundbreaking for the project. But I think the high point came later when I had the chance to take Frank Purdue, probably Mr. Poultry for the U.S., to see it in operation years later. He was so impressed he actually took home one of the company's own inventions used to debone a chicken thigh, a tool I suspect now finds a place in Maryland's poultry processing plants. So there were successes and things we did that made a difference.

But for much of the nineties these were more or less the exception. The greater norm saw life in rural communities during this period continuing to degrade. More and more people were leaving the countryside for the cities, leaving behind an aging rural community and an aging agricultural base. This doesn't begin to change very much until the late 90s and early 2000s Then two changes stimulated the rural economies. First land reform permitted the private long term leasing of agricultural land and farm land becomes an attractive place to park capital. Second the economic crisis of 1998 gives Russian agricultural products a strong competitive edge in the Russian market. So, the agriculture sector lags quite badly. But some seeds are there and while most of the nineties see a hard time for rural Russia, our programs of assistance and our private sector together with European efforts did put in place the foundation for what would become a remarkable renaissance for the countryside when conditions changed to encourage its revival.

Q: As you describe these problems, I'm thinking that you would find the Foreign Service corps ill equipped to deal with these things. We are not farm managers. We don't bring much to the table on corporate law and the complexities of farming for example?

COLLINS: Well yes and no. Let's agree we are not talking about AID for the moment. I agree that the traditional Foreign Service was not cut out for this work for the most part. We were not equipped for the business of implementing development programs in the countryside, setting up banks, or advising on how to organize capital markets. We were in the business of trying to report on what was happening in these fields, to inform policy makers and to provide them a sound fact based foundation for making decisions. And we were trying to convey what the impact of the social, economic and cultural changes we were seeing and living with had on the political realities and policies of the country we lived and worked in. We were following developments that would and did define a new foreign policy in a new way for a new state. We were, in short, doing traditional Foreign Service work, but we were also monitoring the impact of the American-European juggernaut and its domestic engagement in a society where it had not played that role for a century. We were trying to make sure people understood what the real impact was of what we were doing - on the economy, on the society, on the culture, on the thinking of Russians. We were trying, too, to be clear about what needed attention, what was going well, and what was not going well. We weren't the doers here, but we were deeply engaged in providing a professional assessment of what impact our involvement in Russia's transition was having on how that important country was evolving. This role becomes more complex and demanding as we moved into '92 and '93, and we get more agencies involved in implementing more programs. Agencies implementing programs under The Freedom Support Act, the Nunn-Lugar program, and other new programs, for example NASA's work with the Russian space agency to design, build, and launch the space station all brought new types of specialists to the Embassy family.

Q: Speaking of law, did you feel that the legal system was beginning to be responsive to the modern day as opposed to the Soviet legacy?

COLLINS: I would make two points here to provide some context. First of all, as Americans we are almost reverent when we speak about the "rule of law." It is a bedrock of our thinking about how our society, democracy, economy and culture hold together and define who we are. The picture of law or its function in Russia was different. While I don't want to oversimplify or misrepresent, I think it is fair to say that for most Russians at this time and I suspect since, the "rule of law" was far from an affirming or positive defining element of their society. Rather, as often as not "rule of law" was seen as embodying or legitimating the instruments of control created, enforced and employed by "them" to control "us". Historically it was seen as the means used by Tsars and Communist Party bosses to keep the population under control, doing their bidding, and serving the interests of the rulers. So, far from seeing getting around the law as improper or illegitimate, as often as not, it was seen as the only sensible way to live and survive in a system that used the rules for the interest of the rulers. So friends often would express to me a degree of pride in their ability to circumvent a regulation, get around a rule, or avoid being subject to a legal requirement. In short, getting around the law was getting

around the authorities' rules for which you as a citizen had no responsibility and in which you had no stake. So, we started in dealing with the law often talking two different languages when dealing with the Russian public. And this was a factor that would be slow to change if it ever really did.

Second, recall that Russia has law based in codes - the Napoleonic system I guess it is and not common law - more like France than Great Britain. Formally, I suppose all the laws of the Soviet Union ceased to be valid on January 1, 1992 at one minute past midnight. However, as the successor state to the USSR Russia adopted and was governed by the Soviet Constitution. So for much of the field there was continuity when the Soviet Union came to an end. What brought the most dramatic changes were the initial Russian decrees and laws that started to change the economic system. Most existing law that pertained to property rights, business, etc. either became irrelevant or had yet to be developed. In this area things were just plain chaotic, and few looked to "the law" to determine right from wrong. Some decrees began to bring a legal framework and system to provide relevant legal bases for essential elements of the market - private property, market operations and relations, economic rights, etc. But all was new and without relevant Russian precedent, and for a considerable time businesses relied on contracts, to define almost all relationships. And even this practice suffered from the absence of any uniformity in the application of law to enforce contracts across the territory of the Federation, making it difficult to rely on law or the courts for anything like a uniform application of even the new principles across the territory of the country.

The court system, meanwhile, largely reflected the state of the law. With little to no experience in dealing with the new economic rules, few if any turned to the courts as a venue for resolution of disputes. Foreign business almost universally relied on foreign arbitration to enforce contracts. Russians looked to their own devices, often at this point employing quite primitive means to settle disputes. Up to the mid 1990s to the extent a system existed, it was more or less like our wild west in the way law enforcement worked. It was largely contract-based, convention-based, culture-based. How things were dealt with was not by going to the judge or looking it up in the code book. It was agreed on. If you didn't honor an agreement, various things would happen. But the idea of going to court was normally not among the options. This will change with growing momentum in the later nineties. At that point both judicial reforms and the growing sense that the propertied class of new owners had an incentive to protect what they had acquired began to strengthen the role of the courts and law.

Q: One of the things I had a little taste of when I was in Bishkek in '94 was the tremendous number of entrepreneurs who were coming in every field you could think of. They had the solution to everything. They were talking very big. You must have been deluged with visitors of non-profits and others. How were things going with our private sector?

COLLINS: Well your Bishkek experience wasn't unique. The cast of characters that showed up in Russia in these early days seemed limitless and varied. I imagined Colorado in frontier times. It was the land of opportunity. It seemed like open territory,

no rules, any guy can make it. There were very decent, honorable people as well as people who were mercenary and totally unscrupulous. Nor was it all about the economy or just private sector business people. There were lots of people coming to remake Russians, to try out experiments or ideas that they could never get a mandate to try in the U.S. I had everything from human rights advocates to religious missionaries who were going to create the new Russia in ways that would answer the highest aspirations of their hopes. All these people, from the well meaning to the venal and self interested did share the idea that they were in Russia to make the place different and show Russians how to remake the country.

It was often a real challenge to cope with. On the economy we had the marketology people of all stripes coming to encourage the Russians to employ the latest ideas about what an ideal system would look like, tell them how to make it all work. We had democracy "experts" there to set up the ideal system that would correct all the problems our system seemed to have. I recall one adviser/contractor working for AID who explained to me the unacceptability for a democratic system of one political party having more money than its competitors. He seriously suggested that was unacceptable in a democratic system. On the other hand, we had some of the very best advisors to help in restructuring the Russians system, and they made an extraordinary contribution. But the cacophony of different voices was, at a minimum, confusing and sometimes at worst counterproductive.

Amidst this diverse grouping the established corporate business community was more pragmatic and focused. Of course, we had our share of charlatans and con men who saw the chaos of the system as an opportunity. But frankly they paled in comparison with their Russian competitors. On the other hand, people like our major oil and big manufacturing and retail companies who had an interest in the Russian market and establishing a place in it brought many exceptionally important contributions. They were, of course, hoping to establish profitable operations in Russia and become players in its future market economy. Their biggest problems and often biggest sources of trouble had more often than not to do with a failure to understand that they were dealing with an environment wholly unlike anything they worked with in their other foreign operations.

Q: How did the oil companies do in this environment?

COLLINS: The oil companies in particular thought, "We know about coming into new foreign markets. We have experience, and Russia is like any other place we work in. We have a lot to offer, especially in Russia's dire economic straits. We bring a lot of money and technology. We can, develop a key resource that is in bad shape. It will make everybody better off." The Russians, of course, had various reactions to this, but I think it's fair to say few of them started from buying the logic of what the American companies were selling. First, most Russians were suspicious of any foreigner coming in and, as they saw it, trying to take over their resources and things that were the national treasure. They knew that others did make arrangements with these kinds of companies, and so they were willing to explore what the companies were offering. But they were skeptical about any foreign ownership of their resources.

Second, the majority of Russians with whom the Americans had to deal had a very limited understanding of the economic ideas, business terminology, or financial thinking that the Americans were discussing. The Americans and others who came from outside would come in and talk about balance sheets, and profits, investments and how all this would produce returns over various periods of time. These discussions meant little to the majority of those in the room who had worked their whole lives in a command economy where what mattered was meeting a norm with little regard for costs of inputs or investment. That was an issue for others to address. In fact, for most of them this just didn't make much sense of mean anything. Money and its role were at best vague concepts, and that money was the means to determine everything from value to comparative advantage, was a new foreign and vaguely understood concept to the majority. It was basically new except to a very small group of people. So trying to explain the technicalities of rate of return on investment or the details of a production sharing agreement was often way over the head of people who were in the room with the representatives of our majors or other businesses.

And finally, the companies confronted the problem of closing any agreement, when a Russian counterpart had to make a final decision. Discussions were one thing, but taking the final decision for an agreement meant vulnerability and responsibility. In the circumstances it was as often as not the case that no one wanted the hot seat. Who was going to sign on the dotted line that this was a good deal? No one on the Russian side knew with any confidence what the asset was worth, or whether the offer was the best to be achieved, and who truly understood the basic finances involved. Amidst this sea of uncertainty, who was going to sign on the dotted line that this was a good deal? Most often the answer was nobody, it was easier to defer such a decision or pass the buck to someone else. In the end, the only big production sharing agreement that ever got signed in my time was thus one for offshore oil and gas off Sakhalin Island.

As you can imagine this was a source of immense frustration for the American companies who invested immense time in working to come to terms, but for years ended up with little to show for the effort except the one Sakhalin off shore project. When they came to me I concluded the best I could tell them was, "Well, it's very simple. The Russians say we don't have any technology to do offshore work. So, if these fool foreigners want to go punch holes in the ice and give us half of the money they make, fine, because we're not losing anything, and it's not something we can deal with.." But on shore it was a different matter. "We know how to deal with those assets, and we have developed them in the past. Why should we let the foreigners get these resources or give them control over a resource that is vital to our ability to fund the government?" So in the nineties the Russian energy industry was almost wholly unwilling to sign production sharing agreements with anyone and relied instead on their ability to get oil service companies or parts of the majors to work to improve output without surrendering to foreign interests control over any of the on shore oil and gas. It worked to improve energy output over time and never raised the issues of Russian assets under foreign control.

Q: Did we get offshore agreements in Sakhalin?

COLLINS: In Sakhalin companies did. If I recall correctly, U.S. majors Exxon, Shell, and Marathon, and Japanese companies formed a successful consortium and arranged PSA arrangements with the Russian government. Those projects had gone forward, not without some troubles, but they were a success. But as far as I can recall the Sakhalin agreements were the only PSA agreements that went forward in Russia in my time. In other cases, where our companies sought such arrangements, the negotiations dragged on and on and never got to an agreement. Company representatives would come to complain to me about this, and I lent a sympathetic ear. But I could offer little encouragement.

I should say that in part the companies' problems evolved from a very different U.S. and Russian perceptions about just what the two sides were discussing or trying to arrange. For the Americans the agreements, whatever their terms, were essentially considered and framed according to business criteria and a company's business needs. The Russians had a different starting point. For them, and remember we are still here mainly talking about government officials, the key reality was that oil and gas provided essential core funding for the government budget. It wasn't the sole source, of course, but it was essential to viable financing of government operations. Therefore what the Russian side required was agreement that whatever the economics involved, at a minimum the production of oil had to be assured . They were not interested in banking reserves or holding assets for the future benefit of owners. They needed an assured income stream, and that meant agreement that oil would be pumped regardless of price to meet the government's budgetary needs.

Q: Americans were coming in with all sorts of businesses and one hears about how the criminals took over some of them. If somebody comes running to you saying I am trying to set up a Hallmark Greeting Card operation and I am getting hit up for protection money or I'm in disputes that are or may turn criminal, how did you deal with their case?

COLLINS: We dealt with them in rather traditional ways I suppose. When we got these cases, we usually would take them to the appropriate ministry, or governor or someone with the authority and capacity to address the grievance or problem. In the early nineties, that rarely meant going to court or getting a lawyer except as a pro forma response. Courts were weak and had little capacity to enforce judgments. It was important at some point to have a supportive legal position, but that didn't usually matter much in getting the outcome needed. Rather up to the mid '90s success more often than not depended on finding the official or individual with connections who could affect an outcome. Sometimes you could find one, and sometimes you couldn't.

I remember one famous case of a poor soul who had signed a big contract with people to open a fishing resort up in the far north. He received incredible terms from his point of view, receiving major rights to what he thought an immensely profitable business in return for a limited investment to upgrade and organize a site with immense potential. It all seemed too good to be true, and indeed that is what it proved to be. His partners welcomed his investment and seemed to be working with him in model fashion. Then, with the project completed they began proceedings to exclude their American partner

from the project, and he found himself out of the picture. That was when he came to us. We never did find the formula to resolve that case. Neither we nor he were ever able to find people willing to take it on or the legal means to seek redress for him. It was frustrating.

In other cases we had more success. Someone would try to move in on an American business that had established itself, and we would go to local law enforcement, or governor, or security people, or appropriate officials in Moscow making the case that the actions against the American were outside the law, damaging to efforts to attract investment, etc. When we found the right entrée, officials would get the problem fixed. But frankly once again, the legal system was not usually effective. It was normally important to have the right legal citation or decision in hand, but the legal institutions and law did not usually lead on their own to an acceptable outcome. Few at this time thought going to court could bring justice. The operative approach was to find the official or personality in the system that could get your problem fixed. It was the age of the fixer.

This kind of environment reflected the prevailing dynamic of the early nineties until, say late '94-'95 or beyond. It was the time of the acquirer. It was the era of establishing yourself by getting your hands on a piece of what had been Soviet property or manipulating the ambiguities between the holdovers from the Soviet system and the new market realties. Establishing a property right usually meant grabbing it or finding a way to get it under control, including by use of the voucher program became trying to legitimate ownership and hold it against competitors. At stake could be anything from a taxicab owned by a driver who says, now, this is my car; to an aspiring oligarch with baskets of vouchers bidding on an oil field. Any way you could do it. You made wealth, you got wealth, by acquiring things of value from the state pool and then defending them from predators. It was in many ways a bare knuckles, no holds barred, ruthless environment in which government structures, courts, and laws were seen as having little effective capacity to dispense justice, protect property or resolve disputes. This is the time you have bankers being shot in Moscow and owners of this or that property disappearing. The rules were that there were no rules. There was no force -state, private, or regional authority - capable of effective mediation or resolution of most disputes.

Q: I would think you have American businessmen come and say I am interested in investing here, what should I do? You had to give them a very dismal account.

COLLINS: Well yes and no. What I described above was the situation predominating among Russians. If they used the tools available, foreign investors or businessmen had greater protections. When we counseled American or other foreigners looking at entry into the Russian market we were, of course, candid and made the risks clear. But we also noted the opportunities if they took care. The advice we gave them then really hasn't changed very much from what I gave them later on and would still provide.

First of all find a Russian partner, but that partner must be a good one who passes muster after a strong process of vetting. This is critical because the Russian partner is the one who is best positioned to be the guarantor for your interests because he will be looking

out for himself as well. Even in the most chaotic times this was possible. There were good, honest, sound business people; it wasn't all evil or totally unprincipled.

The second thing involved enhanced insurance. We advised everyone thinking about an investment or financial exposure in Russia to arrange that their contract would have an outside arbitration clause, i.e. ensure that the UK or Swedes or someone outside would be the court of last resort in settling any significant dispute you got into. This meant the investor had an authority above Russian courts and bureaucracy It was pretty effective. If you had to defend your authority, you could go outside to get a judgment that the Russian government took seriously.

Third understand that investing in Russia is not like investing in Belgium. The investor will have to manage his investment every day, ensuring that he has a full grasp of what is happening to the investment, what it is being used for. This is not like a portfolio investor putting money in and just waiting for others to make it grow. The companies that did well were careful in whom they hired. They would come in with a comprehensive team to set up the business and launch it consistent with the enterprise's practices and values.

Finally, the more successful of these new ventures understood that the model they used to introduce themselves to Russia was not the best for the company's long term way of doing business in the Russian market. The successful ones grasped early that they would have to train a Russian workforce to run their factories or operations. Many of these companies started greenfield operations from new buildings up. Some took over existing enterprises and restructured them in ways that amounted almost to the same kind of new start. Either way, however, they mostly brought in and trained young Russians in various operations of the enterprise. Then after a few years they reduced the expat role to having a foreign chairman or chief managing the plant, a foreign head of the personnel section, and a foreign head of the finance division. Pretty much everyone else would be Russian. That pattern has largely continued for lots of organizations.

Q: Why would the human resources person be in that mix. I would think having someone there who knew the market and the availability of people would be more logical.

COLLINS: Essentially because experience had shown that job was one that had to be done with integrity. It had to be held by a person who wasn't vulnerable to pressures from outsiders or insiders.

Q: To hire somebody?

COLLINS: Yes, to hire his cousin or to get so and so in because he knows so and so. There were lots of reasons you didn't want that function in Russians hands - and most Russians understood and respected this. It was also a symbol to employees that this would not be run like a typical Russian operation. This business would have its own corporate standards and culture. It's still the way many things are working today.

Q: Did you get stories from people like McDonalds or Burger King that the Russian response to customer demands was usually slow and slovenly. I would think it would be difficult to train a new smiling entrepreneurial staff.

COLLINS: It's a good question, and the answer is, yes. McDonalds is an extraordinary institution and became a symbol of change at the critical time of Russian transition to a wholly new economy and economic culture. It had established itself at the very end of the Soviet Union after years of preparation. It opened its first outlet in the heart of Moscow on January 31, 1990, and then a second not far away not long thereafter. They became an almost instant phenomenon as a symbol of American culture, a new kind of night out for family, and a place exhibiting a very new culture of service. They were really the pioneers.

None of this impact had come easily or quickly. McDonalds had done years of preparation. First they had to get the right kind of product, to make the Big Mac a la Moscow. This meant they had to grow their own potatoes, find their own source of lettuce, vegetables, buns. They even had the problem of finding the right kind of container to put the Big Mac in. They imported some, but they also had their own potato and meat production; so they were also in the farming business. Then, as they do here, McDonalds hired young people, people not yet spoiled in attitudes about service and work habits by the old system or inculcated with the "what the hell do you want anyway?" attitude toward any customer. They were trained to serve, prepare, manage, clean, and acculturated in the McDonalds way and as new to the workforce knew no other. In this way as well as the entire experience of a little piece of America, the new restaurants were unique and an immense success.

For those who were employed there, it was a big opportunity. They got steady work and a good employer, but I always thought the most significant was the opportunity for young people to be given responsibility and opportunity. And they responded very well. Even in the earliest days, you could walk into the new McDonalds and didn't know this was Moscow. It could have been in Europe or Detroit. A totally different way of doing things. The premises sparkled with clean windows, bright lights, and shining facilities - a rarity almost anywhere at that time in the city. And the spirit was infectious. It was a young establishment, run by a new generation, and showing how to serve everyone from young to old and most importantly families who had very few places they could take children in that time in Moscow. It was a cultural phenomenon.

Finally, I might say one word about another first that set McDonalds on Pushkin Square apart from the pack. In September, 1991, the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) held an international ministerial meeting in Moscow on human rights and the third dimension. The U.S. delegation was led by Max Kampleman, who came to me as charge, and said he wanted the U.S. delegation to host a reception for the attendees during the conference. As an aside that meeting was being held in the Hall of Columns (a bit of irony here because this building was the venue for the infamous Stalin show trials in the 1930s that sent many old Bolsheviks to the camps or death). In any case Kampleman asked whether I thought the McDonalds on Pushkin Square might serve as a

venue. It was an inspired idea, and it turned out to be the talk of the conference. Symbolically, it also seemed to me a harbinger for a future following the coup's collapse a month earlier that augured well for a better kind of Russia.

What McDonalds did was true of a lot of the new franchise businesses that came in and tried to establish themselves. The pattern was the same. They depended on young people; took them and trained them. The approach gave the employees an incentive to make the enterprise work. And like McDonalds, the key was that in the early 90s these pioneers counted on young people who didn't have Soviet memories or mentalities. These were youth from the capital who belonged to the mid to late '80s. They developed their consciousness about the world during the perestroika-glasnost period and are late teenagers in 1991-1992 just ready to start out. So when someone like McDonalds or Pizza Hut shows up, they are intrigued and drawn to the new. This is the West; this is the outside; this is the future; this is the new world we're a part of. It's not our parents' world. If you are going to rebel, work for McDonald's.

Q: Were you seeing any change in what I understand were the Russian/Soviet habits of heavy smoking and heavy drinking which was having real effects on aging?

COLLINS: First, there was a big difference between men and women. Women are not really the ones who get discussed when we talk about the depth of these issues. Throughout this period women's life expectancy remains ten years or more longer than men's, and the women just are not living the same lifestyle. As the Soviet Union ended and we moved into the '90s the Russian male's lifestyle, on the other hand, was a case study on how to shorten life. You drink; in a cardiologist's nightmare diet you mainline cholesterol; you get very little exercise; and you smoke. Then combine this with the beginnings of the health care system's collapse and rising depression among males about their position and role. The upshot is a drop in male life expectancy to under sixty years. It is a generational disaster with implications that even decades later have an impact despite some recovery in male life expectancy.

This reflected a host of factors, including the terrible cost the upheaval the Soviet collapse extracted from a generation of men who were, let's say, around 45 or older when the communist system ended. These people were in or were looking to take up senior level positions in society or had every reason to look forward to a retirement a la Soviet. They had worked entire careers to prepare for a secure future as part of the elite or after completing their careers move into a stable, comfortable retirement. Suddenly all of this disappears. The pension becomes all but worthless because of inflation or because it just isn't paid. Their ability to get into new positions is limited and most of what they had done to prepare provides no advantage.

The blow was psychologically devastating to huge parts of a generation. The capacity to be the breadwinner was eroded. The Soviet system had entitled men, been run by men, let men climb the ladder to authority and top positions. Suddenly it's an open competition and the men the Soviet system most rewarded are often least prepared to deal with it. The new world became a very chaotic and depressing place for them because the future they

had worked for disappeared. Meanwhile the McDonalds of the world are going over their heads to employ their children and grandchildren as the employees and managers of the future. That combination of circumstances, combined with the sharp general economic decline and disintegration of the health system (limited though it may have been) cost a huge number of lives. And its effects became long lasting.

Q: As a resident of a retirement home myself right now I'm curious about how they treated retirees.

COLLINS: From the best I could tell the retirement system depended essentially on two elements. The first "system" was family. The extended family, if you had one, was a retiree's dependable and real safety net, As often as not the retiree or retired couple remained a significant contributor to the family's economy and lifestyle. As husband and wife worked and brought in the income, babushka and dedushka (grandmother and grandfather) in retirement were often the backbone of daily home life routine, caring for young children, standing in lines for everything from food to clothing, cooking, cleaning, etc. And, of course, it provided a degree of security for all to have family to count on in the most general sense.

If you didn't have such a family you depended on what the state or perhaps your employer, village community, etc. provided: this was a pension, however limited, social services that normally assured housing, healthcare, a variety of benefits like free transport on public facilities, etc. There were also limited cases in which retirees could obtain employment in positions such as museum guards that some institutions reserved for those who had worked in their sectors. In general, this element was basic, normally providing little more than a subsistence level life for the majority. In the early nineties with the economic downturn and collapse of the government's budget, it was this part of the system that was at great risk. Pensions became worthless if they were paid at all, and previously available services, like health and housing became more and more difficult to obtain.

These same issues were present for other at risk groups we came to see more clearly in the crisis years following the economic collapse in the early nineties. Some of those we mentioned earlier as the targets for our emergency food assistance Orphanages, prison inmates, isolated military units, etc. But there were others as well; single women, particularly if they had children to feed and were alone were very vulnerable. The same was true for children who lacked a solid family. And broadly pretty much anyone who was dependent on the Soviet State structure for an acceptable life fell into deep trouble by the beginning of the '90s because the money and traditional minimal services either stopped flowing or were not there. These people were largely cast adrift and had few to fall back on for support.

Q: Let me turn to a broader question about what's going on in the larger region. Were you directly engaged in some way with the Stans and Caucasus and other areas? Both before and after the coup and Soviet collapse there was a lot going on in the Baltics, in

Georgia, between Armenia and Azerbaijan. Did the Embassy play any role in reporting on or engaging these developments?

COLLINS: Well, yes. We've discussed how the embassy had been working to bring our knowledge about these republics and areas up to speed from the late eighties. We had begun to assign officers to visit republic and major provincial capitals regularly to get to know the ground and the leading people. By 1991, we had officers going regularly to Central Asia, the Caucuses, Ukraine, Belarus, and the Baltics . The embassy had begun to engage the elites in these non-Russian republics as well as in the Russian Republic provinces away from Moscow and Petersburg. And the embassy had followed very closely things like the conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia, what Gamsakhurdia was doing in Georgia, and the percolating voice for greater freedom from Kiev. And, of course, in 1990-91 the challenge the movement for independence taking shape in the Baltics brought a near daily call for more information from Washington, fortunately well managed by our colleagues in Leningrad.

These challenges to Soviet authority and cohesion built momentum in the period after the collapse of the Warsaw Pact and were an established fact at the end of the summer 1990 when I took up the DCM position. And the Embassy and Consulate in Leningrad were expending significant effort to follow what was going on and what was happening. But in a way as I look back, we all had the problem of forests and trees. I think people didn't appreciate how far these movements had gone and how abruptly they would bring the Union to an end. In retrospect there was probably an over-emphasis on each of the conflicts without putting the puzzle together until very late in the game.

Q: How about after the Soviet breakup. What were you doing vis-à-vis the various "stans," Ukraine, and others? You talked about how you had developed circuit riders throughout the former Soviet Union. What was coming from this?

COLLINS: Well, I think it was essentially two things. It gave us a cadre of people with experience in what had been the Soviet republics now independent states, and it provided Embassy Moscow with a model to use when we had to engage Russia more fully regions outside Moscow and Petersburg. Let me recall some of the background though, even though some of this has already been covered. At the end of the eighties, Jack Matlock had written a cable that brought to the attention of Washington that the Soviet Union's regions - the republics - were becoming more and more important. He didn't say there was a fragmentation of authority, but that the republics themselves were taking on greater significance. The idea of circuit riders was a response to coping with that reality. As I arrived in Moscow in 1990 we were already thinking about how the Embassy could do a better job of monitoring and reporting and thinking about the situation beyond the capital. And we agreed establishing contacts with the republics' leaderships seemed ever more important.

Historically the Embassy didn't have great contacts in the republics. There had always been some. People knew the first secretaries of the Party who were included in the Politburo or Central Committee of the Communist Party and others who were part of the

Moscow establishment. But we had not delved deeply into the republics because the key decisions were made in Moscow. The whole premise during the Cold War was that if you were going to understand or influence government, the politburo, the key players, and to a degree the broader intelligentsia in Moscow would be your focus. They were the people who made the decisions. But as Gorbachev unveiled perestroika and glasnost the constellation of players began to expand, and by the end of the eighties there was a new reality - more voice in decision making was being claimed by these regional and Republic leaders, and we were seeing manifestations of nationalist demands, of people in the republics demanding greater autonomy.

Gorbachev had begun to move to address these new realities and forces. He had started to renegotiate the relationship of the republics to the central government and was opening the whole fabric of the Union to "new thinking" as the phrase went then. The circuit riders had been a response to this reality, to the fact that people in Yerevan, people in Tbilisi were acquiring a voice that mattered. So, we started giving officers responsibility for dealing with one or another republic, becoming the experts, if you will, on their area and getting to know who was who in the region they covered.

I remember in this regard a young officer Daria Fayne. Daria all but became Mme. Uzbekistan. She got to know the people in Tashkent and they got to know her. She became about the best authority we had in the U.S. government on what was going on and who was who in Tashkent. She became almost a virtual one person consulate in Tashkent and an exceptional asset for the Embassy. The situation was more structured in Kiev. There we had agreed to open a consulate, and established an advance team. With Ukraine's independence these officers had already put in place a basis for opening an embassy. They were already dealing with leadership in Ukraine before the breakup and had in place something like an infrastructure for representation by the beginning of 1992.

Our Consulate in Leningrad had undertaken a similarly active role with the Baltic republics. They were monitoring and reporting on what was transpiring in the Baltics in 1991 when the Lithuanian movement to restore the country's sovereignty had come to the forefront among the challengers to Moscow's authority and had become an almost daily issue for Washington. As these leaders ever more boldly insisted on having greater autonomy or independence, our Consulate people, George Krol and Dick Miles, became essential eyes and ears about developments as well as significant symbols of America's commitment to these people as they pressed to regain independence.

So, fortunately, the circuit rider program had established connections with a lot of people in the republic capitals when the breakup of the Soviet Union came. We knew something about the dynamics of what was going on in Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, in Tbilisi, in Kiev, and so forth. And we knew the people in those places who were making a difference. This effort at understanding what was going on outside Moscow, while in retrospect perhaps late to emerge, was nevertheless a significant embassy initiative that would pay off substantially as the events of 1992-'93 unfolded. Everyone owes a great deal to Ambassador Matlock for pushing his insights forward, and when I got there for backing us in creating the new circuit rider system.

Let's recall the point that the collapse of the Soviet system came as much as a shock to everyone in the Soviet republics as it did to the Russians, Americans and Europeans. Candidly, no one was prepared for it, and so far as I know no one had meaningful contingency plans. So from the outset in 1992 we were all making it up as we went along. This was as true of all the leaders in the former republics, now independent states, as it was for Washington and Moscow. But the U.S., even so, did take steps with profound implications for the future of greater Eurasia. I noted earlier the U.S. immediately recognized each of the non-Russia republics as a sovereign, independent state and member of the international community. We then proceeded to establish diplomatic relations and representation with each. The immediate effect of all this on Embassy Moscow was to curtail our formal responsibilities in Eurasia. We now had responsibility for the Russian Federation only. So far as the other new states we kept abreast of what Moscow was doing with them as now "foreign policy", and did what we could informally to support building of U.S. relations with the new states.

It was a limited function but significant. For one thing, as I recall, a few embassy staff members who had been our circuit riders for Soviet republics were snatched away to help establish relations with the new states. In many cases they were among a very few official Americans with any contacts in the new capitals. The embassy also made a conscientious and sustained effort to develop relations with the representatives the new states had in Moscow - mostly former representatives of the leaders of the republics in the capital. With them we did what we could to facilitate communications with Washington for their governments, provide information, at times just provide personal support, and, as we could, give them advice on practical matters.

But, we were also conscious of the need to avoid any implication that we, as America's embassy to Russia, had any official responsibility for U.S. relations with the new states or saw Moscow as retaining authority over them. It was a bit of a balancing act. We were often sought out by the representatives of new states for personal, informal advice, finding the right contacts with Washington, and such. But, from the beginning of 1992, Embassy Moscow was not really engaged directly with the governments of the new states. That was the job of the new missions we sent there and Washington. So, even as we were focused on Russia as the Embassy in Moscow, we also had a role, often tangential or supportive, in advancing the U.S. policy of promoting the breakup of the USSR in a peaceful way into a community of independent nations.

Q: Were you running the equivalent of training programs and all? I know, I went to Kyrgyzstan as a consultant on consular matters, but I don't' know whether there was much going on elsewhere?

COLLINS: I think there was less of that in Russia than in the other new states. The Russian system, after all, for better or worse, inherited the Soviet bureaucracy. For the most part the top leaders had been removed and were out of the picture. But the people who moved up and took over were professionals, had administrative and bureaucratic skills and understanding. They provided our advisers and program people

with counterparts who had been working the issues they came to address. The biggest challenges emerged where Russia was seeking to adopt the new systems of a market economy. In this world there was, in the main, simply a tabula rasa. But those who were taking over both within government and as the private sector world emerged were anxious to learn. The Moscow embassy also did have some of our officers accredited as attaches to some of the new states, and we sent people from time to time to these other states to assist them in setting up institutions to help them to relate in the international community of which they suddenly found themselves a part. But, more of that came from Washington or from Europe than from us.

Q: The western diplomatic corps has always been a cohesive unit, at least because of the cold war. What were the British, German, and French doing at that same time? Were they seeing this too?

COLLINS: I would say none of them that I recall had a program of this kind. I think we were unique. But, some European embassies had special interests they followed in particular regions and a few consulates outside Moscow. The German embassy for instance, was always interested in the Baltic area and in regions where German immigrants had settled in the past. So they took a special interest in and knew a lot about the Volga region. The Polish embassy had historic connections in the Polish Catholic community, and as the Bloc collapsed and the Polish embassy transformed its mission, reestablishing broader connections with Poles who lived in Siberia as a result of earlier exile, for instance. The Scandinavian missions were likewise very active in the Baltic republics and built very close relations with these close neighbors. So these embassies had some regional connections, but not to the extent or as systematically as we did.

Q: What was the role of Chechnya in all this.?

COLLINS: The Chechnya conflict comes later. It is part of the post-Soviet struggle over the future of the Russian state itself. The Chechen drive for independence raised fundamental questions about whether the new Eurasian order was to be defined by the structures Stalin set out in the 1930s regarding national borders or whether the new states would be subject to revision regarding the borders they inherited at the Soviet breakup. Within the Russian Federation beyond this basic point it was about central versus local authority, about relations between Moscow and the parts of the former USSR that remained within the new Russian Federation. At its most fundamental it was about whether the Russian state would hold together or fragment. In these early days of new Russia that question was seen as very real and very much unresolved. The Chechnya tragedy emerged when the parties concerned failed to resolve these issues and brought a stalemate that ultimately broke out in open conflict. But at the early stages the Chechnya effort to assert control over their territory was not all that dissimilar from what Moscow faced elsewhere across the Federation. The issue turned violent in 1994 as Moscow sought to assert its authority and the Chechens decided to resist.

Q: Was there ever a real sense that the Russian nation could come apart? Certainly that was not a feeling I ever had?

COLLINS: I think the only answer is that at the beginning there was a widespread fear that breakup was a real possibility. There were, to be sure, certain institutions that were not subject to this dynamic. For example, the railroads more or less worked on their own. They kept the same timetables even though the Ukrainians at one point wanted to have a separate timetable. I could never picture how that was going to work, and they finally agreed that the old rail system would stay uniform. The air traffic control system was likewise immune And within Russia itself, the unity and unified command of the army, so far as I know, was never seriously challenged.

But if the logic of these institutions and functions argued for and promoted unity, you didn't have to go far down the ladder before these considerations could give way to focus on interests in having greater say over local interests; where people in the provinces were ready to say to Moscow, "This is our business." As a result by 1992 there was no real clarity about how far or how extensive the control exercised by Moscow went or would ultimately go. If in any given republic or province Moscow's authority was challenged, leaders in Moscow and locally faced the question of where would the loyalty of the people lie? Was the loyalty to the local governor or republic President? Was it to Yeltsin? Was it to some non-government force? There was ample reason everywhere to be cautious, and there was serious discussion about whether the country was going to survive or would come apart.

In '92, the answer to the uncertainties on most all parts was caution and determination to avoid confrontation. Moscow negotiated "treaties" with many of the provinces designed to regulate relations between the center and provinces and in most cases also provide for budgetary arrangements. The Tatarstan treaty, for example, was broad-ranging and probably represented the most ambitious effort by a region to maximize its "sovereign authorities." It talked about the status of the Tatar language, which courts would have jurisdiction over what, and such like. As a result the patchwork of arrangements that existed by the end of '92 or early '93 meant that relations between the federal government and the provinces were far from uniform.

Q: This must have made it very difficult to get decisions or have any uniform programs. How did our businesses manage?

COLLINS: U.S. businesses did have a hard time. We started hearing American business's complaints:, "Goddammit, we have a contract here, and they won't enforce it over there." Well, they didn't. Or "Is there anybody who can make a decision that we can count on?" It was a very difficult environment and hardly the kind of environment businesses hoped to have where the rules were clear and the decision-makers identified. In the circumstances whom you dealt with became a critical issue for nearly any transaction. In particular, governors were often key. If an American business came and said, "I want to set up a plant in Chelyabinsk," the first advice that we would give is, "Okay, tell the appropriate people here in Moscow, but then you are advised to talk to the local governor and authorities because you won't succeed unless they are on board. They will have as much say about what happens as anybody here in Moscow and maybe

more." This approach, even with the development of more mature institutions for the economy, remained very much a feature of the business environment all through the Yeltsin period. For me it recalled reading about the period between the American Revolution and 1789 - the rules and the laws that worked in one place were by no means uniform across the land.

Q: Who were the governors? Were they appointed or what?

COLLINS: As of the end of '93 they were elected, but before that they were nearly all appointed. Appointed is an interesting term. Some were literally appointed by Yeltsin as new people to go out and take charge of a province. Others, for instance Rossel in Sverdlovsk Oblast was a communist party leader who became a governor. There was no uniform practice As a result the governors were a very diverse lot. They included former senior Communist Party apparatchiks who simply changed hats from Party leader to head of regional government to the most liberal democratic types from the Yeltsin team determined to remake their regions.

One example of the latter, Governor Prusak of Novgorod region, was an exceptional and creative leader. He was part of the young generation that got a chance with Yeltsin's new government. Like the young governor of Gorky (later Nizhny Novgorod) Nemtsov, he was a determined modernizer. He made attracting foreign business and foreign investment a priority early on. He told me, "The reality is the governor, if he really plays his cards right, has a huge amount of latitude. We can't do things that are against the law, but there a lot of things you can do if you just use the right interpretation of the law." And he used these openings with skill. Very early he experimented with ideas like a creative form of mortgage for people to buy their apartments. But it was also the case that many governors trained in and conditioned by the Soviet system never really left it behind and took advantage of the latitude to retard any change.

Q: I had a taste of this in Yugoslavia. You go 10 miles outside Belgrade and all of a sudden you're in the 13th century. It's all very nice but things move at the pace of an ox.

COLLINS: That was certainly true across the expanse of Russia. It was a huge place. Everything from the 18th through the 21st century coexisted quite comfortably in the same country. I recall on one trip driving along a country road and looking up the main street of a village,. If it weren't for a telephone pole, it could have been the 18th century. It was a mud street, wooden sidewalk, log or other crude board houses at skewed angles. All straight out of Gogol. But then I would go to the Academy of Sciences, and meet scholars doing the latest genetic research. Our country's big, too, but I think our differences are not as great as those I saw in the Soviet Union as it came to an end. The countryside was much less developed in almost all respects compared to the urban areas. That was in part because the Soviet mentality the countryside and its peasantry was to be exploited to advance the urbanized, industrial, modernized, economy of the cities and their working class.

Q: This was an extremely complex situation. How was Boris Yeltsin responding?

COLLINS: Yeltsin came to power with rather specific ideas about the changes he believed necessary. As we've discussed, he talked almost incessantly about making Russia what he called a "normal country,' and that meant more or less a European, western country and society. He likewise embraced the idea of Russia's inclusion in the Euro-Atlantic community with, it seemed clear, preservation of Russia's role as a partner-leader of the post-Cold War Euro-Atlantic community and the leader of post-Soviet Eurasia. These two objectives represented his guiding north star, and they were central to shaping his expectations and policies as he took power.

As he looked outward, Yeltsin pursued inclusion in Europe and valued both the reality and symbolism of Russian participation in bodies such as the G-8 economic forum, the contact group formed to address the Bosnia conflict, security structures such as the partnership for peace and Organization for Security Cooperation in Europe. The expansion of his participation early on in such institutions and the promise inherent in American policy as defined by President Bush and President Clinton in the early years gave him a sense of confidence that Russia and the United States could continue their leadership of the Euro-Atlantic world, and the expectation that Russia would be accepted as a full partner in determining the future security system for the greater region. We've discussed elements of what this meant in terms of his expectations and the problems they encountered. But in this early period, the issues that would arise to undercut these expectations had yet to undermine seriously Yeltsin's or Russia's confidence, and he remained a dedicated integrator seeking Russia's inclusion in the European home.

At home, Yeltsin knew that making Russia a normal country meant revolutionary change. He had no question about that. He further deeply believed that new Russia could emerge only with the destruction of the old Communist system, a requirement with which he was more than comfortable. By the time he took up leadership of Russia, he had a deep seated hatred for the Communist Party and system. He felt it had betrayed him, had tried to destroy him as a political figure, to thwart his future in the mid '80s. So, he was out for revenge as well as victory and that fit perfectly well with wanting to modernize Russia on the basis of a normality that was incompatible with just about everything the Soviet system represented.

When he came into office, he had no qualms about tearing up the old system. In fact, it seemed often that his foremost objective was to get rid of the old system and the people who governed it. And a number of things he did reflected this determination and would leave an indelible mark on the way he left the country when he left office. Just a few items.

First, he seemed to intuit that his generation and the people 50 or older were too old to absorb the new ways he had in mind for the country. From the outset he relied on young people in their 30s for key positions of leadership in his government. Gaidar, Chubais, Pain, Kozyrev, for example, held key positions at the center, and other newcomers like Nemtsov or Prusak in the provinces, became key forces for modernization, reform, and Russia's turn west. They were names everyone in Washington knew in '92, '93 . They

knew western economics, western politics, they spoke western. They were early questioners of communist orthodoxy, had careers that had not yet vested them in the old regime, and spoke, thought, and embodied the aspiration for real reform. Many had been staunch supporters of the Gorbachev perestroika and glasnost reforms and had been bitterly disappointed when those stalled. These were people who, as I saw them, were really a product of the post-Soviet era in the sense that era ended with Gorbachev's ascent. They were the new thinkers ready for new ways. They were just what Yeltsin looked for. So, from the outset he uncharacteristically set out to build a new team from people who were not his friends or his age group, but belonged to the generation of his children or in some cases his grandchildren.

It was an experiment: it was exceptional: and it had its issues. For one, it seemed to mean instability. Yeltsin was known for throwing people out if they couldn't do the job he wanted and bringing in new ones. He brought in older personalities only when he felt he had to convey stability or comfort that things were not out of control. In crises he tended to turn to people who were unassailable by people his age, people all would see as keeping the radicals in check. You saw this in '93 when there was the shelling of the Parliament and after the '98 economic crisis. But in the end he kept looking to the next generation as the only hope he had that his legacy would be respected.

The second thing that was very important about him was the understanding he had about his role. It was always my sense that his vision of self was that of father of new Russia. The job was to set the state on a new trajectory: to ensure the big decisions were consistent with his vision about normal Russia as a part of greater Europe.
He left governing and implementing to others. He really had no interest in economics. It wasn't his thing, and he saw his job as picking people who could do that job. On the whole, during the critical early years he didn't pick people badly, and that was one of his strengths. Of course, he made some bad decisions, but on the whole he kept going back to find people who could do the job. On the other hand, he was very fickle about backing them up at times or pushing the things they said had to be done. He was a tough guy to work for, wasn't always consistent in his direction. There were a lot of frustrations in the ministries and regions. But he trained a new generation of leadership in his decade, gave Russians their first real taste of democratic, pluralistic, accountable governance, including how to live with norms like press freedom, and he guided his nation through a socio-economic revolution without significant bloodshed.

Q: Did you find in the embassy that you were fighting a battle to support Yeltsin where there were lots of naysayers back in Washington or not?

COLLINS: That evolved. This wasn't the case in the early period. Yeltsin was immensely popular in the U.S. He was the man on the tank standing against the powers that sought to restore the Stalinist system and the Cold War. He comes in mid-1992 to Washington and gets a hero's welcome. He addresses a joint session of congress telling his audience, "I put an end to your problem." That gets a standing ovation. Strauss took him out to Kansas, and Senator Dole, in a way Mr. Republican, welcomed him warmly.

He had a very successful visit, and he came home on a high. He also solidified the idea that this was a new leader who deserved our support.

So, there were not very many naysayers about Mr. Yeltsin or Russia at that time, nor was there much disagreement, discussion or debate about whether or not we should support Yeltsin and what he was seeking to do with his country At this point it was fair to say that support was bi-partisan and our political leadership was playing in harmony from the same sheet of music. The divisions and disharmony over Russian policy started to emerge much later. For the first several years there was a uniform view about what our goals were.

The one significant source of discordant notes at this stage revolved around a third dimension of what was happening in Eurasia. That was the disintegration of the Russian empire we have already discussed at some length and the development of relations between Russia and its new independent neighbors-former dependent republics. As we discussed then, the issues involved ranged from the fate of nuclear weapons located in some of these new states, to how the shared wealth and debts of the USSR would be parceled out, to defining borders, to decisions about the movement of people and citizenship.

In Washington this played out as a steady effort by the cast in this drama to gain U.S. support for priorities they were pursuing in resolving these issues or in some cases to obtain more assistance from the U.S. for their own state building projects. Much of this involved direct diplomacy as we were setting up relations with the new states, supporting their independence and sovereignty and, in general, making every effort to create successful new nation states. But there were also constituencies in the U.S., national diaspora organizations, religious groups, human rights organizations and such that were pressing for support of their causes and communities. Early on some diaspora communities, supporters of Ukraine, Armenia, Georgia, and the Baltic states, in particular, argued that the central element of U.S. policy in the region had to focus on protecting against Russian efforts to preserve or restore its empire or otherwise undermine the independence of its neighbors. And despite the fact that this seemed a remote possibility at the time, these voices often gained a sympathetic ear. But in ’92 this issue had not really developed momentum. Rather, this was a time when everyone was ecstatic that Russians and all the others in the former USSR had finally understood reality and what was right, and our task was help them put their house in order. That was the general view.

Q: What about the articulate members of Russian society looking at this? How did they see it? Did they feel that we were screwing them or something?

COLLINS: In Russian society broadly speaking you had a great division that pitted those who thought that 1991’s changes were a catastrophe against those who thought it hadn’t come fast enough. The majority of those in the new states were satisfied with the end of Moscow’s rule, and their independence. As for those who felt lost status or felt abandoned as local leaderships took control many began to emigrate to Russia or

elsewhere where they felt among their own. In Russia, meanwhile, the divisions was as often as not between pro-Yeltsin and anti-Yeltsin, the latter those who lost out in '91 - the communist cadres and those who kept to the communist way of thinking versus the new generation who took over determined to make a new nation and in the process create a new post communist elite.

But for all among the elite the sense of trauma was profound and deep. The whole system had been turned on its head. As we've discussed, the ways they knew for getting ahead, establishing positions of authority, leadership, prestige evaporated to be replaced by new norms and values that set the rules. What had been anathema yesterday was today's road to advancement and reward. This meant that Soviet system's premise for organizing society, that the political leadership of those in power, most often seen as the Party, was the arbiter that awarded the resources and benefits to citizens on the basis of society's needs and the contribution each made to advancing its goals. Whatever its warts, problems, challenges and catastrophes it was also fundamental that this would mean people were to be rewarded or compensated by their contributions and selected for advancement by their talents to rise to the level they could perform. Now, I am not saying this is actually how the system worked, but as it fell short, I think it was fair to say far more blamed the corruption or misuse of the system for failures than saw the fault in the structure and system itself. And so it was largely accepted that each level in some sense had its rewards in the society. If you were an academician in the academy of sciences, you had a car, one of the better apartments, a driver. You had a range of perks or benefits that accompanied your status. If you ran a store somewhere you were further down the ladder and probably didn't have a car. On the other hand, you probably had access to certain things that your neighbor working for the store did not have. You got a smaller apartment probably associated with your work place. And so on down the line.

When '91 ends and '92 begins, and the announcement is made that prices are free and planning is over, this system is turned upside down and a wholly new basis for decisions about allocating society's limited resources takes hold. The Party and bureaucracy are replaced by the market and the world flips almost overnight. The academician who was at the top of the social pyramid with the corresponding benefits is suddenly trying to exist on 200 rubles a month. A few dollars. But, the previously unknown guy who has opened a kiosk on the corner of a street in downtown Moscow selling Snickers bars and cigarettes has a driver and Cadillac, because he has the money to acquire it, and that is all that he needs to enjoy a new life--making real money.

This obliteration of systemic bureaucratic and political control over allocation of society's resources and benefits and its replacement by market forces, marketology if you will, as the driver of who is on top and who is important traumatized the Soviet elite; it turned all to focus on survival in this world they hardly understood. For the older generation that had lived to rise or survive in the Soviet system, there is a sense of abandonment and dislocation. For the young the way forward is suddenly far more fluid and uncertain: the old path of going to university doesn't necessarily seem the key to success or even all that important. If real money is to be made in selling the Snickers bars, running a kiosk, or buying and selling, do you need a university education. The key

is to find a way to be a part of this new market system. Some, primarily among the younger element, are adaptable and make the change successfully. Among the generation over 50 it is more difficult They lived in a world where the only market was a "black" one and all for which they prepared became irrelevant.

So the upheaval in the capital and in the larger metropolitan areas is palpable: it brings untold suffering to an entire elite because the basis for their existence is thrown into question. If the universities aren't getting money to pay salaries, how much does it matter if you are a professor? Or if you were the head of the State Hospital and the pay is a government salary that may or may not be paid on time and the real money is suddenly going to private doctors, where is your future?

And then another blow accompanying this turn to the new role of money comes with runaway inflation. Inflation deals a second blow to the older generation as the collapse of the ruble all but erases savings and the value of ruble salaries. The results of these upheavals for nearly everyone's life brought a variety of responses. For one, as I think I noted, anyone who can do it tries to find a source of non-ruble income. A job with a western company or work for a foreign embassy, or anything that gives you a hard currency salary, automatically provides security and a place on the way up the ladder. Suddenly knowledge of any foreign language or technical skills with the new technologies becomes a valuable asset.

Then, more broadly, you have the emergence of a new, bizarre world in which people are working - but for no money, no pay, no salary. The busses, the trains, everything keep going. The factories keep turning out stuff whether there is demand for product or not. Why? We've talked about how the place of work was the source of a noon meal, of medical care, of living accommodation. It was the benefits package that kept people at their job even without pay, or with pay in kind. This brought the appearance in Russia of so called wage arrears, a unique system, I can tell you, that was hard to explain to Americans. Most thought working for no pay was insanity. Why would you go work for nothing? Well, they weren't working for nothing. They were working for a place to live, for a school for their children, for medical care, and for access to some food.

Then there was what I can only call the return to the land. This meant that anyone who could was a part time farmer. As I think I mentioned everyone beginning in '91 when garden plots became available to any citizen who could establish one, did so. Moscow was all but deserted for May Day in the years immediately following this new decree as people were out planting, and in the fall no less so as the harvest was brought in.

Then along with this we saw another strange phenomenon worth repeating. The traditional urban-rural shopping pattern in the Soviet era had seen people from the countryside come to the city every so often to get consumer goods available only in town. In return, they would bring the things into the city they had to sell, agricultural goods, crafts, clothing etc., that was on sale at the farmer's markets that were an essential contributor to the urban food supply. At the beginning of 1992 this pattern was suddenly in reverse. People were leaving the city with a carton of cigarettes, clothing, or other

goods not available in the country to get food in the countryside and bring it back to the city. It was a reflection of who really had the basics of survival and what was involved in getting them to those in need.

At the same time, a more tragic side emerged among those who found no way forward in this totally disorienting system. These were people dependent wholly on the state, often without family to rely on or on pension and alone. Or they were those whose positions simply ceased to exist or were rendered superfluous. For many such people their fate was just to fall by the wayside, and we observed this tragedy in the rise in alcohol consumption and the drop in men's life expectancy. We also observed a decline in the younger generation's interest in the traditional way of getting ahead in the Soviet system, which has been go to university, if you could do it, or pursue a career in a promising government agency. Now, even the Ministry of Foreign Affairs finds it hard to recruit new talent.

It is very difficult for an American to grasp what this period meant to nearly every citizen: how the changes undermined the importance of almost everyone's lifetime experience, and required an entirely new way of looking at the world. Basic things we take for granted, supply and demand, time and money, meant nothing under communism. They had a completely different set of incentives and way of measuring efficiency or value. Suddenly they are told they have to think like a European and throw off nearly everything they had been raised to believe.

Q: You've mentioned that Yeltsin looked to the young and not his generation. Did you sense a new generation coming along, coming to the fore out of the universities and all?

COLLINS: Well a new generation was coming along, but they weren't necessarily coming out of the universities. Rather, when the Soviet system collapsed what went with it was the Party controlled system of who could rise and what limits different groups in the society were prevented from exceeding. This had two immediate effects. First, the Communist Party and other elements of the elite that had managed careers for success in everything from government to the academy to the arts and journalism suddenly found their solid road a mass of pot holes, gaping holes in the concrete and impassible obstacles. Most of the means they had learned to overcome any previously understood obstacles were also now more or less useless.

On the other hand, all of the fences and barriers that had protected this road from interference or non-sanctioned travelers in the past suddenly disappeared. Waves of new competitors for a space on the path took over setting the rules of the road or creating new byways. To change analogies, those who had lived with various kinds of glass ceiling in Soviet times, had a clear sky above them and they took advantage of it. So, the emerging group at this stage is made up not just of those from universities. Now those who were not allowed to rise beyond limited levels have a clear sky to rise. National and religious minorities, women, black marketeers, now admired for their business acumen, practitioners of frowned upon foreign cultural genres, even criminal elements suddenly had the chance to make their way to whatever level in the economy and emerging more

open society they could attain. The ceilings were shattered and anyone could aspire to rise. The old rules were gone.

In this atmosphere the traditional Soviet structured universities and other institutions that had been training grounds for success in the Soviet system began to suffer. On the one hand, as mentioned, now anybody who had English or knew how to use a computer or was at all acquainted with the modern technology had seemingly open opportunity. These skills opened opportunities to work for a western company, for western aid agencies, or Russian companies trying to establish ties to the outside. Further, age didn't matter much. Young people were also going off to start businesses, or get a job, or go out and start selling stuff in a kiosk because there were opportunities all over to make money, and money, not status now was what mattered. So people who had traditionally seen the avenue to advancement through getting education or professional training, would get secondary school training and then go off and start working in business.

A second development likewise had a significant impact on the young. With the Soviet collapse, the traditional system of higher education underwent wholesale upheaval. On the one hand market forces and the demand for new kinds of training spawned creation of many new universities and training establishments, some offering traditional education but many keyed to the new demands of a market economy, for new skills from economic analysis, to legal expertise, to technical capabilities. The traditional university system, thus found new competition that challenged its monopoly control over the academy. At the same time, the network of technical schools that had trained generations of Soviet workers in the technical trades fell on hard times and all but lost their ability to provide what we might see as the skills offered by our community colleges. It would take significant time for the system of post-secondary education to adjust to the requirements of the new economy and in the meantime the reluctance or inability of the Soviet academic organizations to meet the new demands brought hard times.

The government was suffering as well. They were losing people from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, for example, because people could suddenly go to work for Citibank at a much higher salary and with greater prospects for a diverse career. All of this was a shock to the entire social system, its mores, values, and expectations, but it was also true that the young generation of people 35 and under was emerging as the dynamic force defining the future. And they were doing so well before accepted tradition would have expected that their time had arrived.

Q: So did you find more women entering the scene?

COLLINS: Definitely, and they are going to make a change. You know, it was almost a cliché that women were really the ones who ran the country anyway: it was the secretaries, the assistants, the deputies, the number two's, the office managers, the wives who ensured that the unworkable could work. But with the exception of a few token personalities like Culture Minister Furtseva in Khrushchev's time or Tereshkova, the first woman astronaut in Brezhnev's, the Soviet hierarchy was an exclusive male club. When that Communist overlay was removed, any number of women emerged. Because they

knew how to make almost anything work and had always managed the pragmatic side to life from the home to the office, women were well suited to an open, unstructured and free-for-all environment. And they responded. When I would visit outside Moscow or in the big cities, it was women forming the new NGO culture to address everything from support for primary schools to establishing health clinics. The emerging private business sector provided opportunities for women to become entrepreneurs. I knew a number of these exceptional personalities. One woman, a PhD chemist, became a partner in owning the hallmark Uralmash factory complex, the biggest steel fabricating complex in the country. Another, a mathematician, took up fur and jewelry design and became one of the most successful furriers in the country. A third, went into the business of restaurants and hotels to become owner of the landmark Red Square historic restaurant and a chain of American style motels. Katya Genieva, the director of the Library for Foreign Literature was a force of nature. She opened up information to the public, created new facilities for the young, became a partner as we sought to open America Corners across the country, and in many ways revolutionized the entire Soviet library network, and there were many more. What they shared was the determination to take advantage of new opportunities. The experience and pragmatic sense to get things done in the free for all atmosphere of these early post Soviet years made them a new creative, dynamic force for the nation that brought significant and lasting change.

In addition to the women, other groups denied access to the senior ranks of the system before - Jews, Tatars, Central Asian and Caucasus peoples, now also saw their chance. They too found their survival skills and experience in making their way in an environment designed to keep them down, gave them know how to prosper in the new, open atmosphere. It unleashed talent and drive from this cohort that suddenly saw the way open for them to advance.

At the same time, the new openness brought with it less attractive sides. People who had run the back market or criminal gangs put their market experiences to work spawning a variety of new criminal enterprises and activities. In an environment of weak law enforcement and even undefined boundaries between the legal and illegal, organized crime grew as it found opportunities in traditional and non-traditional endeavors that shared the feature of loose and plentiful money.

So these elements were all out there reshaping the way Russians went about their daily lives every day. It was a time when people who had never been part of the group allowed to shape the future each in their own way suddenly grabbed the chance to create a new future for themselves. It unleashed people who had not been able to play that kind of a role or hope to rise to the top tier, and gave them an opportunity to become instruments essential to building Russia's new society, economy, and culture. It was energizing to work with them.

Before we leave this topic I have one additional point.

Q: Please.

COLLINS: This touches on the youngest generation, the young people in school, the kindergarten to secondary school population, the young just coming of age and the true post-Soviet future. This is one place I had a bone to pick with our approach to change almost from the beginning. One of the things that seemed to me a missed opportunity by the United States and Europe was our neglect of the public schools across the former Soviet space in favor of a focus on higher education. The development experts and the gurus of educational reform almost all came from the academy or from government or nonprofits that worked with the academy. These people, probably not surprisingly, liked to deal with their counterparts in higher education, people in universities and institutes, people who also for the most part spoke English.

At the same time very few paid much attention to the public schools, that is, nursery school through secondary school. And we paid a price for that. This was a time of revolution, an end to the Soviet system, communist party ideology, and everything that underlay these relics of a disappearing order. But, as I found early on, no one seemed to pay much attention to the kids that would be the future. Rather they continued to be instructed from school text books and materials that the teachers had used in the Soviet period. No new history books. Old communist economics. The Leninist version of just about everything you learned, unless teachers themselves rebelled and used materials they knew to be more germane to the future of their students. The only real exception to this pattern came from outside; it was George Soros, bless his soul, who alone was willing to spend serious money to rewrite Russian texts and bring them into the new era. It took time. It was not simple, but with the governments putting no serious attention or priority into this process, his was virtually the only voice for change for the new generation.

Q: You mean our government?

COLLINS: Our government as well as the Europeans.

Q: There is a reflection of this in the Middle East. What the Saudis have been cranking into the school systems all over the Islamic world - the histories and other books have been, from our perspective, distributing poison throughout the area. We haven't done much to counter it.

COLLINS: I think it's probably true across the board. The policy people just don't think about the young as their target. They seem to justify their program ideas by focus on teaching the teachers, but in my experience that just isn't enough. My father was an educator, a schoolteacher and administrator. He ran a school system throughout most of his career. He used to say, "Give me give me kids until they are about eight, and I will have the whole thing wrapped up. Their direction will be set." We were paying basically no attention to the education of these young people. I think it was a great missed opportunity. If we had put one bomber's cost into funding the production of revised literature, history, economics, and civics texts, we would have educated a new generation of Russians and Ukrainians to think in a different way and perhaps find greater comfort in the new world they would have to create.

Q: One of the important casualties of the collapse of the Soviet system were those in universities in the former Soviet space and East Europe and elsewhere who had been teaching with Marxism as the going and official ideology. Certainly this was a traumatic change for Russia and elsewhere in the former Warsaw Pact region. What do these scholars do? Were they out selling pencils?

COLLINS : This is an interesting and complex question. The changes in the society and economy we've discussed had a profound effect on the Soviet universities and research institutions. Of course, the end of the Marxist straight jacket made any number of faculty redundant and ended the requirements for study and homage to the ideology in nearly every academic program and work of research outside the hard sciences. But the impact was broader. First as the market economy took hold, one early and fundamental change at the university level was to end the government's monopoly over higher education. As demand grew for new skills and disciplines to serve the demands of a private sector business community, new professional skills in fields such as law, and previously unheard of specialties such as marketing and business management, new academic institutions sprung up to meet the needs. The traditional universities likewise began to adapt, including new courses and disciplines and having to adjust priorities to fill their classes as students demanded the new fields of study that would prepare them to find work in the emerging new economy. So the effect on the Academy broadly was profound, and it was made the more so as government subsidies and funding became less reliable and support for many of the kinds of traditional fields of study became harder and harder to come by.

It was also the case that in a broader sense the academic and scientific professions that had stood high on the ladder in Soviet times and were generously supported by the government now in the new market system found themselves called upon to justify their work and position in very new ways. The injection of economic justification for fields of study or research projects changed radically much of the traditional culture at universities or the Academy of Sciences. At universities faculty found new requirements to justify the courses they were teaching and often to show their relevance in preparing students for the new career world that was emerging around them. Pressure on the Academy of Sciences and its far flung research institutional network came under scrutiny and pressure to show that their work was producing outcomes relevant to the development of the economy and the new Russian nation.

And finally within the broader community I think it fair to say nearly all engaged felt a diminution in their status. As the new social order began to award status by the ability to amass wealth or succeed in business and money came to confer benefits and status previously awarded by the leaders of the Soviet system by competition in an open market, large elements of the academy and research world found themselves diminished. By the time I returned to Russia in the late '90s, the academic and research world was profoundly changed. Many succeeded in making the transition to the new order. They remained teachers and instructors in higher education, teaching new skills and fields, adapting their professions to a more open and competitive environment. But it is also the case that there were others who found the transition traumatic and never truly found a

place in the changing world that upended their lives, professions, and place in society. Certainly among these latter the academics and departments that had served the communist party and its ideological needs became superfluous.

Q: What was the impact of all this in the West, in the U.S. Marxism is now just history and the ideological confrontation is over. What happens to the scholars here?

COLLINS: You are raising a major issue. Outside the communist East, the response to the Soviet collapse upended the whole way we thought about the international order, America's place in that order, and what was now going to drive international politics. Most profoundly, I suppose, the communist collapse and Soviet breakup essentially put an end to the idea of an ideological struggle and the idea of a bi-polar system in which the two super powers determined the direction of global developments. These events certainly shook the foundations of the academic world, the foreign policy punditry, the political elite, etc. All this meant not only a wholesale restructuring of teaching about Marxism as a foundation for an alternative system that had challenged our own for most of the twentieth century. It meant also the disintegration of the models, intellectual constructs, ways of thinking about international relations, and perhaps most significantly the fundamental base that underpinned the whole American rationale for leadership of the West.

As I have noted I think it essential to remember that these events basically caught everyone in the West off guard. And the adjustment to the new realities was far from uniform. For a considerable time from my vantage point, a significant community simply sought to deny that a real change had occurred or that what had occurred required a new way of thinking. Many cautioned against overreaction. So, for a significant time it seemed to me much of our military, our intelligence community, our analysts and intellectuals essentially substituted the idea of Russia for the old Soviet menace or challenge and carried on. Outside these circles, however, change in thinking and approaches came quite rapidly. Historians saw the Soviet demise as the end of an historic epoch; political scientists moved from studying communist systems to developing new models to understand transition economies and political systems; international relations scholars saw in Russia more continuity than change for the most part and debated how its new order would affect its role as a major player in future Europe, etc. So most of those who had framed their studies on the Cold War paradigm adapted rather quickly, and we saw new ways of thinking about the Euro Atlantic world and global system emerge absent the ideological component.

Q: We're talking about this change in era.

COLLINS: Absolutely. 1992 had brought Russia a soc-economic revolution, set the country on a new path, and forever put an end to the Bolshevik communist economic experiment. It had been a painful year and it came to a close with the nation's economy in deep depression, massive unemployment, uncontrolled inflation, and a society in upheaval.

It had also been a remarkable year for U.S. relations with Moscow as well as the larger region. We are now deeply engaged in support of the new states of Eurasia, in their transformation to independent nations and in efforts to promote their integration with greater Europe.

It had also been a year of major advances in long pursued security objectives for Washington. In the last year of the Bush administration negotiations for a new treaty to reduce nuclear arms bore fruit. As one of his final acts President Bush visited Moscow at the beginning of January 1993. The START II treaty had been negotiated on the basis of principles agreed by Bush and Yeltsin in Washington in June and the last meeting of the two presidents was arranged to sign the new agreement. It became a summit to remember, though, not only for the START II signing.

Q: How so Jim.

COLLINS*;* Well, to begin this was my first experience in charge of arrangements for a Presidential visit. We had summits while I was DCM, but Ambassador Strauss had left post not long after the 1992 election and for this one I was it. Now, we haven't discussed too much about summits, but this one was unique. It was first of all termed a working visit, and that meant some of the ceremonial elements normally made obligatory for presidential meetings were put aside. Further the Russian side had determined the meeting would take place in Sochi away from Moscow and, I presumed, from many of the troubles Yeltsin was having with his Supreme Soviet colleagues and hardline critics. In any case, the planning, negotiations, and care and feeding of numerous visitors dominated December but were well completed in time for all involved to spend the Christmas holiday at home before putting the planned visits in motion.

All was well and normal until the day of New Year's eve in Moscow. Advance teams, press, security were all in Sochi in readiness for the President's arrival. And then because of freak cold weather and a snow storm the planners determined it would not be safe for the aircraft carrying the President and other dignitaries to land in Sochi and the meeting was moved to Moscow. What followed is well described in my wife Naomi's account of two hectic days during which I, President Yeltsin's chief of staff, and a group of embassy and Ministry of foreign affairs staff planned and completed arrangements for a summit in less than 48 hours. It was not the most festive New Years, but it was memorable for all involved and produced a thirty-six-hour program in time for President Bush, Secretary Eagleburger, Jim Baker and their accompanying parties to arrive on a bitter January second in what was the Bush farewell to his partner Boris and the signature of a second historic arms reduction agreement.

Naomi's account is better than I can possibly reproduce in describing the events of those two days. I will only say that what we managed to accomplish in less than forty eight hours did raise in my mind a lot of questions about why months of planning are required for a presidential visit and just how much of the tax payers' money is truly necessary to make an event like this just what it should be. I was also immensely proud of the embassy staff for their professional and dedicated work in putting the U.S. side of the visit

together from motorcades, to guest lists, to the final texts of the Treaty to be signed by the two presidents. It was our team at its best and what the Foreign Service can do when called upon. It was also memorable as an event from my side because of the way Americans and Russians turned to and worked together to get a complex and important task completed on time and as it needed to be done.

Naomi was with me through all of this and I do commend her accounts of an exceptional forty-eight hours. She also was the essential partner for this charge in what I suppose was a test run for what would become a number of presidential visits to Moscow at a later stage. It was also to put it mildly a memorable and unexpected way to end the year and open the next chapter as we concluded the Bush administration's tenure on a high note and prepared for what the new Clinton team would bring to the Russian relationship.

Q: So Jim, we are at the beginning of 1993, You have been charge since Strauss's departure following the U.S. election. Let me go back, though, to the campaign. As you watched the campaign, did the Clinton outlook concern you? Sometimes elections can bring out nastiness or differences that you wish it didn't put in the headlines

COLLINS: I don't recall there was that much controversy about Russia in the campaign. Russia was throwing out the communist system and remaking itself. I don't recall there were any major philosophic differences between the campaigns and what priorities they would pursue regarding Russia. All agreed it was in the American interest to support what the new Russian government was doing to bring in a market economy and more democratic, pluralistic political system. And everyone saw the end of the Soviet/Russian empire as a positive development.

There was one theme I thought troubling that arose – primarily from the Bush campaign. That was the idea that we, the West or the Americans "won" the Cold War. For Americans this meant there was also a loser. Initially people like Nixon, Strauss, and most of our leaders were willing to see that loser as the communists and their system, and everyone, including the Russian people, were the victors. But this would not last. Rather, over time, this theme morphed increasingly into the idea that it was the Russians who lost the war rather than the communists. This idea then came to portray the outcome of the Cold War as an American-led victory over Russia and Moscow that was not so much as a victory over a pernicious ideology as a victory over Europe's last autocratic empire. In this narrative the victory became a successful victory for the liberators of oppressed nations long subject to the Russian imperial yoke and for the champions of those who freed themselves from Moscow's domination.

But even as this thinking emerged during the 1992 political campaign, it did not come to dominate America's strategic view or policy toward Russia at this time. Rather our diplomacy and policy toward Russia and the region continued to enjoy bi-partisan support. This unity promoted and supported by the Bush [Senior] administration even in the heat of the campaign got the Freedom Support Act through the Congress, a work of legislations that became the base for development of the entire assistance program in support of Russia and the new independent states. And this consensus likewise brought

forth the Nunn-Lugar program with its revolutionary approach to cooperation with former adversaries in managing problems associated with the Cold War nuclear arsenal strewn across the former Soviet Union's territory.

So, even in the midst of our political campaign, it was our capacity to come together in support of our national interest in a successful transition in Eurasia that represented the best of what Americans can do when we put controversy aside to address a national challenge. That challenge put Bob Strauss and Richard Nixon on the same side pushing the Freedom Support Act through Congress; it united Senators Lugar and Nunn around the program that would bear their names for more than a decade. So, whatever the differences were in the '92 campaign, these did not seem to have any great impact on our approach to Russia or addressing the implications of the Soviet collapse. Russia was just not a controversial issue.

Q: O.k., But what was different about the new Administration?

COLLINS: Clinton comes in with a well thought out and solid approach that lasts quite effectively all the way up until about '98. He began by bringing a new structure to the way policy would be managed toward Russia and Eurasia. He launches his policy in a well orchestrated two stage process that involved in April '93 a speech at the naval academy laying out Russia policy followed by a summit meeting with Yeltsin in Vancouver that launches the key elements of the Administration's strategy for the coming period.

When the Clinton team arrived, it became clear Russia would be given priority in the Administration's foreign and national security policy. Not surprisingly there was an early review to define administration policy and strategy toward Russia and its neighbors. Keep in mind as well that this is the first truly post-Soviet policy review Washington undertakes for Russia and Eurasia. The results of that exercise emerged in the early spring in the form of a new institutional structure to manage policy toward Eurasia, a speech that laid out key policy elements and preparations for a subsequent first meeting between the new President and Yeltsin. Together the institutional changes and the speech and meeting set priorities, an agenda, and an approach/vocabulary that would shape our Russia policy for most of Clinton's two administrations.

On the substantive side, Clinton outlined the priorities and the approach the administration would take toward Russia and its neighbors in the seminal speech he gave at the Naval Academy in April. In it he committed the U.S. and our allies to support the transition of the former USSR from Soviet communist nuclear super power to a Eurasia made up of Russia and eleven other new independent states with secure borders, market economies and democratic political systems. He also made clear the U.S. would promote the integration of these new nations with the rest of a Europe whole free and at peace. It was a noble and ambitious vision, at the time largely at one with the thinking we encountered in most of the former Soviet space.

The speech made no bones about the major challenges we faced. It focused first on dealing with the Soviet nuclear arsenal, specifically on finding a path to ensure we did not emerge from the process with three more nuclear weapon states in Europe. I might recall here that Russia by mid-1992 had managed to withdraw the tactical nuclear weapons from the new states back into Russia. But strategic weapons remained in Kazakhstan, Belarus, and Ukraine. Further the speech recognized the challenge of dealing with the security of the nuclear arsenal and materials in the process. Here the Nunn Lugar program would become central to success. Beyond this priority the new policy concentrated on ensuring a stable political and economic transformation in the former Soviet space that would assure the 15 new states of the region their sovereignty as independent nations, their territorial integrity with assured, secure borders, and their development of market economies and democratic institutions that would promote their integration with the global economic, financial and trading system and with emerging greater democratic Europe. (Note: Officially the U.S. position was recognition of 12 new states, including Russia as one and the restoration of sovereignty for the three Baltic nations after decades of illegal occupation)

Q: *By the way, in a speech like that, does all that get vetted through you?*

COLLINS: Embassy voices are eminently forgettable in things like major speeches. There are some exceptions, but not many. So, no: we didn't have the chance to vet the speech, but I do know our reporting and views were available as the team considered the results of the review.

Q: When you saw it, did it say anything that surprised you?

COLLINS: There were no big surprises in it. We already knew about the new structure at State, and I took its policy statements as a strong endorsement for continuity and as reinforcement for existing U.S. commitments with renewed commitment and vigor. We had been talking about its main provisions for most of the past year. But the speech was especially important as a prelude to Yeltsin's first meeting with Clinton which took place in Vancouver in April '93.

Q: Why Vancouver?

COLLINS: They picked that venue so that it didn't have Yeltsin coming to the States. He had already been in the States, but the American President hadn't been to Moscow, and no one wanted to deal with that issue. So Vancouver was picked as a neutral venue, and if I recall correctly, it was picked in part because Yeltsin was travelling in the Russian Far East.

Q: How did the meeting go?

The meeting was really path-breaking. It was the first Yeltsin personal encounter with Clinton as President (he had met candidate Clinton during his visit to Washington the previous year). Gore was with him as was Strobe Talbott. Pickering, at that point

ambassador designate, and I were also there, as were a whole gaggle of people from the White House and the new administration almost all of whom would be part of Clinton's Russia team over the coming years. The meeting was important for at least three reasons. First, as noted, because it was Yeltsin's the first meeting with the new American President, and it went well: the two presidents got to know each other, and actually liked each other, I thought. The chemistry was good. Second, the meeting introduced numerous people on both sides to each other, and it set some early priorities for follow up. And third, it inadvertently created what was to be known as the Gore-Chernomyrdin Commission. That body, led by the Vice President and the Russian prime minister, would become the inter-governmental group that could take up whatever issues or programs the presidents decided needed attention and oversee their implementation and follow up.

Q: How did that develop into the Commission?

COLLINS: Well, first of all nobody ever created the Commission formally. It just sort of emerged, but it quickly became a useful instrument for both presidents. The background lies in the way summits always seemed to be prepared. Certainly when Yeltsin and Clinton were to get together, the bureaucracies on each side had a long list of things that they wanted the bosses to get done, issues to be decided, things to be put in train, or programs to be authorized.

Many of these were things that neither Bill Clinton nor Boris Yeltsin knew in detail or in many cases had much interest in discussing, but they agreed it would be good to address the questions. So it became routine to say, as they had done in Vancouver for several issues, "Yes, let's do this. Let's let Al and Viktor get it done." And that habit gave birth to the relationship between Chernomyrdin and Gore, and the idea that their job was to get things done that both presidents wanted the systems in both countries to accomplish.

I'm not sure when it became "commission." It was born without ceremony or specific intent in that first meeting, because the presidents needed a way to address issues by assigning someone to deal with them. Gore and Chernomyrdin were at hand and were tasked with seeing that their respective governments did what the presidents wanted done. The projects that came up ranged from nuclear issues to health to space cooperation to economic reforms and a variety of others.

Following Vancouver both Gore and Chernomyrdin returned to follow up and I suppose just logically assembled those who would have responsibility for each of the elements of the tasking they had taken home. From those meetings the group became the commission and henceforth was the vehicle for getting the bureaucracies to work on the issues in a coordinated way. This body also became a key in other important respects; it soon emerged as a vehicle for preparing issues for decision by presidents when they met the next time; it became the vehicle through which the Russian and American governments began routinely to develop direct relationships across departments and ministries, something unheard of in Soviet times. It was important because it began to break down the idea that you had to take everything from the bottom all the way up to the minister

across to the secretary and back down again. Now we saw the beginning of horizontal relationships between the bureaucracies at working levels.

So this commission was a key instrument of policy during both Clinton Administrations and left an important, lasting legacy. Throughout the mid '90s it was used to move forward projects and programs and to get decisions prepared and made at the presidential level. It was the program workhorse for an expanding agenda and effectively built bridges between the two governments that were productive and critical to moving any number of projects to fruition. The commission also gave birth to similar institutional arrangements with Ukraine and Kazakhstan and were mirrored in part with a number of other New Independent States (NIS). So, the very early encounters between the Clinton team and their Russian colleagues laid a very broad foundation for any number of elements in both our Russia policy our broader policy toward the NIS, and how we conducted our business with Russia and its neighbors. We'll talk more about the Commission and its work later when we take up my work back in Washington.

Q: While you were there during this period did you get visits from Clinton? I assume Gore was there frequently.

COLLINS: While I was there as DCM, Gore did come, but Clinton did not. The President's first visit to Moscow took place after I had returned to Washington. I went with him, but I was no longer at the embassy. Later, he did come when I was ambassador.

On the other hand, in those first years what we did get were numerous congressional visits, including a number of large delegations some of which were led by the congressional leadership. As I remember these were almost always bi-partisan groups. Congress was very much engaged in what was transpiring in Eurasia, particularly with the Russians. It was harder to get them to go to the other places, but they went to Moscow a lot. There was broad consensus about supporting Russia's transition, reflected in very substantial resources voted by the Congress to fund everything from our Nunn-Lugar programming to assistance across a range of fields.

Q: What was your job at this point? Were you still charge?

COLLINS: Well, yes, but there was more. It has been an extraordinary two plus years to put it mildly. And the last year was no exception. Nineteen ninety three, in fact, like the previous two years, was hardly predictable or normal for me or the mission. On one hand, for the first half of the year or nearly that long I was Chargé until Tom Pickering arrived to take up the Ambassadorship in mid-May. Then as the new administration settled in, I found myself increasingly having two jobs, as DCM for Tom Pickering and as part time adviser/assistant for Strobe Talbott, in his new position as Ambassador-at-Large for the New Independent States. So, for much of the last part of the year I was back and forth between Moscow and Washington. Professionally for me it was an unusual period.

Q: What was going on in Russia at this point?

As I noted ’93 was no less an extraordinary year for Russia or our relations. If ’92 had been the year that finalized the Soviet collapse and ended the command economy, imperial system, and Bolshevik political model, ’93 was a year of decision about new Russia’s constitutional and institutional direction. Recall that at in the last months of the Union, the Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic with its communist elected parliament, Russian republic institutions, geographic divisions and Soviet era personnel proclaimed the Russian republic an independent, sovereign Federation and asserted the Soviet Union no longer had valid authority with regard to management of its Republic affairs. This action was taken by the Soviet elected Russian Republic Supreme Soviet, which in support of its move to independence, had also provided its directly elected President Boris Yeltsin powers to rule by decree for a limited period of months. And so 1992 began with broad consensus between President and parliament on the Republic’s independence but not much understanding about what would follow. In addition, unlike the other new states, Russia, as the recognized Soviet successor also inherited the bureaucracy of the Soviet Union’s central government and powers over critical aspects of Soviet authority and power such as the nuclear arsenal and its forces.

For much of 1992 the political, economic, and social reforms the Yeltsin government instituted were as much engaged in dismantling Soviet rule and economic institutions and accommodating the realities of transition of authority over old Soviet structures or dismantling same as about new directions. But the economic reforms were having a profound effect and the social upheaval they brought was demonstrably changing life, particularly in urban areas. Not surprisingly as the year went on, economic decline made life harder, and lawlessness seemed to take hold across the nation. These changes spawned political tensions and greater division. And this tension increasingly came to the fore in sharpening divisions between the Kremlin where Yeltsin was ruling in the main by decree and the Parliament (still the Supreme Soviet elected in the Soviet era) that sought to reclaim powers it had surrendered to Yeltsin as the Union collapsed.

By the end of ’92 and during early “93 the issues of who would set the agenda for Russia’s future and how would it be defined was on the table and ever more bringing division between the Kremlin and Supreme Soviet. We were monitoring this struggle and in particular the gamble Yeltsin ultimately took in accepting the referendum of April, 1993, to validate his course and authority.

Q: How did we feel about that?

COLLINS: Well, all, I think, saw it as a tense and deciding moment. People also thought Yeltsin’s decision to agree to go the people was a big gamble. There were a lot of doubters. But he was determined and I have to say Yeltsin knew his people better than we did. He put himself on the line and won, taking the outcome as a mandate. But it had really done nothing to change the structure of constitutional arrangements, and the same parliament, representatives and governmental structures that had forced the referendum were still in place. And so, increasingly in the summer of ’93 and into the fall the opposition to Yeltsin and his course, including a reviving communist element reemerged to push back against the Yeltsin team’s reforms and the changes.

This built to a major confrontation in October . It came when Yeltsin demanded new elections for the legislature. He based his action on the victory in the spring referendum that provided for calling new parliamentary elections. He decreed the dissolution of the parliament and parliament refused to go. The result was violence. In order to enforce compliance with his order to dissolve the Supreme Soviet, Yeltsin called on the military to enforce his decree. The result was the shelling of the White House where the parliament was sitting and the arrest of the deputies who had defied his order, including the speaker, Yeltsin's vice President Rutskoi, and a host of other prominent Russia leaders who had stood with Yeltsin in 1991. It was a lasting shock to the system that was to have lingering effect on both Russia's development and U.S.-Russia relations.

I happened to be here in Washington in October of '93 when the most dramatic of the events occurred - the shelling of the White House, forcible suppression of the opposition to Yeltsin and arrests of the deputies who had stood against the President. It was a difficult moment for all of us. And it created uncertainty here in Washington. On the one hand Yeltsin was the man reforming his nation in ways that were applauded by the West. On the other, suddenly he is a leader using the army to shell an elected parliament and imprisoning his critics. With Congress and those with reason to doubt Russian intentions, the events raised questions and opened the first significant wedges in what had been more or less unqualified support for Russia's leadership and direction.

Q: Were the officers at the embassy picking this up, understanding this confrontation, and did we wonder what this might lead to?

COLLINS: Yes, I think the embassy had a pretty good understanding and grasp of what was going on and the stakes involved. My colleagues had mostly been in place since 1991 and understood better than most the scale, pace, and scope of the changes we were watching. Some elements of the Soviet system had already changed radically. The communist party's privileged position had ended and for all intents and purposes Russia now had a multi party system. The problem was that the parliament - Supreme Soviet - did not reflect the changes. It had been elected in the Soviet era and reflected the circumstances of 1990, a world long gone. At the same time, we had seen the end of key elements of the command economy, the freeing of prices and beginnings of a nascent market system based in private property. Yet the State still owned and controlled the vast majority of the nation's resources, leaving immense authority over economic decisions in the hands of bureaucracies and those who controlled them.

And it is worth remembering that although radical changes in government and economic structures came quickly in 1992, the vast majority of the elite that ran political, economic and social institutions did not really change. Party first secretaries became governors, red directors became plant managers or CEOs, kolkhoz directors became CEOs of farm corporations, education leaders stayed as members of the academy of sciences and school directors, and incidentally had only Soviet text books for their students. As events unfolded over this first year it was clear that tensions kept building between President and

legislature until a final reckoning: the coming to terms between executive and legislative power.

The result of that reckoning in the fall of 1993 in essence began a new phase in the revolutions overturning the Soviet empire. Yeltsin didn't get rid of the Supreme Soviet or the Soviet legislature in '91 and the beginning of '92. When they started to balk at many of the changes that were being pushed by the reformers around Yeltsin who was pressing fundamental changes by decree, the tensions mounted steadily and dominated most of 1993.

Q: So, the situation in Moscow becomes more tense as the old order loses ground and new people come into their own. But there must have been efforts to control this?

COLLINS: Yes, there were several efforts to avoid open conflict. The key moment when things grew urgent came at the end of 1992 when the legislature's 1991 grant of exceptional powers to Yeltsin ran out and the Supreme Soviet refused to renew them. Concurrently, in a move that said volumes about their views they also refused to confirm Yegor Gaidar, the personification of what had been done to the economy in 1992, to lead Yeltsin's government. It was an overt challenge to Yeltsin's stewardship and the direction he had taken the country, and the challenge reflected the effects of irreversible socio-economic changes launched at the end of the Soviet era and their impact on the socio-political order. Those who were trying to resist the changes were losing control over the nation's assets and wealth and their political capacity to manage and/or dispose of them that had characterized the Soviet system. Meantime new elites, based in a new private economy, were emerging and pressing the dismantlement of the old order.

The two sides had sought a peaceful decision by calling the referendum of April '93, which was more or less a referendum on Yeltsin's reforms and presidency. I remember a very tense time at that moment. We were following it very closely. It turned out to be a solid victory for Yeltsin, his reforms, and his call for new elections for the parliament. It was also significant as the backdrop to his meeting in Vancouver with Clinton, giving us confidence that we were dealing with the man in charge. But as in most cases with politics there's never a final or definitive answer when the differences are existential. And so it turned out in Moscow.

Q: It was a huge problem?

COLLINS: Yes. It got to the point where the Supreme Soviet was blocking changes Yeltsin insisted the referendum had validated. For much of the summer it was a story of mutual accusations, stalemate, and threats. The Supreme Soviet tried to impeach Yeltsin but failed to get the required 2/3 majority. In response Yeltsin ordered dissolution of the Supreme Soviet and new elections. It was a Russian Cromwellian moment. Yeltsin proclaiming, "you have sat too long." His opposition led by Rutskoi, the vice president and Khasbulatov, the speaker of the parliament, responded saying "we will not go" and occupied the White House. Yeltsin issued an ultimatum giving them a deadline to leave. When they did not meet it he called in the army to enforce his order. The White House

was shelled by tank fire and set ablaze, and the occupation ended with arrests of those who fled the burning, blackened White House under the gaze of television cameras. It was a complete but costly victory.

Q: How So?

COLLINS: Yeltsin prevailed, but both at home and abroad his shelling the White House and use of the military brought controversy and questions. He had a good case, but the shelling and the resort to force in October, '93 were setbacks. They hurt him with large parts of his own constituents in Russia, and outside, people didn't know what to make of what he had done. In Washington our Congress didn't like the idea of shelling a Parliament. There were few who put his action in context or saw its background, and I saw the episode raise the first real questions about him here in Washington. It was also damaging among Yeltsin's supporters at home. Among the Soviet system's opponents, there had been almost unvarnished adulation of a man who had thrown out the communists, ended the empire, given unprecedented freedom to Russia's people. Now some in the intelligentsia reverted to their more traditional role as critics of power and started to question Yeltsin's motives and means.

The reality, of course, was that in carrying on the political revolution and bringing it to a logical place in view of what had been happening to the economy, society, and imperial structure, Yeltsin was paying the price for a critical failure of 1991. At that time as the Soviet Union disappeared, its institutions in Russia largely survived. It became clear to me that Yeltsin's greatest mistake at that time was his failure to get rid of the old Supreme Soviet at the end of '91 along with the rest of the old regime. It was probably understandable then, but Russia didn't write a new constitution or fundamental law for the newly independent Russia partly because Yeltsin had come to power essentially as the defender of the old constitutional order. In the end that was a costly problem.

Q: Were you looking at the Soviet-now Russian-military as a factor in this equation, the question of which way it might jump?

COLLINS: Oh yes, absolutely. There were real uncertainties about what role the military would play and how they would react. After all, the episode in August of '91 was quite fresh in people's minds. Recall that when the coup leaders tried to oust Gorbachev, the military had basically split, some defending Yeltsin, others at the outset at least, following the orders of the people in the Kremlin. In 1993 conditions were uncertain because it wasn't clear that the military would necessarily obey or support Yeltsin. In the end, certain key individuals, including Gen. Grachev, the defense minister, were absolutely critical in bringing the military along to support Yeltsin and go along with using force against the Parliament. It was by no means a popular or unified position.

Q: I would think that at this time there would be considerable questions about the stability of Yeltsin. That he might go into tantrums or what have you. I would imagine that the embassy would have to send out reassuring statements that said, "No, he's fine." Did you get involved in that?

COLLINS: There were certainly questions about the stability and future of the government and what they were doing. It was a very uncertain and very fluid time. But, I don't recall that there were great questions about Yeltsin and his team. It was more about the broader issue of stability of the new nation and whether it could hold itself together. There were still plenty of pundits both in Russia and outside worrying about the Yugoslav scenario. And any number of regional leaders and elites ready to challenge Moscow's writ. Many were unsure that the Russian Federation could survive intact. The economy was in dire condition; the authority of Moscow was a questionable thing in many parts of Russia; the central government was more or less negotiating its relationships with the various parts of the Federation; budgets were the product of negotiated agreements with regions; there was no assured acceptance of legal decisions or documents from region to region, etc. On the other hand, what seemed critical at the time were some of the institutions like the military, the rail and air transport systems, economic institutions and so forth that strengthened the national structure; and there was an intangible but very real sense of national identity linked to church, nationality, language, etc. that certainly limited the impact of the centripetal forces challenging centralized authority. These were the fragile but nonetheless powerful elements of what kept the nation together it seemed to me.

Q: Let's turn to another topic. We've talked before about the other new states, say, Belarus, Ukraine, Kazakhstan, the embassies there. How did we develop our relations with them?

COLLINS: We are really talking here about what was going on in the other new states. Let's recall that each of the fifteen former Soviet republics is now an independent nation. As noted before, we had never recognized the incorporation of the Baltic states into the USSR, so we saw them as different – regaining their sovereignty and independence after what we had always insisted was an illegal occupation. The other twelve, including Russia, were different. From our side they were all new states. Russia, no longer an imperial metropole, despite its status as the successor state to the USSR, now had to develop its institutions within new borders and restructure itself profoundly. Perhaps more significantly it had to develop a new national identity. The other eleven new states were beginning de novo. A few had had brief experience with independence for a short period after World War I; others none at all. At the end of the USSR, these republics became independent nations and in one of the most significant legacies of the George H.W. Bush administration had been recognized diplomatically as an independent sovereign, full members of the international community.

In their early years these new nations began to establish an international identity and presence. In the course of '92 and '93 we were determining how we would organize our representation in each. The states, on their part, gradually opened their own embassies in Washington and with American support became members of the United Nations. No less important, each began to develop governmental institutions more often than not based in what they had inherited from their time as a Soviet republic. Most, for example, had some kind of nascent Ministry of Foreign Affairs that had been an adjunct of the Soviet MFA

or independent as in the case of Ukraine and Belarus because of their status as UN member states. I don't want to get into the details of this process because it is beyond the scope of what we are discussing. But, suffice it to say, these new states rather quickly developed their own national interests, relations with each other and critically redefined their relations with Moscow.

As this process unfolded, the United States was challenged to develop relations with largely unknown peoples and their leaders. Development of U.S. representation in each of 14 new capitals (we had the embassy in Moscow) was a challenge that occupied Washington and our embassy for most of two years. At the outset one problem we faced was Secretary Baker's determination that, "We're going to have embassies in all these countries, but there won't be any additional money requested in the budget." Not very realistic; simply put there was a sense of unreality meeting the demand for 14 new embassies without money. Moreover, nobody had ever built 14 US embassies at one time before. There were various thoughts about relying on a regional center for administrative support to limit the size of each post. There were a lot of different models discussed, but in the end State is conservative, traditions have power, and bureaucracy is pretty hidebound about its procedures and institutions.. We ended up doing the easy thing. We established a normal embassy structure in each of these capitals by early '93, and the Clinton Administration completed the appointment of ambassadors in each capital to replace the chargés or interim envoys who had been tapped to set up the embassies in the new states.

In Washington, meanwhile, the Clinton administration, as we've noted, moved to create a new policy and programmatic structure to manage relations with these new entities. The twelve new states in Eurasia (the Baltic Countries were excluded) were removed from the Bureau of European Affairs and set up under the authority of an "Ambassador-at-Large for the Newly Independent States." The position reported directly to the Secretary and discharged the functions normally in the hands of an assistant secretary of state regional bureau. The position additionally had authorities for coordination of inter-agency matters that gave it some qualities normally associated with the National Security Council Staff. Strobe Talbott, a close colleague and friend of Bill Clinton had that position from the beginning of '93, and took the lead for the Administration in shaping policies and programs for the U.S. government with our part of the world.

It was not a traditional institution but it worked. Strobe used his interagency convening authority to shape and coordinate programs and policies across agency lines and to pull together a coherent strategy that would serve the administration for the next several years. His authority with the program people in other departments brought a significant degree of coherence and purpose to the burgeoning number of agencies and programs targeted at these new states. It was not always traditional or tidy, but it was an effective instrument that laid a solid foundation for the Clinton administration in an area of priority for their international position.

Q: How did Secretary Christopher see this way of doing business? It was certainly unusual.

COLLINS: Well, I did not detect any particular problems in this regard. It was a rather odd arrangement. For most of ’93 when much of the policy formulation and critical speeches were given, and priorities were set, it seemed to me to enhance the State role in policy. Strobe at State would call inter-agency meetings to review or develop policies, formulate issues for decision, provide guidance for negotiations, etc. He was assisted in this by a coordinator for assistance who oversaw the allocation and expenditure of Freedom Support Act and other assistance funds for programming in the NIS

From my perspective in Moscow and from what time I spent back in Washington working with these institutions I found the system effective and creative in addressing an unprecedented situation that was fast changing. In ’93 it dealt well with a very fundamental set of issues . These people were called upon to deal with the nuclear weapons problem, do our best to prevent a breakdown in order or chaos across this whole region. This involved getting the new states established, introducing them into the international system, giving them standing, getting them assistance, information and support required for them to do everything from setting up a ministry of foreign affairs to putting in place the beginning of a market system. In many ways it was an exceptionally effective operation in bringing the U.S. Government together to work effectively.

In the Russian case the tasks were somewhat different from those we faced in the other new states. Russia as the successor to the Soviet Union inherited a developed bureaucracy, government, and culture of rule and governance. They had an Ministry of Foreign Affairs with seasoned diplomats. They had a UN Security Council seat. For the Kremlin, there was a lot of historical continuity for better and worse. The transition for Russia came at the beginning of ’92 when the Russian Federation bureaucratic leadership, which was very small, superimposed itself on top of the old Soviet ministry system. Andrey Kozyrev who had been the Russian Federation Minister of Foreign Affairs became Minister for newly independent Russia. But, bureaucracies don’t change overnight. There were many personnel changes, but a lot of baggage accompanied the transition, and for the time being a large segment of the old Soviet government agencies in Moscow survived into the new era. So the ministry of coal was still there, even if it didn’t have much writ anymore in Donbas or the other parts of the larger Soviet Union. There were exceptions associated with the Confederation of Independent States (CIS) at the outset, importantly in the military area. But let’s leave that for a later discussion.

Q: How did Russia react to these new states? Were we involved in the relations they set up?
COLLINS: The whole business of Russia coming to terms with the reality of a new political order in Eurasia and having to treat former parts of an empire Moscow and Russia had ruled for centuries was an issue from the beginning and will be one to resolve for at least a couple more generations I suspect. It was also an issue on which the American view was much more defined than was Russia’s. As we discussed we saw the new states from the outset as full, sovereign members of the European family, no different from, say, Poland. So our focus was on establishing each nation’s independence, its sovereignty and its security within the international system. We promoted their

participation in institutions like the United Nations, the North Atlantic Cooperation Council, and the CSCE (to be the OSCE). We encouraged them all to see themselves as full independent members in these institutions. And implicitly we encouraged them to establish normal state to state relations with Russia and Russia with them.

In Russia, meanwhile, we also were dealing with the question of Russia's relation to the Soviet past in terms of successor issues. We and the international community in general recognized Russia as the successor state to the USSR. But there were questions. For example, would Russia simply succeed to the Soviet Union's UN membership and to its UN Security Council seat. We supported that position. I know Tom Pickering was in New York at the time, and he worked with the Russian permanent representative on some of these issues. We also more broadly accepted Moscow and Russia as responsible for observing the international commitments the USSR had undertaken in areas such as arms control, the Helsinki and subsequent treaties on European security, etc. And as I recall there was no significant questioning from the Russian side of that view or position. And so from the point of view of international law, not many issues arose to question Russia's status as the legal successor to the USSR.

There were other issues, however, that were much more complicated, and where the question of succession offered no simple formula to arrive at a resolution of differences. For example, how the Soviet debt would be dealt with or questions about ownership of Soviet property abroad. The Soviets had an embassy here in Washington. Who got it, and what were to be the arrangements for dividing up property that had been held in common in the past. That issues had been more or less resolved easily with the breakup as each new state claimed ownership of any properties on its territory. But for things abroad or intangibles held in common like debt or financial assets it was more complex. There were a whole series of such issues, and we in some sense were dealing with the family getting a divorce. In much of '92 and '93 such issues seemed to be constantly coming up and we found our relations entwined with finding a way out of whatever the latest squabble would be .

I remember one of these concerned Soviet property in the United States. The Russian government just asserted control and ownership of the Soviet embassy buildings and properties. We didn't contest that, but we also supported the principle that Moscow had to deal with claims from Ukraine, Kazakhstan, and the other new states to a portion of Soviet assets. So the whole arrangement of the settlement of claims and counter claims arising from the breakup was an issue that we found ourselves seemingly always involved in and where the parties would routinely come to the U.S., including at times via the Embassy, to make their case for support of this or that position.

Q: Well how did you deal with it?

COLLINS: Well. as noted, we accepted the fundamental premise that Russia was the successor to the Soviet Union We particularly wanted no backing away from treaty obligations or other important commitments it had taken generations to achieve between Washington and Moscow. When issues such as property claims or things like

responsibility for the Soviet debt came up, we encouraged Moscow to negotiate agreements with its partners. The most difficult ones in many ways for this period and on for a number of years were with Ukraine, where it seemed almost every issue became contentious. The Ukraine border was the one serious challenge to the premise that the borders of the USSR republics were sacrosanct and it came early. Similarly it was the one case in which the nuclear issue became a contentious and troubled issue

Q: The fleet and….
COLLINS: Yes that as well; what was going to happen to the Soviet fleet and what would happen to the Russian fleet in Sevastopol became a perpetual neuralgia. And it seemed there was an almost endless list. What was going to happen to the debt? Did Ukraine assume part of the responsibility for the Soviet debt in some formula or not? Views you can imagine were different. What was Ukraine's claim on property here in Washington and elsewhere? There was a lot of diplomacy involving Russia and its neighbors almost from the outset that cast us as a kind of a mediator between Ukrainians and Russians and Kazakhstanis and Russians and so forth. The most active of that activity was over nuclear arms. It was fundamental to U.S. objectives that there should be no proliferation of nuclear weapons states and that meant getting Ukraine, Kazakhstan, and Belarus to surrender their nuclear weapons. Diplomacy to achieve that objective went on until we finally got agreement in 1994 that the three other states would give up their nuclear weapons.

Q: What about some of the other embassies there, the British, the German, Japanese, Chinese? Big things were happening in Russia. What sorts of roles were they playing or were we the lead? What was happening in Russian foreign policy?

COLLINS: The Europeans early on both in bilateral programming and via the EU developed a semi-parallel approach to our assistance programming The nuclear and security side was left almost wholly to the Americans. But in terms of economic development, technical assistance, development of institutions not just in Russia but across the region, Europeans too had very active programs. Institutions like the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) played a key role in promoting investment in the private sector, for example. Like several programs it had started in East Europe and it moved east into the post-Soviet space after 1991. They had what they called the TACIS (Technical Assistance for the Commonwealth of Independent States) program which was the equivalent of the Freedom Support Act..

We did maintain contacts with our colleagues on these matters. The tradition of the weekly Quad Meeting continued. It was a gathering of the British, French, American, and German ambassadors that had begun when the Berlin Wall went up in 1961, and in the new circumstances served as a very useful way to compare notes regularly with allies. There was also a regular exchange of information with others, with the Japanese, the Italians, and Scandinavian countries all of whom were involved in the same kinds of activities. So, we had good and regular contacts at all levels with our diplomatic colleagues.

One thing was truly different now, however, from my earlier Soviet experiences. In Soviet times the diplomatic community was very close, but that changed after the opening up of the Russian system. Now all of us in the corps saw less of each other than previously. We spent more time with Russians with whom we could now deal directly. In Soviet times about the only people you could invite to your apartment were other diplomats or foreign visitors. Now, as noted before, you couldn't keep Russians away. So while the diplomatic corps was important, the focus was much more on the Russian dimension than what our diplomatic colleagues were up to.

Q: I would think that the Chinese would be pretty nervous about what was happening because they had their own similar Soviet style system and here is a country that is chucking the whole thing.

COLLINS: I think you're right. As we saw it and derived from our contacts with our Chinese colleagues, the Chinese had great angst about what Gorbachev had been doing. They felt that what happened in Russia with the Soviet demise was dangerous if not calamitous. Because they jumped quickly to recognize the legitimacy of the coup plotters in '91, they blotted their copy book quite badly with the forces who came out on top following the coup. Later I think it fair to say that they sought to keep their distance and insulated themselves from a contagion they saw engulfing Eurasia.

At the same time China and Russia both needed a relationship that did not threaten. In the early '90s, the two countries and their diplomats settled into an understanding that seemed based on the idea of live and let live without upsetting any apple carts. So, the process of demarcating the Russian-Chinese border and other steps to normalize relations proceeded without significant interruption after 1991. Then the opening of the economy in Russia led to a burgeoning of so-called shuttle trade that sparked commerce across the border and brought volumes of Chinese consumer goods to the Russian market. Although the relationship was not comfortable, it seemed reasonably stable to us as a relationship Russia needed to keep calm. Meanwhile the China question touched not only the Russians, but also the Kazakhstanis and the others in Central Asia with Chinese borders. And here, too, the need for correct and workable relations with the Chinese continued the basic approaches the Soviets had developed without much interruption. My impression was this was mainly because the Russians had no particular sense of what to do vis-a-vis China anyway. The Chinese similarly I think - and I'm not a China expert - were worried about contagion. They were comfortable with an arm's length, non-confrontational and non-troubled relationship. The Russians seemed content that China kept looking mainly south.

Q: Of course as Americans this suited us just fine, didn't it?

COLLINS: I think so. From my perspective in Moscow at the time, China was not normally on our list of priorities. We certainly wanted to see peace and quiet along the Chinese border. We saw our interests served, it seemed to me, by calm there because of the uncertain and fragile nature of the states that bordered China including Russia. Having China dormant in the region only made it the more possible for us to focus on our

priorities in the European world - dealing with the nuclear issues left by the Soviet collapse, encouraging peaceful transition in Russia and among its neighbors from empire to a community of sovereign states, and the transformation of the political and economic systems across Eurasia. In all this the Chinese for the time being were not seen as a major factor for us. I think to the extent we were addressing Pacific regional issues the one I recall as most persistent in our diplomacy at the time was the issue of Russo-Japanese relations and the possibility of reaching a peace agreement to end World War II between them.

Q: What was going on in the Middle East at that time?

COLLINS: Let's recall that as the Soviet Union came to an end, Moscow had made major changes in its approach to the region. They joined the U.S. in opposing Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait and had been partners at the Madrid Middle East conference in October 1991. The end of the Soviet Union made these changes pale. It brought an almost wholesale revision of Moscow's Middle East policies. Three factors, I think, converged to reshape the traditional framework the Soviets had developed over most of the Cold War period. First, the Soviet collapse ended the ideological barrier that prevented almost any contact between the Soviets and the conservative Arab monarchies. Second, the arrival of a market based system in which money shaped priorities largely put an end to the Soviet practice of providing arms to their Arab partners on credit and injected the new idea of cash for arms, a system that reduced the attractiveness of Russia as a supplier for a number of traditional clients. And third, Russia reversed course on its relations with Israel and established normal ties that expanded rapidly as the Russian diaspora in Israel began to set up official and private sector ties with new Russia.

At the same time, Moscow was reducing its presence across most of the third world. In Asia, Africa and Latin America, there was a major pull back. And the Middle East was not exempt. But, it was also true this region remained in some ways special. Moscow still sought to be part of whatever Arab-Israeli negotiating process existed at the time. It was clear this remained a symbol that Russia retained status as a major power, even as the reality focused them inward and it was clear they were not playing a particularly strong hand in the region. What did emerge as a long lasting achievement at this time was Moscow's normalization of relations with the states of the Middle East where earlier they had almost no ties. They began openings to the Gulf countries and Saudi Arabia which had been absolutely off limits during the Soviet period. The Israelis came back. They change the approach they take to the region from the equation in which they were the arms supplier and built influence through credit to expanding their ties and using their influence and connections in more diverse and, I would say, traditional ways, albeit keeping as best they could their traditional links to former clients.

Finally, there was one relationship that had been of special importance to U.S. relations with Moscow. The Cuban relationship had brought us to the brink of a nuclear exchange in 1962, and the Soviet presence and activity in Cuba had remained a point of neuralgia from the Castro revolution to the end of the Cold War. Now, with the new approach Moscow began to take toward the former Soviet clients, Havana was not exempted. It did

not take long for Moscow to signal that the former subsidy arrangement for Cuba was to come to an end as Moscow told Castro, "No more of the old barter system. Cuba will now have to pay for its oil, etc." The result was a near total collapse of the Moscow-Havana link and a Russian withdrawal of significant assets it had kept in Cuba ever since 1962.

Q: And the Soviet diplomats who were stuck in these godforsaken African posts were coming back, weren't they? Were they being taken care of?

COLLINS: Certainly the Ministry of Foreign Affairs at this time underwent a huge upheaval and change. In great part this involved the passing of the Soviet elite and its replacement by younger ministry cadres that rose to prominent positions after the coup and arrival of the Yeltsin government. It began before the Soviet collapse. With the collapse of the coup many of the senior Soviet people who were directly or indirectly implicated in the putsch were forced out and replaced by people who had not been compromised. This included senior people in Moscow, including Minister Bessmertnykh, who was replaced by Ambassador Panin from Prague, who had not carried out instructions from the coup leaders. Many other ambassadors abroad who had carried out instructions from the ministry during the coup also lost their positions including the Ambassador in Washington, Komplektov.

In Moscow there were also sweeping changes. I don't recall how broad the changes were but certainly at the deputy minister level those with whom I had dealt were changed unceremoniously. The man who had been Mr. North America, Deputy Minister Obukhov and his Arms Control colleague simply disappeared. And in their place we began to deal with Mr. Mamedov, the Director of the North American department, who by good fortune was out of Moscow on vacation in August and returned to take up the responsibilities of Deputy Minister. So, a great deal of change already had occurred in Soviet ministry during the aftermath of the August events.

When the Soviet collapse brought another upheaval, the changes continued and became even more widespread. A new generation of people came in, many of them younger or raised from the ranks. A number of the senior slots, such as that held by Mamedov, stayed in the hands of those who had taken over after August '91, but Yeltsin installed his own minister Andrey Kozyrev, and a number of new, younger faces began to appear as well, including many as you have suggested coming back from missions that were downsized or just closed out as Russian retrenchment took place. It took time but gradually the MFA, even as its doors kept the Soviet seal, began to be shaped by the Kozyrev people In my case Mamedov stayed as what I called our den mother, the Deputy who oversaw the Americas and arms control, but elsewhere a new group of deputies were brought in, many of them coming back from abroad, to replace Soviet predecessors. As for those who were cast out, many just retired. Others, because they had foreign experience, knew languages, or had skills useful to those coming into new Russia from outside found new opportunities that offered them a future.

But, the Ministry did face a second challenge, both of retention of needed talent and recruiting new personnel. One problem came from the reality that the government wasn't

paying very well. Staff, who often knew English or had experience abroad, were suddenly very much in demand by foreign businesses, or others coming to work in the former Soviet space. This meant diplomats, including both those returning from abroad and those in Moscow, had a whole new open field. So a lot of them left diplomacy to work as consultants or found a position with a Western company earning a hard currency salary.

At the same time, the Ministry had a hard time recruiting in the early 90s because it was not where young people saw the future. Those with the skills the Ministry wanted could make better money and secure better positions using their language skills, economic training, knowledge of foreign affairs, etc. in the private sector. They could get well paid positions with foreign companies or institutions and many tried their hands at business, marketing, consulting, or whatever. I remember visiting Moscow State University at this time with my wife Naomi and asking students what they hoped to do. Almost universally they said we need to learn English and master computer skills to get work with a foreign company. That was seen as the key to a better life. Going to work for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was low on the totem pole, and it was hard for the Ministry to maintain the cadre, keep the professional quality they wanted.

Q: Now. let's turn to a different community. How did you find, you might say, being a member of what they used to call the Kremlin Club or the Russian Club? Did you find that it was a great advantage, or was there a problem with being a Soviet expert?

COLLINS: It's a good question, and there's no simple answer. The most dramatic change came for the "Soviet Club" in these early post-Soviet years simply from finding itself buried under an avalanche of new people claiming a role in the region or expertise about its new status as post communist and transitional. The Soviet collapse, emergence of fifteen new states where we had one Soviet Union, and the end of the communist system moved Russia and its region from being "the other" or our strategic enemy to becoming suddenly part of "us," but with a lot to learn and change. At the beginning, that was largely a view shared by both Americans and the Russians. That meant they needed partners, teachers, investors, consultants, you name it, to build the democratic, market systems they professed to want and we agreed deserved support. It also meant working with the region that had belonged almost wholly to the Soviet experts suddenly required a raft of wholly new actors with different skills, ideas about how almost everything worked, and a sense of mission that foresaw a Russia and its neighborhood becoming "normal" to use Yeltsin's phrase, or as most Americans interpreted the idea, more like us. Businesses, NGOs, religious groups, political and social scientists, advisors about almost everything, suddenly began to engage with counterparts, partners, business clients, across the expanse of Russia and the other new states.

Amidst this avalanche, the rather small community of American Soviet/Russia experts were overwhelmed by numbers and in many cases faced irrelevance because their expertise had gone into the dustbin of history. Nor was the Embassy immune from the trend. As we ramped up assistance programs, broadened our engagement, undertook new initiatives to explore Russia in new ways, and had to engage a public now anxious to

know us, Embassy numbers grew. We added agencies such as AID, DEA the Defense Threat Reduction Agency, staffed largely by people with no experience or historical legacy of dealing with Russia or Eurasia. It changed the Embassy profoundly.

The reaction among the Russia family, as I think we have discussed, was mixed and as I saw it, fell into three groups. One group of analysts and practitioners more or less insisted that nothing critical to our interests had really changed. This contingent more or less substituted Russia for Soviet in their analyses and positions and carried on, all but rejecting the idea that the Cold War and its threat from the East had been transformed. I think it's fair to say that this group grew smaller with time and for the most part had little on the ground experience of new Russia/Eurasia. The second group went to the other extreme. This group, in many ways the largest, were brought into the process of developing America's relations with Russia and Eurasia following the Soviet collapse. They joined without any real experience of the region or past association with it. They were the economists, political scientists, development specialists, etc. who now saw their task as applying tested or yet to be tested models or ideas to the task of transforming Russia and its region into western style democratic-market systems and integrating them with the West.

Finally there were those who came to Russia and the region in the '90s with prior experience dealing with the region or early on in the post-Soviet period. This community both from the government and private sector worked to transform Russia on the ground, living with the reality of rapid change, that things were different today than they were yesterday and would be different tomorrow. These were the residents living with their Russian hosts amidst that upheaval, need to cope with uncertainties, the absence of obvious direction, and the need to survive who came to appreciate both what was new and what was old, what was cast off and what would endure as Russia found its way ahead. It was this latter group that became what I would call the new "Russia club," and I believe acquired the best understanding of what was truly taking place. Our voice was not always heard, however.

In working with people who came to Russia for the first time in the early nineties, had never been to the Soviet Union, and had almost no background in Russia or the region, it was a task to get them to understand that they were not working with a tabula rasa. Even the Soviets had had to deal with nine centuries of Russian history and culture, and they had only been able to modify but never replace it. An end to communism and its bizarre socio-economic model, did not mean Russia and its culture disappeared. Beyond this, almost none of those who came had any experience with the kind of rapid change we dealt with daily. You had to use whatever means you could to get people to keep their eyes open and to keep asking questions because nothing stayed the same for six months. It kept changing. Yes, there was continuity, but you could not be complacent. There were no real models for what was happening and what was taking place in transforming the political, economic, imperial, and cultural systems was without precedent. As I think I noted earlier my motto was every hour a day, every day a month, every month a year.

I was proud of the embassy and people during that early period because those who had been there before said, “You’ve got to look at this differently. It’s Russia but it’s not the same.” People who had never been in the Soviet Union meantime brought new perspectives from other societies or professions to expand the way our Russia experts could see Russia’s development and options. So, there was a huge expansion of the Russia club: economists, business people, treasury representatives, political advisers, NGO specialists, most without prior experience with Russia.

There were, of course, some problems with this. People came in without a clue about the context within which they would work and with expectations that simply would not be met. I used to tell my economic people, “I don’t know what you learned in economics classes or business school, but forget it. This is not an economy you will recognize. You can think about patterns, but this is different. The foundation from which it comes is different, and where it’s going is not clear. Ask yourself basic questions every day when you see things. ‘What is really going on here? Where does it fit?’” “How does an economy work if people don’t understand the role of money?” The effort to jam models from outside onto this reality will only lead to frustration; so, yes, the Russia Club with its thinking that this is just the Soviet Union with modifications were a problem. But it was also true that Russia is not just like Mexico, as some people said. The historic baggage made it unique.

But as we put together both the new folks and those with the Russia experience we brought new perspectives to bear on the ground daily and in melding the ideas of the newcomers with those of us who had a longer historical perspective the “Russia Club” grew and diversified its capacity. What it shared was on the ground experience and a commitment to passing on the new ground truth to those without that experience. For us all the challenge was bureaucracies, governments and politicians don’t deal very well with revolutionary change. They’re also not usually interested in unique. They’re interested in what’s comfortable because they know it or they try to impose some model on it that’s comfortable. I think in ’92-’93 this was probably one of the biggest challenges - to find a middle ground where people could make understandable back home what was going on so that decisions made in Washington would not be totally at odds with Russian reality when they arrived in Russia.

Q: You must have come up against the established academic Mafia, the Marxists or the anti-Marxists who had built their careers on the Soviet system. All of a sudden it collapsed, and they were far away from it, but they were probably still teaching what they knew.

COLLINS: This is a bit like the Russia Club. I used to say that a good Kremlinologist was about as useful as a good Nazi economist. Much of the expertise developed during the Cold War was really irrelevant by the early ‘90s. So, not surprisingly in academic and think tank circles there was a scramble to try to retool; or, in some cases to say, no need to because it’s all the same anyway. From my perspective as an outsider this sent the academic world in a few different directions: some simply modified and continued; others turned to studying what happens during post-communist transition. Economists,

political scientists, and others built models around the kinds of changes they believed were taking place. At the same time, you had a decline in area studies as academic disciplines increasingly seemed to reject the idea that place or culture mattered to economics, politics, international relations, etc. Many social scientists saw the challenge as more "generic." as if place doesn't matter in understanding transitions. Once the communist model's gone away it's all the same. Others insisted that Russia is really just the Soviet Union with another name and analyzed it as such. Another third group had experience equivalent to many in the Soviet academic world. These unfortunate folks saw their expertise simply became irrelevant, and were left behind. Many never quite got over it.

Q: What was the impact of the breakup of the Union on the Club?

COLLINS: Well, we have discussed some of this already as it pertained to Russia itself. Broadly it called for a lot more diverse expertise among those dealing with new Russia. The Embassy was expanding rapidly and the need for more Russian language speakers was incessant. At the same time, the Foreign Service was suddenly called upon to staff the new embassies opening in fourteen new states. Moscow had done some initial spade work in the final year or two of the Soviet Union, and we were actively involved in "92 and '93 in supporting opening the new embassies and establishment of relations with the new states. Moscow, for example, hosted several attaches with regional responsibilities. At the same time there was a large range of new demands that taxed the capacity of both the Service and the academic world. For example, I remember trying to find Uzbek speakers to take up positions in our new Tashkent embassy. There were none in the Service, and there was almost no place that taught Uzbek, except, I think Indiana University had a course. Early on we were making do with Russian speakers, but the new demands were taxing to the limit the capacities of the USG's Russian speaking community

Q: Before we leave this area one more question. Moscow and Soviet affairs had always been a special, pre-eminent specialty in the Foreign Service. Did you sense a beginning of a shift in this towards China, for example?

COLLINS: Not at this early stage. The awakening of American policy to China's really comes after the turn of the millennium. It was going to be another decade or decade and a half, and as I recall it now it was in the wake of the mid 2000s financial crisis that our focus truly shifts. The change we did notice had much more to do with the composition of the new Eurasia team. The Soviet club had largely been just that in the Foreign Service and in the U.S. Government. There were people whose careers were built around serving in Moscow and Leningrad, the only Soviet posts we had and the only designated Russian speaking positions the service had. Many if not the majority in the "club" were repeaters in one of these. Some in the group served in these posts two or three times as I did. Most started at the junior level. then served in the mid-grade or counselor level, and a few then became DCM and/or ambassador. Now all of a sudden, this club is dispersed, as I said, to 14 or 15 posts. At the time there were not enough people in that club to fill the newly created jobs. The result was a sea change in the community in at least three ways.

First, we had a dispersal of the Service's Russian language community. Previously this community had opportunities to serve in only two or three posts; now suddenly it becomes 15 or 16. The "club" suddenly is not big enough to fill the posts available and there is a shortage of manpower with Russian skills. To fill the gaps we were bringing back annuitants; we were raiding posts all over the world for anyone with Russian language capability.

Second, a new issue arose as Russian lost its place as the only language needed in Eurasia. With the emergence of the new states where Russian was a second language, a new requirement for the other languages had to be addressed almost from ground zero. We had no language capability in Uzbek or Mongol or the other languages. For the Baltic languages, Ukrainian and Armenian we were able to find a few USG employees, mostly outside State, to bring into service at the new embassies in the Baltics, Kiev and Yerevan. But for pretty much everywhere else we had to scour the academic community for help. As I returned to Washington in '93, I remember trying to find someone who could teach Uzbek. We had people scouring the academic world, and émigré communities trying to build up a cadre at FSI to teach the new languages. We also were using universities locally if possible, and further afield when necessary, to begin training people in the new languages.

Finally, and in a way the biggest change of all came from an influx of regular Foreign Service people to take up jobs in Russia and the other states who had no Soviet background, who had not been Russian specialists or even had the academic background to prepare them for work in the post-Soviet Eurasian environment. So we were getting people from Latin America, Africa, Asia coming to Moscow to do things like the consular and admin work, or to take up positions in new agencies like AID, people who brought no experience in or understanding about the region or the communist past it lived with. Not surprisingly this began a cultural change in the embassy because these people brought a very different perspective. They had no memory of the Soviet past or what it was like in "the good old days" of the Soviet system. Nor did they have much grounding in the cultural, historical, or socio-political realities the people they dealt with brought to everyday life. This had its plusses and it had its minuses. Its plusses were that the new blood kept raising questions that the embassy old timers didn't necessarily see in the same way. If you had been there for 30 years, the context you brought to the table almost always had an historical foundation. For the newcomers, however, many saw not the uniquely Russian but similarities to other places they served or to what they knew of other developing countries.

Q: Tom Pickering is a good example because he had seven ambassadorships and had never been in a communist country. So he was bringing El Salvador, Nigeria, Jordan.

COLLINS: He also brought the UN experience, which was perhaps his biggest benefit in a way. He knew many Russian diplomats and had worked with both Russian and Soviet representatives in New York. So, he knew much about how our policies were developing and he was known and respected by the Russian diplomatic community. But you're right

that he also brought a broad experience outside the Soviet/Russia community. He was a professionals' professional and he brought diplomatic skills and global perspective to the embassy in its transition. I worked closely with him first as DCM and then from Washington. He made the embassy a vibrant and interesting place. He made people from the Soviet club and the community of new comers ask questions and challenge their assumptions whether about the Soviet past or what they brought from outside. What that did for the embassy was to make it one of the few institutions dealing with Russia in this time that actually questioned everything every day, and pressed others not to be complacent. Nothing is the same as it was a week ago. People from the outside helped see that. People who had been there said yes this was really different a year ago. So the embassy and consulates were among the very few places where the concept of change, and questioning assumptions or premises were a basic part of the culture and the way questions were approached. That made us effective reporters. It made us effective analysts, We probably had a better understanding of what was going on than most people elsewhere who had to rely on the printed word or who were prone to be stuck in seeing Russian reality at a particular moment they personally had experienced it.

Q: Well, were you still getting, particularly from the outside the political world, sort of the neocons seeing things in a black and white as they had been.

COLLINS: Well I don't think it was the neocon mind set at this time that was most troubling. In fact, I think the term had yet to become commonplace. Rather, the more difficult idea we had to begin dealing with was a more complex one that would bedevil us for the coming decade and beyond. That mindset centered on the idea that the Cold War's end and Soviet collapse represented an American "victory" in the sense that we "won" the Cold War and it was Russia that lost it. Not Yeltsin, of course, but Russia, nonetheless.

Recall that in the first year of new Russia, as I sat in Moscow, America was taken up with our electoral campaign. And it was probably too much to hope that we could avoid a degree of triumphalism over the "victory" that ended communism and the Soviet Union. But as I saw it at this early stage this theme had not yet become a significant obstacle.

In this early time leaders from former Ambassador Matlock to Ambassador Strauss and Richard Nixon embraced and promoted ideas that gave America common ground for dealing with all those who benefitted from the Cold War's end and the Soviet collapse. Ambassador Matlock and those who joined his thinking saw the end of the Cold War as a victory for reason and diplomacy, a victory shared between Moscow and Washington who negotiated the end to the nuclear arms race, brought an end to the Warsaw Pact, and achieved an outcome that benefitted both the West and Soviet sides. Strauss and Nixon embraced the idea that with the collapse of the USSR all the people of East Europe and the new states in Eurasia, including Russia, shared in the victory over communism and its imperial system. The loser was the communist idea, those who embodied it, and those who sought to perpetuate it. But they were now history, and the challenge was to rebuild the region on the basis of democracy, a market economy, and integration with Europe of all the new nations of Eurasia.

So, as noted earlier, in these early days we had a bipartisan consensus that it was in America's interest to see the success of this transformation across East Europe and Eurasia. Congress responded with significant support for the objective. And our strategy, so far as I understood it in both the Bush and Clinton administrations promoted the key idea that the integration of the new states, including Russia with Europe and its institutions was in the interest of the U.S. and our allies. It is the time when our goal was defined by President Bush as a Europe whole, free, and at peace with no new dividing lines.

But even at this time there were other voices promoting a different assessment of our options and in particular warning against Russian intentions. These views in the simplest terms, equated the Soviet collapse with a Russian defeat and pressed for building defenses against any Russian resurgence. Influential voices from the new states and from the newly liberated nations of East and Central Europe pressed for support and actions to limit Russian capacity to influence or shape their futures. In the U.S. these voices found support from skeptics about Russia and its intentions and from those who remained unconvinced that Moscow's transformation had brought the strategic changes President Yeltsin insisted were directing his country's new course.

For the moment, even during the American political campaign these voices had limited influence, and the new administration of President Clinton carried forward the strategic objectives of his predecessor in seeking an undivided Europe. But the undercurrent of triumphalism, suspicion of Russian intentions, and the emotions unleashed in Europe by the Soviet collapse that would grow more divisive were already present at this point.

Q: Jim, We are coming to your return to Washington at the end of 1993. You have had an extraordinary three years at Embassy Moscow to say the least. I would like you to look back on that time. How might you sum it up?

COLLINS: I spent my time as DCM with three different ambassadors, as I think I might have mentioned. I started with Jack Matlock, who left just before the '91 coup. I then served with Bob Strauss, who was ambassador from late summer '91 and through the end of '92. Then in my final year, Tom Pickering came to be ambassador, in late spring 1993. Through the three years, I had fairly extensive service as charge, memorably during the coup in 1991, and six months from late 1992 and until Pickering's arrival in May '93. But there were other rather lengthy periods as well, and as a result I had excellent access and relations with the senior levels of the Russian government almost the entire time I was DCM.

As we've discussed, for the Embassy this period of '92 and '93 brought a wholesale reworking of the Embassy mission, priorities, staffing, and approach to our diplomacy. The Gorbachev era had made significant strides toward normalizing relations and the conduct of our business with the Soviet Government. But even the end of the Cold War and greater openness of Soviet society had brought only limited change to Embassy functions and structure. Under Ambassador Matlock the mission had kept pressing the

frontiers of what was possible to expand our reach and our engagement with Soviet society, including giving greater attention to the non-Russian republics, making the most of possibilities to reach the public in new ways, and expanding the reach of our contacts both in the capital and outside.

But reality was reality. Our structure and staffing was still defined by the Cold War and decisions in the mid-eighties. This kept us without Russian staff and limited our complement to some 240 cleared American personnel in Moscow, plus the staff at the consulate in Leningrad, and a small advance party in Kiev. Even after the coup and with some loosening of the reins, these limits remained through the end of '91, and we continued to operate as a Cold War mission surrounded by a hostile enemy separated by a determined adversarial regime intent on preventing any access to the broader Russian public, an enemy outpost behind the lines. There were admittedly some changes following the coup; for instance, coming to terms on a settlement that would permit us to restart the construction of a new chancery, and some relaxation of travel controls. But there was more continuity than change even in those closing months of the Soviet regime.

The end of the USSR truly changed that. I don't want to repeat what we have already discussed about the revolution and upheaval Russia and the other regions underwent in '92 and 93. Suffice to say we entered a rapidly changing, unpredictable world in which it was hard to find much from the past to guide us in remaking relations with the new states of Eurasia or new Russia. But my constant companion for these two years was almost uninterrupted change, the need to find ways to achieve newly defined objectives for the mission, and the challenge of converting our Cold War representation into a representation designed to work cooperatively with our hosts in the business of transforming their society as well as building the infrastructure needed to dismantle key elements of the Cold War's legacy.

And so it was that my main preoccupation for the last two years as DCM and often charge, was to work at building a mission that could engage our host government and society in radically new ways, accommodate the demands of the U. S. government for an exponential expansion of our presence in Russia both in numbers and composition of agencies represented at the embassy, and ensure we were providing Washington with the best information we could as the one official source of ground truth on what was really happening across Russia. It was exciting, challenging, never the same two days in a row, and an experience very few FSOs have the opportunity to know.

Q: What did you understand as our priorities and objectives in this context? Did you have a sense Washington had a clear idea of what we were trying to do?

COLLINS: Looking back on this period I think it fair to say that our leaders responded to this period and these unprecedented events with remarkable wisdom and strategic vision. I know this sounds a bit like adulation, but from the vantage point of Moscow what I saw from both President Bush and Secretary Baker and from President Clinton and his Russia team was a remarkable and well-conceived strategy about where we wanted to go with

Russia and Eurasia and a readiness to press forward with programs that could advance those objectives.

As I saw it from late ’91 on there were three central priorities: First was to do everything we could to ensure that the USSR breakup did not produce a Balkans catastrophe. This meant reshaping the entire U.S. approach to Eurasia, to new Russia’s place in that region. The whole structure was changing, moving from an empire governed by a communist system to an as yet to be defined community of fifteen independent states, or at the outset perhaps even more. About all of this there were as many uncertainties as there were communities and ideas about what lay ahead. There were conflicts in Georgia, in Moldova, between Armenia and Azerbaijan over old long simmering grievances or unresolved open conflicts. Within the new states, including Russia there were differences between minorities and majorities, over peoples exiled by Soviet dictators demanding return, over demands for greater autonomy from regions subject to central authority. And in Russia at this point there was real uncertainty about whether the Russian Federation would hold together. Fortunately, while there were any number of these unresolved conflicts, it was remarkable that few brought significant violence, and in the end the basic structure that emerged as the Union collapsed held.

A second priority from the outset concerned the fate of the Soviet Union’s armed forces and their equipment, most specifically the nuclear arsenal. We have already talked a good deal about this, but it is important to keep in mind that there was probably no single issue of greater significance in these early years for our future relations with Moscow than finding a way to ensure security for the Soviet nuclear arsenal, Russia coming to terms with its new neighbors about the command, control and security of nuclear weapons and the material outside Russia and within, and ensuring that the terms of the Soviet era agreements to reduce the number of nuclear weapons between Moscow and Washington were carried out.

And finally the third priority was to see the new successor states that emerged from the USSR’s breakup would become democratic based nations with market economies that could be integrated into both the market based international economic, financial and trading system and politically into the community of European or Euro-Atlantic nations.

And so it was against the background of these key priorities that Americans were establishing representation in all of the capitals of 14 new states, and I was much engaged in implementing the new priorities in relations with Russia and managing a very much changing embassy in Moscow. As I think we have discussed I started in 1992 with an embassy of about 240 cleared American staff and no Russian employees. By the time I left in late ‘93 we had returned a growing complement of Russian employees to the embassy, we were greatly expanding the American and new FSN employees to support them, and we were operating what seemed a more normal, but intensely busy embassy. Further, as Russia opened up to our programs and thinking, we were dealing also with the question of expanding our representation. We did reopen a consulate in Vladivostok in 1992 (it had been closed in 1948), and we were considering how better to provide American services and establish our voice in the middle of the country. So we were

expanding and connecting across that country, and the embassy was adapting from one focused almost exclusively on divining the intentions and actions of the small leadership in Moscow to acquiring an understanding of the interests, thinking and attitudes of a Russian population spread across eleven time zones that now had a voice in where the country would go.

In response to the issues associated with the armed forces, nuclear weapons, and the implementation of our arms control agreements, we rather rapidly set up new contacts with the Russian military and security establishment and created the structure we needed to begin work in implementing the terms and promise of the Nunn-Lugar program. This project, in its many dimensions, increased geometrically the number and extent of contacts and working relations between U.S. military and civilian security people and Russian counterparts that began to work on issues associated with the destruction, security, and disposal of nuclear and chemical weapons.

Meantime our engagement with those leading and implementing the Yeltsin government's programs to transform the nation's economy and political system established a multi- dimensional program to administer the bulk of funds from the Freedom Support Act, This brought both USG officials in large numbers from AID to representatives from the Commerce, Justice, Agriculture, and other Departments each with a mandate to engage their counterparts and/or oversee the work of a burgeoning number of NGO or contract employees who were arriving rapidly.

So my two years as DCM at the Embassy were marked by immense change and a wholesale transformation of what the Embassy was expected to do and be by those in Washington who depended on us and by our Russian hosts who now looked at our role as one of support for their change.. Our budget as I defined it, mushroomed. By the end of my time in '93 we were at the early stages of building a space station with Russia.. We had a private sector that was beginning to show up and assisting them in a unique economic environment called for new skills and practices from those involved with business support. Our access to the Russian public was unprecedented. Suddenly we could talk to anyone and increasingly we found that "anyone" might matter. We had more access than we could deal with. And the embassy just looked very different. We were a major mission with multiple government agencies involved in programming, a big AID presence, a major presence for NASA, for DOD, for the Commerce Department. So by the time I left the embassy it was a different place meeting daily the different challenges of a different Russia.

Q: Could you give a sense of how all this affected your job and the embassy?

COLLINS: As I believe we discussed earlier what was going on in this period brought a profound redefinition of Embassy Moscow as a mission. At the end of 1991 Embassy Moscow technically had a complement of some 240 Americans. They represented the traditionally recognized national security community: State, DOD, the intelligence community, Commerce, Agriculture, etc. with State the largest and leading agency in the Mission. As we have discussed previously we had no Russian staff. This was traditional

Embassy Moscow with the exception of the absence of Russian employees. By the middle of '92 this picture began to change fundamentally, and with it the role of the Embassy front office and of State more broadly. By this point it seemed every Washington agency awoke to the need to be in Moscow. AID people, new military specialists, astronauts and engineers were arriving in numbers, Treasury insisted it now needed attaches. The list seemed endless and the pipeline of those seeking Embassy accommodation and support was mushrooming. Almost none of these requests, of course, came from State per se, but it seemed we may have been the only agency in Washington that was not trying to establish its Moscow presence or expand its Embassy staff.

The results of this tsunami were profound and as I look back on it, fundamentally changed both what I had known on arrival as Embassy Moscow, and in many respects the job of DCM and Ambassador in Russia's capital. It did so by adding a wholly new dimension to the job State and the DCM and Ambassador would now have to adopt. How so? Well, almost all these new personnel were the implementers and overseers of new assistance or cooperative programs. Almost none had any Soviet background or experience, nor had they worked elsewhere in areas where the Soviet Union had been relevant. This is a new breed for Moscow, members of AID, the military, and hosts of contractors. The expansion of the American complement involved in the Russian economic, political and security system is growing geometrically.

Well, if traditionally the Ambassador and DCM focused on representation of U.S. interests to the Soviets and on reporting and analysis of Soviet actions relevant to U.S. interests, they now suddenly have responsibility for oversight and performance across a range of agencies and their programs that made that position the equivalent of what I used to call the CEO of the Russia division of the USA incorporated. The DCM was something like COO I suppose. And the State contingent was now called on either to support these new agencies and their activities or to ensure the embassy could provide sound advice and assessment regarding the burgeoning American role in Russian affairs they were defining every day. It was not the job any of the "Soviet Club" had prepared for and it transformed the culture, nature, and definition of what Embassy Moscow was about.

Q: Turning to the situation you leave behind, Yeltsin is through the October crisis and Russia is putting a new constitutional order in place. Still, as you are about to leave. did you feel that Yeltsin was in control or was he a victim or a prisoner of events or what?

COLLINS: At this period, and remember we are talking about through the end of '93, I would say Yeltsin both embodied the new Russia and was very much in the lead in defining what it would become. He was active. He was present. He presented himself as the author of new Russia and the legitimator of his country's transformation. He was also controversial at home and in many ways what we would today probably call a populist. I remember very well watching him go out on the street or visit factories. It was obvious he liked being out, liked engaging people. He was involved. I remember being in the office of one government official on the Kremlin staff Emil Payne. Payne was in charge of minority matters. While I was there, the phone rang; it was Yeltsin checking up on what

was happening about a problem he had given Payne to deal with. He was activist in this sense. I believe he also saw himself as the father of the country of new normal Russia. It was his self-defined role. He didn't see himself as a manager. He saw himself as the leader, as the one who was setting the future direction. He had got rid of the communists, and he was the one who was bringing in the new generation. He was giving a new idea and a new identity to his country. So, in this early period in '92-'93 he was the driving force.

Q: Who was around Yeltsin at this point?

COLLINS: To me one of the truly important things Yeltsin did was to create a new generation of leadership. A lot of leaders are comfortable only with those they know. Yeltsin seemed almost determined to find people to bring along who didn't belong to his past. Given his determination to extinguish the Communist leadership that tried to destroy him this was understandable in a way. But in pursuing his "normal country" he also seemed to think you needed a post-Soviet generation to create and build it. So it was that Yegor Gaidar , Anatoly Chubais, Peter Aven, Emil Payne, Dmitry Vasilyev, Sergey Stepashin, Andrey Kozyrev and a host of others became the new names leading Russia, reforming systems, building new institutions, fashioning the instruments for a market economy and more democratic political system. Yeltsin reached down to the thirty year olds for answers and talent, and he kept doing so, finding a new appointee when one didn't work out, or moving new talent into positions when others were moved on. The result was a new generation of leaders that largely replaced the old elite in Moscow. They were getting rid of communist institutions and building replacements based on market and democratic principles. They were replacing a generation of Yeltsin's age with people who skipped over the whole generation that would have inherited the system in the normal course of events.

At the same time, Yeltsin had a circle of comrades in arms from his Urals past. This was an interesting group of people, many of whom he had known for a long time. Some were identified to me as having been on his volleyball team in Ekaterinburg in days when he starred on the court. These individuals like Poltoranin and Burbulis, weren't much known to the outside, but formed a sort of kitchen cabinet Kremlin team he seemed to rely on as loyal colleagues and advisers.

This new governing team moved into the positions atop the old ministries that survived or took charge of creating the new structures that would emerge from the early reforms. A lot of the initial reforms and changes came through decrees out of the Kremlin. They were issued under the powers Yeltsin had from the Russian Federation Supreme Soviet (parliament) dating back to the end of the Soviet era, and emanated from Yeltsin and his team without great engagement by the legislature. As the reforms brought ever more significant changes and touched vested interests, they became more controversial. Resistance to Yeltsin's rule and reform by decree grew more forceful and opposition more pronounced. In response, Yeltsin took the issue to the public, seeking validation for what was being done in a referendum in the spring of 1993. He won that vote, validating his leadership. But the opposition continued and for most of the remainder of the year a

test of wills pitted him against the Supreme Soviet until the contest erupted into violence in October. Again, Yeltsin was sufficiently in control to put down the open challenge to his authority from the Supreme Soviet and his opponents, and as I left Moscow at the end of that year, it was clear Yeltsin was the man in the cockpit of decision making setting the course for the country; there was no question about who was pilot.

But concurrently, there was another reality to which I think we at the embassy failed to give enough attention in terms of limits to Yeltsin's power and how much and how fast he could move the country. There was no question about who was in charge in the capital. But out across this vast country you had governors and mayors and heads of local legislatures and county administrators, so called red enterprise directors, heads of collective farms, and so forth. For the most part, this cadre were almost all produced in and by the Soviet system. And so the Moscow reform team had to try to implement and make their economic and social revolution through all the same people who had run the Soviet system in the 80s. That accounted in many ways for the lack of uniformity in implementing the reforms; it was a tough slog to get even major laws or regulations implemented in any uniform way across the eleven time zones.

Certain things did happen. With the end of controlled pricing a market system of sorts quickly took over. It brought inflation, but in a remarkably short time it began also to produce some immediate, positive results. Where you had nothing in stores in December of 1991, by the middle of 1992 many stores begin to have adequate goods. The shopper's problem is not can you find it, but can you pay for it. So, there were certain things that happened ubiquitously across the country; they may have been uneven, but they happened. Still, management of most aspects of the government bureaucracy and the economy, outside a few big cities, was still largely in the hands of those who managed the country in the 1980s.

Moving that Soviet created regional elite to a new way of thinking or a new approach to thinking about law, or how the courts were to work, or who was in charge was not an easy matter. In retrospect, I think we underestimated the inertia of the Russian people and the system that summer. It was far greater as an influence and as a shaper of the pace of change or how change was going to happen than most of us caught up in the heady atmosphere of revolution that was Moscow's daily environment really accepted. I came to appreciate this more at the end of the 90s. But in the early period in Moscow we were surrounded daily by the group of dynamic young people making things happen every day. We had the sense that every day there was something new. We might have done well to ask just how far it extended outside Moscow's outer ring road. As would become more evident in time this was a critical question.

Q: All right. So we are now in late 1993 and you are returning to Washington. You are leaving Russia as it begins living under a new constitution following a violent showdown between Russia's parliament and Yeltsin. In many ways the old guard suffered defeat, but there were also new challenges. Did you at that time think there was any possibility for a return to the old Soviet Union?

COLLINS: I had no doubt the Soviet Union was over. Not only was the ideology based communist Bolshevik system gone. The political and economic fabric of the country had undergone sufficient change even in a relatively short period of time to ensure there was no bringing the old system back. The worries on people's minds after the confrontation and elections were different.

I would say that they focused on three questions. What did the appearance of a strong nationalist right wing contingent in the Russian political spectrum mean? How would Russia develop relations with its new neighbors – former dependencies? What was going to become of the Soviet military industrial complex, Red Army, and the nuclear arsenal that remained in the hands of four states in Eurasia?

The first of these issues emerged when the so-called Liberal Democratic Party led by Vladimir Zhirinovsky captured a substantial portion of the seats in the new Russian Duma. Over the two years following the Soviet collapse there had been a fair amount of angst among many that the threat to a Russian democratic future was more likely to come from a red-brown or communist-nationalist coalition than from any return to communism as such. There was a good deal of worry about the example of Weimar Germany in the 1930s as inflation gutted the ruble and signs of nationalist extremism appeared in occasional nasty demonstrations or signs of support for Nazi like symbols, skinhead attacks, and other such right, extremist activity. This unease and outright fear among the intelligentsia and supporters of Yeltsin's program was certainly increased by the success of Zhirinovsky and his supporters. These factions gave voice to a nationalist right wing extreme agenda that disquieted Russia's minorities, western thinking supporters of the government, and Russia's neighbors. For us, of course, it raised a nasty set of issues about whether Russia's pursuit of normality, democratic values, respect for human rights and minority equality were now in serious danger.

Linked closely to these questions and challenges was how Russia would develop relations with its neighbors, the new states-former Soviet republics-imperial dependencies. Before the Soviet Union the greater Russian state that had incorporated central Asia in the 19th , the Caucasus in the 18th and Ukraine in the 17th centuries. Moscow's imperial relationship with these dependencies had survived the Bolshevik revolution despite unsuccessful efforts by some dependencies to attain independence. Now, with the Soviet breakup, each of the fourteen republics had declared independence, and Moscow had recognized a new relationship with them as independent states linked to Russia only through the amorphous and ill defined Commonwealth of Independent States,

But the relationships between Moscow and its new neighbors and among these neighbors themselves were still problematic and unclear, and just what political arrangement was going to prevail in Eurasia was uncertain. The U.S., of course, had a clear and set policy to support the full independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity of the new states in Eurasia. And in the early days of new Russia there were few voices raised to question Russia's commitment to the same policy. But the rising voices in Russia from the nationalist contingent and the emergence of issues such as whether Crimea should belong

to Ukraine or Russia put the issue of Russia's relations with its new neighbors squarely on the U.S. agenda. And so it was, as I returned to Washington.

Thirdly came the complex of issues surrounding the breakup of the security system of the Soviet state and its devolution into constituent parts. For elements of the system such as the police this was not a particularly complex process. But for the Red Army, its equipment, the Soviet nuclear arsenal, and the components of the military industrial complex the issue was complex and fraught with danger and the potential for confrontation. Moreover, as we have discussed, it was a fundamental U.S. objective to prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons in Europe and that meant bringing Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Ukraine to give up their nuclear weapons. By late 1993 the issues of tactical nuclear weapons had been resolved, and as we understood it all were located only on the territory of the Russian Federation. But the strategic weapons remained in their former venues. The command and control structure was evolving, but there was no certainty about its durability or that the principle of single command under Russian control would survive. And, again, not to overdo it, but the rising voices of nationalism forces in Russia and Ukraine brought growing concern about the subject of nuclear weapons as well.

Q: A last question from your perspective in Moscow. How did you find the chemistry between Clinton and Yeltsin. It would seem pretty good, they seemed similar in many ways.

COLLINS: I believe each of them very much appreciated the other as a political leader. There was a certain bond between instinctive political beings. Clinton understood a lot about Yeltsin, about what makes a man like that tick, how he thinks about the world and how it works. And Clinton knew as well what it took to make a relationship work. I remember very well when, say, at a cabinet meeting preparing for a Yeltsin visit or summit, the American bureaucracy would always have a checklist a mile long for things Clinton was asked to get Yeltsin to do or accept. Having listened to all his advisers Clinton would pause and then ask the assembled, "Fine, but what is in it for Boris? Why would Yeltsin want to do this?" He had a sort of instinctive understanding for the kind of challenges a man in Yeltsin's position was feeling. And I think with Clinton Yeltsin found somebody, as he had by the way with Strauss in my view, who spoke the same language, had to cope with the same problems. It was always my sense that Yeltsin was in many ways quite lonely in his position. With the exceptions of his wife and family, I thought he had few around him he thought he could trust to understand his position or who would not seek to use him for their own purposes. He found in Clinton and in Chancellor Kohl people he felt he could talk to, who understood what he was up against, who unlike most in his own system were not trying to use him to get something for their own ends. So I saw Yeltsin as having a pretty strong relationship and positive chemistry with Clinton that began even in their first meeting in Vancouver in early 1993.

I also think it is true that they enjoyed and were comfortable with one another. Yeltsin and Clinton would often talk about things quite openly that would make his bureaucracy and ours cringe. And there were many very personal moments even in larger settings. For

example, I will not forget one luncheon Yeltsin hosted for Clinton in the Kremlin. It was the normal formal setting with delegations from both sides arrayed across the table from one another. Note takers were poised, talking points had been prepared and conveyed to each principal. But in the middle of the discussion, Yeltsin had had enough of the formality and began a new topic dear to his heart. He spent about 15 minutes explaining to Clinton how he prepared the Russian dish *pilmeni* (a ravioli type dish) that was on the table in front of everyone. I would later learn that in Ekaterinburg Yeltsin was known for his own ability to make the dish, and it seems he was intent on this occasion to let Clinton in on the secrets of his recipe. It was personal from his side, the kind of gesture I would say gave a sense of two people who could talk to each other with a sense of respect, confidence and understanding. That was important.

Q: Well Jim we are at the end of your tenure as DCM. You are coming back to Washington. You left under President Bush and return with President Clinton nearing his second year in office.

COLLINS: Yes. Tom Pickering is established as ambassador, my time as DCM is ending and I am looking forward to returning to the Department that has been reorganized so far as Russia and Eurasia matters are concerned I will work with Strobe Talbott in the newly established S/NIS. I transfer back formally in November, 1993 to take up my assignment first as Strobe's deputy in S/NIS with responsibility for our diplomacy and policy linked to the unresolved conflicts in Eurasia after the Soviet collapse.

Q: The Balkans?

COLLINS: No, this pertained strictly to the unresolved conflicts within and between the states in the former Soviet space. The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, the Georgia-Abkhaz conflict, the uncertainties surrounding Azerbaijan, the Moldova civil war, and issues between Russia and Ukraine, etc. There was still real concern that these conflicts might erupt and plunge the region into a Balkans in the East with nuclear weapons. As I think we discussed Strobe had asked me to begin phasing into this responsibility even before I left Moscow. I was coming back on a part time basis and more or less wore two hats over an odd six months or so from May to November. It was unusual but most of all it put me in Washington as the new administration was developing its approach to Russia and the NIS and at a time that turned out to be particularly important for the changes it brought to Russia. It was an intense time of change that taxed us all.

Q: Jim, you're now back to Washington. You sort of summed up all the problems facing Russia at the end of '93. What did you find on return to Washington?

COLLINS: Well I finished my time in Moscow in November '93 just after the confrontation between President Yeltsin and the parliament and before the new constitution was in place. The new constitution and the parliamentary election's outcome took place as I was on my home leave, but I watched as it created great uncertainty about where Russia was headed and what the outcomes from all these events would mean. Washington's earlier certainties about the direction events were taking were no longer so

firmly grounded. Events seemed to raise questions about Moscow's direction, its relations with neighbors, and how closely its thinking was to ours. Then, too, events elsewhere in Europe and globally were raising new issues making the future of the post-Cold War international order less certain.

As I returned to work, it seemed in some ways the biggest issue we faced was trying to explain the context of events in Moscow to members of the Congress, to make the case that this wasn't just an autocrat shelling a democratic parliament or a Russian turn to the past. In fact, as I saw it, the October events were at basis the last act of the drama that began with the coup in 1991. We had seen the dissolution of the USSR, the end to the communist party monopoly over Eurasia's people, and the emergence of 15 new nation states out of the Soviet empire. Now, in Russia the reckoning with the Russian Supreme Soviet was a final political act that would redefine Russia's constitutional order. The Supreme Soviet had survived from the Soviet era's 1989 election as the elected body running the communist Russian Federation. It had played a key role in establishing Russian independence but belonged to the communist era and might have disappeared at the end of '91 but didn't. As the body increasingly sought to rein in Yeltsin's reforms and government, it was seen by him and the reformers as working to thwart efforts to build a new nation. Yeltsin in a sense drew the line in the sand that led to a confrontation from which he and his supporters emerged victorious. There follows then a new constitution, and following a free and open election a new parliament. We welcomed both the way the election took place and the new base of legitimacy for the legislature. But the legislature's composition also shocked Americans. The last key institution of the old communist system was put to bed, but its new successor with its heavy representation from the Communist Party and newly formed nationalist Liberal Democrats raised real questions about what was to come. So we might pick it up at that point.

Q: So, there is a lot of uncertainty.

COLLINS: Yes. For sure. The Clinton administration now entering its second year finds its policy goals and priorities facing a shifting environment not only in Russia and the new states of its region but more broadly. The question of NATO and its future and how to address the pressures from countries like Poland for enlargement are growing more intense. These forces are raising broader questions and challenges about differences with Moscow regarding the views Europe and Eurasia and about the NATO's future. Preventing the proliferation of nuclear weapons in Europe and bringing Kazakhstan, Belarus and Ukraine under the NPT and START treaty agreements have yet to be resolved. Nor did there seemed any let up in the economic issues that remained acute across the region as a threat to political stability and the development of more democratic systems based in market principles.

And finally, as I return, the portfolio Strobe has given me seems ever more urgent. There is rising concern about Russian nationalism and its implications for its new neighbors. Concerns are mounting about ensuring against a revanchist Russia or return of empire in Eurasia. The conflicts among or within the new states are seen as providing Russia a path to interference in its new neighbor's affairs. Moreover, relations with the new states are

becoming more complex as time passes. We are now beyond the first flush of promoting their independence and establishing relations with them. By the end of 1993 we are entering a new phase with each, more focused on encouraging their political and economic development along lines consistent with democratic and market principles. So as a new phase opens in our relations with Russia it does so with the new states of the region as well, and all these issues seemed now more actual and looming to shaping the post-Cold War Euro-Atlantic world than they had a year before.

Q: What were you doing when you returned? The Clinton Administration had changed the way we were organized to deal with Russia if I remember right?

COLLINS; As we've touched on already, I actually came back from Moscow in a kind of odd way, sort of in stages. For much of the last half of 1993 I more or less had two jobs. Strobe Talbott was asking me to come back and work with his staff at the same time I was still DCM for Tom Pickering. It was a time of transitions. In Moscow we were transitioning to a new ambassador, my third, and in Washington Strobe Talbot was taking on and defining a newly created position as Ambassador-at-Large for the former Soviet states minus the Baltics. That position, created when Clinton came into office and technically attached to the Secretary's office. gave him senior policy responsibility that combined authorities associated with the Secretary's office and some of the capacity normally associated with the White House. At State it gave him the authorities of a bureau assistant secretary and his authority over the inter-agency process regarding the former Soviet area gave authorities normally associated with the NSC.

So, for me the summer of '93 was sort of chaotic. But when I came back in the fall to be on Strobe Talbott's staff, I was assigned a portfolio to deal with or try to deal with conflicts, semi-conflicts, unresolved issues of borders and so forth that addressed one of the central issues we were concerned to see develop in a peaceful and orderly way. I was made special envoy for conflict resolution in the NIS or something to that effect. I would have to look up the title. I knew most of the issues involved only indirectly and tangentially from my Moscow experience. But they were central to building the future international order for Eurasia, and I quickly became immersed in the details of the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh, Georgia's conflict with Abkhazia, Moldova's civil conflict, and so forth.

Q: But you didn't stay long in that job, did you?

No. I stayed in this job for a few months. I had barely begun to define its mission and how we could play a useful role in the various diplomatic processes that were addressing the conflicts, when a major personnel change at State abruptly put me into a new role. In February 1994, Strobe Talbot was unexpectedly asked to become Deputy Secretary of State, and yours truly was assigned in his place to be Special Adviser to the Secretary on the New Independent States and if one could use the term "acting" Ambassador at Large, a position in which I would get confirmed somewhat later.

Needless to say, the advancement was somewhat daunting. I was being put at the center of what probably was the most significant foreign policy issue on the Clinton agenda at that time. I had had only limited experience with management of inter-agency issues during my Washington career. And I certainly did not bring the political credentials Strobe had to the position. So it was with some well-deserved humility that I started out on the new position. But I have to say here, that I was given the strongest encouragement and support by Strobe in taking up the job. I could not have succeeded in whatever I was able to accomplish without him and his steady encouragement. And I think in this critical period we made a strong team in managing what were critical decisions during that period of the mid-nineties.

The job was complex to say the least. But one element stood out for me early on. It was clear that Washington's interest focused on Moscow, and the issues we have discussed earlier were the priority for most of the administration. Ukraine, Armenia, with strong diaspora communities in the U.S. also attracted interest from Congress and the administration. And Georgia, because Shevardnadze retained many supporters in the capital, had a following and interest that made it a subject of interest to many. But for the rest of the new states the Ambassador-at-Large was almost alone in taking charge of developing and defining our relations with these new international partners and having this a policy priority. The office was also the one point of reference for the leaders of these new countries and their representatives in Washington.

This meant that for the next nearly four years, my voice was one of several when it came to Russian affairs, a lead influence in relations for Ukraine, Armenia, and Georgia, and all but alone in our government in my focus on setting policy, establishing relations, and building cooperation with the other new states. I used to say that in the job I had probably seventy five ambassadors to Russia in Washington, a few DCMs and envoys for Ukraine, Armenia and Georgia, and only my little office to give any sustained attention to all the rest. I was thus very much engaged in defining an American approach to Central Asia and building the first real relationship with the new governments there. The same was true, for Azerbaijan, Moldova and Belarus.

For most of this period I had the good fortune to lead a team that worked well together, met regularly, and became a travelling roadshow welcomed broadly in all the new states. The group consisted of creative, thoughtful, and innovative partners to whom I owed more than you can imagine in whatever successes I managed to achieve. Chip Blacker was my partner from the National Security Council staff, Dick Morningstar was the coordinator for assistance, Ash Carter was our partner at the Pentagon, This team met once a week and became the NIS core group. Our agenda was basic: how do we define our interests in these new states; how do we shape and implement a sustainable policy that will advance those interests; how do we make our programs effective in these unfamiliar surroundings. We spent a lot of time on these issues and countries, because, as I said, many other heavyweights were stomping around on the Russian account.
We did have certain key responsibilities regarding Russia, Ukraine, Armenia, etc., but we saw ensuring these other new states were not ignored in the process as time and effort well spent.

Q: When you returned. You said you started out as the Envoy for conflicts. Did that include Chechnya?

COLLINS: No, The Chechnya tragedy begins later when I was already in the Ambassador position, and because it was essentially a Russia issue it was a conflict that I had to deal with myself from the outset. The Envoy, Joe Presel, after I became the head of NIS, was part of the team, but Chechnya remained in my hands. The conflicts I worked on as Envoy were those I described earlier – Nagorno-Karabakh, Georgia Abkhazia, Moldova, etc.

Q: When you arrived in NIS, did you find you had to help refocus the people dealing with this whole post-Soviet empire? Cold War thinking had been pretty straight line and had its own organizational framework for a long time. It must have been pretty hard to get this community into the swing of the new things.

COLLINS: That certainly was the case. First of all the USSR had not only disappeared and a new order emerged in Eurasia; in Washington the emergence of new institutions to deal with this region upset old institutional patterns. The Ambassador-at-Large for the New Independent States was essentially a bureau but as noted was also unique. When the Clinton administration came in, they wanted a coherent policy approach toward new Russia, its neighbors, and their development They might have created a new State Department bureau, but that didn't happen because the Department of State had a certain number of assistant secretaries and to create a new bureau would have exceeded that number. It turned out there were also certain political forces that opposed a new Bureau that would have been dominated by Russian issues. So, the answer as Clinton took office was the Ambassador-at-Large overseeing the old Soviet desk that was growing what amounted to individual country offices and groupings within it to deal with this part of the world. So, by the time I got back, the people at the State Department dealing with the New Independent States (NIS) on a day to day basis had made the transition quite rapidly to a new world.

This was in great part because things like budgets, creating missions, dealing with logistics and the administrative realities of having to support actual offices in each of the new capitals, finding personnel who had language skills previously not part of the Soviet portfolio dominated the day's work. These kinds of things more or less just *sui generis* focused individual country people on the practical reality that the USSR was no more, and you couldn't get anything done by relying on the old channels and institutions.

There was also a second dimension that forced the pace of change, at least for the people immediately involved. That was the Freedom Support Act. The Act appropriated money to be spent on assistance programs in each of these individual countries, and that engaged agencies, people, NGOs, and experts almost wholly unknown to the Washington bureaucracy that had managed the Soviet portfolio. A coordinator's office working for the Ambassador-at-Large parceled out and oversaw these funds to different agencies,

including some like Commerce, which had worked with the Soviet Union and others like AID with no such experience.

Now I would simply argue as a believer in common law that the need to address new challenges and realties sooner or later create the institutional framework that gets them resolved. So the Department in many ways approached this problem as it does in most cases where it has to organize itself to deal with new or crisis issues around the world. And as they reorganized and created new responsibilities you began to have a corresponding change in mentality about dealing with these new states that as the months passed fundamentally changed the way nearly all of the people in State saw the former Soviet space.

Q: Warren Christopher was the Secretary at this point?

COLLINS: Yes .

Q: Christopher's skills were that of a lawyer rather than somebody who thought big about foreign policy. How did you find his relationship with Strobe Talbott, who could talk directly to the President?

COLLINS: I would say it was a relationship of understanding. I think, in fairness, Warren Christopher was never terribly interested in this part of the world. It was not one with which he was particularly comfortable in dealing, it seemed to me. So in a way Strobe was an asset. He had friends at the White House and was a friend of Bill Clinton. Everybody understood that. But I personally never saw this become an issue between Strobe and the Secretary.

Q: It is a little bit like the relationship in the Kennedy administration of Dean Rusk and George Ball. Dean Rusk was considered to be the Asian man and George Ball was considered to be the European man.

COLLINS: Perhaps, and my experience in the seventh floor of the Department is that most secretaries find it effective to parcel out portfolios of responsibility for policy areas among seventh floor principals. In this context, Strobe had the role of a principal, as Ambassador-at-Large, even without the formal organizational position, and his portfolio was the NIS.. This was admittedly an issue that preoccupied many people, but still, I didn't ever sense Strobe's authority generated significant tensions among the principals. There were staff issues. There were many cases in which you had different ideas about what the Secretary of State ought to be doing on a given day, for example. Those things are there, but the thing I thought was very important, particularly in this early period when first I started in '93, and then later as I was here full time, is that Strobe was able to gain respect for his authority from pretty much the entire governmental structure dealing with the former Soviet Union without raising issues among the key players or within State. So Treasury, Commerce, Defense Department, all showed up when Talbott as NIS coordinator or later as Deputy Secretary called a meeting. It was an effective system that

reminded me somewhat of my times in the Operations Center overseeing the workings of a task force.

In a larger sense, it seemed to me at that time to represent the inter-agency process at its best. There were periodic meetings of agencies with equities in the NIS region. These sessions went over upcoming and recent events, their policy implications, programmatic initiatives to be launched, etc. Agency reps would gather in the Operations Center conference room, and in an hour or two every few weeks would go over issues in a way that was collegial, productive and conducive to resolution of differences. I honestly don't remember this being a part of my Department experience almost ever, and in its way it was stimulating because it gave the Department the real lead in this particular area. I have to say in that sense it was a very positive thing to come back to because we were the ones who broadly speaking were defining the fundamentals of policy and were key to shaping the advice the Secretary and Strobe provided the President.

Q: Well, I can see particularly in this early period a meeting of all the members of the department about what are we going to do about this, where ideas would be floated, and you, having been the man on the ground obviously that is a nice idea but it probably wouldn't work because of such and so.

COLLINS: There were elements of that. I was often the one to say, "Wait a minute. It is neither as good nor as bad as you are seeing it. Let's remember that things happen every day, and not everything is a crisis or great victory." I think it was more that kind of counsel that I gave almost daily. I also had my inputs on programs or policy matters. But in both cases the most important thing I contributed, it seemed to me, was to bring a sense of ground truth to the way people were seeing developments in Russia and its region. Too often people were inclined to see more the extremes of cataclysm or nirvana than reality warranted. I often said of my work that it seemed my principal contribution often centered on providing the system with a needed dose of valium to give everyone time to make judgments in a more relaxed and contemplative way.

The other thing I did a fair amount of was to provide counsel about how to deal with Russians or others in the region. At this time huge numbers of people in government, the bureaucracy, NGOs, and the private sector were engaging Russia and its neighbors for the first time. It recalled images of our Puritans first encounter with native Americans. Well this was a lot of first encounters. Not all of them were easy or successful, nor at the outset was there much common language. Our AID people, for instance, had virtually no experience dealing in countries like these. They were coming from backgrounds in Africa or the Sub Continent or Latin America, where the issues centered on modernization and economic development, but the socio-economic framework and historic background were consistent with models our systems considered normal.

But such was not the case in the communist world and particularly in the former Soviet region. Here, for all kinds of reasons this experience turned out to be of limited use. Many of the assumptions they brought to the table from their experience just didn't fit. In Russia and the other NIS these experts found they were working with educated and

highly literate societies and developed economies with technologies and science establishments equal to our own. What was missing was a framework that could permit the economy, intellectual framework, and socio-economic system to function and compete effectively within the non-communist global system.

For their part, Russians and other former Soviet peoples found it difficult to work with our people. They often had no way to put in context what they were hearing. It was often also a problem that in hearing the approaches of our experts, Russians and others felt they were treated like people from under developed, third world societies or were being used as subjects for development model experiments.. The one thing I could do to ameliorate this was talk to people who were going out to explain this problem to explain, for example, that it was important to make few assumptions about what truly would be understood in what they were discussing. I could tell these people, "You are going to meet people who don't know what money is in our sense of the word. They don't think about time and money as linked or in most cases see profit and loss as the measure of an enterprise's success or failure. Nor, in my experience, do they accept efficiency as we think of or define it is necessarily a positive basis for assessing economic worth." So, I did a lot of this tutoring quite frankly.

Q: Did you have sort of a cadre of interpreters. I am not talking about language. I am talking about cultural interpreters who would go with projects to make sure that both sides kind of understood each other?

COLLINS: We had a real challenge with that. As I came back the initial steps had been taken to establish diplomatic relations with the new states and to send our first envoys out to set up the new missions. But the effort had not developed very far. One of the biggest challenges we had was personnel. Historically only two foreign service posts were staffed with Russian speakers. Embassy Moscow and ConGen Leningrad were staffed from a limited cadre that made up the Soviet club we discussed earlier.

Then there was a limited group of Soviet experts in other agencies who supplemented this cadre. But as the demands grew, we found out taken together this was a pretty small group. All of a sudden we were casting around for any talent that could expand it. There was a general scrubbing of the Foreign Service and other agencies for Russian speakers and speakers of languages of the new states. I think I read in Vlad Lehovich's interview that he was one of them. Most of those recruited were sent to staff the new missions, however, so it didn't leave a lot back in Washington. The Soviet desk was still reasonably experienced, but they were getting stretched. So, yes, we had the need for these interpreters and for people to engage these new organizations and instructors going to the field.

The situation was further complicated by a second major change that accelerated rapidly as the old Soviet club was dispersed. In the new world the people who were coming to staff mid-level positions in Moscow's consular and even political section were coming from places like Mexico or Nigeria. They had no experience of the Soviet Union or its system or in that part of the world. The language capabilities began to be less robust for

the whole community and the experience and understanding about what that part of the world for the 20th century was rapidly diluted. It wasn't too long before having served in the Soviet Union in the 70s made one a unique piece of living history among the cadre who were now staffing our fifteen posts in the NIS and Baltics. So, there were a lot of changes and adaptations that meant changed backgrounds and experience among the new people who conducted our business and relations with that part of the world. And that had its challenges and problems as the encounter developed.

Q: Did you find academics or others you could reach out to. Did they have a lot to contribute? My impression was they were all grasping for answers and there really wasn't much there. Was there?

COLLINS: Well, there were a few cases in which the academic community made a significant contribution. We turned to Indiana University, for example, to equip us with Uzbek language speakers and they produced. Others, similarly, had capabilities in languages or specialists, particularly on the less known regions who were helpful. But in the main, I would say the academic world and others in that community were not able to provide a great deal of help in what we in government were called upon to accomplish. What I found very generally was the that analytical academic community, research community, the media, and most of the Washington chattering class, broke down loosely into two large groups: what I would call the globalists and the regionalists. Neither of these it seemed to me was very effective in assessing the realities of change that defined the world we worked with each day.

The globalists saw the end of the Cold War, collapse of the communist system and disappearance of the USSR and communist ideology as momentous events that unleashed the power of globalizing forces, put finish to artificial global divisions, and put us on the road to a global century. This community was made the more certain its analysis and conviction about a new world was on target by the expanding role of digital technology. They saw the internet and mobile phone as unstoppable new forces that would both unite and undermine the twentieth century structures that had divided economies, societies, information space, and prevented the free flow of people and information. There was also at this time, by the way, a conviction that with the U.S. in the lead on the development and expansion of these technologies, we could be confident democracy would grow as the new digital age expanded.

A side effect of this globalized view was to downplay the study of topics focused on what differences regional, national, or cultural characteristics brought to political, socio economic or international behavior. Instead their focus was to define or describe models or patterns that transcended the unique and gave scientific or universal understanding of what the new forces at work globally were producing. And, of course, it was to a degree a side element in this view that the western models and patterns were the new standard and basis for true understanding.

And so there were many models built, theories developed, and experiments put together on the basis of these assumptions. It also brought a side effect in academia of a decline in

interest in everything from language to area studies as political science, economics, and the other social and political sciences turned ever more of their research toward development of universally applicable models for development or to explain the behavior and development of societies. For my world it seemed the new focus was on the idea of "transition" of post-communist societies toward their new place in the globalized world. It was, in the phrase of one of the most noteworthy scholars at the time "the end of history."

Concurrent with this trend, however, there was a second group among the researchers, academics, and pundits. This group as I saw them, were united in rejecting the idea that the end of the Cold War and, more particularly, the disappearance of the Soviet Union had brought the kind of profound change their colleagues were convinced had created a new world. As often as not these people had built and spent their careers analyzing things Soviet, communist, ideological; they were experts in Kremlinology, details of the Soviet armed forces, how the command economy worked, Soviet government and politics, etc. These people suddenly found themselves not very relevant. Some turned to transition studies where their skills could be applied, but a substantial number, including many in the official analytical community focused on the continuities in the region and challenged the very idea of profound change, particularly in Russia.

I remember in many ways that for a long time the intelligence community's writing on Russia often seemed simply to substitute "Russian" for "Soviet" and carried on with little sense of what had changed. The result, it seemed to me, was limited understanding of or appreciation for the dynamics of what was going on in the post-Soviet region. It often seemed analysts and others grasped to make important what they knew, and they weren't so good at assessing the unfamiliar or the new. I thought, for instance, the analysis of the economic transition and its socio-political implications in Russia and across the region was weak. The assessment of how the new states were establishing themselves and their relations with Russia was likewise poor. Instead, the analysis from both the official community and academia tended to focus on the idea that somehow the past was prologue. They knew the old communist establishment and they didn't know the new people popping up. In short a lot of the expertise that existed about the Soviet Union did not seem to be applied to understanding how the Soviet past affected change and frankly seemed to miss the profound nature of what was happening. They weren't terribly quick on picking up the new questions, the new issues. That is where I would say the foreign service and the embassy was way ahead of academia, of most of the analytical community.

Q: Well, being here in Washington we have to have an enemy. We have this huge military establishment. Did you find a beginning of a shift towards looking at China or was China just not much of a factor at the time'

COLLINS: Actually, I have to say that at least in my world China was just not seen as terribly central day to day. The focus was on Europe or perhaps better the Euro-Atlantic world and its future. This was the absorbing foreign policy and security question for the Clinton presidency. There were other crises, but this was the pivotal issue. Russia and its

future were central, and the thinking on the issue seemed to me to fall into two schools, One camp saw Russia primarily as the potential enemy in a changed world. It was the other nuclear super power; it grieved over a lost empire; relations between Russia and its former Warsaw Pact allies and the new states were far from stable or established; and, as we discussed, Russia's own internal politics hardly provided comfort about the solidity of democracy. I think in the view of this community it was always assumed that Russia would remain a challenge and a force to be limited.

A second school found itself disoriented by the events of the early nineties. This group, I think, accepted that we would live in a new Europe and Euro-Atlantic space It was preoccupied with imagining what the future security system of Europe should look like, the issues of preventing proliferation of nuclear weapons in Europe, assuring a secure future American presence in Europe, building a stable region in Eurasia as the empire that had governed it collapsed and a new state system emerged.

Now, I take your point that we need an enemy, but for much of the first part of the 1990s two things seemed to me to preoccupy the national security system more than who was the enemy. First was to ensure that there was no proliferation of nuclear weapons in the region; this meant preventing the emergence in any way of additional nuclear powers or states that might use nuclear materials for unacceptable purposes. Second was to ensure that no catastrophic instability emerged from the collapse of the Warsaw Pact/Soviet Union, etc.; ensure there would be no Yugoslavia in Eurasia or elsewhere in East Europe with all of the weaponry, including nuclear arms and material floating around in very uncertain circumstances. These were the top issues as I saw them for the early nineties. So the enemy in that case was sort of uncertainty and the absence of clarity.

Finally, as I returned there was a third dimension as well to the agenda I had as I took up the new responsibilities. We had already done the preliminary work with the new states of Eurasia in recognizing their independence, establishing relations with them, opening representation in each, and formulating some initial approaches to working with them to build the economic and political foundations that would give them the opportunity to pursue integration with European institutions. We had also set out to encourage and support each of these new nations to develop market economies and accountable government systems. And so, these large objectives defined the policy framework and agenda I began with at NIS.

Q: We have talked about what was happening on the nuclear issue after the Soviet breakup. Perhaps this is the place to take this issue to the success in getting agreement that Kazakhstan, Belarus and Ukraine do finally give up their nuclear weapons and join the NPT. That was a great accomplishment for the new administration.

COLLINS: Well, just to recall, we have briefly discussed how the Soviet military command and its CIS-Russian successors managed to concentrate all of the tactical nuclear warheads inside Russia by the middle of 1992. They had initially also sustained central command and control over the strategic forces, missiles, and warheads on the territory of Kazakhstan, Belarus, and Ukraine, although as time passed there was growing

concern that the control was showing signs of strain and vulnerability regarding the weapons in Ukraine. By the end of 1993, both Kazakhstan and Belarus had signed agreements binding their nations to elimination of the nuclear weapons on their territory. It was fair to say, or at least as I recall it, Washington had few truly troubling issues with either country regarding their commitment to becoming non-nuclear states. Issues such as they were revolved around practical and fiscal matters: how to accomplish the complex process of deactivating and financing the removal of the weapons and warheads primarily.

With Ukraine the process was more difficult and protracted. Ukraine was determined to use the weapons to achieve longer term security, economic, and political goals, particularly vis-à-vis Russia. This made the process both more complex and uncertain. And as 1993 went on without resolution of key issues questions about just how secure the Russian control over the weapons in Ukraine remained began to lend urgency to the question. Nor was Washington reassured by voices from Ukraine questioning whether Ukraine should insist on becoming a nuclear weapons state or seeming to challenge the urgency of removing the weapons from Ukrainian territory.

Q: During your first year back in Washington the administration nonetheless did succeed in bringing the nuclear issue to a successful outcome; there will be no new nuclear powers in Europe, Kazakhstan, Belarus, and Ukraine have adhered to the Start agreement, and the NPT. The issue is now one of carrying the implementing agreements to a successful conclusion.

COLLINS: That's correct. In December 1994 at an OSCE summit in Budapest, the final documents concluding the Budapest Memorandum with assurances for the states surrendering their weapons and the adherence to the START protocols concluded the negotiations committing the three new states in Eurasia to become non-nuclear powers. It was a major achievement for the administration and the parties. That said, I do recall that on the eve of President Clinton's arrival, I spend hours until 4:00 a.m. engaged in resolving a last minute effort by our Ukrainian friends to alter one of the documents to be signed the next day. The episode was only the last in what had been one of the most difficult negotiations over the year to bring Ukraine and Russia to agreement. But, in the end the signing was successful in putting to rest major uncertainties about the future of the nuclear weapons left after the Soviet breakup and ensuring Europe would have not new nuclear powers as it addressed it future security system. It was, however, also only a beginning of our more extensive engagement with all four nations involved in the nuclear project that would last over much of the decade.

Q: How was the nuclear destruction program working while you were there?

COLLINS: Well, here I have to return to Senator Nunn and Senator Lugar. Nunn himself came to Moscow for what turned out to be a historic set of meetings. I think he was the first congressional visitor to Moscow after the August '91 coup, and the issue on his mind was the disposition of the Soviet nuclear arsenal. He had come to Moscow at the invitation of Andrey Kokoshin, a scholar and authority on Soviet defense matters who had opposed the Kremlin coup in August 1991 and would become a deputy Minister of

Defense following the establishment of the Russian ministry. Kokoshin was deeply troubled by uncertainties about the nuclear arsenal in the conditions emerging in the country and wanted Nunn to understand the gravity of the problem he foresaw. He succeeded. Nunn left alarmed at what he heard and saw, and not long after his visit he and Senator Lugar proposed legislation that would make available United States financial and other support to Russia and the CIS states to assist the Russians in meeting their obligations for destruction of nuclear weapons, and as it developed, to help in building a new nuclear infrastructure that would provide secure destruction, storage and handling for nuclear material and weapons. This program expanded quite rapidly and also became a central part of the negotiations to remove the remaining nuclear weapons from Ukraine, Belarus and Kazakhstan

That program got going quite successfully because the Russians had a major incentive to cooperate. They had an obligation to destroy a sizable number of weapons under existing treaty arrangements. Destroying nuclear weapons is a very expensive business, and they just didn't have the money to do the job. Additionally, it was clear that the entire nuclear infrastructure was in trouble financially and institutionally. The old security structures were disintegrating and within the nuclear community we were seeing growing concerns about even the most basic security and handling of nuclear material. These conditions were a strong incentive for the leadership to bring the Americans in as funders and as technical support to meet their requirements under the treaties and to explore new ways to manage the transport, handling, and security of nuclear materials and weapons. As the program developed, it was also linked in part to the arrangements by which the warheads were brought back into Russia from Ukraine, Kazakhstan, and Belarus.

Q: How was it set up? This is a major job and there must have been those in Russia who were less than enthusiastic about the Americans getting access to their military crown jewels?

COLLINS: The program had three pieces to it. One was simply the payment for dismantling and destroying nuclear weapons and rockets. Second was the creation of new facilities for the storage of nuclear materials or weapons. The third was technical assistance in which American experts worked with their Russian counterparts to share with them plans and experience Americans had with designing a very different kind of nuclear security system. Our system had always been built on a very different basis from that the Soviets relied on as we noted. At a later point these same programs were expanded to encompass cooperative programs to deal with chemical weapons and materials that posed many of the same issues.

The great success of the system was that they managed to work out procedures whereby the Russians could protect the secrecy of things they needed to protect and at the same time work productively with Americans to design secure facilities and other projects to achieve defined objectives regarding weapons and nuclear material. The joint effort let them do what needed to be done to transition from the Soviet to the Russian base for managing their arsenal and the nuclear materials spread across eleven time zones. That was the great success of the Nunn-Luger project.

Q: It seems it has been quite a successful.

COLLINS: It was very successful.

Q: O.k. Jim. We have brought the nuclear issue to a successful conclusion. Let's turn to the other set of issues that were dominating the agenda, the development of the future security system for Europe. How did you see this question and what were you doing?

COLLINS: This second dimension was really planning for a post-communist, post-Cold War Europe. What was it going to be like? How would America be engaged. What kind of arrangement could ensure stability and security? Here I would have to say that inertia in many ways was not a friend. If you look at the period in the first half of the 90s, the discussion or thinking about this came down to the issue of what was going to happen to NATO? Was it going to disappear? Was it going to create new relations with partners to the East. Was it going to get bigger? Was it going to stay as it was or become something else? How was it going to relate to all of these other states who had been the enemy and reason the Alliance existed, but who suddenly insist they are friends. Further complicating the picture was the fact, clear to me, and something I never heard contradicted, that NATO never had a "foreign policy." Now it was having to cope with issues the Alliance had not really addressed when it had only an enemy, and a membership policy was all it required. Initially they didn't have any alternative arrangements, and for some period, a preoccupation was the effort to sort this out without abandoning the idea of no new dividing lines in Europe.

Q: Did this occupy a great deal of attention from your point of view? I mean what do you do about the other major power and the other states. Are they in NATO or out of NATO? Where can they fit?

COLLINS: Certainly for my time as Ambassador-at-Large this became an abiding issue. Its resolution and our policy toward it became the central question for the entire region. And the way in which the question is ultimately decided has been central to defining our approach to the Euro-Atlantic region since. Of course it occupied a lot of my time as well as that of my colleagues in the other bureaus and agencies. We need to begin by recalling some of what we have touched on already about our views about the future of Europe following the Soviet collapse. As I returned the phrase "Europe whole and free," initially formulated by the Bush administration had become established at the center of the Clinton administration's approach to Europe. It set the framework for the broader issues of security for the Euro-Atlantic region, or at least this was my understanding as I took on the new job. It was the guiding principle that set the goal of preventing re-emergence of any new dividing lines in Europe. At the same time, by this time it was also accepted that NATO institutions would serve as the core element in shaping any future security structures for the region.

Q: Was that really well understood?

COLLINS: I would say by the time I returned to Washington that was well understood. There had been a debate in '92 right after the Soviet collapse, that had voices asking what is NATO for now? The Soviet threat is gone. But, other voices argued that NATO was essential to secure U.S. interests and a stable American security role in Europe. We had made major investments in NATO, and it remained our anchor on the continent. Making any case against NATO's continued role was pretty hard, even though the Russians tried and pressed to have alternatives such as the OSCE play the lead role for security in the future.

Q: Well it really is. The old saying of keeping the United States in and keeping Germany and France from going at each other and the other countries. But one of the other things that I heard mentioned many times was that the Russian Club was saying don't expand NATO.

COLLINS: I was going to say, as I returned to Washington this question has not yet come to be front and center. There were already signs that this would emerge as a central question, but it is not yet fully on the table. The question, however, was raised early by the pleadings and insistence from Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary, the Visegrad States, to join NATO. There was significant debate in Washington and it was clear by late '93 that there was support from Clinton for expansion at some point. But by the fall a position emerged to defer any clear decision and to announce instead the Partnership for Peace as a structure to provide the states in the East a relationship with NATO short of membership and an Article V guarantee. There was also to follow misunderstanding about whether P4P was a path to membership or an alternative. The Russian side would hear it as the latter.

Q: What does that mean?

COLLINS: Well let's recall that the Partnership for Peace (P4P) was an institution to provide those who joined a recognized, official, substantive relationship with the Alliance. It provided for representation in Brussels, involvement in NATO planning and NATO exercises, participation in P4P councils and programs and joint training with allied forces, etc. What they did not have was membership or participation in the NATO council, the Alliance's governing body. They didn't have a vote. Nor were they covered by Article V. So the Partnership was a vehicle where military assistance, technical assistance was conveyed and partners were engaged in alliance activities, planning and programs. It gave NATO training and skills to the militaries of the former Warsaw Pact states and the New Independent States. And it was a way for all of the countries, including Russia, to establish a cooperative working relationship with NATO. Most importantly at that moment - in late 1993 - it provided a way for NATO and the American administration to finesse the question of membership for the states in the East that were pressing the question at least for a time. But that finesse was bought at a cost.

Q: How so?

COLLINS: At the core of the problem was ambiguity about just what relationship the Partnership for Peace would have to future membership in NATO and the very different interpretation Yeltsin put on what it meant juxtaposed to what Washington said it involved. In October, 1993, as we've noted, Warren Christopher came to Moscow to explain Partnership for Peace to Yeltsin, and put simply Yeltsin understood Partnership for Peace to be an alternative to membership in NATO. Or more to the point NATO would not be accepting new members and had decided on having partners instead. I remember that he was more than pleased at this outcome and thought the issue of NATO enlargement off the table. That, of course, was not the case from the perspective of the Administration, which continued to link the Partnership to membership without specifying when that membership might be possible. So, as I returned to Washington, this issues had been deferred. Yeltsin thought he had heard that NATO enlargement was no longer an issue, and the Visegrad states and others were hearing that it was a path of promise. In the event, however, for the time being P4P was successful. It engaged the NIS, including Russia, with NATO and became a particularly useful tool for me to use in my early efforts to expand relations between the new independent states and European institutions. So, for most of 1994 it kept the issue of enlargement to a great extent on the back burner.

Q: How long did this last? I seem to recall that the NATO debate was a central policy issue from the beginning of the Clinton administration?

COLLINS: Well, yes and no. The Partnership compromise damped down the intensity of debate for a time. But with the final agreement about removal of nuclear weapons from Ukraine, Kazakhstan and Belarus and signatures at the end 1994 that brought these new states under the umbrella of the START agreement, the issue, I would say, became central. It became more intense as concerns rose about Russian nationalism and intentions. This had come to the fore with Moscow's actions in Chechnya and regarding Georgia, and the shock of a speech delivered by Yeltsin in Budapest warning expansion of NATO would produce not security but a cold peace. And with the onset of 1995 the debate about NATO's acceptance of new members intensified.

Q: I would imagine that during all the discussions you would have to keep looking over your shoulder at Congress. I mean ethnic groups are extremely important within congressional districts, and Congressmen had built long reputations on their stand on Polish matters or Armenian mattes. This must have caused all sorts of headaches as you were trying to work on these problems.

COLLINS: Well I think there is a good case that a lot of our approach to the issues of NATO enlargement was driven by domestic politics. I think underlying a lot of the background to the debate on this issue were long simmering issues that divided Americans: what I came to call Yalta guilt or issues raised by the captive nations community. It seemed to me that we often were more taken up with trying to get the end of World War II right this time than we were with thinking through what kind of security system would best keep the peace in post-Cold War Europe. But the emotions were strong both at home and in Europe and much of the dynamic behind how the NATO

enlargement debate developed were driven by questions that were never really put on the table. Those involved a variety of agendas on the part of the various states pushing enlargement. They were skilled at playing the anti-Russian card as Russia became in America's thinking more and more synonymous with the Soviet Union. It took place, in short, against the background of a defeat for the idea that Russians no less than others shared in the defeat of communism and the Soviet system - the argument that had prevailed in passing key legislation like the Freedom Support Act - and gave way to the presumption that Russia and Russians bore responsibility for the sins of the Soviets.

Q: I just thought somebody looking at this, Yalta guilt refers to the so called sell out of eastern Europe to the Soviets during WWII.

COLLINS: At the end of the war.

Q: At the Yalta conference. That was '44 or something.

COLLINS: In February, 1945. I remember well, that this was one of the political arguments against Franklin Roosevelt, that he had somehow sold out our East European allies and the people who had helped win WWII to the communist regime of Joseph Stalin. I recall from my school days there were plenty of people who felt that was treasonous behavior perpetrated by Roosevelt, and its emotions lingered. I was from the Chicago area where support for Poland to become part of the west was intense. So these domestic factors were in the background in addition to any practical considerations being considered about military security and how Europe would organize after the Cold War.

On the other side, there were plenty of people in the debate who felt enlargement would not be good for NATO. They argued new members would dilute the alliance's military effectiveness and turn it into a political talking shop. Others argued about what the terms under which any country could join should be. But in the debate one of my frustrations was the near impossibility of being heard about the consequences taking these new members into the Alliance would have in their neighborhood, and particularly with regard to their future relations with Russia. Earlier on this issue had been a central concern, but as the debate grew more pointed, it grew more difficult to have the implications of enlargement for our broader relations with Russia and Eurasia be given the weight I thought they required.

Q: Well it was very difficult considering the buildup we have had for years of talking about these countries yearning to be free and all. All of a sudden to slam the door. This was not an abstraction.

COLLINS: It wasn't an abstraction. The problem was the Clinton administration had started out talking about a Europe whole and free, trying to figure out how you would arrange that, but never coming to grips with what we would mean by Europe. Rather domestic politics and the politics surrounding pressures from Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary to join NATO came to define the issue. It was framed in terms of considerations about its consequences for narrow Europe and not about its consequences for a Europe

whole and freed or to put it another way an undivided Euro-Atlantic security community. In that sense, alternative ideas and opportunities including giving the issue more time were foregone. Nobody thought about OSCE as a serious institution. I found no one ready to contemplate giving Russia a voice in defining the security system in future Europe. There just wasn't a significant voice to raise the idea that perhaps we would need a new Congress of Vienna. Yeltsin had made clear on more than one occasion, including in the famous Budapest cold peace speech, that enlargement was going to have a heavy price if it took place absent sufficient consideration for Russian interests. And, frankly, nearly all Russians made clear that any early enlargement was going to come at a major cost.

Q: But while this was going on Yugoslavia was falling apart wasn't it, and the OSCE was very much involved. I remember being briefed by a Russian security officer as an election monitor in Tuzla.

COLLINS: Well I believe the Balkans tragedy had a profound effect on the thinking about Europe's future security structure. The dynamics that developed as Europeans, Americans and Russians tried to manage the crisis in this period, and the lessons each drew from that had a lot to do with the way we came to see the future. In the mid-nineties the Balkans conflicts became the focus of a lot of the thinking about future European security. What was happening there also became a kind of test bed for the role of NATO and place of the non-Alliance states in the continent's future security system. And it seemed to me the lessons that we took away from the evolution of events surrounding the Bosnian horrors and the Serbian/Kosovo conflict were central in shaping decisions later on.

To oversimplify, let me begin with how I saw the phases of these events unfold. As the early war in Bosnia war devolved into a barbaric tragedy and refugee flows started to unsettle neighbors, the Europeans worked in vain to get the war under control. Their failure brought the second phase defined by American intervention and greater internationalization of efforts to halt the fighting. This concluded with the Dayton accords. The third phase developed around the Serbian conflict with its Kosovo province that brought direct U.S. military action and a U.S.-Russian managed ceasefire. Now I know this is much over simplified. But as a framework it makes sense to me, particularly as I think back on what it all meant for our thinking about European security and how it ultimately affected relations with Russia. Through this period, I was in Washington for the Bosnia phase, and I was in Moscow during the Kosovo conflict.

As we moved through these episodes, it seems to me, the U.S. drew conclusions about the broader security of the region that on one hand made perfect sense and on another missed the major point about the future. The first conclusion came as phase one of the Balkans conflict in Bosnia revealed that there was no international or European structure capable of bringing the Bosnia mess under control. The UN couldn't do it; the OSCE was not up to dealing with the conflict; the EU proved unable to act effectively; EU defense institutions more or less were paper exercises. As the war ground on, Washington reluctantly came to the conclusion the U.S. would have to engage more directly. In 1994

the U.S. joined with other key players to form the Contact Group as the political vehicle for coordinating actions with key allies and Russia to end the conflict and began to turn to NATO as the vehicle that could provide the forces to implement any agreement that might end the fighting.

The result of this approach was a structure that proved capable of uniting the powers in Europe with interests in the Balkans to work jointly to stabilize the region and in the process, from my point of view, suggested certain important realities about the future security system for Europe. First of all, creation of the Contact group had particular significance. It appealed to Moscow because it acknowledged their role as a major power in Europe with interests in the Balkans and capacity to play a role there. Second the group represented something akin to an executive committee or security council for European affairs comprised of Europe's major powers: Russia, the U.S. the UK, Germany, France, and Italy from 1996. Thirdly, while it was never a formal institution, it was the forum to address issues that affected the interests not just of NATO allies or others seeking NATO affiliation, but assured Russia a voice in setting the agenda and determining outcomes affecting the region as a whole. And it was this reality, so far as I could understand it, that made possible the cooperation of Russia with NATO in providing military support for the Dayton agreement's implementation .

Indeed, I have always assumed that it was this framework that lay behind the agreement Yeltsin and Clinton reached in Hyde park in October, 1995, to engage Russia with NATO in monitoring a Bosnia peace. It was the basis for Russia's role as part of the Dayton negotiation to halt the Bosnia conflict. And it formed the basis on which Bill Perry, as Secretary of Defense, reached agreement with his Russian counterpart a month later on the terms for Russian forces to work under U.S. command in policing the ceasefire in Bosnia after Dayton. In sum, I believe that the success in having a NATO led peacekeeping structure include broader European participation including Russia, Ukraine and others was based in the success of the Partnership for Peace and the Contact group as a vehicle for Russia to find a voice it felt adequate in a critical European security issue.

It was also the effect of this group that, I think, also played a role in successfully negotiating a second objective the U.S. was pursuing in Europe: Russian acceptance of NATO expansion. This issue, temporarily cooled by the development of Partnership for Peace became more acute as the U.S. moved closer to open support for growing membership in the Alliance. The Russian position - opposition to any expansion that did not include Russia becoming a member – was articulated clearly in late 1993 by Yeltsin in a letter to Clinton clarifying his earlier Warsaw remarks that seemed to give blessing to Poland to join NATO. Russian opposition was further reinforced in the Cold Peace speech in Budapest a year later. These developments, of course, coincided with the debate in Washington about expansion and ultimate decision to move forward, even as the Balkans conflict was producing a new dynamic of Russia-NATO cooperation that created a base for a new effort by NATO to regularize relations with Russia. That project was launched after the U.S. election as a NATO summit launched the process that would lead to negotiation and signature in 1997 of the Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation and Security between Russia and NATO. I recall joining the party led by

President Clinton in Paris for the signature and the sense of optimism that a new era had begun. NATO and Russia were committed to cooperation, and implicitly the way was open for Russian acceptance of the Alliance's expansion under agreed terms. Not much later, of course, the U.S. welcomed Hungary, Poland and the Czech Republic to membership in the Alliance and there was hope that a new era had begun.

But I also recall that it was not long before the cracks in the framework began to emerge. On the Russian side Yeltsin made clear that Russia strongly opposed any inclusion of former Soviet republics, now new states, in the Alliance, and I recall hearing Russian displeasure with the idea that the NATO-Russia forum routinely amounted to Russia alone speaking with a unified Alliance membership. For the Alliance's part there was emphasis regularly on the limits of the Founding Act, on what it did not require or permit, on making clear Russia might have a voice but not a veto on NATO matters, on the flexibility provided by provisions in the Act regarding Allied forces deployment to new member states, etc. The Act, in short, had established an alternative basis for laying out the future basis for Euro-Atlantic security that differed significantly from what Russia found attractive in the way affairs had developed in the Balkans and created for the U.S. tension between two variants in the way we would deal with Moscow on the future.

So from a variety of negotiations between Russia and NATO, and Russia and the United States about NATO we had two working models for Russian engagement with the future of European security - the NATO Founding Act created a machinery for Russia and NATO to interact on a regular basis in an institutional framework that was beyond partnership for peace, had a unique role for Russia as a partner with NATO and would provide the political context for future. But this was a very different structure and arrangement from what Russia had found met its interests in dealing with the Balkans where the Contact Group was providing a forum for coordination and political oversight, and Russia was working with NATO under the Group's umbrella. It was a very different model, and it was clear to me almost from the outset that Moscow did not see it as offering Russia the role it sought in shaping the future of European security.

Q: Did you find people trying to recruit you to join those who opposed expansion of NATO? How did you see the expansion and all that?

COLLINS: Personally I never thought moving to enlarge NATO when we did it was a good idea. I took seriously as a fundamentally sound objective avoiding new dividing lines in Europe. I knew there was going to be a price if we saw NATO enlargement as the way to reshape European security. I thought that price was going to be substantial. I thought it was going to be substantial for NATO, but even more so for Europe's unity, for avoiding the drawing of new lines in Europe. It was always clear to me that if we decided NATO would be the fundamental institution to build the new security architecture for Europe and we began unilaterally to incorporate new members to its east, we were in essence building a new line between members and non-members. We were excluding those not in the Alliance from a full voice in defining the future of Europe's security architecture, and ultimately dividing the Euro-Atlantic family into two camps. There are going to be those on one side of it making new rules, defining objectives, and speaking as

one Europe. On the other side will be those without a voice in that process, except as agreed by members of the Alliance. That is a very different dynamic from what the Russians thought they had in the Contact group and, however imperfectly it worked, was their preferred way to address the development of future European security arrangements.

I also understood very clearly that with the new approach, when it came to what I would call thinking about Europe's security system or the kind of framework and processes the system would encompass, the people who would be speaking to such issues from the East would be easily ignored. This was going to be a problem. Once you started down the path that the issue now was NATO and NATO's future, the momentum would drive NATO to look inward, and our American community dealing with Europe and NATO would devote the bulk of their energy to thinking about the mechanics of expanding the Alliance, about how to prepare potential members for their new status. You had thousands and thousands of people in the military and in the European community that now took up these issues as central to the future. What mostly got short shrift was the Alliance's foreign policy and finding the way to build a new relationship with nonmember nations in the East, in particular in Eurasia.

Q: A NATO set of qualifications or regulations or something is huge.

COLLINS: It is huge, but the point is that the juggernaut in Brussels dedicated itself now to thinking about the details of expansion. Few were thinking seriously about future relations with those who were not members and most likely would not become members. It was certainly my sense that once expansion became the objective, the partnership for peace lost its priority as an institution for building bridges. As for Russian reactions, Washington had the Ambassador-at-Large and his staff and few other people in Washington and embassy Moscow trying to ensure the implications of expansion were understood. But it was hard to be heard. This dimension seemed never to be seen as a strategic or for that matter particularly serious issue. The voice of those who were thinking about the fallout from expansion was just not very effective. It had no particular resonance on the Hill. It had no particular resonance in the Pentagon, and no particular resonance almost anywhere.

Q: Well was there any talk about what NATO is supposed to be doing? I mean if we are not going to stop the Soviets at the Fulda gap, what are we doing?

COLLINS: Well, in fairness, that issue was in a sense defined by what was to become the Alliance's lead role in dealing with the Balkans and establishing relations with all the former enemy states.. Those issues occupied the Alliance for much of the first half of the nineties and into Clinton's second term. These issues in a sense validated the need for NATO, preoccupied a lot of people for a lot of time. It gave NATO a mission - making peace in Europe. So it was my impression that this kept people from having really to focus on the question of what NATO was going to be about in the face of new post-Cold War realities. The Balkans was seen as a solid justification for NATO. It showed the value of bringing in new members who were going to be helpful in securing Europe. In this sense even the fact that the Russians were working with us on the Balkans seemed

promising. So issue deferred I would say was the outcome from this initial period. Then once the dimension of expansion became a real focus, how NATO would plan and execute accession by Poland or the Czech Republic became the principal issue before the Alliance system. This occupied thousands of bureaucrats. It was also my sense that with these matters front and center, thought about the broader question of Alliance mission or what impact the decisions being made were having on the broader question of maintaining Euro-Atlantic unity were put to the side.

Q: This is probably way out in left field but was anybody talking about maybe we could use NATO to squelch the problem in the Middle East?

COLLINS: You know I was not a part of the NATO establishment, so I can't really say, But I don't remember that there was much NATO discussion about the Middle East. Some of the members in the South were raising questions about the Mediterranean in the context of discussions about enlargement. But the focus was on NATO's nearest eastern neighbors.

Q: Let's move to a different subject, but related. You are back in Washington, now as Ambassador-at-Large. Your responsibilities range across all the former Soviet region. Give me a sense about your outlook and priorities.

COLLINS: First, recall that we are in the very early stages of developing America's relations with all the new states. When I come in they are just over a year old: there had been relatively little attention to most of them beyond recognition, establishing relations, sending representatives to open a mission, and in some, beginning a few programs under the Freedom Support Act. I began with what was in many ways a tabula rasa in terms of bilateral relations and country policy. It was a very open field. I determined an important first step was simply to get to know the leaders of the new states and for them to get to know me as their entrée to Washington. I made my first trip to all of them in early '94. Strobe Talbott had made one trip out to these places, and there'd been a couple of other visits by mid-level officials previously. But I was really the first senior visitor from the U.S. to signal serious intent to engage each of them in a sustained way and signal they could see me as their point of contact in Washington. With these visits and in welcoming a number of the new leaders to Washington, within my first year I had established a sustained dialog with the leaders in the region. I subsequently visited these capitals about three times a year, and that helped us expand our relations over the next four years. A lot of my time was, thus, taken up establishing the basics of relations with all of the new states and their leaders.

Doing so I had set two or three goals for myself. One was to ensure that these nations all developed the capacity to play their role in the international system effectively and also to derive the benefits of that. Getting them into the UN and institutions in Europe they were eligible to join was a priority. Getting each engaged in the Partnership for Peace and establishing a working NATO relationship was likewise a major objective.

A second objective was to work with the new leaders to encourage their commitment to develop a market economy, and as possible some form of democratic political system. The effort involved encouraging them to establish relations with international financial, trading and economic institutions, open themselves to outside investors and business, and link their economic futures with a global economy they poorly understood and over which they had little influence. It was a heavy lift. Similarly, as possible, we urged the new nations to embrace more open government with accountable institutions and democratic practices founded in rule of law, to pursue a reform agenda to develop institutions and practices compatible with the values we believed all had assumed in becoming independent members of the Euro-Atlantic community.

The third objective was to work with each of the new states on a whatever foreign policy and security issues they inherited from the past and on development of policies that would advance our shared interest in their independence and success in undertaking the new challenges they faced as independent nations. This often involved offering guidance on everything from building a ministry of foreign affairs to what options we saw for them in addressing a given issue with a neighbor. It was also the area that kept me engaged with the unresolved conflicts and relations between the new states and Russia.

I was quite proud of the work we did in each of these areas. In the course of a few years, we established good relations with all of the Central Asian countries that served us well into the post-9/11 period. Our relations in the Caucasus for the most part kept a fragile peace or halted conflicts threatening the area and set in place lasting good relations with the three new nations in that strategic region. And as I completed my time as Ambassador at Large our relations with Ukraine, Belarus, and Moldova were well established. We had created a senior level bilateral commission with Ukraine, and solid ties with Chisinau and Minsk. The last of the nuclear weapons in Ukraine, Belarus and Kazakhstan had been withdrawn to Russia or destroyed, and all the states were participants in the Partnership for Peace.

The one thing that I always felt was a challenge, however, was getting senior political leaders from Washington to pay sufficient attention to the part of the world. With the exception of Ukraine and Armenia and to an extent Georgia my only sustained strategic partner was the military. Bill Perry, the Secretary of Defense, was willing to visit the new states and DPOD (Department of defense) regularly devoted resources to building relations with their militaries. Among other cabinet departments it was pretty hard to get that kind of attention or participation from senior officials.

Q: Let's talk about the states themselves. I'd like to begin with something that at least occurs to me as a trouble spot. Belarus. I mean you had not a benign ruler there

COLLINS: Well, not quite the case. At the beginning we began our relations working with Mr. Shushkevich. He had been one of the signatories of the agreement with Kravchuk and Yeltsin that brought the USSR to its end. He was the first president of Belarus and a reasonably liberal democrat. His tenure saw the beginning of our relations and the early stages of negotiations to remove strategic missiles and warheads from

Belarus as part of our effort to ensure Belarus became a non-nuclear state. But it was also the case that Shushkevich, like his counterpart's in the other new states, presided over a catastrophic economic collapse, profound socio-economic upheaval and dislocation, and governed a nation that had become independent so far as it seemed from Moscow at the time as much by default as design. The shock of the Soviet collapse and its aftermath brought a reaction against those conditions and the direction the president was taking the country. Shushskevich lost the presidency to Aleksandr Lukashenko in mid-1994 in an election that was judged mostly open and fair. It was in a way the opposite outcome from what happened in Moscow in 1993.

Lukashenko's election was a shock to us even though we knew Shushevich was in trouble. Lukashenko was mostly an unknown politician and during this early period something of an anomaly. He was certainly of the Soviet era, made his career as a collective farm director, and was a world apart from Shushkevich. But there was also little early indication he was destined to emerge as the dictator/strongman he would become. He was a political newcomer, did not have the kind of authority he would attain later, and did not seem that strongly in control. In our early dealings we worked with him successfully to remove Belarus' nuclear weapons and engaged him, for example, at the Budapest OSCE summit as one of the new NIS leaders. We also knew many of the people in the Belarusian military and political elite that at this stage were still active and influential, and they gave us no real sense of alarm.

The evolution of Lukashenko's rule toward authoritarianism took time. It's important to recall that at this time nearly all of the former Soviet states, including Russia as well as Belarus, are beyond the first euphoria of independence and end to what was most disliked about Soviet rule. Now the time of harsh reality – economic depression, unemployment, collapse of the social safety net, political chaos etc. – are generating opposition, frustration, and unrest. We have had the October, 1993 effort to challenge Yeltsin in Russia. Ukraine's president Kracvhuk has been voted out of office in July 1994.

In Belarus much the same dynamic brought Lukashenko to power. He was an alternative to those associated with the collapse and sense of helpless frustration. He promised to return what people yearned for from the past. His policies in general were to restore, return, and revive. The last thing he suggested was innovation and reform. We used to say he was trying to create a Soviet theme park. And in many ways he was successful. But, in this period he certainly seemed less than impressive or representing the kind of authoritarian heavy-handed ruler he would become later. So it was this rather tentative, often seemingly unsure leader I met several times in the period form '94 through mid '97. And it was Lukashenko who, from the U.S. perspective, was a partner in our most important policy achievement of the period, the establishment of Belarus as a non-nuclear weapons state.

Q: Well what about Ukraine? I would think the Soviet Union would never come back without Ukraine. It was such a big vital part of it.

COLLINS: From the outset and on through to today Ukraine has had two or three characteristics that were terribly important in determining the way we would conduct our relations with that country and how it would develop its international position and relations with neighbors. First among all was the relationship and links to Russia and its past. Ukraine as Ukraine had been a part of the Russian empire for 400 years. But even more significantly in many ways the region including its capital was in some sense in the eyes and minds of most Russians the home of Russian culture and identity as a people and nation. The first eastern Slavic empire Rus started in Kiev and Moscow traced its lineage to that beginning. So from the beginning in 1991, there was a complex, psychologically difficult issue about Ukraine-Russian relations on all sides. Most simply put, many Russians simply saw Ukrainian independence as a blow to Russian identity and fragmentation of their culture. Ukrainians saw independence as the final realization of a nationalist dream that would give their culture, language, and people a chance to flourish outside the dominance of Russia.

The second problem for Ukraine came from internal divisions. It had regions and people with different historical backgrounds. Ukrainian borders had shifted over the twentieth century and as they emerged in '90-'91 reflected what had happened after World War I and the settlement of WWII. That settlement incorporated significant territories from pre-War Poland and smaller territories from Czechoslovakia and Romania. In the East was historic Ukraine, the part that had for centuries been part of the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union. Finally there was Crimea, a territory incorporated into the Russian Empire by Catherine the Great and given to Ukraine by Khrushchev in 1954 to mark the 400th anniversary of Ukraine's inclusion into the Russian empire. So the definition of Ukraine itself, the identity of Ukraine was by no means an obvious or simple matter and has remained a challenge for its leaders from the beginning. It suffered from divisions that pitted Ukrainian against Ukrainian and Russian speaking regions against the Ukrainian regions to the West, and Church against Church. From the beginning, Ukraine had challenges of self-identity that carried almost existential implications for building a new nation state.

Third was the question of where does the new Ukraine belong. What does Ukraine want to be. Does it want to look west to Europe? Does it want to look East? The fact was that in this early period, no consensus on the question existed, and because the nation sat between East and West it had to deal almost daily with the implications of its geography and its past. It meant, if nothing else, the relationship between Ukraine and Russia was difficult. It began as what amounted to a family divorce kind of relationship, where one spouse has moved out but without settling the issues of property, who gets the kids, or what provisions will govern the economic future of relations.

From the standpoint of U.S. policy, these issues were complicating and troublesome. There was no question that the United States supported Ukraine's independence without reservation. We also worked to achieve and stood behind arrangements between Russia and Ukraine we felt were vital to our mutual interests. Initially this had centered on the problem of dismantling the Ukraine based arsenal of missiles and nuclear warheads in a way that would not compromise Ukraine's security but would secure Ukraine's status as

a non-nuclear weapons state. Negotiating that outcome took two or three years. It was done; it was successful; but it was almost certainly the most demanding negotiation I had any hand in during this period. As the negotiations unfolded we, the Americans, were constantly in the middle. We were ever working to prevent other issues from thwarting agreement on the key goal or diverting us away from finding answers to a negotiated outcome for the issue on its own merits. We were constantly pulling the sides back to focus on the priority from arguments about everything from property settlements to what was the responsibility of Ukraine vis-a-vis Russia for the Soviet debt or the division of Soviet property overseas. It literally was a divorce proceeding and I came to know why I had never contemplated getting involved in a divorce case. It was clear being the marriage counselor was not easy,

Q: Did you have to deal with the Black Sea Fleet?

COLLINS: Yes, as we discussed earlier. The Black Sea fleet and its basing in Sevastopol was one of the issues we had to deal with. It seemed to me that when Ukrainians and Russians ended up in a room together, it was a prescription for deadlock; nothing happened. You needed a third party for almost any issue or you got nowhere. We were dealing with a profoundly dysfunctional relationship. In stepping into this breach America did a huge service for both parties by getting them through some of these seemingly insoluble issues and by preventing permanent or avoidable damage. It was an example of political courage from many leaders in Washington because it meant holding to a course that was frequently at odds with elements in America's Ukrainian community that sought support for Ukraine on nearly all issues against Russian positions. Indeed it was just this kind of issue that challenged the premise put forth by the supporters of the Freedom Support Act whom we discussed earlier. This was the alternative argument that equated new Russia with the USSR and Russia with the oppressor of colonial dependencies as opposed to the argument that the USSR and communism were defeated by the people of the entire USSR. That division remained a political problem in Washington. It was going to become more divisive in the future.

Q: What about this very peculiar situation in Moldova? There you have a cohabitation with a Soviet military unit sitting on a hunk of a country and ruling it essentially and a new state government insisting on its sovereignty and territorial integrity but unable to enforce its authority. .

COLLINS: We've discussed the almost miraculous breakup of the USSR without real violence, and I continue to believe it was one of the great accomplishments of leaders like Yeltsin, Kravchuk, Nazarbayev, et al. But it is also the case that there were exceptions where violence and conflict accompanied attempts to settle old scores, establish agreed borders, determine who would be in charge in the new states, and what would happen to minority ethnic and/or linguistic populations. Moldova was the victim of one of the unresolved conflicts. The conflict arose between the part of Moldova that had formerly been part of Romania before WWII (Bessarabia) on the west side of the Dniester River, and the part of Moldova that had earlier been part of Ukraine before the end of the War (Transnistria). The division was complex and involved linguistic differences – the East

part was predominantly Romanian or Moldovan speaking and Transnistria was majority Russian/Ukrainian speaking. The division was historical as well with the West associated historically with Romania and the East with Ukraine. And finally the presence of the Soviet 14th Army in Transnistria further complicated the politics and allegiances of the two parts of the population.

As the USSR began to unravel, the weakening control of Moscow over the republic brought actions by leaders in Chisinau to define their country's identity using the Romanian heritage and language with the result of open and mounting opposition from the East. Transnistrians openly challenged the government's actions and proclaimed their own government in Tiraspol setting the stage for open conflict which brought the first clashes in 1990 of what would become the still unresolved civil war. Fighting continued on and off but with growing intensity until a cease fire in 1992 overseen by the OSCE, a condition that remained largely unchanged for the rest of the decade.

I had dealt with the Moldova conflict as one of the facets of the Soviet breakup through my departure in 1993, and when I returned to Washington I was involved with the conflict for the next four years. As I returned to Washington the fighting had been brought to an end by the Russian/CIS establishment. The country was divided by the Dniester River. The Russian military as successor to the Soviet forces claimed responsibility for the 14th Army force and its weapons stockpile in Transnistria, and that region while formally part of the new state of Moldova essentially acted like an autonomous, independent region. It evolved and developed its independent existence from that point on.

Q: Happily selling their equipment.

COLLINS: Selling their equipment, engaged in many other questionable kinds of transactions, and remaining an issue on the U.S.-Russia agenda. But, for my time in Washington, I think it fair to say, our priority policy objectives for Moldova were two: prevent any revival of open warfare between the country's two parts and support the development of Moldova as a sovereign, independent state. With regard to the first, keep in mind that in mid-90s we are not that far from the open fighting. The presence of the Russian military was still substantially greater than it became later, and the tensions between the two parts remained serious. At the same time, the conflict had not entered that state we have come to call frozen either. There was a continuing idea that diplomacy could find a resolution of the division. The challenge was seen as bringing the Russians and Ukrainians and Moldavians all to agreement on terms. There were active efforts to promote that outcome, either through OSCE or through European allies or through our own efforts. But success remained elusive and the state of division moved ever closer to permanence and frozen status despite the best diplomatic efforts.

At the same time, my staff were heavily engaged in supporting Moldova's development. We had established our embassy in Chisinau, by early 1994 had an ambassador in place, and were developing relations across the range of issues we were pursuing with the other New States. One key element in this effort was support and diplomacy aimed at building

ties between Moldova and European and international institutions, encouraging their participation in Partnership for Peace, joining the European Parliament, becoming members of the UN, etc. We saw these goals - almost completely achieved by the time I completed my tour in NIS - as fundamental to establishing the position of states like Moldova as full members of the international community and European family. For Moldova this process has continued to develop seeing ever closer ties to institutions such as the EU even as the country maintains its relations with Moscow and keeps the peace at home.

We were involved with Moldova in developing governmental institutions as well. We provided assistance as the government developed its national army, ministry of foreign affairs, central bank and market economic institutions. I suspect in this regard it is fair to say we were more effective in helping Moldovans establish their government than we were in getting a resolution to the conflict between the two banks of the river. Moldova has become a viable nation and is well launched, but the conflict remains the one unfinished dimension of the country's future that remains entangled with questions far larger than domestic Moldovan issues. It was one of the issues I felt most frustrated in dealing with and remains a failure for all who have tried to tackle its roots. Perhaps the one consolation was our ability to have the OSCE take responsibility for keeping the peace. That has at least been successful.

Q: Sure. What about the Baltic countries, Latvia, Estonia, and Lithuania? How did they fit in with what you are discussing regarding New Independent States? They had a different history.

COLLINS: Very true. The three Baltic nations had become independent of Russia following World War I. They were independent states on the eve of World War II, suffered first Soviet and then Nazi occupation following the Molotov Ribbentrop Pact in 1939 and war, and then came again under Soviet control as a result of the Nazi defeat in 1945. The United States Government never recognized the incorporation of the three Baltic states into the Soviet Union even as they were governed de facto as republics of the Soviet Union after the War. It was also the case, though, that even as the USSR brought the three states under their authority, they always had something of a different standing. In the minds of most Soviet citizens I knew they were seen as almost western and somehow different from the other republics.

So, with the Soviet breakup we didn't have to recognize the independence of these three states the way we did with the "new" states. We simply resumed the conduct of diplomatic relations with the governments in Vilnius, Riga and Tallinn. We didn't even have to establish those relations because we had never broken diplomatic ties with what we considered the representatives of the three legitimate governments of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania.

Q: I assume some of the resident geriatric representatives here in Washington were replaced?.

COLLINS: Yes, and we very early on sent people to Vilnius, Riga, and Tallinn. Again they reopened our missions and established our presence quickly. It was also the case that unlike the other New States, the Baltic nations were picked up as part of the Bureau of European Affairs, and so were never part of the portfolio for the Ambassador-at-Large. These states had an additional element of unique support that brought them special attention from Europe, support that was at least as important if not more so than the American role. That came from the Scandinavian countries. The Finns, the Swedes, the Danes, Norwegians all took a very strong interest in the development, security and re-Euroization of the three and were constant sources of practical and steady support for each of them. America in a number of ways, also became a key source of support, not least via the return home to their former nations of many American residents who would rise to prominence in the three states as leaders and the rebuilders of the economies and institutions in all three nations.

Now, as I said, from the beginning of their return to independence these three nations were accepted as a part of the European family by the U.S. Bureaucratically they were kept under the wing of the Bureau of European Affairs at State and became part of the European family in other agencies of the U.S. Government. Their assistance programs were funded from the SEED Act rather than the Freedom Support Act. But, at the same time my office and the NIS family had at least three policy issues that involved us in Baltic matters. First, Washington played a particularly essential role in seeing through the withdrawal of Russian (former Soviet) forces from the Baltic states where they had been stationed since the World War II. I recall that no issue was more fraught in stabilizing Russia's relations with its former Baltic neighbors than this, and what was involved was essentially provision of a place to return for the withdrawn Russian forces that had no ready base facilities or housing in Russia. The U.S. role in finding both a formula to pay for these facilities and in buying the time necessary to provide for an orderly withdrawal occupied a great deal of effort at very senior levels.

A second and in some cases related issue that complicated our Russia relations sprang from the fate of the Russian speaking population that remained in the Baltic states. This minority, much of which had known no other home, became a minority in states determined to recapture their national identity, language, and sovereignty. For our relations with Moscow, the rights of these minorities became a complex and troubled issue as both Russian nationalists and those in the states aggrieved by their treatment at the hands of the majority in the new states brought a seemingly never ending agenda of issues that put Washington in a difficult position.

Nevertheless, our approach to these states had a different quality and significance than that we brought to the other NIS. Washington simply accepted the Baltic states as a part of Europe. They were seen as reassuming their rightful position just as states of East Central Europe. In this sense the three presented a different set of issues than the new states such as Ukraine. Even in the case of Russia, it seemed to me, the Baltics never raised the same issues of East versus West identity that we came to see with the New Independent States.

Q: Let me turn to the Caucasus. This region has a history with Russia, and not always an easy one. Did problems in the Caucasus cause any difficulty during this particular period?

COLLINS: Well, this region always placed high on our agenda and on Russia's. It had strategic location, it was a major oil producing region, and the U.S. Armenian-American diaspora gave their newly independent homeland a special place on our radar screen. It was also a region with complex and difficult problems from the outset. It's probably important to start with some historical background.

As I think I noted earlier the Soviet republics south of the Caucasus Mountains became the independent nations of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia in 1991. In this regard they differed from their neighbors on the other side of the hills, the Chechen, Dagestanis, Ingush and others whose territories remained a part of the Russian Federation. But the peoples on both sides of the mountains shared a common feature in having a volatile mix of ethnic groups that made development of statehood and issues of national identity difficult and fraught. Furthermore, in each case as early as the end of the 1980s all three republics were beset with outbreaks of violence, rising nationalism and divisions among ethnic majority and minority peoples, These issues created a witches brew of tension and instability at the very time Moscow was least able to manage the problem, and events surrounding each republic's drive for independence unleashed or intensified historical ethnic enmities As the Union broke up, these forces only accelerated and grew in intensity, and in a more parochial sense, laid the foundation for some of the most difficult issues we faced in the region and in our future relations with Moscow.

For U.S. relations with Moscow, realities on the ground challenged the fundamental, if simple and straight forward principles behind American policy and our strategic approach to the region. Here our policy of recognizing as the new national boundaries in Eurasia the boundaries of the Soviet Republics defined by the Soviet constitution and Soviet law at the end of 1991 meant sooner or later putting established policy up against movements by a variety of minorities for national self-determination. Only in the Baltic states whose incorporation into the USSR the U.S. had never recognized, were these issues never problematic for Washington. In the event for much of the decade of the nineties the rise of nationalism and demands for greater recognition by minorities within the new states became a particular challenge for Washington's relations with the newly established governments in the region, in particular with Russia and the Caucasus states.

Azerbaijan and Armenia were engaged in an ongoing military conflict over the region of Nagorno-Karakakh. By 1991 the war had put that territory as well as a significant part of western Azerbaijan under Armenian control, created a large refugee problem for Baku, and remained a festering conflict that continuously threatened to escalate into broader warfare.

In Georgia, the dissolutions of the Soviet Union sparked conflicts that left two regions of the Soviet Georgian Republic outside the control of the Georgia national government but within the internationally recognized borders of the new state. The origin of the problems

stemmed from the Soviet era when Abkhazia and South Ossetia had autonomous status within the Georgian Soviet republic. As independence loomed in 1991, Zviad Gamsakurdia, Georgia's nationalist leader and first president after independence moved to centralize authority over both regions. The resulting resistance by the populations of both territories brought open warfare that included Russian backing for the insurgents. The subsequent defeat for Tbilisi set the stage for a further unresolved conflict in the South Caucasus as a cease fire left both regions de facto beyond the control of the Georgian government, saddled Tbilisi with a major refugee problem, and left the status of Georgia's borders in question.

For Washington, each of these situations, better known as unresolved or frozen conflicts, presented ongoing challenges. For one, we had recognized borders of all three states that were in dispute and unsettled at the moment of independence. For another, the continuous threat that these unresolved conflicts at any point might turn from stasis to open conflict meant U.S. interests in the region were under constant threat. And finally, the unresolved conflicts provided unwelcome and, from our point of view, challenging opportunities for Russian meddling in the region along with the possibility of a NATO ally Turkey becoming involved in the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict. In sum, this was a region where a number of U.S. interests intersected that demanded regular attention.

Q: Let's start with Karabakh. What did you do? I mean, you know, actually do?

COLLINS: Well first of all by the time I returned to Washington, international efforts had managed to bring the Karabakh fighting to a halt, achieved a cease fire, and created a framework for negotiation of a settlement of the conflict. At a 1992 meeting of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (later the OSCE) the Chairman in Office was tasked to convene a conference on Nagorno-Karabakh in Minsk. That forum, while it never actually met in Minsk, nonetheless did give rise to the "Minsk Group," tasked with leading efforts to negotiate a settlement of the conflict and secure the cease fire in the meantime. Representatives from the U.S., Russia and France were asked to lead the group and their representatives henceforth became the OSCE's ongoing vehicle for efforts to promote a settlement of the Karabakh conflict. While I briefly served as our representative in that forum, once I became Ambassador-at-Large our lead representative there was Ambassador Joe Presel, who did yeoman work promoting the search for a formula to settle the conflict.

It was a frustrating portfolio. There were times we seemed to achieve considerable progress. Our Russian and French colleagues contributed to building support for positions between the parties and in the early '90s and mid '90s very substantial efforts engaged both the Armenian and Azerbaijani presidents, their foreign ministers and indirectly representatives of Karabakh in defining approaches to a deal and work up the outlines of what a peace settlement was going to look like It was a tedious, often frustrating process, but at one point we had got close enough that I thought it justified engaging the President. But….

The problem always had been getting the political leaders to agree to what their diplomats had been able to accept, because the actual elements of a settlement sooner or later came up against the question of whether the political leaders would make the compromises necessary to close the deal. We thought that there was a substantial prospect to get a deal and so we asked President Clinton to meet President Aliyev in New York at the United Nations - I think it was in 1995. We believed Aliyev, with a prospect of deeper U.S. relations and support, could be brought to support a compromise. And as Aliyev left New York we thought there we had a real prospect for success. It just never materialized. And it didn't materialize for the most part because Aliyev went home and we got word back he couldn't bring his leadership to carry through on the move. In other cases, we seemed closer to a deal and the Armenians or Karabakhis couldn't move. It was one of these classic cases in which I think the Minsk Group diplomats were able to keep the cease fire alive, narrow differences about what a deal could look like, but just could not get the political will from the two sides to close the agreement.

Q: Okay but as they worked on this, was there sort of the thing where, okay, we can't get a deal but we've got a deal? In other words, were basically accepting conclusions but we can't sign something?

COLLINS: Well yes, I think, in fact, jumping ahead we did get close to that situation. After my time in the early 2000s the Bush Administration convened a major meeting in Florida where all concerned basically had the outlines of a comprehensive settlement drawn up and ready. There was, as I understood it, widespread agreement, but they just could not get it across the finish line. The leaderships of Armenia and Azerbaijan just would not make the political deal to sign.

Q: Well but, okay, it didn't get across the finish line officially but sort of unofficially were things happening?

COLLINS: Well. I think the Minsk Group's efforts were essential in exploring and presenting ideas about how to resolve the divisions between the parties. How does one square the circle between a region belonging by international law to a sovereign nation and the demand of the population there to self determination, for instance? I also believe the Minsk process remained essential as a guarantor and protector of the cease fire. For a long period, and indeed still, in that sense the Minsk process or the diplomacy of the Minsk Group and the work done under its auspices did have a number of successes. We did not have another war, and in the circumstances that was an accomplishment.

Q: Yes.

COLLINS: At the same time, these efforts have not successfully addressed the core root issues that are there, competing claims over a piece of real estate; populations that have grown estranged and are dehumanizing one another and frankly giving political elites in both countries a conflict to exploit for their own political purposes. It's quite tragic. During most of the 20th century the peoples in this region actually lived together without major difficulty, but the war has now polarized both sides and left a generation of people

bitterly divided. Their leaders and others who have fanned the conflict have a lot to answer for.

Q: Right. I spent five years in Yugoslavia back in the '60s and the same thing is happening. How about with Georgia?

COLLINS: Well Georgia is another country in which boundaries shifted and different people prevailed over others at different times. Under the Stalinist constitution adopted in the '30s, the Soviet Georgian Republic combined Georgia proper with its Georgian speaking majority population with neighboring areas that had substantial non-Georgian populations-- Abkhazians, on the Black Sea coast, Ossetians, on the southern slopes of the Caucasus Mountains, and an Armenian minority on the border with Armenia. As the Soviet Union broke up the authorities and bonds that kept these elements together frayed. As Georgia took greater control of its affairs from Moscow, its leaders tried to assert stronger direct authority over its regions. Abkhazian and Ossetian minorities were resisting these efforts by the government in Tbilisi to the point that open conflict broke out resulting in Georgia's de fact loss of control over both territories. The situation was further complicated by the interference of Russian elements in the fighting.

As with the Karabakh conflict, this presented Washington with another dilemma. Did we support keeping the borders of the former Soviet republics unchanged? Did we support the demand of two minorities for self-determination? It was additionally complicated by the fact that there was no question Russian elements had been involved in support of the resistance groups raising the question of Russian intentions regarding its new neighbors, their independence and territorial integrity. So our relations with Georgia from the outset are burdened by two significant issues: first a major irredentist problem and second ever-present tension between Georgia and Russia. It involves us in inter-ethnic conflicts, the fight over self-determination versus territorial integrity, and in this case the additional problem of almost unending problems with Moscow. For my time in the nineties, our problems focused on dealing with the immediate aftermath of the open conflict. That meant first of all keeping the peace and preventing further conflict and second, the ultimate status of these territories.

Q: I mean look at it as the ambassador in Moscow, did you see this really as the Russians trying to destabilize a new neighbor, or were they basically called in because it was an unstable situation?

COLLINS: Well there wasn't any question that Russians had been involved in the conflict. It was not always clear just who the Russians involved represented or where the orders were coming from. This is a very chaotic time in Russia and there's no question that there were elements of the Russian security and military establishment involved. It was also the case that any number of elements in the Yeltsin opposition hated Shevardnadze, who had only recently moved to Tbilisi to take on the presidency at the invitation of the Georgian parliament.

In any event, as I returned to Washington, the issues we faced essentially came down to finding a way to preserve the tenuous ceasefire that had halted the second round of fighting in the area following the rout of Georgian forces by the Abkhazians and putting it on a more stable basis. The UN had established an Observer mission to police the first ceasefire and now with agreement on the second cease fire, the question became support for a stronger observer force. In this context, I have to say, I was disappointed in the role America played. Decisions about what involvement we might have in a peacekeeping/observer mission were debated against the background of the traumatic experience we had in Somalia. One option on the table was a proposal to establish a much beefed up UN force that would have required significant U.S. logistical support. The Russians at that time were actually willing, and I remember this very specifically, were willing to have a UN blue helmeted force go into Abkhazia. In the end, we declined to commit to supply the support the UN needed. I remember very well hearing various reasons: we did not want to become involved: this would over extend us: our military didn't have adequate capacity to support a UN force. So, instead what we got was a small UN observer force but the peacekeeping was delegated to a CIS force led by the Russians. I have always thought that decision could have been different and established the critical precedent that peacekeeping in this region was an international UN matter and not a matter for Russia and its allies only. Had the Americans stood up at that moment and said, okay, we will support the peacekeeping operation, it might have given us a greater voice in the way events in the area played out

Q: We just didn't want to get involved?

COLLINS: We didn't want to get involved. We didn't want to undertake another peacekeeping commitment. And I think that was basically a mistake. I mean in the long term I think it was costly.

Q: What about Chechnya and the North Caucasus? This area was part of Russia. Tolstoy, Lermontov and others wrote about this didn't they? It was Russia's wild west. How did all this fit in with what others were doing in Russia? Were there other efforts to get independence?

COLLINS: At the end of the Soviet period the Russian Federation was seen by a lot of people as a fragile institution. There was a lot of talk about whether it would hold together; would the far east stay part of the Federation or would it go off on its own direction. What would happen to other regions in the North Caucasus, What about the Muslim Republics (Tatarstan and Bashkortostan) in the middle of the country. It was a particularly uncertain time, and having the Chechens pushing the extreme outcome of disintegration made Grozny a special issue, something of a bellwether.
The norm for this time involved Moscow making arrangements with regional leaders to hold the Federation together. Yeltsin's government was negotiating individual agreements with Governors in Oblasts, Presidents of constituent republics like Tatarstan, leaders of other regions with special status within the Federation. In a sense almost all individually negotiated the terms of their arrangement with the greater whole on an individual basis. In fact in some cases there were treaties between constituent parts of the

Russian Federation and the central government covering the kind of relations that would exist between the center and the province down to the issue of what language would have official status for example.

But the situation with Chechnya remained an outlier. The Chechens from the outset didn't buy into this process. They stuck with their demand for independence from Russia. Their leader, Dzhokhar Dudayev, had been a Soviet paratroop commander in the Baltics during the breakup of the Soviet Union, and I assume that he took home lessons from what he watched happen in the Baltic states as they successfully pressed their cause for independence. In any case when he returned home to Grozny he began to reject Moscow's authority and proclaimed independence. Moscow, with much else on its hands at this early stage did little to counter Dudayev's claims, and Chechnya gradually devolves de facto out of Moscow's control. More troublesome, it also becomes semi-lawless and the source of problems for its neighboring provinces and regions. There were kidnappings raids outside of Chechnya by bands of thugs that unsettled the broader region and challenged Moscow's authority openly. So, in late '93 and early '94 pressures on Moscow were mounting to do something about Chechnya, and Yeltsin made various efforts to deal with the problem from negotiations to employing security authorities and police. None of those efforts produced results, and Yeltsin was under increasing pressure from local governors in the region to get the situation under control. In the end after one particularly egregious raid by Chechens outside the republic, he turned to the military. The Minister of Defense Grachev reportedly assured him., "I can take care of this in a couple of weeks." The result, though, was the beginning of the disastrous first Chechen war in '94 that became a bloody disaster for Moscow, ended with what amounted to a draw from which Dudayev emerged with his people unbowed, and a cease fire that left the issues that began the struggle unresolved.

Q: Did we take any sides or get involved in this.

COLLINS: Well I think this is one of the less appealing moments of American policy in the sense that our approach often lacked creativity and a clear sense of what we were after. When the war broke out it was really not that bloody. I was back in Washington then. But within weeks it had turned into a tragedy. The Russian military which said they could deal with it in two weeks got their hat handed to them. What began was a long, protracted, gruesome war in which the Russian military was doing to Grozny and Chechnya what they did to Berlin in 1945, basically just killing people indiscriminately and destroying a city. The Chechens themselves were no less brutal and indiscriminate in their violence. It was a bloody, ruthless human disaster.

My sense was the best thing we could do for all concerned and to serve our interests was to get the fighting stopped, find some way to get the parties talking. There was a strong moral repugnance in Washington to what the Russian military was doing to Chechnya and its people. I was worried that we might see the issue develop as a divisive issue that could sour relations with Moscow. I also saw trouble for our bilateral relations with Moscow if Chechnya was turned into a U.S.-Russia issue. So, I pushed very hard for us to engage the OSCE in efforts to halt the fighting. That was a success. OSCE became

extremely effective as an intermediary in working out a cease fire and stabilizing the situation on the ground.

I also want to credit our own leadership for backing the OSCE effort. OSCE was generally not seen as a particularly effective instrument for U.S. policy. But in this case our priorities were on getting the fighting stopped and ending the bloodshed. I also found support for my view that the last thing we wanted was to make Chechnya an American-Russian issue. Using OSCE was a way to that end as we managed to internationalize bringing the fighting to a halt.

That worked. We had a cease fire, the OSCE went in and the peace was kept for a critical period. It was also true that a cease fire didn't end the conflict or resolve the issue that brought it. Russia never really recovered authority in Chechnya, nor did Chechens achieve their independence: the issue was left to fester until a later time when Yeltsin having turned to Putin, opens the way to the second round at the end of his presidency. But, I would say that as a way to bring the early confrontation to a halt our approach was a success and we bought time, time that unfortunately was not used to resolve the fundamental issues that caused the first war.

When we get to the second war at the end of the nineties a great deal has changed. I am in Moscow as ambassador. Relations between Russia and the U.S. have entered a more difficult and complex period. We have been through the economic collapse of 1998, the Kosovo crises, the early stages of our political campaign in the U.S. The "who lost Russia?' idea that gained currency as politics heated up at home has eroded bipartisanship over Russia policy, and Russia itself is in the process of beginning a transition of power. A new figure, Vladimir Putin, a former head of the Security Service becomes prime minister and the probable successor to Boris Yeltsin. Against this backdrop the brutality and seeming inhumanity that quickly became the defining feature of the second Chechen war made it much more difficult to manage as an issue in our relations.

Q: Jim, it's the mid- 90s. Was oil an issue at that time?

COLLINS: It certainly becomes such. It is a period when there was a lot of uncertainty about the security of global supply, and our companies were looking around for secure places to get oil. The opening up of Eurasia provided new possibilities, and despite all the uncertainties of the time in the region, by comparison with some of the other possibilities it was an attractive possibility. So, one of the most interesting things in my time in Washington was the emergence of energy as a central element in policy toward the region.

The USSR, of course, had been a major oil and gas producer for much of the twentieth century. And it had created a complex network of pipelines for oil and natural gas both for domestic consumption as well as export. We might recall here the great debate about Europe becoming dependent on Soviet natural gas in the 1980s to recall the importance we attached to the sector's strategic importance. So it is not surprising that with the

breakup of the USSR the region's energy resources drew a lot of attention. Russia, of course, even after the breakup, retained the largest resource base for oil and gas in the NIS. And, significantly, it also retained control of nearly all the core elements of the former national pipeline system giving Moscow significant leverage over the possibility for export by nearly all the other new neighbors. At the same time, oil and gas become especially relevant for Azerbaijan and for Kazakhstan and for Turkmenistan as a major source of natural gas.

I found myself enmeshed in the issues this sector presented us almost from the beginning of my time as Ambassador-at-Large. It came to the fore during my first trip to the Caucasus when I visited Azerbaijan. Haidar Aliyev, formerly the Communist Party First Secretary in the Azerbaijan SSR in Soviet times, had consolidated power after ousting the country's first post-Soviet democratically elected president and a period of some turmoil. Now in early '94 he was at a point of making a decision about how he would approach the future development of his country's major resource, oil. You may remember that Azerbaijan was among the world's first big oil producers and was the biggest competitor to Pennsylvania in the 19th and early 20th century. It had been the main Soviet oil production region until the Soviets opened up Western Siberia in the 60s. So oil and gas were Azerbaijan's wealth, and it was endowed with that resource in a way to make it a global player.

Aliyev was someone who understood power and who thought strategically As I assessed our first encounters I came to believe that we met first at the point where he was trying to decide how he would approach exploiting this resource for the country's and his maximum advantage. I think the central question for him was what kind of a role outsiders other than Russia should have in the sector's development and who did he want to have playing that role. To what extent did he want to keep the Russian connection? What if any role did he want the West to play.

My first visit to Azerbaijan turned out to be a moment for him to assess what might be possible with Americans. The visit became a long discussion to help him discover and evaluate the American view of Azerbaijan, our position on various issues, most importantly the Nagorno Karabakh conflict, what America would think regarding developing economic ties with Azerbaijan, etc. After this visit and during the next year or so, it became clear Aliyev had made the decision that he was going to go with the Americans and with the western major oil companies to develop Azerbaijan's energy resources and to find a way to extricate Azerbaijan from its exclusive dependence on Soviet era, Russia-centric infrastructure. He wasn't going to cut off relations with Russia, but he wanted to develop options. Now what else he had in mind I don't know but he clearly decided he could work with the western companies after this visit. So it turned out our Baku stop on that trip had consequences, certainly more so than I suspect any of us thought at the time.

What we all recalled was that it was an unusual visit, and I remember it very vividly. I had flown in. I mentioned, I think, I was traveling with people like Ash Carter, Joe Presel and so on. Richard Kauzlarich was our ambassador. We had our own plane in order to get

around that part of the world at that time because it was almost impossible to do so commercially. We had landed in Baku in the afternoon, and I had a couple of hours in a hotel to take a shower and get myself ready to go for a first meeting with the President which was set for around five or six o'clock in the evening. We had all just flown over the ocean and were not exactly in the greatest shape, but I thought OK we are going to have a preliminary meeting with Aliyev and a couple of his advisors which is what we had been led to believe. Instead, on arrival at the President's offices I and my colleagues walked naively through a door into a huge room arranged for a much different kind of first encounter. At the midpoint of a table as long as any I had seen sat the President flanked on each side by a dozen or more officials that I learned made up nearly the entire Azerbaijani government: to complete the scene, television cameras were positioned on both ends. We were indeed going to have a discussion, but it was not the one I had prepared for.

Well, we got through it OK. I had a mantra that I was using about American support of the sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence of our new friends and about our hope to establish close relations with Azerbaijan, etc. I made the point that we were in Baku to explore how we can do that, and that I was proud to be a partner looking forward to helping and working with Azerbaijan to take the place it deserved in the international community. So that discussion ended, it seemed, successfully and so far as we could tell there hadn't been any horrendous gaffes.

But this was just the beginning. Following the meeting we went to a dinner hosted by Aliyev at the state guest house. It started out where we had a glass of wine and then went up to dinner. At the table were only Aliyev, a few of his closest colleagues and my small party. So we sat down and started the dinner. I fortuitously decided I would drink cognac that night rather than vodka, and I think by the end of dinner and all the toasts I had consumed about half a bottle of cognac. Around 10:00 when I thought we might be nearing the evening's end, we all joined the President in getting up from the table, and he said, "Let's go downstairs to my 'club' " which turned out to be a strange place in the basement of the guest house, something of a Disneyland cave and grotto with glass stalactites and with logs and stumps for seats. So my party and Aliyev alone spent more time down there drinking and talking policy, personal likes and dislikes, American interests, etc. It was all rather surreal, and Aliyev was very flattering to the ladies in the party. Then, he said to me, "OK, let's go have a talk." So, we went upstairs and for another 1-1½ hours, until midnight or 12:30, in the morning (that's 4:30 p.m. the previous day in Washington) we drank and talked about almost anything you can think of from horses to American cars to oil technology.

Q: You must have been exhausted.

COLLINS: Well yes, but I was still going . I think in a strange sort of way it was his test about whether I was serious, somebody with whom he could do business.

Q: Well that is the Russian way.

COLLINS: Yes very much so I think. He did not drink me under the table. He did not find me saying different things when I had consumed a bottle and a quarter of cognac than when I had none etc. It established a rapport with him that I maintained throughout my subsequent time in Washington. I could always see him. He would always be generous with his time. I do think the visit was a turning point. It seemed to open the way for western majors to begin to make their move into Azerbaijan, and it set a new framework for U.S.-Azerbaijani relations. It was also an indication of how large our opportunities for developing these new relations had become.

Q: Well here we are talking about some of the things in diplomacy that often get overlooked. That at the diplomatic level there are relationships that are developed, maybe through all night drinking or what have you that really have an effect on the direction of relations.

COLLINS: I think that's right. I might say that on the same trip I had an analogous experience in Uzbekistan. Again, it was my first visit to Tashkent. I spent two plus days or so there. My host at that time was Foreign Minister Kamilov. Once again, I arrived as the first senior representative of the United States to visit the country and spend time getting to know the country's leaders. Strobe Talbott had been there a year before, but his trip had been brief: I was seen as the first senior American to come with time to discuss and explore our agenda.

In that visit I and my team spent a great deal of time with Mr. Kamilov. We talked a lot about different aspects of relations. They were very interested in what would be possible in security cooperation. So, I and my party met senior military people as well. But I also on that occasion had a serious and, I was told, very unusual meeting with President Karimov. Karimov had almost no dealings with Americans in the past. Our first encounter started as predicted and planned or at least as expected by the Foreign Minister. This meant a lengthy session with Karimov and his key people at which Karimov did most of the talking. It ended with the visitor - me - getting a highly decorated, traditional Uzbek robe from the hand of the President and accompanied by bows all around.

Our formal discussion had gone much the way it had in Baku. I discussed our interests in Uzbekistan, our support for their economic and security development, our interest in seeing regional cooperation in Central Asia, and our readiness to assist Uzbekistan develop its role as a member of the international community. So we went through all of the formalities and the ceremonials ending the session when one of the President's aides came up and said, "The president would like to spend some time with you alone." It was clear this too was unusual and not expected by the Foreign Minister or others. But when the President asks… So the two of us went down to the basement where Karimov had had a private office, and we spent about two hours alone talking about what was on his mind.

As with Aliyev, it was a discussion not about specific policy questions. We were talking about what he wanted Uzbekistan to become. What he would like to see from the Americans in terms of what it was he was trying to do. It was the kind of discussion you

don't normally have with presidents if you are an unknown foreign visitor. But it seemed to me Karimov wanted to express his hopes and ideas and see my reaction. There was no interpreter or note taker: we did it all in Russian. It was an unusual encounter. I left impressed with the fact that Karimov had a well-formed idea about what he wanted Uzbekistan become. It was clear he did not really understand what would be involved in making a market economy work or many aspects of development he would face. Nor did I come away with any illusions about his commitment to democracy. But he had a vision: what he said was, "I want Uzbekistan to be the center of Central Asia again. It always has been; it always was the place where all the mail came for distribution to the others, it was the place where the power grid's center was located, etc.". My response boiled down to saying, "Well, you know, Mr. President the world is changing. It may well be we won't even have mail in a decade. You are going to have to educate a broader base of your population to make the country function well for you and for its people; you will have to give them the tools of modern technology. You will have to embrace the new. Most of all you will have to involve more and more people in running the country and making decisions." It was my initial attempt to suggest he would have to open up Uzbek society and share more of the decisions about its future.

After that visit, I was able to see Karimov as needed, and I think he actually absorbed some of what we discussed. He began to engage the Americans in a lot of ways he hadn't before. When he came to Washington. I arranged a meeting with President Clinton which made a significant impression on him. So, in this period in many ways relations were going quite well. We were making reasonably good progress on military cooperation. There were also some positive moves on economic reform and a degree of opening up to the outside. But regrettably as the Afghan situation worsened and the Taliban came to be seen as a proximate threat, Karimov got scared. He started to pull back on reforms, clamp down on dissent in any form, and gave priority to establishing control. It was a disappointment.

Q: I know time is sort of running out, but maybe we could stop with Armenia. I was thinking of Glendale, California.

COLLINS: Well, as we've discussed, Armenia from the beginning was a challenging portfolio. It brought to the table a number of unique and complex issues of policy and politics. First was the activism and dedication of the Armenian diaspora in the U.S. What united this community was commitment to gaining recognition of what its ancestors had sacrificed at the hands of the Ottoman Empire and gaining recognition for what the community insisted was the first genocide. As new Armenia emerged this factor became a touchstone for U.S. policy toward Armenia, and it complicated relations with Turkey and Azerbaijan, one an ally and the other a key new partner state in the NIS.

This issue played itself out in two ways. Turkey, a NATO ally, sided with Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh, closed its border with Armenia in support of Baku, and refused to establish normal relations with Armenia. At the same time, Ankara took a hard line on the genocide issue refusing any effort to open the question or engage in discussion of recognition or legitimation of the claim regarding an Armenian genocide. The Armenian

community concurrently and in part in connection with its approach to Turkey sided strongly with Yerevan over Karabakh, pressing consistently for the U.S. to exert its influence over Azerbaijan in support of Armenia and the Karabakhis. And, finally, even as the Armenian community was united on these questions, political rivalries among and between factions in Armenia and their supporters within the U.S. community brought divided views about what objectives and policies the U.S. should support regarding Armenia's development, its political direction, and its international orientation.

So, for much of my time as Ambassador-at-Large I found our policy toward Armenia weighed down by the two issues unique to their circumstances and by having to deal with different factions regarding nearly any decisions or approaches Washington wanted to take. Our policy in my time on the genocide was to accord the term no official recognition even as we worked to encourage Armenian-Turkish engagement and discussion of the issue in support of finding a mutually acceptable path toward reconciliation. With regard to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, we worked, as discussed, to the extent possible through the Minsk Process to promote a negotiated settlement, prevent any resumption of hostilities, and provide international support for a peace agreement if attainable.

In candor, it was a frustrating and often almost maddening problem. Domestic politics in both countries used the issue in ways that frustrated hopes for dealing with issues on their merits. Emotional baggage from diasporas or those displaced by the conflict magnified differences and made compromise a challenge for all sides. And there were issues among the Minsk parties that often undermined a united position. On the U.S. side maintaining a credible capacity as impartial mediator was complicated as well by a congressional resolution limiting assistance to Azerbaijan and a strong element of support for the Armenian side on the Hill. So, after nearly four years of effort that included personal involvement by President Clinton, more than one attempt by international organizations like the OSCE or UN, and any number of initiatives by well meaning nongovernment actors, the conflict seemed more or less stuck at the same point it was when I arrived. If there was any good news, it was that the fighting never again broke out and the peacekeeping monitors managed occasional incidents.

Q: What is the solution?

COLLINS: Well the solution probably lies in finding a way that fudges the issue of sovereignty for both sides, provides the inhabitants of N-K with a substantial degree of self rule, returns other occupied Azerbaijani territories to Baku, and provides for normalized relations between Armenia and its neighbors. I fear, however, I am less than optimistic. Political will is lacking on all sides, and after any number of efforts by international players, it seems to me at this time that keeping the status quo is an outcome all can live with. Meantime, the Azerbaijanis are usually outclassed internationally but do have their oil and gas resources that keeps them on the agenda. The Armenians, because of the war and failure to resolve its outcome live with no open border to their largest neighbor Turkey, a major limitation on their economic position, It is closer to Russia than the other two and has ongoing relations with Iran that have raised issues from time to

time. But on balance our relations have been quite good. We have done in Armenia as we have done elsewhere, provided a variety of programming and assistance and worked with the government trying to insure healthy economic and political development under pretty difficult conditions. Armenia also has had a real challenge in that they have lost a sizable part of their population over the last 20 years.

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Q: Where did they go?

COLLINS: Largely to Russia, where there is a big Armenian diaspora. But a fairly large number also came to the States and Europe.

Q: This does raise a question. I am reading a book now, a detective story about police in Los Angeles. It talks about Armenian, Ukrainian, and Russian crooks. From what I gather a significant criminal element has come out of these places that had been trained during Soviet times. Did criminal activities get you involved?

COLLINS: This was a problem, but certainly neither unique nor even unusually linked to Armenia or the Caucasus. The emergence of criminality, including networks of organized crime emerged all across the post Soviet region. It was then and in many ways remains a serious challenge. As government authority across Eurasia broke down in the early post-Soviet period and the traditional system of controls and structure gave way, the result nearly everywhere was a free for all over who would own what, who could defend what was claimed, and who was in charge. As we've discussed a key result of the Soviet collapse was an end to the uncontested position of the communist defined elite and the opening of opportunity for those who had been kept down by the Soviet system - national minorities, women, etc. But criminal elements also gained a new space for action. Anyone who travelled to the USSR knew that the Soviet Union had a big black market system. It was part of the way the system worked to satisfy demands that were not officially being met otherwise. What was different in the Soviet system was that the market controlled by this element encompassed a far larger sphere of activity than it did in the West. It was not just things like fencing stolen goods, controlling prostitution, gambling, narcotics, etc. It ranged much further into the provision of what in the west were normal market goods and services (blue jeans, for example) that were not available in the established Soviet market or were in such short supply that illegal channels found a way to control their distribution and sale. When the Soviet command economy and its bureaucratically controlled allocation of goods and services gives way to an open market system, the community that had managed the black market was ready, understood the dynamics of supply and demand, and knew about pricing and money. They knew about buying and selling things, moving money, etc. So they emerged as one of the groups that prospered in the chaotic world of transition we lived in in the early nineties.

But in addition to the real issues the emergence of Russian organized crime presented to all of us, there was another dimension that complicated dealing with it. That had to do with defining criminal activity and differentiating it from what we in the West accept as the basic principles of legitimate business. The problem centered in how the average Russian citizen saw what was happening to their life and the system they had accepted

for decades. For example, Soviet citizens all had been brought up to think that profit was evil, and anyone who made a profit or who was in business was exploiting his fellow man. “Biznis” was an accepted Russian word, but it was more or less synonymous in meaning with words for black market or illegal trade. So “business” was not a positive thing in the popular mind, and yet all of a sudden people were plunged into a system that made legal and positive what just days earlier had been illegal and negative; it was the equivalent for most normal citizens of hearing that everything now would be allocated and decided according rules of “business”, i.e. the black market.. From the intelligentsia to the common man, it was the world turned upside down. Suddenly the whole economy was in the hands of crooks. Whether they were in legitimate business or prostitution they were “business.”

For the Americans in Russia working to explain the merits of the new system all this was a bit of a problem. On the one hand we were having to make the point that the turn to a market economy was NOT synonymous with turning Russia’s wealth, trade, and economy over to criminals and the black market. However, there was a reality that criminal groups did take advantage of the chaos to do what such groups always do; they went after the easy money. They got into all of the things that were traditional crooked endeavors like prostitution, drugs, money laundering, frauds, robberies, etc. But, they also got into legitimate businesses, because some of these were highly profitable as well. So, for much of this period, it wasn’t always clear what was legal and what was not; who belonged to the criminal and who belonged to the aggressive business entrepreneur class.

As I dealt with this issue through the nineties, there were some aspects of the picture that were more or less distinct. One was what I will call clear, real criminal activity. This community was the group of people killing their rivals, running drugs, or involved with the drug cartels, or associated with international criminal activity and groups. That group was more or less defined and understandable to our law enforcement and to all of us. They were significant, dangerous, known for being ruthless, and among the most aggressive on the international criminal scene. In Russia they were known as families, and rival families were no less violent than those we knew in the thirties here in the U.S. or that became notorious in New York in the mid century. This world made its money off the activities everybody understood to be unacceptable and illegal.

More troublesome to deal with or manage was a second group that either transitioned out of that kind of activity and became legitimate or belonged to a class of aggressive, no holds barred business figures who skirted the borders of what was legal or acceptable. Many of these folks made their money questionably to begin with. Then, as the economy began to stabilize and set its rules and norms, a lot of them moved to legitimize their position as businessmen. Many of those that became what we now call oligarchs belonged to this group.

Finally, for the American side there was another dimension of this transition that bedeviled our economic development programs and efforts to support transition to the rule of law and accountable government. That was the issue of corruption. Corruption, defined in the way we see the idea, was a pervasive aspect of the Russian economy and

society. Nor was it new. It had been in its own form a standing element of the Soviet system. In the mid 90s there also wasn't much distinction made between criminal activity and corruption and for most people they were linked. But what made it significant for us as Americans pressing the idea of the rule of law was the role "corruption" played in making the entire system function in this period of transition in the early nineties. It was part and parcel of achieving a modicum of stability in a system where you did not have an effective police and court system, and where the "law" was anything but clear. For most businesses - legitimate or criminal protection came from private security firms or having a protector, colloquially known as a *krysha* (roof or cover). Most arrangements were made by contract and these structures were your protection for a contract or agreement. This environment without much alternative lasts up until the mid 90s; it is a kind of free for all where rules were defined by what could be protected and enforced not by the state but by parties to agreements.. And to the extent rules emerged or existed they were mainly enforced not by lawyers so much as protection guys and enforcers. It was going to take years to begin restoration of the state institutions of police and courts to recapture their role in managing the new systems and economic realities.

Q: OK, Jim. The next time we pick this up we will continue talking about the mid 90s when you were in charge of the former Soviet space. We will talk next time about business and the implications of America moving in and your view of other parts of the international community. From time to time you talk about OSCE, but there are the British and Japanese and French and China and all. We will talk about that and move on.

COLLINS: Good.

Q: Today is July 27, 2013, with Jim Collins. Jim, where were we?

COLLINS: Well It's been a while. I am afraid we will be going over quite a bit of already plowed ground. But let's pick up with my Washington period. We are in the mid-1990s. Russia is beyond the immediate transition/crisis management phase of the Soviet collapse and the emergence of the new order in Eurasia. New Russia and its neighbors are now established if still fragile. In Russia, Yeltsin has weathered the challenge to his presidency that began in the spring of 1993 and ended that fall with the dramatic shelling of the parliament building, disbanding of the Russian legislature and subsequent implementation of a new constitutional order. We have established nascent missions in each of the new states and had preliminary engagement with their governments.

In Washington the Clinton administration's policy and programs for the region have been reasonably well defined. The April '93 speech and subsequent meeting with Yeltsin in Vancouver have established the administration's objectives and priorities for Russia and the region. As I saw it that policy had some key themes. First, preserve the peace in the region, and prevent any crisis like we faced in the Balkans. Second commitment to the integration of the new states of the former Soviet Union, including Russia, into the international system and into European institutions - to "a Europe Whole and Free. " Third each new state a secure, independent and sovereign future. In other words, the U.S.

opposed any reconstitution of the former Russian or Soviet empire. Fourth, support for democratic and economic reforms essential to achieve this American objective. That, in turn, was tied to support for a variety of programming to assist in the transformation of these nations/societies away from the old Soviet political and command economic system to states/societies based in the principles of democracy and market based economies. And finally, perhaps the highest priority single security objects for the region remained the removal of nuclear weapons from Ukraine, Belarus and Kazakhstan and agreement with Russia on a reduction in the number of nuclear weapons under START I.

Let's recall, in the first years after the Soviet breakup, the future of nuclear weapons outside Russia continued to be an issue. By mid-1992 the Russians had managed to withdraw all the tactical weapons back to their territory as we've noted. But a significant arsenal of strategic launch vehicles and warheads remained outside Russia, and as time went on there was greater uncertainty about whether they remained unambiguously under a single, unified system of command and control. There were emerging ambiguities about who had charge of what; in particular, regarding the strategic rocket forces in Ukraine. So, with the completion and ratification of the START I agreement at the beginning of 1993, negotiation of agreements to remove these weapons from Ukraine, Kazakhstan and Belarus and get all of those warheads out of the territory not under Russian control was of the highest priority for the U.S. and became a critical priority for the incoming Clinton administration.

In negotiating the outcome of this issue during 1993, the Clinton administration expended major effort and was absolutely central to the outcome. Kazakhstan and Belarus reached agreement with Russia without major issues. Ukraine was much more complex but after protracted and often bitter disputes with Russia Ukraine too agreed to becoming non-nuclear and to accepting the removal of nuclear warheads in return for Russia agreeing to provide nuclear fuel for Chernobyl and other nuclear plants, and America covering the costs of the removal and destroying the strategic delivery vehicles. In addition, the final arrangements included the provisions embodied in the Budapest Memorandum signed by Russia, the U.S. and UK.

On other elements of the agenda the future of the security system or architecture for the Euro-Atlantic region remains in flux. There were still many open questions about what a security establishment for a new Europe without the Soviet Union and the ideological confrontation was going to look like, and how it would be established? By the beginning of 1994 certain aspects of the initial debate had been decided. The debate over whether NATO would continue was behind us. In our strategy, the Alliance would remain a cornerstone for European security. What had not been decided was just what this would mean for the states to its East and how the continued Alliance would be squared with the promise of a Europe whole and free. From the time of my return, that question was rarely far from the forefront of issues on the agenda for me and my colleagues in the European bureau.

Q: Now where were you in that? What were you-?

COLLINS: Well as we discussed earlier I had taken up responsibilities of the Ambassador at Large for the New Independent States. It was a substantial change in perspective, and from day one it immersed me among those debating America's approach to what the security system for Europe would be in the aftermath of the Cold War and wholesale change in the East. So far as I saw it the central question for our policy toward the greater region became this: how would we pursue the Europe whole, free, and undivided that Clinton had described as America's goal and simultaneously preserve our Cold War era Alliances and NATO as a basis for any future security system for the region. Quite simply the two objectives pitted keeping relations with Russia, which opposed any central role for the Alliance in defining Europe's security system, against those, particularly from the former Warsaw Pact states, who saw joining Europe's institutions as the basis for their future security and membership in the European family. The dynamics of this debate were just emerging as I took over, and they intensified through '94, '95 and on into '96 when the clear direction emerged in favor of action at that time to expand NATO by welcoming new members from the East.

Now, sitting where I did, the key issues I faced focused on how to prevent what increasingly became a policy direction that was going to complicate if not disrupt our relations with Moscow. Everyone knew that Russia was going to oppose NATO expansion. Moscow's views on this had been clear in Gorbachev's time and were no less intense under Yeltsin. Indeed, our position was complicated even further by the fact that Yeltsin and his colleagues took as fact the position that Gorbachev had assumed in agreeing to permit the reunification of Germany: that the U.S. had promised there would be no territorial expansion of NATO beyond the incorporation of East Germany.

So, as I sat with responsibility for our Russian interests, the issue of NATO was never far from the surface. As we've discussed previously, in the initial period of my Washington time there was a seemingly effective compromise that appeared to defuse and postpone the issue with Moscow. The "Partnership for Peace" was basically a way in which NATO could establish a relationship with all the non-member states to the East who wished it. It did not make them members of the Alliance. But it gave them a formal association with NATO, brought the militaries of these countries to Brussels, and enabled them to begin doing joint work with NATO institutions - exercises, learning NATO methods, building the basis for interoperability, etc. It was very successful. But perhaps most importantly, the project was embraced and endorsed by Yeltsin, who said, this is a great idea, you know, it's not membership, which he opposed, it's partnership. The partnership was in fact a brilliantly successful idea. It remained viable for several years; it headed off any real confrontation with Russia over NATO; and from my perspective it became a very important diplomatic tool in engaging the new states beyond Russia.

Q: Well were we making a distinction between Russia being a Eurasian state at one point, between Asia and Eastern- Europe? In other words, Ukraine, Belarus would fall within sort of the European but the Stans, were we claiming were not?

COLLINS: You are raising another major issue I engaged almost daily. And it was one I felt very strongly about. For all of my time dealing with these issues - nearly a decade - I took the position that what had been the Soviet Union and Russian Empire before that belonged in Europe, was sensibly only seen as part of Europe, and for sound reasons of U.S. interests should continue to be treated as and managed in our relations as part of the Euro-Atlantic world. For a decade, to my satisfaction, the former Soviet space, including Central Asia, continued to be engaged and treated as a part of the Euro-Atlantic community. In this regard I can't say my voice was dispositive or even terribly influential, but I was uncompromising in opposing efforts to change that policy, and it did not get changed.

One reason I saw this as so important was linked to our objective of bringing these states into the international system and affirming their membership in Euro-Atlantic institutions. As former components of the USSR they became members of the OSCE, for example, and were considered eligible to join other institutions such as the Council of Europe or Partnership for Peace. Additionally, they were seen as part of the European regional group in the UN, and as European states were linked to EUCOM (the U.S. European Command) in connection with U.S. military programs and relations for the region. In short, up until the beginning of the 21st century there was a consensus in Washington that all of these countries were best placed for the future within the Euro-Atlantic Security System and community. So they didn't belong to South Asia and they didn't belong to Asia. They belonged to Europe and I hoped would continue to look there for their future models.

Now, this was not without some controversy. I did have my problems convincing French colleagues, for instance, that the Tajiks were Europeans. But no one objected to accepting them as eligible for integration with European institutions in the same way Russia or Ukraine were regarded. Assistance programs, security arrangements, and other aspects of programming to break down the old Cold War barriers and integrate the new states in the East were conducted and managed within the broader institutions of the Euro-Atlantic system. In Washington these programs and policies were largely administered through the elements of the U.S. Government responsible for Europe and the former Soviet space. This was the approach the U.S. took from 1991 on and therefore the OSCE, when it was constituted, gave the idea institutional expression and consolidated the consensus about the extent and boundaries of the Euro-Atlantic security community.

I might also say that an additional reason I saw significant reason to keep Central Asia in this family concerned our rising issues *vis-v-vis* the Muslim world. The fact was that as former parts of the Russian Empire and Soviet Union, the Muslim states in Central Asia as well as Azerbaijan in the Caucasus had developed their Islamic culture in tandem, or perhaps better said, as subjects of European power and culture. The region's Islam also emerged from largely Turkic and Persian rather than Arabic culture. As such it provided an alternative Islam to that which was increasingly spawning the militant and anti-western strains of Islam that were troubling the Middle East. It seemed to me in our interest to promote the forms of Islam that had learned to live with European culture. Nor could I see any merit in having the U.S. position work to promote de facto linkage of the

Islam of the post-Soviet space with that in the Arab world or the militant movements that were unsettling Pakistan and Afghanistan.

So, there was a working consensus about the unity of the Euro-Atlantic space on one level and it was given expression in Washington in the way we were organized to promote the reform and integration of the post-Communist East into the Western world and its structures. And that consensus was strong. However, it was also the case that the end of the Cold War released long suppressed antagonisms, historic enmities, deeply held senses of grievance, and pent up frustration at injustices of the past among nearly all those who had attained new freedom and opportunities to express ethnic, religious, and national identity. This reality gave birth almost from the beginning to a witch's brew of divisive forces that challenged the very essence of our objective to produce a Europe whole and free, and it challenged a number of the principal ideas underlying the pursuit of integration of all the peoples and nations of the Euro-Atlantic community.
These forces of division played an especially forceful role in the early deliberations about how the new security structure for the community would evolve. In the early period, Partnership for Peace emerged as the guiding structure for relations between NATO and the non-member states of Europe. The Partnership did provide a framework for Russian and other nations to establish a new relationship with the NATO alliance and within Partnership structures provide a voice for all partners in the structure's future. But as we've talked about previously, Moscow, from my experience never fully accepted the idea that NATO was the future core for the broader security system and pressed for a security structure that would provide Russia the kind of voice Moscow had enjoyed in Soviet times in setting security policy for the region. Ultimately seeing this institution in the OSCE, Moscow began to press for that structure to become the most important institution in building the new European security system. Washington, on the other hand, from the earliest days saw NATO as the one structure that could be effective in building a new European security order.

So long as this difference played out against the background of a NATO working to build relations with its eastern neighbors via the Partnership for Peace, the different ideas in Washington and Moscow remained manageable and largely suppressed. But as pressures mounted for movement on expansion of NATO in '93, '94, '95, the American system moved inexorably toward the conclusion that NATO enlargement had to be moved forward. Russian reaction was sharp, as in the speech Yeltsin gave at the OSCE summit in Budapest. But as the movement toward enlargement gathered momentum, it also refocused the Partnership in the eyes of many participants, making it of significance primarily as a vehicle to prepare for NATO membership. And that set of conclusions led to the ultimately unresolvable issue of Russia's place in the equation. The evolution of U.S. policy led to this turning point, and for much of the remainder of my time at NIS, the issue of managing Russia's position and response to U.S. and NATO actions to expand the alliance membership became central to the way Russia relations evolved.

At the core of the matter was a simple reality. In Russia NATO was in essence a four letter word. It was seen as an instrument of American domination. It was seen as a hostile, threatening military alliance moving ever closer to Russian borders, creating new

threats and taking advantage of Russian weakness. It was good fodder for those anti-reform/anti-Yeltsin forces who opposed his opening to the West. There was no prospect Russia would accept the Alliance's legitimacy as the dispositive author of any new Euro-Atlantic wide security system unless Russia somehow had a voice in decision making equivalent to its great power members, in other words to the U.S.

NATO members, in turn, while standing firmly by the position that the Alliance was open to all who would support its mission, affirmed that Russia would be eligible for membership at some time. But until that point Russia would have no greater role than any other member of the Partnership for Peace. The mantra for this emerged at some point to be a voice but not a veto. In fact, the Alliance membership had no answer to the challenges Russian membership would present to the Alliance, and from all I could see, never took seriously the prospect of Moscow's membership. Rather from the moment the decision was announced that NATO would accept new members, the object became a search for a middle ground that would permit admission of new members to the Alliance while addressing Russian security interests in other ways. So once we focused on the idea that the Partnership for Peace was the path to full NATO membership in the '94-'95 period, we faced the reality that Russia believed the U.S. had gone back on its word about the Partnership for Peace being an alternative to NATO enlargement. Thereafter, managing Russian responses to the dynamics of NATO expansion becomes a central element of East-West relations again.

Q: Was there part of the thinking the old thing about NATO being a way of keeping France and Germany from going at each other? I mean were we thinking of NATO as the glue within Europe?

COLLINS: I think by this time there was little focus on that question. We have seen the development of the EU, a wholly new sense for European cooperation that put that idea far back. The agenda at this point was greater Europe, where was this Europe going, and how would the U.S. secure its interests in this Europe. The question of the demand and the strong pressures from the former Warsaw Pact countries to be part of "Europe" defined by most of them as institutional Europe (i.e. NATO and the EU). The idea was simple: those people who were in those institutions were European: those who were not were not fully Europe. And that dynamic, it seemed to me, pushed those who had been under the Soviet yoke, in particular, to demand recognition as part of "real Europe" and to care less about, if not find outright unpalatable, the idea of a Europe whole and free that would run from Vancouver to Vladivostok. At best the sentiments in a country like Poland were clearly focused on building bridges in one direction and achieving their aspiration of full European status.

Q: Yes.

COLLINS: Now, I should also say that throughout all this we kept alive the principle that NATO was to be open to everybody, and for much of the Clinton Administration the idea that Russia could join NATO remained at least formally on the table. Nobody expected to have to deal with the prospect, but this position kept intact the principled support of a

Europe undivided, whole and free. But the fact is that the moment we decided NATO would accept Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia as full members, we faced a different dynamic that has survived to the present, a dynamic driven by the Russian perception it is confronted by an expanding Western military alliance, which they see as a tool of American policy and existential threat to Russian interests and security. This thinking further built a sense that Russian security was linked to preventing further expansion of NATO.

Q: Were we making attempts to get Russians embedded as much as we could within the NATO process?

COLLINS: I think it's fair to say that in the mid-nineties that was how we hoped to square the circle of NATO enlargement and Russian opposition to it. There were essentially two parallel projects going on that involved this question. One was to deal with the issue of nuclear weapons in Ukraine, Kazakhstan and Belarus. That issue was almost certainly paramount for our diplomacy during the first years of the Clinton administration. We've talked about how the intense negotiations with each of the parties ultimately produced agreements that provided all nuclear weapons would be withdrawn back into Russia or would be destroyed. The agreement was a huge diplomatic success. In the early post- Soviet period it shaped in critical ways the negotiating process and the dynamics of the relations between Russia and Ukraine, Russia and Kazakhstan, Russia and Belarus.

The process also had a great impact on U.S.-Russia relations. We shared the same strategic objectives. In our support to make Russia's new neighbors non-nuclear weapons states, we recognized the importance of the agreements for Russian security as well. Russia also accepted that American diplomacy was absolutely essential to finding resolution of the issues between Russia and its neighbors, most particularly Ukraine. We more or less brought about resolution of grievances by brokering and mediating arrangements between Russia and each of the new states concerned that allowed an end to a potential nuclear threat to Russia and in return got Russian assurances and support for its new neighbors. I suppose many in Russia saw this process and outcome as the way future European security issues should be managed. (Note: this passage was prepared before 2014).

On the NATO issue, our approach to dealing with Russia had to be different, however. There was never a comity of view about the positive outcome of NATO accepting former Warsaw Pact states as new members. Our approach to moderating their hostility to the idea of a bigger NATO was to develop arrangements between Russia and NATO that would overcome the worst of Russia's objections, engage Russia more with NATO, set frameworks in place that would give Russia confidence NATO did not represent a threat, and provide a framework for Russia's voice to be heard in resolving issues of mutual importance. Developing such arrangements was critical to maintaining any future for the broader objective of Russian integration and preventing re-division of Europe. We, of course, kept assuring Russia that NATO was not a threat. And indeed some cooperation between Russia and NATO on issues of European security had been developing since the

foundation of the Partnership for Peace. Russian participation in the Bosnian peace keeping effort after the Dayton Agreement represented a tangible aspect to Russia NATO cooperation. But as the prospect of adding members to the Alliance evolved, it was clear further steps would be important to bring Russia along. Negotiations between Russia and NATO sought to create institutional arrangements that would build new trust and cooperation, new kinds of transparency, new kinds of engagement between NATO and Russia.

Strobe Talbott led the U.S. side in this effort. I and others from Defense, State, the White House and the Intelligence community made up his team. The effort resulted in the first significant post-Cold War agreement between Russia and NATO and provided a hopeful opening to ease the tensions that had built as a result of NATO's commitment to accept new members. That agreement, "The NATO Founding Act," affirmed that Russia and NATO were not adversaries, provided a restatement of support for many of the key agreements and structures defining post-Cold War European security institutions, and declared NATO's intention to observe certain limits on what NATO would do in the new member states to the east of the Alliance's borders after German reunification. It defined limits in terms of deployments, in terms of stationing of forces, and in terms of NATO infrastructure that would be envisioned in Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia soon to become new member states. Fundamentally what it said was NATO did not intend to station major permanent forces in the new states to the east of Germany, and it addressed limits on deployment and other activities that would be acceptable within the new states. The Act further established the NATO Russia Permanent Joint Council, a consultative mechanism for Russia and NATO where any issues raised by either side could be discussed. This provision more or less set the framework that has existed since. It proved itself not fully satisfactory as an instrument to either party. But it did diffuse some of the most potentially disruptive issues that arose from the initial NATO decision to accept new members.

Q: Well were the Russians, the Russian military looking at the NATO structure and beginning to, in a way, adjust to it? I'm thinking particularly, Russia's had this basically, almost medieval conscript system of sucking in everybody rather than ending up with well treated, smaller troop establishments and all.

COLLINS: You're raising the question of Russian military reform I guess.

Q: Yes.

Well, we have talked about this before. For most of the nineties the critical focus for the Russian military was, first and foremost survival and second to create a viable military out of the disintegrating Red Army. Russia did have certain unique assets and structures that remained largely intact, such as the nuclear and strategic forces. But when it came to the general army and other branches, the Red Army was broken up. As the Union came apart forces and equipment on the territory of the new states were more or less nationalized into the armies of the new states in a messy and quite chaotic fashion. Each new state including Russia shared the challenge of creating a viable and effective military

force out of the assets it had inherited. This process was further complicated by the return of Red Army units from the Warsaw Pact States and the Baltics, an issue that most of all affected Russia where most of these soldiers and equipment ended up.

By the mid-nineties some of the major upheaval has defined aspects of what was possible. The other new states had largely determined what pieces from the Red Army would belong to them and had created the structures for their own national armed forces. But it was also the case that Russia inherited the Soviet central command structure from the ministry on down, ended up with most of the forces that were being withdrawn from East and Central Europe and the Baltic states, and generally was responsible for dealing with what was left after the other new states had defined what forces and equipment belonged to them. And this process of restructuring, absorbing returning forces, and redefining mission all takes place at a time of wholesale economic collapse, lack of funds, and an environment where the objective for most becomes simple survival. The good news from our point of view was that even in these conditions the command and control system over the nuclear arsenal had survived and so far as we knew, or at least I knew, remained intact, functional and in control of the arsenal that had been concentrated in Russia alone by 1996.

Q: Were we involved in what the Armed Forces were doing?

COLLINS: We were. Almost from the outset of the Clinton administration the U.S. was exploring ways to build military to military contacts and cooperation with the Russian military. The rationale was obvious. We had an existential interest in preventing any collapse or disintegration of control and management of the nuclear arsenal. That was an issue identified very early, for instance by Senator Nunn. But our engagement expanded rapidly in the early nineties to encompass defense conversion of industries, programs, in particular the Nunn Lugar project, to ensure the safety and security of nuclear weapons and material, assistance with military reform programs, and assistance to help the government cope with the returning forces and demobilized personnel. By the mid-nineties the engagement also came to include joint exercises and in the case of Bosnia the actual deployment of Russian peacekeepers under U.S. command.

But even with these developments the Russian Armed forces lived with a condition of degradation because its very foundation all but collapsed. The whole structure of the Soviet armed forces was predicated on having first claim on manpower and resources, a claim that had given it virtually unlimited capacity to mobilize what men and resources it needed. Suddenly with the loss of population at their disposal and the end to the command economy that base disappears. Now you have a Russian population of 150 million, not 300 or so under Moscow's authority The security system's access to resources suddenly is based on having the funds to pay for what is required in lieu of a command decision by central planners. In short reforming the military becomes as much a matter of ensuring survival of the institution as planning for the future. The process that results was a tortured and in many respects traumatic one for nearly all levels of the military leadership.

Two or three factors came to affect and most often limit the options for change. First, the money began to dry up. There's no longer the unlimited pool of resources that permit avoidance of hard choices. The leadership does take care of the most essential priority, the strategic rocket forces and the nuclear arsenal. But the remainder of the structure begins a life based in cuts to everything from training or operations to reductions in manpower and supplies. In many cases this devolved into military commands relying on local sources for their minimal requirements and survival as units. We saw this when some of the units sent to Chechnya at one point were counting on the towns where they were garrisoned to supply them with essentials in food and clothing.

The second reason reform moved slowly was its complexity. The kind of decisions all knew would be required were really hard. For instance meaningful restructuring and re-organization of the army to match its size with potentially available resources and the new mission it was defining was going to mean the members of the general staff had to fire half of their colleagues, cast them into an uncertain future that could not even assure them a retirement nearly all would expect after a career. This situation was made all the more troubled by the fact that the military was still preoccupied with bringing forces back from Germany and the Baltic countries, having to quarter them without sufficient housing, and having to determine which components would survive. Huge amounts of money were needed for things that did nothing but support withdrawal operations, ensure housing and life support for units without a mission or provide retirement for personnel that would have no further military function. It was a thankless, often personally difficult environment and created an atmosphere in which deferral of hard decisions made progress slow and difficult. It was understandable.

The third problem that hindered real reform was quite simply a lack of any real strategic idea about Russia's future position. It goes without saying that having a sense of what Russia is, what its international position will be, who will be its friends and who its enemies, etc. was an essential minimum in order to begin to define why it has its army, what its army will be asked to do, etc.: all the kinds of things anyone has to know to set the objectives for a reform program. The process was complicated by a gulf between the new Russian leadership focused on the normalization of relations with the West and much of the military establishment that psychologically are still thinking in Cold War terms.

Q: We're having the same problem.

COLLINS: Well yes, but we had the idea that even if we had prevailed in the Cold War and we could adjust our forces in Europe, we still had a global mission that planners at the Pentagon could use for reshaping our force structures and priorities. The Russians faced the problem that their entire nation, ideology, mission, and place in the international order had been upended with no clear indication of what the future was going to hold.

Q: Trying to figure out what to do about the Fulda Gap.

COLLINS: That's right. As the Union collapses both the Yeltsin government and we are confronted with an upheaval in the entire military, military industrial complex; the closed cities and intelligentsia that supported these structures, etc. These institutions, industries, laboratories, and such are suddenly anachronistic holdovers from a bygone era. Many continue to function but out of inertia or because they have no other purpose. They lack direction, funds, and purpose: they have neither the mission or the resources to define or provide them a future.

It is in this context that one of America's greatest contributions comes along primarily in the form of the Nunn-Lugar program. That program as we've discussed provided U.S. funding to help pay for programs to ensure security for nuclear materials, help dismantle nuclear warheads, and assist the Russian authorities to dismantle safely and securely elements of their arsenal required by the arms control treaties then in force. I am not going to try to describe the scope of these programs, What I do want to underscore, though , is the significant role these programs played in providing critical elements of the Russian military, military industrial complex, and scientific establishment employed by these institutions with newly funded missions, an avenue to cooperation with the American counterparts, and in the context of the disintegration of the system they had served, a new framework to continue their professions in a manner that was supportive of both Russian and U.S. interests.

I had the good fortune to be part of the team that developed the programs to implement that program. My counterparts in the Pentagon were Ash Carter and Elizabeth Sherwood Randall; Coit (Chip) Blacker was at the White House; and I had an exceptional team at State. With backing from our most senior political sponsors and the Senators we were able to engage a range of Russian officials and initiate an exceptionally successful program. And it answered critical questions for Russians seeking answers in a time of immense uncertainty: how to get rid of weapons without funding; how to secure weapons and nuclear material in a new way given that the old security system had largely become unworkable; how to refashion the whole nuclear, military industrial complex in a way that would allow it to keep secure weapons and materials permitted under treaty provisions, destroy other weapons in a secure way, and deal with the residue? The Nunn-Lugar money that starts to flow significantly in '94, '95 is very important not only to ensuring that Russian nuclear weapons and material are managed in a secure manner, but becomes essential to some of the restructuring of the Russian military and military industrial complex.

Q: Nunn-Lugar, by the way, is a Senate bill sponsored by Senators Nunn and Lugar, a Democrat and a Republican.

COLLINS: That's correct. And its basic objective was to make the United States more secure by assisting Russia to reduce its nuclear forces according to treaties, in dealing with their withdrawal of the nuclear weaponry from the other NIS countries and ensuring the destruction of the rockets and other elements of the strategic arsenal. The program also came to work with projects devoted to the elimination of chemical and biological weapons. I think it also important to give attention to the way these programs

demonstrated the capacity of American and Russian professionals and military to cooperate when our leaderships defined a common objective for them. I personally found that aspect of the program one of its most significant achievements. It succeeded in bringing together scientists, engineers, nuclear experts, military professionals to develop and carry out joint projects. It was a time that showed what is possible when these professionals put their efforts behind a common objective. It was frankly exceptional and inspiring. I suppose the one remnant of this kind of work remains the space station, our shared space colony that continues despite the downturn in our relations. So, of all the programs with which I was involved, I put the Nunn Lugar program very high on the list of successes.

Q: As you worked on this you'd be one of the members of NATO and the major players in NATO were Great Britain, Germany, and France although France is sort of betwixt and between. Were there problems with your fellow NATO members, and how were they involved in this and all?

COLLINS: Are we talking here about the expansion issue? More broadly?

Q: Let's say how our allies saw relations with Russia.

COLLINS: Well I think it fair to say NATO worked its way forward without huge tensions in this period. Let's look at the context. The big issues in Europe at this time are: the question of defining the framework for post-Cold War Euro-Atlantic security; the issues surrounding the role of NATO and whether NATO will accept new members from among its former adversaries; and the emerging and deepening crisis in the Balkans. By the mid-nineties we had made up our mind about NATO expansion, and the other Allies had joined consensus to open the Alliance to the former Warsaw Pact countries in the east. Now, that decision, once made, quite soon reshaped the focus of attention among the Allies from debate and discussion of issues of Alliance relations with its former adversaries to the questions surrounding the issue of what the nations aspiring to membership would have to accomplish to become full members. In short, as I watched it, the Allies now turned significantly greater attention to defining the requirements members of the Partnership for Peace would have to fulfill to become full Alliance members than they did either to further development of the Partnership per se or to how NATO would develop and manage its relations with non-member states.

This shift was made more understandable against the background of developments in the Alliance's relations with Russia that appeared to be addressing positively core issues most saw as danger points for future NATO-Russia relations. Even against the backdrop of movement by the Alliance toward a decision to accept new members, there were significant signs that Russia was open to new arrangements with the Alliance that could assure longer term mutual accommodation. We have talked earlier about how Russia at this point, under the umbrella of the Partnership for Peace and a UN resolution joined the peacekeeping force IFOR for Bosnia. The U.S. and allies had achieved a newly agreed basis all hoped would become a more robust and enduring new relationship between NATO and Russia that was signed in May 1997, prior to the formal move by NATO to

open the way for the first three applicants from the East to become full Alliance members. So, it was hoped that with the Founding Act in place, it would be possible for NATO to turn to admission of new members and have at least an agreed framework with Russia that would avoid expansion's becoming a source of division with Russia.

Finally, I want to take note of an additional element of the equation at this time that, as I saw it, also influenced significantly how many Russians saw developments more broadly. Let's recall that at the heart of Russian strategy and thinking about their future if not the central question was Moscow's retention of its position as "the other super power" and as a decisive voice in shaping the future security architecture of the greater Euro-Atlantic region. This was the position Russians had exercised since World War II and its retention after the Cold War was a moment of the greatest sensitivity for Russian leaders. In this regard, Moscow had succeeded in retaining the UN Security Council permanent membership and its veto. It was a leading voice in the OSCE after its foundation in 1994. It was the other nuclear super power. And at this particular time as the Balkans conflict developed, what came to be called the Contact Group, consisting of the U.S., Russia, the UK, France, Germany and Italy appeared to confirm acceptance of Russia as one of the major powers to be entrusted with maintaining order in Europe, a role Moscow hoped to see established above that of NATO, the EU, or any other exclusively western dominated structure.

In sum, during these first years surrounding the issues of NATO expansion, while not without tensions and troubles between NATO and Russia, there was a basis to hope that a pathway was open to normalize Russia's place in a future Euro-Atlantic security system based on NATO. And as NATO turned its principal focus about the alliance's future relations with non-members to the question of how to prepare future members to join rather than establishing long term relations with non-members, the NATO bureaucracy churns and churns and churns to define how you do these things, rather than dealing with questions of including non-members in a broader system for the future. It also proceeded in many ways with a misplaced confidence that Russia had accepted the fundamental premise of NATO's enlargement as the foundation for Europe's security future, an issue that becomes harder to address as enlargement brings in new members with different views of their large eastern neighbor than those among the original members. That becomes more evident after the first new members, Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary take their seats at the North Atlantic Council (NAC), because they have a voice now equal to France or Germany but carrying often different very strong views about how you deal with Russia.

So I would say the challenges of the membership question, while absorbing the energies of immense elements of the NATO bureaucracy and the militaries of its members, were much less complex than those confronting NATO's foreign policy. In this area questions of what did it do about those nations that weren't members and in particular about Russia were simply deferred or given less priority. Nor was it easy to achieve consensus on the issue. There was always a lively debate. During my time in Washington, before the admission of new members consensus was achieved about the biggest issue, and the NATO Founding Act did define a relationship between NATO and Russia with great

potential and agreement on key issues. But it also left open the question of the degree Moscow's voice would play a role in shaping critical responses to the future regional security arrangements and all that went with that. Did that resolve all the issues? Of course not, but it was a very successful step in defining some of the issues that were important, and it deferred others.

Q: How did you find the other side of the equation, the Russian leadership in dealing with this? I mean, who was calling the shots. You're an old Russian hand, how did you see it being played when you were on the other side of the water?

COLLINS: Well in Yeltsin's time, and this lasts until the beginning of 2000, Yeltsin kept to the course he set to make Russia a part of Europe, and whatever the problems, he never really gave that up as his goal. He more or less said our future lies with Europe; our long-term strategy has to be to develop the capacity to be an effective, normal country albeit a major power that plays the role it always has in shaping the future of the continent. That broadly speaking also meant he saw Russia remaining the other major power and partner of the U.S.

Now, exactly how that was to become institutionalized was probably the central issue of what was an evolving story. But, he was very intent on getting Russia into key institutions. He sought, for example, to have Russia join the G-7 to make it the G-8. He pressed for establishment of relations and institutional arrangements that assured Russia's influence and authority with the Alliance. As I mentioned, he pressed to have the OSCE, the contact group, bilateral agreements with the U.S. all enhance the idea of Russian normalization of relations with the West on the basis of equality and recognition of Russia's special role as the other major power. You even begin to get interest in a relationship with the European Union about which the Russians knew almost nothing.

Q: Really?

COLLINS: Yes. They had paid almost no attention to the EU, thought it was irrelevant to their interests. It was seen as a secondary, lesser institution, compared to NATO.
But fundamentally, it's central to keep in mind that Russia was looking inward. Yeltsin's fundamental strategic objective always seemed to me to keep things quiet so that he could deal with the issues at home: to eliminate any chance of a communist return to power in Russia; to see to conclusion his policies that were transforming Russia's entire society. On the international stage Yeltsin was playing a weak hand; he saw it essential to keep things as quiet as possible internationally to minimize threats to Russian interests, to prevent adversaries from taking advantage or using vulnerabilities. And so, certainly up until the late '90s, he pursued, a strategy that said we don't like what you're doing now-NATO enlargement, for instance - but every country has its right to decide its affiliation. But, we also insist that all countries have a right to insist on having their interests taken into account, and we do not agree with the direction NATO is taking. The American reaction to these positions seemed to me based on selective hearing. We chose to emphasize that Russia was accepting the western idea about NATO and its role or to take statements like Yeltsin's in Warsaw to mean the Russians didn't have a major problem

with what we were doing. It was a misreading of what was really behind the different statements.

In reality the Russians had a serious problem with what we were doing; they just lacked resources to do anything about it. Some had tried to warn of the danger. Kozyrev, the Foreign Minister, for example, as early as 1992 gave a shocker of a speech in Helsinki as early as 1992 warning the west about the dangers Yeltsin's nationalist opponents represented. Yeltsin himself made the point very clearly in the Cold Peace speech in Budapest in 1994. And when Kozyrev began to lose authority and ultimately was replaced in 1996, it was by Yevgeny Primakov who throughout most of his time as minister pressed the defense of Russian interests with vigor and conviction that Moscow could regain respect for its authority by standing firm against what he saw as unilateral western efforts to ignore or disregard Russian interests.

Q: Well were we from your perspective taking this into account? Were we looking and saying if we do this, this really causes the Russians problems and then adjusting to how we felt the Russians would react: trying to make sure that we weren't stressing the system?

COLLINS: To be frank, I don't think the American Government really paid significant attention to what the Russians were saying and signaling about things like NATO's enlargement, or about the way we and our allies set out to define the future of European security systems. Some of this is 20-20 hindsight, I suppose. But, it seems to me we missed opportunities or often failed to listen very well and frequently failed to look much beyond the near term.

We simply got out of the habit of seeing Moscow as relevant to nearly any issue or decision regarding Europe's future security system and grew comfortable proceeding in our planning and negotiations with allies the way we had done during the Cold War. With a weakened, smaller, seemingly prostrate Russia this was easier to do, and it avoided the need to include or factor in a complicating Russian response. And so it grew routine to set aside much consideration of a possible Russian reaction to events or actions. Russian interests were just de facto not given very much weight.

Politics in Washington also played a role in this trend. In the mid-nineties opinion in Washington ranged on one side from seeing Russia as yesterday's news; they're finished; they're declining, they're a weak regional power. The other side emphasized the dangers of a future Russian recovery: we need to do whatever we can to be sure Moscow doesn't ever re-establish control over the former empire. And so, the dynamics of policy here were not very often driven by trying to get the best possible reaction out of Russia or get Russian buy-in to what we were doing.

Another reality for me was the implications of a huge imbalance in the weight of the small community of people I worked with from AID, the Pentagon, the White House, State, and some of the other bureaucracies around town set against the juggernaut of those linked to the western Alliance . My team had programs of assistance, programs

opening up totally new business with the Russians, programs of relief for the region etc. But when we had a meeting of these agencies and the people engaged in these efforts we fit comfortably in a modest conference room. It was a dedicated and active group. And from our perspective we were dealing with significant budgets, major programs like the Freedom Support Act, all a pretty big chunk of money when we looked at its objectives and place in what State was doing

But then I looked at the NATO budget and the number of people in Washington who were involved in, let's say defining the terms to be employed in having NATO accept a new member. Well, in the building that housed these people we could fit in the corner of a bathroom. So the whole juggernaut of the bureaucracy and the national security structure was so heavily weighted on the side of the NATO-EU structure and its priorities, day to day work, and agenda that the idea you could say, "wait a minute, the Russians might think such and such," rarely rose to the level of an issue that was seen as relevant or worthy of playing much of a role.

Q: Well now, speaking of East-West, did deliberations bring you into contact with or have you consider China, Japan?

COLLINS: China not terribly much but Japan, an ally, was part of the agenda throughout my time here in Washington. Japan's issue was linked to achieving a peace treaty with Russia to bring to a formal close to World War II and the issue of "the northern territories." Japan also had a significant place in our thinking and theirs as a potentially significant player in Russia's post-Soviet economic development, particularly in Siberia and the Far East, and as a counter-weight to China. So, Japan-Russia relations appeared and faded in the agendas of those dealing with Russia over the mid '90s as hopes rose and fell that Russia would finally come to terms on a peace agreement and the territories. In this regard Russia blew hot and cold about having Japan become a significant partner in their economic development. I became engaged in these issues from time to time, usually in support of pressing the case for Moscow and Tokyo to find a way to come to terms on peace or encouraging expansion of Japan's role in Russian economic development. One of the key projects on this front did become Japanese participation in the development of Sakhalin off shore oil and gas and ultimately a pipeline network to give these resources an export market. In the end, however, the inability to come to terms on the peace treaty kept Japanese potential limited and relations between Russia and Japan constrained.

In terms of China-Russia relations, the U.S. kept our distance. In Moscow our embassy had limited contacts with the Chinese mission and the same was true when I was in Washington. Russia-Chinese relations were simply not a significant part of the agenda we discussed much with Moscow and so far as I recall Beijing rarely engaged us on any issue they were addressing with Russia. It was certainly my impression in the nineties that China saw what happened in the Soviet Union as a warning or caution. Relations were correct, but so far as I could determine not easy. What did take off as the Soviet Union broke up and Russia's economy opened to greater free trade was development of major bilateral trade in consumer and other goods that became fundamental to the retail

markets in cities across Russia. This shuttle trade had its own peculiarities, being based heavily for a long time as much on barter as money. But it served as a significant vehicle to expand China-Russia relations for most of a decade

On the official level, there were also significant developments between Russia and the post-Soviet new states and China. Border demarcation, begun under the Soviets continued and became of vehicle for Russia and others to begin a new chapter in relations with China. These openings as in the Russian case also evolved into broader ties and economic/trade relations led to more regularized security arrangements. China used these opportunities to develop new openings and to engage neighbors that had remained largely closed to them during the Soviet era. All that said, the expansion of China's role in the area was not a major issue for me or so far as I could tell for Washington at this time, and I would say for the most part dealing with China was not that big a factor in how we approached Russia questions. Remember, this is well before China assumes the role of economic juggernaut it assumed in the mid 2000s. In the '90s the main question when it arose was whether or not there would be stability on the borders between China and Russia and the NIS and whether the demarcation of those borders would succeed at the end of the day.

Q: Well you mentioned economy. Today one thinks of Russia as being an oil country, an oil producer and not much else. I mean, the fact that Russia doesn't seem to produce much. Was there a concern about its ability to compete or diversify?

COLLINS: Let's recall we have talked about our support for and involvement in Russia's economic transition, about the Freedom Support Act, about some of the things that program helped to accomplish. What I would like to do here is discuss where I think our policies and programs were successful, and where we were not very adept at dealing with the challenges all this presented.

I start here by saying that our programs were absolutely essential and for the most part highly successful in working with Russia and the other new states to build the infrastructure for a market economy and to reform government and other institutions as needed to serve a market-based system. Far less successful, as I now think about it, was our management of the impact and problems introducing the market system had on other dimensions of the societies involved. These changes affected nearly every aspect of the social structure, values, social safety net, career paths, and way of life in every one of the countries I was dealing with. And not surprisingly these effects had implications for the political structures and thinking about western models across Russia and its neighboring societies. In hindsight, it seems to me we were really quite successful at imparting and working with these states to carry out the changes required to put in place the essential foundations for a functioning market economy and integration of these economies into the global economic, financial, and trading system. We were much less successful, it seems to me, in addressing the social, moral and intellectual challenges these reforms imposed on Russia and the new states.

The collapse of the economies of Russia and all its neighbors brought catastrophe. Throughout this period the Russian economic picture was dismal, on the order of our great depression or greater. In addition to economic reform a priority for us throughout was to stem and to do what was possible to ameliorate the consequences of this drastic decline. And that was pretty much true across all the new states. They were all subject to radical declines in GDP. In Russia it was something like 40 percent. The entire economic infrastructure was in chaos. At the same time in Russia, Ukraine, Central Asia, the Caucasus, the Baltic states, nearly all aspects of life that were linked to the economy were turned upside down by moving from the old Soviet planned command economy with its state fixed prices and planned norms to a system where everything - goods and services as well as prices - became a function overnight of market driven demand and supply. But even more profound for almost every individual or family was the complete change in the role money played in daily life.

A bit of background here. I think we have talked about this previously. In the Soviet system money per se had a very limited role. For the individual it was normally an essential part of daily life and the ability to acquire or use goods and services. But it was also true that in most cases where it mattered, money had to be accompanied by authorized or arranged access or authorization to be useful. To buy a car, for example, money was needed, but money had to be accompanied by acquiring an established position on a list entitling the customer to make the purchase. So in this system money alone as often as not did not suffice. What was essential was access, and that was assured by a complex system of status of position and webs of personal arrangements that the system and individuals created to ensure the ability to spend the money available or arrange barter to meet the needs and niceties of life.

The market economic reforms completely upended this way of life. Suddenly money itself was determining access to the full range of goods and services, and supply and demand set the prices. The question became overnight not whether one had access and authority to acquire something, but rather whether one had the money to do so. Making and having money or not became overnight critical in defining opportunity, access to what society offered, and creating lifestyle: all things previously been linked to status, place of employment, Party affiliation, etc. Money now seemed to determine it all. It was shock therapy for sure, but far more complex than what our economists had in mind or understood.

Simultaneously, this disorientation for most people's lives was compounded by a second catastrophic development, the collapse of the currency, or in the case of the new states the conflation of the Ruble's collapse with the need to establish a new currency. Piled on top of the new place of money, the inflation dealt a heavy blow to almost every individual or family. Savings and any cushion they represented evaporated in months, salaries that had conferred significant benefits became all but worthless as prices in the free market skyrocketed. Combined with the new place of money in determining the distribution of society's assets it brought a social revolution and set the new values as defined by the market system at odds with the system that had been constructed by 75

years of Soviet control. It had a profound impact on nearly everyone in society and its social costs were high.

Finally, a third dimension of these changes, the opening of the economy and society to private property ownership beyond personal property combined with the new role of money and market pricing challenged many of the most basic ideas about social justice, reward for contribution to society, and who was entitled to the nation's wealth, a way of thinking about allocating what society had to offer that generations of Russians and others had grown up to accept as the moral compass for their society. Now instead of being forbidden, private ownership of the means of production and more broadly nearly every kind of property was open to private ownership. It was a stunning reversal of everything the communist model had represented. It was greeted with a degree of schizophrenia. On the one hand citizens welcomed the ability broadly to own a private garden plot, an apartment, a country home, a taxi to make a living, a restaurant, a kiosk. It was opportunity. On the other hand, there was great skepticism and significant opposition to the idea that the nation's wealth - its oil fields, steel factories, forests, fishing streams, etc. - might belong to individuals or give owners arbitrary rights to their exploitation. This issue would become more acute as the development of the economy through the mid-nineties gave rise to the Russian and other oligarchies across the region and brought growing inequities in wealth throughout the system.

Now, western observers assessing these developments often overlooked key aspects of what was in fact taking place. Having determined that Russia and its neighbors had by the mid-nineties become market economies, they came to measure and analyze them as such. It became standard to cite economic statistics like GDP, money supply, etc. to assess what was taking place in Russia's economy. But this missed reality as often as not. The analysts often had no idea what really was going on because the money figures they relied on didn't come close to reflecting the real GDP, the amount of internal trade and production, or how people were surviving. What they failed to understand was that by the mid to late-nineties the Russian economy according to figures I was given was something like 75 per cent based in barter, and at one point had developed an entire alternate currency called a *vechsel*, something akin to a kind of generalized promissory note, that allowed commerce to operate. It could work, for example, such that a maker of bath towels would give his product to a customer who had gasoline and the customer in turn would provide the towel maker with gasoline for the company truck. But it might also provide you the towels in return for a vechsel that says it is worth the value of a specified amount of gasoline to the bearer. I can then use that elsewhere in exchange for a needed commodity.

A further example of the limits of western understanding arose over wage arrears, the reality of people working regularly without being paid wages. Most western analysts could not understand why people were going to work every day and not getting paid, settling for what amounted to a charge account with their employer who agreed to owing say the last 18 weeks' wages but did not have the money to pay the employees.

Q: But they were at least paying them in food, weren't they?

COLLINS: That was the point. What our people could not fully factor into the picture, the policy people at least, was that the reason everybody kept working was that it provided employees an essential benefits package. Despite the major reforms and changes, this whole dimension to being employed in the old Soviet system carried on. So it was housing, it was the education for your kids, it was a noon hot meal, it was medical care, it was daycare, it was all of these different things which for a large element of the working population across most of the country were linked in some way to employment. And as that arrangement kept on through most of the '90s, it also satisfied essential needs for substantial elements of the work force. This was true in Russia and other states, and was an essential part of preventing the worst outcomes from the collapse of much of the social network across nearly all the states of the region and certainly in Russia.

In the meantime a new focus for the economy was emerging gradually. It shifted from the sectors that were favored in the Soviet command system to sectors that reflected values determined by the dynamics of a market economy. There was a degree of continuity. Commodities remained a critical sector. Commodities export was the main foreign currency earner for the economy and for the government budget in Soviet times and it remained so. So oil, gas, other commodities, timber, nickel remained a key element for the economy and in the new era this sector began to attract outside investment to enhance its effectiveness. Returns from the export of these items remained the key resource for the government's budget.

Concurrently, however, other sectors, many seriously neglected by the Soviet system, developed as the new market took hold. All of a sudden there are new houses being built around the cities, and new urban housing projects are transforming urban landscapes. The new building reflected the success of a new private construction industry satisfying an unmet need. This is also the time we see the emergence of things like the software and computer industry, more or less a post-Soviet sector that is also in private hands and linked to growing contacts and investment between Russian and western companies. A company like Boeing comes to Russia attracted by the availability of engineering talent, contracts for engineering services, and sets up an operation in Moscow that becomes an integral division of the larger corporation. And then there is the explosion of the retail sector that is satisfying an insatiable unmet demand for the kinds of things of daily life Russians had lived without for decades under the Soviet system. Western companies like Gillette and Proctor & Gamble, Ford and GM, and Mars all find the Russian market an exceptional opportunity and grow rapidly to meet what seems an unlimited demand.

So the economy is transforming, yes. The commodities remain vital to the government and they are a vital part of the economy. But there's also gradual development of new economic activity. The result is a gradual move away seeing life lived amidst almost universal scarcity to a life of seeming unlimited availability. But it is also a transformation of the question from how do I find a light bulb to can I pay for it. To the typical family economy in Russia it's no longer whether Grandma (Babushka) can stand in line for three hours to get some oranges; it's whether somebody in the family can get a job that will pay enough to buy the oranges because the oranges are now to be taken for

granted as available. The effects of this transformation can be seen happening up through the mid nineties. As the overall economy changes from one of scarcity to one of adequacy there is an accompanying change in the way people think about making their way ahead in a society. First and foremost, that is now a function of earning power and requires markedly different thinking from what they knew in Soviet times.

And this, again, leads to the next change that has a profoundly important impact on the development of Russian society and the societies in the region during the 1990s, the impact the differentiation of incomes and the diminished role state decisions play in defining people's options for their future. This was particularly striking for the younger generation, those in university or only beginning their careers. Their thinking about the future, about their options, about their capacity to control their lives was very different from those of their parents. When I talked to young students, for example, what I heard was "I need English and I need to know how to operate a computer." If I know that I can get a Western job or a job where somebody will pay me in dollars. That will mean opportunity for a job with a wage whose value is predictable and will ensure access to necessities. It was in a sharp abandonment by the young of their parents' way of thinking and way of life.

And this reality plays out in other ways. If you think about the Soviet pride in its position as a super power, a nation accepted by the U.S. as an equal and so on. The critical concept was "parity". Suddenly the Russian national currency that you and your children count on to hold any value loses its meaning. Now it is dollars everyone needs and counts on for stability and value. We calculated that something like $50 billion in U.S. currency was being held and used in Russia. It was used to store value or for any significant exchange or purchase. Nobody had faith in the ruble because inflation remained beyond control. The ruble was something to spend as quickly as possible, a way of thinking that only kept fueling inflation. Government efforts at one point to prevent use of dollars and Euros and to make people work with rubles yielded a typically creative response from the public and business community. If the law would not permit use of foreign currencies, they invented an alternative called the Universal Unit (U Ye) The U Ye was pegged to the dollar or Euro. So a price in Rubles would also have an U Ye price meaning it was the equivalent of $14 or 12 Euros or 80 yen or whatever. People were learning quickly about the market!

Q: You mentioned the young person and English and computer skills, but the hero of the Soviet Union always was the steelworker the factory worker These are not people who are easily going to tap into this foreign market are they?.

COLLINS: I do think Washington and our policy people missed a lot about the real impact this transformation was having on the Russian population over all. This was especially true about how it affected most of the elite and intelligentsia and even more broadly how different it was for the majority for the rural and the urban, for the young and the old. Take, for example, the generational question among the urbanized elite. What I detected there was a growing generation gap between those in 1991 who were, let's say, university age or ten years older, those just entering the job market, and those

already set in their careers, moving toward retirement or retired with expectations shaped in the Soviet system. The younger people have one great advantage: they start out with no assumptions or attachment to the old rules. They have already lived through the era of Gorbachev reforms and leaned to take the world as they find it, turbulent, chaotic, constantly changing, uncertain. Among the urban, educated young having English opens the prospect of a job with Procter & Gamble making something in a lab or working in an office for a western bank. It opens the world to opportunities undreamed of five years before. And the new market rules open all kinds of possibilities to make a living: in many cases to strike out on their own, to start a business, anything from a kiosk to a computer sales and service operation, to a construction firm. Some of these people became very wealthy; some did pretty well, some only managed, but for this generation, particularly in the urban regions opportunities were expanding.

By contrast for those of the last Soviet generation, those who had been educated, moved into their professions and were pretty well established on their career paths by 1991, this transition was a lot harder and for a large proportion of this population close to traumatic. For these people the rug was pulled right out from under everything they had learned, expected from career and professional life, behavior that would provide security and advancement and a stable retirement. The introduction of the market as well as Russia's integration with the international economic, trading and financial system, upended any certainties about the future for Russian enterprises from steel mills to newspapers. As the government abandoned setting norms for production or subsidies for professions, the market transition was unforgiving. If Soviet steel was not competitive, there was no demand and the industry faced a Pittsburgh fate 10 times over. In this early phase it seemed the only certain demand from Russia was commodities. Commodities always had a market. To some extent defense equipment was also still in demand. But even this sector suffered because the Russian government curtailed credit sales. Where demand certainly existed, the auto sector, for example, fundamentally nobody wanted a Russian automobile if a foreign model could be acquired. The influx of the foreign automobile into Moscow and Petersburg and other bigger cities was amazing. All the more so because with it came the entire infrastructure of higher quality gasoline distribution, service and repair, and sales and distribution of what these new vehicles demanded. By the mid-'90s, for example, the biggest Mercedes dealer in the world was in Moscow and the region had created the infrastructure to support these highly demanding autos from the ground up.

For people in their 40s, 50s, early 60s the changes were profound. These citizens had been trained and had given their lives, skills, professions to make the Soviet system work. In return they had been rewarded in ways they understood, and they expected a more or less secure future. Their work tended to define everything from housing, to status, to opportunity for children, to pension. Suddenly all of these things, an entire way of life, comfort in knowing how to manage the system, to prosper, or just survive, all of the system that created them disappears; everything goes.

The consequences and reactions of this community fell into two broad categories. The more successful found a way to adapt and hang on. Outside the large urban centers of

Moscow and Leningrad (now Petersburg) some simply said okay, yesterday I was the communist party director of this tire factory; now it's a joint stock company and I'm the director or CEO of the newly formed tire company. It's the same guys and the same mentality and about the same efficiency at making tires. And so what takes place is a sort of degradation of the capacity to produce goods that can compete as Russian producers find themselves in a global market. Once again, oil, gas, and commodities are still perfectly saleable. But Russian auto parts? Okay if you've got an old Russian car, but as competition from foreign cars grows the market for these parts shrinks and it gets harder. So, we saw a steady decline in the economy and struggle for survival as this whole generation of people who were far enough along in their careers when the Soviet Union collapsed find it terribly difficult to adapt to the change. Looking back it created what amounted almost to a lost generation.

Q: What about politics? We were talking about the economy but on the political side a new process and system is developing, politics, parties and that sort of thing.

COLLINS: Well, I think there are two things going on concurrently with politics. One is the destruction of the old system, tearing it up. Yeltsin was absolutely determined and so was his young team; they were going to tear up the Soviet system so it could not come back. Throughout the '90s that remains a basic goal. The other objective is to put in its place a new order Yeltsin and many of these people hoped would be based in pluralistic politics, a system that would respect basic civic rights and freedoms, respect freedom of the press, respect rule of law and so forth; a "normal" country.

The system that ultimately emerges was difficult aborning. I think it fair to say it begins with the coup in 1991 and concludes with the passage of the new Russian constitution in 1993. We've discussed how it emerges from a struggle between Yeltsin and his supporters and their critics and opponents who held on to power in unreformed elements of the Soviet system. At the outset they had control of the Soviet elected Russian Supreme Soviet. This competition played out over the course of two years as Yeltsin and his team pressed their agenda of reform and transformation of the economy, defined relations with the new states/neighbors, the West, and other international partners, and pressed political reforms. As we've discussed, the two sides grew further apart and the Supreme Soviet sought to curb Yeltsin's authority. Yeltsin first challenged his opponents successfully by winning a referendum in the spring of 1993 and then when the Supreme Soviet sought to block him further issued a decree dissolving the legislature. That action, in turn, led to the final chapter in the struggle in October with the shelling of the parliament, the forced dissolution of the Supreme Soviet, and replacement of the remaining Soviet political structure with a new constitutional order.

So, with the beginning of 1994, as I am now back in Washington, Russia is embarking on a new phase. It has a new constitutional structure, a newly elected legislative branch, and the communist or old-line opposition to the Yeltsin reform agenda is discredited, in prison, or in disarray. The new political system that will last pretty much through Yeltsin's time, had certain features that were, I thought, particularly important and significant. For example, the Duma, the lower house of parliament, was elected in two

ways: half was elected proportionally by party, and each party then selected the number of members to which they were entitled from their rank and file. The party leaderships, in short, decided who would sit as deputies. The second half of the Duma was elected from geographically defined single member constituencies where the district's voters selected their representative directly. In these constituencies the parties might have a role in selecting candidates, but the voters themselves determined who would represent the district. This segment of the legislature became particularly important as it began to produce new, young, political leaders more directly linked to their constituencies than their professional party colleagues. This was, to my mind, particularly important at the time because this element made a place for genuine opposition to the traditional party elites and produced some of the best young political talent from the regions.

Furthermore these directly elected representatives were provided alternative legitimate political voices at a time when the political parties were themselves quite weak. The Duma and more broadly speaking politics and political power was dominated by a so called party of power. It was the recognized ruling party. It was the source of patronage, and it had the capacity to make things happen; it became the party of the governors, the mayors, the majority. The minority parties, the "opposition" were constantly challenged to take on this juggernaut. But with the members from single member districts capable of retaining a degree of independence, the party of power continued to have voices they had to listen to from outside the capital and the regular parties. This had the effect of limiting the Party of Power and preserving the country's multi-party system. As a result, with four or five major parties and a number of independents competing in districts, Russia for most of the decade did run fairly open, free elections. They were contested openly, very few were prevented from running for office, and the outcomes were as often as not uncertain.

What I think was no less important than these aspects of the system, however, was that Yeltsin, albeit with some exceptions, throughout this period substantially adhered to certain key principles of the system he created. For example, he stands by press freedom; he does not try to clamp down on the press or control it. Despite obvious frustrations and moments of downright anger with the institution he basically respects the role of the Duma, the parliament, as the sole source of legitimate legislation; he does not again seek to rule by decree; nor does he try to bludgeon it or make it bend to his will by threatening to dissolve it. Basically, although I'm sure he was frustrated no end, he works to get the legislation he needs with the tools he has as President. No less importantly, at this time the judiciary too begins to acquire a growing degree of independence. By the middle of the decade it is beginning to play an increasingly significant role in resolving issues and disputes emerging from the new market system and experiencing a growth in demand for the services the courts provide by a public seeking fairness and defense of their rights in an often seemingly rule-less society But these developments and the system they are creating remain very fragile.

Q: Well I mean, looking of course at today, Putin seems to be reversing much of what you are describing. Where did Yeltsin pick up these ideas? I mean was this instinctive or what?

COLLINS: Personally I have my own view of Yeltsin. I think Yeltsin actually was, at heart, a kind of populist democrat with a small "d" in certain particular ways. It's not that he wasn't quite prepared to be fairly authoritarian and he could be, but fundamentally he actually brought to the presidency something that was unprecedented in Russian history. First, he believed that his legitimacy, authority, and power derived from being elected, and he established the premise for the first time ever in Russian history that being elected was the sole basis for legitimate political authority. If you weren't elected, you didn't really have legitimate power. Now, that was unique in Russian political history. It meant it wasn't the ideology that you embodied that legitimated your claim to authority. It wasn't who your father was that legitimated your succession to power. It was getting elected by the people that legitimated your authority and right to exercise power. So that was number one.

The second one, I'm quite convinced, was that he believed the Russian people basically had enough sense to know what was good for them. And while I'm sure he didn't necessarily agree with many of the decisions voters made or views many people expressed, he didn't act to prevent those ideas or thoughts from being considered or given a hearing. I recall that during his early years in office he frequently would visit a factory, talk with people on the street, call members of his team without warning just to talk. It suggested to me that in his own way he truly believed that he was not there to define what was good for Russian people, what they should want, and then make them want it. He seemed much more comfortable with the idea that it was his role to listen, come to a decision and to convince his public his direction made sense or was the right one. This is how you account for his staunch support for freedom of the press, it's how you account for the fact that he had all kinds of people get elected he didn't like, why all sorts of different things were going on that he probably hated. So, his actions seemed to me to show comfort with the idea that society would be pluralist, that it could accommodate a variety of different views, that the business of politics was basically to find the way to pull these different elements together or reconcile them or give them shape without suppressing those who differed from your own views.

Now the problem for him and for these ideas was that they coexisted with a time of economic collapse and a society in upheaval. It was a time when people's lives got worse pretty much universally. So, to put it mildly, Yeltsin's idea, his model, is not remembered with great affection. And yet his time made the changes that were essential to build a new market based economy, to establish a new basis for legitimacy of political power, to provide Russia with an experience of greater openness than at almost any time in its history. I only hope its legacy will have an impact beyond the reaction to it of recent years.

Q: Well now when you're back in Washington and in this job things are really changing. Are all our perceptions of Russia turned topsy-turvy? Did you find yourself in the role of professor or intellectual trying to explain what was happening? Because you must have been up against all sorts of establishments that were trained to think in a different way.

COLLINS: Well, certainly during my time back here and later when I go out as ambassador, which we can talk about next time I did regularly see myself partly as an interpreter trying to convey to Washington some sense for the impact and implications of two big things. One was the incredible pace of change that was taking place across Russia and Eurasia. And second that the emerging Russian society really was different from its Soviet past. It became a different country about every month in many ways, but certainly most importantly it was essential to come to terms with the fact that the Cold War was over and the system that created it was gone. It was also essential to counsel patience, because what was to come was still a work in progress. Nobody yet knew what the longer term would hold, and none of these developments were taking place in isolation. In a couple of specific cases how the U.S. conducted its policies and relations would have a special impact and could create real problems unless addressed wisely.

One was the idea that the Americans won the Cold War. In a sense, of course, it was true the American or Western idea prevailed, and the communist or Bolshevik idea lost out. But neither Russia nor any of the other new countries were ever conquered in any traditional sense. The Cold War did not end like World War II. But American have their sense of "victory", and as Americans began approaching Russia as the losers of a war, it generated growing tension. The Russians never considered themselves as having been vanquished, and certainly in no way saw themselves in a position analogous to Germany or Japan at the end of World War II. Basing our approach on that view was a dangerous way to go about defining your relationship with new Russia.

This grows as a challenge as the defeat of Bolshevism becomes conflated by the peoples of the newly independent states not as a shared victory over an ideology and system of government, but as the defeat of Russia and its domination of people that had suffered under Russian imperial rule. It was, of course, the case that for many in the Russian and then Soviet empire communism and Russian imperial domination were synonymous. And yet it was also the case that with the Soviet approach to nationalities and the structure of the Union based in nationality defined republics, it was far from the case that Russians alone had managed the ideologically based communist system. Nonetheless, for the outsiders like the U.S. defining the end of the USSR as a liberation from Russian domination becomes an issue as the new states in many cases come to define themselves as not being Russia or part of Moscow's future. So we the Americans find ourselves in a position, particularly with our Ukrainian, Georgian and Baltic friends being lobbied to help the new leaderships keep the Russians from doing this or that, warning Washington against trusting the Russians, etc. In other words the whole idea that the Cold War was less about ideology than Russian imperial rule. The idea that the defeat of communism was a victory of all gave way incrementally to seeing the key dimension of the Cold War's end not as the collapse of the communist ideology and system, but more critically as the beginning of a post imperial era for Eurasia based in the final defeat of Russia and the breakup of its empire.

In the U.S. the tension between these two ideas was a central factor in our strategy and policy for most of the decade. The premise that the Cold War's end and defeat of communism was a victory for all the peoples and nations in the East, including the

Russians underlay the broad base of policy that brought about the Freedom Support Act, the Nunn Lugar program, and the strategic premise that our long-term objective, shared by Moscow as well as the other states of the East, was an integrated Euro-Atlantic system with no dividing lines and at peace.

On the other hand, as our policies gradually encompassed the idea of greater reliance on NATO for the future security architecture of the Euro-Atlantic region, we encountered growing efforts by key new states to press for greater support against Russian influence. Russia itself concurrently grew more resistant to western efforts to limit its regional and international role. As the idea that the U.S. faced any threat from communist ideology dissipated, our policies and thinking focused on the new challenges of dealing with the issue of Russia's future place in Europe and Eurasia and preventing restoration of any Moscow based imperial control over Eurasia. As the decade progressed, particularly in the wake of the 1998 economic default by the Russian government, our public, it seemed to me, grew comfortable with the idea that Russia lost the Cold War, should be accepting that fact, be more accommodating to U.S. policies and objectives in light of its loss, and appreciate more fully American support in Russia's time of recovery. It was a way of thinking at odds with how Moscow saw things.

Q: One of the major institutions in our relations with Russia was the commission Al Gore led with Chernomyrdin. How did that work. What was it and how did you feel Gore played his role.?

COLLINS: In the mid-1990s the commission became one of our most effective tools for conducting government to government relations. For its time, it was revolutionary in many ways and became so successful that pressures mounted for equivalent institutions among other NIS. Ultimately we did have a Gore-Kuchma commission with Ukraine as well as another with Georgia. I think I've also remarked that like a lot of things from this era, the commission itself was more or less an accident, that it emerged from the Vancouver summit in 1993 as Clinton and Yeltsin tasked "Al and Viktor" to work out details or get things done on matters they discussed. As these assignments became codified, the Vice President and Prime Minister found themselves *de facto* overseeing an expanding bureaucratic network and programs of U.S.-Russia cooperation. And with the inevitable logic of government, the two principals created a committee or in this case the commission to coordinate and oversee a wide and expanding agenda of bilateral programming on their behalf. The GCC thus served for most of the decade as the key coordinator for major portions of the multi-billion dollar effort the U.S. was making to support Russia's economic and political transformation and to expand areas of cooperation between the two governments. The result was a growing web of engagement between U.S. and Russian ministries and departments in support of an expanding program mix that came to include joint projects in space, health, science and technology, industry and so forth.

In its time the commission did three things that were very important. First, it set an agenda and defined priorities. It either defined a course of action out of the often very general guidance from presidents Clinton and Yeltsin, or it prepared program proposals

for the presidents to consider. In this, the co-chairs saw to it that what were often general aspirations or general policy directions became concrete guidance and programs jointly agreed by the political leadership of both countries.

Second, the commission coordinated the activities of the two governments and played a key role in assuring needed funding, resources, or authorizations for agreed programs or projects. It assigned responsibilities among governmental agencies and entities and specified tasks for the bureaucracy to accomplish within a given time. It played an often critical role in the allocation of resources among competing claimants. Both on the Russian and on the American side if you had tasks assigned by the commission, it was a way to strengthen a claim for funds and resources to fulfill commission defined responsibilities.

Finally, the commission in important ways either took responsibility for major decisions or resource allocations off the shoulders of ministers or their subordinates in ways that enabled far greater scope and flexibility for cooperation between the bureaucracies of the two governments. In fact, it often seemed to me that the commission's greatest contribution lay precisely in the way it permitted expanded direct engagement between our government officials at a range of levels. In absolving people in the bureaucracies of responsibility for taking risks associated, particularly in Moscow but in the U.S. as well, with exploring greater or new cooperation with the former adversary or competitor, the commission permitted people in ministries and departments to work together far more freely and openly. It made it possible for professionals, for example, to establish direct contacts at working levels meaning that they didn't have to go all the way up to the president and back down again every time they had a new idea to discuss with a counterpart.

Q: Sort of as we developed with Canada and Mexico.

COLLINS: Yes. Well, that was the idea. And in fact it was a success. We were building direct relationships simply unimaginable in an earlier time. For example, doctors from the Center for Disease Control developed a very active project working with their Russian counterparts on diagnosis and monitoring of unusual diseases. In this new world they didn't bother going through the Secretary or the Minister of Health; they just were talking to each other. That kind of thing was as important as it was unprecedented. It was building what I hoped at the time would be lasting new relations between the people in our governments that would pay dividends in the future.

So the commission was essentially the tool the presidents created to get things done and to move bureaucracies that were not known for their spontaneity or responsiveness to concrete action in support of very new and unfamiliar strategic objectives. Because the commission co-chairs met about once every six months, we had a calendar of action forcing events that people like myself could use to get action. I would sit down with a colleague each from the White House and Pentagon and my colleague in the assistance coordinator's office, and the four of us once a week would go through the list to assess how were doing. It was our way of managing our policy responsibilities and to be ready

to support the needs of the Gore and Chernomyrdin people. It helped organize priorities and ensure we kept abreast of what was working, what was not, where we had to give greater attention, where a decision was necessary, etc. Then, when the two co-chairs met, it was an opportunity to get decisions made. So it was very important to me as Ambassador-at-Large and to my colleagues. It helped us get needed decisions, guidance, and support. It provided the two presidents with a vital, trusted executive instrument they could turn to to make things happen, and it provided me and my colleagues with critical leadership and support. It worked very well, and for the mid '90s was absolutely central to the conduct of our Russia relations.

Q: Did Gore understand Russia?

COLLINS: I believe he did. He was not an expert, but he was intelligent and he listened. He developed a very good and productive relationship with Chernomyrdin. He also had a good staff; Leon Fuerth was his special assistant, and was first rate in preparing his principal for the commission meetings. Gore did a very good job of managing and leading what was often a difficult institution and menagerie of personalities.

Q: Okay. Today is the 8th of August, 2013, with Jim Collins. And Jim, let's now come back to how you become ambassador to Russia. I mean, you're obviously well qualified but that often is beyond the point. Why you?

COLLINS: Well, I suppose it was most important that I had come to know and work closely with the Clinton administration's Russia team from the time they came into office. I had been their man in Moscow as charge for the transition and the first several months of the administration. And I had known Strobe Talbott, Clinton's point man on Russia, well before that. As Tom Pickering's deputy for the remainder of 1993, I spent a fair amount of time working in DC with Strobe as he shaped the contours and priorities of his job and his new organization S/NIS.

Q: Can you remind us what S/NIS was.

COLLINS: Most simply S/NIS was a virtual geographic bureau attached to the Secretary of State's office. It was headed by an Ambassador at Large and special advisor to the Secretary for the New Independent States. Strobe Talbott created and held the position until I took his place in early 1994. The office was responsible for coordination and implementation of policy and programs for all the former Soviet space with the exception of the Baltic States. The new arrangement, unprecedented as it was, ensured that the region would have leadership responsive to the White House, hence the Ambassador title, and would receive the special focus Clinton believed Russia and its region demanded. As a side note, by the way, I enjoyed from time to time the fact that as Ambassador-at-Large the position outranked the assistant secretaries at State in protocol order.

Q: So you came back into this new organization.

COLLINS: Exactly. In a way, it was a logical transition. I had worked closely with the Clinton team before I returned to Washington in November, 1993. On my return I joined Strobe's team, at his request, in the new position he had created to focus on the unresolved conflicts in the NIS. In this position I was part of his inner circle and less formally in a way a general adviser. But, this arrangement lasted only a short time because in February 1994, Strobe was tapped to become Deputy Secretary of State, and I assumed his position as special advisor to the Secretary and ultimately Ambassador-at-Large for the NIS although confirmation in that position didn't come until almost a year into my tenure. I stayed in that position until the end of the summer 1997. So, it was from that base that Strobe and the President decided I would be a good replacement for Tom Pickering. Needless to say, big shoes.

Now, this background did prepare me well for the new assignment. I had worked very closely with Talbott on most of the key diplomatic and policy issues of the period.. I had been part of our effort to remove nuclear material and weapons from Belarus, Kazakhstan and Ukraine, of our early steps to define and develop policies toward the new states in our region. I had worked closely with the interagency team to coordinate our defense and other programs with our new partners, to promote their engagement with European and international institutions, and so forth. With Russia I had been heavily engaged in negotiations ranging from the terms for implementing the Nunn Lugar program, to the NATO Founding Act, to the range of agreements that emerged from the Gore-Chernomyrdin commission. So I'd been very engaged with Russia and the whole neighborhood over the course of nearly four years.

I had also made clear to Strobe that if it became possible, I hoped to be considered for the job, and when the time came I was the State Department candidate. I was fortunate as well to have the support of Strobe Talbott and some important outsiders like Bob Strauss. So, I was approved by the White House and nominated by Clinton. It was a moment I could only marvel was actually upon me. Not in my wildest dreams, even after decades of service in Russia, study of the history, culture and language, and engagement with our relations with Moscow over most of my career could I quite believe what I was about to undertake.

Q: But it was also the case, I believe that Moscow, with some notable examples like Strauss, had not been an overtly political ambassadorship like France or London.

COLLINS: That's true. In the post-war period Moscow historically had been a career post. I think there were a couple of reasons for that. First of all, the job involved a lot of very hard work; it was very intensive, around the clock, "always on" work. Moscow was also a rather high-risk post. There were lots of things that could or did go wrong in Moscow. Nor was Moscow a "social" post: while there had been some exceptions in the past, it wasn't the place for parties or receptions that would make the society pages. And finally, Moscow historically had not been a very easy or pleasant place to live even if you were terribly interested professionally or, like I did, simply found it fascinating and engaging. It was a career diplomat's place.

Q: *It was sort of the plum?*

COLLINS: Yes, that's a good way to understand it. But as someone trained academically as an historian, who had spent most of my professional and academic life hooked on Russia, the assignment had other implications. Frankly, I was somewhat humbled to be joining the ranks of George Kennan and Averill Harriman. These were the people I had read about, the people in the history texts. What did it mean to be a direct descendent professionally of John Quincy Adams. It's a fairly important lineage. It was a great honor and a sobering moment to join that lineage. I had already been through some historic moments and events, but this, for a career member of the Foreign Service; well, I don't think you could aspire to something greater. To me it was the premiere job.

Q: You were there from when to when?

COLLINS: I was nominated in the late spring of 1997. It took a while to get the paperwork done and to wrap up matters I was engaged in managing before I could leave. I was confirmed at the end of the summer, and I finally departed for post in early September. So I was in Moscow from Labor Day, 1997, until after the Fourth of July, 2001 almost four years.

Q: How did the confirmation hearings go?

COLLINS: Well, to be honest, despite the usual nerves that preceded any such meeting with the Congress, and by this time I had many such, this case was a pleasure. The hearing was friendly: very nice things, almost embarrassing things, were said by Senators I had come to know, and by the end it all seemed more like a ceremony than a hearing. I had warm support from Senator Lugar, with whom I had worked for a long time and from senator Paul Simon from my native Illinois. But, I can only say that even as the questions were easy and the praise at time almost embarrassing, I was relieved and I suspect a bit light headed when it was over.

Looking back on it now, it was important that I had these hearings and went out at a time when there was still a largely bipartisan consensus about the Clinton Administration's basic policies, strategy and approach to Russia. The hearings came before many of the things during my time as ambassador that began to erode that consensus and before Russian policy became a divisive political issue in Washington. That only happened toward the end of the Clinton Administration and well into my ambassadorship. So I would say as I approached the confirmation and as I was getting ready to go out, I had every reason to expect pretty solid bipartisan backing and strong support from the Hill for the basics of policy I would be representing.

Q: How would you say relations were between Russia and the United States when you went out?

COLLINS: They were pretty good. They were not the honeymoon I knew when I was last there in the early nineties following the Soviet breakup. That was an exceptional almost

abnormal relationship. As Yeltsin and his young team looked to us for answers to nearly all questions, differences were mostly shunted to the background. It seemed to us we were working from the same playbook, same points of view, same premises about the future. It was a high point, but to me it really seemed at times almost abnormal.

As we went through the mid '90s our relations certainly did hit some serious bumps and difficult points, but they still remained quite good. As we've noted a couple of issues had raised serious problems and challenges, in particular our decision to support enlarging NATO, which we've talked about earlier. Other issues that began to emerge involved Russia's relations with its immediate neighbors, the former republics, now new states of the CIS (Confederation of Independent States); relations with Georgia and Ukraine in particular were unsettled. And at home developments such as the shelling of the parliament in 1993 and the first war in Chechnya had raised some questions about Russia's resolve to abide by American ideas regarding commitments on human rights and democratic norms. But with Russia's new constitutional structure, successful elections under the new system, a cease-fire and relatively peaceful environment in Chechnya, and the negotiation of new terms of engagement for Russia with NATO all in place by the time I was ready to depart, most of the more troublesome issues that arose in Yeltsin's first term had been largely defused. Finally, Yeltsin's reelection in 1996 had reaffirmed the country's rejection of any communist return and ended anxiety about any communist resurgence.

This, of course, was not to say there were no issues. On the security side the one major issue that remained was Russian withdrawal of Soviet era military infrastructure and personnel remaining outside its borders, in particular the remaining forces in the Baltic states. In the absence of virtually any trust between Moscow and its Baltic neighbors resolving that issue, including the provision of housing for the returning troops remained a challenge. On the economic side, meanwhile, I would say things were proceeding reasonably. In my meetings with banks and business leaders in New York before I departed, I was given a positive picture of how that community saw prospects in Russia. The financial community was doing very well, major firms and investors I found bullish on prospects for everything from retail goods to energy. Of course, America with its Type A personality about getting things done right and right away was always frustrated reform didn't move faster. But, at this time, the existing issues were not really divisive or politically controversial.

Q: How did you see your goals as you arrived.

COLLINS: As I went out to post, I would have to say, I did not foresee an agenda focused on managing critical differences or confronting a relationship based in fundamentally different interests. More or less it seemed to me my major job was to represent and embody America's continuing encouragement and support for Russia's transition from its authoritarian, communist, command economic past to what we hoped would be a market based, modernized, European industrial democracy. I saw managing America's involvement in these changes and the implications they would have for our

relations appeared to me the central theme I was going to address during my tour in Moscow.

Against this background, I went out with what I came to define as a six-part agenda: it began with support for Russia's political transition; second came promotion and support for economic reform and transition to a market economy; the third and related item was to advance American trade and investment; fourth was to sustain and advance our cooperation on key security issues, in particular the reduction and safe management of nuclear weapons and material, military reform and cooperation; the fifth was to promote normalized and productive engagement in the cultural/scientific/educational/human dimension of our relations - to build a normal base of engagement between our societies and institutions; and sixth was to encourage cooperation on international issues and normalization of Russian relations with its new neighbors.

As it turned out this agenda really didn't change too much over my tenure. There were, to be sure, a number of events during my time that were disruptive or diverting. In fact it seemed there was one "crisis" or disruptive event after another in the relationship that required diplomacy and management to keep things from going off the rails in ways that were totally out of proportion to what was at issue. It was in this sense that I came to loathe the term "crisis" because it seemed everything was one no matter the gravity of the problem or issue. But such was life.

On the other hand in my time I did encounter two issues that truly deserved the term crisis, issues that tested key elements of the foundation for our relations. The 1998 Russian financial default and the fallout from the Kosovo crisis truly deserved the term. These two events deeply challenged the foundations of support for our relations in both countries and left them more difficult as a result. They were deeply challenging to us in Moscow and in both cases the mission was deeply involved in managing real crises in relations. The term crisis was in fact well deserved.

Q: Well I would imagine every embassy's got such events, but relations with the Soviet Union with a long period of hostile relations meant you had to watch what you said and had to treat this relationship very, very carefully. It's not one that you could take for granted and was always sensitive at home as well as in the country itself.

COLLINS: I absolutely agree. This was a challenge we all faced constantly. It seemed I was regularly working to prevent whatever the latest issue was from mushrooming out of control and/or diverting the relationship off course or distorting it in some way that was going to be counterproductive. Several major developments had changed the environment I had known in the early nineties and complicated the environment for managing such issues.

First we were living with a growing sense of urgency among our hosts about finding a Russian sense of national identity. This had many healthy aspects, but it also gave birth to growing nationalism and prickliness about anything appearing to slight Russia that was clearly taking root as I arrived. I remember very well feeling a sense of unease at what I

heard at a ceremony for the 850th anniversary of the founding of the city of Moscow that fall. I was struck at that event by the nationalism and chauvinist themes, something that had not been part of such events even up to the mid '90s. But the mayor, Luzhkov, whom I had known years earlier as a pro-Yeltsin, pro-Western patriot, was now sounding Russian themes in a way I found unsettling. His speech and demeanor suggested he found politically playing on a sense of grievance and disappointment at where Russians found themselves half a decade after the Soviet collapse a political expedient. He played on ideas about slights to Russia's place as a great power, Russia not going to be ignored, Russia not going to be manipulated, not taken for granted. This was going to be a trend in the political environment that only grew stronger over my tenure. Somewhat ominously as well, Luzhkov was one of those vocal about the injustice of Crimea falling under Ukrainian authority.

Second on the list of environment changing developments came in the economy. One year after I got there we faced the Russian default and financial collapse of August '98. It left a lasting imprint on the mood about Russia in the U.S. and about American economic models in Russia. On our side, Americans had made significant investments in the success of the Russia's transition to a market economy, in Russia becoming part of the Western financial system, etc. It was also true that a lot of banks, investment houses, and such were making a lot of money in Russia. I had been told when I went out, for example, that investment in Russian government paper was extremely profitable for the big banks and Wall Street. Well suddenly it all collapsed as Russia defaulted; a lot of financial people didn't look very good, and big money was lost.

The view of Russia as an economic success story turned around 180 degrees almost overnight, and the fallout from the default were widespread in both countries. In the U.S. the image of Russia and America's role in the country's future changed dramatically. From being part of a great success story where Russia is building democracy and learning how to run an economy our way, our portrayals of Russia now focused on people and a society who don't pay their debts, ignore responsibilities and legal obligations, etc. It gave all a great shock and undermined confidence and trust on both sides. In Russia, the counterpart mood of distrust and suspicion of American models and advice replaced confidence in the American way and wisdom. There were also those resuscitating the portrayal of America as seeking to exploit or weaken Russia at a time of troubles.

Third was the sharp division that emerged over events surrounding the Kosovo war and the American decision to intervene there militarily, in particular the decision to bomb Serbian targets to stop Milosevic's campaign against the Kosovars. Russia had strongly opposed the U.S. military intervention, and when we acted, it had a profound effect in Russia that went more deeply into the Russian public mood and thinking than any other event I had seen in years. The impact was fueled by feelings of sympathy and emotional ties to fellow Orthodox Slavs fanned by critics of the Yeltsin government. In this sense this regional dispute turned into a domestic issue where Russian elements who had opposed much of what Yeltsin and his governments had been doing from the outset thought they finally had a chance to exploit a weakness and prevail against him.

The argument went, you've supported these Westerners, now look at what they're doing to our Serbian brothers: if they are doing this to Serbia, what will they do if we don't bow to their wishes. Yeltsin, indeed, found himself on the defensive and for a time himself joined the critics until he turned the tables on his opponents by taking on the role of peacemaker and mediator in the conflict. But these weeks were difficult for us. It was a moment when we had no friends for a time: Yeltsin and everybody else piled on criticism of the Americans and our use of military force against Belgrade. The negative effect on Russian perceptions of the U.S., brought forth the hardest criticism of the United States in a decade, and its affects went much deeper than any other such moment during my time For the first time in a decade we began to see anti-American sentiment penetrating downward among the population. From my perspective it had a lasting, negative effect.

Fourth on the list was the condition of the president himself. Yeltsin with growing health problems was becoming less capable. His popularity was declining: his term of office was coming to an end, and we knew we were going to have a transition. So the fourth thing that strongly affected many aspects of our work and relations centered on the issue of uncertainty about the leadership of Russia itself. That was resolved only on New Year's eve 1999 when Yeltsin shocked his own citizens and the rest of the world in announcing his resignation ahead of time and naming Vladimir Putin as his successor.

The loss of Yeltsin as partner and his choice of Putin was an unsettling event. Putin was, a largely unknown figure in the U.S. Nor did it help that. almost immediately his name was linked with his KGB background in nearly every mention in the U.S. media. The new reality of an unknown, new Russia leader only intensified U.S. uncertainties about Russia that had been building since the 1998 default. Recall here that for most of my time before coming to the Embassy in 1997, U.S. policies toward Russia had more or less enjoyed bipartisan support. It seemed an almost apolitical approach. But with the events I have described above and with the approach of our own political season this changed quite significantly. Emblematic of the new mood was the famous "New York Times" magazine front page story about "Who Lost Russia" a slogan/headline that would become a major leitmotif in the campaign between Gore and Bush. So it is probably obvious, but the growing politicizing of our relations during my ambassadorship made life more complicated and harder.

Q: Okay, before we go further, could you talk a bit about who was your DCM and did you get to choose him or her?

COLLINS: Of course. I had two deputies during my four years. John Tefft was my first deputy and John Ordway my second. I selected a third as well, Paul Smith, who became in a sense interim DCM for my successor for one year until his own choice became available. John Tefft, whom I had known earlier, was charge when I arrived. He had done a terrific job for several months after Tom Pickering departed post and stayed as my deputy for my first two years. I had not picked him directly, of course, but I knew his professionalism well from my position in Washington. He was just first rate. We had precisely the kind of relationship everyone says an Ambassador needs with a DCM. It was marked by full confidence, trust, and openness that, in fact, became close friendship

very soon. I could not have asked for anyone better. He was a great people person and manager: he knew his staff, he knew the embassy; and he knew our policies and programs. His was a huge job. I knew he had done it earlier but it was magnified several times by what the embassy had become and how it had grown. It was hard to imagine but our mission – the embassy and three consulates – employed some 1,600 people.

Q: Good God.

COLLINS: Overseeing the day to day running of this enterprise was a huge job, and he had a full mastery of all of it; also he and I saw very much eye to eye on how we saw the place, how we saw our goals. We talked a lot about how to structure the work of the embassy and broader mission, which was a challenge because, if I remember right, we had 29 government agencies in the embassy community. State Department was, of course, a minority in that mix, but central. And finally, the icing on this cake was what for the time was probably the most complex, controversial, and contentious building project the U.S. was undertaking overseas at the time - construction of the embassy's new chancery building to replace the structure that had been compromised by the Soviets a decade previously.

John Ordway was in every respect more than ready to fill in when John Tefft departed to become Ambassador in Lithuania, a much deserved onward posting. Ordway had been political counselor, in effect number three for the embassy, during the first half of my tour. So having him join me as DCM was almost a given so far as I was concerned. Like Tefft he knew the ins and outs of the mission, our policies and our programs: he had stints as acting DCM. And most importantly I knew he had the respect of the mission and was someone in whom I had absolute confidence. For his time, he had to manage our way through any number of those difficulties I described earlier, and he was absolutely essential to me in ensuring things went smoothly. Like John Tefft, John Ordway became a close confidante and friend and was to go on to ambassadorial postings in the Caucasus and Central Asia afterward. In sum, if I had to provide a profile of what any ambassador should want for a deputy either of these two represent the model profile.

Q: Tell me a little bit about how you saw your own job. What was involved in being ambassador in Moscow at this stage. It is very different in significant ways from predecessors who served in the USSR.

COLLINS: First of all, you are absolutely right that being ambassador in the late nineties was very different from what my predecessors a decade and more before had been asked to do. Russia was a different country from the USSR and the ambassador and embassy had a very different mission to accomplish. There was some continuity. But in a nutshell it was a different Embassy Moscow. As I took charge it had responsibilities familiar to those working in nearly any other major European embassy: it was also tasked with managing programming and assistance that might be associated with an embassy in a large developing country with an extensive assistance mission, and it was a mission with an extensive and unique number of security, scientific, and military undertakings,

including the Nunn-Lugar and joint space programs that set Moscow apart from almost any other mission we had overseas.

Overseeing this complex was a sizable leadership and management challenge. So, when people ask me, what was it like to be an ambassador, my response is that it involved at least three full time jobs. One was to represent the president and our government to the Russian government and all of our people to the Russian public. The second was to ensure that Washington had the best information and advice possible from those of us on the ground in Russia to make well grounded and informed decisions - day to day and strategic. But the third thing was a new part of the job that had never been a significant part of an Ambassador's job in Moscow in the Soviet period. That was to discharge the duties of CEO of what I used to call The U.S. Government Incorporated's Russian Division. It was the job of overseeing all the programs undertaken and money spent by the U.S. taxpayer on the numerous programs we had going in Russia. And that was a very big enterprise. It ran from building a space station, to storing nuclear material, to creating a Russian stock market, to issuing visas to tourists. It was a huge enterprise with a budget I assumed ran close to one billion dollars per year for the years I was there, a budget I defined, by the way, as including any tax-payer dollar expended by someone I could remove from the country. It was very large.

Q: Yes. Can you say something about how you approached it? This is a very large and very diverse undertaking.

COLLINS: Well, of course, I would like to tell you I had all this scoped out before I left Washington and hit the ground with a well established and developed plan about how to proceed. Not really so. But I did have an idea about the dimensions of the challenge I would face, and I had some ideas about how I would try to proceed. I had faced many of the challenges I would find in Moscow as Ambassador-at-Large in Washington, and I understood many important things about the workings of the interagency community and agency relations with their people in the field. I appreciated that every one of those agency representatives had a budget from and bosses in Washington with defined ideas about what she/he was supposed to be doing in Russia. So when I arrived what I found wasn't chaos, but there also wasn't a sense of what I would call mission-defined strategic purpose. What everyone was doing reflected first and foremost orders from headquarters in Washington and to the extent that was uncoordinated - and that was often the case - the same was true in Moscow.

So at the outset I decided the only way to organize the embassy's work was first to establish clearly that I expected every agency head to understand she/he worked first for me the Ambassador. Second I set the task for the country team to establish among ourselves mission goals we would use to guide and evaluate our work. The task was to define the fundamental objectives we were all trying to accomplish. The result of that process was the six-part agenda we've noted earlier. Around that I then organized six virtual task forces out of country team members, one task force for each objective. For instance, my economic counselor led the task force on economic reform and development; trade and investment was led by and the commercial counsellor and so

forth. Then I tasked each member of the country team to define what his/her agency or section could or did contribute to the achievement of each goal we defined. So, for example, on trade and investment expansion, some agencies or sections had nothing to contribute, but many well outside the traditional trade and economic agencies had ways to advance that objective in tangible ways For example, the military. The idea that the military spending millions of dollars a year around the country wasn't contributing to our trade and investment mission was absurd. They clearly were. So it was simply understanding that they had that role as well as their defined military function and needed to ensure that the trade and investment people knew what was being done.

The public diplomacy dimension was a constant struggle. USIS was still an independent agency, and it implemented a number of worthwhile programs. But it was often like pulling teeth to get that group as well as others to understand that each and every agency had a public persona and what it did affected our public diplomacy posture and function. Nothing was more frustrating in some ways than getting sections like consular or parts of the administrative system to understand that how they engaged the Russian public, business sector, or city agencies had a significant effect on our public reputation, image, and in general how Russia's society saw us, our policies, and our intentions. So, I tried to make each section understand their role in contributing to the broader mission effort. I won't overstate how effective this was, but I do believe the approach went a long way to giving the country team a degree of unity and sense of common purpose.

One other thing I did to enhance the effectiveness of this idea was to insist that we were going to look at the whole question of mission budget very differently from the way the Department did traditionally. When I got to post I found out what I think all ambassadors probably learn quickly: that you actually have control over very little money, usually confined to things like a representation budget, long distance telephone charges and overtime. That was supposed to be the things you're worried about for your budget. The rest of the money was assigned by Washington either via appropriations, OMB, or agency budget wise men.

In reflecting on this, I said to myself this makes no sense. I had a letter from Bill Clinton that said I was responsible for what was happening in Russia and nothing much happened without spending money. So I said to my team let me tell you how I define my budget as chief of mission. I define it simply: it is the total of all taxpayer dollars spent by someone I can throw out of the country. And taken that way it was about a billion dollars a year of American taxpayer money being spent and administered by agencies in Moscow on things that all fell under programming for which I had responsibility according to the President and according to U.S. law.

So I said let's start from that premise and we're going to think again about funding shared responsibilities, and I did do some unusual things: I said, for instance, when we were doing representation events that involved a number of agencies each was to contribute. I also wanted to know what the different agencies were spending and to what purpose. But more broadly, I said the State Department budget needed to be rethought in terms of what we actually do: State, of course, administers certain specific programs; those have to be

funded. We also perform essential administrative, support, security, and communications functions, etc. for other agencies. There was a formula, according to which agencies at post contributed to to pay for those services. But beyond this, state is the agency under my authority that has to see that the American law is carried out, that the policies of the President are implemented, and that our programming and activities are consistent with our broader policy objectives. So the State Department's function here is to be the overall manager, guide and support structure for the chief of mission and the people who are running the mission's operation to see that all is done according to these principles. With that understanding I said, you know, the State budget as formulated doesn't say truly what the State Department budget is meant to fund, namely the management component for the billion dollar budget you have given the Ambassador responsibility to oversee.

Well, this idea caused a certain amount of controversy, as you might expect. But after about the second year I actually had the Undersecretary for Management call me back and say, you know, this is pretty interesting. And my memory is that this idea then became a part of the guidance for a new way to write the mission program plans for State So we weren't any longer just talking about the admin section and the phone bills. I mean, we were now talking about the mission's functions and the State budget now reflected the role our officers had to support the achievement of those functions.

But even with these efforts, and I do think they made a difference, it was hard to overcome the reality that Washington headquarters remained key in the day to day operations of most agencies. The advent of the new communications systems had made it ever more problematic for the ambassador and his support to keep track of what other agencies were doing via the many new channels that were being employed. (email in particular was the new issue). This meant to me that I had to count even more heavily on my people to work together and ensure that what we were doing was consistent with the objectives the mission had agreed. And frankly that worked quite well But what I learned quickly was that if we didn't organize things at the mission level you couldn't hope to have it organized from Washington where it seemed to us decisions were most often stove piped by agency. The only hope was organization at the mission and the ability of a CEO or ambassador to trust his people.

Q: Well how could you control all this? You know, I mean all of a sudden AID Washington gets an idea that Moscow AID will do something, sends out an instruction to the Director of AID there. How could you keep track of what your agencies were doing?

COLLINS: First of all the idea of control in any detailed sense was out. What we could do was direct, guide, coordinate, and lead. Key to all this was one given. The staff all had to understand that they worked for me and as part of the mission. I made that clear at the beginning and tried to be clear what my expectations were for everyone regarding mission priorities and agenda and the boundaries for the conduct of our business. Then together with John Tefft and his successor John Ordway we made sure everyone knew we also wanted to understand what everyone was doing, their problems, their successes, the issues they had with headquarters, if any. The key point here was to ensure that so far as

possible all saw my task to be to help each of them get their work done. In sum, we worked hard to create a mutually supportive team, and I think we were quite successful.

Of course, I knew full well I could not control it all; you can't micromanage a mission of 1,600 people with a billion dollar budget; it's just not possible. What I found key was to know what your people were being asked to do, to establish a relationship of trust with them, and assure they know they can have support if needed. So I had to work it such that everyone understood what we were all trying to do and how they fit into that.

I also made it clear to all I didn't want any surprises. I said look, there are no dumb questions, you can talk to me or the front office about anything you want, but I don't want to be surprised by something you've got going that goes off the rails. I don't want something to show up in headlines we don't want when nobody bothered to tell me it was coming. It was to ensure at least we knew what was going on, and I would say that approach was very successful. I had a good country team; I had good people; we worked well together. As possible I wanted to empower them, and they responded with real teamwork. It also gave them all a framework to use in dealing with their bosses in Washington.

It was not all easy, of course. The AID people came to Russia with their own ideas and way of thinking about development. The problem was it had been shaped and honed by experience in environments that were different in fundamental ways from that in the former USSR. I didn't try to change this reality, but I did insist that they keep me informed about what projects they were undertaking or being asked to do. I wanted them to let me know their priorities, how and where they were spending their budget and why, and what the issues were they faced. I found these kinds of discussions helped keep their mission well integrated with what others were doing and with our broader agenda. It also helped me help them understand that Russia was not an underdeveloped country in the sense they normally understood the term and that approaching some of their issues in ways some of us with background could suggest would help their effectiveness. It was, for example, important to be sure new AID arrivals understood they were working in a country with near 100 per cent literacy, a scientific and technological base equal to ours in most respects, and an industrial society in many ways capable of competing effectively with our own. This was not the "third world".

I had much the same experience with the military. We had three different elements to the military presence at the mission; first, we had the traditional defense attaché unit responsible for liaison with the Russian military, analysis of the defense sector, and other work that had been a part of their embassy functions from the beginning; second, we had a substantial contingent of Defense and Energy Department people tasked with administration and oversight of the Nunn-Lugar program. This contingent known as the Defense Threat Reduction Agency had personnel engaged in the destruction of Russian nuclear weapons and other mass destruction and in rebuilding and reorganizing the systems for securing nuclear material; and third, another special group was involved in investigation and resolution of POW-MIA (Prisoner of War-Missing in Action) issues, mainly left over from the Cold War/Soviet era.

Q: Well what would the POW-MIA issues be with the Soviet Union? What was all this about?

COLLINS: Well, this function and its unit has an interesting history and story. It was also one of those case studies of what good diplomacy can achieve in avoiding problems. In the early '90s before the Soviet collapse, a novel came out called "The Charm School." The author, Nelson De Mille, built a fictional spy thriller around the idea that the Soviets had taken captured pilots and prisoners of war from Vietnam to Russia and were using them to train Soviet spies to act and pass as normal Americans, the idea being to infiltrate them into the United States to live under cover and pursue whatever intelligence purpose they were assigned. The novel was quite sensational and it was, of course, fiction. However, it was not long after the Soviet collapse that it started to become clear to me - and this is in 1992 - that some in the American POW-MAI community were beginning to assume this fictional story was true and to insist that the Russians must know a lot about American POWs or those on MIA lists. It did not take long then to insist further that there was evidence Moscow was still holding people, etc., and we were off to the races of mounting conspiracy theories you can imagine. Almost from the moment the USSR ended, we began to get a letters from the POW-MIA community pressing for investigation of "information" about Americans being held in Russia. I saw this building to a real problem unless we acted to get it under control.

Q: Oh boy.

COLLINS: At that point, I went to my counterpart in the foreign ministry, Deputy Foreign Minister Mamedov, and said look, if we don't get a handle on this we're going to have a problem. I told him my best judgment was that we were not going to be able to deal with these claims by ignoring them, turning them off, or stonewalling; our best hope would be to organize a means to deal with it together. I proposed and we agreed we would try to set up a committee of Russian and American members to work jointly to investigate any stories, claims, evidence, about POWs. With our own system in mind and the potential for this to become a real issue for members of Congress and thus for us, I also said I wanted the committee to have in it both members of Congress and the Duma as well as military experts and diplomats.

To my great satisfaction we got that committee created. It was, as far as I know, unique in its composition as a joint executive-legislative body, and it was effective almost immediately. It quickly defused any tensions between the legislators, the Pentagon, and the POW community because it provided an address where any letter or any inquiry could get attention. Having members of Congress on the committee ensured Congress was fully informed and engaged, so the issues of what Russia was up to on the issue did not become a congressional issue. The members on the committee got the letters from constituents; they had the ability to deal directly with their Russian counterparts or other officials on the issues. Over the next several years the committee had a presence in Moscow, a group of people from the DOD office that dealt with POW-MIA issues who were assigned to the Embassy as the staff support for the committee. The group worked

directly with Russian counterparts and authorities to explore or run to ground any claims about this or that evidence that an American was being held in Siberia somewhere or whatever. The Russians, for their part, began to look to us to help determine the fate of some of their missing people in Afghanistan. And as the committee developed its agenda it also expanded its work to encompass investigating missing personnel from World War II on both sides, the Korea conflict, and Cold War missions

This committee existed when I arrived as ambassador, and they were part of the Defense Department presence. The commission itself had actually worked quite well since its creation. There were some tense times, but the committee found it possible to delve into a number of even the most sensitive issues of missing personnel. Looking back at a Cold War lost aircraft, for instance, they were able to identify what happened to a downed spy plane and its crew; they also found some World War II remains hitherto unaccounted for. We shared with the Russian military some of our methods to establish identity, or the technology we used for location of potential missing personnel. The technical side of POW-MIA work, thus, became a part of what the committee did, and that contributed to the idea of a shared mission. So in some ways for the time I was there as ambassador the committee continued its work and remained quite productive. Both sides undertook their work as a humanitarian issue, and those involved shared a commitment to the mission. They also shared frustrations about officials blocking access to files or information, but for the most part the Russian side, was quite supportive at this point about getting out information from their past.

Q: Well I know. I one time wrote a little article for "American Heritage" about my time as an enlisted man listening in on Soviet broadcasts in Korea. All of a sudden people started contacting me: did I know about a spy plane that was intercepted (they were talking about radio intercept planes); my grandfather was onboard and do you know anything about this? This went way back but what happened to those people was still a burning issue for people.

COLLINS: That's right. It is. And I thought that this program was one of the really decent things we managed to do at this time. I don't know how it's functioning today. If it is, it's probably not doing as well as it did. But in the nineties it did a great deal of good work, and the people who did it on both sides were decent and dedicated; they wanted to find the truth and they rather quickly bonded; differences between Russians and Americans just sort of disappeared.

Q: By this time we are well into the programs under Nunn Lugar. How were these programs going? I assume they were a major part of your broader military portfolio. Did you find a significant working relationship develop between the Americans and Russians on these programs?

COLLINS: By the time I am ambassador the complex of programs is wide spread both geographically and substantively. We are engaged in everything from building a new storage facility for nuclear fuel from dismantled warheads to helping design and build new facilities for secure storage and rail cars to transport the material to a variety of

projects dedicated to defense conversion and the provision of new employment for the engineers and scientists made superfluous by the new START agreement and transformational change in the military industrial complex. These projects threw Russian nuclear experts, scientists, engineers, and military professionals from the nuclear complex together with their American counterparts. Their relationships developed in different ways. There was no simple pattern.

Among those who were working to carry out joint projects, the people who understood and appreciated the problems they were facing and were the professionals with responsibility for finding the new path forward, relations tended to develop well. These were the problem solvers, those with a shared task, professionals who spoke the same language and saw issues in many ways much the same. Russian nuclear scientists were first rate. They're as good as ours, and they knew exactly what they were dealing with and wanted answers to their problems. So those people by and large were very interested in working with their American counterparts and very good relationships developed. And it was not only true of the scientists and engineers. I also remember going to places where the project was focused on security within structures linked to nuclear weapons or materials. Here too very good relationships between the two militaries, among the science people, the engineering people, and our contracting people developed easily.

Q: What happens to all that fuel, the stuff that blows up and is designed to blow up when you take it out of the weapons?

COLLINS: Well let's start by saying you are not talking to a nuclear expert or scientist. What I understood was more structural and institutional than scientific. On that score one thing we undertook as a priority was construction of a major storage facility for nuclear material that was taken out of warheads. There was a lot of controversy around it. It was a long complex project that seemed to drag on without end. Congress was often impatient saying, "Why aren't you spending the money better?" etc. The fact is that the facility did get built and was a major success for the program. Other approaches had to do with working jointly to find ways to dispose of nuclear fuel. In this case a negotiation produces a program in which highly enriched uranium was blended down and exported to the U.S. to be used in nuclear power stations. It appealed because it gave Russians value for a commodity they had sacrificed heavily to produce, and for us by destroying warheads and converting their material into fuel at a reasonable cost.

The same was not the case for plutonium. The American and Russian views of plutonium, as I understood the problem, were quite different. We thought that plutonium that wasn't in a bomb was really just a dangerous, nasty substance you needed to get rid of if you could. The Russians view was, "We spent a lot of money to make this. It's got to be worth something." They had been working on ways to make it into nuclear fuel for reactors. There had been a variety of joint efforts to deal with material, but as I understood the situation by the end of the nineties none had proved successful.

So I would say the professional community of nuclear experts worked well together. They respected each other, trusted their professional qualifications, and had dedicated

their lives to the same science. Where most issues and problems arose, they tended to come from other quarters. First of all, those involved in security, political, and foreign policy issues faced different issues from those in the problem-solving world. Here the Russian and U.S. interests were not always congruent and there was no consensus on any number of key issues or ideas about objectives. Furthermore, there were always significant elements in these communities that opposed the whole idea of destroying or dismantling what they had spent lives dedicated to building; for those of us working to promote these projects it wasn't an easy selling point to go in and say, "We're here to help you destroy what you spent a generation building." Then there were others who took the position that we were there to weaken and disarm Russia. This was a recurring theme, and a persistent part of Russian politics even at the earliest times. And finally there was always tension between the security establishment and those who were working with the foreigner even on agreed jobs. You know, security services are probably much the same everywhere. They were suspicious, uneasy at the very idea of Americans running around sensitive facilities, and prone to limit or obstruct what was being done because they just didn't like the risk.

Yet despite these issues and obstacles, in general the program was very successful. On the whole the shared goals prevailed, and our scientists and engineers found common purpose and language in undertaking joint work in the most sensitive national security area our countries had. It was a joint learning experience for both sides it seemed to me. The cultures that produced the experts and their approaches to their problems had been very different in many ways. Nevertheless, even before the Soviet collapse, nuclear scientists and experts from both countries were familiar with the work of each other and understood the science and its implications in common ways. When they got together, therefore, it was a meeting of family in a way; participants from both sides had a lot to share, a lot in common, a lot they had lived with for decades as custodians of the most destructive force in their countries' possession. In the end their joint work was a success for both parties. It demonstrated what is possible when we find a shared agenda.

The Nunn Lugar program addressed a number of other issues that expanded its importance beyond the narrow field of nuclear warheads and material. Funds from the program defrayed costs to dismantle and destroy strategic facilities and equipment in the countries giving up their weapons as well as in Russia. The program in this regard was essential in seeing through the destruction of rockets, rocket silos, and ancillary materials in Ukraine, for example. In time it also took on issues associated with the disposition of chemical weapons in Russia, and, under its auspices, facilities for the destruction of the Russian chemical arsenal were built and employed. So it was a program that expanded as the years passed and played an essential role in the reduction of weapons of mass destruction across all of the former Soviet Union. It was, in that sense, a program that certainly made all Europe and in critical ways the U.S. more secure.

Q: The space program was another sensitive area. How did that work?

COLLINS: Well, the focal point for that program became the development, building, and ultimately staffing of the joint space station, and I had much the same experience with that project. It's worth remembering that on both sides the people involved in this program only months or perhaps a few years before had been building rockets to destroy New York or Moscow. On our side the only distinction was a difference in target. That had been their job and their life. Now, all of a sudden our governments threw them together and told them, "Build the capacity to support a joint colony in space," and laid on them responsibility for jointly engineering a single vehicle, joint astronaut training, providing adequate facilities for launches, etc. On both sides, there was a lot of suspicion: that each was losing precious secrets to the other; that Americans were being forced to use old technologies; that Russians were not being given the respect they deserved; etc. Even with all this, in the end the two cultures came together, and they worked effectively to produce the world's first and only space colony. It was a tribute to all those involved, but in particular to Dan Goldin, the Director of NASA and his Russian counterpart Yuriy Koptev. Without their commitment the whole project might well have broken down, But from their work we are at a point now where NASA has become reasonably comfortable in depending on the Russians to support our people in space and vice versa. You could not have envisioned that in the early '90s.

Q: I have another subject that must have been a big issue for you: the new embassy building. What was going on with that?

COLLINS: Oh, you couldn't be more right. This issue had two parts or dimensions. First came the question of just what an embassy should be in Moscow after the end of the Cold War. Second was the challenge of building a secure facility after the first effort at the project had been compromised and scandal ridden because of what the Soviets had done to bug the project.

On the first question the issue boiled down to how the embassy would structure itself both functionally and physically to provide services to the Russian public. This had not been a particular concern during the Cold War. Soviet citizens simply had no freedom to engage the embassy openly and, with the exception of those authorized contact, were kept away from the facility. After the collapse of the Soviet system, contacts burgeoned from consular to public affairs, to business, to students, etc. We found ourselves facing the demand for public service similar to a normal European embassy with a facility that had been designed to keep Russians as far away as possible; a fortress behind enemy lines. The challenge in the post-Soviet nineties was that the architects and the planners and all the people who had been behind the new chancery project worked from the premises they had in the '70s at the height of the Cold War. No matter what I thought, the basic idea behind the construction and the planning for the new chancery I inherited on arrival was to build the ultimate Cold War embassy and to avoid anything like the embarrassment so many had endured from the first such effort.

Now, if you asked what forces and thinking were driving the new chancery's construction, architecture and what it needed to be, it was the intelligence/counter-intelligence/security community. And among this group the priority was clearly to avoid

the humiliating embarrassment of the first attempt at building the structure. The resulting structure was essentially an enclosed fortress, designed to keep Russians out, deny them any but tightly controlled access to any information about what was going on inside the embassy compound, and certainly not have any sort of easy engagement by the Russian public with any part of the embassy save isolated areas of the facility providing essential services to the Russian public. And this objective began with the new building process.

I won't get into the whole story about the discovery of the bugging system in the embassy and all that; we talked about that earlier I think. But when I arrived in Moscow the basic decisions about the new chancery that I had worked on in Washington as Ambassador-at-Large had been made: what it would be, how and who would construct it, the building's architecture, and its relationship to the rest of the surrounding embassy compound that housed a significant part of the staff, the school, and a variety of facilities serving the community. As I arrived little of the actual construction had begun, however. I arrived more or less as the implementation phase was to start.

Now, my experience with this project was that the counterintelligence/security community had made a profession of the project. They had more or less taken apart the old building with tweezers and studied it to death. Moreover the project had involved well over a dozen agencies in one way or another. The memo that Ronald Reagan had agreed to ordering replacement of the compromised semi-constructed chancery by tearing it down to the ground and building a new structure in its place had been all but ignored and for most of a decade nothing had really advanced the project. In the early '90s you may recall I picked up the plans for what the Russians had done to the original building project. Following that and an agreement with the Russians that in exchange for allowing them access to their new chancery building in Washington, we would be allowed to construct the new chancery in Moscow on our own terms and without interference, serious work to replace the flawed structure was undertaken. But I knew from my experience that unless there was consensus and firm leadership about what was and was not going to be done, the project would be fraught and a never ending source of contention among the various agencies and players involved in the work. If the past was any guide the infighting within the various security communities would have continued and would have become a major obstacle to any orderly progress.

So, on arrival I made clear to all of the agencies with an interest in this new building that I would not accept anything but a totally secure construction site and building. That was to be the basic criterion for the project. That was the first point. The second point was to say that as we are starting construction on this $400 plus million site and project, if any one tells me that the site is not secure, then I will order a stop to construction until it is secure again. I also recall putting out the word that if anyone I ask cannot assure me that the site is secure and that we can go forward, I will stop work until any concerns are addressed. Subsequently, I never heard anything more about security issues that might have halted the project. I do know there were some issues, but they resolved them, never brought them to me, and we never stopped the project.

It was a strong lesson. What I learned was real respect for those charged with security. They have serious responsibilities; they are professional; they have a complex job; they live with vulnerability that is unforgiving if anything goes wrong. I sympathized with them in many ways. But I also knew that if you left to the security professionals alone the decision about whether a project like the chancery construction was secure, it would inevitably never be secure enough to get the job done. So essentially I said you have to convince me that this site is secure enough to continue building or we will stop it. But I also let it be known I would make the decision about when to return to work. The result was an extraordinary security project that the professionals had a free hand in designing. They built a perimeter worthy of protecting a nuclear weapons site and operational procedures that seemed at times over the top. I was told, for example, true or not that the contractors used imported sand for the secure parts of the building.

Q: Cleared sand.

COLLINS: Yes, cleared sand. And almost everything needed came into the country and were delivered to the site under controls equivalent to those for a diplomat pouch. It seemed at times over the top, but I wasn't going to argue how they did it or what they did, so long as it was done securely and satisfied all elements of the security community. The result was a project that got the new chancery built in two and a half years with very few incidents or interruptions, and, most importantly to me, without any real problems in Washington . It would have been cheaper had they done what they should have done to begin with, which was tear the compromised structure down to the ground and start again. Instead they saved the bottom floors and then built a multi-story office tower on top of them in what amounted to a separate building. I always believed it was the absolute most expensive option. But it got done, it got certified, and I never had any further issues with it.

I also had the good fortune to join Secretary of State Madeleine Albright in dedicating it on my birthday in 2000. All in all, building the chancery was a life lesson in how you run a mission like this: what decisions you have to let others make and which ones an ambassador really has to decide.

Q: And also, where to put responsibility.

COLLINS: That's right, yes.

Q: I mean, rather than leave it a little bit amorphous which allows infighting.

COLLINS: Exactly. So we are in the new facilities. And now the questions of security turns from building to using the new quarters. When we moved down from the old embassy building, a 1950s building up on the Garden Ring Road, we left a structure that had been remodeled so many times nobody remembered what it looked like inside to begin with. About all we knew was that it had originally been designed to be an apartment building. And in using the structure for decades we developed security rules and practices that became ever more complicated and arcane.

So, when we moved to the new building, I told the RSO (regional security officer) it was time for a thorough review. I said look, we have a thick, 200-some page security manual for this mission. Let's start over when we move to the new building and let's focus on our challenges in our new building and compound in the host nation environment today - on the new conditions we're actually living in. I said further the starting point from my point of view was to be two foundations: statute and the Foreign Affairs Manual (FAM) the bible for State Department procedures. I said if it's not in the FAM or in statute it doesn't go into your new book without thorough review by you and explanation of why it has to be there to me. The old book had grown like Topsy; things kept being added to prevent a repeat of a security lapse or problem, but nothing was ever taken away and there was plenty that made no sense anymore. And so essentially they got 200 pages down to a fraction of what they started with and the procedures became more focused on protecting what they were supposed to have as their key priority focus, the mission's classified material and facilities.

At this time physical safety received normal attention but was seen as less of a critical priority, particularly in Moscow. This is the pre 9/11 period, and I, for example, aside from my driver and guards at the residence entrance, had no security detail. The result of the review was a much simplified, expedited ability to get visitors into the compound to see American hosts and simplified procedures and facilities for handling foreign nationals who visited the chancery. And a lot of the nonsense that had built up over decades but had little relevance to our life in 2000 was done away with. Unfortunately after 9/11 a lot of the old thinking and procedures came back.

Q: Well given the Sergeant Lonetree business, how did all this affect the Marine security guards? How was that question handled?

COLLINS: I was not in Moscow for the Lonetree episode, but its effects lasted well beyond Lonetree's time, including how the embassy was staffed. We talked about how, when I arrived as DCM, for example, perhaps the most significant legacy was evident in the absence of any staff but cleared Americans. By my time as ambassador, of course, we were well beyond the Soviet period, Russian FSNs (Foreign Service Nationals) had returned to be part of the staff, and our environment was vastly changed. Nevertheless, the Lonetree lesson for the Marines was taken to heart, and the security guard detachment lived under a strict regimen that reflected the ongoing concerns about what had happened. From recruitment to training to the daily routine they lived with at post it was a carefully chosen, trained and monitored team.

Of course there were new issues for the detachment as well. This was no longer the Soviet Union. Our detachment no longer lived in an environment under constant siege and threat; there was more openness, more normality to life. So this presented new challenges for the Marines as the detachment had to learn to live in a society closed almost completely to them in the past that was now largely open and unrestricted, and by the way having many young ladies only too happy to meet an American. Now this was not a unique situation for the corps, of course, but it was for Moscow. However, the

leaders and members of the detachment handled it professionally and with understanding such that during my time the Marines avoided any major problems. They were well briefed; they were strict about the rules of the road. And their leaders treated them as professionals. It was a good detachment.

Q: What about living quarters of the full staff and servants and all? How was that set up?

COLLINS: The new embassy compound had townhouses and apartments for a limited number of staff. When built in the 1980s it was, of course adequate for a large part of the total. By the late nineties, however, the majority of the staff lived out in the city. A sizable number were housed in the apartment complexes traditionally reserved for foreign diplomats. These were mostly from the Soviet era and were owned and administered by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Another segment simply lived in apartments they found to rent in the city in what had become a busy and flourishing real estate market. And finally, we had some housing a fair distance from the center of town in a townhouse complex built by an American developer that was initially attractive because it was near the new Anglo American school. So, I have to say that the living quarters on the whole were improved a lot compared to the 1970s in terms of actual physical space and availability of amenities where people lived.

The bigger problem for most now became getting to work from home. One of the most dramatic changes in the '90s was the explosion of traffic on the streets as Russians discovered the automobile, their import became a flood, and traffic grew worse and worse every year. Commuting was still manageable even at the end of my time as ambassador, but it had become a much greater burden for a sizable part of the staff, particularly those who lived further out or were not close to public transportation, and specifically the metro system. For those who could access the metro and lived within the older parts of the city conditions were more crowded and commuting or getting around the city took longer, but it was manageable.

Drivers taking the car to work now also faced a new and emerging challenge - parking. It was now a daily struggle to find a space available to leave the car. And so in the nineties our staff went from having housing that ranged from not very glamorous too difficult to enjoying pretty decent housing and physical space to live in. And the necessities and things of life one needed were much more readily available. But the increasing problems associated with commuting and getting around the city probably became the biggest morale issue I had to deal with in so far as living conditions were concerned. And it has only become more challenging in the years since from what I know.

Looking back, I think the most unfortunate decision the American government made in this regard was not to buy real estate downtown early in the nineties. I remain convinced we could have acquired without a great difficulty, either through a long term lease or purchase, facilities that would have been adequate to house the embassy staff in well situated and suited quarters for any foreseeable future. And it could have been done at very reasonable prices. We did raise this with FBO (Foreign Buildings Office) in the early '90s, and we were informed in no uncertain terms by FBO, "We only rent." Now,

this to me was frankly stupid in the circumstances, but there was no flexibility. The result; we ended up missing an opportunity and spending more for less satisfactory housing.

Q: Could our staff begin to do representational entertaining at home?

COLLINS: Certainly. That had become routine by the time I came back as ambassador. But it was also the case that the embassy and the broader official American community we worked with were still having trouble adjusting to the new Russia. The Russia hands, if you will, who had made careers during the Cold War and knew mostly only a closed society in the Soviet Union were in many ways still disoriented. On the other hand, those who came to new Russia after 1991 and had known only that society took for granted a kind of openness and easy engagement with the Russian public that Russians themselves often found somewhat disorienting. So the process of defining new terms of engagement and reorienting the way official America dealt with new Russia was still very much a work in progress.

In many respects the embassy had moved beyond the Cold War. Simply conducting our business had made clear the society in which it was presumed we had no free dealings with Russian officials or members of the Russian public, elite, or active dissidents was a thing of the past. All of that change in the early '90s and our challenge became the opposite. We had almost infinite possibilities for contacts and access to the public but worked in a building and often with holdover procedures or requirements from the past that were unsuited to promoting our objectives in the new environment. Perhaps the best example was the problem of shifting our approach to building influence in the new Russia. In the Soviet period I think it fair to say the target for our public diplomacy efforts were almost solely among the ruling cadre, primarily the smaller group of Party leaders and government officials in Moscow, the educated elite, and other opinion leaders and makers. Suddenly, we faced a new reality that called for us to talk to the population as a whole (voters), a much broader range of elite actors both spread widely across the country and across a much larger set of professions and institutions than anything we had ever addressed in the Soviet era. In sum, all of us engaged in the Russian transition faced the challenge of shifting our thinking, conduct of business, scope of contacts and engagement to a wholly new model. It was not an easy transition; the newcomers who had functioned in open societies brought new attitudes and ideas to those of us from the Soviet club. And those of us who saw the opportunities new Russia had opened had the background to know the difference between post-Soviet and western attitudes and thinking about engagement with us. And some simply resisted the idea that there had been a real transition or change.

In all this, the challenges from the outset were not so much with contacts with the new government officials or leaders from newly emerging economic, social or political institutions, i.e. normal representation. These people were easily accessible. These Russians would come to your home; join you for a restaurant meal; go with you to a concert, meet in family settings, things almost unbelievable to anyone who had been in Moscow in its earlier iteration. It was all a very different environment. You could spend

as much time with Russians as you had, and one of the big challenges for nearly all those seeing Russians normally in the early '90s and on into my time was setting priories for your time. One real change on that score was that nearly everyone now spent a lot less time with the diplomatic colleagues, which in the Soviet period had been the community one normally spent time with. Suddenly now nearly all my officers and staff spent nearly all their time with Russians. To give some sense of scale here, I recall events at the Ambassador's residence - Spaso House - during the Soviet period were limited, and those who attended, aside from the diplomats and other foreign attendees, would normally come from a limited and familiar community of Russians who, one way of another, had secured the ability to attend an American ambassador's event. It was a limited and a select group. By the time I lived in that house we hosted something like 10,000 guests each year and the number could have been double or triple that had there been the time or opportunity to do so.

Q: A few intimate friends.

COLLINS: Yes, a few intimate friends. The events ran quite a gamut from cultural programs, to the big national day July 4, to receptions and dinners putting visiting delegations of officials together with Russian counterparts. We also had several summit and ministerial meetings during my time and that had its special dimension because it often brought the most senior Russians to the house. So Spaso hosted a wide variety of events and the only problems I ever had were those associated with some who didn't get an invitation, not who did. In this regard, I made a very conscious effort to attract a broad range of Russians and expand the reaches of our engagement with Russian society to the maximum extent possible. And I encouraged the officers to do the same, to cultivate relations with a wide range people that were part of their portfolio. The opportunities were immense; they were almost unlimited. The question was time and how much effort you could put into this.

Q: I want to talk a bit more about the economy. You were there for the first days of new Russia. For the new post-Soviet leaders getting rid of communism was a goal all of them endorsed. But did they really know what they were getting into? And they are looking to us for a lot of answers, but I was just going to say the average foreign service officer doesn't bring an awful lot to the table. You mentioned the MFA when you came out as ambassador just wasn't interested in the EU for example. It was sticking with the issues it knew; not surprising I suppose. Joining the world's economy on a new basis must have been shocking and challenging. But what is your impression of the economic picture as you start out in 1997?

COLLINS: I think that's probably an understatement to note that the successors to the communist regime had little idea of what they were getting into on the economy. It wasn't surprising that Moscow's diplomats weren't very effective in dealing with the EU, for example. That simply reflected the fact that they worked from an economic base that was alien and seemed to change almost daily. To the extent these officials were involved along with others in dealing with the outside on economic issues, the subject most often was about what Russia needed or what it had to do to become a member of the global

economic system from which it had been separated for three quarters of a century. In ’92-’93 that meant that EU country diplomats or we in discussing economic issues were more often being asked for advice, help, or support than discussing issues like trade relations or business issues. This was still largely true as I arrived as ambassador.

For us at embassy Moscow, the economy, nevertheless was almost defining in setting our priorities and mission. I don’t want to repeat a lot here. But it has to be emphasized that we were deeply involved in the economic, legal, and institutional, transformation Russians were undertaking. And Russians had from the beginning held high expectations about what we could do to help. I remember in ’92 in particular and to some extent even into ’93, very senior people coming to the embassy from economic ministries and more or less putting to us the question , “How do we make a market economy?” Whatever piece of it this or that person had, they were looking for an answer, and basically assuming that the Americans could supply it. By the middle of the nineties this was not so frequent and there was a building base of economic expertise and experience that made Russian officials and private sector actors more self sufficient.

Nevertheless, I often felt uncomfortable with being asked to answer certain queries, and even the people who were coming in as experts were often out of their depth with the questions that were very basic and left one with no clear place to begin an answer. There were many assumptions in such questions I thought should give us pause. One was the abiding idea that a market economy is a thing. Second was a widespread assumption that the Americans knew how to make it because we had one. And third it was possible just to say do it this way and the result would produce your hoped for outcome. There were so many unrealities in those three assumptions you just didn’t know where to start. It put us often in very difficult positions, taking us into uncharted territory or well beyond, it seemed often to me, what any foreign government should be taking responsibility to recommend to another. And I found this as true when I arrived in ’97 as it had been earlier in my DCM years.

Q: I suppose an answer that “It was just like Topsy, It growed,” wouldn’t have satisfied.

COLLINS: Almost certainly not. But there were some things that had provided a basis for change. In a rudimentary sort of way, the Russians had begun using a primitive market system as the old command structure broke down. People were using barter and market instruments to satisfy immediate needs. Prices were being set on the street that had no relationship to the state set prices in the official stores where there was nothing to buy. But turning these rudimentary beginnings into some kind of ordered system based on money and property was change on a scale that had never been done by anybody. And yet we were seen as the people with the answers. So one major challenge we faced and that fell to me in particular, both as DCM working with Strauss and with Pickering, and then as ambassador became the management of Russian expectations. I don’t know that we did a particularly good job of it, but at least we at the embassy took care not to give a false sense of expectation or security by saying just do that and it will be all right. We did not get into the business of simplifying what was certainly not simple. At the same time, we tried to provide support where possible.

Q: Was it really the Wild East?

COLLINS: In the early years it was a difficult environment. As one might expect when you have this kind of a huge country in the process of transformation a kind of the 20th century version of the wild west was the result. There weren't really a lot of rules, and there weren't really very many institutions that functioned nationally with any efficiency. Further, law enforcement and the legal system had largely broken down or were ineffective. The economy seemed to work basically under a kind of primitive contract law. Whatever arrangements existed, existed because the parties agreed to observe certain terms until they didn't. When the contract broke down conflict resolution was often basic. Concurrently even those few things one had traditionally thought reasonably safe became unrealizable. There was rampant inflation. People lost their savings. The safety net was collapsing. There were few expectations that government could deliver even the most minimal services.

This was complicated by what seemed to me the preoccupation Yeltsin and his young team had with breaking up and preventing any restoration of the old system. I have always believed that Yeltsin in this period was motivated most of all by his determination to take apart the communist system in a way that humpty dumpty could never be made whole again. Therefore, a lot of effort went into ensuring that you broke things up. You didn't let things stay the way they were. Now some of this from our point of view was fine, but it raised questions. For instance, Americans have sort of reverence for constitutions and rule of law. But, what really was happening to the Russian society was a move away from effective central government back to something like our period during the Articles of Confederation, where it wasn't at all clear that an agreement made in one province was going to be honored in another, or that if you paid a bill here to cover a debt in another province that payment would be recognized. In sum not only were we seeing a breakdown in economic institutions, that fragmentation was extending to the very core structures that defined national unity.

By the time I arrive as ambassador, some of this Wild East environment has begun to ease. As property has been divided up and people from oligarchs to modest citizens increasingly have a stake in something they own, there is a rising demand for more regular and regularized ways of acquiring and exploiting property. Rules for ownership, protecting property via courts or rules, demand for greater predictability and security in property ownership all are moderating the free-for-all atmosphere that characterized the beginning of the decade. Even so, however, it was still a very uncertain and difficult environment for businesses, entrepreneurs, and others seeking a way ahead in the new economic system.

Q: Did you and officers of the embassy have a set of rules? How did you deal with the so-called robber barons? You might explain what we are talking about.

COLLINS: Broadly, I would say that unless we had a solid reason to suspect an individual of criminal activity or actively working to undermine U.S. interests, we saw it

as our job to know all elements across the political and economic spectrum from the anarchists to the monarchists, from the communists to the capitalists and everyone in between. That included those who became the oligarchs and the new moneyed class.

As we've discussed the chaotic period after the Soviet Union broke up saw a scramble by almost everyone for a part of the Russian national pie, in this case consisting of virtually the entire national wealth of Russia. It was also a time of rampant inflation, a world without laws for a new order, and a socio-economic system in chaos. And we've also discussed some of the ways this wealth got divided: the voucher project that hoped to ensure every Russian citizen got a fair share of the property, a massive movement toward spontaneous privatization for some kinds of property, providing a way for employees and managers of enterprises to obtain an ownership stake in what now became private businesses, including the farming sector, etc. Of course, these efforts quickly produced people who were able to amass assets, some legally some not, and the results certainly produced unequal distribution of the wealth practically from the outset. But, there were other ways that wealth was accumulated during the period from the last years of the USSR through the early nineties, in many cases probably more significant for the emergence of the oligarchy than just seizures or amassing vouchers.

One way was linked to the fact that for much of this period many commodities, goods, or services of value still were marketed for fixed Soviet ruble prices. I think we mentioned, for example. that air fares well into 1993 more or less stayed at the same ruble price they had been at the end of the Soviet period. Well, because of inflation, the difference between the Soviet ruble price and the world price in say dollars represented a growing and before long a huge difference. So you might buy a barrel of oil for, say fifty cents equivalent in rubles - the Soviet market price - and then sell it to someone in Berlin for $20.00. This was the equivalent of drug dealing profits. In a variant on this scheme a Russia seller of, say, fertilizer bought at the official ruble price would contract a sale to a western firm for a profit but take his payment in items to be sold in Russia at the equivalent of western prices. This permitted a major profit but without the use of banking systems or fund transfers. So, there were a variety of ways in which the arbitrage between what you could get things for in rubles in Russia and what you could sell them for outside were huge profit makers, and playing that reality was one way a number of people amassed a quick fortune.

A second way was use of government funds at no cost, in essence taking a loan of funds without the niceties of a contract, interest, or obligations to repay at any time. Individuals would form banks, and then secure a contract to act as government paymaster in a town or province. This scheme gave access to sizable money over which there was minimal supervision from the central government. These "bankers" could use the funds they controlled to acquire assets or engage in trading or business of other kinds. Meanwhile, the payouts on the government account just wouldn't take place: government salaries and government bills weren't paid, and we begin to have wage arrearages. In sum, people were using government money out of Moscow or collected locally and never sent to the capital for their own purposes, and in this way giving themselves plenty of liquidity for private use.

A third way people acquired state assets involved government borrowing. This was the basis for the so called, loans for shares scandal in the nineties when the government could not support itself from tax revenues and the entire budgetary and tax collection process broke town. As the government need for money increased, it did what governments have done historically. It borrowed it and in return, because the lenders had no faith in the Russian government's faith and creditworthiness as a borrower, they required collateral. The government, in turn, used its oil fields, gold mines, forests, factories, and so forth it owned to meet this need. This gave a group of Russian moneyed interests a potential claim against significant Russian assets. Then, of course, in the event the Government couldn't pay its debt, the assets held as collateral were supposed to be put up for open auction, and the proceeds used to pay off the loans to the Russian lenders. Well, the government, of course, could not pay off the debts in time and the resulting auctions were rarely open. I think it was also the case that the people running the Russian government were not about to see foreigners acquire these key assets. They wanted them to go to Russians, and once it was clear the government couldn't meet its obligations, the idea of open auctions gave way to ensuring the auctions produced the right outcomes. Government debts were paid off, but many people acquired whole oil fields and industries for what were bargain basement prices. We all knew this was going on. This was what was happening, but given the conditions set for the process it was a given that they weren't going to be holding "open" auctions.

It was also the case that another problem with doing that came from the limits western business and banks would have had if the auctions had been open. For example, if an American oil company had a chance to bid on an oil field they would assume clarity about who owned it, that it had legally established and demarcated boundaries, and that you could get clear title to the property in exchange for the funds paid. None of those conditions existed as a matter of reality in Russia at this time. So the people who acquired that oil field were going to have to defend it and make their claim stick. The oligarchs knew how to do this. They knew how to manipulate the system and work in the Russian environment. Outsiders didn't. So, it was all fine to say these assets were sold off for prices that were ridiculously low, but on the other hand there weren't too many outsiders willing to put in high bids for something they couldn't be sure they would ever own. It was a very chaotic period, and the risks, particularly for an outsider, were daunting. The result of all these conditions was, of course, the onset of a huge differentiation of who owned what and the emergence of the oligarchs. We were in touch with all of them.

Q: How did we view the rise of the oligarchs? I mean was it a threat to what we hoped would happen or was it a first step or what?

COLLINS: I would say there was a spectrum of opinion on this. On the one hand the rise of oligarchs and the emergence of private ownership and private management of big industries or oil fields or whatever, was pretty good insurance against the return of the communists. That is not insignificant. Breaking up state control of the economy and the nations assets was a goal we shared with the Yeltsin team. This advanced the goal of creating a pluralistic economic structure of ownership and was a core part of ending the

government's monopoly ownership of the nation's assets inherited from the Soviet system. There were always plenty of people who criticize how it was done, that it wasn't fair. It probably wasn't fair, but I always have the question of how it could have been accomplished in a way critics would agree was fair. The idea that every Russian citizen was going to get an equal piece of the national wealth, and it would all be parsed out in that way, was a dream. There was a scramble for assets, and the people who were ready to take advantage of it emerged as the major winners. But it is also important to remember that, in fact, the state kept ownership of very sizable parts of most of key institutions or structures and of natural resources. Under Yeltsin and in this period, the government was not asserting strong authority or control over what it owned on behalf of the state, and they let oligarchs and other emerging business interests manage many of the key assets often mainly for their own benefit. Nevertheless, it remained the case that the Government retained ownership rights for many of the most important assets involved, and at a later time under a new President would reassert its control more directly.

Some individuals became manager owners of entities that they revived, invested in and made major enterprises. A man like Potanin, for instance. Potanin, a banker initially, got hold of Norilsk Nickel, the biggest nickel and palladium operation in the world. At the end of the Soviet period, it was hopelessly managed and a mess. He put a lot of money into it, and he became an extremely wealthy oligarch based on that particular asset and then expanded to acquire others. People like Khodorkovsky, the famous man whom Putin sent to prison, began with a bank and decided he would go into the oil business. He used his bank to acquire oil assets and built his holdings into Yukos which in the 90s and on into the beginning of the first decade of this century was the biggest private oil company in Russia. So there was one group of oligarchs that emerged from getting hold of a former state asset and in taking it private became major oligarchs.

But, there were others that started differently. They began new businesses, or built enterprises that didn't' exist in the Soviet era. For example, a man named Gusinsky built the first independent television network NTV. With the network he also set up studios to create new Russian programming content for Russian viewers hungry for new content as good as that coming from the West, and he ultimately expanded his enterprise to include an international satellite system. He built a new business from the ground up, even though he, like others, used much capital from state linked sources. Similarly, some of the biggest construction operations were new, even though in part built on the bones of old Soviet enterprises. Then, highly successful new enterprises emerged from opportunities some recognized in the emerging technological world: business based on the mobile phone, software or computer business, or new retail business that the Soviet era had never let develop. Some oligarchs, who found their way in these sectors became almost prototypical self-made men.

So how did the Americans look at this? At this stage, I think, we essentially saw this as consistent with our vision of a Russia casting off its communist system, going through very difficult times and changes that were hard for some and benefitting others. But we saw it as a transition time headed for a better future. And we dealt with all the elements

who were involved. We certainly had few illusions about many of the oligarchs, but I think we saw them at this point as the instruments which were breaking up the communist monopoly over the economy. Many were seen as reasonably responsible investors in a new kind of economy, and there were plenty about whom there were always questions. But aside from those we knew to be Mafiosi or identified as criminals by our system, we'd work with them. I knew them. I used to see them regularly.

Q: What can you tell me about the public diplomacy environment? The Soviets had been opening up under Gorbachev. What was going on during your time?

COLLINS: After spending a bit of time in Moscow leading the mission, I had decided that this general area had two dimensions. One was dissemination of information about the U.S., U.S. policies and goals, American culture, etc. This was the usual USIA mission and in the post-Soviet Russian environment the opportunities for disseminating information and getting U.S. thinking in front of the Russian public was largely without limit beyond those imposed by funds, access to a limited media, and material in Russian. At this time, for example, Radio Free Europe had a medium wave station that broadcast to much of the country. U.S. programming was increasingly available via a growing network of cable TV systems, the internet was just emerging but was open and free, western press and press owned by western groups had an open market, etc. In sum, when it came to the question of disseminating information, the boundaries were all but unlimited.

A much bigger issue was creating the means for the U.S. outside a few urban centers to engage with the Russian public, make communication more two-way, or provide any means for a broader Russian public to approach us. By the late nineties we had the Embassy in Moscow and three Consulates, in St. Petersburg, Vladivostok, and Ekaterinburg. These four posts did serve key Russian urban centers and a sizable population. But Russia is immense and the mission still had no way of extending its reach or engaging the Russian public in any sort of institutionalized way more broadly. Remember too, this is before social media or the smart phone. So one of the things I took on was this neglected aspect of the public diplomacy problem: how to extend the American Government's reach out into the eleven time zones and reach more deeply into this huge population.

State in its accustomed thinking had proposals to build an additional consulate or consulates to do some of this. But there were real problems with consulates. They were hugely expensive; almost certainly costing millions. A consulate would carry with it all the security constraints that go with a diplomatic post, a major constraint on public access to the institution. Then, opening any new post would involve reciprocity questions and at a minimum, a lengthy negotiation with the Russian government. Taken together this just didn't strike me as anything that was going to bring early, if any, relief for our problem.

We did have at hand, however, one existing alternative model. The American Center in Moscow, a combination student college admissions counseling center and USIA library housed in Moscow's Library of Foreign Literature. And that gave me the idea that some

variant of the American room at that Library might have promise in addressing our objective. So I talked with the Library's director the late Ekaterina Genieva, an extraordinary woman who had been a significant force in support of the Yeltsin side in 1991 and a committed democrat. I also talked to my public diplomacy section, in particular. Eric Johnson, who had a library background and was our library specialist. Together this team came up with the idea of "American Corners."

The idea was quite simply that the embassy would provide a public library in a regional capital or a major city with equipment they clearly wanted to acquire - computers, printers, and an internet connection, as well as a collection of American books and information on American universities and colleges. In return, we asked that the library provide space and support for the facility. My only absolute requirement for the arrangement was that there would be open public access to the facility, materials and equipment provided. In Russia no "*propusk* (entry pass)" could be required to use the room. And so in early 1998, Embassy Moscow on its own hook and with post resources started this project . We opened the first Corner in the city of Novgorod that spring, and we continued that program for the rest of my tenure. If I recall correctly, we had opened about 22 Corners spread across the breadth of the country by the time I left.

Q: What was Washington's role in all this? It was very innovative.

Not much. We did this all pretty much without any reference to the Washington foreign policy community and State/USIA bureaucracy. I used post funds for what we arranged and kept the agreements with the libraries within bounds the post could arrange. But there was one indispensable Washington supporter without which we could not have managed. The late Jim Billington, the Librarian of Congress, was a pillar of support. He backstopped everything we were trying to do. He was a close associate of Ekaterina Genieva, and together they became true boosters for the project. Both did everything they could to help it succeed.

Q: Jim Billington was a very, very interesting figure; a Russian scholar and confidante of some key members of Congress.

COLLINS: That's right. And he was a good friend and someone with whom I worked very closely. For the Corners he helped me get key collections of books on America. From post funds I got the computers and the Internet connection. So for about $3,000 we would open one of these facilities, and it turned out in the end the librarians in these cities were very eager to have what the corner offered. They would give us space, and in some cases a librarian as well. And they would accept my only criterion, that people would have free and open access to whatever was in the room. For the remainder of the '90s, and I think through the first decade of the 2000s, the program continued to grow. It ended up opening over 40 corners across the country. What I didn't know, was that this success got back to Washington and the Department. After I left the Service, I understand that State public diplomacy picked up this idea and began to establish corners or corner like facilities all over the world as a major vehicle for their programming.

I was never quite sure what to make of this. On the one hand I suppose it was flattery by imitation. But the success of the project in Russia was based on the strong and well organized Soviet library system. So, I don't know how successful this is around the world where that infrastructure is absent. But, it was a tremendous asset for my effort to connect our government with a broad base of the Russian public, including in particular the younger generation, especially before the advent of the iPhone, internet, and social media. The corners were immensely successful and popular. partly because they offered access to the Internet, partly because they were a small window on America which for a considerable time remained unique and new. It was very successful initiative, and I owe a great deal to the people who made it happen, most particularly to this young man, Eric Johnson, who was the project's champion.

Q: What about books? I go back to the era of Cohn and Schine when they made their infamous trip around to American libraries in Germany and other places, weeding out what they considered to be communist books and all. I mean, did you have a problem?

COLLINS: I never had any problems of that kind from the American side, at least not that I was aware of. The only controversy of that kind I recall involved art and Jesse Helms. State at some point had sponsored the display of work by a controversial photographer Robert Mapplethorpe. He was known for his treatment of controversial subjects, primarily gay relationships, and the exhibit became something of a cause celebre. My wife Naomi had suggested we select for our Spaso House art a collection of portraits of Americans by prominent, contemporary American artists of different backgrounds. The collection was to show the diversity of America's people, and I was proud among them to have one exceptional photo by Mapplethorpe. I suspect Jesse might have been up in arms about it which frankly wouldn't have bothered me, but I never had any of that kind of issue. That kind of thing was pretty much in the past by the late '90s, and one photo raising a controversial social issue just didn't seem to matter.

Q: Did you have anti-American groups or sentiments in the general Russian public during this time?

COLLINS: By the time I went out as ambassador, the framework of Russian politics in general had evolved significantly from the early nineties. But I always thought it remained divided over the issue of the Soviet collapse into two camps. One thought that 1991 had been a catastrophe and a treasonous plot that destroyed a nation's greatness and standing as a great power: the other group thought destruction of the Soviet Union and what it stood for hadn't come soon enough or been as thorough as it should have been. This group was, however, less united in its view about the fate of the empire. Like their colleagues on the other side of the 1991 question most expected the West to continue to accept Russia's status as a great power, particularly in the Euro-Atlantic region. As the decade progressed these two camps remained at loggerheads over most things domestic, but came often to find common ground when it came to Russia's status.

Yeltsin's opponents and critics were a mixed bag. The old communist party had recast itself in many respects, and as it reemerged in the first half of the nineties came to

resemble something more akin to a Euro-social democrat hybrid than its Bolshevik predecessor. On the right there was a rather disparate grouping of rightist-nationalist factions and parties. The new Liberal Democratic Party led by Mr. Zhirinovsky was the most prominent and influential among them but there was a group of outliers such as a monarchist party and some ultra-nationalist groupings that were on the far right margins of this part of the spectrum. Taken as a whole, this group both on right and left became in many ways something loosely resembling the descendants of the old Slavophiles. They opposed Russia adopting western models and rejected the idea of Russia as part of the West; they were dedicated to the idea Russia had a unique role and mission, to Russia's exceptionalism if you will.

On the other flank the post-1991 reformers and their allies dominated the political scene. Led by Yeltsin and his colleagues they were driving an agenda dedicated to eradicating remnants of the Soviet politico-economic system, and pressed the idea of Russia's integration with the West and status as a major power in the post-Cold War order. This grouping's main element became a fluid and shifting group usually called the party of power and had a number of liberal or western minded allies. Like the ultras on the opposition's flanks this community too had its critics, liberals who charged Yeltsin was a phony and a fake democrat avoiding what really needed to be done. These were as often as not from the intelligentsia that had challenged the Soviet leadership and now became the thorn in the side of the new party of power.

Within this division, broadly speaking the critics of America and the appeal to anti-American/anti-western sentiments most often belonged to the leftist/nationalist critics of Yeltsin, and our strongest supporters to the parties in charge. But by the late nineties, it would be a mistake to think we did not have some pretty strong critics among the supporters of the government, elements mainly focused on whether Russia was being given its appropriate due as the other super power.

Q: Yes, OK.

COLLINS: So, the society was divided in this way. Among the political elite the government was dominated and the trends were set by the people whose basic intent was to get rid of all things Soviet and build Russia into something that looked like a normal state, by which they meant, more or less, a western type social democratic state with a competitive market system, and pluralistic political structure and constitutional order that respected essential human rights. At least that was what I saw as their unifying core objective. It was with this group that we associated American policy and objectives.

Q: So, anti Americanism was rooted in the opposition?

COLLINS: Among the elite basically yes. But the opposition was complex. It certainly included those who resented the end of the Soviet system although this group was far from uniform. Then it contained what I would lump together as a nationalist authoritarian contingent that included everything from the monarchists to the Zhirinovsky party. What tended to unite these groups was a visceral opposition to adoption by Russia of Western,

and particularly what they saw as American, values and systems. And finally there was a third group that was significant: this was made up of members of the Yeltsin supporting party of power who over the decade found reason to be critical of American policy and seeming readiness to ignore or disregard Russian interests.

But, if we are talking about anti-Americanism more broadly, that was something deeper. As we've discussed, at the beginning of the decade, it was probably fair to say that there was not any strong current of anti-Americanism among the broader population. Rather, as we saw it, the contrary was the case. In those times the anti-American banner largely belonged only to those critics in the elite I just noted, and at that time included very few among those around Yeltsin. But as the decade went on, the situation changed and voices critical of the U.S. and the West found more fertile ground among the public.

The core dimensions of our problem were linked to the costs and disruptions associated with of the changes Yeltsin and his colleagues were bringing to the country and the fact that they were drawn out and seemingly endless. The reforms were closely associated with American advice and programs, and as the decade progressed the bloom increasingly came off the American rose as the price of the changes dragged on among the Russian public. These trends were exacerbated during my time, in particular, as I think we discussed, by the 1998 economic default and recession, and by the Kosovo crisis that fueled perceptions that America was ignoring Russia and its interests as it reshaped alliances and relationships in Europe.

As the costs of change mounted and memories of the Soviet realities faded, understandable nostalgia for elements of the old system people valued grew along with questioning of those pushing the new. People more and more felt the new system was depriving them of their security, that the government wasn't providing the minimum services they thought it should; it was failing pensioners, school children; unemployment rose; inflation had destroyed savings; the rise of the oligarchs shined a bright light on inequities. That change had been accompanied by such pain and was seen increasingly as a function of Russia using American models and advice; it became the norm to assign responsibility for the people's condition to those who had listened to us. And so, for most of the period I was ambassador the society was at loggerheads and the dynamism of the reform that had driven change in the early '90s along with the faith in American answers declined as Yeltsin's second term progressed. No one ever emerged to challenge Yeltsin, but Yeltsin's popularity declined, and with it the early rosy views of the U.S. even among some of our most important supporters. This broad trend accelerated with the financial crisis in 1998. That shock to the system significantly undermined the credibility of the reformers that remained, and it led Yeltsin to bring more conservative people into the inner circle of his government.

Q: You seem to be suggesting that the reform process was already in trouble before 1998 and the default and recession only made the situation worse? How far had the reform actually taken the country?

COLLINS: Well in some ways the answer is two-fold. On the one hand by 1998 Russia was a country that hardly resembled the nation a decade earlier. On the other there were striking elements that seemed all but unchanged. To sum up: Russia is a new nation state, no longer an empire. It is engaged in finding a way to define itself in this new existence but has only begun to find its way with new neighbors, with new borders, and with a new global environment. It has largely destroyed the system it lived with for three quarters of a century. The Bolshevik model is all but gone, a new constitutional order has taken its place. Gone is the closed alternative universe the Soviet system sought to create and operate; Russians now exist within an open global system in a country open to and integrated with the broader world. Finally, Russia has established a market system and is making the changes that are integrating it with the global economic, financial and trading system. So, there is no doubting the revolutionary upheaval has made Russia a new country.

But there were important elements of continuity that remained relevant. They strongly influenced events and the way the changes to the society played out over the decade. For example, in Moscow, the central government was controlled by the young reformist team Yeltsin brought to power in 1991, and they shaped the changes at the center and from above. But it was also a reality throughout the country that for the vast majority of people much was unchanged. Those still in charge of the society's institutions from factories to stores, to school systems, to social service agencies, to whatever in the vast majority of cases remained the same people who had been in those positions during the communist period. They just changed their hats. Now they were a mayor as opposed to a chairman of a town soviet; formerly an oblast' (region) party first secretary, they became a democratic governor.

So the reality was Yeltsin's reforms had brought major political change. It ended Communist Party's political monopoly. It ended the communists' ideological monopoly. And by moving to the market it ended its power over prices and the distribution of goods, services and assets. But he was forced to implement these revolutionary changes using the very same people who learned and made careers by mastering the old ways, and that meant a harder and harder row to hoe as time went on.

By the time I arrive as ambassador the reform process has been slowed, and those who have profited and done well from the radical changes of the early nineties are beginning to see their interest best served by holding or conserving what they have acquired or achieved. The oligarchy has established itself and control of great assets has moved to a relatively limited number of hands; the government is weak, often unable to collect enough taxes to fund its budget; the governors, the security establishments, the bureaucracy, the regional elites; the oligarchs are each looking to their own interest and at times seem almost semi-autonomous. In these circumstances Yeltsin and his team are trying to preserve the country's unity, oversee and guide a system that is fluid and without consistent discipline. And that only fuels the constant butting of heads between the people who think the old way with its discipline needs to be restored and those who think the reform process has to go further and needs to be reenergized. The result, increasingly was a kind of paralysis in the system.

Finally, it is important to understand that during the course of the nineties the oligarchs and others also underwent a transition that had a profound effect on both the political and economic order. In the early '90s nearly everything was up for grabs. While there were efforts to create some order to the process, much of the "privatization" was chaotic and hardly understood by most of the public. On one level individuals and families understood the idea of owning their apartment, a private plot, or perhaps joining a cooperative owning a store. It meant at times, for example, that if you drove a truck for the city, the truck might become yours. The government hoped to engage the public in the process and give citizens a stake in this effort to distribute the national wealth by introducing the much maligned voucher program in which each citizen received a piece of paper entitling him to a part of the national assets of the nation.

But when it came to the big assets, a variety of maneuvers had put significant pieces of the country's biggest assets in the hands of an emerging oligarchy In the first part of the decade these figures were largely obsessed with acquisition either from the government or from each other. Their maneuvers took place in an environment where there were few fixed rules or agreed norms, the time Russia acquired its reputation as the wild East. Ownership and control of assets tended to be determined by the ability to acquire and defend them, while government institutions, courts, laws or contracts provided little security.

By the latter half of the nineties, however, this had begun to change. Those who had succeeded in acquisition began to seek rules and institutional arrangements to protect what they had. With the larger assets, more or less well on their way to being carved up, the new property owners, whoever they were, began to have the idea that you could gain more by growing your wealth than by stealing more from a competitor. And so as I arrive in Moscow the economic oligarchy is at a point where a substantial portion of them are trying to stabilize the system. There's less reliance on Wild East methods and more on the cutting of deals, informal understandings about how business will be done, and efforts to insure assets or deals via third party - often western - guarantees and so forth. And a critical dimension also became building links with the government to ensure stable support of the oligarch's interests

In many respects this trend did bring significant stabilization and more order to the economy. The problem was that it also led by the end of the decade to stagnation. Change needed to keep the reform agenda going just stopped, and a weak economy that is really set back on its heels by the 1998 financial crisis is slow to recover momentum after an initial recovery.

So, for my four years, I watch a slowing of economic and socio-political reforms and change as the Yeltsin administration plays out its last years. That changed only as the new president, Mr. Putin, took charge and began to reenergize the government, institute a new drive to unite the society, and began a period of rapid economic growth.

Q: Ok, Jim, Let's stop here and when we return we can pick up with the end of the Yeltsin presidency, his legacy, and the arrival of Vladimir Putin.

COLLINS: Good, I also want to digress a bit and talk as well about the experience the embassy had in dealing with the global computer problem known as Y2K. It was a particularly interesting and disruptive event for us, and it raised a number of questions about Washington's decision making.

Q: *Today is the 24th of September, 2013, with Jim Collins. And Jim, last time we were talking about the end of the Yeltsin period and you wanted to mention the computer problem of the turn of the century that accompanied the transition.*

COLLINS: Yes, I think I've said that bringing a dimension of ground truth and experience of place to the way Washington dealt with Russia policies, decisions, and programs was a major focus of our work. We were proud of the work we did, for example, during the 1998 economic collapse where embassy input was among the best information Washington had on what was actually taking place in Russia. So, we had real successes in contributing substantively to shaping critical Washington decisions. But there were also examples when we were ignored to the detriment of sound decision making. I am not suggesting we were always right or had the best assessment of all the factors at work when issues were on the table in Washington. But I do think we had a perspective that almost always deserved attention. At times we got it. At times we didn't. But when we were ignored, it often was at a cost.

Y2K was a prime example. I came to think it revealed a great deal about our intelligence capabilities and our capacity vis-à-vis a country like Russia where we had targeted an immense part of our intelligence budget for decades. The Y2K issues centered on great uncertainty about what would happen when the computer systems of the world had to cope with the change of dates at the turn of the century. As I understood it, much of the world had used only the last two digits of the year, say 99, in dating computer based applications, documents, etc. Y2K involved uncertainty and concern about potential collapse of the systems when the structure would be confused by two digits that would precede the 00 of the year 2000. Would computer programs revert to the year 1900 or accept the year 2000 as beginning a new century's annual sequence? Predictions of potential disaster or chaos were prevalent, and in the case of Russia we were hearing about potential disastrous results

Q: Only four digits.

COLLINS: Only four digits for a year.

Q: And we were completing the 19s at the end of 1999 or something like that.

COLLINS: Yes, so that when at 12:01 of the new century computers went over to a date ending in 00 nobody knew what would happen; would it go to 2000 or back to 1900. Would time go in reverse? I suppose there were experts who had a better idea of what

might happen than we did, but it certainly came across to us that nobody in authority really understood what was going to happen, and hence an assumption that it would lead to a great computer breakdown across the entire globe and all the systems tied to them unless fixed to deal with the problem.

In this instance, as seems almost always happens, there were any number of worst case scenarios emerging from those studying the problem. In the United States a number of analysts, writers, and pundits started to talk about the potential for an accidental launch of nuclear missiles or the collapse of an entire space system with unforeseen but almost certain dire consequences. But most importantly and persistently it seemed there was belief a computer breakdown could disrupt or bring a collapse of the Russia's electrical grid or at least significant parts of it. That, it was reasoned, could have meant collapse of critical systems dependent on power: emergency services; disorganization of law enforcement and military organizations; darkness across whole cities. It could bring chaos, robbers in the streets, etc. And such ideas about what might happen in Russia were gaining currency.

This reminded me in a way of the Russia House-American prisoner kind of issue. I frankly thought the analysis and reading of the situation was off base. But I also know we would need a factual base for making any judgment about the question for Washington. So, I had our staff begin to investigate just what the reality was we would face in Russia. Over time the intelligence community agreed there would be no accidental launch of nuclear missiles. But the idea that collapse of the electrical grid could bring danger had real legs, and we concentrated on that question.

Now, the embassy knew a lot of people in the Russian ministries with links to various aspects of the electrical system. We stayed in touch with them and investigated every aspect of the issue we could. We talked to the full range of people involved in the electric power system. The result: these officials, experts, managers, etc. assured us there would not be a significant issue: there were precisely two electric power stations in the Russian Federation that depended on computers. The rest were not digital; they were manual and analog, turn on the switch, turn off the switch; or they managed the load distribution mechanically. They had been such for three quarters of a century, and there was no way computers were going to play much of a role in the electrical system's reaction to whatever Y2K might bring.

We reported this result back to Washington without the slightest effect. The intelligence community had done its own study. They concluded that the electrical grid had a probability or a distinct possibility of collapsing, and that became the basis for decisions about how we would respond to the potential danger Y2K posed. I was ordered to make available to all American embassy staff the option of voluntary departure if they felt their security wouldn't be adequate during the holiday period. Of course, in the end nothing happened to the grid or anything else so far as I know. I marked the occasion of midnight, 1999-2000, with embassy colleagues in Red Square with a lot of inebriated Russians, fireworks, and dazzling amounts of light. Absolutely nothing had happened from Vladivostok to Moscow and nothing did happen.

As we returned to work after the holiday, it seemed to me this whole episode had been a very substantial and significant intelligence failure. As I saw it, our best minds and analysts, looking at the technology base of the Russian Federation, had made a monumental mistake about a relatively straight forward issue regarding the Russian electrical system. If that was the case, you had to ask how much they were accurate or mistaken about other assessments of Russian technology or response to crisis, etc. So I asked for an assessment of what had happened in this case. I never got one. Nor do I know whether there was ever an assessment. But what I was told informally later on was that the analysts and experts felt the embassy's reporting reflected conclusions or assessment of facts by people who were too close to the Russian government and therefore were not as objective as the kind of work done by the intelligence community and the people that they employed to do their study.

I would say case closed in a way. I think, if that was the approach the intelligence community brought to assessing what was happening in my host country at that time, it revealed many of the problems that subsequently became obvious in the attacks on the United States in 2001. I think it was a wakeup call to some of the inadequacies in our analysis. Most specifically, to me it highlighted the failure to use obvious, open, available sources, the kind of diplomatic and other reporting that became possible in Russia and to which the community just didn't pay adequate attention.

Q: Yes, it's very easy to discount information from people who are reporting from other countries as coming from people too close to those countries. Therefore we should rely on ourselves: we who read books and absorb data and all, and we'll make up our own minds.

COLLINS: In my experience it is also a matter of where information comes from. The intelligence community, not unexpectedly, I suppose, likes to believe its own sources are much better than anything that the State Department or Commerce Department or others acquire. That, in my experience, is often costly if not at times ridiculous. But there is a sense that if it is acquired clandestinely it somehow has to be more credible.

Q: I was talking to Bob Dillon. He is a Turkish expert, long retired. He's in Turkey now as a guest, but he dropped by the Turkish desk before he went, and he was quite surprised to find that no one on the desk had served in Turkey. He said that, you know, they really didn't read a lot and they're bright people but this is troublesome

COLLINS: I'm afraid Bob is raising a very fundamental issue about just what makes the Foreign Service and for that matter Department of State vital to an effective U.S. foreign policy. There are a lot of different views about this, but I come down strongly on the side that says our greatest value to a President and to the American people is our ability to get things done with foreign countries and societies and to help our leaders and citizens make sensible decisions in engaging them. Put most simply it is expertise in getting things done abroad short of using force and helping our citizens do the same.

Now that means having expertise in one skill above others - area expertise, knowing how to work effectively in a foreign society, knowing how to get to its leaders, what motivates them such that our leaders know how to approach them, understanding the dynamics that govern the range of things Americans need to accomplish with a foreign partner. That is what State and the Foreign Service have always contributed to our national security system and foreign policy, and in my view it remains what defines the mission and professional role State has and should claim in the government.

What Bob is alluding too, however, reflects a State Department that seems often bent on putting other considerations above those I think most important. Assignments are made, careers developed, and personnel policy is formed against any number of considerations that have little to do with ensuring that our core area expertise is given priority in shaping the Service's future and the Department's ability to contribute its most important advice to our policies. I will cite one example. I recently met with a young officer going out to be chief of the political internal section at Embassy Moscow. She has never served in Russia and has only FSI Russian. Now, there are many jobs in the embassy where this background would be fully adequate preparation, but this is one case where this bright and talented officer will start off at a great disadvantage. It's almost unfair to the officer to take up a position of having to manage and set priorities for reporting, deal with a range of bilateral issues all of which have a history, but do so without any real experience and background in the issues and the internal political dynamics of that complex country. I'm not quite sure what the Foreign Service personnel system is thinking.

Q: Before we leave this all completely could you say a word more generally about the arrival of the digital world in Russia. Had the age of digitalization, IT, hit you much?

COLLINS: Certainly not as it would in the few years after I left. For example, I was the last ambassador with the luxury of not having to read and react to email as my first in the morning and all-day preoccupation. The embassy had no classified E-mail even at the end of my time. We did have unclassified email and computers were fully in use for unclassified work and communications. But so far as official communications and the classified we were still doing most of our work as we had done it in the 70s.

Q: You had gotten rid of the quill pens.

COLLINS: We had gotten rid of the quill pens, and over the decade there had been a revolutionary change in communications more generally. I recall that as DCM we did have unclassified email and we had computers in the embassy. But they were still limited in their use because none could be used for classified or sensitive work. I recall the cell phone showing up not long before I left, but there were maybe four or five people, myself being one of them as DCM who had one. So some of the digital age was poking up its head in these early days, but it was still very much an early stage.

On the other hand, the establishment of fiber optic connections was revolutionizing connections between Russia and the rest of the world. I remember attending one event at which President Yeltsin, the Swedish Ambassador and I stood together in a modest

office-sized room to be part of a ceremony in which a gentlemen threw a switch that opened 64,000 new phone lines between Moscow and the outside world. This capacity mushroomed and rapidly ended any idea of Russian isolation. But the technology was still at a pretty early stage. So the beginning of digital. yes, but we were not yet there, and the computer revolution was to come when I was ambassador. On the other hand there were additional new dimensions of the information space brought about by expansion of cable television in the major cities. These media and unjammed regular foreign radio brought foreign as well as Russian programming to large audiences and exposed Russians to foreign media in a way unprecedented in any earlier time.

Now, when I returned as ambassador this world had moved dramatically ahead. Russians had leapfrogged hard-wire phone technology to plunge directly into the cell phone era. What had been a rather rare instrument as I left just a few years earlier was now ubiquitous in Moscow and widely across the country. I remember we were impressed on the rail trip I took in 2001 before I left, that even in remote areas of Siberia, cell phone service was available nearly everywhere along the rail line and in the towns and villages we passed. As the new century began, Russians were, in short, connected and any idea Russia's information space could be isolated from the outside was history.

The internet was also beginning to penetrate the country. It was open, uncontrolled, and provided Russians even in remote parts of the country with opportunities to engage with the outside world in unprecedented ways. This had broad implications for the way the embassy could engage with Russia's public and suggested a very new and different world was aborning for those working to shape Russia's future and its relations with the outside. Most importantly, however, by the time I left Russia, it was clear Russia's rulers would almost certainly never again have the capacity to isolate their society from the impact of outside information. As with its economy, Russia was now inextricably part of the global information space.

Q: Well we're at the end of the Yeltsin era. I wonder if you could point up where the Soviet economic structure had ended up by this time. I mean, was Russia ready to enter the Western European economic system: were they already part of it: what?

COLLINS: Well, let's put it this way. Russia has cast off the institutions of its Bolshevik political structure; it has cast off its institutions of imperial control over territories it had ruled as Soviet republics: and it has destroyed the institutions of a command economy. By the last years of Yeltsin's term, it is in key respects building core elements of a more democratic political system, of a Russian nation state, and of a market economy. In sum, the Soviet Union is history, and Russians are beginning to sort out what will come next. They have been led for a decade by a man who has hoped to make his nation a normal country.

Let me say a word first about politics and then we'll turn in more detail to the economy. In my view Yeltsin established a key premise that had profound implications for any future Russian political order. His revolution set in place the premise that the only legitimate basis for power in Russia henceforth will be getting elected. He didn't and

probably couldn't say how that was going to be done, but he set the standard that the only legitimate power would come via the ballot box; in the future, there was no ideological basis for legitimacy and there was no bloodline to confer for legitimate political authority, the two previous ways in which rulers became the legitimate head of state. And he closed the book on the idea of Russia's empire, at least in any formal nineteenth century sense. Russia instead ended his time as a new nation state within borders it had never had before. It remained without question the large power in Eurasia, and many still saw Moscow as legitimately claiming a privileged or exclusive right to exercise influence or authority over its former imperial holdings. But Yeltsin had pressed forward recognition and normalization of Russia's new borders and relations with 14 other new states that now were Russia's sovereign neighbors. It was a profound if still fragile legacy, but it set a framework for what would be legitimate in the future, however distorted its implementation.

On the economy, let's just say Boris Yeltsin, in the course of a decade, made Russia into a market economy, however strange at times. He had also integrated Russia's economic fate with that of the global economic, trading and financial system. His reforms had created a new economic and managerial elite that he and his team hoped redefined much of the role of government. Those he chose to lead this revolution from the center were by and large young, were largely untainted by having had responsibility for managing and running the Soviet system. At most they'd started their careers in Soviet times. So they had their real power and responsibility in carrying out Yeltsin's economic goal to replace and destroy the Soviet communist system, and replace it with a western type market economy. That meant ripping up and dismantling to the extent they could the structure that united political and economic power in the hands of a single entity as the way to ensure the communist party and its system could never come back.

And so this team started with the basics of a market based system; they freed prices at the end of 1991- beginning of 1992 They instituted a program of massive privatization of property. They also took the really difficult decisions about restructuring the role of government and its institutions up and down the line that were necessary to put in place institutions to govern a market economy and to replace the institutions of the old command economy

So as he leaves the scene, the economy is transformed and well on the way to becoming a functioning if fragile market based system integrated with the global economy. But the cost of the transformation has been high, and the 1998-99 economic crisis has left a sense of despair at prospects for recovery. The Russian GDP (gross domestic product) at the end of his time or close to the end of it was down roughly 40 percent from what experts said it had been at the end of the Soviet era . Vast swaths of the old Soviet enterprises, industries, including the military industrial sector were idled, collapsed totally or were barely surviving by adapting their capacities to satisfy uncertain new markets. I recall, for instance, visiting the biggest titanium producing factory in the world that had been providing products to satisfy the demands of the huge aerospace industry and other military industrial users. By the late nineties this factory had turned to producing new titanium and aluminum windows for a growing construction industry, a line of consumer

goods that included titanium pots, pans, and garden tools, a sample of which – a small shovel - I took home as their gift. These products were scarcely keeping the plant alive, but its employees were confident a new opportunity; a new contract to provide titanium components and raw material to Boeing for its aircraft held significant promise for the plant's future.

And so it was Yeltsin's fate to have as a legacy an economy that was deeply depressed and seen as a failure by a broad swath of his people. It was an economy in which pensions weren't being paid on time, wages weren't being paid on time, much economic activity depended on barter, and there was no great incentive to make a lot of the major changes that now needed to be addressed to move to the next stage. Great swaths of the Soviet economic patrimony had been divided up through privatization. It had been undertaken through a variety of programs and other means, some legal, some not legal. There was a question often whether there were any rules or laws governing the process; it was messy, often unprincipled and corrupt , and as it proceeded even as it benefitted many citizens or working people who had an unexpected opportunity to become property owners or begin a small business, what came to be most associated with the process was unfairness, the reality that it benefitted people unequally.

These processes of privatization that featured half a decade of a free-for-all carving up of the national wealth, years of hyper-inflation, massive unemployment, a stunning economic crisis in 1998, and the broad based collapse of basic elements of the social safety network had been exhausting and for much of the population disillusioning. By the latter part of the '90s, moreover, those who emerged as winners from the chaotic early Wild East nineties began to see their future linked more to protection of what they had acquired than simply getting more from a competitor. They increasingly used a weak government to that end reaching a certain consensus about the need for stability and a more secure way to establish ownership, protect property rights and so forth.

The result for Yeltsin's final years is a time of stagnation. It is time marked by growing inequality, economic power disproportionately in the hands of the new oligarchy, weak and ineffective government and a broken social safety net. In sum, Yeltsin leaves an economy which is depressed and institutionally weak. But his legacy also includes a Russian economy firmly established as a market system with new institutions, new personnel, and new practices that have put finish to any idea that a Marxist alternative could have any opportunity to return. I suspect from his point of view that was a major success.

And the final thing I would say he leaves as a key element of his economic legacy is an economy which, for the first time in three quarters of a century is fully integrated into the global system. I remain convinced that one key result of the financial collapse in 1998 was Russian understanding and acceptance of the reality that their economy had become an inextricable part of the global system. Russia could no longer control its economic future outside the global system. This represented a huge change in thinking and adjustment in how Russia would see its options from a belief or hope that Russia could stand almost totally separate from global economic forces to one that now is intimately

linked to the benefits and vagaries of the international economic order. That was the lesson that emerged from the Russian default brought on by the gyrations of a few currencies in Asia. It was a lesson of the financial collapse in 1998, hard to learn but not forgotten as the new century begins.

Q: Was there intellectual backing for this change from the universities, the think tanks, government structures? This is a whole different mindset.

COLLINS: What I think we're really asking here is who made lemonade out of the lemons falling from the tree and who simply felt acidic sourness from the rain of fruit. As I saw it the answer to that was in part generational, in part a question of comfort with change, in part a matter of seeing possibilities versus dangers. It was also in part a matter of winners and losers. One thing was the same for all. As we have talked about, the collapse of the Soviet Union was liberating and upending of nearly every aspect of life and for practically everyone. At the same time, in a perverse way, that old order had provided a safety net for the largest part of the public to meet the basics of existence.

In this context I think it's fair to say that among the younger people there was a great sense of liberation, In very rapid order all kinds of new opportunities were open. You could travel abroad, you could study English, you could choose what you wanted to study from among a growing number of new private and public schools teaching the new mysteries of business, management, finance, etc., all things that hadn't existed before, or if they existed, were dedicated to teaching a selected group of promising young comers how to run things as a communist bureaucrat. Suddenly all that's changed: it's a new world, and as I think we noted young people wanted English and computer skills as the key to launching a future. With those two things you might find a job with a Western company or internationally related private sector work. It was also a time when skills with the new technologies like computers opened possibilities for building new businesses.

On another level the new economy created opportunity for countless new business entrepreneurs. The kiosk retailers, craftsmen turned builders, auto mechanics skilled at fixing the growing foreign automobile fleet. These opportunities were suddenly legion, particularly in the urban areas and they drew the young in particular to make a new beginning. So, the market economy is rapidly opening up all kinds of new possibilities in the construction industry, for instance, an industry largely neglected by the Soviet system that now becomes an explosive sector. Satisfying demand for consumer goods, a function of lowest priority in the Soviet system, becomes an opportunity for nascent young Marshall Fields to start running shops and learning how to manage microeconomic institutions across the country.

The young are certainly a force for new thinking in this new world. But there is another group I thought exceptionally important. This group comes from those whom the Soviet system denied the opportunity to rise above an established glass or concrete ceiling the communist system imposed. They were minorities: Jews, North Caucasus people, Tartars, for example: they were women: they were from the peasantry, a group that remained

suspect even into the eighties; they belonged to marginal or criminal elements like the blackmarketeers who fully understood supply and demand.

During the course of the nineties I came to see representatives of all these groups seize previously denied opportunities and become leaders and success stories in the new market system. I knew a number of women entrepreneurs. As women, they would never have been given a shot at the top levels of management or positions of responsibility in the communist system. Suddenly they became very successful leaders of industry, consulting agencies and businesses. Others, in some cases coming out of a communist youth organization suddenly, as in the case of Mr. Khodorkovsky, see the world's opportunities to become highly successful business leaders and oligarchs.

And you asked about the universities. Some of the old line universities or at least faculties within them adapted and embraced aspects of the new system. These taught the new subjects suddenly in demand from their students and quickly found ways to engage outside experts to strengthen their credentials. A large number of new private universities, colleges and business schools also set up campuses, particularly in the larger urban areas. Often partnered with or supported by foreign institutions, they expanded access to higher education and helped build a strong foundation of people equipped with western style business, management and financial skills. So the answer to your question about whether the academic world supported the changes of the nineties is simply yes in part they did.

But there was also another side. And here I would say great parts of the traditional academic and research world were far from supportive of a system that seemed to threaten their position in the elite, began to set very different criteria for what would be demanded from the academic and research world, and for many devalued the skills they had spent a lifetime developing. In this sense, the academic and research world shared much of the shock the nineties administered to most of the communist elite, particularly for the generation that had established its credentials and position in the communist system that is suddenly pulled from under them. For the people who were, let's say the age I was, in my 50s, the changes of the nineties were a calamity as often as not. The entire world that they had prepared themselves to occupy, take over and manage simply evaporated. For those a decade older a life they expected to enjoy during their next stage living securely on a state pension as a result of good work during their life disappeared over night. Among this generation, there was a lot of bitterness and grievance. Many of those outside these circles working for enterprises or collective farms, for example, hold on to the elements of the past the continue to provide essentials like housing, a noon meal, school for the children and medical care. They may work for no wage but the old structures for at least a time provide the minimums.

One result from these developments is a growing and ever more pronounced generation gap. Parents would talk to me about it saying they don't understand what their children are doing. They were shocked at the different values. How were they not interested in going to university to study, say, philology or nuclear physics. It had all become about opening a business, something the generation of my age thought a suspect endeavor

anyway. So in many ways by the end of the Yeltsin era you had a society which was deeply split. There were those who had won very big by acquiring assets, acquiring property, developing new businesses and so on; the oligarchs - those who saw the future as opportunity. But a great part, probably the majority, had not found greater security or prosperity during this tumultuous time, and among the elite there was a substantial part of two generations that rejected and in many cases resented what had taken the place in the world they had been raised to rule and respect.

Q: And these were out of the old ruling class, weren't they?

COLLINS: Well, many were yes A lot of the people who were in the elite or were on their way up being groomed and selected by the communist party elite found themselves sidelined or irrelevant. Many just faded from the scene. I knew highly respected academics from the Academy of Sciences, for instance, men at the top of the professional ladder, who suddenly are just seen as irrelevant; nobody cares about their research; the government doesn't pay them very much; and everybody's asking how can I use your knowledge and if I can't, what's the point. This reflected a whole reversal of values and expectations that had a tremendous and often catastrophic effect on people in the generations over 45 - 50 which were largely bypassed by the events of the decade and never recovered. The place of these people is taken by the new elites: the oligarchs, the young, the more entrepreneurial people, people who were making their way in regional business or government and so forth.

The problem for Yeltsin was that he never overcame the split in society that divided the groups. And as he left office, the division between the two sides had pretty much stultified efforts at further domestic reform. After recovery from the worst of the 1998 recession, there was no significant reform agenda. Yeltsin couldn't get much legislation passed in areas that needed attention, tax reform, land reform, judicial reorganization and so forth. As his period comes to its end, his prestige is very low, drawing ratings of three or five percent support. And yet being himself to the end, he managed to make a last impact on his legacy in a way that was vintage Yeltsin. Confounding his critics who were telling us regularly that he'll never leave office, he'll never give it up and so on, Yeltsin announced on New Year's eve that he was resigning the presidency six months early and according to the constitution, conveying his authority to Vladimir Putin, the Prime Minister who became acting president that day. Thus, Vladimir Putin assumed a new office and Yeltsin entrusted a difficult legacy to a successor on whom he placed, it seemed to me, his hopes if not his conviction that what he had begun would continue.

Q: Well during this change, I mean really momentous change, how were you and others reporting to convey back to the people in Washington what was happening? I mean, did you go out and say to somebody, I want you to take the pulse of academics in the Lenin Library or I mean, how did you keep your hand on the pulse?

COLLINS: In this regard one or two things were very important. First, as opposed to the Soviet period when getting anybody to talk to you was a major problem, the problem now was the opposite. So many people wanted to talk our challenge became trying to figure

out who was worth talking to and to judge which opinions were worth anything and which ones weren't. Again, we could come back and make a note of my intelligence failure. I might recall here a similar issue I encountered during computerization of the OpsCenter when we went from limited to overwhelming volumes of communicated information. There was an analogy. The amount of information just mushroomed and therefore what now mattered was having the judgment to select the best, reliable information. My people, having gone through the transition from Soviet to Russian Moscow were good at it.

Second, another challenge we had in communicating effectively with Washington was linked to the difference between getting views and understanding of events from the media, pieces from a few sources, or selected in depth assessments and being on the ground and living something that changed every day as we were in Moscow. At the embassy we lived with the confluence of the everyday and the newsworthy. We understood that no matter what, everybody gets up in the morning and gets on with it until the evening and then goes to bed and gets ready for the next day. In other words, the newsworthy events that showed up in the print media or the radio or television were inevitably nearly always what I called the atypical truth and did not necessarily convey a very good basis for judging what was really significant and what was the exception.

Third was that the pace of change during the whole decade, including even in the last years of Yeltsin's administration, was so fast that the bureaucracy in Washington or the legislative process affecting policy associated with assistance money, for example, was almost always way behind the actual progress of events on the ground. This meant actions in Washington were almost always too slow to affect circumstances as they occurred. So U.S. programs conceived, developed, and legislated according to our procedures and laws would be ready for implementation on the ground as often as not after the conditions they were meant to affect had long passed This became a serious problem.

Let me give a couple of examples regarding how Embassy's provision of essential ground truth could be significant for our decision makers. In the 1998 financial collapse the embassy sent in a daily report on economic developments. We had people from our consulates and from the embassy on the street and in offices talking to all kinds of people, from bankers to businesspeople to government officials and so forth. We tried to give a balanced daily report.

I recall one incident that gave a good sense for why we thought this critical to do. Fairly early on in the crisis - I think this was a day or two after the default - CNN got footage of a group of elderly women pounding on the door of a bank and demanding their money. The report portrayed their actions as emblematic of a run on Russian banks that threatened real catastrophe. As far as we could figure out, however, it was the only such incident in Moscow and it was really not that significant. But based on the CNN report, that was not the view back in D.C. Here assumptions were beginning to be made about impending chaos in the streets, an economy on the verge of collapse, worries that that the system could well fall apart, etc. We had a hard time getting a hearing for the contrary

view based on what we saw, a picture of a profoundly different reality. The trolleys were still running, the electricity was still on, people were going to work. I don't know what impact our reporting had, probably not enough. But at least it gave some people a basis on which to say wait a minute. The embassy says something different from CNN, We do know that people were using the embassy reporting because it showed up from time to time, and I suspect this was an instance where our reports helped keep sanity. The Y2K example, as mentioned, was another time we tried to bring ground truth to the fore, but we didn't succeed then.

Another instance, this time on the political side, was linked to our effort to provide a sense for the impact U.S. programs and money were imposing on the society, and for the context in which they operated. We saw it important to explain the increasing problems Yeltsin faced from the collapse of the Soviet social safety net. People's pensions didn't get paid; the health care system was collapsing; life expectancy for males kept declining. We tried to make the point that it was important to Yeltsin's success to give weight to the discontent and social pain these developments were bringing, and not to assess the success or failure of economic reforms only through the eyes of Treasury Department data on the macroeconomic or microeconomic picture. In this area, I am not sure our impact was very great. Certainly it was important to get the economy back on track but to do so in a way that disrupted institutions on which the population depended was going to be costly. I never was successful in getting the case made effectively that our economic programs had to pay greater attention to their political impact. I think that was in part because when Washington thought about doing something with, for, or to Russia the issue usually boiled down to money; what could be funded to bring about change or advance a defined U.S. interest. The things that got priority were things that money could address, and that could be measured.

In some cases - Nunn Lugar might be an excellent example - the paradigm worked. Our funds produced measurable results, in the form of more secure facilities for nuclear materials, timely destruction of strategic weapons, or conversion of certain military industry to civilian configuration. Similarly, many programs to support the creation of new institutional capacity within the Russian government or create essential structures for the new market system were very effective. But there were many issues or elements of transformation where money alone and our reliance on "shock therapy" were not up to successful management of the political dimensions of the upheaval that was visited on the Russian population. The approach with many major successes in changing the economic system was far less capable of figuring out ways to take account of the non-monetary dimension. There was little regard for the public's suffering as the social safety net collapsed or sense of urgency in finding a way to restructure elements of that dimension in ways that would have balanced the emergence of markets with the capacity to demonstrate the new economy's ability to support social needs. I don't think we did a good job of that, and I think we paid a price for that failing. To the extent people in Russia tend to equate the '90s with economic collapse and a decline in their living standard, our approach gave little help to our efforts to establish and strengthen democratic institutions. Rather by the end of the decade there was a broad sense that the

political structure that let them down shaped a disappointing view of democracy or what it could assure the Russian people.

Q: Well you know, one of the things I've noticed in my own personal experience abroad is that when Americans go to a country and see a problem, we begin to ask ourselves what can we do about it? Right now in Syria we're asking what are we going to do to fix the mess rather than what are the Syrians going to do. Did you find much of your time was occupied with questions about what are we going to do about this or that situation or problem rather than how will or can the Russians deal with it?

COLLINS: Oh yes. A lot, and it became more the case as my time in Spaso House went on. The financial crisis or 1998 combined with the U.S. political season intensified this kind of thinking in the U.S., and it only became more the rule for the remainder of the decade. In our media, in Washington generally, the debate about American policy seemed simply to assume we the Americans were somehow responsible for whether Russia turned out "right," an idea defined, of course, by us. By extension this meant therefore the President was somehow responsible for whether Russia turned out acceptably.

With that assumption more or less fixed in place the next question became, as often as not, not what to do, but who is to blame. That dynamic really took off as a result of the financial default in "98. That shock brought a war cry to find who had allowed or caused the financial collapse, and who had mismanaged the entire Russian experiment. While there was a good deal of finger pointing and talk about Russian corruption, as I recall, the bulk of argument revolved around not the Russians, but who here in Washington had mismanaged the economic support programs, failed to see the dangers, or by mishandling our assistance brought on the default. This was intensified by the fact that the default cost Wall Street a lot of money, blotted a lot of careers, and made fools of a lot of others. As I noted earlier, I suppose you could see this whole dynamic best summed up in the famous front page of "The New York Times" magazine headline "Who Lost Russia?" That summarized both the presumption and the kind of arguments that surrounded our Russia policy for the next two years.

As it took hold over the decade, this kind of idea or attitude was, from my point of view, increasingly making it difficult to develop policy based in a realistic view of Russia and its region. First of all the very idea that someone lost Russia - and the implication was it was Bill Clinton and Al Gore - presumed with a degree of chutzpa hard to match that we somehow had it in the first place. It further came to see our policy not as development of a positive, productive relationship with an international partner, but as what amounted to a massive program of social, economic and political engineering that would transform Russia and its neighbors into partners willing and desirous of following America's lead in rebuilding what President Bush called the new world order.

Now, this was partly understandable. It was a mood and way of seeing Russia occasioned in part by the approach the Russians themselves took early on when they came to us and asked what should we do, referring in particular to reform of their economy and interest in joining the community of western partners. As you have suggested, Americans are not

reluctant when asked for help or guidance in resolving a problem to provide answers and get into helping get the job done. It's the American can-do spirit, and in this case our readiness to assist did a tremendous number of very good things. We've talked about what we did in the early in mid-nineties that truly did much to support Russia's transformation.

On the other hand, by the time core elements of the economic, political and social reform agenda have been put in place, and the first bloom of liberation from the Soviet system is off the rose, some elements of the reform aren't working out so easily. The Russians are beginning to insist on having their voice heard regarding their own priorities and future reforms, and the divisions between Yeltsin supporters and critics are becoming more pronounced. These trends are sharpened, as we have noted by the financial collapse and the split between Russia and the US. over issues like Kosovo. When things do not go well, as they did not regarding the 1998 recession, Russians almost instinctively pose two questions, who's guilty and what should we do. Well, just as in Washington, who's guilty became the increasingly important question in Moscow. Now, the Russians increasingly said it was the Americans, and the Americans in a perverse sort of way agreed about our responsibility. But we narrowed the finger pointing to the administration or increasingly and disturbingly, it seemed to me, the Russians. The presumption was clear. If Yeltsin and his people had just done as they were told, all would have been well.

As this kind of thinking and unrealism about Russia's understanding of its position and role and about U.S. capacity to bring Russia along as we deemed necessary took a more and more prominent role in debates about Russia-U.S. relations, I found the embassy more and more consumed with working to explain Russia to Washington and Washington to Russia. In Moscow the environment was the growing more complex. Fallout from the financial collapse increased polarization and the expansion of NATO and U.S. intervention in Kosovo presented Yeltsin and his government with a series of emotional and divisive issues that ultimately cost Yeltsin dearly. The results were a steady decline in Yeltsin's popularity and estrangement from the Americans among the broader public. Questioning ran deep about the idea that America had either the answers for Russian problems or Russia's best interests at heart. It was a long way from our popularity at the beginning of the '90s.

Q Had Putin been a figure when you were there earlier?

COLLINS: I first met Vladimir Putin when he was in Leningrad, I think in '91. He was a deputy to mayor Sobchak then. His portfolio engaged him with the foreign business community in Leningrad/St. Petersburg, and he was involved with Americans coming to explore business and investment opportunities in the city and area. He held that position until the mid '90s, and I probably met him a couple of times in connection with business questions or visitors he was seeing.

After Anatoly Sobchak lost the mayoral election in what was now formally St. Petersburg Putin was brought down to Moscow. He worked in an office (*upravlenie delami* in Russian) that was responsible for managing the assets and holdings of the Russian

presidential administration. This was a huge organization that oversaw and managed everything from the Kremlin palaces and grounds to a presidential airline, to a range of presidential properties around the country and more. As part of that operation he was among the Kremlin insiders. He worked directly for Pavel Borodin, the official who commanded the large resources and funds that among other projects at this time were employed to remodel and I would say de-Sovietize the Kremlin buildings and offices. It was in this period, as I recall, for instance that offices we visited were remodeled and quietly the former Lenin office in the Kremlin –what had been almost a shrine – was dismantled and moved out of town. But Putin evidently had wider responsibilities as well and was understood to be involved in various other issues such as the center's relations with regional governments.

Putin came to Moscow when I was still in Washington, but not long after I came to Moscow as Ambassador, he became the head of security service, the FSB. It was there that I first worked with him professionally in any significant way. Subsequently, I saw him while he was briefly the National Security Adviser and then when he was serving as Prime Minister in 1999. Yeltsin then appointed him acting president on New Year's Eve 1999-2000 and subsequently he is elected President in the spring of 2000. It was a rapid rise for someone who appeared to the outside a relatively unknown and obscure politician.

Q: When Yeltsin left, what was our evaluation of Putin as his successor?

COLLINS: In reality nobody knew him very well. We knew his bio; we knew him as head of the Russian security service for a few years; we knew him as prime minister for some months. Some remembered him from his days as a deputy mayor in St, Petersburg where he had cared for western business interests. I had worked with him a few times when he was head of the FSB and Prime Minister. But, he was not a regular interlocutor for American visitors; nobody knew him well or had much sense what he would have as priorities. That's not too surprising, because the Russians themselves didn't know him very well, and they hadn't very much of an idea about what he would represent.

The one factor that raised questions, of course, was his past as a member of the KGB. He had served abroad in Germany as an intelligence operative. In the public domain this background was a burden from the outset. The media in the West almost from the beginning associated him primarily with the KGB background, and in Russia itself that service raised questions for many. But Putin had also been an associate of one of the early reformers/supporters of Yeltsin, Mayor Sobchak in Leningrad/Petersburg, and he was reasonably favorably known by those who had worked with him in that capacity. Similarly, I would say, that as FSB chief he had positive relations with his western counterparts. As he assumed the position of prime minister the one troubling issue that arose revolved around what role if any the security services and possibly Putin himself had played in a terrorist bombing of an apartment complex in Moscow. That event became a scandal and a topic that would dog Putin for years.

Q: I recall you telling us the first war ended without a real conclusion. What happened to restart it? The second war takes place when you are already in Moscow and you are in the thick of it.

COLLINS: Yes, the second war de facto restarted the conflict held in semi-abeyance by a cease fire but left unresolved. Following the truce in 1996 and Russia's humiliating withdrawal of its forces the tensions between Moscow and Grozny were unrelenting. Chechen militants engaged in a terror campaign with headline making bombings, raids and kidnappings raising the temperature and challenging Russian authority. These actions kept the pot boiling and hardened sentiments for action in Moscow. In the late summer of 1999, an invasion of Dagestan by a Chechen militant rebel force presented a blatant Chechen challenge to Moscow's authority outside Chechnya and raised the pressures for a response. Then not long after, bombings in Moscow and other Russian cities killed some 300 Russian apartment dwellers. The Russian response, led by the new Prime Minister Vladimir Putin, was a campaign to end the Chechen threat and restore Russian control over the Chechen territory. It began the second war, this time presented by Moscow as a counter terrorist operation, and managed militarily to ensure there would be no repeat of the humiliating loss suffered in the first conflict.

The result was a brutal conflict. Atrocities were committed on both sides. There was no sign of restraint or respect for civilian safety. The fighting largely demolished the Chechen capital Grozny and put Russia or its new Chechen partner Ahmad Kadyrov in charge of the territory. Russia's new Prime Minister had succeeded in restoring Russian territorial integrity. The Chechen terrorist campaign would continue but independence for the region was no longer an issue.

In dealing with this war, I was at Embassy Moscow and in a much different role than I had occupied during the previous go around. This time I found myself working between diverging views and pressures that were defining positions in Moscow and Washington. I was conveying on the one hand the growing concerns and dismay in Washington at what the U.S. saw as an expanding human disaster and as an issue that was increasingly complicating relations with Moscow. On the other I was reporting Russian determination from the highest levels of government to put an end to their Chechen problem once and for all and to avoid any repeat of the outcome of the first war that had humiliated Moscow's authority and left unresolved the question of Russia's control over its territory.

Looking back, I think it is hard to overestimate the negative impact on our relations with Russia that emerged from that period. There was quite simply a yawning gulf between the thinking that drove our policy and that motivating Russian leaders. Yeltsin was seen no longer as the leader who had stood on the tank in 1991. Now he represented the head of state who had brought Russia's promising economy to a default, shown himself an unreliable ally over Serbia and Kosovo, and failed to deliver on his promises to build a healthy democracy. Now he had put his government in the hands of a Prime Minister not from the community of democratic reformers but from a past most hoped gone forever, from the circles of Russia's security services. We were just beginning to get to know Vladimir Putin, and set against the outbreak of the new Chechen conflict shortly after he

assumed his position, his background as a former KGB officer and chief of its successor institution the FSB was breeding suspicion.

One incident, in particular, I recall symbolized the problem. I had received instructions to see the Prime Minister to convey our strong position opposing any movement by Russian forces beyond a key river in Chechnya. Mr. Putin in response said to me there was no such intention. Only a short time after that Russian forces crossed that river and set about the march and assault on Grozny that brought immense cost in lives and the bloodiest phase of the conflict. The incident certainly did nothing to enhance confidence in Mr. Putin or in our ability to find common ground or build trust with him. It was not an auspicious beginning.

At the same time, I found the American position on the war weakened by the lack of any defined goal we were prepared to support or work to achieve regarding the conflict. As I understood it, the American approach sought to bring the Russians to stop being barbarous, to respect human rights, in short to be decent to their people in Chechnya. That position as it came to me to convey more or less presumed, first, that the Russians were acting as they did in a situation where they had real control over the territory where the fighting was taking place. Second we seemed to assume they were arbitrarily using excessive force against a small group of people trying to claim legitimate rights to govern themselves and get out from under oppression. Well, from my vantage point this was,, to begin with, a naïve view of what was going on in Chechnya and between Chechnya and Moscow. A broader issue was our own lack of precision about the objectives we were trying to achieve. We were quite insistent and vocal regarding the need to end the bloodshed, about the Russians' responsibility to avoid brutality and violations of human rights and not to mistreat their population. My problem was our inability ever to come to terms with the question of what Moscow was to do with a region like Chechnya which was essentially lawless, in the hands of thugs, and had basically become a criminal state or enterprise. The Russian answer was the war they waged to end Chechen defiance of Moscow's authority. And we basically contented ourselves with cajoling the Russians to do the right thing without any real definition of what that was to mean beyond avoiding unacceptable action against the Chechen population. Now I can't say I had the answer to this conundrum this time, but I don't think we were intelligent about defining what we wanted to happen as an outcome or in finding a way this time to halt the bloodshed.

Q: Well a lot of this starts with perception as you say, all of a sudden these are freedom fighters.

COLLINS: We never said that in this case, but it was rather implied. The Chechens were portrayed as the underdog and victims. At the same time I don't recall anybody here seriously advocating or wanting to see an independent Chechnya. We just wanted it not to be a problem and for the Russian to act in a way that would take it off our problem list. The difficulty was the Russians didn't know how to do that and achieve their objective of reasserting sovereign control over Chechnya at the same time.

Q: I mean to me it sounds like a place where you put a cordon of troops around the border into Russia and let them fester.

COLLINS: There were a variety of efforts by the Russians to control the region after the first war. The problem was they simply were not effective and there were Chechen elements including criminal or semi military groups who continued to press actions against their own leaders or their neighbors. In the end Putin defined an answer after the second war. He more or less installs a total thug to run Chechnya, but it is his thug. The outcome as it has developed doesn't mean the writ of Russia runs in Chechnya the way it does in most other regions of the country, but the current arrangement does not challenge Russian sovereignty over the region. Chechnya's leaders don't say Chechnya is not part of the Russian Federation, but in return Moscow provides its leaders with a largely free hand in the region and keeps paying them lot of money to keep the peace. Someone I respect describes the arrangement Moscow has settled for as that of suzerainty rather than sovereignty over the region**.**

Q: So Putin becomes acting President. Was this a surprise to you?

COLLINS: Well as I said not so much that he was appointed acting president. That was the logical constitutional successor to the President. The shock was the timing. It was the fact that Yeltsin had confounded almost all the pundits and chattering class by resigning the presidency six months ahead of the end of his term and entrusting his office to someone few had thought in the running for the role when Yeltsin left office. It was a surprise to us, frankly. The only comfort, if you could call it that, was that we had been dealing with Putin over the period of two years and had some sense for him.

Q: How did he start out? Did his early moves give an indication of where he wanted to take Russia? In this early period did you feel a certain shutting down or clamping down? Were we heading back to the bad old days?

COLLINS: Well, to begin with I have to say that no one had any good idea of him as leader or how he saw the future. We were not alone in this. Few Russians knew him in that sense either. It seemed to us the general assessment when Putin was the topic at that point was one of wait and see what this man will do. Moreover, the answer to that question did not become clear while I was there for the next year and a half.

There was just no clearly defined answer to that even as I departed. There was much that suggested continuity from the reformist nineties. There were likewise some troubling actions. It's also important, I think, to recall that when Mr. Putin arrived on the scene, he inherited a much weakened presidency and Russian government regardless of what the constitution seemed to provide. Power and wealth had been dispersed. The government system was as much used by private interests as it was using its authority to govern them. The country's major constituencies like the military and military industrial complex, the security establishment, the regional elites and governors, the bureaucracy, the economic oligarchy and the new private moneyed class used their own positions and control over various assets to advance or protect their own positions and interests. The president and

government in Moscow, all but unable to collect taxes and often nearly broke, found their authority diminished and writ across the nation limited. As Putin came in, therefore, his authority as often as not rested on the ability to combine use of governmental resources with his authority to maintain balance among competing interests, to serve as the sort of arbiter among the country's constituencies.

In this initial period, I would say in retrospect he employed actions in four directions that were key to consolidating his position and authority. One was personal; one was ideological/systemic; two were good constituent focused politics.

The first of these was very personal and important to defining Putin as a leader and capable president for the nation. Recall, Yeltsin had been in poor health. He was perceived as weak, spent in some ways, unable to control his drinking, more and more out of touch or unable to rule. There was a sense that his circle was running him rather than the other way round. Putin from the beginning set out to establish that there was a new man in town. He took every opportunity to demonstrate his vigor, physical health and strength, ability to discharge any duty that might come his way. He flew a fighter plane. Pictures of him in karate garb were on display. He was at ease doing the business of being president. And he used with real skill these different assets he could bring to bear. He was, in short, the non-Yeltsin: vigorous, young, physically fit, mentally acute, no alcohol in sight. And this image played well with a public that had grown weary of a leader it saw as weakened, detached, and out of touch.

Second, Putin almost from the outset articulated a new, strong, well crafted, and distinct vision for his country and people and their future. It was designed, as I saw it in time, to appeal to what the two camps that were divided over Russia's direction after 1991 shared in common. Boiled down to its essence, it evoked historic themes to challenge a fractured nation to come together and to join him in restoring Russian pride and greatness. It was no longer a call to normality or an aspiration to be part of a larger European world. It was a summons to Russian recovery, to restore Russia's greatness, by remaining true to Russian traditions, values, and faith. Putin's people unveiled the vision the new vision on the Orthodox New Year less than two weeks after Putin had been made acting president at the Kremlin. The Patriarch presided over a program in which he represented the Russian Orthodox tradition. He was joined by the leader of the communist party Mr. Zyuganov, Mr. Primakov, the former prime minister and respected symbol of both the old and new systems, and Mr. Zhirinovsky, leader of the newly emerged ultra nationalist party in the parliament. Each of these four joined together to introduce elements of a program that was designed by their presence that a new era was emerging, a time for coming together.

Their participation embodied the core message of the evening. It was centered on the ideas of a Russian philosopher Aleksey Khomyakov, one of the founders of the Slavophile movement. He had written that Russian greatness comes from unity and adherence to values he portrayed as unique to the Russian people. Each of the speakers addressed the theme, and expressed how the values Khomyakov identified had affected their lives and careers. Suffice to say, however, the theme of unity was clear by the end of

the evening. But there was one aspect of the event that suggested a cautionary tale to which I don't think any of us paid enough attention. It made clear to all who joined the new president in his mission to make Russia great again would be welcome under the new big tent he was seeking to build; all would be welcome to be part of the effort and ways would be found to make a place for all ready to join. But those not ready to join, those who chose to remain outside, or those who tried to oppose the greater effort would find they had no place in the tent. That message, I think, was one that we should have taken more to heart than we did at the time. Its emphasis was unity, and it implied no tolerance for dissent. It's implications emerged clearly later, mainly after my time. But with a few exceptions it was not something that got much notice at the beginnings of Putin's presidency. But it was the opening moment for the idea of unity- *edinstvo* - and all the implications that term has come to embody since.

A third dimension of Putin's early presidency came from giving elements of this philosophical or ideological dimension tangible reality. Here he made a number of early moves that were reassuring and taken quite positively. Some were primarily symbolic: he brought a close to the argument over what flag would represent the nation settling on the Yeltsin era flag for the national standard, but permitting the Russian army to use the flag they fought under in World War II. He resolved the impasse over a national anthem by casting aside the Yeltsin era Glinka hymn that was never given words in favor of an anthem with the old Soviet melody but new words for modern Russia. In other cases the compromises or moves picked up and advanced key parts of the agenda Yeltsin had been unable to get accomplished. So he achieved progress by completing major steps in tax reform, early legislations on land reform, and a comprehensive rewriting of the criminal judicial code, all long stalled legislation and reforms Yeltsin had been unable to move forward.

On the economy he made a number of additional moves that the business community welcomed and they felt showed the government was serious about necessary steps to improve the investment and business climate. His introduction of a flat income tax, 13 percent, revolutionized attitudes toward taxation, and people began to pay their income tax. His reform of the judicial procedural code in its essence reversed the dominance of the police and defendant in criminal cases, basically introducing the idea of innocent until proven guilty and imposing new requirements on the police to prove a case. It also enhanced the role and position of the judges, Putin passed a land code, which became the basis for revolutionary change in the way land purchases could be financed and made possible development of a system for mortgages.

Fourthly, and certainly not least, Putin strengthened the ability of the central government to enforce its laws and writ from one end of the country to the other. These measures were welcomed by the private sector both foreign and domestic. It meant growing confidence among investors and business interests that a contract made in Petersburg would be honored in Vladivostok, something that was not true under Yeltsin. It was a welcome boost to morale for the private sector and had an early impact on investment and economic growth. In sum, in this very early period Putin brought about a lot of

change Russians broadly welcomed and that gave evidence of an ability to resolve or address divisive issues. They gave encouragement that the economy could improve.

On the other hand, these early days revealed certain troubling aspects to his approach. One element was the reemergence of the security services as a prominent force around the Kremlin. Early in the nineties Yeltsin had diminished the role and power of the Soviet era security establishment. The KGB was broken up: it lost its paramilitary element, the foreign and domestic security elements were divided. They lost much of the central place they had occupied in the Stalinist and post Stalinist system, and during the reformist nineties were sidelined to a great extent. On assuming the presidency, Putin reversed this trend. Faced with strong vested interests and constituencies accustomed to using central authority for their own ends or simply bypassing it altogether, he turned to the security services to reassert state authority, reestablish the Kremlin's primacy, and serve as enforcer of the new directions set out in his vision for Russia's restoration.

The security services in time become his principal instrument to push everybody else to get going. He also serves notice once elected that going forward the relationship between the new moneyed class and the state was going to change. The oligarchy had exploited their powerful economic position to bend the political establishment to their own ends and had grown accustomed to the state protecting and serving their interests. Putin served notice that the new man in town saw it differently; the oligarchs and new moneyed interests could have their property protected provided they left political power and governance to the politicians and government. If they get involved in politics all bets would be off.

To demonstrate the authority he intended to use he made an example of two people who openly opposed him, one in the media, one in the Yeltsin inner circle; Mr. Gusinsky, who had created an independent television network and was a very successful self-made man was jailed and subsequently exiled. His media empire was confiscated. Mr. Berezovsky, who recently died in London, an oligarch with money in a variety of activities, most particularly, the auto industry, had been a Kremlin insider and part of the circle around Yeltsin. His apparent effort to continue his manipulative activities under the new regime ended abruptly in his exile as well The signal was delivered clearly. Trying to use your money to influence political and governmental decisions, most particularly if they are outside the new tent defined by the new leadership or openly trying to challenge or to oppose Mr. Putin, will come at a significant price. The message was understood, it seemed to us, and subsequently, after my time, the infamous Khodorkovsky case makes it very clear to the oligarchy that if you got out of line, there was no security no matter how powerful your position.

One further dimension of this trajectory emerged in Putin's early years that complemented this trend. Despite a false sense that the Russian government had diminished its share of ownership over the nation's assets in the course of the privatization and reforms Yeltsin undertook, the reality was in many areas very different. Somewhere around the end of the decade I had asked my economic people to undertake a study to test the idea that the majority of Russian assets were in private hands by that

time, a view that kept being broadcast widely in the West. In fact, what we determined was, to the contrary, that something like seventy per cent of gross Russian assets remained in the hands of the government. What had changed in the Yeltsin era was that minority shareholders in many major industries such as oil and gas had been permitted to run and manage the industries largely without government intervention. Now, coincident with his notice to the oligarchs, Putin likewise moved to reassert Russian government shareholder rights in these key sectors, for example, putting loyal subordinates onto the boards of such enterprises as Gazprom, the natural gas giant. Again, the effect was to enhance dramatically the role of the government in many of Russia's key economic sectors, and in the process begin the emergence of a new economic elite linked to the Putin regime, a process that will grow steadily over the next decade.

All of this over the course of the first Putin term significantly changed the politico-economic arrangements that had emerged during the nineties. Mr. Putin, in relying as heavily as he did on people from the security services to move things in new directions, began to build a much more centralized, less pluralistic system. There was less and less room for a range of views or different groups defining alternative ways to approach development. The introduction of greater discipline, greater direction, greater structure to the government's authority, policies and programs had its pluses to begin with, but the instruments on which Putin relied to rebuild the nation's economy, political infrastructure, and national unity laid the groundwork for something that took off course what we hoped Yeltsin's trajectory would eventually bring.

Q: Well on this, in retrospect would you say from the American perspective that Putin was the right person at the right time?

COLLINS: Certainly there were doubts about him from the outset. Just to recall, not very many people knew him or much about him. Plenty of people were uneasy that he came from an intelligence/KGB background, despite his association with reformers who supported Gorbachev's and Yeltsin's reforms. I think I mentioned his rise to prominence was also tarnished by suspicions about his role in the apartment bombings in Moscow and other cities in the fall of 1999 that triggered the second Chechen war. And we were aware that he had not been President Yeltsin's first choice. As I think we discussed earlier, for much of his second term Yeltsin was trying to find a successor that would effectively protect and carry on his legacy. He tried two people, Sergey Kiriyenko and Sergey Stepashin. In the event, Kiriyenko lost his chance over the 1998 financial default, and Stepashin simply seemed not up to the job. After Stepashin he turned to Putin, who in the Presidential Administration and as head of the FSB, had done a credible job. He appointed him Prime Minister in August, 1999. It was certainly understood that this put Putin in line for succession, but at the time there was also no certainty that Putin would be the last option. Despite ongoing speculation about what Yeltsin would do at the end of his second term, there was a prevailing sense that Yeltsin would find a way to stay on. So, it was also a twofold shock for many when Yeltsin announced his resignation early: the fact that Yeltsin decided to leave and early at that, and the assumption of the presidency by a man many doubted would be the successor Yeltsin would choose.

Was he the best choice from our point of view? I don't think we had much of an idea about who would be best, but Yeltsin thought Putin his best choice, and whatever misgivings we had, he was in place. Of course, Yeltsin's appointment of Putin as 'acting" did not assure he would be the formal successor. Putin had to be elected in May, 2000, and he faced eleven opponents. But the incumbency and Yeltsin's implicit endorsement gave him the needed support, and he won election to a four-year term in his own right.

At the time, there are all sorts of stories about the politicking around how Putin became Yeltsin's choice and what factors went into Yeltsin's decision. Ever since the decision, conspiracy theories have abounded, stories of intricate political plots have come and gone. I have never personally been confident I had a good fix on why Putin. Certainly Yeltsin wanted to be sure that his family and he would be okay if he resigned; he had made history in a way by ensuring that Gorbachev had an honorable if somewhat Spartan retirement. I am sure he believed Putin could assure that would happen in his case. But I am convinced there were other elements as well. Yeltsin cared about his legacy: he had seen himself as father of new Russia, a patriot. I remain certain he wanted the country to go in a direction that would build on what he had begun, and he needed a successor who was capable of making that happen. Putin, his third choice, may well have seemed the best he had available. The bench as he would have seen it was not deep. I'm also sure there was intense politicking surrounding the choice and the transition. You can read about all this. But, nobody outside his inner circle seemed to have much insight about what Yeltsin was planning. It seemed to me that Putin became the acceptable choice because he discharged the duties of prime minister adequately, had been loyal, and Yeltsin concluded he could do the job. Was he the best choice? There were certainly many doubts, including from Yeltsin and his closest people. I heard doubts expressed about whether Putin would become a real democrat; doubts about his reliance on "them," a clear reference to the return to prominence of the security services and his reliance on them.

From our point of view, as Americans, I suppose it's true that if you looked around at the bench Yeltsin had, there were some other people that we might have preferred in terms of their record and evident commitment to developing the Russia that we thought was possible. But, for a variety of reasons none of them was going to be acceptable, either because they would have only furthered the country's division, were feared unable to hold the country together, or were seen as simply not up to the job.

Q: Well what about the equivalent to the parliament at the time.

COLLINS: We have discussed some of the details earlier. The parliament had two chambers. the Duma, lower chamber was the more powerful and more significant of the two. The Federation Council, the upper chamber was more limited in its powers and generally was unable to initiate legislation. The Duma was elected by popular vote, one half by single member district, a system like ours for members of the House, and one half on the basis of proportional party vote that apportioned seats according to the proportion of the total vote each party received in an election. The Federation Council had two members from each Russia region selected by regional legislative bodies and governors.

The power and influence of the Duma devolved from its position as the source of legislation and a degree of control over government budgets. The Russian constitutional system gives the president immense power. But the Duma, in particular, is essential to the passage of laws. While there had been a period early in the post-Soviet period when Yeltsin had authority to govern by decree, the parliament had precipitated the crisis of 1993 by trying to halt that process. In creating the resulting new constitution Yeltsin and his colleagues provided for a strong presidency, but also established the principle that laws duly passed by the legislature would become the basis for further definition of the legal structure for the country. Essentially, no more rule by decree, the future would belong to parliamentary approved legislation. Yeltsin, I believe, badly burned by the outcome of the parliamentary crisis of 1993, understood and stuck by this principle. From the beginning of the new constitutional period in 1994, the problem he had was a parliament very much divided where his supporters rarely constituted a strong majority. Getting things into law to promote the reforms his supporters hoped to see was a real problem and was the reason much remaining essential reform was stalled.

So, the Duma was split. And Yeltsin had to deal with that situation through the remainder of his presidency. He was often frustrated, angry, threatening. But, importantly in my view, he never tried to disregard or deny the authority of parliament to pass laws and budgets. He tried to live within the system; to find a way to use it or a way to get the legislation he needed. But he didn't change the rules or the way the Duma was elected. Success for his policies depended on formation from among the Duma members a "party of power" to support the leadership's program. The Kremlin and government were, of course, not without their assets to encourage support and they used them. But for much of the time this grouping, formed from a shifting mixture of large and small parties, remained fluid and without dependable discipline.

The upper house of the parliament, the Federation Council had much more limited powers, but was essential to final passage of legislation and reflected the views of critical players. Its members were sent to Moscow by the provincial elites and were heavily beholden to them. They came into the capitol with the interests of their governors and their regional power brokers foremost in mind and collectively were significant in embodying the unity of the country. They were also the guardians of the local interest and an insurance against discrimination against regions or their interests.

And so Yeltsin dealt with a parliament over which his control was often problematic. The Duma, in particular, with its multiple parties, reflected the absence of consensus across the land. It and the Federation Council did represent the diversity of the country, the range of different political interests, the sharp differences about economic policies and reforms, the diversity of view among ethnic and religious communities, and a multiplicity of other matters dividing Russia's society in this immediate post-Soviet era. It seemed every view was out there, and in some way got reflected in electoral politics. So it was representative, and in that sense inclusive. The downside was it was very difficult to bring coherence to the political system or define its direction. There was regular talk about a two party system; but the work of the Duma remained fractured, chaotic and too

often ineffective Over all the result was a growing frustration at the government's inability to move critical reforms ahead, and a sense of frustration at its inability to address critical issues.

So it is this world that Mr. Yeltsin left to his successor. As he left office he was the object of scathing criticism and often derision. But I continue to believe Yeltsin deserves great respect for standing by and respecting the role of the parliament and the limits that body and the judiciary represented for the presidency. He tried to manipulate around and through it; he tried to build coalitions or pressure it for outcomes; but he never tried again to dissolve or otherwise undo the parliament or what it stood for. And until the Putin era, the Duma continued to be elected in the two tier system. It remained an important check on the president's powers, and it did reflect significantly the diverse views of the population at that time.

Mr. Putin, as we noted earlier, saw unity as essential and diversity and pluralism as an obstacle. He took another approach. Relatively early on he eliminated the election of Duma members by single member districts and made proportional representation by party vote the sole basis to elect and apportion the Duma membership. He further narrowed the openness of the system by establishing substantial barriers to participation in the electoral process. These barriers required a large number of signatures or percentage of the vote in a previous election to be on the ballot. The new rules knocked out a tremendous number of potential political players. The changes did produce a more manageable Duma, but it undermined the Yeltsin parliament in profoundly unsettling ways. It would be only a beginning.

Q: When Putin took over from Yeltsin did you see a change in the role of the United States and of the embassy? In relations generally? Did the embassy become more reporter than player?

COLLINS: In the remaining year and a half of my time, until mid July 2001, I would say the change was not a substantial. Our access to people, our ability to talk openly with them about most anything, the broadly positive idea we were working with shared purpose remained pretty much intact. My personal ability to see almost anyone, travel anywhere, and have access to the public as I wished continued. Likewise, our assistance programs and joint activities even in sensitive areas continued. The Nunn-Lugar, and space programs carried on without interruption; our AID programs were still well received for the most part We kept opening American Corners with official acceptance. The changes in these areas come later, well after my departure.

On the other hand the trajectory toward more complex relations that began in earnest after the 1998 financial collapse and Balkan-Kosovo crisis continued to make managing the American role in Russia more complex. First of all, as we discussed previously the bloom was off the American rose, particularly after the economic setback in 1998. The sort of unquestioning acceptance of American advice or the American model for any new structure was a thing of the past. The economic miracle the Russians expected just didn't materialize. The Americans didn't seem to know how to get the Russian economy out of

its mess, and what had early been expectations of streets paved with gold in a couple of years had given way to the Russian reality of the same old mud. So, you had an inevitable disenchantment with the Americans in which the financial collapse seemed a particularly critical moment.

Atop this problem, the bombing of Serbia became a flashpoint. It was, in my time, the biggest single event that triggered open vocal and deeply rooted anti-American sentiments that ran down through the population well beyond the usual chattering class in Moscow. It brought a groundswell of resentment at the way Americans were treating not just Serbs but by implication dismissing Russians and their interests. The sentiment was exploited to the hilt by all who had opposed the U.S. involvement in Russia since the Soviet collapse and those who sought to use the opportunity against Yeltsin and his reforms.

And finally, it seemed to me clear that relations between Yeltsin himself and Clinton and other western partners were growing more distant. From Yeltsin's point of view, it seemed, his American partners, in particular, had not kept faith with key elements of what he saw as our deal on Europe's future and our partnership. First we had abandoned the Partnership for Peace and expanded NATO east: by late in the Clinton administration we were also again trying to modify the ABM treaty, Both policies seemed to contradict the idea we would not take advantage of Russian weakness following the Soviet collapse. And then, his friend Bill. had disregarded a direct request from him not to intervene militarily in Serbia.

Q: What about the election of 2000 in the United States?

COLLINS: Well, it's probably worth noting first that the political calendar in the two countries created an interesting dynamic. Let's recall, Putin becomes acting president on New Year's Day 2000, the point at which the U.S. electoral campaign is just beginning. He then becomes the elected president in May. So you have a new Russian president taking office and engaging Washington for the first time during the final year of the Clinton presidency and the developing political campaign to elect a successor. It was a time when the American side was not sure what Putin had in mind and the administration was focused on winding up unfinished business. On the Russian side it was a new president finding his footing, trying to assess his American counterparts but without certainty about what administration he would be dealing with in a year.

Putin's first encounter at a senior level with the American administration took place in February, 2000. Secretary of State Albright visited Moscow and during the visit, in addition to talks with counterparts, had a long discussion with the acting President. Putin was confident, engaging, and knew his brief. But most of all I recall his effort to convey a vision about how he saw his country. He told the Secretary words to the effect that I do karate and I like Chinese food ,but that's not who we are. We are a part of Europe, we see ourselves as European. We may have arrangements with Asia or with others, but our home is Europe. He also made the right noises about wanting continued cooperation, but

also, I would say even then, was intent to signal to Albright that he intended to pursue Russia's own course and interests.

Subsequently President Clinton met with Putin in June, 2000; it was Clinton's last visit to Moscow. It took place as the political campaign in the United States was already far along, and it was clear to me Mr. Putin knew he wasn't going to do any new business with Bill Clinton. As Putin saw it, if there were a few things to tidy up, he was ready. But this was neither the time for new initiatives nor the man with whom to undertake them. And so Clinton, I think, found the visit and encounter with Putin pretty frustrating. He was working hard on the Middle East, and he was engaged in a number of other important issues. But Putin simply saw a man on the way out and wasn't listening much. He conveyed, it seemed to me, the idea that he was talking to yesterday's news, even though Moscow virtually to a man thought Clinton's man Gore was coming next. Putin, however, seemed cautious and certainly was not going to place all his bets on continuity.

What all this meant for us at the embassy was that the last year for me and for the relations was largely a place holding effort. It was a period in which I kept my fingers crossed Russia would not become a big issue in our election, and thankfully it didn't. I thought, for me, and for all of us in the mission the task for the year 2000 was essentially to keep things steady and limit any damage, to keep incidents from becoming enmeshed in the political campaign at home or from disrupting our programs or normal relations. I think we did a fairly straightforward yeoman job of it. The relationship ended up such that our newly inaugurated President had a quite solid relationship to build from as he took office with few obvious or pressing issues that required urgent attention.

So, we got through our political campaign all right, but it was a year of marking time. Programs continued and relations on a workaday level continued pretty much without incident. There were no big initiatives and there were no big headlines. I suppose the most memorable and in some ways embarrassing moment in the year came when our electoral system could not produce a clear outcome in the normal time. It took a good deal of fancy foot work for me and my staff the night, actually day in Moscow, of the election returns to explain how the world's greatest democracy couldn't count ballots, particularly after we had spent years 'instructing' Russian officials on how to run an election. But that, too, faded into the past as the transition began. The Russians were turning to us to know who members of the new team were, and Putin and his team waited to hear from the incoming administration.

Q: What about exchange programs during this period? An emphasis of my interviews has always been on the effect that going to the United States had on Soviets. Did the end of the Soviet Union mean a significant change?

COLLINS: I suppose the answer is yes and no. On one hand yes, the impact of exchanges as you describe them was dramatic as well. But, the difference in the programs of exchange after 1991 was dramatic. It was qualitative and quantitative. You may recall that in the Soviet period bilateral exchanges had the effect of opening a window for a limited number of participants from each side to understand what the other society was

about, Exchanges gave us rare personal experience to know each other beyond the official and news media portrayals that largely shaped the way we saw, understood, and portrayed each other.

U.S.-Soviet exchange programs all took place under strong controls well into the Gorbachev era. A bilateral agreement on exchanges from 1959, I think it was, shaped the limits and possibilities of the programs that included education, science, culture, exhibits, and so forth. On the Soviet side the program was government controlled and on the U.S. side in the large number of cases until late in the game was government administered or at least funded, although the eighties saw a growth in more student programs sending Americans for language or familiarization programs outside the former more formally structured exchange. Until the late eighties, though, the student exchange had been pretty much equal, either absolutely one for one as in the time I went as an exchange student in the mid-sixties or more or less balanced until late in the Soviet era. And even in the eighties - even into the Gorbachev period - when more Americans were going to Russia, the Russian participation remained very limited and strictly controlled.

With the end of the Soviet Union this whole picture changed. The generalizations I make here did apply to much of the former Union as, like Russia, the new states opened up to the West and particularly the U.S. For openers, the end of the Union also meant the end of the bilateral agreement and framework under which previous exchanges were negotiated. As Russia's institutions became accessible, government controls over the programming all but evaporated. Students, scholars, artists, performers, became free to engage, define programs on their own, set up commercial or non-commercial programming, exchanges, opportunities for study or research, etc. Probably most significantly, however, Russia and nearly all its institutions across the country opened to the U.S. and as often as not sought new connections and opportunities to engage.

The result was an exchanges environment profoundly different from anything that existed during the Cold War. First of all, one effect of the Soviet collapse was emergence of a fundamentally unbalanced exchange, if you could any longer even call it exchange. With the end of the Cold War, U.S. interest in Russia and things Russian including the language declined precipitately. The irony was it was now easy to study, do research, engage counterparts, across the country. As an American student, graduate student or professor it was possible to explore nearly any subject, engage nearly any scholar, or visit nearly any region. The country was open. But, ironically. except for the emergence of exploding opportunities to exploit a growing commercial market for film, entertainment, etc. interest in Russia simply waned. The number of students studying Russian dropped. The growth of opportunities for study seemed to have an inverse impact on the number of those who wanted to exploit the new opening.

The response and reaction on the Russian side, on the other hand was just the reverse. As obstacles to travel, study, and exploring the outside world opened up, Russians couldn't get enough. At the same time, the American government began enlarging programs to encourage Russians to explore the U.S., our system, our market economy and its management, our socio-political and non-governmental institutions, just about all about

us. A whole alphabet soup of programs were established that, though called exchanges, really were set up to bring Russians to the United States to see how we do things, receive training in operating their new institutions, provide expertise in making their way in the emerging new universe Yeltsin and his reformers were building at home. The majority of these programs were directed at the younger generation. For instance, former senator Bill Bradley established a program to bring high school students to the U.S. for a year abroad. They lived with families, attended the local high school, and became American teenagers for a year. Several thousand students from all over Russia participated during the decade of the '90s, going to everywhere from Boise, Idaho to a village in Arizona, to New York City. I met many of these students, and it was clear their year had a tremendous impact on them. It changed lives, and for the most part by the end of the year, for better or worse, I couldn't tell who was American and who Russian in a gathering of both. It was a program that seeded experience of who and what we Americans were across a new generation.

Other programs focused on university undergraduates or professional training. Programs like that for Muskie Fellows provided training for management of economic and political institutions in the private and public sectors. Cochran Fellows explored varying aspects of American agriculture, etc. This universe of professional training programs sponsored by government, the private sector, universities and non-governmental institutions, brought thousands of people to the U.S. and sent almost all back to make up a core element in Russia's new market, political, social and educational institutions.

I want also to note a special and all but unique program in which I had a part. In 1999, I got a call from Jim Billington, the Librarian of Congress, asking my support for a program to bring Russian young, future leaders to the U.S. Billington had received some 10 million dollars for the program with the support of Alaska's late Senator Ted Stevens. The idea was to bring Russians under forty years of age who had never been to the U.S. for a visit of some three weeks. Their program would focus on shadowing someone in their profession or in a U.S. community similar to their own in Russia. The program was designed to select participants who were already beginning their careers, and showed promise for the future. In its first twenty years that program brought nearly 20,000 people to the U.S. It has been a bit like the kind of leadership programs many counties have in the U.S. There is no language requirement for the program, participants nearly all live with a family most of their stay, and when the program works well they see how Americans cope with our problems, issues, disputes, local politics etc. That program has also retained its most unique feature: it belongs to and is run by the Congress, not the executive branch, and as such has been successful in establishing itself also as something of a link between legislative branches, and thus remained somewhat immune from the specifics of changes in administration policy.

Looking back, exchange programs have changed a lot since Soviet days. But, I believe they have been our most effective, long term program in building a new base for long term relations between Americans and Russians. There is now a generation of younger, largely post-Soviet Russians who have spent time in the United States. They have a direct and very different appreciation of America and Americans than their parents did. It's very

hard, of course, as with any exchange program to evaluate or know the long-term effect or impact such a program has. Some participants, for instance, have become our strongest critics. Others have become staunchly pro-American or have used their experience to address issues of their own at home. But I would say almost all of them share one feature; they have all taken something from America home; we may never know what it is, but it is there.

For instance, in talking to several younger people I was struck that one of the things they took away from their experience often was the idea that Americans volunteer. Now this is something unique. Volunteering was not something one did in Russia for the most part. I have been told repeatedly in discussions with Russian friends that volunteering was almost always organized in the Soviet period. You were told by the Party what to "volunteer" to do or if it was originally voluntary it was soon co-opted by the Party and "organized." To contribute unpaid time to accomplish something. And so volunteering got kind of a bad name. Coming to the U.S. they found out that Americans have a very different idea. It is part of life to volunteer to do things, to organize, to get something done. This made a real impression on lots of the younger people who were in high school or starting college.

So the impact of these programs is hard to gauge. What I think is the real challenge today, and we are in 2013, is that we as Americans are losing our way regarding what such programs are and what they can do. The funding and the interest in sustaining these programs is significantly diminished. The possibilities for Russians to come to the United States or for Americans to go to the Russian Federation have become a shadow of the past. We have now turned our focus to Asia and the Middle East. Students today study Chinese and Arabic. That's a problem not because we are suddenly understanding the import of studying and understanding more of the world. The problem arises because Russia and its neighborhood remain significant and critically important to us. It is a relationship that requires sustained attention. In this sense I keep recalling for people that those individuals we engaged in the nineties are getting older, and eventually will disappear. If we don't keep viable programs like those we found successful in the nineties for the coming generation, we lose whatever impact we have had. This is one of the real challenges that I couldn't address effectively in my time.

Q: Well, when you left did you see a strong residue of the United States is the enemy? Because I sense this here, even in our politics today, but certainly in earlier years.

COLLINS: I do think by the time I left in mid-2001 the American-Russian relationship was saddled with some heavy and troublesome baggage. An accumulated sense that neither side had fulfilled the expectations of the other was fueling a lot of disillusionment and finger pointing. If you were charitable, the failures were attributed to things beyond leaders' control or uncontrollable factors: if you were less charitable, the failings were attributed to malign intent, plots by hostile forces. Toward the end of the Clinton administration these forces were troublesome, but I had never doubted the fundamental strategic judgment that considered Russia a serious and strategically important power with whom we had to manage relations carefully. But in my six months working in

Moscow for the Bush Administration and when I returned to Washington, I did not develop the same confidence about our direction. Many of the people who came in with the Bush administration were well known to me and knew me well. Colin Powell, Condi Rice, etc. And I had worked with them during the administration of Bush senior. But I will say, I was uncertain about how well they understood the degree to which the Russia they knew from the end of the Soviet period had changed over the subsequent eight years. I also did not know well a number of others who would have a significant role in shaping what happened over the coming period.

During my time working with the Bush team, it was clear to my colleagues in Moscow that I was a holdover from the previous administration, and I would be replaced by the summer of 2001. I continued my role at Colin Powell's request until my replacement arrived, but I was pretty much out of the policy discussions going on in Washington. It was for the most part a period of few significant events, but two did stand out and in a sense seemed to suggest uncertainty about future direction. The first was an abrupt expulsion in March of some 50 Russia diplomats from the U.S. and a reciprocal action expelling fifty of my staff from Moscow. It was something of a cold shower and a kind of unpleasant reminder of older times. I also found unsettling the turn away from maintaining contacts in key ministries and elsewhere that had been serving the U.S. well and what seemed to me a strange throwback to an earlier day in the White House as the new Bush team tried to find a new trusted "channel" to the Kremlin; it seemed a throwback to Soviet ways of doing business that had not been part of our relations for years. It was costly in losing our ability to employ some of the best connections available to our leadership.

On the other hand, I was encouraged by a number of things. The new administration made no significant changes to the broad range of programs basic to the relationship. Broadly I was carrying forward most programs and policies that were well established. And as we approached the first meeting between Bush and Putin in June, there was a sense of opportunity in Moscow, that something constructive could come from a new U.S. administration. And that meeting did go reasonably well. There was a good atmosphere. President Bush famously noted he had looked into Putin's soul and believed it was time to move beyond the Cold War. The dialog they had didn't produce significant decisions, but its atmospherics and sense both were looking to the future left a positive impression. The spirit of possibility was reflected at the July 4 reception I hosted as my last official gathering at Spaso House. That day with somewhere between 2500 and 3000 guests was marked, I thought, by a sense of possibility and new opportunity. The event was well attended by officials and a range of the elites that had been part of my life work for nearly a decade. It was a fine farewell, and I left with a sense the new administration had established a basis for a productive relationship with Putin and his team despite some scratchy beginnings.

Q: So you left with a sense of confidence? How did you find things on return to Washington?

I will be blunt here. What I found on my return was a shock. In making my rounds as outgoing ambassador I heard a far more negative and dismissive view of Russia than anything I had encountered in more than a decade. It was made clear to me, particularly at Defense and in the White House, that the Bush administration had an agenda of its own that more or less put Russia in the second rank of nations and saw Russia as a declining regional power. The challenge, I was told, was now to manage America's unchallenged position of global leadership. In this, relations with Russia would not be a particular priority. I was told by one official, for example, that Russia had been "Clinton's thing," and the new administration had other priorities. Russia's role or what Moscow thought wasn't a particular concern; it was a declining regional power losing influence and relevance to U.S. priorities.

To put it mildly this assessment and frame of mind came as a real shock and great disappointment. I thought it ill-conceived and ill informed, and I was convinced it boded ill for managing the Russia account effectively. Looking at subsequent events, I have no reason to question that judgment and view. Rather it seems they were fully justified by what took place over the coming months and years.

This was especially the case as I watched from the outside how events played out over the period following the 9/11 attacks. Both in retrospect and at the time, it seemed to me that events surrounding the 9/11 attacks on New York and Washington provided the Bush administration an opportunity to engage Russia afresh. We had not really done so up to that point, and I had the strong belief that Moscow was looking to define its relations with the new administration with which it had had only preliminary engagement. Regrettably the administration did not make the most of the opportunity. Putin's response to the 9/11 attacks seemed to me calculated to define his own relationship with the U.S., not simply carry forward one inherited from his predecessor. On his visit to the U.S. after the attacks, Putin signed a series of exceptionally forward-leaning documents defining future opportunities for cooperation. For the first time any Russian president had done so, he declared Russia did not consider the U.S. an enemy. Russia's leader had never before done so, and I had noted this anomaly to my Russian colleagues in light of regular statements in the other direction by American leaders. It was also the case that analysts here were largely in agreement that Putin had taken this course against significant opposition from many in his camp at home.

In the end, the outcome from this potential opening was minimal. While 9/11 in many ways shaped much of U.S. strategic thinking and focused our policies on the terrorist enemy, the attacks did nothing to revise significantly the new administration's view that Russia was a secondary player, not capable of affecting American interests in any serious way for good or ill. And thus, the first major action affecting Russia following 9/11 became U.S. withdrawal from the ABM treaty, a step affecting one of the core elements of U.S.-Russian strategic stability and what amounted to a step I believe Moscow read as rejecting the overtures Putin had undertaken at some risk. And so the high point, I think, of the possibilities reached right after 9/11 when Putin came here and went to Texas and New York with Bush produced no particularly lasting results and may well have

undermined any future capacity we had to develop a more productive relationship with Russia's new president. I was more than disappointed.

Q: At this point did you sense that Russia was playing a secondary consideration compared to China?

COLLINS: I don't recall thinking this was so. China comes to fore it seems to me only after the 2008 financial disaster. Certainly, there were many elements in the U.S. watching China's emergence, but it is the financial crisis that vaults them to the top. Suddenly for Americans, they are a major player, they are becoming more and more important to the American economy, they are playing a much greater role internationally and strategically. But the whole idea about the rising authority of Asia while certainly there at the beginning of the Bush Administration was not the strategic preoccupation it becomes afterward, at least not as it was conveyed to me as I returned from Moscow. But, what was conveyed to me very clearly at the end of my time as I came home was that Russia was yesterday's news and there would be scant reference to Russia's interests, reactions, or views as we defined our post-Cold War strategies, programs, and policies, particularly in the defense and security area. We stood as the only super power: we had our responsibilities and our interests to pursue. Russia would just have to accommodate.

Q: I'd like to come back to one nagging issue, NATO expansion. You were there when we began taking advantage of the collapse of the Soviet Union to expand NATO. As you departed Moscow in 2001, what was your feeling about this. How was the embassy looking at this?

COLLINS: We have covered a lot about this. So I will try not to be too repetitive. And let's reiterate here that what we are really talking about is the American approach to developing the post-Cold War Euro-Atlantic security system. Now, when the major initial decisions about NATO were taken I was in Washington, not Moscow. But I was there for the next round that brought in the Baltics. I had started with this issue in Moscow as both Bush senior and Clinton set forth an inclusive view about the Euro-Atlantic security system they sought to create. George H.W. Bush had called for a Europe whole, free, and undivided. In his Naval Academy speech in April, 1993, Clinton had reiterated the vision in talking about Russia's role in the future of the region. That approach was very attractive and reassuring to Russians; they thought it promised Russia an assured role as partner for the Americans and a substantive voice over Europe's future configuration. It was the Russian baseline view of what was expected following the end of the USSR. But this view was at odds with thinking in the West and Washington. Decisions in the nineties and then in the new Bush administration resulted in the emergence of new lines in Europe, a steady exclusion of Russia from participation in key decisions about the future structure of Europe's security system, and from Moscow's point of view, a steady march of the new lines of demarcation to the East.

Now, I understand all the arguments on both sides about the expansion of NATO. My disquiet with the evolution of events throughout was that no one gave sufficient weight to the impact their decisions would have on the Russians and the neighbors in the east or to

exploring how to build a bigger alliance that could find acceptance by Moscow. Perhaps it could not be done. Nor will I say nobody thought about it; we did think about it, and we worked hard to develop two important agreements with the Russians as NATO took in new members, The Founding Act, which set up the first formal structure of Russian consultation with NATO and so forth and a second later version that reshaped some of the way NATO was to do its business with Moscow. But the reality was that the emphasis in Washington and in Europe remained on getting NATO right and then working to find a way the Russians could accommodate themselves to whatever we decided. They were never a part of the decision-making process, they were never a part of a discussion about alternatives in any significant way.

The result is what we have seen, a re-divided Europe, an outcome few, I think, would define as ideal for assuring European peace and security. I continue to think that the way this happened could have been different. There was plenty that was shortsighted on all sides. There was not enough of the kind of thinking that might have produced alternative outcomes, ways to define a Russian role in the system of new Europe that could have more successfully accommodated Russian interests and those of the many parties with a stake in the outcome. Instead, Moscow was given no substantive role in the multilateral process and came to see themselves only as objects of decisions made by others. And that, frankly, is what it became. It was not a matter of whether or not just to enlarge, it became an ongoing process of decision-making about arrangements from which Russia was excluded. Lest any doubt remain, by the way, it was clarified for all in the famous insistence that was a standard formula to describe Moscow's position, "Russia can't have a veto," which came to mean, in fact, Russia can't have a voice. The Russians, I think, reacted as you might expect.

Now to be clear, the Russians themselves made plenty of missteps as well. Nor were they hardly ever inclined to put forth their own vision or ideas in a way that addressed the new realities. And their behavior toward their new neighbors grew less and less constructive as the decade passed. I, for example, do not recall any particularly relevant Russian initiative to propose alternative ideas about the issues under discussion beyond trying to make OSCE rather that NATO the core place for decision making on Euro-Atlantic security, a hopeless effort from the start. So, as I have said, there was plenty of blame to go around. But I found it discouraging that we, at a time of almost unrestricted opportunity to think outside the box, could not get beyond our own construct that to me was based in thinking of the previous era. For example, it has seemed to me opportunities were missed when we never explored what might have been developed on the basis of the models of cooperation that surrounded the Bosnia crisis and peace agreement. That set of events involved institutional arrangements like the contact group that Russia embraced as meeting critical interests. And the military cooperation that emerged from the peacekeeping effort suggested patterns of engagement that might have held further promise.

Q: Jim, you were involved in several ways dealing with the development of our relations with the new states of Eurasia, the conflicts between and among them, Russia's approach

to them. How do you think this turned out? We dealt with conflicts. We worked with all parties for peace. How do you assess our policy regarding Russia and its neighbors?

COLLINS: I will offer one thought about how our policies have succeeded and also left much work undone. There is no question that the decision by the U.S. in 1992 to recognize all the new states in Eurasia and support their development as independent members of the international community has benefitted the people of the region. It helped each of the nations establish itself as a successful member of the international system, and it did much to achieve a peaceful transformation of Eurasia as the empire that ruled the region for centuries gave way. Our leadership support for each of the new nations, including Russia, and work to promote their integration with international and European institutions over the last two decades transformed the region and gave its diverse peoples an opportunity to define futures as independent nation states.

That said, I also believe our policies and programs fell short in substantial and critically important ways. Central here was a lack of attention to building normal state to state relations between Russia and its neighbors, between Moscow and those it had ruled as subjects. Our success in promoting development of each of the new states was not accompanied by emphasis on building workable and constructive relations between them and between each and Russia. In the first years of the nineties we engaged in assisting the Russians and all their new neighbors to resolve the issues of the divorce. We discussed some of that in our conversations. But our subsequent policies and programs gave little priority to promoting or building normal, regular relations between Russia and the new state or for that matter among them.

If we had priorities, they focused on integration of each of the new states into the European and international systems, establishing their independent future and national development. At the same time, less articulated but fundamental was a strategic interest in preventing the restoration of Russia domination over the region: put simply preventing Russian restoration of its imperial role in Eurasia. Regrettably, these aspects of our policy defined policies and diplomacy toward the area that gave minimal attention to normalization of state to state relations between Russia and its neighbors. We did not expect or press Russia to develop relations with Kazakhstan along the model of relations they had with Hungary, for example. Nor did we encourage the development of relations on that model as what the new states should insist they wanted. In practical terms it meant we did little to encourage or promote institutional developments for the conduct of economic relations – trade, financial transactions, etc. between Russia and its neighbors.

At the same time, we were clear in our opposition to Russian efforts to promote integration for the region, seeing that effort, certainly with much justification as an effort to limit the role of outside powers in Eurasia and restore Russian primacy. I do not mean to suggest here that there were any simple or clear answers to the questions we faced at the time, and I cannot say my own role and thinking at that time had a clear idea about how we might have been more effective. I do believe, however, that we failed to give the attention needed to working with all the new nations of Eurasia to build more effective relations among themselves.

Q: Well, did you have much contact or did you gain an impression of what used to be the old Kremlin watchers? I would think that they were in quite a bit of disarray

COLLINS: Well, to be honest, the biggest effect on this community was its fall from center stage as the Cold War ended and the other super power threat simply seemed to evaporate. The problem almost from day one became finding anyone who cared any more. In this sense the collapse of the Soviet Union had a profound effect on the entire world of people who had careers built on the Cold War and the other super power. That was true in government, it was true in the Academy, it was true in the think tanks; it was true across the board.

Now there were different reactions to all this shake up, and we've talked about this previously. This changes over time, but in the initial years one reaction was something like denial, insistence that thinking there was real change was a delusion. This school, and there were many in and outside government who looked at Russia and said the same guys are around, and you're going to begin to see the same results. From my perspective that line just didn't pass the smell test. There were too many changes and too much that was irreversible either to say nothing real was happening or it would all revert to type at some point. The Soviet Union was gone, the ideology was history, and whatever was to come was going to be different and outside the old models.

Another group from the Russia crowd tried to adapt and to develop new Russia specialties. As discussed before, this group develops a set of new fields that I would say could be lumped under something called "transition studies." The big field of study became how do communists become Jeffersonian Democrats, or why don't they. How does a planned economy transform itself into a market system and what are the features that show success or failure? The whole business of what does it take to get from A to B, and how can we measure where we are on the spectrum of that process became a significant industry for political scientists, economists, and others in the social sciences.

The one group of specialists that seemed to weather the change quite stoically belonged to the humanities professions. The historians, language and literature specialists, cultural experts, theologians had kept the Soviet era in perspective from the beginning and its passing simply opened a new phase for a region, people, set of cultures and histories that carried on the story in an interesting part of the world. For this group that challenge was simply to keep people, students, researchers, and funders interested. It was a struggle, but they did prevail and often, from my perspective as a fallen historian, had more of use to say than most of the others.

And finally there was a group of newbies, people without prior experience or knowledge of the region or Russia, who showed up never having known the Soviet Union or its people or Russian/Eurasian culture. Suddenly these people were all over the place working to apply to the former Soviet societies some imported model most often developed to serve the needs of some other region. For instance, our AID people had never served in a communist or European country. Communist countries didn't have AID

missions, and they were coming from Africa or India or Latin America trying to apply what worked in, say, Zambia.

This group of emerging new Russia experts had a mixed success whether they came from business and the private sector, civil society or the government. To the extent they were sensitive to their surroundings and adaptable to the conditions they found, many did exceptionally good work. But if as many did, particularly at the beginning, they approached Russians as a third world society, they generally encountered real problems. In some areas U.S. experience was welcomed and relevant, in areas like public health and medicine, for example. The experts understood one another and the Russian professionals as often as not were eager to know what had been closed to them for their entire careers. In other fields the models or approaches these westerners brought in just weren't relevant, because Russia as a subject was neither fish nor fowl; it was on one hand a developed country and on the other a developing one needing almost to start from the beginning.

So, you had a sort of mix of all these different Russia experts playing in the environment for most of the nineties and early 2000s.

Q: Today is the 22nd of October, 2013, with Jim Collins. Jim, we left off last time with the idea we would pick up now with a sort of round up. I'll ask some generic questions a little later but I wondered, how did you see things when you left

COLLINS: My four years as ambassador, 1997 to 2001, were first of all a second term for both President Clinton and President Yeltsin. It was also a time of transitions to new presidents, George W. Bush in 2001 and Vladimir Putin at the beginning of 2000. This was not a time for big, new initiatives or big, new policies from either capitol. And for our embassy, as I have discussed, it was rather a time focused on trying to preserve and as possible advance the accomplishments the Clinton Administration had achieved in its first term and assure the new American President as positive a base of relations as possible.

I am quite proud of what the mission did accomplish in this complex and often fluid time. From the American perspective the early '90s represented the high point of relations with Russia. The Cold War had ended, The Soviet Union was dissolved. Eurasia's political map had been redrawn. New Russia had new non-communist leadership. And Russia, in search of normality and acceptance by the West essentially came to the Americans and others asking for advice and support for their transformation to what Yeltsin regularly called a normal state. And at that time Russia and the U.S. largely seemed to share the understanding of what normal would be.

That, however, was less and less the case during my tenure at the end of the decade. By the time I arrived in Moscow, as I've said, we had lost much of the bloom on that rose. We were beginning a rebirth of Russia's view of itself as a great power with independent ideas and independent thoughts about its future. Its people were increasingly thinking in their own terms about where they wanted to go, and the idea that the West and

particularly Washington, had the answers to Russia's questions was increasingly questioned.

This development, of course, wasn't always welcome in Washington. Our leadership, and particularly our Congress, had grown accustomed to the idea that we were the accepted guide and model for what Russia wanted. Moreover, we had provided extensive funding for Russia's transition and help for them as they weathered the devastating effects of moving to a market system. Having our colleagues question our advice or our guidance was not easily accepted. And there was significant sensitivity to instances where Russia seemed unwilling or unready to meet our requests or needs. So an almost constant leitmotif for my time was a series of what I can only call moments of tension. Some were based in major policy disagreements like the bombing of Serbia during the Kosovo crisis, That produced the worst demonstrations against America and probably the most profound negative shift in public opinion about America during my time. Others came from incidents like the arrest of a man who was locating sites for cell phone towers for one of America's big communications companies. That arrest brought a blizzard of calls from senators, and members of Congress, from the company's CEO and business lobbyists demanding action - demanding to know how they could do that, that they have to let him go and send him home.

In any event it seemed every one of these incidents, issues, or conditions from large to small had the potential to become a test case; was Russia really acting as our friend and behaving as a friend should? Or to the contrary were we seeing a reversion to Moscow as our rival and principal adversary. It also seemed to us there was most often little distinction in Washington about the degree to which American interests were engaged in these incidents. I do believe in this regard that the Embassy played a significant and positive role in managing such events. Our objective always was to find the formula that would resolve the issue but preserve a productive and working relationship between us and keep our dialog open.

Finally, there was a steady stream of cables and communications from Washington that frankly often just left me bemused but demanded attention as potential sources for difficulty if not addressed. The Department and others seemed regularly to send us cables that began by informing us "Department is concerned that …" I had become accustomed to this phrase in Washington where it had a number of variants from asking how concerned I was about some event to telling me that someone to whom I was supposed to answer had concerns about something. Before leaving Washington I had become somewhat known for pointing out in response to these observations or questions that concern was not a policy or response to a situation or event. And this I carried to Moscow. The idea did catch on with my staff who generously somewhere around the middle of my tenure presented me with a "Concernometer", a uniquely crafted little device that offered me the option of measuring the intensity of the condition from mild to panic with a red button to sound an alarm when that stage was reached. I have treasured the little machine ever since. But I suspect the greatest prominence for the idea came when Secretary Albright included the observation verbatim in a speech while I was in Moscow. In any case, alleviating concern in Washington was, like other aspects of the

embassy's role, a defined part of our job. It provided assurance someone was doing something to alleviate concerns, and it was an ever present companion of our work.

A second dimension I thought constructive in what I tried to do involved enhancing the effectiveness of the mission. This had to do with how we approached and organized ourselves and how we defined our mission. I don't want to repeat too much here, but the essence of what I believe we accomplished had to do with setting a clear agenda and establishing responsibilities among our agencies for their activities in support of mission-wide objectives. Recall I think I noted I had responsibility for some 29 government agencies' activities across Russia. The presumption was that the work of these agencies was somehow coordinated in Washington. That was certainly not evident from the Moscow end whatever Washington thought, the system just wasn't working as it needed to do to be effective.

So, as we've mentioned before, I sat down with the country team to define what it was we, the U.S. mission in Russia, were trying to do. The result of that exercise was the six-part agenda I've outlined earlier, and a program to address it that asked each agency to contribute to the tasks we identified in whatever way their budgets and goals allowed. Some of them couldn't contribute much of anything to a given objective, but they would be in the lead on another. Others would contribute something to nearly all but take the lead on none. But we found nearly everyone would be in a position to contribute to more than a single goal and that many had never thought about that as a function of their agency in Moscow.

The agenda to recall included: support for the political transformation of the Russian Federation; support for the economic transformation of the nation, advancing American economic, trade and financial interests in Russia, public diplomacy programs and dissemination about U.S. programs and relations with Russia, diplomacy to advance U.S. goals regarding regional matters, and pursuit of a broad and comprehensive security agenda that ranged from advancing objectives of the Nunn-Lugar Program to promote nuclear security to a broad set of programs supporting military reform and cooperation as a whole.

I think the result of this effort was a cohesive approach for the whole mission. Based in this way of looking at the mission program, as mentioned, I also saw my budget not in the usual State Department way, but rather as including all American taxpayer money spent in Russia. There were no exceptions if it was spent by Uncle Sam. And so, as mentioned earlier, we said our budget, the money I was technically responsible for, was well over a billion dollars, and we saw it as our base for the achievement of the agenda we defined.

I was never certain about just how this was received as an approach in Washington, but I heard it came as a great revelation to the State Department, which normally saw its budget as linked only to the specific things State paid out. i.e., salaries, admin expenses, building expenses, etc. I said, no, the State function really encompassed management of the mission and therefore our budget had a much bigger objective. It only made sense to

shape our approach to budgeting with this in mind. So one of the things I was very proud of is that Moscow did leave a legacy out of that time that was bigger than just our own mission. It provided an example of a different idea about how to approach to a mission's responsibilities.

So we spent a lot of time putting out fires or managing mini-crises. I used to say that one of my tasks was to administer valium to Washington as well as to Moscow in these cases: to work to get something resolved or dealt within a reasonable way that didn't disrupt relations. I thought we did a pretty good job of this, of having defined priorities and principles, giving direction to what the mission was about, and not letting the monthly or six monthly crises blow up on us or disrupt our nations' capacity to do business together. I thought that was a satisfying outcome for four years.

Q: Did you feel that you had a teammate in the Russian ambassador to Washington? I mean were you both working on the same game plan or not?

COLLINS: The Russian embassy in Washington played a much more limited and traditional diplomatic role in the relationship than the embassy in Moscow. That was probably inevitable during a time the U.S. was broadly engaged in Russia's transition and mounting major programs in and with Russia. The Russian side had no equivalent. So, my counterpart in D.C. did not generally have the same kind of role or responsibility for programming or management of the diverse aspects of our agenda that we did in Moscow. But from the standpoint of their ministry and leadership in Moscow the embassy did play an important if more traditional diplomatic role. The Russian diplomatic service is professional, and their diplomats know their craft extremely well. They were used for Russian communication to Washington. They provided analysis of what was going on in the U.S. as we went through everything from an impeachment to an election campaign: and I know their thoughts about what was going on here were heard in Moscow. But in terms of the overall relationship the balance of major issues were discussed by both governments through the embassy in Moscow or directly by principals. I think it was also true that my Russian colleagues were always interested to hear my analysis or assessment of what was going on in the U.S. So, explaining my own country, what it was up to, its policies, and most of all how I saw what was at the base of our thinking was one of the most important aspects of my daily routine.

Q: Well let's use a case in point, the man who was arrested for trying to locate sites for cell phone towers. How did this come about and how did you deal with it?

COLLINS: Well first of all, keep in mind that the arrest and incidents didn't take place in Moscow; this was down in the provinces, in the southern Volga region. The man who was arrested had been driving around at night in a car loaded with electronic gear. Well, this raised all kinds of flags for the local security people who thought they finally had a real spy on their hands, and they were going to show they knew how to deal with such a challenge. So, they arrest the man they think they have caught red handed, put him in prison, and charge him with espionage. On the side of the technician, I don't think he had

any idea what had happened; he was just doing a job the way he had done it all over the world.

The first I heard about it was from someone in Washington who had received a frantic call from California saying words to the effect of, our man in - I think it was Saratov- has been arrested; you've got to get him out: what's going on; this is outrageous, etc., etc. So the first thing for us was find out what happened; this was all news to us and, it turned out, likewise to the people at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. With time and much back and forth we finally got clarity about what had happened, talked to the man under arrest, and understood the dimensions of the problem. With that information in hand it was a question of working with officials to figure a way out. Part of it, initially, was essentially to get the facts on the table; the Russians in Moscow heard their version and interpretation of the case from their security services in Moscow. We had our side from the company and from the individual in Saratov. In this case, I personally had ultimately to sit down with the Foreign Minister. We reviewed the facts as we could understand them and agreed that it was silly to have this become a nagging irritant. We agreed it should be resolved, and an agreement was struck. The man and company were to accept the man's expulsion from the country with no possibility of return. In turn all charges would be dropped, and, as I recall, the equipment was returned to the company. That was a good outcome.

I can assure you though that not all of them were that simple. I had other cases that dragged on for months, where a case was not so easily resolved and could raise the temperature in Washington. Arrests of missionaries were a particularly sensitive and troublesome issue, for example. At the root of problems in these cases was a fundamental difference of view about the place of government in religious affairs. Russian law even under their new constitution provided the government with significant powers to regulate the activities of individuals or entities claiming to be affiliated with religion. The American standard, by contrast, was our First Amendment. and the operating approach from Washington was to demand that Russia observe that standard even though Russian law provided no such guarantee. These cases could bring expression of outrage at acts against an American citizen for missionary work, for example, including arrest for violations of Russian laws governing religious activity or disturbing the peace, and they also often resulted in the Russian authorities digging in on their position. Once this spiral started, it would become harder and harder for either to find common ground or be seen to back down. As I recall I did not leave any but one such case unresolved for my successor, but it did seem the case that it was the exception in Russia when a routine case did not rise to the political level before it could be resolved.

Then there were issues that simply would not go away and remained on the agenda for the decade. These would arise almost any time we were engaged in significant meetings or summits, and were never far from being active. The issue here concerned Russian refusal to turn over to the Chabad Jewish organization in the United States the library of the movement's founder was such a case. It began in the last months of the Soviet era and was alive and active as I left Moscow in 2001. The leaders of the effort to recover the library had access to American leaders and from December 1991 until I departed in July

2001 this issue emerged on the agenda of nearly every summit meeting, session of the Gore Chernomyrdin commission, or congressional visit. It is still alive and well as an issue.

Q: Well how about the Kosovo problem? How did you deal with that?

COLLINS: The Kosovo issue from the outset for us was an exercise in damage limitation. There was never any question about the disagreement between Yeltsin and his government and Clinton and his administration when it came to the U.S. military intervention to stop Milosevic. There were plenty of Russians with little sympathy for Milosevic or what he was doing, but that did not extend to joining the U.S. and allies in a military intervention to stop him. When we got to the point where the American and NATO side started the bombing campaign against Belgrade, it ignited the most intense reaction against American policy in my time as ambassador. The reaction was not a surprise to any of us, but its intensity and depth were.

So you asked what did we do. Put most simply, I would say our goal was to get relations through a very difficult moment as intact as we could, and, as possible, to prevent the Russian side from any action that would have deepened the clash of wills that was building. Of course, I and the embassy were not left alone by any means. Moscow's reaction and Yeltsin's personal rejection of Clinton's course had made clear we had touched a nerve. At one of the more critical moments Strobe Talbott was there. The Russians occupied a key airport making clear their readiness to act unilaterally as Washington and the allies had done. It was a tense moment and an incident that many have documented where questions arose about who in Moscow was actually in charge of the operations and what were we dealing with on the Russian side.

It was perhaps the lowest point I dealt with during the decade. And frankly in Moscow we were unable to do much beyond underscore the depth of the Russian reaction to our intervention and the price it was exacting in our relations, ensure that our security was all right in the face of protests outside the embassy, deal with demonstrations, things thrown at the chancery building, vocal threats, and most bizarrely of all an arrow carrying a warning fired into the yard at Spaso house by an armor-clad horsemen in sixteenth century costume. I have kept that arrow as perhaps the most unusual way an ambassador has received a threat in my time. In all it was a nasty situation for several days, and it was the only time in my whole four years that I was given no choice about having a security detail that stayed with me for about three weeks. I had never felt the need of one before and did not afterward, but at that time emotions were running high and there was a feeling of real uncertainty. So, aside from ensuring Washington understood the intensity of what was happening and providing them perspective on the depth of the problem we and our Russian friends were facing, there wasn't a lot more we could do.

Q: How was Yeltsin responding to this? He was being accused of not being supportive enough of the Serbs by his critics.

It seemed clear to me from the outset that this upheaval was as much if not more about domestic politics than Serbia itself. Our actions put Yeltsin on the defensive. Yeltsin's opposition saw they had an issue they could finally use against him effectively. And they played on the emotions, nationalist sentiments, and sense of aggrievement in the population to flay the president, his western associates, and the U.S. Yeltsin, in a corner initially, found himself berated for what his American friends were doing, for his cozying up to those bombing the Serbian brothers. In response at the outset of the crisis, Yeltsin joined a lot of the criticism and the critics. He certainly saw his friend Bill as letting him down. But, feeling he had to get on top of the situation, he made every effort not to let the opposition seize the flag or ride the emotional wave at his expense. For a couple of weeks he became a strong voice opposing the military intervention by the U.S. I think the emotion he lent to his words at that time also, frankly, reflected his own sense of being abandoned and ignored by his friend Bill Clinton.

In the end, though, Yeltsin remained focused on his mission and his refusal to grant his opponents the initiative. He bided his time and at the critical moment turned the tables on them by seizing the high ground. Condemning his critics for reckless ideas and threats, he branded them war mongers and seized the mantle of peace maker. He then sent Viktor Chernomyrdin, his former prime minister, to Belgrade to engage Milosevic, and it was hoped, mediate a halt to the fighting. The result of Chernomyrdin's mediation and work by Finnish President Ahtisaari was ultimately successful: a negotiated agreement halted the fighting, and moved the conflict to the negotiating table to set terms for an agreed status for Kosovo. But the effects of the breech between the U.S. and Russia were lasting. In my judgment we never fully recovered from the damage that particular period inflicted on our relations and, to a significant extent, on the way a significant part of the Russia population saw our intentions. It was, I think, more in sorrow and disappointment than in anger, but from where I stood it seemed we never regained the position we had enjoyed previously with the Russian public.

Q: I would think that in a way you would be in a different game after this. Over the years we've had demonstrations against us in all kinds of countries. I know when I was in Belgrade, we used to have demonstrations over the Congo, for God's sake. But by this time Moscow must have been inundated with Starbucks and offices of various American outfits, and I would think that it would make us far more vulnerable to attacks.

COLLINS: In our environment at this time the political differences or policy disputes as we saw with Kosovo, for instance, tended to focus on government or official institutions or positions. At this point, they did not manifest themselves in targeting American companies or visible American symbols like McDonald's. In fact, general admiration for American business, cultural institutions or programs, things American and the American lifestyle went right on. We were still engaged in broad-based cooperation and America was still largely seen by most as the place that knew how to do things and a society of prosperity and opportunity. It was policies of the U.S. government they didn't like or trust, and it was largely against the official side that we saw demonstrations or open opposition. Interestingly, however, I myself cannot recall any actions or campaigns against me personally.

Q: Sure.

COLLINS: So, what I will call anti-Americanism just did not show much in the way that you saw it in other parts of the world where, say, McDonald's would have been the object of attention for mobs and so on. It just didn't happen. In Moscow the only mobs at McDonald's were buying Big Macs. In fact, when I left in 2001, I think seven of the 20 largest McDonald's in the world were in Moscow. It said a lot about the company and what it represented as well as Russian's positive view about how Americans treated the customer and the public. By the way, the mayor of Moscow, who was something of a nationalist/populist and made clear he was not a great friend of U.S. culture, tried to launch a Russian equivalent to McDonalds. It was a total failure. It couldn't serve food the Russian family wanted, and it couldn't treat the public with the McDonalds style. So, American culture, what America stood for in terms of opportunity, the way we treated each other, our respect for the customer, and our lifestyle remained very popular. Our America corners kept drawing crowds, American education was sought after. And I personally never had anything but a very good reception wherever I went.

Q: By the time you left were political parties forming or had they formed? Were they real parties or were they branches of the former communist party?

COLLINS: The post-Soviet Russian political system really dates from the 1993 reorganization of the state under the new Yeltsin constitution. For the rest of the nineties it was a system dominated and focused around a strong presidency and executive, a parliament dominated by supporters of the President with a weak and fragmented opposition, and judicial and governmental institutions that were generally weak and only emerging gradually to deal with the new post-Soviet economic and political realities of new Russia. On the other hand, most of the period was marked by a significant degree of political pluralism. Yeltsin and his government observed norms of behavior that preserved not so much a formal separation of powers among the branches of the system as a respect for the authorities each branch needed to develop and operate Russia's new political, economic, and legal system.

Within this framework, there was never any question that the presidency and the bureaucracy it controlled remained primary and paramount. When it came to political parties, like the other institutions within which they operated, they too were relatively weak institutions. Critical to the way the parties developed and the role they played in the political process was one salient fact that seemed most relevant to me. The parties as such, with the exception of the Communist Party, had almost no enduring structure or institutional being that was not based in the individual or individuals who led and defined them. It seemed to me that one was dealing more with the followers of individuals than institutions. This reality showed in the parliament's composition where what the Russians termed the "party of power" dominated. This "political party," the parliamentary majority, consisted of deputies loyal to the president. The party changed its name with each parliamentary election, known as Russia's Choice (1993-1996), Our Home (1996-

1999) and Russian Unity (1999-2003), but retained its character and functions as the President's party throughout the period.

In addition to the party of power a group of other parties that ranged across the political spectrum vied for political power. Among these parties, during my time the Communist Party was the largest. The successor to the Soviet communist party, it had a sizable, broad, and loyal following and a base and an institutional structure inherited from its predecessor that in a way set it apart as a structure. Heavily populated by loyalist holdovers from the previous era it attracted its following among those who suffered from the Soviet collapse, felt 1991 had been a mistake, and wanted a future based in something like a Social Democratic system.

The other parties, as I saw them, were defined largely by their leaders. They ranged from a populist, nationalist right wing party led by Vladimir Zhirinovsky, an upstart demagogue who regularly played to nationalist emotions and attracted the votes of the aggrieved that would not join the communists. On the liberal side Grigory Yavlinsky led the Yabloko party. A well-known reformer he first gained recognition during Gorbachev's time for his economic reform plans. With the arrival of Yeltsin he sought to rally forces pursuing a western style, liberal democratic agenda, but remained apart from the circle of support around Yeltsin. Also present were a group of fringe parties from Monarchists to the beer drinking party that fielded candidates and occasionally won seats in a legislature or a mayoralty, but were never more than marginal players, often centered on a single personality.

Throughout the decade these parties rarely coalesced or managed to put together the kinds of coalitions to sustain significant influence in the parliament. And with the exception of the presidential election of 1996 when the communist candidate for a significant time appeared a serious challenge to Yeltsin's reelection, no party or coalition of parties were able to mount any serious challenge to the president and party supporting him. By the end of the decade, Vladimir Putin's United Russia party commanded a dominant position and became the vehicle to build his authority over the coming years of his first term and beyond.

So, I think it fair to say that by the end of the Yeltsin era, Russia had failed to build a viable multi-party system or create an infrastructure of parties as institutions that were in a position to challenge the "party of Power" or control enough seats in of the legislative branch to act as a viable check on presidential power. And it was in exploiting the precedents set in the Yeltsin era and weaknesses of the party system that President Putin built an ever more authoritarian, centralized system of political control.

Now I've asked myself any number of times why the party system never truly took hold or remained so weak in the face of the presidency. I'm sure there are plenty of political scientists with answers. But I have come to see the principal reasons in three factors that dogged the decade and efforts to make parties effective political institutions.

First was the fact that the constitutional order lodged such great authority in the president and government structure. The presidency held so much of the initiative, political control over the instruments of government, and stature as *primus inter pares*, that the parliament was always at a disadvantage and behind. Second, was a factor of political culture. It always seemed to me clear that the Russian public had a certain aversion to the idea of political parties. They associated the idea with the communist period and the Communist Party they had just thrown off. And that was done not by other political parties but by their president and his allies who controlled the Kremlin and the parliament. Parties per se, generally weren't trusted, nor were they seen as representing anyone but their leaders and his allies. Third, and finally Russia had no real tradition or history of parliamentary government. During the debates about the constitutional order that took place at the beginning of the decade, there was little if any real support for the idea of a parliamentary as opposed to a presidential system. Nor did those in the new parliament have real experience in working effectively either as legislators or overseers of the government's activities. I remember, for example, one instance in which the committee of the Duma with oversight responsibility for the military asked to see a prior year's budget for the Ministry of Defense in preparation for their consideration of the budget for the coming year. They were provided with two or three pages in response and given to understand that was the extent of the information they could expect. The Duma simply accepted this and to the best of my knowledge never threatened to hold up funding for the Ministry of Defense unless they provided adequate information. It was not a legislature ready to use the power of the purse or to exercise anything like realistic oversight and hence exert significant independent legislative power. And this limited any real chance for the development of independent authority or ability to shape the way government would allocate resources among competing priorities. So, while the parties did exist, with the exception of the party loyal to the president, they had little institutional life beyond the leader that formed them, and they remained an ineffective institutional check on the authority of the Kremlin.

Q: Well, I know in other countries, for example in the '70s in Portugal, you had the European socialists and other parties in Germany and France working hard to develop parties in Portugal after the coup there. Was there an effort by Western European parties to, say, have a socialist or a Christian Democratic-type party or some such?

COLLINS: Well, yes and no. There were a number of programs, including some by the Americans, to support the development of political parties and democratic procedures. The National Endowment for Democracy's Institutes, the International Republican Institute and the National Democratic Institute, for example, were active in this area providing non-partisan support to parties on building organizations, mobilizing an electorate, learning to use political technology, etc. Their programs were designed to provide expertise and training to make parties effective in electoral campaigns and in mobilizing an electorate, and so forth.

As I saw it, however, one problem the Russians and these organizations never sorted out was just what kind of model a political party in Russia would follow. Their tradition had included some historical experience with European models, parties that were built around

an ideological platform and defined by formal membership. Then, they had what they called "movements." Movements were closer to our political parties it seemed to me, open in membership, structured around platforms or political programs designed to attract maximum support from a broad base of population. It was a "you all come" structure, built around the idea of shared interests and vision. As the decade went on the elites went back and forth between these ideas without finding a way ever to create a structure that could challenge the president's party of power. Any effort to create a two or three party system never succeeded in part because the various parties tended to be associated with specific programs and individuals unwilling to share the authority of leadership.

Q: One of the things that has struck me over the years is that Russia has all this talent within the people yet they don't seem to be producing much other than natural resources. Did you see any real change as a result of the new economy - you know, all of a sudden Russia being able to turn out fancy cars or clocks or whatever.

COLLINS: What we are really talking about here is the impact brought about by the introduction of the market system – of supply and demand rather than government planners shaping what Russia produced and what was available to the consumer. On the production side, what it meant was the Russian people or their customers abroad began to determine what would be produced rather than a bureaucracy in Moscow sending them a plan. This change affected the extraction industries and producers of commodities the least, and they more easily understood how to adjust. The producers of oil, gas, timber, aluminum, etc. had a customer base that did change greatly in becoming global in scope, but remained little changed in what it asked of them even if the particular customers or product mix were different. So, in that sense there was a good deal of continuity and the suppliers' main adjustment came in having to define success more in terms of economic efficiency than production to meet a government generated order.

The real change emerged on the consumption side of the economy where a gulf between what the government decided would be produced and what the population wanted had been enormous for decades. As satisfying the demands of the Russian consumer began to determine production and supply, the entire face of the economy changed almost overnight. Old sectors like retail, automobiles, telecommunications, food processing, clothing manufacture and sales – you name it, moved into the hands of private businesses. Industries that never got attention from the communists or had been starved of resources suddenly had almost unlimited possibilities for growth. In addition with the arrival of the digital age and new technologies, Russian entrepreneurs jumped into computers, cell phones, production of software and all the structures that were necessary to make these work. In sum, where the Soviet system had deprived the Russian people for decades the private sector rapidly built the infrastructure to meet almost limitless demand.

In the sectors such as construction and housing the new open system unleashed extraordinary growth. By the second half of the '90s the country was in the midst of a sort of private home boom around almost all major Russian cities. People with sudden access to building supplies and fixtures either imported or domestic were transforming

their vacation house into a new residence or building the new home from the ground up. And with this you saw a major new construction industry emerge building new apartment buildings in major cities. On the supply side I found one of the more fascinating developments in the emergence of a Russian equivalent to Home Depot, which was usually a huge sprawling marketplace with everything the do-it-yourselfer needed to build a house, to construction companies that were now formed and were doing this work on a private basis. It was all new, and it was changing the lives of urban Russians beyond recognition.

What wasn't so successful, it seems to me, was the failure of the Russian economy to produce the value added sector goods that would logically be there if you had a housing boom. Nobody it seemed, made bathroom fixtures anyone wanted despite demand. Everybody who could bought Italian or German bathroom and kitchen fixtures. The same was true of electrical fixtures, appliances and other such. These were imported and for whatever reason the Russian manufacturing sector simply failed to develop the capacity to supply these things. The one dramatic exception to this was food and the retail food sector. Russia took quickly to the supermarket model. and particularly after the financial crisis in '98, Russian products suddenly came into their own even in Moscow's market where imports had dominated before. So you know, these elements of the production side were developing, but it was uneven. What was clear, however, was that the government planned economy no longer defined supply and demand which now depended most of all on price and the availability of money in the consumers' pockets. And this was particularly the case in a decade where the government nearly always lacked the money to shape much demand from the old major sectors like the military industrial complex.

Q: What about agriculture? I mean The Soviet Union had some beautiful soil but I've heard a counselor say that maybe a quarter of what had been produced during Soviet times essentially rotted; it didn't get stored at all. Well what was happening now?

COLLINS: In the breakup of the Soviet Union some of the region's best agricultural areas ended up outside Russia in Ukraine and Kazakhstan. But Russia was amply endowed with agricultural resources. The problem new Russia faced in this sector was its Soviet heritage. The disaster of Soviet agriculture was infamous as you certainly know. The sector never really recovered from Stalin's collectivization and its place in the Soviet system as a sector to be exploited to benefit others, to benefit industrialization and the cities. Beyond this the sector had suffered from disastrous management and a variety of initiatives from Lysenko's genetics to Khrushchev's love affair with corn. It was in dismal condition at the end of the Soviet Union. The measure of this disaster was manifest in one fact. At the outset of World War I, the Russian Empire was the breadbasket of Europe and a major exporter of grains into the world market. At the end of the 1980s Russia was importing massive quantities of grain to feed its people, and as often as not was the world's largest importer of these food stuffs.

The end of the USSR, and the turn to the market economy affected this equation in profound ways. There was no quick fix that would undo decades of mismanagement and exploitation, of course, but change did begin. The most immediate effect of the Soviet

collapse came in two ways. First, the collective and state farms, the Soviet structures at the heart of agriculture, were reorganized as private business entities, usually becoming a kind of cooperative or a privately held business. Second, the advent of the market meant the agricultural sector was for the first time in decades in the position of working for its own benefit rather than as a source of capital for the benefit of other sectors. So there was a profound new base to the system. That said there was no quick fix for the sad state of the sector's technological, managerial, or financially strapped base. At least for the decade of the nineties reformers did not touch the third rail issue of privatizing land ownership, leaving the only exception the small plots to which each farm family had been entitled even under the Soviet system. Nor was there consensus about the future basis for agricultural production: would it lie with the large cooperatively held business entities farming state owned land held on lease or would it turn to private entrepreneurial farming based in private land tenure or some combination of the two.

As a farm boy by upbringing I had a deep personal interest in the sector and spent considerable time both in the early nineties as DCM and then later as ambassador keeping an eye on what was happening in the sector, getting to know people involved in agriculture from officials to farmers, and spending time with our attaches and agricultural people on American policy and programs affecting the sector. It was something of a personal passion, and I ended up involved in any number of specific projects that took me into the sector more deeply than others.

Q: What were our programs trying to accomplish? Who was involved.?

Broadly speaking there were three elements to American involvement in the ag sector. The first I think we discussed earlier. The U.S. responded with support to alleviate critical shortages in the food supply. We did so at the beginning of the nineties with the extensive program of emergency supplies for parts of the population that were in particular need. Then, in the aftermath of the 1998 financial crisis we again provided major relief through the PL-480 food programs, sending major shipments of grain and commodities to supply the market through the painful adjustment in 1998 and 1999. These programs, were not particularly influential in reforming or transforming the agricultural sector, but they were significant in providing the government time and flexibility in sustaining its programs to reform the economy.

The second dimension of American involvement was focused primarily on provision of technical assistance to the sector from developing market institutions to serve agriculture to introducing ideas and practices from U.S. agriculture and providing expertise and training in U.S. practices. Here I think the impact and results of our input were mixed. In one respect I thought a significant element of the programming was out of synch with reality and what was going on even in the U.S. A substantial part of American policy we tried to push was centered on the premise that the private family farm, the yeoman farmer if you will, could be a core element at the heart of future Russian private agriculture. This system was seen by many agricultural people from the U.S. as the effective antidote to the disaster of collectivization and was the key to invigorating the entrepreneurial spirit in

the countryside. And so, much of our agricultural programming focused on the countryside sought to develop the idea of small farmers, family farms and so forth.

I personally thought this was misplaced, much as I admired what many of our AID and agricultural NGO people were doing. But, it was policy and I did what I could to support it. That said, I do think we could have had much greater impact had we done what we did in some other sectors. There our approach took the infrastructure of the Soviet system, and in the American terminology, restructured them to compete in the new market economy. In the case of agriculture this would have entailed taking the big, extensive agricultural institutions, and transforming them into more efficient, productive and profitable enterprises.

We did that only rarely, however. The exceptions arose in subsectors such as poultry, where there were efforts to bring about significant change by upgrading and in a sense Americanizing the industry from raising to processing poultry. This project emerged after the first "chicken war" a disagreement about poultry meat imports; the resolution to the dispute involved among other provisions, creation of a Russian-U.S. joint venture demonstration project to show the Russian side how to structure, run and manage a modern poultry farm. In the end that project became a model success story to the point that on a visit with Frank Purdue to the enterprise not long after I left as ambassador this master of the poultry world was impressed enough to take home a particular piece of Russian invented technology he thought could be applied to his own Maryland-based farms and processing facilities. It was a successful project and in some ways a model of what could be done when Americans and Russians put their heads together.

There were some similar efforts in dairy, and what we would call truck farming - farming mainly targeted at supplying the demand for vegetables, potatoes etc. to nearby markets. One of these, for example, became the supplier for the growing demand from McDonalds for tomatoes and lettuce and from that developed into a major supplier of the vegetable market in Moscow's growing supermarket network.

Then, I would suggest that a major contribution from the U.S. side to Russian agriculture lay in our technical assistance and training programs. These included on the ground support experts could give to agricultural institutions from farm to farm and educational institutions involved in agricultural education programming. Under other programs U.S. based education, training and fellowship programs brought young Russian farmers and other members of the agricultural work force for training and hands on experience with U.S. agriculture. A special program was directed at development of something analogous to our agricultural extension service to assist Russian agriculture across the country. So, the formal U.S. sponsored programs had significant successes in agriculture, but the focus on the smaller family farm never truly had the impact its authors hoped.

The third source for change in the countryside came from the role we and Europe played in transforming major elements of the processing and distribution sector for food and agricultural products. This involved both investment from western sources that introduced change from the field to the supermarket and the introduction of new

technologies, structural models and management practices throughout the sector. For much of the nineties the impact of these elements was slow to mature and as often as not scattered in its impact. But it had a growing and lasting effect on everything from crop yields, to animal husbandry, to food processing and retail distribution that affected nearly all aspects of the farm to table chain. For instance, firms like Case and New Holland introduced seeders, cultivators and combine harvesters that increased yields for farms by up to fifty per cent simply by increasing the efficiency of the machinery used in crop production. The adoption over time of western models for retailing stimulated demand for new products such as fruit juices and packaged vegetables at retail outlets. That in turn generated a broad change in the way produce and fresh products were prepared for market. None of these changes happened over night, but they changed much in the way the agriculture sector was organized and the way its parts functioned over the course of the decade. I would say, in this sense, that the nineties laid the foundation for what would be strong growth in the next decade that put much of Russian agriculture on a solid footing both to satisfy much of Russia's need for foodstuffs and in the longer run return Russia to the ranks of countries exporting foodstuffs to deficit countries.

Q: Did you see the whole legal system make the shift to support the new structure in commerce and all?

COLLINS: Yes, certainly. I suppose it's obvious that the kinds of changes transforming the economic, social, and political structure of Russian society inevitably brought with it or in some cases was driven by fundamental changes in the legal framework by which the nation and its institutions functioned. Creating this new legal framework was a monumental undertaking. Remember that there was no legal code to deal with significant private property issues, and the whole question of the transition from a command economy to a market economy and from a totalitarian, ideologically based political system to one that was more open and pluralistic ultimately had to be reflected in changes to the country's legal codes and institutions. Remember also, Russia uses a code system based in the Napoleonic French/European/continental models. It's not an Anglo-American system. But as the Russian legal professionals, from lawyers to judges went through the transformation of their world the American models and ideas had an attraction in some ways and our people and programs had an impact.

First of all, we had a very effective influential project that brought American judicial officials, mainly federal judges, to Russia. These judges were linked up with counterparts, and over the decade developed professional and personal relations between our federal judiciary and their judicial cadre. These connections resulted in a lot of training in areas new to Russian colleagues, and back and forth over professional issues. But what I thought most interesting was what our judges represented regarding the role of the judiciary itself. This was in contrast to the traditional Russian understanding about a judge's position. The Americans came with the particularly subversive idea that the judiciary was a branch of government co-equal with the executive and legislative. Russian judges started to get the idea that maybe this wasn't such a bad way to see things. In such a system they could have a role that was independent of the phone call from the ministry of justice or the president. Now, this was a long way from becoming reality, but

the idea that the judiciary could be an independent branch of government had a lot of attraction for the judiciary and inclined them to see their American counterparts as offering an often attractive alternative to the way other partners from Europe traditionally saw a judge's position.

American experts also had a big role in a lot of the revision and development of Russia's legal codes. American and European experts had major input to the commercial codes that emerged during the decade as the market economy replaced the command system. But, to my mind one of the most profound changes took place during the first year of President Putin's presidency. This change, long in its development and a project Americans had worked on with Russian counterparts for years, brought about a wholesale revision of the Soviet era criminal procedural code. That change was absolutely revolutionary. It reversed the relationship between the prosecutor and the judge, and in theory established the presumption of innocence until proven guilty as the basis for any criminal proceeding. In a stroke it took out of the hands of law enforcement and put into the hands of judges decisions about treatment of people accused of a crime; it took away from the prosecutors, for example, the authority to detain any accused more than 48 hours without a judicial order. It introduced habeas corpus overnight, and resulted in the release of thousands of detainees held in investigative custody under police orders. The code introduced the right to trial by jury for major criminal cases. In short this new code, not welcomed I might note by the security and law enforcement forces, was little short of a socio-political revolution in the entire criminal justice system and seemed to auger and new day for the rights of the citizen. It was a good omen toward the end of my time, if it could last.

So, in my time it was fair to say Russia put in motion what amounted to a legal revolution from its constitutional foundations through the emergence of almost wholly new commercial and economic codes to regulate the new market economy and ultimately profound changes to the criminal procedural and other codes that affected the rights and protections of the citizen against arbitrary authority. But these changes were only fragile beginnings. They had yet to build a foundation in concepts like the sanctity of private property, the idea of the rule of law, and idea that law was not an instrument in the hands of the rulers. As we talk today, that potential has been set back, but it remains on the books.

Q: Well were they looking at other systems, particularly the European, the continental system as they developed these codes?

COLLINS: They certainly did. And it was logical. Russian legal tradition from tsarist and Soviet times had been based in the European tradition and its models. It was code based and Napoleonic in origin. The 1993 Russian constitution was most heavily influenced by the French, with its strong role for the president compared to the American separate but equal powers. Nor was the American model necessarily a primary influence on the actual codes written for the economy or criminal law, but there were elements in all these codes that reflected the U.S. model, trial by jury, for example. But as I have noted I think perhaps the most important fundamental American concept that acquired influence in the

nineties was this peculiar idea about the judiciary as an independent branch of government, a judiciary with a different far more significant role in the society than that most of Europe accorded their judges and courts.

Now, it's true that most of the stories coming out of Russia over the last few years have been about how the judicial system has been politicized and how it is just a tool of Mr. Putin or his oligarch cronies. There is much in this reporting that is true. But, it is not the whole story. The other reality is that during the '90s the public's idea about courts, judges, and their place in giving citizens some protection against arbitrary authority evolved significantly. In the Soviet period, for example, a pensioner threatened with expulsion from his apartment, would most likely have gone to the equivalent of a ward heeler or someone in his survival network for help to get his problem resolved. With the end of the USSR, these systems evaporated and for a considerable period there was great uncertainty about how to deal with an equivalent situation short of getting some privately arranged protection from potential predators. Later into the '90s, as the new order of things and reforms brought new status to the judicial system, citizens like our pensioner began to go to court to get justice against the arbitrary or threatening. The result, unexpected as most found it, was that as the '90s came to a close, the significant new challenge for the judicial system was to cope with an unprecedented rise in demand for judicial service by the public to resolve their differences or their disputes with government and each other.

For the most part, I took that turn to the courts to mean that normal Russian citizens expected to receive fairness and/or effective service from judges and courts. Had they not seen the process this way, I would have expected them to develop an alternative as they had in Soviet times, and they wouldn't have used the system. But, they did use it and have continued to do so. It is perfectly true, of course, that high profile political cases or cases involving members of the elite exist in another world; here it is obvious the courts just aren't independent. But in the day to day routine world, it seems to me the verdict of the public is that the court system tends to work and meet the expectations of the public.

Q: What about the arts and culture? The government had a commanding role before, but what about the arts after the communist era? I think of Russian music, Russian literature as being a major world influence going back to the tsar's times and through the Soviet era. What was happening after the Soviet collapse?

COLLINS: Let's begin here by noting I am talking mainly about the first decade of New Russia. The arts and culture have continued to evolved and adapt in Russia as the nation has changed, and we are not in the same place today that we were in the nineties. So, looking at that time, I saw two or three changes wholly transforming the world of Russian arts. First of all, there was liberation. The end of the Soviet Union and communist ideological controls meant the end of Soviet censorship, the ideological straight jacket for the arts the Soviets imposed on the arts and culture, and the end to the isolation of Russian arts from the world cultural and artistic community. It completed the liberation for the arts Gorbachev had started with glasnost and perestroika. The Russian arts world

opened up to all comers. It was wholly free. And it became an integral part of the world arts and cultural community.

Now, as I watched it and engaged with the community, this new and free-for-all environment had two or three outcomes over the decade. For one thing, pretty much everybody told me that literature came on hard times: it seemed to be drying up: it was not producing interesting work; it seemed to lack topicality. The exception was poetry where familiar and new names were exploring new genres like rap. Graphic and plastic arts, on the other hand were breaking new paths. Painting, sculpture, engravings, photography were testing the limits, producing what for Russians were seen as outlandish as well as pioneering works. For those of us from the West we'd been through some of these epochs already. But for Russian society this was path breaking, avant-garde, and revolutionary.

I would say continuity and inspiration kept the music going. Even in the hardest economic times, the musicians and composers continued to produce, established artists experimented with their new freedom and the steady stream of young talent produced a new generation of concert artists, dancers, and performers. Elements of the music world that had remained in the shadows, particularly jazz and western popular genres, suddenly produced a mushrooming cohort of young personalities that easily and quickly rose to the ranks of world class performers. And composers and choreographers experimented with new work that was performed in a growing market looking for original work to bring in new audiences.

A second dimension of the changes the nineties brought the arts world were more troubling in many respects. If the liberation of the arts and culture brought new freedom from bureaucrats and ideologues, the other side of the coin was less salutary. With some exceptions, government all but abandoned financial and institutional support for the arts and culture, leaving the community to find its way in the new world of private money and competition. This dealt a major blow, particularly to the second and third tier institutions like regional orchestras, museums. ballet troupes, theaters, and individual artists outside the major metropolitan areas or those fortunate enough to remain national institutions like the Bolshoi theater. And so the '90s was also a time when a lot of people in world of arts and culture found life very difficult as subsidies were pulled and money dried up. Even for the most famous of the institutions funding and support became a challenge for managers and directors accustomed to public support.

This new order affected the sector's patrons more broadly in a simple and, to me, a sad way. When public subsidies had supported arts institutions, the authorities had kept prices for admission or participation at a level the general public could afford. Now that broad accessibility disappeared. Where I, for instance in the early '90s had purchased tickets to a concert series for $20 by the end of the decade a single concert ticket was going for a $100. So along with liberation and participation in open competition, the arts also became subject to the laws of business and the market. That was resented by many people in the arts and in other parts of society who had depended on public support but sought it without dependence on authority. This change, in particular, was a factor that I found

brought a significant degree of disillusion to parts of the cultural world that had been enamored in Soviet times with the freedom of their colleagues in the West, but now resented the necessity to join them in having to earn from their art a means of financial support.

Finally, and thirdly there was competition. Here in this new world and related to their new position in surviving as members of a market based economic system, the end to Soviet imposed isolation also meant that Russian arts and artists suddenly had to compete on the global stage with world art on the world's terms. It was no longer good enough to have the support of Soviet authorities to achieve stature and success in the Soviet controlled system, or to do something that challenged Soviet orthodoxy to achieve notoriety at home or abroad as a dissident. For many this brought shock. Many artists who had achieved a degree of prominence in the Soviet period did pretty bad art, but they were lionized by the arts world abroad for their stance and courage. The new world of open competition brought a very different environment for the arts and artists used to the hothouse of Soviet closed culture: it was not an easy transition On one hand it let everybody do his thing and the arts hosted all kinds of new and established people experimenting and innovating in their new world without boundaries. At the same time, as outsiders became part of the Russian arts scene, the global competition Russian artists faced was stiff.

So, in short, for the arts and culture the nineties were a time of turmoil, profound adjustment, a sorting of new from outdated talents, and a growing sense of ambivalence about how to see the place of their world in the new Russia of markets, pluralism, and competition for the public's support. By the end of the decade, it seemed to me, the returns were still out on where their thinking might end up. Nevertheless, the nineties were a heady time for culture and arts. I was fortunate to have in the residence, Spaso House, a venue at which any number of the best people in the arts welcomed an opportunity to perform. It was my opportunity as well to provide some of the new talent with the chance to have attention from a select audience that helped a few in establishing themselves. These performers ranged from aspiring Bolshoi stars to a young boy who had to stand on a box to reach the xylophone he played with the mastery of an accomplished solo artist. He was 11 years old at the time, and by now I am sure has made his name. When the idea did begin to surface it was most often greeted with skepticism; why would you want to give it away if you had money. But over the '90s and over my time the idea did begin to grow and emerge; giving money to certain recognized institutions like the Bolshoi or the Hermitage Museum or equivalent institutions including in the regions started to acquire stature. It was seen as a way to demonstrate that people with money were engaged in doing socially good works, a plus in a society that still generally saw wealth as suspicious and business as probably just shy of criminal behavior. It was far from a society and culture steeped in the Protestant ethic.

The other side of this coin emerged as the government leadership decided that philanthropy was something those with the means would be expected to do. And so there was almost an unofficial understanding that if you were one of the oligarchs, the big money people, the financially well off, you had responsibilities and you were given

guidance about what they were. And so it was understood you would support the Saratov Opera if you were making money there. That continues. By the second decade of new Russia, some of the philanthropy is freely given. But, much of it is has become a form of unofficial taxation where it's made clear wealth, status and role are linked to being a "good citizen." All of this emerges late in the nineties and especially under the new president after his election in 2000.

Q: Well in a way there's a certain amount of that in some of our philanthropy.

COLLINS: There's a degree of it, but here I don't think, with the exception of the financial incentives, that there's all that much direct political "guidance" that drives it. In the Russian case it becomes much more prescribed and understood for what it is.

Q: Did we have much to do in supporting the arts or bringing change in this sector?

COLLINS: In a limited way. We had any number of programs and projects directed at the development of "civil society". That had come to be shorthand for the system of non-governmental institutions that served societies in what earlier might have been called the third sector, what we also call non-profit organizations. We've already discussed some of these efforts regarding political parties, social welfare organizations, etc. And we did do some work in this context to support Russians laboring to develop alternatives to governmental budgetary support for their institutions. For, example, we had specialists from some of our museums or centers like Williamsburg come to work with Russian institutions trying to develop a new basis for sustainable support of organizations like regional museums. We also had programs that took Russians to the U.S. for training on NGO management, fund raising, project design, etc. Some of these were in the world of arts and culture. But this was an uphill struggle for nearly everyone and remained so throughout my time there.

Q: Turning to a completely different subject but still dealing with this period, what about foreign relations? With China, with the Arab world, etc.

COLLINS: Throughout the first post-Soviet decade Russia's foreign policy from my perspective focused on two critical objectives: to maintain an international environment in which Moscow could safely pursue a major domestic transformation in peace; and to bring about Russia's integration within the Euro-Atlantic world as an equal partner to the U.S., while preserving its preeminent position of influence within the former Soviet space. In this context Moscow saw Europe as the focus for its future, and for most of the nineties pursued a significantly reduced global role and policy beyond the Euro-Atlantic community. So, even as Russia asserted its place as the successor to the Soviet state, it pursued a policy marked by retrenchment and withdrawal from the extended Soviet involvement in Africa, Latin America, much of Asia, shrinking dramatically the extent of the Soviets' presence across the globe, including places such as Cuba. In the Middle East its engagement was marked by a significant shift away from Soviet priorities in favor of a new relationship with Israel, openings to more diverse Arab countries, and a more limited

relationship with states like Iraq, Libya and Syria that had formed the cornerstone of Soviet influence in the region.

So, as I saw it, this was a foreign policy strategically designed to ensure a benign environment for Russia's domestic development, to preserve Russia's role as the super power in the East, and to preserve Russia's security in the midst of a major upheaval at home. It was also my assessment that the tensions we encountered with Moscow arose when, from their point of view, U.S. policies or actions disturbed the quiet or challenged the status quo.

This Euro-Atlantic focus also meant that other regions were given less attention or priority. When it came to Asia, for instance, Moscow didn't devote major resources to the region. I used to ask colleagues regularly how Moscow could spend more time obsessing over the Russian speaking minority in Latvia, at least as I measured their concern from column inches in newspapers or radio program time, than they spent on all of Asia. I concluded this was partly because whatever the issues were in Asia, they had no real answer for, or approach to them that seemed to provide a productive outcome for the issues Russia faced there. Nor were the issues given the same political immediacy those nearer to home regularly acquired.

There were certain things they did do in Asia in the '90s that were important. Continuing the broad strategy and program Gorbachev had defined with China, they pursued further the normalization of relations with Beijing, completing a lengthy border demarcation with China, regularizing relations and trade, and generally putting China relations on a stable basis. But this effort was not so much an expression of growing interest in an expanded relationship as it was , it seemed to me, a means to keep things peaceful and quiet in relations with Russia's largest land neighbor at a time when avoiding issues there was essential to bigger objectives.

Q: Well China was also undergoing its transformation at this period, wasn't it? Were the Russians saying hey, can't we do that, or something?

COLLINS: Not really. There were some people who drew attention to the Chinese model but they attracted minimal interest. Remember, Yeltsin and his team saw ridding Russia of the communist system as their calling. China's answer to reform was quite different.

Q: It just didn't fit.

COLLINS: It didn't fit and also Russians, to the extent they had a partnership with China, saw Russia as the senior partner. So, why would Russia pay much attention to what the Chinese were doing ? That obviously has changed since, but at that time there was no sense that China offered a model to watch. If there was such in Asia, it was Japan. There Russia had a very difficult and ambiguous relationship that went back and forth in trying to improve the relations and to get Japanese investors to be interested in developing Siberia and the Far East. Russians also saw Japan as a potential counterweight to China in Asia. But a resolution for the Northern Territories eluded Moscow and Tokyo. That

prevented the two nations from signing a formal peace treaty to end World War II, and it remained an insurmountable obstacle to major expansion of Japanese engagement in Russian development.

The one case where Russia did make a significant departure in Asian policy came in their relations on the Korean Peninsula. There Moscow in the '90s moved to enhance relations with South Korea and to end its almost sole dependence on the North. But to generalize, I would say again if there was any dominant theme in their involvement in Asia in this period, it was continuity from the Gorbachev period. Russia worked to reduce further areas of tension with China and to keep things quiet and stable along their border. They also normalized as possible relations with the region's states, particularly where they had had minimal ties before, and as possible worked to engage Japan and other possible investor nations to take a greater part in development of Siberia.

Q: Yes. Well then moving on, you left Moscow when? Where did you go when you left?

COLLINS: I left Moscow on July 11 in a sendoff I will not forget. The entire country team was there and it was emotional. It was one of those moments when everyone seemed to feel that something special was coming to an end. And in many ways that was true.

Q: Did you retire at that point?

COLLINS: I did. Yes.

Q: Well then let's pick up there. What did you do?

COLLINS: My wife Naomi and I had already made a few key decisions. She by the way has written a book about our service in Moscow.: *Through Dark Days and White Nights: Four Decades Observing a Changing Russia* is the title. She has also done a wonderful set of interviews with you for this program.

But to come back; I had taken the retirement seminar some years before, and I did take one thing to heart. One of our speakers said, when you retire, don't move from anything, move to something. And so if you don't have a good reason to move somewhere, don't move. Well neither of us felt we had a good reason to move. So we stayed here in the Washington area. Our friends were here, our connections to institutions were here. Washington stayed our home.

I also had decided that I was not really ready to retire in the sense of leaving work. I decided that after some time off, I would look to see what might be available in the area. We did see the Grand Canyon in the period, and we spent time at our new family dacha (vacation home) on California's Central Coast. And then, as I was getting back to Washington, I had a call from Bob Strauss asking if I would consider joining the law firm as an advisor. It was an offer I just couldn't refuse. I had enjoyed working with Strauss, and I knew as he had done before for me, he would open wider worlds for me as I was

about to change my life significantly. So I signed on and I worked for the law firm as a consultant and non-lawyer member of their team for about five and a half years. It was interesting and for me eye opening. Since I left university, I had never worked in anything but government; so there were a lot of wholly new dimensions to the world: like salaries that were beyond anything I had experienced in a whole career, and a business world approach to routine things like travel and hotels that was well beyond anything I recalled from government service. I probably should also say that I always worked only three quarters time for Akin Gump. I reserved the remainder of my time for activities that were in no way competitive or incompatible with what I was doing for the firm, but that gave me a second, separate existence.

I was glad I made the decision I did. Working with Akin Gump was very different, interesting and educational. I worked with some of the firm's clients doing business in Russia and helped them with issues they encountered in maneuvering their way through the Russian system. Akin was enhancing their credentials on the international scene, and I was part of a team that included Mark Medish and a few other colleagues I had known from the Clinton administration. In the course of the work I did learn a great deal. One thing I took away that has been lasting was an understanding of the extent to which the corporate world and business leaders live in a world that most often leaves them with almost no understanding about how government works, either in Washington or elsewhere. It gave me a wholly new perspective on the value and the kind of contribution the Foreign Service actually can contribute to American enterprise abroad and how much FSO's can profit by listening to those who do understand a world beyond what they know.

Q: How did they use you?

COLLINS: At Akin I suppose it's fair to say I provided three basic kinds of expertise and help for the lawyers. I did work with clients who were setting up businesses in Russia or simply wanted advice on the lay of the land. I tried to help these companies understand the realities they would be dealing with in the Russian market and assist them in steering a constructive course as they either entered the market for the first time or were trying to expand. Mostly this meant ensuring the client didn't try short cuts, stayed away from actors we thought were questionable, or simply provided them guidance on how to get something done. I worked on this in many cases with our office in Moscow. I was available to talk with them whenever they needed it.

Second, I tried and I admit with very limited success, to help them engage clients. The firm found it useful to have two former ambassadors to Russia on the roster, and I was as helpful as I could be in supporting their efforts to attract clients that were looking for firms with a sound Russia team. Akin did have such, and they were very successful in many respects, particularly in working for the oil and gas industry. The had clients that were Russian firms and American firms doing business in that market. I do think I was helpful for them particularly in the initial time I was with them when the firm was expanding its international business.

And finally, I was at times helpful to the lawyers in providing experience and expertise where the legal element alone was not sufficient to address a client's issues. It was the rare case in Russia where the political, bureaucratic, or personal dimension didn't play a role. I could often help the lawyers understand that and just what the context was for what they were trying to do or their clients faced. I think I played a helpful role with Akin. I had a few firms that were my clients, not as lawyer, but as general counselor for their business objectives, and some of those became major players in the Russian market.

But there was also always one element of the job that limited my effectiveness and where I thought the firm never really understood how best to use what I had to offer them. I discovered that a law firm can have a challenging time using someone who is not a lawyer or whose experience is outside that world. I came away believing Akin never really understood how to take advantage of what I could do for them. I concluded this was basically a cultural problem. In my previous existence over the last decade, I had largely dealt with CEOs, members of boards of directors, and the people who run companies. By contrast the firm's lawyers mostly dealt with a company's general counsel, the lawyer. I didn't know those people from Adam, nor did I really speak their language. Our lawyers, meanwhile, didn't know what to do with someone who expected to discuss issues with board members or CEOs. There was almost always something of a misfit unless I was with Strauss or a few of the firm's people who did deal with the senior officials or the boards of their clients. And that meant most of the firm really were not sure how I could help them or their clients. I did work with several clients who were establishing themselves in the Russian market or coming up against issues in Russia that were outside the legal realm. That work was always interesting and it kept me engaged in a world that expanded my universe. But there was always a certain disconnect with the lawyers.

Q: Well, then what did you do?

COLLINS: In early 2007, I came to the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, a non-partisan think tank with offices in four other regions, including Moscow, as well as here in Washington. Now I have to say at the beginning here, when I was in government I don't remember that we paid much attention to think tanks, but I have a new appreciation for what they can and should do. And, of course, from this new vantage point I think those in public office should pay attention to what we are doing. At the same time, I also have an appreciation for the limits on those outside government and the importance of avoiding efforts to supplant those who are inside. And I hope I've done that.

Along with my think tank work, I've also stayed engaged, as I did when I was at Akin, with other organizations involved with programs between the U.S. and Russia. I have served on the board of the "Open World" exchange program. This program remains unique among exchanges in belonging to and run by an institution of the Congress. As I think we discussed earlier, this program has brought close to 20,000 Russians and others from the region to the United States since it began in 1999 under the leadership of Jim Billington. Also in the exchanges world I served on the board for American Councils for International Education for several years and maintain a close relationship with them. In

2008 I joined the board of a new NGO, The U.S.-Russia Foundation for Economic Advancement in the Rule of Law. The foundation is a legacy organization endowed by the U.S.-Russian Enterprise Fund to continue support for the development of Russia's private sector and to promote the rule of law. The Foundation gives grants to develop Russia's market economy, promote its health, and support the rule of law. I also participate in the Dartmouth Dialog that has been part of citizen diplomacy with Moscow since the Eisenhower administration. I'm as well on other advisory boards: for Indiana University's School of Global and International Studies; for American University's Russia program, and for a few other institutions with programming mainly focused on Russia and Eurasia. So, I've remained engaged.

Q: Well I was wondering, I mean we're getting close to the end now, but there's an awful lot of news coming out of Russia with Vladimir Putin running things. You've had long Russian experience. Where is Russia going? Is this still part of a transition period, or is this a throwback? What's happening?

COLLINS: Well, as we conclude these interviews in 2013, we are nearly a quarter century into the post-Soviet, post-Cold War period. Eurasia is a region of 15 new states, Marxist Leninist ideology no longer rules any people in the region, and Moscow rules over a Russia with a third less territory and only half the population of the Soviet Union. Students graduating from Moscow State University do so with no personal experience of the Soviet Union. Their ideas about that time come through the eyes of parents and grandparents or school texts all constantly reevaluating what to say about that time. So, it's a good question of whether today's Russia is still aborning or has now established itself. Certainly there is no question that new Russia has evolved over this period. And that evolution has moved the nation beyond much that characterized its early days, and that change has altered significantly the dynamic between our two countries. As I knew them in the nineties.

I mentioned that during my time as ambassador in the last half of the nineties, events like the 1998 economic crisis and Kosovo had begun to strain relations and bring Russians to question whether Americans had the right model or answers for their future or truly would accept them as a partner. Even as I left in 2001, well before Russia's economic recovery in the decade 2000-2010 or the emergence of more distance between us over several international issues, Russians were demanding respect and recognition, they were no longer on their knees, that they were back on the international stage. For his first decade plus as president Putin has pursued policies and reforms designed to recover Russia's standing as an international great power. He's paid off Russia's international debts to limit foreign influence over his economy; he brought his nation remarkable economic recovery; he has reclaimed consolidated governmental power and authority over the nation. It has been in many ways a quite remarkable success story, albeit achieved through controversial actions that challenged fundamentals of democratic development and modernization of Russia's economy on western lines. It has, though, been consistent with the theme of unity as he had it signaled in the ceremony on Old New Year 2000.

From the U.S. point of view, more disturbing and troubling has been Putin's turn away from a national strategy that pursued Russia's integration with the West to a strategy based in Russian development as an independent pole in what it insists is a multi-polar global system. Along with that shift, rejection of American "unipolar" global leadership and sustained efforts to promote Russia as a leading voice in an alternative multi polar environment has made anti-Americanism a fundamental part of Russia strategy and policy. As Putin regained the presidency in 2012 this shift emerged as a central element of Russian domestic politics bringing to the fore a Russian posture and policies consistent with many of the earliest signals Putin sent to his people and abroad about his view of Russia's future Khomyakov, the early Slavophile, has remained a leitmotif of Putin's vision.

On the other hand, in retrospect I also think that at the beginning of his tenure, Putin hinted at alternative paths that might have unfolded differently. In the context of 9/11 and the American shock that event represented to our sense of triumph in the Cold War, Putin came to us in essence saying, I'm willing to be part of an international effort to fight terrorism. In documents and statements during his visit here not long after the attacks on Washington and New York, he also suggested a broad basis for a new kind of partnership. No one knows, of course, what Putin might have done then or how this proposal might have developed. What I do believe is that at that time we missed an opportunity to explore what Putin might have been willing to do. As I mentioned previously I found the Bush Administration, even before 9/11, largely uninterested in Russian relations or Moscow's views; they made clear to me that Russia was Clinton's priority and theirs were different. The signal was clear: the U.S. is the only superpower and we're going to pursue our agenda. Against that background, I suppose it was not surprising that we never took advantage of what might have been an opening to develop a new or different relationship with Putin. Instead we more or less, told him Russia and he weren't that important to us or our objectives: we would call him if we needed him. Subsequently, relations only grew more difficult. The dialog diminished. Disagreements over the Iraq war, the American financial crisis and the turmoil it produced globally, the war with Georgia, differences over the Arab Spring, the Libya intervention, and Syria all compiled to widen the estrangement between us.

It also seems to me that when he returned to the presidency in 2012, Mr. Putin had concluded that Russia could no longer secure its position as a global power by linking its future to integration with the West. He believed America and its allies had rejected that option on any terms Russia could accept. Moreover, I am convinced he believed that America and Europe were losing stature and were in decline. In a world of rising China and the emergence of other economic and regional leaders in Africa, the Middle East, and Latin America, Putin saw Russia's future in defining an independent course, building its international standing on terms of its own definition. The result has been a policy based in strident rejection of U.S. "unipolar" leadership and what Russia portrays as globalization sponsored by America and in service of American interest.

This policy served both domestic political imperatives for a returning president and a strategic direction for the nation that set it apart from unsuccessful past efforts at

integration with the West. It was also a strategy that justified greater attention to Asia, in particular China whose rise had become more existential for Russia as that new power served notice it was now the dominant partner in the relationship with Moscow, a position Russia gradually came to accept in the run-up to Putin's return. The new strategy also permitted a new focus on consolidation of Russia's position in the former Soviet space. Initiatives to create a Eurasian Economic Union, and later Eurasian Union combined with Russian pressures for acceptance of a Russian sphere of influence in Eurasia. It didn't seek a restoration of the Soviet Union but it asserted Russia's predominant role in the region where both European and Asian interests were now more challenging than at any time in the past.

The American and European reaction to Russia's turn away from fundamental underpinnings we assumed defined the accepted post-Cold War, Euro-Atlantic order has brought estrangement between East and West to a new level and U.S.-Russia relations to a low point. In the new context it seems to me we have yet to define a workable foundation for realistic and sustainable relations with a Russia pursuing a new global strategy. Our agenda with Moscow remains stuck in an era that has passed. One of the things I've spent quite a bit of time on in the last three, four years is trying to explain to people that the era of American aid giving and Russians accepting the role of recipient or student is over. Russia at this point has served notice it has matured and recovered. We are dealing with another major power no less determined to pursue an independent future than Brazil or China or Indonesia. To continue to treat Russia rather as though they're still on their knees, weak, disorganized and in need of assistance, to assume they will accept the idea of American primacy internationally or at home just isn't workable or realistic. Russia is not a 51st state; it has not accepted the American constitution or our first amendment. And yet in many ways that mentality from the '90s, born of a time Russia indeed did ask for and willingly receive our assistance, expertise, and guidance dies hard here in Washington.

Q: Well, do you think that there are still elements within Russia that are hoping to build a democracy and all? Is there hope for a democratic outcome?

COLLINS: Let's put it this way. I don't think there's anybody there who has any idea that there's going to be a nice liberal Jeffersonian democracy in my lifetime. But, they didn't have such a system in the nineties either. I think there are two or three things that have happened, though, over this two-decade period. One, I believe, the Russians have finally understood that there is no future in which they are not a part of the global economic, financial and trading system. Up until 1998, even after the Soviet collapse, they thought they were somehow able to act independently of this system, to hold it back, to make their economy function their way while everybody else had to go along with the international market. The Russians had, after all, largely made this happen for as long as the Soviet period lasted. In 1998 the financial collapse and its results showed Russians they were now firmly and wholly embedded in the global economic system. Henceforth if somebody sneezes in Indonesia, someone will catch a cold in Moscow. It was a hard lesson, and they learned it reluctantly.

Interestingly too, I think, with time they also lost some of the clarity of that lesson or at least some did, and as the 2008 economic crisis approached, Mr. Putin began talking about an alternative universe again. He harped on the mess the Americans had made and how Russia would be okay. It had amassed significant reserves. It had no debt and so on and so forth. It was a revival of the idea that Russia could live in an alternative economic universe, separate and protected from that global system dominated by the Americans and the West. Well that was short-lived; it lasted about two weeks when it became clear Russian reserves could meet about two weeks' needs, and that Russia was not immune from anything. As a result, I think there's again understanding that there is no separating Russia from the global system. That's a factor.

At the same time I think Russians today are obsessed with finding a way to separate themselves from the effects of globalization. Almost from the beginning of Putin's presidency there has been an undercurrent of suspicion and fear of what they see as a force designed by the United States and its allies to promote American dominance and hegemony. On his return to the presidency in 2012 Putin launched an effort to put Russia at the forefront of nations rejecting what he portrayed as American driven globalization, playing to those elements trying to galvanize support for the local, for nationalist and national values. The Russians have played this theme to the hilt; President Putin has presented himself as the defender of fundamental Christian values of traditional European thinking, of support for national identity, etc., etc. He often sounds like Nicholas I or Alexander III, standing up for Russia against the menace of European revolution.

In the long term I frankly don't think this idea of driving a wedge between Europe and Russia is going to survive, but at the moment in 2013 Russia is feeling reasonably confident that they have charge of their own system, that they've weathered the economic crisis and overcome its effects unlike the Europeans and Americans who still can't get their employment back up, etc.

The problem with this mentality is that, like it or not, they're living in a world where local may be important but global is still going to drive much of the worldwide system in which Russia will have to compete. That is a problems because Russia remains very uncompetitive: they still make little anyone wants to buy aside from commodities. No one buys a Russian automobile: they buy foreign automobiles made in Russia or assembled in Russia but they're not buying the Volga if they have a choice. Russian exports are heavily based on commodities as they have been for most of the post war era. Russian infrastructure is weak and being consumed without replenishment. They're facing serious issues of how do they pay for reviving even those sectors. And in that sense I think there's a limit to how far Russia can carry the idea the nation can go its own way without having to accommodate other key neighbors. That's the mood at the moment, but I don't think it's got a long-term future. Does that mean we will see democracy? I think it almost impossible to see what will come following the present phase. The returns are out. What is all but certain, however, is that the Russian people will not support a government or system that cannot meet their major needs. What I do believe is that Russia will remain a major power with whom we will have to deal. What will be important to us is finding the wisdom and courage to define realistically our

objectives and conditions for a productive relationship with the Russian nation. That will mean we must come to terms with what we believe an acceptable relationship with Russia should look like. I do not believe we have come to terms with that question today.

Q: Okay well, I have four interns here and I'm going to ask them if any of them have a question.

COLLINS: All right.

Intern: In terms of the recent crisis in Syria, how do you see the United States and Russia's relationship developing?

COLLINS: Well I think on one hand recent events demonstrate that we aren't totally unable to work together on matters that become important to the two countries. On the other Syria has also demonstrated how limited that capacity has become. It's clear that we have been talking with Russians for some time about chemical weapons. In fact, during my time we were dealing with Russians to develop joint programs to destroy the Russian arsenal of chemical weapons. So chemical weapons is a subject where we've developed a pattern of cooperation based in shared interest. We have been talking to them about Syrian chemical weapons almost from the outset of the crisis there, and I suspect there is no real difference between us about the unacceptability of Syria having or using such weapons. This is one of those cases where we have the good fortune to have little difference of view. Certainly Mr. Putin's decision to put forth the idea that we need to get rid of these weapons is a welcome initiative from the Russians. I think it's particularly important because Mr. Putin has taken on the responsibility for it, and so the Americans are not the ones who have to be in charge, but have a central role to play. If we can manage to make this a success, it could have implications for a broader capacity to work together to do something more in Syria. But, that's a long way forward. We'll see whether that happens.

Intern: Are the U.S. and Russia working together on issues like human rights?

COLLINS: Not really. The problem is that we have a very different idea about what is on the agenda. The American international human rights agenda has expanded over time. Today I would say it largely encompasses promotion of all the rights we Americans believe are assured as fundamental and inalienable. It is an agenda that boiled down to its essentials asks the rest of the world to accept our interpretation of inalienable rights of the individual as they are defined under our Constitution and to agree they are the only legitimate basis for international and national policy.

Now, our view and interpretation of those rights is just not the way much of the rest of the world looks at it, and the Russians, in particular, are sensitive about the issue. With their own history, culture, religious traditions, and political history, the present leadership portrays our position as an effort to force American culture, values, and political norms on their society. And we should not delude ourselves that that view is without support in Russia, even if not unanimous. We, in turn, in many ways are saying Russia has freely

signed on to agreements and in their own constitution have adopted these policies and rights, and we are only working to hold them to what they have agreed to achieve for their citizens. In my experience there were strong arguments supporting much of what we pressed the Russians to do. On the other hand, there was room for interpretation and different views. For example, I used to remind people that the Russians had not passed the American Constitution's first amendment. So, when it came to law's relating to churches and religion, there were different ideas about what freedom of religion meant, what role the state could play in regulating religious institutions, etc. These kinds of differences came to the fore with frequency, the more so as the government in Moscow moved toward more authoritarian rule, issues like gay rights emerged on our agenda, or the limits on the rights of minorities became more controversial.

What has happened in recent times since 2013, with the Magnitsky Act and Russian reaction in halting adoptions, has underscored the fissures these issues are causing between us. We are now at a point where it seems to me we are more determined to engage in polemics and demagoguery than diplomacy to resolve issues of human rights. The reality is that our governments, politicians, and leaders have not figured out a way to engage or discuss human rights in any constructive way. Even though both of us are signatories to various conventions and we have both undertaken freely various obligations, as far as I can see neither the Russian nor the American side approach these issues with an interest in finding solutions or ways through specific issues. We on our side seem rather preoccupied with whether or not Russia conforms to norms we believe they have accepted and the Russians simply react to us by saying, we're not going to be pushed around by Americans; we're not Americans, and we're not going to be Americans.

What I don't know is how we're going to get back to the point we can use diplomacy to find ways through differences and put human rights back on the bilateral agenda between us. We were successful in doing this during the later stages of the Cold War. I recall well that issues on the human rights agenda were a regular part of our dialog with the Soviet leadership along with topics like nuclear weapons, economic relations and regional conflicts. We have got out of that practice. We need to find a way to return human rights to our diplomatic agenda with Moscow. We don't have a dialogue on the subject right now to the best of my knowledge. I am certain beginning such an effort will be far from easy. It's not clear to me the Russians will be interested in one nor I fear is it clear to me the Americans are ready either. Nevertheless, it seems to me essential that we begin to try.

Intern: I just want to know, what do you think about how America and Russia will deal with Iran? Do you think they're going to work together on this situation?

COLLINS: Over the years the Russians have moved closer to us on the Iranian nuclear issue, but not on much of anything else. They are no more interested in Iran having nuclear weapons than we are. So we see that issue similarly. I don't think they have ever had a different view. Differences over nuclear issues arose earlier because Russia was supplying Iran with reactor technology and building a nuclear power plant at Bushaer. Moscow was convinced then that they had everything under control. They were

convinced that Iran had no way to exploit for military purposes their access to Russian provided nuclear technologies and know that was carefully controlled by Russian authorities. It was a shock when they learned otherwise, and since that time, we have pretty much stayed on the same trajectory vis-à-vis Iran's nuclear program. We have an agreed goal; they're fully a part of the six countries trying to negotiate an agreement with Iran. Their diplomats support that objective. That doesn't mean there are not disagreements over tactics at a given moment, and sometimes disagreement with the Americans on how to proceed or particulars of the negotiation. But from what I know, I don't see that there's particular reason that the shared effort to prevent Tehran from gaining nuclear weapons is going to go off the rails unless the whole effort collapses.

On another level we do have significant differences about Iran. First, one Russian bottom line is rejection of any military intervention in Iran. That has been consistent for decades. A second issue that complicates our relations over Iran seems rather farfetched from the American point of view. From many discussions over years with colleagues in Moscow over the years it seems the Russians are truly worried that a normalization by the United States of relations with Iran would weaken their position both with Iran but more broadly in the region. Many Russians over the years have told me they know that if the Iranians ever get things settled with the Americans, the Russians will be finished in Iran. It's worth recalling that under the Shah, Iran was close to the U.S. and that memory remains. It is also true that Russia has a long and problematic history with Iran and its predecessors. To us all this may seem farfetched. We're a long way from normal relations with Tehran even if we get the nuclear question resolved. But opening up Iran would certainly make it much more difficult for the Russians to maintain today's privileged position they enjoy with Iran. But for the present I don't see such a development, and I hope we're keeping Moscow informed about whatever we're doing bilaterally with Tehran. I don't think surprising the Russians about Iran would be a good idea.

Intern: Recently we went to a conference at the Woodrow Wilson Center. It was in regard to Russia wanting to start a Eurasian union. There was a debate among some scholars, and it seemed that they didn't really think that it was as likely the Russians would succeed as the Russians seem to think or hope. What do you think?

COLLINS: I've always believed that what the Russians want for this region is what I have understood underpinned the Syrian approach to Lebanon. Put simply, that boiled down to Syria accepting other states involvement in Lebanon and Lebanon having ties with other states. The essential was that none of these other states should have a bigger role or greater influence with Lebanon than Syria or be allowed to threaten Syrian interests from Lebanon. I think at this point Russia has much the same bottom line idea regarding the former Soviet space with the exception of the Baltic states. Moscow is intent that Russia will remain the largest and ultimately dispositive voice in this territory. That said, I don't think Moscow sees as realistic restoration of the control over this region it once exercised as an imperial metropole. They do not see a prospect for running the region the way Moscow did under the Tsars or General Secretaries of the Communist Party. Rather they want no other power to give them real problems or real competition for dominance in the area. The problem they face is that such competition is precisely what

all of the new neighbors want. Ensuring Moscow has competition in their region is seen by Russia's neighbors as a form of insurance against overwhelming Russian domination. And so there is, to put it mildly, limited interest among the potential members of such a union in having any arrangement that would enhance the role Moscow could play in limiting their ability to work as they wish with outsiders. In short no one really has any interest in handing Moscow anything looking like a monopoly over their foreign economic relations.

Another real problem for Moscow is making viable a Eurasian union that doesn't include Ukraine. It will seem truncated to most, and at the same time there is minimal prospect that Ukraine will be willing to tie its future to Moscow. As much as Belarus is prepared to link its future to Moscow, Minsk is just not a major player: nor Moldova, nor Armenia. But if the Union doesn't have Ukraine, it doesn't really have credibility as a Eurasian entity. It's rather like a European Union without France. Moscow knows that and that's why they're almost apoplectic about what Ukraine is going to do when they go to the summit in Vilnius and may or may not sign the cooperation agreement linking Ukraine to the European Union. If Ukraine follows through and does so, this will be a big loss for Mr. Putin and to the whole idea of Russia leading a more integrated union of Eurasia. Further it will preclude the Russian role in Ukraine from becoming *primus inter pares.*

So, I don't think there's much prospect that the idea of an inclusive Eurasian Union is going to prosper. What I do think is interesting, though, and I don't know quite what to make of it, is that the U.S. is presently engaged in two major trade negotiations. One is with the EU, the European Union, and the other with Asian states. Both of these proposed agreements exclude Russia and its neighbors. Now, if I had to concoct an argument for Putin, right now, it would underscore the idea that the West is trying to exclude you from their groupings. The only place you can go to to enjoy some kind of a community is with us. It's not a bad argument. And so, how we're going to relate these new trade structures if they really come about, to Russia's neighborhood and Russia itself is something that nobody seems to be giving much thought to. I do think that if there's anything that could breathe life into the idea of some kind of a customs or trading block or financially structured commonality among the Eurasian community it would be finding themselves at a disadvantage because of exclusion from these other groupings. I think that's something to think about.

Q: Okay. Well, Jim, I think with this I will call an end to the project. It is mid-2013 and we have been at this almost a decade

COLLINS POSTSCRIPT: The final session for this interview took place in the late summer of 2013, a dozen years after I departed Moscow and more than a decade into the transformation President Putin brought to his nation after my departure. The interviews concluded, as well, before the dramatic events of 2014 in Ukraine that challenged the European consensus and international order, brought a sharp downturn in U.S.-Russia relations that has continued to the end of the second decade of our century, and turned Russia away from the course of integration within the Euro-Atlantic community.

I finish the final review of the interview in the midst of the 2020 Covid-19 pandemic, nearly two decades after my departure from Moscow after four years as ambassador. In the intervening years. time has not been kind to the hopes many of us had for a constructive and cooperative, future Russian-American relationship and an undivided Euro-Atlantic world. Rather, today our relations with Moscow are mired in mistrust, hostility, estrangement, and uncertainty about the future. And the Euro-Atlantic world is again divided between East and West.

I am nonetheless hopeful that as our nation emerges from a time of great challenge and change we will again find the way to define an American global role that will ensure our leadership among nations and give us the wisdom and patience to rebuild relations with an important global partner. The world may have passed beyond de Tocqueville's global vision of nearly two centuries ago, but it remains essential for America to manage its ties with Russia in a way that will benefit both our peoples in the decades to come.

September 28, 2020

End of interview