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

AMBASSADOR JEFFREY DAVIDOW

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INTERVIEW

Q: Jeff, let's start at the beginning. When and where were you born?

DAVIDOW: Boston, on January 26th, 1944.

Q: All right. Let me start on your father's side and then we'll move to your mother's side. What do you know about your father's side of the family?

DAVIDOW: Well, my father was born in Fall River. His two older brothers, just separated from him by a couple of years, had been born in Russia. So the family was new to the States when my father was born. His father died when he was a young boy, about 15-years-old. And he came to Boston, went to Northeastern University Law School at night, but graduated in the middle of the Depression and never really practiced law. He wound up running a small business for the rest of his life. My mother was also born in the States. Her family were recent immigrants as well.

Q: They were immigrants from where?

DAVIDOW: On my mother's side, they came from Vienna, but they had probably recently come there from somewhere else in the Austro-Hungarian Empire. And she grew up in Boston, married my father. I have one older sister who was born about six years before me.

Q: That's all right. OK. Well, let's talk a bit about being a kid, what sort of elementary school and all. What school were you going to?

DAVIDOW: I went to the Edward Devotion School, which although it sounds like it might have been a Catholic school, was actually the name of public elementary school in the Coolidge Corner area of Brookline. Edward Devotion was one of the early settlers of Brookline.

Q: Yeah, they had those sort of biblical sounding names.

DAVIDOW: That's correct.

Q: What was the neighborhood like? I mean was it basically Jewish or was it Irish or --

DAVIDOW: Almost entirely Jewish and the homes were a combination of apartment houses and one or two-family homes on sort of leafy streets. It was a pleasant environment actually.

Q: Oh yes. You didn't have the three-deckers there, did you?

DAVIDOW: No. It was a bit more upscale, not by much, than the neighborhoods with triple deckers.

Q: How about what were the teachers like?

DAVIDOW: It's very interesting. They were almost entirely, in elementary school, spinster WASP ladies. There was a great emphasis on discipline. Not, not too much, but there was some of that. And when I think of it, it's interesting that for these children and

grandchildren of immigrants, the teaching was really quite waspy in a sense, a lot of Longfellow and other New Englanders. I remember singing songs like, "The British Grenadiers,"" tow, row, row, row," that kind of --

Q: Oh yes, I think of Alexander.

DAVIDOW: Yes.

I also remember when we entered the eighth grade our teacher called us on the first day "kids". And that was the first time any of us had ever been called a kid in school up until that point. We were always addressed as "children". And we thought that "kids" was just the height of liberality and coolness, or whatever we called it at that time. Also policemen were called policemen. The word cops was considered vulgar. I think there was an emphasis on civility. It was sort of 19th century in a way.

Q: When the teacher came into the classroom did you all stand up? That sort of thing?

DAVIDOW: No, we did not. But we began every day with the Lord's Prayer and saluting the flag. It was from today's perspective a very different time.

Q: Well, now this was when that you started?

DAVIDOW: Well, I must have started school in about -- well, at the end of the '40s.

Q: Yeah.

DAVIDOW: And into the early '50s.

Q: So were people still talking about World War II and all that at the time? Was this part of the atmosphere?

DAVIDOW: You know, I don't think it was very much of the atmosphere. I mean at least I don't recall it as such. I don't think we were really that plugged in to the rest of the world.

Q: Being in Boston, did the Irish side of Boston intrude on you at all in these early years?

DAVIDOW: No, not really because we lived in a very isolated community. That's the way it was in Boston at that time. There was the Irish section and the Jewish section, Polish section, Italian, etc. And there wasn't a great deal of mixing. There was certainly hostility and anti-Semitism, but not a tremendous amount that I was aware of at least in the environment I lived in.

Q: Well, in '54, '55 I went to Boston University for a master's degree and I was surprised at how elements of the Irish there would get -- were really quite anti-Semitic, which really surprised the hell out of me.

DAVIDOW: That was a, a constant in our life, but it did not impact on me as a child because as I say, I lived in this sort of community packed in cotton wool. But my parents were very aware of it. And I remember conversations in my house with my parents saying, "Well, we'd like to go to such and such restaurant or go for holiday to such and such, but they are restricted."

Q: Good God.

DAVIDOW: And "restricted" meant Jews were not allowed. I remember them talking about, for instance, Arthur Godfrey who had a big hotel in Florida, but no Jews were allowed in that hotel. That didn't stop them from watching his television show, but my grandmother who lived with us particularly liked Ed Sullivan because everyone knew that his wife was Jewish. And it was a topic of conversation. So they were very, very aware of this. And you know, and I think that that carried over. I remember every time we went out to eat my mother would instead of just hushing up the kids, she would say, "Be quiet. We don't want them to think the Jews are loud," or something like that.

Q: Oh my God.

DAVIDOW: Oh no, it was, it was the real part of life.

Q: Well, did, for example, the Holocaust and the creation of Israel, did this affect you or were you aware of this?

DAVIDOW: It really wasn't a big issue in my house. I mean I'm sure it was a big issue for my parents. We didn't talk about it very much. As in every other Jewish house I knew, we had what was called a pushke box, P-U-S-H-K-E, and it was a blue and white sort of metal box with a slot at the top to collect pennies and other coins. And that would go to the state of Israel. Certainly both my parents had relatives who had died in the Holocaust, but there wasn't much talk about it. At least not that I was aware of.

Q: Were you much of a reader?

DAVIDOW: Yes, I was. The school put a premium on that. And I remember one summer, maybe when I was eight or nine, I set a goal for myself to read 20 books. I was pretty proud of that. Now, as I look back, I don't even remember any of them and I'm sure it was --

Q: (laughs)

DAVIDOW: -- you know, kids books. But --

Q: But do you remember any sort of books that made a real impression on you?

DAVIDOW: At that time, not so much. I remember reading a biography of Crazy Horse, the Indian, and I thought that was pretty cool. I think being influenced by books probably didn't happen until I was a teenager or my first year of college. But to be honest, I'm not one of these people who say, " Oh, these five books, you know, changed my life."

Q: Yeah.

DAVIDOW: You know, I'm always suspicious of that. There are books that indelibly impressed me. I know 1984, which I must have read at the end of high school, is still in my mind. I have not reread it in 50 years. Still the greatest book that I can recall. And, there were other books as well, but I cannot say that any one volume particularly changed my life

Q: Well, was your family -- first place, how Jewish was your family?

DAVIDOW: They were essentially culinary Jews. There was no real emphasis on Judaism as a religion. But there was an awareness and an involvement with Jewishness, on being a part of a tradition and a community. I was sent to Hebrew school four or five days a week after public school for six years. It was a great waste of everybody's time because I was a horrible student and was not interested in it. I never figured out what the teachers were trying to due. We spent most of the time reading obscure bible stories that always seemed to me to have had possible value if I were tending goats, but nothing elsewise. I guess I missed the point continually and consistently. But that's what my peers were doing, so that's what I did. My parents would go to synagogue once a year for the High Holidays.

Q: Where did your family fall politically, or did they?

DAVIDOW: Well, I think they were Democrats. They were clearly on the liberal side. But then again, it wasn't a very politicized atmosphere in my house. My father was interested in public affairs, and one of my first memories was sitting on his lap when he came home from work to read the Boston Traveler. At a very young age, I could identify the photos of the columnists, Drew Pearson, and the others. In my first year of high school, a friend got me involved in campaigning for a young Harvard student who was running for Brookline town council. I remember spending a frigid October afternoon delivering campaign material to houses and deciding that I did not want to do it again. It was a bad introduction to active politics, and 40 years later, I told Mike Dukakis that that experience had turned me off of campaigning. But I always maintained a keen interest in politics, and, of course, I came of age in the Kennedy years.

Q: Well, did you -- when you had free time, what'd you do as a kid?

DAVIDOW: Oh, the, the usual kid things, you know, kick around the neighborhood. I guess from the age of, seven or so I'd get home from school or on a weekend and I would go running around with my friends in the neighborhood, doing the kinds of things that I don't think the parents let the kids do now. We lived in a suburban area, but there were

some woods nearby and we would go and play cowboys and Indians. We would go by ourselves to the Saturday morning matinees down at Coolidge Corner, which was about a mile from my house. Just hang around doing nothing particularly purposeful. I'm always struck by people who spent their youth learning the violin or how to tap dance or speak six languages. I always feel like I *(laughs),* I wasted a great deal of time in my life.

Q: Mm. You weren't a young violin virtuoso?

DAVIDOW: No. Totally without talent. I think I tried once or twice on one or two instruments and the teachers were willing to pay me to stop.

Q: Well, just to get a picture of the neighborhood. I take it this wasn't a gang area or something like that. And I'm not using the term gang in a pejorative sense, but you belonged to a group or something like that?

DAVIDOW: Well, there were, like in any school, cliques, I'm sure, but no, organized gangs or anything like that did not exist.

Q: How about -- I'm losing my train of thought here -- what about school? I mean were there any subjects in say, elementary school that you were pretty good or particularly unhappy with?

DAVIDOW: I always was very good at the soft stuff, like history and English, although I remember in eighth grade every week we had to produce an exercise given to us by the teacher, and it had to be absolutely perfect. And if you didn't get every comma and semicolon -- these were grammar exercises -- she put a big red X on them and you would have to write the whole paper over, frequently many times until they were letter perfect. And sometimes this would take me many hours of after school detention to get it all right. And *(laughs)* I don't think I particularly learned anything, but I do remember that kind of discipline coming from the teacher.

Q: How about arithmetic?

DAVIDOW: Arithmetic, I was OK until I got to high school, and then I could never really make out algebra. Geometry was a little easier for me because I could draw a line. But second year of algebra was just a fog and I never tried calculus.

Q: Did --

DAVIDOW: As were all sciences. I did not do well in biology. I guess I took chemistry, but if I did I probably just scraped by.

Q: In elementary school, did any teachers stand out in your mind you remember?

DAVIDOW: Not so much in elementary school. The elementary school teachers were essentially wasp spinsters. There were some who I really liked a lot and some I didn't. It

was a fairly pleasant environment as I look back on it now. I'm sure at the time I had all the kinds of problems that kids have, getting the work done, doing my homework, not screwing up in class and stuff like that. But I was essentially a good kid, not a real problem for my parents or for my teachers.

Q: Well then, where'd you go to high school?

DAVIDOW: Went to Brookline High School, which was the high school for the entire town of Brookline. And very large. Probably, 1,500, 2,000 kids.

Q: Oh boy. Did you feel a bit overwhelmed there at first or?

DAVIDOW: Maybe at first I probably felt overwhelmed because the kids that had been my best friends in grammar school got into a different clique than I did. They were a lot more advanced in dealing with girls. It was a lot easier for them and they fell into the most popular group. I was sort of a shy guy and socially awkward. Like all teens, I felt like I was going through the worst of hell, but, as one grows up, I realize that I had it pretty easy. After a year or so I found a group of people who I would hang around with. I got involved in student activities and would wind up as chairman of the sophomore dance or head of the clean-up crew or something like that. I was a responsible citizen, generally hanging around with kids very much like myself. Brookline High School had a justifiable reputation as being one of the best public schools in the country. I was aware of the reputation, but I don't think I really took advantage of what was offered academically. I did have a few memorable teachers. I especially recall a history teacher named Frank Smith who was superb, funny, open minded, interested in the world, and generally tolerated me.

Q: During your high school years, did the outside world intrude much? Far as would you keep up with the news or concerned about things?

DAVIDOW: Well, I remember always keeping up with the news. I graduated from high school in 1961. And still, we were very much children of the '50s. So all through elementary school and high school of course we would have our air raid drills and be concerned about, in a general way, about communism and Cold War. I think I probably paid more attention to the news than most of my friends. We always had a newspaper in the house and watching the evening news was essential. So I think I was better informed than most of my peers.

It was in high school that, you know, I probably became, became much more aware and then more so in college because of Kennedy, the Cuban Missile crisis, and the civil rights movement.

Q: Well, in high school did you get involved with things like debates or any of this type of activity?

DAVIDOW: No, I think I was on the school newspaper, maybe the school yearbook, but that was all pretty tame. I was not involved in sports, which was always a troubling thing for me. I was never athletic. I lacked both the physical and mental discipline to really dedicate myself to a sport. And this was difficult because I am -- I was, and I still am, a big guy. I look like the kind of guy who should be on a football team and I was not. I was embarrassed about that: tough for a kid, you know, not to be involved with athletics.

Q: Well, did you find yourself using the various museums and other things, the history and all of the Boston area? Was this part of your growing up?

DAVIDOW: It wasn't so much that we visited the museums and the other sites that often. Of course, there were the usual school trips and my parents would take us here and there. However. there was something about growing up in Boston that created a sense of history and stoked my interest in it. We simply assumed that Boston was the center of it all. Which is interesting, because as I've grown older my own chauvinism still sometimes surprises me when I reflect on the fact that there are other cities -- Philadelphia, for instance -- that have an equal claim. I'm often *(laughs)* amazed by Boston's conceit. But as I say, we were very much aware of being grounded in all things Boston. Very much Red Sox and Celtics fan. I even went to Boston Braves games. I remember when I was -- I guess the Braves left Boston to go to Milwaukee in '52.

Q: Yeah, I forgot about the Braves even.

DAVIDOW: Yeah, but the Braves actually had their ballpark in what is now the Boston University stadium. And that was within walking distance of my house. It was no more than a couple of miles away. And I remember when I was maybe eight-years-old going with some friends to a Boston Braves game. I have a six-year-old granddaughter in Los Angeles. I can't imagine in two years telling her, "OK, well, go off to Dodger Stadium. We'll see you this afternoon or tonight." It was a different time.

Q: Well, were you aware of some of the universities around there? Because the place is -- MIT, Harvard, Boston, Boston College --

DAVIDOW: Definitely. Harvard was very much something that we were all aware of all of the time. And we were of course aware of the other universities as well. But not a day went by in which somebody from Harvard would get quoted in the newspaper. It certainly was a part of the topography of Boston. And became even more so when Kennedy was elected president.

Q: What about the Cold War? Were you getting a strong dose of the Cold War mentality or?

DAVIDOW: Oh, definitely. In the early years when the Korean War was still on with the air raid drills in elementary school, and what was in the daily newspapers. Every day that was the story. I do remember the McCarthy years and I remember watching the McCarthy-Army hearings? I remember one of my friends in elementary school was one

of the few non-Jewish kids. His father was a well-known Unitarian minister in Boston, very liberal. And he was speared in the press as a communist sympathizer (probably believed in fluoride in the water or something equally dangerous). And I remember my parents saying, "Well, he's still your friend. You don't pay any attention to that." And I think we were all appalled by McCarthy. He reminded my parents of the hate mongers that they had grown up with like Father Coughlin, Gerald Smith and Father Feeney. But the other side of it was Cardinal Cushing. And Cardinal Cushing was very respected.

Q: Yes, I can remember hearing him recite -- I'm not a Catholic -- but every morning you'd catch him, in his heavy Boston accent, reciting I guess it was the Rosary or something, which is something you'll never forget.

DAVIDOW: Yeah. Well, that's the world that we lived in, and because my parents had experienced hostility in that world, they created the very safe and comfortable environment that I grew up in. And I think probably, although I never put it this way, it also meant that -- even though I had lived a very sheltered life -- I certainly did not intend to live a sheltered life as an adult. There was no question in my mind, for instance, that I would go away to university, rather than stay in Boston. And when I finished university there was no question that I would go to graduate school even farther away. And then go on a study year to India and join the Foreign Service. I think the security of the home and the community made me self-confident enough to want to break out in ways that just had never occurred to my parents, or were certainly not available to them. They were not always happy with my choices -- particularly the year I spent in India -- but they accepted what I was doing.

Q: Did you find that as you were in high school and the news was coming through, that you were taking sort of opposite sides from your mother and father? You know, the normal breaking out of the kid trying his wings and that sort of thing?

DAVIDOW: No, I don't think so. They weren't particularly political. I think probably looking back they were generally fairly liberal both in politics and the way they treated me. And no, there wasn't a great deal of youthful rebellion actually. I was a good kid. I don't think that I was spoiled, and my home life was not difficult. I started working as a soda jerk three nights a week when I was 13 and I helped my father in his business every Saturday morning all through high school. It was not a hardscrabble life, but it was not one of wealth or privilege.

Q: Well, then you graduated what year from high school?

DAVIDOW: '61.

Q: Were you at all caught up with the feeling that many people had in the election of Kennedy in 1960?

DAVIDOW: Oh, definitely he was Boston's boy. Politics was another sport for us to follow -- like basketball or baseball. We grew up with the stories of colorful Boston

politicians like Mayor Curley. We followed the local politicians. The more outrageous they were, the more we liked them. They were a source of humor and disbelief, but also of civil pride. We had guys in South Boston like Knuckles Mahoney, or a name something like that. And these were local ward bosses. I remember a Jewish state assemblyman from Dorchester named Julius Andelman. Very early in the '50s, one of his constituents became ill in Florida, and he made a big thing of arranging for this person to be flown back from Florida. And as she was being taken off the plane in the stretcher -- he was so anxious for what we now call a photo opportunity, that he ran up the stairs, and in doing he jostled the ambulance attendants and they dropped the woman off the side of the stairway. That *(laughs)* sort of summarized local politics in Boston for me.

Q: Oh boy. God. Well, in high school, did you find yourself concentrating or being more comfortable in certain fields of study than others?

DAVIDOW: Again, it was the easier things like English and history, the subjects that you could get by in, if you had a good memory and good language skills. Whereas, the tougher stuff -- or at least tougher for me, like the sciences and mathematics, they were very difficult for me.

Q: Did you have any idea, I mean, were people saying, "Well, what are you going to be when you grow up?" and that sort of thing?

DAVIDOW: It was just taken as a given that all the people that I grew up with and myself were going to go to college. I mean that was not a bone of contention. It was not an area of doubt—as it had been in my parents' generation, whether they could go or could afford it or what have you. I know that my mother regretted until the day she died that her father could not afford to send her to college during the depression.

But everybody I know planned on going to college. And then when I wound up there, I had no specific goal. I sort of fell into the liberal arts because by that time I realized that I didn't have the mindset or skills for something like engineering or the sciences. I majored in history.

Q: Well, when you were approaching college, you've got all these ones nearby, but you wanted to get away. Where did you go and why?

DAVIDOW: I wasn't anywhere near the top of my class. I was a good sort of B student. I wanted to go away. I applied for the University of Massachusetts in Amherst. At that time there was only one University of Massachusetts. Now there are several.

Q: Yeah.

DAVIDOW: And I think one of the factors was that the tuition was $100 a semester. And that was doable for my family. We were not poor, but we did not have a whole lot of money. I think I probably could have gotten into Boston University or Northeastern or

someplace like that. But that would have meant living at home, and I wanted to go away. I was accepted at UMass (University of Massachusetts), and the price was right.

Q: So you were there from when-to-when?

DAVIDOW: '61 to '65.

Q: What was it like in those days?

DAVIDOW: Well, it was interesting because UMass, like the other state universities in New England, was going through a period of tremendous development because of the baby boomers. We were just hitting the college years. And as you probably know, the state universities in New England, and this applied to Connecticut and University of Maine and so forth -- had essentially been agricultural colleges in the rural areas of the individual states. Because there was so much private education available in Massachusetts, it wasn't until the baby boomers -- started to matriculate that these universities grew. In the 1950's, UMass was still essentially an agricultural college with maybe three or 4,000 students. By the time I got there in 1961, it was a booming university that over the next 10 years, tripled or quadrupled in size. So it was exciting. There was construction going on everywhere at the university. It was really a good place to be. And I got very much involved in student activities at the university. I spent a whole lot more time on the newspaper, for instance, than in any of my classes. It was a much bigger environment, a larger -- much larger world than Brookline had been. But still, it was manageable, or I felt it was manageable.

Q: What subjects were you taking?

DAVIDOW: Well, I took a lot of history, again, because I was interested in it and because I found it easy and there were excellent teachers available. I remember Howard Quint, Jack Thompson, David Leonard. These weren't famous men, but they were superb teachers. I also took sociology, anthropology, psychology, and others of what I call the "soft" subjects. Back then there were more requirements than I think exist now at universities. We had a couple of years of science, had to take foreign language, had to take physical education. I was in one of the very last classes in which the boys all had to take at least two years of ROTC (Reserve Officers' Training Corps). And then at the end of those two years, a percentage would stay in and later become officers. But it was mandatory that all boys had to take the first two years. Which I *hated*. Because it was a, a waste of time. We had to wear heavy woolen uniforms the entire year. We got one uniform. And so about three or four days a week we would have to put our uniform on to go to class. Except in my second year, I figured out I was one of the biggest guys. And I waited until the very end and watched the two or three other guys of my size go and get their uniform. When I got there they told me they were out of my size uniform. So for most of my second year, my sophomore year, I didn't not have to wear a uniform. It was a small triumph, but important to me.

Q: Oh yes (laughs). Well, did -- you were at the beginning of the '60s. Were there any movements during that time you were in college that affected you?

DAVIDOW: Yes, one of the guys in my dorm recruited me to write for the school newspaper. There weren't a whole lot of volunteers, and I started off as a sports reporter. By my sophomore year, I was the sports editor- again, the competition was not overwhelming. And in my junior year, I was the editor-in-chief. It sounds impressive, but, in reality the editor-in-chief was the guy who had to get up very early on cold New England mornings and go down to Hamilton Newell's print shop in Amherst to proofread the paper. Newell was from an old Yankee family and spoke with a distinctive twang. The typesetters were deaf mutes, as that was an occupation that their schools had encouraged them to take up, for one reason because print shops were overwhelmingly noisy because of the linotype machines.

I was editor in l963-64. That year was the beginning of the anti-Vietnam protests, the height of the civil rights movement, and, of course, the Kennedy assassination. And I was involved, usually more as an observer than as an activist. But I think people thought I was something of an agitator. I am embarrassed to admit that I started wearing black turtlenecks and smoking a pipe (tobacco not pot) and probably looked more the part of a counterculture guy than I was. And I think a lot of people thought I was, you know, sort of a rabble rouser. But I really wasn't. We had an all-white South African woman's hockey team come to the university. And some students used the occasion to protest apartheid. It got to be quite a scandal, and I supported the students strongly. The dean of women nearly blew a gasket. However, I wasn't always on the right side of history. At the end of my sophomore year, in mid- '62, some writers from The Atlantic Monthly came to the university. And they wanted to interview student leaders on the growing protests. When they asked me, I basically said, "Well, you know, there's something to it, but I don't think they'll be much impact. … I think things will probably continue pretty much the way they are." And of course I missed it, I missed it entirely because by the mid-'60s, the country was being ripped apart. But so much for being prescient. I wasn't, obviously.

On the newspaper we were always so short of staff that we pretty much printed anything that people would bring in. There was one female student who would write a column of drivel every week. She used her initials which, like mine, were JD as the only identification of her pieces, and I was concerned that people would think that I was writing the stuff. But I could never bring myself to fire her or to insist that should use a full name byline. I remember a couple of guys who wrote op-eds about Vietnam. I think we were all sort of intimidated by them because they seemed so much smarter than the rest of us. One of them was a guy named Paul Theroux, who became a very famous -- and still is -- writer.

During spring break of 1963 I went with the editor of the Amherst town newspaper to North Carolina, because there were a lot of kids from Amherst College and some from UMass, who were going down to participate in sit-ins in a small North Carolina town. So we went down for that. And that turned out to be a very formative experience, because

we ran into a lot of trouble and got kicked around by rednecks .It was frightening. But it was a very interesting experience. All in all, I was probably more involved in what was happening in terms of civil rights, in terms of Vietnam than most other people, although I don't portray myself as a great activist.

Q: How would you put the black population of the university at that time?

DAVIDOW: Oh, it was a handful, very few.

Q: So it wasn't really much of an issue at all, I mean as far as a group you could point to.

DAVIDOW: Not at an issue so much at the university, but certainly it was a national question that was on our minds on a daily basis.

Q: Had busing started in Boston yet?

DAVIDOW: Busing was a big issue, I think -- I can't remember the dates, but yeah, that was a very big issue. We were all very much aware of it.

Q: Well, did you find, looking back, that you were, particularly with the school newspaper, this was at least the beginning of the era of the younger generation tweaking the nose of the older generation. Don't trust anybody over 30. Was this part of your modus operandi?

DAVIDOW: No. There was some of that, but I was far more establishment than, than I might have appeared. And I wasn't particularly confrontational. Although on the newspaper we would get into it with the administration. But I was not motivated by a desire to duke it out with the older generation or a belief that they were all horribly corrupt. I wasn't on a mission, and, in fact, have always been reluctant to cast myself with those who are totally convinced of their rectitude and correctness.

Q: Was there much of a social divide that you found, or was there even any connect between -- you had Smith and Amherst College there. I mean were these just different worlds?

DAVIDOW: They were different worlds. First, it wasn't easy to get back and forth between the colleges. And certainly, when I first got to UMass, the town of Amherst was much more oriented toward Amherst College than to the University of Massachusetts, for a couple of reasons. Amherst College is physically in the center of the town of Amherst. The students at Amherst certainly had a whole lot more to spend than the students of the university, even though there were more of the latter. Most of the stores in town would have a large Amherst College banner and a much smaller UMass banner in their windows even though by that time the University had four times as many students as the College. Amherst was the big dog. I actually got to know the town of Amherst better than most students because for a while, including one whole summer, I had a job on the Amherst Record, the local newspaper. I covered zoning board hearings, local disputes about

parking and other small town stuff. I still love to read small town newspapers, even from places that I've never visited.

Q: You said you were a shy boy in school earlier on. How about girls?

DAVIDOW: Well, you know, I was interested. I probably wasn't -- I certainly wasn't as successful as I wanted to be.

Q: Yeah (laughs). Join the club.

DAVIDOW: Yeah. And, and, you know, I had -- I never really had a fulltime girlfriend until maybe my senior year for a period of time. I certainly was not the lothario that we all were striving to be. I met my wife at the end of my sophomore year (her junior year) and we dated for several weeks, but broke up at the beginning of the following school year and didn't really see each other for six years until we re-connected when I came to Washington to join the Foreign Service and Joan was working for PanAm there.

Q: Oh yeah (laughs). You had this taste of ROTC as you're getting ready to graduate. What was the situation military-wise?

DAVIDOW: All of us lived with the constant knowledge and concern about the draft. I did not want to go into the military. One of the impetus for me to go to grad school was -- at that time, now I'm talking about 1965, -it would change later - anybody in grad school could still get a deferment. So it made sense to me to go to grad school, if for no other reason than to get that deferment. And also because I was not trained to do anything else. I had four years of university education and I really didn't have enough knowledge or skill top put two sticks together to make a cross.--

Q: (laughs)

DAVIDOW: -- to earn a living, you know.

Q: Yeah.

DAVIDOW: A couple of years later the draft changed. People already in grad school were grandfathered in to their deferments. But individuals who were graduating college and wanted to go to grad school could not get a student deferment. So I probably kicked around grad school longer than I had to just to maintain my deferment.

Q: So where did you go to grad school?

DAVIDOW: I went to the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis. There were a couple of reasons why I went there. First, in between my sophomore and junior year in college I got an opportunity to spend two weeks at the University of Minnesota School of Journalism, which every summer ran a program for college newspaper editors. So that was probably the first time I had been on an airplane, and I flew out to Minneapolis and I

thought it was a really nice place. But if you know Minneapolis you know it's a nice place for about --

Q: During the summer.

DAVIDOW: The summer.

Q: (laughs)

DAVIDOW: Most of the university was on one side of the Mississippi and some was on the other side. And every day I would walk across the Mississippi River two or three times. And for a kid from Massachusetts just the idea of crossing the Mississippi was something big. So when it came time to apply to grad school I applied to the University of Minnesota to enter its American Studies program. I was accepted. The other reason I went there, and what made it possible for me to do so, was that I got a job as a residence hall counselor, which gave me room and board and a small salary, which was about equal to the tuition that I would have to pay -- in other words a free ride. So I went out to Minneapolis.

Q: Well now, at this point had the Foreign Service ever crossed your radar?

DAVIDOW: I was aware of the Foreign Service, I'm sure, from high school time. I knew about diplomats, I was interested in international affairs. Now, did I think I was going to become a diplomat? No. That probably developed while I was in grad school. Then in my second year in Minneapolis, I got a job teaching American and world history in a local junior college and I took grad classes at night. And during that year I applied for a program, which the University of Minnesota had run for many years, with an Indian university called Osmania University in Hyderabad, India. Hyderabad now is one of those hot Indian cities, like Bangalore with --

Q: Yeah, it's sort of the Silicon Valley of India.

DAVIDOW: But back then it wasn't. But I won the competition and I went and spent a year in India. And that I think was a very formative experience in the sense that I realized I really could cope with living overseas. It was something I could do. Also, I visited a friend of a friend who was working for USAID at the embassy in New Delhi and he took me to the snack bar for a hamburger, and, considering my usual diet in India, I thought that was pretty hot stuff. And I wound up taking the Foreign Service exam in Calcutta of all places in late 1968.

Q: Well, how did India, Hyderabad -- what was it like there at the time?

DAVIDOW: Well, it was interesting. I went without any specific academic plans. My idea was I was going to take both undergraduate and graduate courses. The program that I was on was not particularly rigorous in terms of demanding academic outcome. But when I got to the university, I discovered that it was on strike. And it stayed on strike for most

of the year. So the few classes that I did go to were pretty poor because at that time, and maybe still now, what the Indian professors did was get a hold of the only copy of the textbook that was available outside of the library and they would read it to the students in class. And so that was pretty boring. So I spent a fair amount of time traveling around India during that year. It was a time when a lot of American and European hippies were flooding India, but I had very little to do with them. I traveled to go to Fulbright meetings (I had a small Fulbright grant) or to visit other Fulbrighters where they were studying or working. Travel was always an adventure, and not always pleasant.

Q: Yeah.

DAVIDOW: I also got a job to fill my time and to make some spending money. I taught elementary school in the Hyderabad Public School for Boys. This had been the old pukka British elementary school for Hyderabad. By the time I was there in the late '60s, most of the students were Indian, many the sons of military officers or civil servants who got transferred around the country. The headmaster was a rather formidable Christian from Kerala in southwestern India where there was a strong Christian community. And I would go there almost every day and teach classes. And that kept me busy, but, I wasn't academically achieving anything either as a student or as a teacher. But in November, I took a train up to Calcutta and took the Foreign Service exam. I remember because I had to make my way to the consulate in Calcutta. And the night before I stayed in the YMCA (Young Men's Christian Association) in Calcutta. Previously, I had stayed in New Delhi in a YMCA there. It was cheap and clean . But the one in Calcutta was literally the "black hole" and for the only time in my life, before or since, I woke up with a whole bunch of bedbug bites.

Q: Oh my God.

DAVIDOW: So I went to take the exam in the consulate, and the guy who was proctoring it, I think he was the GSO (General Services Officer), invited the people who were taking the exam, myself and three or four Peace Corps types, to his apartment for lunch where he served us franks and beans. And if anything convinced me that the Foreign Service was for me it was sitting in Calcutta eating franks and --

Q: (laughs)

DAVIDOW: But as we sat there after lunch -- I was so naive -- a bug crawled out from my shirt and I found that rather interesting. And I said to everybody, "Gee, I wonder if that's one of the bedbugs that bit me last night." In retrospect, I now realize bedbugs are not that big, and that one probably should not call attention to such things on your own body. But this guy jumped up. He had had several gins and tonic during lunch and he yelled for his for his servants and insisted that they spray Flit all around room. They tried to spray me as well. *(laughs)* I wouldn't let them. But that was, that was my very --

Q: (laughs)

DAVIDOW: -- inauspicious beginning in the Foreign Service. Big bug bites, being sprayed with Flit, franks and beans. It was a memorable day.

Q: Oh boy. Well, did you pass the written?

DAVIDOW: I passed the written and I then went back to Minneapolis for another year of grad school. I had gotten my master's before I went to India. And so technically, I was a PhD student when I went back. This would be '68-'69. But, I realized I wasn't going to get a PhD - there was no way I was going to spend, three or four years researching some unimportant topic and writing about it. So I started looking for a job. And about the only thing I was suitable for was -- once again, junior college teaching. And during the '68, '69 year, I applied for jobs. I was offered a job up in Ely, Minnesota. Ely, Minnesota is -- if you watch the weather reports they'll say, "The coldest place in, in the United States today is Eli, Minnesota."

Q: (laughs)

DAVIDOW: And I remember the lady who interviewed me came down to Minneapolis. She thought one of the great selling points for Ely was that you could go snowshoeing eight months a year. I didn't think that was so great, but I didn't tell her that because I wanted a job, any job. But ultimately, I went to Chicago and took the oral exam, which I remember very clearly. And then, a few months later, I got a letter telling me that I was in the Foreign Service. 1969 was a very interesting year, because my class, the 87th, which began in June, was the first class of that entire fiscal year. And it was the usual Foreign Service personnel screw-up. Most of the people were like myself who had been accepted and told to show up on a given date. But, there were a large number of people in the class, about 15, who were told that they could only get in if they agreed that their first assignment would be Vietnam. And you can imagine that those people were pretty pissed when they came and found that there were other people in the class who had not been given that ultimatum. At the end of the class, I indeed was assigned to the CORDS (Civil Operations and Revolutionary Developmental Support) program in Vietnam. And probably, you know, a day or so later when I sobered up, I went to see the personnel people, because the guys who had come in knowing that they were going to go to Vietnam on the CORDS program were getting some kind of per diem from AID (Agency for International Development). I remember going and seeing a lady in personnel, and she was quite angry at me because I asked that since I was going to spend a year in Washington studying Vietnamese, could I get per diem as well? And she said, "We don't have any money for you. We don't know why you were assigned to CORDS. AID has not given State enough money to cover the costs." -- I think there were five of us who got that assignment. And I remember going back to FSI (Foreign Service Institute) and talking to the counselor for my class. And he suggested I do nothing. But within a few days the assignment to Vietnam was broken because of budgetary concerns. Then I got my assignment to Guatemala as a consular officer and stayed at FSI for about five months studying Spanish. But I came very close to going to Vietnam.

Q: To take you back, do you recall any of the questions that you were asked during the oral interview?

DAVIDOW: No, I don't recall the questions so much. But I remember the scene very well. It was sort of comical because one of the three FSO's (Foreign Service Officer) on the interviewing panel .had a health problem. He could not control the blinking in one of his eyes. His eyelid would go down like an eyeshade and then come back up. It wasn't fast blinking. So he looked like he was winking at me. And this --

Q: (laughs)

DAVIDOW: -- I found this disconcerting and I didn't know whether he was winking at me to say, "Gee, I'm on your side and that's a good answer."

Q: (laughs)

DAVIDOW: Or God knows what. I had had some experience teaching by that time, and I realized -- this is a horrible thing to say, but even then I knew that often it doesn't matter what you say, but how you say it. And I remember them asking me one question and I responded by saying, "Well, there are three parts to that answer." And as I blathered on -- I can't remember what I said, or even if I said anything intelligent - I remember holding up my fingers, one, two, three. And I gave the illusion of having an organized mind. And I could see that they were sort of impressed by that. And again, I had no idea whether the answer was intelligent or not. But, if you sort of make believe you're organized that can be helpful. So I passed the oral, and a couple months later I got the, the letter from the Foreign Service. But, the letter had a paragraph missing, so it was really unclear what they were telling me. Was I in? Was I out? And I had to call them and figure it out. And in June of '69 I went to Washington. And as I said, I was in the first Foreign Service class of that fiscal year. We were a pretty tame group. But the classes that came immediately after us were more imbued with the protest of the time. And there were people in those classes who were upset about Vietnam, upset about the way the Foreign Service was treating them, so forth and so on. We were sort of the last well-mannered class of that era.

Q: When did you come in?

DAVIDOW: June of 1969.

Q: OK. Well, I think this is a good place to stop. And we'll pick this up in June of 1969.

Interview, March 7, 2012

Q: OK. You know, a question I forgot to, to ask before. In growing up in your Boston period and Minnesota and all, did you ever run into any discrimination against Jews or not? Or was this no longer really a factor?

DAVIDOW: It was no longer really a factor. You know, once in a while very rarely one would hear a comment or something like that. But I never felt -- I never felt personally discriminated against or that it was a factor in my life or my career in the Foreign Service.

Q: Yeah, I got a little touch of you might say discrimination having the name Kennedy and going to Boston University. You know, there are people who sort of, for obvious reasons, assumed that I was Irish, which I'm not. And you could see that they were sort of in a way putting me down or something. Just a little of that. But Boston --

DAVIDOW: Yeah. But maybe also with that name you were privy to conversations that I would not have been privy to. Maybe you had a different view of anti-Semitism than I had.

Q: Well, I remember I was a grad student and I remember one of my mates there was an older guy, was not a student. And he got mad at one of the other boarders who was Jewish and called him a sheeny. I'd never heard the term before. But this man was, you know, straight out of the Irish, whatever you want to call it, background.

DAVIDOW: Look, it was in the in the air -- the wallpaper of sorts of that time. It probably still is in some parts. But I do not think it really had an impact upon me in a way that it would have impacted on my parents' generation. I do know some of my Foreign Service contemporaries who ran into anti-Semitism in the Service from the old Wasps, but for the most the terms of engagement in State were fairly civilized, no matter what people might have thought privately.

Q: Yeah. OK, well let's come to the Foreign Service.

DAVIDOW: OK.

Q: You'd taken the exam and you came into an A100 course, basic officer course, when?

DAVIDOW: In June of 1969.

Q: What was your training like?

DAVIDOW: It was horrible. It was *(laughs)* boring as hell. It was a succession of four or five speakers a day from various parts of the department. Once in a while there'd be an excellent speaker or a fascinating topic, but most of it was boring and full of acronyms. In a way, we were also learning a new language -- Department speak. Two of the phrases that the Department speakers repeatedly used were, "keep a low profile" and "do this in order to get a leg up," meaning to advance in one's career. And there was a connection between the two. Since I was bored out of my mind and was not listening to the speakers, I drew a logo for the class, which was dachshund lifting its leg. And it said, "Keep a low profile and get a leg up."

Q: Did any of the people in your class sort of stand out later in your memory?

DAVIDOW: Of course, I made friends with a lot of the people in the class, and, I would run into them from time-to-time during my career, but, to my memory never served with any of them overseas. What I do recall is that the three or four guys in the class who I think everybody looked at as those who had what it takes to reach the top of the Service because of their education, experience or seriousness did not go as far, at least in terms of promotions, as I had expected. I may have reached higher than anyone else in the class, and I was the one drawing pictures of urinating dachshunds. I worry what that says about the Foreign Service.

Q: Well, as you were doing this did you begin to develop a picture of what you wanted and what you didn't want?

DAVIDOW: Well, I definitely wanted to be a Political Officer. That was my predilection coming in. Of course in those days you did not have to choose your cone even before you got into the Service. The only distinction was between the USIS Officer and the State Officer. From what I could see and I could pick up, the idea of being a political officer and basically spending my time schmoozing and then writing reports was close to my journalistic background and appealed to me.

Q: Did you have the infamous consular course with Alice Curran, by any chance?

DAVIDOW: I can't remember who taught the consular course, but I obviously did take it. It was better than A100 because we were learning very specific things that we had to know. We had to study the regulations and then deal with the test questions which I'm sure they are still using about the citizenship of a child born to one American parent and one foreign parent on an American boat off the coast of Guam, and things like that. I liked doing that a lot better just sitting there listening to boring people bloviate.

Q: Yeah. I remember getting the lectures on the commercial side of things. And they had to have dragged out the most boring person you can imagine to talk to us about it.

DAVIDOW: Well, let's face it. I am sure when a request came in from FSI to a given office to send someone over to speak they weren't necessarily going to pick the sharpest pencil in the pack, which was unfortunate, but I think that's how things work.

Q: What about area as far as where you wanted to go?

DAVIDOW: I was totally open and, and would have gone anywhere actually. I got the assignment to Guatemala after the assignment to Viet Nam fell through for budgetary reasons. I can't even remember whether I had requested it or even if we had that opportunity to request at that time. I would have been happy to go anywhere, although I really did not want to have to spend a year or more learning a hard language.

Q: How about India? Did you want to go back there?

DAVIDOW: I would have gone back, I just can't recall whether I requested it.

Q: Well, how'd you feel about Guatemala?

DAVIDOW: Oh well, after having Vietnam hanging over my head, Guatemala seemed like a good alternative. I was dating my wife- to- be at that time and, if I had gone to Vietnam, I don't think we would have gotten married. But when the assignment was changed to Guatemala, we decided to get married and had our wedding very quickly. But then our departure for Guatemala was delayed because along the way in my travels I had really hurt my back, and had a bad disc problem. There was a nurse assigned to FSI, and she saw me hobbling into the building everyday. She blew the whistle on me. And so my departure was delayed for about two months while I had to convince the Department that I was in OK shape which, in reality, I wasn't. So about a year later I had to have a disc removed in Guatemala.

Q: Just a little about your wife. How did you meet her and what was her background?

DAVIDOW: I met her at the University of Massachusetts. We had dated at the end of my sophomore and her junior year. After she graduated, I saw her only once in five years. I knew through mutual friends that she was in Washington. So I looked her up on the day I came to Washington for the Foreign Service. In the meantime, she had gone off to the Peace Corps in Africa and done other things. We got back together. We had not been that serious in college, (or, at least I hadn't been), but I think we had done a lot of growing up in the interim and quickly became serious when we met in Washington. We got married on November 1, 1969, about four months after we reconnected in Washington.

Q: So you were in Guatemala from when-to-when?

DAVIDOW: From about March 1970 to mid-1972.

Q: Were you rotational or did you have a specific job?

DAVIDOW: I was rotational and my first assignment was going to be in USIS. But the weekend after I arrived our Labor Attaché, Sean Holly, was kidnapped by leftists guerillas. This was about a year after our own ambassador had been killed on the street, and a few weeks before the German Ambassador was kidnapped and killed. Fortunately, he was released and immediately left the country, which opened a hole in the Political Section. So I spent my first six months in the Political Section, which was a great opportunity because I had very good people to work with. The chief of the section was Larry Pezzullo, later ambassador to Uruguay, who was a just a delight to work for. The ambassador was Nathanial Davis and I did a lot of political reporting, much of it from newspapers. But Pezzullo was good about bringing me to meetings and letting me meet the country's political players, some of whom were real thugs, but interesting thugs. I was also responsible for the monthly death chart, tracking the number of political murders in Guatemala per month. The report would say that the number's going up or the

number's going down, so forth and so on. It was a pretty stupid exercise -- the violence was endemic and horrific and was not changing over a month to month period. But I did that and it was a good experience.

Q: Who was shooting at whom and why? And what was sort of the situation in Guatemala when you arrived?

DAVIDOW: What you had in Guatemala in the '60s was a war between the government, which was pretty right wing, and left-wing guerillas, very much influenced by Castro and supported by him. And of course in those days of the Cold War, the U.S. was pretty much completely on the side of the government, though we continued to advocate for more respect of human rights. We were assisting the government in many ways, and the ties between the military and police and the CIA were very strong. There was a lot of violence, a really ugly scene. After I left Guatemala, it actually got much worse, because the guerillas went out into the countryside and proselytized among the 50% of the population, which is desperately poor Indians. Guerillas had essentially been urban bourgeoisie. This began a rural war, which the government responded to with nearly genocidal repression. But while I was there it was the battle between the urban guerillas and the government.

Q: As a Political Officer, what were you doing?

DAVIDOW: I think a lot of what I was doing was probably irrelevant in, terms of the really important struggles going on in Guatemala, that I just explained. I met with political types and wrote the usual reports, MEMCON's, and airgrams. I was also involved in the usual chores of political officers, such as welcoming visitors, dealing with CODELs, and the other flotsam and jetsam of the political officer's job.

Q: Who was your ambassador?

DAVIDOW: The ambassador for the first year that I was there was Nathanial Davis, a superb officer. He was a young man with a young family, probably in his mid-forties. After the first year, he went to Chile as ambassador. And that worked out well for me because having worked in the Political Section he knew me and when a position opened in Chile for a junior officer in 1972, I got that job. (People often think that in the Foreign Service assignments are based on "who you know." In reality they are more often based on "who knows you." He knew me and I was fortunate in this instance. He was a man of great integrity and brilliance. He later ran into difficulties with Kissinger when he was Assistant Secretary for African Affairs and was exiled to our embassy in Switzerland because he did not want to get us involved in the Angolan civil war by supporting one of the wearing groups. He was then replaced by another man for whom I had tremendous respect, William Bowdler. Both men were very old Yankee ambassadors, very decent people with superb wives who were very concerned about the welfare of the embassy. He had a great career and was ultimately Assistant Secretary for Latin America and was trying to work out relations with the new Sandinista government in Nicaragua when the Reagan administration came in. They saw him as dangerously soft on the communists

and literally gave him three hours to clean out his desk. And as far as I know, never stepped back into the Department for the rest of his life.

Q: That was one of the more disgraceful changes of administration. It still rankles.

DAVIDOW: It really does. Here was a man who was doing everything he could, a real patriot and they treated him like dirt.

Q: Well, all right, here you are a Junior Officer. And later you were obviously going on to be an ambassador three times. Were you putting in your metal briefcase this is how you should do it or how you shouldn't do it, or?

DAVIDOW: I wasn't that calculating, but I certainly learned a lot that helped me later from Pezzullo and Dan Clare. Both were really very well schooled in the art of being a political officer, how to get information, how to assemble it, how to write reports, etc. Probably most of the reports weren't read, but I certainly learned a lot in Guatemala on how to do things. Also, it was just great fun. Pezzullo was a superb conversationalist and had a story for every topic. He had grown up poor in New York and clearly had a real sense of grievance about how the poor and the powerless could be mistreated. I don't think I had met anyone with the kinds of experiences of those fellows in the political section until I started to work with them when I was 26.

Q: Did you feel there was much attention to what's going on in Guatemala back in Washington at the time?

DAVIDOW: It was not on the top of the list of anyone in Washington except maybe the desk officer, but there was some interest because it was seen as a hot spot in our confrontation with the Soviets and the Cubans. There was certainly a lot of CIA action and a fairly large station. There had been an important CIA presence there for decades. Remember the CIA had overthrown a President of Guatemala.

Q: That was Árbenz, was it?

DAVIDOW: Right. The CIA was at the height of their authority, power and influence in the early 70s. I think whoever was the head of the station there probably had more influence and better contacts than the ambassador.

Q: Did you feel that there was a disconnect between what you were doing and what the agency was doing?

DAVIDOW: Definitely. We had a feel for it, although I probably understood a lot less of it than more senior officers. We knew the agency was deeply involved with the security forces there. I don't think we knew specifically what they were doing or how deeply involved they were. And we were convinced that the security forces were engaging in extra-legal killings and that the CIA was in contact with them. I think the agency's view

was there was a war going on in Guatemala, and that we knew who our allies and who our enemies were. That was the zeitgeist of the time.

Q: As a Junior Officer in this situation, how did you go about your work?

DAVIDOW: There was a lot of open source reporting, reading the morning newspapers and writing reports: who was up, who was out, what was happening in this political party, who was going to be the next candidate for president, so forth and so on. That kind of stuff.

Q: What about normal politics? You know, as soon as you're in Latin America you had the reds and the blues and all. I mean was that going on or had it moved to one side being the far left and the other being the far right?

DAVIDOW: Well, there really wasn't a legal far left in Guatemala. You had rightist parties and the government was headed by an ex-general who had a lot of blood on his hands. And then the opposition was sort of centrist and centrist-leftist. The government suspected that some of the legal leftists were in cahoots with the guerillas. A number of politicians, from the non-guerrilla left were assassinated. And we knew and had contact with a number of those people, including one man, Alfredo Mijangos, who was in a wheelchair and was shot in front of the church he was attending with his kids. Now, Dan Clare had good contacts with this group, which was called the Christian Democrats. And so I met a lot of them, as well as a lot of right-wing politicians because Pezzullo would have lunches, and he would invite me to go along with him. I remember the first lunch I went to, I was at his house when a guy came in and I took his jacket to hang it up. And then when I turned around to face him, I was staring into a gun because etiquette dictated that when you came into somebody's house you would also take your gun out of your waistband and give it over to be put away. Everyone was armed in Guatemalan politics. For something like a July 4th celebration, you'd have about 300 guests, but every one of them had 2-4 armed men with them on the street outside. It was like D-Day.

Q: Well, did you carry a weapon?

DAVIDOW: I carried a weapon once in Guatemala. I really did not know how to handle one. And I didn't have enough money to buy one. But the person who ran AID's public safety program was a wonderful guy named Herb Hardin, a former Arizona State policeman. We were talking one day and he said, "Oh, I'll give you a gun." So I went over to his office and he gave me a gun, and I went out and did some practice firing with Leo Crampsey, the RSO. The gun sort of looked to me like a buntline special from the 1880s: it had a very long barrel. And I only carried it once. I was driving around with my wife and I put the gun in my waistband in my pants, I did not have a holster. Somehow it sort of slid down my leg. I had to shake my pant leg to get the gun out. I decided that I had a lot more chance of my killing myself with my own gun --

Q: Yeah.

DAVIDOW: -- than anyone *(laughs)* -- than anyone else killing me. Crampsey was an unforgettable character. He had been a high school and college football player, had played for the Pittsburgh Steelers for one year, and somehow wound up in the State Department, Security Office. Big, burly, crew cut guy. He had gained fame during the Tet Offensive. There was a famous picture in Life magazine of him as he literally climbed the wall of the embassy, which was under attack, picking off Vietcong, who were also climbing the wall. People would hand him guns from inside the building and he'd empty them like John Wayne.

Q: I remember seeing those pictures, yes.

DAVIDOW: Well, that was Leo Crampsey. Now, Leo was a colorful character. And, and he would certainly make life at the staff meetings interesting, because he really did not understand what was going on in Guatemala, except there were probably people who wanted to kill us because they had killed the previous ambassador. One day, Leo was approached by the Head of AID with the following story. One of the AID officers who was married to a Guatemalan girl, had told the AID Head, that his Guatemalan wife had been accosted in the market and that a man had sexually attacked her. She had gotten away by saying that she had liked their encounter and agreeing to meet this man at some other time in a hotel. It was a very strange story that raised more questions than it answered. But Leo takes this on. And they have the woman call the man who had allegedly attacked her and set up a meeting. And Leo went with some local embassy guard to the meeting. These guards were actually Guatemalan policemen who were a dangerous lot. They picked up this fellow. Leo then calls the DCM (Deputy Chief of Mission) whop told me this story much later. He says, "We got this guy in the car. Now what are we supposed to do with him?" Although the guys picking him up were cops, they weren't going to arrest him. And as he's talking on the phone to the DCM, the DCM hears three shots in the background. What had happened was the Guatemalan police had gotten the word from this woman's family -- which was well connected -- to take care of the problem. So we had a dead guy in the back of an embassy car. They took the body out and dumped it on the road someplace where traditionally bodies were found almost every morning as a result of political murders. It's called Kilometer 13 on the Pan-American Highway. My guess is there was something more than a sexual assault going on. Maybe this woman just got too deep in over her head with someone. But the story is a reflection of just how rough and violent Guatemala was at that time.

Q: God. Did we have any contact one way or the other with the Cubans? Or what were the Cubans doing?

DAVIDOW: Well, the Cubans were not officially in Guatemala at that time because the Guatemalans had broken relations with them. But it was clear that there were Cuban agents operating there and the local guerillas were getting support from them. I certainly never had any contact with the Cubans. There weren't any that I could have had contact with.

Q: At this particular point, Nicaragua was still under Somoza, wasn't it?

DAVIDOW: That's correct.

Q: Did you have sort of left-wing American students that later became known as Sandalistas or not running around? Or left-wing nuns or --

DAVIDOW: The Sandalistas had not yet arrived, but there were certainly Maryknoll nuns and other Catholic religious people who were in the countryside working for the peasants. They were in danger, but their situation became much more dangerous after I had left Guatemala and the violence in the indigenous areas increased markedly. Throughout Central America rightwing governments viewed the clergy with suspicion and, on occasion, they were killed. We also had some hippie-types who would get in trouble with the police. Some were involved with drugs. And when I was in the Consular Section I had a lot of dealings with young people who were in jail. But they were largely apolitical.

Q: Did you get involved in any sort of consular cases, jails or --

DAVIDOW: The majority of the two years that I spent there I was the Consular Section. Much of that time was working the non-immigrant visa line. It was pretty much the same then as it is today. Same large numbers of people, having 30 seconds to decide whether to give a visa or not. It was a very grueling experience. For a good portion of the time I was the American Citizen Services Officer. So I would visit people in prison. I remember that two American guys and a young American girl and her baby were arrested off the Pacific Coast of Guatemala. They had brought their catamaran boat in and were selling drugs from the boat to people who would row out from shore. They got caught, and they were put in jail. The father of the girl came down. And we visited the girl and her baby in jail. We would be bring her food frequently which was not easy because she was on a special hippie diet -- brown rice, soya, etc. We sat with her and, with the two guys who were in another jail. They told the father that yes, they were guilty of selling drugs. After we left, he looked at me and said, "They're being framed."

I said *(laughs)*, "No, they're not being framed. They *told you* they were selling drugs."

What finally got worked out was the lawyer of these people did a deal with the judge, who was corrupt. They signed over their boat to the lawyer and the judge in return for their freedom. A few months later the lawyer called me highly indignant, because it was costing him and the judge a lot of money to keep the boat in repair. Boats do cost a lot of money to maintain. He was complaining to me. I don't know what he thought I was going to do for him.

Q: (laughs)Oh boy. What were the jails like there?

DAVIDOW: Pretty grim. But there was a certain amount of freedom inside the jails. The prisoners would hang out in the central courtyard. I was not aware of great violence in the jail, though I suspect there probably was. They were crowded, they were dirty. But they

were livable. Most of the time I spent in the consular section was in the NIV section. We had real problems of fraud. Not only were the majority of the applicants presenting forged documents and not telling the truth, but the Consul, Larry Lane, discovered that our two senior local employees were selling visas. At that time, the local employees would actually place the visas into the passports and give them to vice consuls to sign. There were plenty of opportunities to slip in some passports that they had brought in themselves. We heard about that from a disgruntled customer, and it was a difficult period for us all.

Q: What about the, the media there? Was this sort of a personal media?

DAVIDOW: Yes, the media was run by various press lords who ran their newspaper to promote their larger business empires. The newspapers were generally irresponsible and spent a lot of print focused on crimes, the gorier the better.

Q: Well, how did you and your wife -- and this is your first time in this environment -- how did you all find sort of social life there?

DAVIDOW: It was really good. There were a number of other young couples in the embassy. And so we socialized with them as well as with my single colleagues in the consular section, Ellen Shippy and Dan Turnquist. Particularly during the time that I was a rotational officer with USIS, we would get involved in various USIS activities, cocktail parties and that kind of stuff. I remember when we went to our first real diplomatic do which was a formal dinner at the British Consul's house. The first course was a gigantic platter with a large fish on it. And this was passed around by the butlers. And I wasn't sure what the hell to do with it, but I followed what the next person did and managed to carve a necessary piece and get it on my plate. Poor Joan was actually the first person to be served and she gave me a look, but she always knew what to do. But most of our socializing was very informal. Our weekend activity would involve traveling around the country or going to one of the local hotels where there was a swimming pool and hanging around there. We had a few Guatemalan friends. Some of the younger local people who worked in the consulate with me were friends. My wife worked at the Bi-National Center. She taught English. So we met people there as well. And then we had a child in Guatemala. That occupied a lot of our time.

Q: Oh yes. Boy? Girl?

DAVIDOW: Our daughter Gwen was born in Guatemala about 18 months after we got there. And so, for the second year that we were there, we really didn't do very much traveling. But, nevertheless we saw a good deal of the country. Guatemala was an easy place to travel in that distances weren't that great. And we would go up to Lake Atitlán and into the Indian Highlands. This was before those areas became dangerous, which happened after we had left.

Q: While you were there, looking at sort of the political scene, what was the situation of the Indians?

DAVIDOW: The Indians were as poor as they had been for the previous 500 years. And they were politically voiceless. There were some Indian politicians and some representatives in Congress. But basically, it was the other part of the society, the non-Indian part that ran things. And the Indians were left in poverty. Guatemala had always had been a violent place. There were always two political groups that were fighting with each other. In the 19th century it was the conservatives versus the liberals, like you say, the reds and the blues. And by the time I was there, it was the establishment versus the left. But the interesting thing about Guatemala is that you can read accounts of travelers in the 1820's as they go through a section of the country, and they name the people who are fighting with each other, whatever the motivation. You could go back 150 years later and the same families were at it. So there was a very high level of violence in Guatemala from the very beginning. But the Indians were really sort of out of it because they lived apart, but when they did come in contact with the whites they were always on the losing end of things. Obviously, they were very aggrieved and when the guerillas moved into their territory and proselytized, they went along with them. Or at least they didn't fight the guerillas. And they paid a horrible price. The government was vicious in its anti-guerrilla activity and the Indians suffered the most, but that was after we had left the country in 1972.

Q: Was there any residue or influence of sort of the United Fruit Company, you know, and all the traditional Banana Republic situation? How stood that in Guatemala?

DAVIDOW: I don't think there was much of that. There wasn't that much U.S. investment in Guatemala. U.S.G. concerns were mostly of a political nature, not of an economic nature. The United States was deeply involved in the politics of Guatemala and in the anti-communist struggle that I described to you. Our activity was really a part of a much larger confrontation that was going on all around the world, including in Latin America.

Q: You were obviously new to the area and all, but did you have the feeling that you were watching a movement that was sort of going against what we wanted or we were confronting it or stopping it? How did you feel? What was the momentum?

DAVIDOW: Well, I think the momentum when I was there was on the side of, the government, because they had all of the force. But many of us in the embassy, certainly Pezzullo and Clare in the political section and Ambassador Davis, wanted to make Guatemala more modern, more democratic, less bloody, less violent. But I think the general attitude within the U.S. government -- this was during the Nixon administration -- was that we have to support the government of today because they are being challenged as part of a great communist threat. From what I could see, the CIA and the military felt very much that way. But we did make efforts to reach out, particularly to the young Christian Democrats, some of whom many years later became Guatemalan leaders, and others who got killed along the way. We made efforts, but weren't frequently successful. For instance, the day I arrived in Guatemala was an election day for president of the country. And so on my first night at a post in the Foreign Service, I wound up in the

embassy and they gave me the job of writing vote counts on the board as we received news. It was very heady stuff for a Junior Officer. The Ambassador was there, there were members of the U.S. press there, and here I was in charge of the chalk. Pretty hot stuff. But I remember looking over at Ambassador Davis, and he was pure white, because he -- and I think with the agreement of Washington -- had refused to have contact with one of the candidates during the campaign, a military man who had a very thuggish reputation. And that man won the election. So we were left with no ties to him, but the U.S. government didn't have much option but to work with him.

Q: Well --

DAVIDOW: We were all victim of so many years of the Cold War. I talk to a lot of students now, and it is hard for them to grasp our mindset, what underlay everything that we were doing in the world at that time. They look at it and think it's bizarre. And maybe it was bizarre, but that was the world we lived in.

Q: Well, let's do a little bit of neighbors. How about Mexico? Did they have much influence?

DAVIDOW: No, not, not really. There was hostility in Central America of a historical type toward Mexico, because the countries of Central America, after the wars of independence in Latin America against the Spanish, had broken off from Mexico. And there was some historical animosity, but Mexico was not really a factor. To the contrary, later in the '70s and '80s when the guerilla movements really began in Central America, there was an influence from south to north into Mexico, for instance what happened in Chiapas in the early '90s.

Q: Honduras?

DAVIDOW: At that time Central America was a geographic region on the map, but not really an integrated whole. What happened in one country did not have much impact on the others. The U.S. government had a goal to promote economic integration in Central America. And in fact, not only did we have an AID mission to Guatemala, but we also had there something called ROCAP, which was a Regional Office for Central American Programs. And its scope was to develop plans for economic and infrastructure integration. And I always felt that we were much more interested in integration than the countries themselves were. It has not been until fairly recently, 40 years later, that we've seen some significant movement on integration on Central America. The other countries were really not a factor in our daily lives.

Q: Well, do we see Nicaragua and Somoza as being sort of a running sore?.

DAVIDOW: I suppose that certainly people like Pezzullo, who later became ambassador to Nicaragua, would have thought that way. I don't really recall any conversations about it. But I'm sure that there were many people in the foreign service who realized that, in the long run, allying ourselves with people like Somoza was not going to serve American

interests. But then again, what dictated American policy was the short run and, you know, we were living in fear of the Soviets and particularly of the Cubans.

Q: Well, sort of in domestic politics, did you feel the hand of Jesse Helms and his ilk on you there? Or was that not in your pay grade?

DAVIDOW: Right. So that period was the time of very conservative policy, particularly in Latin America. So I don't think that it was so much the force of Helms and his ilk in Congress. They became much more involved when the guerilla wars began in earnest. It was The White House itself that was conservative. The White House was general uninterested in Latin America, and Kissinger was openly dismissive, did not like dealing with Latin Americans.

Q: Were the children of the Guatemalan elite going to schools in the United States or?

DAVIDOW: Well, you know, the Guatemalan elite was very small. I certainly didn't have much contact with them. Maybe they would come in to get their visas. And of course our child was a baby, so we really would not have brushed up against them in an American School setting.

Q: You left there in '72?

DAVIDOW: In '72, yes.

Q: You went to Chile?

DAVIDOW: That was '72 to '74. That's the last year of Allende, the coup, the first year of Pinochet.

Q: All right. What was the situation when you got there?

DAVIDOW: Chile was in a very tense situation. There were almost daily demonstrations on the street, marches pro and con related to Allende. There were a lot of factory and farm takeovers by workers. There was a constant shortage of food because Allende had imposed price controls. So a giant black market developed. The government maintained a false exchange rate. The real exchange rate was 10 times what the official one was. And even on the street you noticed a real bitterness among people. There was social animosity. The society was falling apart, which was tragic because Chile had seen itself as the most cultured and democratic places in Latin America.

Q: Well, had there been -- this society falling apart, was this because Allende took over or was there a crises -- he took over and took certain steps that --

DAVIDOW: Allende won his election with only a little more than a third of the popular vote. He ran a coalition government with the parties of the left, of which the Communist Party turned out to be relatively conservative. They were the ones who kept saying to

Allende, "Go slow." But his own Socialist Party, particularly a branch led by a man named Altimarano, were more Trotsky-ite in their approach. And they felt that if Chile were going to have the kind of revolution that it needed, and had happened in Cuba, that they had to move very fast. And so you saw the government and its parties encouraging these takeovers, moving against private factories and farms. And the society really wasn't ready for that. And that's what caused the tension, along with the food shortages and a sense among the middle class that the democracy they knew was in danger of disappearing.

Q: We know in some countries the division between the rich and the poor was tremendous, I mean say in Venezuela and all. But what about in Chile from what you gather? I mean I realize you weren't there at the time, but what you were getting from our people, was the situation pretty bad between the rich and the poor?

DAVIDOW: There were real divisions between the rich and the poor in Chile. Maybe less so than in other countries in Latin America, but still very strong. And of course what you had seen in Chile during the '60s with the Christian Democratic governments a process of slow evolution, trying to improve the lot of the poor through land reform and other social measures. It did not move fast enough and many of the poor became politically radicalized. And this led to a situation in which Chilean society was really politically divided in thirds. You had the Christian Democrats in the center, you had the left led by Allende, and then you had a very strong conservative party. So, nearly two thirds of the society in the beginning were not pro-Allende. He gathered some support in his first year, but really the tensions in the society were such that things started to fall apart.

Q: When you got there, what was sort of the atmosphere in particularly in the Political Section, but the people in the embassy who were following events, including economists of Allende? Was it one of this guy's ruining the country or well, we'll just sit back and see what happens, or what?

DAVIDOW: Well, I know now a lot more about what the U.S. government was doing in Chile during the Allende's government than I did then. Before Allende actually took office, in the period between his the popular election and the election that had to confirm him in Congress, the U.S. Government was very actively involved in trying to block him. The US hoped that the Christian Democrats would join with the rightwing party and cast their votes in Congress for their own candidate, who had finished second in the popular vote. But they refused to do so, and preferred to follow the Chilean tradition of voting for the person with the highest popular vote. They received all sorts of promises from Allende about how he would govern, but he ultimately broke most or all of them. The CIA got involved with some coup plotters in those months before Allende took office. The official record holds that they actually pulled back from the plotters in the days before the congressional vote. But, in any event, they were dealing with very rough and incompetent types whose plan was to kidnap the head of the army and force the military to block Allende's inauguration. The plot was a true screw-up and they managed to kill the general in the process.

Once Allende did take office, the strategy of the U.S. government -- and this was not known, not clear to me, was to help support the political opposition. So CIA money went in to helping to keep the opposition newspapers functioning and supporting labor unions that were against Allende. A fair amount of the tension in the society was actually aided and abetted by the United States. There was a great deal of tension between the two governments. An important factor was Allende's strong support for Castro. Remember, as soon as Allende was elected, Castro took a trip to Chile and spent close to two months traveling the country with Allende. Additionally, there were all sorts of issues relating to expropriation of American firms, particularly the copper companies and the ITT phone company. There was hostility on the part of the U.S. government towards Allende, and it was reciprocated. I think the ambassador was trying to do as much with the Allende government as he possibly could, and to keep Washington in check. But that was a tough job, especially since both Nixon and Kissinger were virulent in their opposition to Allende.

Q: How stood things when you were there? What were you reporting on?

DAVIDOW: Well, as a Junior Officer in the Political Section, I would report on daily events. Almost everyday there was a march or a protest, often violent. We also closely followed all of the political parties, the congressional debates, the various machinations and so forth. It was a hyperactive political situation. Also, as a Junior Officer, my job was to maintain contact with the youth wings of the parties. I had no success with the left-wing parties, but I had a lot of contact with the youth wings of the middle and centrist parties. And they were very active. They were sometimes the shock troops of the opposition on the street, and the elections for student government in the universities were followed by the press and the public with as much interest as the election for members of Congress. It was a super heated environment. And my job was to do what political officers do, try to maintain contacts, try to get insight. And in all probability, the kinds of information I developed and the things I reported were peripheral to the central issues, but it was an ideal situation for a young officer.

Q: Well, how old -- when you say a young officer, how old were you?

DAVIDOW: Let's see. I got to Chile in 1972. I would have been 27, 28 and pretty green.

Q: OK. Well, I would have thought -- by this time a lot of the, sort of the, the left-wing hangers-on in the United States and Europe had flocked to Chile, hadn't they?

DAVIDOW: Allende, from the day of his election became an icon of the left throughout the world. Here was a democratically elected left-wing government that was going to bring a real revolution to Chile. And he was idealized in many ways. Keep in mind that the early '70s was the period of strong anti-Nixon feeling in the United States and elsewhere, a lot of opposition to the war, and anti-establishment thinking in universities. Allende was something new. And the left flocked to Chile. Now, some were what we later came to call the Sandalistas, you know, college kids in sandals, fairly innocuous

types. But also who came to Chile, which added to the tension, was a large number of Brazilian, Argentine, and Uruguayan revolutionaries. These were people who'd been involved in the Montoneros or the Tupamaros. And this of course upset the Chilean military, who, we came later to understand, had trouble differentiating between true revolutionaries and the Sandalistas.

Q: Well, were you able to use your youth in just coming out of your university and all, or not too long before, sort of to connect with the youth movement at least to say gee fellows, what are you up to, and that sort of thing?

DAVIDOW: Chile was my second post, but as opposed to Guatemala where the political scene was so stultifying, an exciting place. In Chile, I had a lot of contacts, and actual friends in the Christian Democratic Youth and other political groups. I was doing what political officers always want to do - breakfast with the Young Christian Democrats, coffee in the afternoon, dinner, meetings, attending parliament, etc., all in the context of a country that seemed to be coming apart at the seams. It was extremely intense.

Q: You remind me of one officer I interviewed who had just learned Arabic and he was in Cuba -- in Libya when Gaddafi took over. And our chargé there one time went into his office and said, "I know you're having a great time, but I want you to know I'm not."

DAVIDOW: That was, I'm sure, the way the Ambassador felt. I really respected Nathaniel Davis. And by the way, he later wrote a book about Allende's last year and U.S. policy, which is still the best thing ever written about the Chilean coup and sets aside a lot of the mythology that later developed. But he worked very hard and I think he kept looking for ways to establish decent relationships with the Allende government. But neither the forces within the Allende government nor within the Nixon administration were particularly looking for friendship.

Q: Could you make any inroads into having somebody to have breakfast with or lunch within the Allende government and say, you know, we want to know what's going on and all that? Or did you feel sort of cut off?

DAVIDOW: I was cut off. I was looking at the youth movements and the ones associated with Allende were really pretty radical and not interested in contact with the Embassy. These were young revolutionaries. There were several parties that were members of the Allende coalition, and the embassy had contact with some of them. And of course the ambassador would have his contact on an ambassador- to-minister level to talk about specific issues such as the whole question of compensation for expropriated U.S. property, particularly copper and telephones. In general, our level of interchange with the Chilean government was fairly limited and there was an undercurrent of hostility there on both sides. There was a great deal of contact with the anti-Allende parties.

Q: Well, was there within the embassy, or at least in your group that you were with of young officers, a feeling of waiting for the shoe to drop?

DAVIDOW: Well, this is interesting because it was hard to have a conversation in Chile in the year before the coup, which is the year that I was there, in which somebody would not bring up the possibility of a military coup. It seemed to me that almost every Friday, before we went home for the weekend, the CIA would put out a report from one of its sources saying, "This weekend there's going to be a coup. The military has had it and finally will act."

And you know, the first time you read something like that it's kind of chilling. The tenth time you read it or the twentieth time, you go, "Yeah, sure." So one becomes pretty blasé.

So what happened to me was on the weekend of September 8th -9th , 1973 for the first time since we had arrived in Chile more than a year before, my wife and I were going to leave Santiago for a short holiday. She had given birth shortly after we got there. We had two small children, infants really, so we hadn't traveled much. But finally we decided to go to Portillo, the ski resort. I went over to the house of Jack Devine, a young CIA Officer. He's a big guy like I am and I needed to borrow his ski boots. So I went over to his house on Friday night and he said, "You really shouldn't go, there's going to be a coup. We're getting reports."

And I said, "Jack, I've seen these reports every weekend for the last year. Screw you, I'm leaving." And of course, that was when the coup came. And my wife and I actually got caught at the ski resort while our two babies were in Santiago and we couldn't return because of curfew. And our kids were in our house with our maids not far from the Cuban Embassy, and there was a lot of gunfire around the Cuban Embassy at that time. The whole question of whether the military was going to step in and try to restore order was on people's minds and in conversation for a long time before the coup. And there were a number of important events, some of which I witnessed, that kept this whole issue alive. I have to say that I'm not very prescient about some things and up until the very end, I did not think the military was going to act. But of course they did and it was --

Q: What about sort of the social circle around the embassy? I'm not talking about the fancy social circle, but you know, I mean your friends and all who were Chilean? Were they sort of looking and saying, "Why don't you do something?" or what were --

DAVIDOW: The Chileans were not looking at the United States to do something. After the coup, the mythology developed in Chile and elsewhere that we had pulled the trigger, given the go-ahead, but actually, before the coup, the Chileans were so into themselves, that unlike other Latins, they were not looking for the Americans to come in and save their bacon. The movement among the middle and upper classes to force the military to act grew over the last months before the coup.

We lived in an upper middle class neighborhood. We would talk with our neighbors, and we would see them in the markets. The middle class was really struggling particularly because of the food crisis. (Allende's government tried to keep the lower class -- its political base- happy with foods deliveries to their neighborhoods). Because Allende instituted price controls, the manufacturers either stopped producing or sent what they did

produce to the black market. Now, that wasn't horribly difficult for us because we had money, because we were changing our money on the black market as well. So, we could get a lot of things that our neighbors couldn't, and they were dissatisfied. And of course, what started to happen a few months before the actual coup is that every night in middle class neighborhoods, including our neighborhood, the women would go out on the street and start banging their pots and pans. These were called the "cacerolazos." And, the sound would reverberate through the city of banging pots. My wife, and other embassy women established ties with merchants in the markets who were working on the black market. All of the wives operated under the guideline to buy whatever they could and in great quantities to be shared later. Once my wife was offered something like 200 pounds of rice.

Q: Oh!

DAVIDOW: Which she took and put in the trunk of her car with the idea that she would split it up with some other women in the embassy. And I remember one of the bags of rice broke, and, if that car is still riding around Chile, the rice is probably still in some of its crevices. But one had a sense of a society that was really out of kilter. And I personally think that by the time the coup came, a significant majority of Chileans -- including some who had actually supported Allende, at least at the outset -- had decided enough was enough, enough of the shortages and the marches and the protests and the demonstrations and the violence. They wanted stability. And the military, which had been relatively reluctant to step in, finally decided it had to.

Q: Did you find -- again, I keep emphasizing the young, because particularly in those days, and I'd say even today, young people have a more -- well, a different outlook than somebody who's been around the block a number of times. Did you feel that Allende was going beyond the, the bounds of what he should do? Or did you feel that he was breaking some eggs but was going to make a better omelet, or what?

DAVIDOW: I looked at it as a lesson in bad political management. Allende probably could have at various points along the way, especially in the last year, worked out some sort of political deal with his opposition. The situation really called out for consensus. And that never came about. Some of the opposition parties were as thickheaded as Allende. But in point of fact, I think Allende was very much influenced by the left-wing of his own Socialist Party and was told to push on and ignore the opposition. And he just didn't have all of the necessary force he needed to do so. After all of these years, I still put the major share of the blame on Allende for the coup. It could have been avoided. He misread the balance of forces within his own country.

Q: Well, if I recall correctly, Allende government was essentially forming an extra military as sort of a, a people's militia or something, which of course was a direct challenge to the military.

DAVIDOW: That, that's correct. And that, of course, worried the military more than anything else. The real turning point for the military occurred in late June of '73, when a

group of young officers staged an attempted coup in Santiago. They took the tanks out of the barracks and they drove up to the Moneda, the government palace and started firing. I was coming to work that morning and I was running around on the street looking at soldiers setting up placements and firing machine guns. It was all very exciting. I felt like a war correspondent. I remember running into the embassy, which was pretty much across the street from the government palace, and reporting to the ambassador what was happening. And as I think of it now, the idiocy of running around on the street is immense. About 30 people got killed that day. I could have been one of them *(laughs)*.

Q: Yeah.

DAVIDOW: That was pretty stupid. But what happened was that the high command of the military came out to the street. It was a very dramatic scene. These generals marched up to the lieutenants and captains who were trying to stage this coup and ordered them back to the barracks. And they said "yes sir," and turned around and drove the tanks home. And of course my initial reaction, proving that once again I was always capable of being wrong, was to write a cable that said, "This absolutely proves that there will not be a coup in Chile because the generals support Allende."

Fortunately, the DCM looked at that and said, "No, I don't think we're going to send this."

And indeed what did happen was that the generals went back to their club that night and said, "Look, if we don't do this, the captains will do it and we're not going to be generals anymore." And that was really the beginning of serious coup plotting on the part of the military. At the same time, there was a lot of political back and forth between Allende and the Christian Democrats. There were negotiations going on to see if they could come to some sort of coalition or consensus. But that all fell apart in July and August, 1973. When we talk about the mythology of the coup, and there is a great mythology about it, the question is did the U.S. give the military the green light? In point of fact, the entity that gave the green light was not the U.S. It was the Christian Democrats who had close, very close ties to the Chilean military and basically threw up their hands and said, "Look, we've tried. We cannot do anything. You, the military, have got to step in." And I think everybody who thought about the possibility of a coup assumed that once Allende was thrown out of office, within four or five months there would be elections, the Christian Democrats would win, and probably the president who preceded Allende, Eduardo Frei, a Christian Democrat, would somehow wind up back in office. And they were naïve. And actually I sort of had an inkling of this in advance. My view was that if the military were going to act in some way, risk their reputations and their lives, they weren't going to give the government back to politicians easily, because it was not just Allende who they viewed with scorn, but the entire political class. And of course that's what happened. The military took over, became very brutal, and they stayed in power for 17 years. I had written an airgram accurately predicting what would happen if there was a coup, but that didn't get sent either -- sort of balanced out with my "there will be no coup" cable.

Q: Well, did we have a -- particularly your level, at Junior Officer level -- any contact with the Americans and Sandalistas, these socialist kids from various areas in Latin America and from Europe who were coming in? And were we saying, you know, kind of watch out for yourselves and something happens? This isn't a benign atmosphere here.

DAVIDOW: No, I did not. There were people in the embassy, particularly some USIS officers and then other Americans in town -- there was a strong Ford Foundation office -- that had contact with some of the American young people. And whether they ever said watch yourselves or not, I don't know. Because as much as in retrospect it seems that a coup was almost inevitable, in reality, I think on any given day if you had asked me and most of the people in the embassy if there was there going to be a coup, the answer would be probably not. So it wasn't as if we were taking actions to prepare ourselves for this. I mean witness myself. I was off on a skiing holiday. So in retrospect, we're a lot smarter than we were at the time. But you're on the track of something really important because of course one of the big issues after the coup and in the writing about America's role in Chile, is the whole question of what happened to two young Americans who were killed during the coup, probably arrested and just shot by the military. And that became of course the whole issue of the book and the movie Missing, which I think had a tremendous affect on solidifying the general view in the United States and around the world that the United States had actually caused or participated in the coup.

Q: What did you observe sort of from the ski resort to your return to Santiago?

DAVIDOW: The ski resort, as you might imagine, was full of relatively wealthy Chileans, or at least upper middle class Chileans. And there was a military base across the road. The commander of the base came over and told the guests to just carry on skiing. So the ski resort was probably the most relaxed place in the country. Finally, when we got back to the city we were impressed by the large military presence everywhere. And immediately we started to hear in the embassy about how the military were going out and rounding up people and reports were coming in of killings. The military issued reports saying that they were confronting armed resistance. In point of fact, there was very little of that. What they were doing was rounding up people, including foreigners, particularly Brazilians, Uruguayans, and a few Americans, jailing them -- the national stadium was one place they kept them -- and now we know were torturing them and just taking them out and killing them. The news started to seep out. The week after the coup there was an article in Newsweek that asserted that about two to 3,000 people had been killed. There was a lot of skepticism about those numbers in the embassy, largely because, I think we just didn't want to believe them. We really had no idea that the military would act with such brutality. In point of fact, the article was correct, or mostly correct, and we were wrong. So it was a lesson in how group think can color your perspective. In the embassy and among most of our contacts, there was a general sense of relief that the coup had taken place and Chile could now reestablish its democracy

Q: Well, the Chilean Military had had a very good reputation in Latin America about being a professional organization and not trying to be very political. What caused this? Was this the radicals at the top? Why the killing?

DAVIDOW: That's a really interesting question. And I'm not sure I know the answer. Yes, they were viewed as a highly professional organization. There hadn't been a coup in Chile for50 years or more. They were seen as loyal to democracy. They had modeled their training of the military of other countries. The army followed a German model, the navy followed a British model, and the Air Force was very much influenced by Americans. But the question that you're asking is I think the most fundamental, because it applies not only to Chile, but also in Argentina, not mention Germany and other parts of the world. People came in, got power, were absolutely convinced that they had to eradicate the enemy because if they didn't do so their actions would have been in vain. Everything else became secondary, including basic humanity. The violence in Chile was probably considerably less than the violence in Argentina. And it's an interesting question as to why the world remembers Chile and does not remember Argentina. But I don't know the answer. I don't know if you had been able to talk to some of these generals and captains and others three days before the coup, whether they would have had any idea just how barbarous they were going to become. I guess it's an essential issue that deals with humanity and how fragile civilized behavior is.

Q: I, I do want to ask -- well, maybe you could just say, had Pinochet been a name that you'd heard of prior to this coup?

DAVIDOW: Yes. Pinochet was the number two in the army. He was seen as the gray professional. I remember that he came to the July 4th party at the residence and somebody pointed him out to me. He was seen as somebody of not great influence. The person who was running the army was a general with a little more flare named Carlos Pratt. And Pratt was committed to constitutionalism and committed to Allende. Not so much I think politically, but the idea that the military should support the president. And he was forced out of office by his military colleagues during that July-August period. And Pinochet took over. In retrospect, that obviously was another step towards a coup. Although as history has revealed, it's probable that Pinochet himself was not one of the principal promoters of the coup, but he went along with it when he felt that he had to do so to protect his own job and protect the military institution.

Q: Well, what was your sort of immediate tasks? You as a young Political Officer? Were you able to sort of get out in the street and find out what was happening? Or was it not safe?

DAVIDOW: I think the coup took place on a Monday or Tuesday, but it took me a couple of days to get back to Santiago, because we were up at the ski resort. And then I think immediately after that my job was probably to report to Washington what the Chilean press was publishing. And then I probably tried to get in touch with my contacts in the various political parties, particularly the Christian Democrats. And at that moment, if I did talk to them, I suspect that they were not too upset about what was going on. They

probably didn't realize very much about the arrests and shared in the general sense of relief that the coup had taken place. Very soon thereafter, they realized how bad things were turning and several left the country to study or live overseas.

Q: What happened in the first few days after the coup in the embassy?

DAVIDOW: In those first few days after the coup we just tried to figure out what was happening, trying to determine how the government would be organized, probably helping the Ambassador try to establish contact with the government, I don't think we were aware of the enormity or the size of the human rights issues in the very first days. That became apparent not too long after the coup.

Q: Well, did you find people associated with the right wing, you'd call it, and their political situation was sort of out on the streets rejoicing or was everybody keeping their heads down?

DAVIDOW: In the areas where most embassy people lived, which were middle class and upper class areas, there was relief and probably a certain amount of happiness. The situation may have been very different in the poorer neighborhoods, but we really weren't in them or had much knowledge about what was going on. And I also have to say that the Chileans who worked in the embassy, even the low paid guards and cleaners, seemed to be pleased by the fact that Allende had been thrown out. I guess that if they weren't happy, they were not going to tell their American bosses.

Q: Did you feel that you were going to get tarred with the same brush as the military?

DAVIDOW: Oh yes, definitely. This was the immediate reaction of the world press. The mood of the time was anti-Nixon, anti-government, anti-Vietnam. Allende was seen as a great hero who had been assassinated in the coup. Of course there was reason to suspect the .S. Our hostility to Allende was well known. We had a history of coup attempts elsewhere. And so there was a general assumption, immediately accepted by almost all commentators, that the embassy had been involved in the coup and therefore we were complicit in the murder of Allende. (At that time and for decades after, everybody assumed that he had been murdered; he actually committed suicide). And there was no interest -- as usually happens -- in the press or in our Congress to determine the background of what happened in Chile and why the coup took place. So there was a certain feeling that we were getting tarred with that brush and it was unfair. Later, the Senate committee headed by Sen. Church studied CIA involvement and actions around the world, and, although inclined to blame the USG for the Chilean coup, could never find direct evidence for our involvement in it.

Q: Well, actually I was Consul General in Athens in 1970 to '74 where we had the colonels in there. And we were getting quite a bit of the same thing. They were our colonels and we were responsible for them. And that was the spirit of the times.

DAVIDOW: Definitely. Now, do -- let me ask you. Had we been responsible for the coup in any way in Athens?

Q: Very little. I really -- there was -- I wasn't there at the time, but I came shortly thereafter. They expected probably a coup, but they expected the generals to pull the coup, and it was the colonels who pulled a coup, who are a different breed of cat than the generals (laughs).

Well anyway, so how did the -- well, particularly you, and how did the embassy settle down to this new situation?

DAVIDOW: I felt that the embassy was doing as good a job as possible. We were trying to establish working relations with a new government. And that government was not universally inclined toward the U.S. There were many, especially in the military, who viewed us with suspicion. On the human rights front, I got involved in that as a reporting officer. We approached the government and urged them to release political prisoners and to let refugees leave. I did a lot of contact work with the human rights community, the UNHCR and with others. But I have to say that I think our general approach was to tell the military, "We want to be your friends, we understand why you had to do what you had to do, help us help you by your adopting a less stringent policy". Another approach might have been, "Look, you bastards, we're going to cut you off at the knees unless you do what we think you should do." But that wasn't in the cards. And our approach was a very incremental, gradualist one, which I have to say now, maybe with some embarrassment, I supported at the time.

Q: Well, did relations with our military depend on our attaches at this point, or how were we communicating with them?

DAVIDOW: We used a part of the previous ministerial structure and the various elements of the embassy, the Economic Section, the Commercial Section doing what we always do, to find the people to talk to in the appropriate ministries. And of course, we were talking with all of the non-Allende political sources in the country. And of course, they, at least at the outset, were accepting of the military. But once it became apparent that the military wasn't going to turn things back to the politicians, then they started to get opposition from some of the Christian Democrats and others. We reported all of this, but not the views of the former Allende people, because we really did not have good relations with them.

Q: Were you talking to the Frei people and others, you know, who'd been in the opposition to Allende?

DAVIDOW: Well, most of the people we were talking to had been in the opposition to Allende. They were generally pleased that he was out.

Q: But was there a sense of maybe things -- maybe this government has gone too far? Or those who'd been post-Allende, were they sort of going along with it or were they horrified?

DAVIDOW: No, I think they were going along with it at the outset. I think there was a general acquiescence in the non-left political class and among the population generally that the coup was something necessary and that any excesses of the military (which were not well known immediately) would soon end. That was the expectation. And as I said before, there was also an expectation at the outset that the military would soon turn the country back to the politicians, and that did not happen.

Q: Then as the military basically took over its control, did your job change?

DAVIDOW: Well, I don't think my contacts changed that much because the people that I had generally been dealing with were in the opposition to Allende. They were people from the center and the right. So I maintained my contacts with them. However, as somebody who was responsible for reporting on human rights issues, I met a lot of different people. The UN Commission on Refugee Affairs sent a team to Chile, and I had a lot of contact with them. The international Jewish community was quite interested because while there was only a small Jewish community in Chile, there were several prominent members of the Allende government who were Jewish and leftist intellectuals who were being held prisoner. Other embassies, the Brits, the Israelis, the French, tended to see us as a central point for information. So I think my contacts expanded. But you know, in retrospect, I'm very self-critical. And when I look at what I was doing at the time and what our policy was, it seems that we were sort of working on the fringes, trying to get a prisoner out here or work on a specific human rights case there. I don't think that we were aggressive enough. We were too anxious to establish good relations with the military government. This was certainly the direction coming from Washington. When I look, for instance, at what Tex Harris did in Argentina a few years later, and what other people in the Foreign Service did by really becoming protagonists in human rights dramas, I have to say that I did not do that. I'm not sure I would have been particularly effective…….

Q: Well, it was a different situation. I mean you had crowds of the women in the square, Tex Harris going out in Buenos Aires, meeting the mothers of the disappeared and all. It just wasn't the same situation.

DAVIDOW: Yes, that's right. There was no similar organization in Chile that I was aware of. Tex did a superb job in Buenos Aires and he deserves all of the praise he has received. In retrospect, I think our whole approach to the new government was too accepting, and we underestimated some of the problems, particularly on the human rights front.

Q: Did you get any feel in the embassy -- and I realize you're fairly far down the food chain -- but about the reaction of Kissinger and The White House and all, what was happening?

DAVIDOW: Well, I certainly didn't have any direct knowledge. But it was quite clear that Nixon and Kissinger were pleased that Allende and all he represented was out of the way. The relations with the new government we assumed would be better than they had been with Allende. The military themselves were pretty prickly and they really did not know how to deal with foreign civilians. I'm pretty sure they brought in, you know, all sorts of conservative civilians. Now, there were a lot of voices in our Congress, for instance, that were very critical. And I remember one of the more difficult CODEL's that I had was a very pugnacious congressman from Massachusetts, a guy named Michael Harrington, not the same Michael Harrington that wrote the book about poverty in the U.S. This one was a young, aggressive, Boston liberal politician who I had to escort around, as he made a point of being very nasty to the new authorities. And I actually took him to a jail. It may have been to the national stadium, and somehow we talked our way in, but we didn't get much beyond the front door. I remember him yelling and screaming to the officer in charge, "You son of a bitch, we know you keep prisoners in here. Now, you let me in." And then he'd turn to me and say, "translate that," which I did, probably with a little less passion. I was more concerned about getting him out of there before he really got into trouble than with the facts of what we has alleging about prisoners and assassinations. I should have let him get arrested. The furor might have helped save some lives. But the Chilean coup, more than any other event in Latin America in my lifetime, aroused great, feelings on both sides of the issue. I still find it interesting, as sort of a historian, as to why the left's scenario of what happened and U.S. complicity immediately became the conventional wisdom and accepted dogma. I was offended by the simplistic approach of so many people. But you know, history always gets reduced to a few lines and catch phrases. The complexities and the subtleties get rubbed off. Foreign Service types like to say, "Yeah, but on the other hand, you have to recognize that…." But in the popular mind there is not other hand. And our intellectual neutrality tends to make us irrelevant for the purposes of political debate.

Q: Well, thinking about it at the time, did you feel that, OK, the coup was done with great brutality and all, but it really was almost necessary as far as the way things were going in Chile? I mean was that the feeling?

DAVIDOW: I would say it like this. I understood why the coup had taken place. I actually blamed Allende more than anyone else for it. But that did not mean that I supported the brutality that became apparent. It took a while for me to understand what was happening on the human rights front.

Q: I know, it's one of our problems always. How did you and your wife find life after the coup?

DAVIDOW: Well, our lives continued on pretty much as they were. Before the coup we had been living on the black market. That is, in terms of both changing currency, because the official Allende exchange rate was ridiculous, and buying things. Once the coup took place, the currency and the supply situation almost immediately went back to normal. So our lives became a whole lot easier in some ways, and in other ways it got more

expensive. But Chile remained a very pleasant place to live. Before Santiago became a very polluted city, you would get up on many mornings and you would see the snow on the Andes from the city. In later years that became impossible because of the pollution. But I think we felt comfortable in Chile. My work in the embassy was certainly challenging. We had a lot of young people in the embassy in their twenties and thirties that we hung around with, and then we had Chilean friends as well, mostly people who had been involved with the anti-Allende parties. So it was a pleasant environment. I don't know if that's very callous to say, but it was.

Q: Did you find as you were reporting back -- and I'm thinking about your colleagues too -- but personally, sort of putting the little extra vehemence, or whatever you want to call it, into your reporting to try to explain to people why the hell this thing happened and saying it was necessary and all? Or were you neutral.

DAVIDOW: I think we were objective. And, of course, once the events took place, the debate about who did what to who and why was a Washington and press issue and we had no role to play in that. Writing a cable on the political events wasn't the place to go back and dig it all up and try to explain things. There were a lot of press people in Chile, more so right after the coup and, as time progressed, there were a lot of visitors, CODEL's and others, many of whom were suspicious of the embassy's role. And in our conversations we tried to be as objective as possible. But I do think we were, wittingly or unwittingly, less judgmental of the military government than we should have been.

Q: Well, in staff meetings or in contacts and all, how did you find Ambassador Davis acting or responding?

DAVIDOW: I had tremendous respect for Davis, I really did. He was an old school Foreign Service Officer. I think he was essentially a very liberal man, and really did not want to see the coup take place. But once done, he had to deal with the new realities. He was, however, a very cautious person in how the embassy presented itself. For instance, he edited every political cable that came out of that embassy. I remember that we used to type on the green sheets.

Q: Oh yes.

DAVIDOW: Triple spaced. And he had an exquisitely neat handwriting. So he would make corrections. And it was so neat that the green sheets would not have to be retyped. They would go directly to the communicator, who would then of course retype them, as was the case in those days. He was a decent man who was concerned about human rights issues. I think he understood what was going on. He was obviously being responsive to Washington, which was pretty conservative. Of course later in his career he ran into trouble with Kissinger. He went on to be Director General and then Assistant Secretary for African Affairs. And perhaps burned by the activities of the CIA in Chile, he very much disapproved of the CIA getting involved in the Angola civil war. And Kissinger fired him and sent him into exile as ambassador to Switzerland.

Q: Yes, I've had a long interview with Chester Crocker who was -- talked about his -- I mean he dealt with the CIA as, as with a hostile foreign power. I mean he -- in Africa. He was, he had to develop his own sort of spy network to find out what his colleagues in the CIA were doing. It's a, you know, incredible situation.

DAVIDOW: Well, I think that was clearly the case of the 1970's, certainly in the early part of the '70s and then in the 90s under Reagan when Crocker was working on Africa. . The mentality of the CIA, both in Washington and in the field, was that it would be preferable to have decent relations with the State Department, but it wasn't essential because they felt that they only had to answer to their headquarters and maybe the White House and not to the ambassadors in the field. There was a lot of mutual resentment between State and the CIA, especially in Latin America and I got a big dose of this in my first job from my boss Larry Pezzullo, the political counselor in Guatemala who was very anti-CIA.

Q: In Chile, how long were you there sort of after the coup?

DAVIDOW: I was there for about a year. We had gotten there the spring of '72. The coup was in September of '73. And then we were due out in '74. And I was looking at the likelihood of going to Washington, because the personnel people told me that there was no chance I could get a third overseas assignment. And then to use a word I know you'll understand, I got GLOPed.

Q: Oh yes, Global Outreach Program.

DAVIDOW: I'm sure you know the history of that in terms of its Latin American background. Kissinger went to a conference in Mexico on nuclear issues late in '72 or early '73. And he had a horrible time with all of the Latin American foreign ministers, who were just making life difficult for him. And this is the story as it came to me. You've probably heard other versions. Every time he would ask one of our ambassadors who was at this conference why were these foreign officials were acting so beastly toward him, they would say, "Well, Mr. Secretary, you have to understand this or that or on the other hand." And he felt that the State Department people in Latin America were horribly inbred and suffering from clientitis. It was that that promoted the GLOP. He wanted to flush out the regional bureaus. After being told in no uncertain terms for months that I would have to go back to Washington, which we wanted to avoid because we had two kids in diapers, they called me from personnel one day and, and literally pleaded with me to take an assignment in South Africa so they could fill the GLOP requirement. I was delighted and almost immediately took it. So that's how I began what would be almost 20 years working in or on Africa, after those first two assignments in Guatemala and Chile.

Q: Well, did you feel, or were you too close to it, than another assignment dealing maybe in Washington with Latin America and you'd be -- that would be your career. I mean you'd be going around the 21 countries. You know, my feeling is I was a Consular Officer and I would see people I knew who sort of disappear into the black hole of ARA and never be seen again in my thing.

DAVIDOW: There were, and still are, various circuits in the Foreign Service. Latin America was one of them. I think that the circuits may have been stronger then before open bidding and other changes that came in the 80s. You got on that circuit and you really never got off. South Asia was another one. I had friends going nonstop from Delhi to Karachi to Islamabad to Colombo for their whole careers.

Q: Yeah.

DAVIDOW: I cannot remember how I felt about the circuits at the time. I would have gladly taken another overseas Latin post. The real issue for me was whether we would go back to Washington or not. We did not want to go back for personal reasons. Also, pretty much everything that I had experienced while in training at FSI had put me off of Washington. So I probably would have accepted assignment almost anywhere. South Africa was particularly attractive because it did not involve language training. And I certainly did not want to go back to Washington and spend another six months or a year learning a new language. Now, in retrospect, I felt I was sort of limited in my career because of my lack of another language other than Spanish.

Q: You know, pointing out your feeling about this, this was sort of mine going through that era. It was, as Foreign Service Officers, we really wanted to scramble to serve abroad. It was financially better, but also, Washington wasn't that much fun. Later on, I think the things has changed, but --

DAVIDOW: Well, look, when eventually we went back to Washington, after serving in South Africa, we had to live in the very far suburbs with our two kids. It took me over an hour to get to work each way. It wasn't great fun. Staying overseas was the goal. I felt that I did not join up to be a Washington desk jockey. I joined to work abroad. During the course of my career I inevitably became a Washington bureaucrat, but I tried to postpone that as long as I possibly could.

Q: Well, before we leave Chile, did the embassy feel sort of besieged by American media and all? I mean people coming in and trying to stretch your words or did you feel that the meeting was sort of the enemy?

DAVIDOW: I think there was a sense on the part of most people in the embassy that we were being unfairly dealt with by the press, public opinion in the US and the Hill, and that we were being blamed for things that we were truly not responsible for. And I think there was a sense of defensiveness there. On the other hand, as I've said to you, looking back on it, I think we really did not do everything we should have done.

Q: Well, today is the 17th of August, 2012 with Jeff Davidow. Jeff, you've been GLOPed which was basically this global outlook program.

DAVIDOW: Right.

Q: Which was designated to get you Latin America types to understand that there's another world out there.

DAVIDOW: Exactly.

Q: Anyway, did you have any choice in the South African thing? I imagine it'd be a rather interesting place to go to. Things were happening.

DAVIDOW: I was absolutely thrilled, because as I told you yesterday, the personnel people had been saying that I had to come back to Washington because I had had my first two tours overseas. And then this South African thing popped up and we were just delighted. We headed out there I guess in the summer of '74.

Q: Well, so off you went. How did one get to South Africa in those days?

DAVIDOW: Through Europe. I can't remember the exact route we took, but it was always in those days a two-day trip. We would leave the U.S., fly overnight to London, hang around London all day, then take another overnight flight to South Africa. And of course with two little kids I'm sure it was quite a haul. I have no memory of the exact trip. I am probably repressing it.

Q: Well, what was your job going to be?

DAVIDOW: I was going to be the number three political officer in a three-man section.

Q: Who was the ambassador?

DAVIDOW: When I got there, the ambassador was a Texas gentleman, a non-career person by the name of John Hurd, who had been appointed by Nixon. And he was a very decent man, but very much out of his element. Because this was -- even back then -- a sensitive, complicated post. And he got caught on several occasions doing or saying things that really made him look bad, because he didn't think through just how complicated it was. The most startling example was that he was invited by the Minister of Justice to go dove hunting on Robben Island. So, he went. This was before I got there. And then it got into the press, and you can imagine how the US press played it. Here's the Ambassador of the United States tramping around where Nelson Mandela has been imprisoned for 20 years, and this guy's shooting doves. So I think by the time I got there he was sort of phasing out -- I remember him spending a lot of time in his office just reading. And he was replaced after a while by William Bowdler, who was I had worked for a while in Guatemala after he replaced Davis when Davis went to Chile. He was a career type and the tone of the embassy changed.

Q: Well, how stood the situation in South Africa? You were there from when-to-when, by the way?

DAVIDOW: '74 to '76.

Q: In '74, what was the situation?

DAVIDOW: The situation was, when I got there, pretty static in the sense that things were not changing. The white regime was convinced that it would last forever. Black political voices really could not exist: they would be thrown into jail. And the whites generally -- not all -- had no idea of the real level of black dissatisfaction. The whites were living basically on cloud nine. They did not know what was happening in their own society. And for a foreigner coming in with a different perspective, it was so apparent that the situation was intolerable and could not last. But I have to say in all honesty, I did not know when it would change or how it would change. But it was during the time that I was there, that the period of real change actually began. And I think we in the embassy were aware of this and we reported on it. We had contacts that we talked to frequently who understood the realities -- liberal English-speaking whites, some Afrikaners, and, of course, the blacks themselves. But the mass of white South Africans, both Afrikaners and English speakers, just could not grasp the precarious reality of their system.

Q: Well, did you at that time, coming, you know, a Foreign Service Officer, still fairly young, did you feel that you were there on a mission? You know, that the situation was intolerable and we've got to do something, we being Americans?

DAVIDOW: No I really have to say, I never felt like a missionary. There are people I respect in the Foreign Service who did have various missions throughout their careers. But, I always felt that my job was to first let my own government know what was going on, which involved having as wide a base of contacts as possible. In my contacts with South Africans, both white and black, I was very open and very clear about how I felt. I tried not in any way to be insulting to individuals, but when I got the opportunity to talk to them about their situation, I was frank. Now, one of the things in South Africa that was very interesting is that there was a significant group, only a small percentage, but nevertheless a significant group of liberal whites -- newspaper writers, editors, academics, even a few members of parliament who continually kept pushing the government towards reform. And so there was a vibrant debate. But it was actually a proxy debate, because it was the white liberals who were arguing for change, because the black political forces really weren't capable of doing so because of the very strong apartheid law.

That began to change -- the whole situation changed, as I said, during the time I was there for because of obvious geopolitical reasons. That was the time of the coup in Portugal. And, all of a sudden, Mozambique and Angola were independent. And Mozambique, in particular, began giving refuge to anti-South African-government, guerilla groups. In effect this moved the battle lines, so to speak, from countries like Zambia and Tanzania where the ANC and other groups had their headquarters and did not present a great threat to white regime, to right next door. And so the level of military activity increased exponentially. It still wasn't very great. But the development of nationalism and feelings of independence spread from Mozambique to South Africa. There were a lot more demonstrations by blacks -- mostly kids -- and guerrilla incidents. We could see this

building, and just as we were leaving post in June of ’76, the SOWETO uprising exploded, and South Africa entered into a new phase of conflict.

Q: Well, in taking over this job, was there a good set of contacts both black and white that you could go to, or were you pretty much on your own?

DAVIDOW: On the white side, there were good contacts, especially among the English-speakers. People like Helen Suzman were quite famous and a senior contact of the ambassador and others. But there were many others who welcomed contact with the U.S. government. I think they saw that as a sort of official acknowledgement and maybe even protection. On the conservative side of white society, the Afrikaner, we had less contact. Of course, we had the kind of contact that you would have to have because they were running the government, and I also got to know some Afrikaner reporters, though they actually worked for the most liberal of Afrikaner newspapers, relatively speaking. We were aware that there were new thinkers within the Afrikaner community. Though most of their new thinking, so to speak, was pretty limited. But some cracks were starting to appear. One of the things that I was involved was choosing people to go on the International Visitors program to the United States for an orientation trip. As part of my job in the political section, I was responsible for following the National Party, which was the governing Afrikaner party. And one of the guys who was up and coming, but still not that well known, was De Klerk. I remember going to see him and offering him one of these visitor grants, which he accepted and went to the U.S. Now, I’m not saying that it was a life changing experience for him, but it reflects the fact that there were more and more younger Afrikaner sort of working on the fringes of what was really a very narrow mined, and we were trying to reach out to them.

Q: Well, let’s talk about Afrikaners. Were we seeing a change, at least, in certain elements of it? Becoming more aware of the pressure from outside that was coming at them and how they’re becoming sort of -- well, being almost rejected by the world opinion?

DAVIDOW: For the time that I was there, from ’74 to ’76, I would say the overwhelmingly dominant reaction of the Afrikaners was to double down on apartheid. When they saw what was happening in Mozambique, when they started to confront what they saw as terrorism -- and some of it was terrorism -- in South Africa itself, they got even tougher and arrested more people and treated them even more viciously. I think there was a growing, but still a very small sentiment among the Afrikaners that something had to change. And by the way, most white English speakers felt the same as well. And they were all imbued with a real disdain for what had happened elsewhere in Africa, because they had seen the independence of other African states starting in the early ‘60s, and thought everything that had happened in those states was a disaster. The economies were failing, the governments were corrupt. This was all based on explicit or implicit racism, but the goal was that what had happened elsewhere in Africa was not going to be allowed to happen in South Africa. The South African Government put all of its eggs in supporting the so-called independent Bantustans were blacks were

theoretically given self-government. It was a pathetic farce, but it was their only way they could imagine dealing with the Africans at that time.

Q: Well, did you find your not being an African hand was a disadvantage in not being that knowledgeable about Africa?

DAVIDOW: No, not really, because South Africa was sui generous. It was a unique situation. So, if I had had prior experiences elsewhere, in Nigeria or Kenya, for instance, I don't think it really would have helped me in any significant way to either understand South Africa better or to do my job better.

Q: What about the blacks? What sort of contact did you have there?

DAVIDOW: Of course, there was suspicion in the black community about us. We were white and fighting against what was perceived as a liberation struggle in Viet Nam. But, especially through the USIA, and then in the Political Section, we had people with whom we would try to establish and maintain contact. Most of these people were either associated with or sympathetic with the liberation movement. They protected themselves by publicly at least, staying on the fringes and portraying their actions as the normal activity and concern of black churchmen, teachers and others. They clearly supported the ANC (African National Congress) and other groups, but tried to walk a fine line so they would not be arrested. Although sometimes the government would clamp down on them and throw them in jail. They did not share with us what they were really doing, and I suspect many of the people that we knew as sympathizers were actually very much involved in running underground railroads and that kind of activity. Also, through white intermediaries, politicians, editors, lawyers, we would get to know some of the black actors. But the really important black actors were outside of the country, in jail or too suspicious to maintain any or much contact with us. I think we understood what was happening, and we understood their motivation. But we did not have a good sort of day-to-day understanding of what might have happened last night or what was going to happen tomorrow morning.

Q: In your contacts with the blacks and the more moderate whites, was Nelson Mandela much of a name?

DAVIDOW: Oh yes, definitely. I mean all of the people on Robben Island, Mandela, Sisulu, Mbeki were household names in the black community. However, the vast majority of the whites, except the liberal fringe, viewed Mandela as a terrorist. And they viewed all of the ANC and the other organizations as terrorist organizations. And the government, particularly after Angola and Mozambique were taken over by communist influenced movements, portrayed South Africa as a principal target for international communism. This was still during the time of Nixon and Ford and that kind of argument attracted support in conservative circles in the US. The ANC clearly had strong ties to the South African Communist Party and the Soviet Union. And, when Cuba got involved in Angola, the communist angle became even more important. So a lot of what was happening in South Africa was interpreted in some quarters through a strictly Cold War

perspective. Most people who followed the scene closely, including myself, did not buy into that. Clearly, Russia, Cuba and the Eastern bloc, even China, wanted to take advantage of the situation, but the facts were that the blacks were unhappy and the liberation struggle was beginning, not because of the communists, but because of apartheid and the injustice of that society.

Q: I know in the later years Mandela always had a very good word for Muammar Gaddafi, because he gave him support when there hadn't been support. How did Libya play there, or did it?

DAVIDOW: Libya provided arms and training for the ANC. But they weren't alone it that. Many governments did so, including the Soviets, the East Germans, and many others. The importance of the Libyan involvement was that it was utilized by the white government to demonstrate the communist and terrorist side of the African liberation movement. The involvement of Libya and the others was an important element in white propaganda and helped keep most whites unaware of the reality of their own country. Whites generally did not have an understanding of what was going on at all. We're talking about 1975-76. They would become more aware later. On more than one occasion -- it sounds like I am making this up -- we would be in the home of a white family, and if the conversation turned to black/white issues, the host or the hostess would call for the cook to come out of the kitchen. And the cook would shuffle out and the white "master" -- and they were called "master" would say, "You're happy, aren't you?"

Q: (laughs)

DAVIDOW: "We treat you well, don't we? You don't want to have anything to do with these terrorists, do you?" Well, it was a predictable answer. I could only think, "what do you think these people are going to tell you?" So that was the environment there at that time. The embassy (the ambassador, DCM and the political section) spent six months a year in Cape Town where Parliament met and six months in Pretoria. And so we arrived in Cape Town and then six months later we debarked and went up to Pretoria and had to set up another house and then later came back to Cape Town. It was a very different environment in the two places. Pretoria was very much an Afrikaner city, very conservative. And Cape Town was more liberal with a large colored population which was, of course, discriminated against, but less so than the Africans. The system of racial classification -- who was black, who was colored -- was elaborate and straight out of Nuremberg. I once spent a couple of days in a courtroom with a local liberal lawyer who was defending a "colored" classification for a woman who the government contended was really "African". The issue was important to the woman because coloreds could live in the segregated areas of Cape Town, but blacks needed a special pass to live in the black parts of the city. Theoretically, if they didn't have a pass, they had to return to their homes in the countryside. By the mid-70s, this system was already breaking down -- at least in Cape Town -- but it was still the law and this woman had gotten caught up in it. There were not a lot of court cases like that, but it was at the same time surrealistic (talking about the shape of lips, etc.) and tedious. I can't remember the verdict. All of South Africa was a pretty uptight place -- it went beyond just race issues into the way

people conducted their lives. There was, for instance, no television when we got to South Africa. It did not come until the middle of 1975. Whites did not want the blacks to have the opportunity to see how whites and blacks might have operated or interacted outside of South Africa. It was a very pinched society in many ways.

Q: Did you find you were having, you might say, dinner parties or cocktail things with a mixed black and white group in an effort to bring these people together?

DAVIDOW: We did some of that and other people in the Political Section and USIS did that, but to be honest about it, if whites and blacks were to come to a party or dinner, the whites who would come were already the most liberal of the liberals. It wasn't as if we were playing a role in bringing the blacks together with conservative Afrikaners. That was not happening, or, at least not happening frequently. The ambassador would make a point of inviting Africans to receptions like July 4, but the amount of actual mixing and conversation among the races was low to none.

Q: Did you sort of take a quick course in the, they used to call it the White Tribe of Africa, the Afrikaners. Were you and your fellow officers sort of getting information about how the Afrikaner element operated and responded?

DAVIDOW: I actually learned a lot about the Afrikaners, and I studied their history. It was a very accessible history. It wasn't just in history books. This was the daily life of the country. The Afrikaners were extraordinarily proud of their battles against the English and against the blacks. They really saw themselves as a chosen people, a separate people. On a one-to-one level, they were most often very pleasant. But one did not get into conversations about race with average Afrikaners. They were defensive and much like the whites in the American South during Jim Crow. I always felt that there was tension in the environment. South Africa was a functioning democracy for whites, but it was a pretty close to a full fledged police state for blacks. You would see blacks getting picked up on the street by the police. I remember once we had a situation in our house where there was an altercation between one of our maids and her boyfriend. I had to call the police. They showed up in about a minute, and the way they treated this black guy was really something out of a storm trooper movie. I asked them what jail they were going to take him to, and they just sort of snickered. They were, I'm pretty sure, just going to take him away and give him a fierce beating and drop him by the side of the road. It was the standard operating practice, The laws were all weighted against the, blacks.

Q: Would you say the embassy was all in tune with a policy of showing them we didn't approve of this or was it a --

DAVIDOW: Yes, for sure when Bowdler replaced the political appointee. But there was a difficulty. For half the year the Ambassador and the DCM and the Political Section lived in Cape Town, whereas the bulk of the embassy stayed up in Pretoria. And there was a pronounced division between the nucleus around the ambassador and the rest of the staff.

Q: Were you able to go to Soweto and other parts? Pretty much travel around the area?

DAVIDOW: Entering black townships was always complicated. I never did go to SOWETO, but I went to several others. The trips had to be well-timed to avoid demonstrations, and it was helpful to have a guide and a fixed destination -- like a church or a school. On more than one occasion I went in with another young officer from the political section, Dick Tierney, and we were stopped by the cops who said that we had no right to be there. And we would say, "Yes, we do have a right. We're diplomats." But, in reality, going into townships was always very tricky because it probably did not help anyone that you might want to visit. It just made them more of a target for the police. So it was not a daily event and probably in the two years that I was there I did not go into the townships more than a handful of times. When we met with Africans it was in the white areas. It was easier all around.

Q: Well, as you got more and more familiar with the situation, what did you feel was going to be the outcome of this?

DAVIDOW: By the time that I left in mid-'76, it was clear to me that there was going to be continued and increasing violence there. But I have to tell you, that at the time, the strength of the white community and the white government, vis-à-vis the blacks and even vis-à-vis the guerilla groups, was so overwhelmingly in favor of the whites that it was hard to make a prediction as to when change would come. It could theoretically have gone on for ages. The internal and external situations changed. New thinking developed. Within about 10 or 15 years from the time I first went there, you had profound change with Mandela released from jail and the end of apartheid. But if you had told me in 1976 when I left South Africa that I could come back 30 years or 40 years hence and it would essentially be the same, I would not have rejected that as impossible.

Q: What about Americans coming there? I mean we had congressmen, newspaper people, and regular visitors. Was the embassy trying to sort of expose them to all elements and explain the situation? This must have been very difficult.

DAVIDOW: Visits were always difficult. In the period 74-76, that is, before the liberation struggle really kicked in with the changes in Mozambique and the Soweto riots, most of visitors -- journalists, congressional staffers and others, were very much committed to the black cause. And the South African Government often treated them with contempt and hostility which made programming them very difficult. Until 1976, South Africa was pretty much a backwater in terms of U.S. interest. The Nixon-Ford administration paid very little attention, except toward the very end of Ford's term Kissinger became alarmed by the possibilities that the conflicts in the region -- not just South Africa, but in Angola, Mozambique and Rhodesia, were fertile ground for the Soviets, so he became active and made his first trip to the area. But, then Ford was defeated by Carter, and the situation changed.

Q: Did you have to have to explain Watergate? Were you there during the Nixon ouster?

DAVIDOW: I guess I must have been because we left in 1976 and he had been ousted in '75, wasn't it?

Q: Yeah.

DAVIDOW: Yeah, so I'm sure we had to explain it. But you know, I think we found in South Africa, and in most of the world, that people would look at our political scandals and basically think they were a tempest in a teapot. (It was the same reaction years later with the Clinton impeachment). I think most people in the world were used to their own corrupt or foolish officials or wrapped up in their own problems, and did not take Watergate as seriously as we did.

Q: Were you there during the concern about the South Africans helping the Israelis with nuclear explosions?

DAVIDOW: That was an issue. Although I can't recall whether it was a concern during my posting in South Africa or in later years when I was working on southern Africa in Washington. I don't know if we ever got to the bottom of the true facts. But I would not be surprised if there had been that kind of association. The Israeli connection with the South African government was a complicated one. Israel was still at that time trying to make inroads in Africa and had relatively good relations with Kenya and a few other countries. But most African governments associated themselves with the Arab cause, which they viewed as an anti-colonial battle, and were hostile to Israel. The South African white government welcomed a relationship with Israel. They wanted Israeli technology. They also had a certain cultural affinity, because both the Israelis and the Afrikaners saw themselves in a similar fashion -- having a special religious bond with God and totally surrounded by enemies. In terms of nuclear cooperation, what the South Africans had, that Israel did not have, was plenty of empty land for testing.

Q: How did you and your wife find social life there?

DAVIDOW: Well, we socialized mostly within the embassy community and with other diplomats and with liberal young whites. In Pretoria, just because of the neighborhood we lived in, we actually got to know a couple of Afrikaner families and associated with them. But that was totally apolitical. We really would not talk about the big issues with them. And probably given the nature of South African society at that time, I would not be at all surprised if some of the whites that we got to know were approached by the South African police and asked for information about us. Our social contacts with blacks were limited, but more extensive in Cape Town than in Pretoria.

Q: Did Africa attract you as being different and more interesting than Latin America?

DAVIDOW: Oh yes, very much so. Even now, when I look back on my career, as we all do, and think of incidents, anecdotes, personalities or really memorable moments, I realize that Africa has left a much more indelible impression on me than Latin America. If I were to sit around with old Foreign Service friends and tell stories, most of them

would be Africa-related. I have stronger feelings of affection for Africa and Africans than I have for Latin America. The exception to that is Mexico which I really have a soft spot for, but our other Latin American posts - Guatemala, Chile and Venezuela -don't ring the same kinds of bells in my memory as do South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe. Not all the memories of those places are happy or good, but they are indelible. Dammit, I'm talking like Isak Dinesen.

Q: Were you able to go to the university and sample what the academic life was like and its conflicted atmosphere?

DAVIDOW: Yes, in the sense that many of our contacts, certainly white contacts, were liberal academics including some Afrikaners. The universities played an important part in the life and development of South Africa, especially Cape Town and Witwatersrand, which were English schools, Pretoria and Stellenbosch, which were Afrikaner, and Fort Hare, which was for blacks. The universities were a part of our political beat, so to speak, because that's where fresh thinking and protest were developing. Of course, USIS had the lead in much of the contact and did a good job.

Q: Were you having to escort congress people, Americans, or staff from Congress around? I mean I would think these would be difficult people to deal with.

DAVIDOW: Yes, they were difficult people because most of those who were interested in South Africa were committed to helping the blacks and were often distrustful of the embassy, particularly during the Nixon-Ford years. I don't really recall that many visitors, but I do think that we did have some difficult situations. I remember escorting a black USIS officer around the country and that was a challenge. He was not going to put up with apartheid -- and indeed by that time -- he was probably considered an honorary white. But we integrated some airport restrooms and had some other experiences which were noteworthy.

Q: Did you run across Stephen Solarz at all?

DAVIDOW: Oh boy, did I ever.

Q: (laughs) I've interviewed him, by the way.

DAVIDOW: Well, I have some funny Solarz stories.

Q: All right, well let's hear 'em.

DAVIDOW: Well, actually the most memorable Solarz story came later, when I was in Rhodesia in 1980. So maybe we'll come to that later, if you want. My problem in talking to you, Stu, is that I was so involved in Southern Africa for two decades, that it's hard for me to sort out what experiences I had in '74 and '76 as opposed to '79 to '82 or later. I guess Solarz was very much involved in Africa in '74 to '76. , I don't specifically remember him coming to South Africa while I was there. But perhaps he did.

Q: I can't remember. But he, he was on the African subcommittee at one point.

DAVIDOW: Yes, for many years. He was very outspoken and very critical of certainly the Republican administration, and also of the Democratic administration as well. He was a piece of work. I don't think I've ever run into somebody who had such a large ego.

Q: How did you -- was the media in South Africa in a way so predictable that it wasn't worth looking at? Or was it a real element?

DAVIDOW: No, it was very much of a real element because there were -- in the English speaking media very outspoken commentators, editors, and journalists who were very critical of the government. Some of the English language newspapers, like the Rand Daily Mail and the Johannesburg Star -- made a real effort to report on race issues. The media was generally free in the sense that the government did not officially clamp down on it too often, but there was always the risk of journalists getting "banned", officially exiled and ostracized. On the dark side of things, the security service would target some newspaper people -- for instance, sending poison laden tee shirts to their homes -- really barbaric stuff. There was a constant battle going on between the liberal white editorial media and the government.

Q: Who were some of your best contacts?

DAVIDOW: We had some decent contacts with various, mostly white, human rights groups, that were supporting the black community. Members of parliament and journalists were also good sources. Much of the real leadership of the black community was either in jail, going to jail, in exile, or highly suspicious of us. We had to deal through intermediaries a lot of the time. And, also we had the usual run of diplomatic issues -- demarches and the like- that we had to pass to the government, and there were always special pleas that we made on race relations, but those were generally handled by the ambassador and DCM.

Q: Ah.

DAVIDOW: The leadership of the Afrikaner community was pretty resistant to contact with the American Embassy. They were usually civil, however. And so I think a high percentage of our contacts were with white liberals who really did not have a whole lot of influence on society, but they were nevertheless worth talking to because they understood their society better than we did.

Q: Did you feel that in reporting on how things were, I know in cases if you're in a country and there's a lot of corruption or awful things happening, that if you spend your time reporting on awful things, you're not really serving the interest of what's going on because there are other things that are happening. Did you find you sort of had to from time-to-time make an effort to downplay the enormity of apartheid?

DAVIDOW: No, I don't think we tried to downplay it. But I understand what you're saying. And I suspect if we went back and looked at the Political Section's reporting, there was probably a whole lot of the usual material -- i.e. who's up, who's out, who's in this political party or that one. There was a whole life that went on in that country which wasn't in many ways different than in other parliamentary democracies. But the real story there was that that democracy only worked for a small percentage of the people. The South African Government's policy of creating Bantustans, theoretically homelands for the African population, also provided grist for a lot of reporting. New political forces were being developed -- most notably Inkatha, the Zulu political party under Chief Buthelezi. All of these forces were largely wiped away when apartheid ended and Mandela took over, but at the time we paid fairly close attention to them. And, of course, there was real hostility between Buthelezi and the ANC that was important to follow. In general, most of our reporting was about apartheid -- opposition to it, new legislation to implement it, etc. It would have been impossible to ignore that. And other sections were writing their cables about the economic situation and what was happening in the treasury and commercial arena, and in the days before economic sanctions they were trying to sell things to the South Africa. I remember -- and this was interesting because it says something about the old Foreign Service -- that Boeing brought its first 747 to Africa. They wanted to sell it to South African Airways. And I remember -- I say this reluctantly because I had tremendous respect for Ambassador Bowdler -- that he was invited to fly on this plane from Cape Town to Johannesburg. He refused. And I asked him why, thinking that perhaps he did not want to have the U.S. do business with the apartheid regime. But it wasn't that. He said, "Well, you know, I just can't jump on a plane with these people. I would have to do it for every American tinker and tailor who came to town and wanted me to sell pots and pans." There were special difficulties in selling things to South Africa because of apartheid, but I think that in that case what he was representing was the very old school mentality, which still existed in the Foreign Service at the time and ultimately led to our losing the commercial function.

Q: Well, then you left there what, '76?

DAVIDOW: Right. We left in June of '76 and almost immediately after we left things changed profoundly, because the school children in Soweto began their demonstrations. There was the Soweto Massacre in which about 30 people were shot during a demonstration. Ironically, as we're talking today, there was a demonstration in South Africa in which 30 people were shot yesterday at a mine protest.
The whole mood of the country changed in mid-76. Those months really constituted the beginning of a new chapter in South Africa. But we left just as that was beginning.

Q: Well, this is probably a good place to stop and, you know, set this up for another time. But where did you go afterwards?

DAVIDOW: I went to Washington finally after six years in the Foreign Service. And I went to the Office of Southern African Affairs, where I became Desk Officer for Rhodesia and Namibia. And that was a very important period, because in the summer of '76 and through the election of '76 in November, Kissinger discovered southern Africa.

And there was a lot of intense activity relating to South Africa, but more towards Rhodesia at that time. So when I got to Washington there was a lot going on.

Q: Ah, good morning. Well, we're now I think in -- what was it -- our bicentennial year, '76 and you're back to Washington to be a Desk Officer for what part of Africa?

DAVIDOW: Well, it would be Rhodesia and Namibia.

Q: OK. And this is sort of the height of action then.

DAVIDOW: Yes, in the following sense. I got there in the summer of '76 and for a variety of reasons -- maybe some electoral in nature, Henry Kissinger discovered South Africa. And we went through an intense period between mid-summer of '76 and the election of '76 in November, in which the U.S. became a principal actor in looking for a Rhodesian peace settlement. So I had come out of South Africa, knew a little about the situation, and became the Desk Officer focusing on both Rhodesia and Namibia, but mostly Rhodesia. And Kissinger got very much involved and sent to the Office of Southern African Affairs one of the highest fliers in the Foreign Service, a guy who I'm sure you know, Frank Wisner.

Q: Yeah.

DAVIDOW: Now, have you ever interviewed Frank?

Q: No, I tried. Somebody did a short interview with him, but we're trying to -- he's I think in, New York is it?

DAVIDOW: Yeah.

Q: Yeah. I hope I can get going with him again.

DAVIDOW: I hope so. He's had an incredible career. And Frank became the Director of the Office of Southern African Affairs. And Kissinger undertook a direct and a very deep involvement in looking for a Rhodesian settlement. Now, this resulted in a number of things. First, Frank put together a team in the Office of Southern African Affairs that included some very competent people, including George Moose and Dennis Keogh (who was later to be killed in Namibia). At first I was the desk officer for Namibia, but then the fellow who was desk officer for Rhodesia was quoted in the press as saying something negative, but generally innocuous, about the Smith regime in Rhodesia, and, Kissinger, trying to convince Smith that we were at base not hostile, had the person fired. So I took over both Namibia and Rhodesia for a time. Kissinger was very deeply involved on a personal level. And that really was another very interesting element. Every night around 8:00, Frank Wisner would go up and see Kissinger. He was usually the last person that Kissinger saw on a given day. And Frank would come back downstairs and give us our assignments, the things that we had to do before we could go home. Three people would do most of the drafting: myself, George Moose, and Dennis Keogh. Frank would come

down and say, "OK, before we go home, guys, you've got to do the following. We've got to write letters to each of the presidents of the Frontline states of Africa. Each letter has to contain the following six points. We have to send a telegram to the embassy in Pretoria," so forth and so on. He was very detailed in his instructions, which he, in turn, had received from Kissinger. I learned a good lesson from Frank which is that when there is a specific task to perform, subordinates prefer concrete instructions rather than the too-often Foreign Service message of, "give me some ideas, let's look at what you can piece together, and then we will edit it a dozen times." And the three of us would sit there and draft from 8:00 to 10:00 at night. Then -- I'll never forget this -- what was most frustrating is that all of the cables at that time had to be written on a machine called the Mag Card, a sort of primitive form of an electric typewriter. Each paragraph was written on a separate punch card that would be run through a printing machine. It was a laborious and difficult typing procedure for the secretaries. And so while we would be finished by 10, we would often have to stay until midnight or beyond while these secretaries, some of whom would break down crying, would be typing stuff well into the night. And then we'd make our way home and start the whole damn thing over again the next day. But it was a very exciting office to be in.

In the fall of '76, the British held a conference in Geneva in which they brought together all of the Rhodesian factions. That included Ian Smith, who was the head of the de facto white government and the African opposition groups. The United States was not formally a part of this conference. But Kissinger sent Wisner to Geneva to be our eyes and ears, to liaison with the Brits, and be the conduit of messages to and from all of the parties. And Wisner decided that he needed an assistant. The conference was an interesting, fascinating experience that ultimately fell apart. And it would be another three years before there would be more negotiations and ultimately a peace agreement. But from my point of view, it was a great place to be, getting the chance to see up close the principal actors -- Smith, Mugabe, Nkomo. But there was a personnel and personal problem. Kissinger had been told by the British to maintain a low profile. And while they welcomed having Wisner there, they did not want to allow the impression to be created that the USG was deeply involved. But Wisner being Wisner wanted an assistant and so I went along with him. But nobody told Kissinger that there was another FSO in Geneva. And so I would go to meetings with Wisner and then write the reports, but without of course any mention of myself. Because nobody had the courage to tell Kissinger that they had disobeyed him and sent someone in addition to Wisner. When I left for Geneva, I thought I would be there for a couple of weeks. But the conference dragged on and on. And I was getting difficulty from my wife. We had just come back to the States. We had two very small kids. She was living in the far suburbs of Springfield, Virginia. And she kept urging me to come home. But the fact of the matter was, I could not come back because officially I was not there. This sounds weird to anyone who does not know the State Department. So finally, just before Thanksgiving, after I had been there for a couple of months, a man for whom I have great respect for Bill Edmondson….

Q: Oh, I know Bill. He was Ambassador to South Africa. He's been interviewed. I didn't do it.

DAVIDOW: who was the PDAS (Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary) in AF (Bureau of Africa Affairs) and who had been my DCM in South Africa, had the courage to give me travel orders and let me go home. I was replaced by George Moose, who, as I recall, was single at the time, and didn't have the pressure of getting home for Thanksgiving. I got home for Thanksgiving dinner. The conference dragged on for another month or so. But then it fell apart.

Q: Were we sort of intruding into a family affair, the Americans?

DAVIDOW: In a way, but the U.K. concern was more about our visibility and their face than with the reality of our presence there. What Kissinger brought to the table which the British understood was that the principal actor in the Rhodesian equation was the South African government. The extremely conservative South African government propped up Ian Smith and his white regime. And the idea was that any resolution, any peace agreement, would need not only a South African buy-in, but it would need South African pressure on the whites in Rhodesia. And the British recognized that Kissinger, who of course had already established his reputation as a world's statesman and was a very conservative figure to begin with, had more options to bring the South Africans along than the British themselves. Moreover, Kissinger, by supporting Jonas Savimbi in Angola, was sending the message to South Africa that the US was its ally in the battle against international communism, and thus we were to be trusted.

The British relationship with South Africa was always a very complex one for a variety of reasons, dating back to the very bitter British -- Boer hostility which never really disappeared, at least in South Africa. And so both the British and the South Africans actually welcomed our presence there. But the conference fell apart. The time wasn't right for a settlement, and with the loss of Ford and the imminent departure of Kissinger, the balance of forces changed. After the election when Carter came in, the personality of the African Bureau changed and Wisner went on to do something else and then became ambassador in Zambia. Dick Moose became the Assistant Secretary at State. And I continued in the Office of Southern African Affairs until mid -78. The twin issues of Namibia and Rhodesia continued as hot items, but the majority of focus shifted to South Africa itself and the continuing battle in Congress about imposing sanctions on South Africa to pressure it to change apartheid.

Q: I was wondering, were there any particular sticking points that really pretty well stopped things?

DAVIDOW: Well, the essential sticking point was that in Rhodesia a white government, which represented probably no more than 4% of the population, had an effective hold on all instruments of power and was fighting a war against two major guerilla groups, one led by Mugabe, one led by Nkomo. The whites weren't ready to give up. They believed that decolonization in the rest of Africa had been a disaster and that a black government in Zimbabwe would mean the end life as they knew it. And in this, they were supported by the South Africans, politically, economically and militarily The South Africans were also fighting their own guerilla war in Namibia with the rebel group SWAPO using

Angola as a base of operations. After the Portuguese left Angola, South Africa entered the civil war there, as did the US, supporting Savimbi who was seen as the anti-communist alternative. So, throughout southern Africa there was a series of guerrilla wars which became more intense from the mid-1970's onward.

Kissinger had "discovered" southern Africa as part of the Cold War, but under the Carter administration it took on a new complexion -- one of human rights and racial equality, though the anti-communist game was still being played. There was a lot of in-fighting in Washington. Cyrus Vance, who was Secretary of State worked closely with Dick Moose and his Head of Policy Planning (S/P) Tony Lake. They wanted to see Rhodesia become independent and they also wanted to see changes in South Africa. Brzezinski was over at The White House, and he had more of a Kissingerian view on things, which was that we were not really going to get very far until we could demonstrate to the South Africans that it would be in their interest to end the war in Rhodesia. There was a lot of activity led by the British government, with David Owens as the Foreign Minister, including joint trips to Africa and meetings with all of the parties. 1976 -78, while I was in the office of southern African affairs, was an intense time, and there were superb people working on the issue, Done Petterson, Dick Moose and Bill Edmondson, among others.

Q: The talks didn't end up in an agreement. Did you feel that they pretty well cleared the brush away to, you know, get ready for the next round?

DAVIDOW: In retrospect, yes, they did, but I'm not sure we were aware of it at the time. A process began in which the white government of Rhodesia was looking for a way out, because they saw the guerilla war increasing and the willingness of the South African whites to support them start to weaken. But they were looking to control the outcome. They were looking for change without real change. So they held elections in early 1979 in which the most accommodationist of the black parties headed by Bishop Abel Muzorewa, won the election and he became Prime Minister of what then became known as Zimbabwe-Rhodesia. But this was not accepted by the outside world, because the real black power in Rhodesia, the guerrilla movements, had refused to participate and they were maintaining the war against what was now technically a black regime, but still really run by the whites. What happened at that point was a great deal of pressure developed in the U.S. Senate led by Jesse Helms to recognize this new black government and to stop our sanctions on Rhodesia, which we had been in place since 1965. And this created a new dynamic. You asked whether we helped clear away the brush. I'm sure that what was done in '76, '77, '78, all of the international pressure on South Africa and on Rhodesia had an effect. And by 1979, there was this new government in Rhodesia - not a real change, but enough of a new dynamic was created. I left of the Office of Southern African Affairs in mid-1978 and was spending a year on the Hill on a congressional fellowship. Before the fellowship ended, I was called back to the Department and asked to go to the new Zimbabwe-Rhodesia as the first official American there in 15 years.

Q: Well, I will come back to your internship. But why don't we continue talking about southern Africa?

DAVIDOW: OK. Given the new government of Muzorewa, there was a lot of pressure on the Hill from Helms and the right to end sanctions against Rhodesia and open relations with the new government. Helms held up legislation or funding and forced the Carter White House to acknowledge that there was at least a different reality in Rhodesia. In 1965, when the Rhodesian whites unilaterally declared independence from Britain, the British of course pulled out its government and we closed our consulate in Salisbury in solidarity. So from 1965 to 1979 there was no official American in Rhodesia. Carter worked out a deal with Helms that the U.S. would send someone. I'm sure that the South Africans, the conservatives on the Hill and the Rhodesian whites were all hoping to get a very senior diplomat who would demonstrate that the U.S. had fully changed our attitude. Instead, I was chosen to go to get the lay of the land. So in June of '79, I left a little bit early from the congressional fellowship and went over to Rhodesia. The British had previously opened an office in Salisbury. Again, they did not recognize the new government, but they were clearly looking for more and more contacts and hoping to find a way out of the Rhodesia mess which was a continuing problem for them with the Commonwealth. I got operational support from our embassy in Pretoria, but essentially I was alone, and it was probably the best experience any Foreign Service Officer could have. I was my own boss. I was in a fresh territory. I was making new contacts. I was dealing with the very unhelpful new government of Zimbabwe Rhodesia, which really wasn't happy to see me because I was so junior, and was tapping my phones and otherwise acting in a foolish manner. The foreign ministry which should have been trying to convince me that a new day had dawned in the country, actually went so far as to say that I could not meet with any of the new black ministers, because I wasn't of sufficient rank and had no real formal diplomatic status. But of course all I had to do was sit around the lobby of the biggest hotel in town and I would just stumble over every politician who was there. Also, I made contact with academics and others who were supporters of the guerilla movement that were still fighting from Zambia and Angola. The liberal white community also welcomed me and I had plenty to do. So it was an exciting time. I would go down to Pretoria periodically and file my reports. It was almost like living in a previous age. The deal that I worked out with the State Department was that I would go for a month or so and then come back to Washington. And if I felt that the situation was safe enough, (remember there was still fighting going on) I would pick up my family, and then go out to Rhodesia on a permanent basis. In Washington, I reported that things were changing politically, but not enough. The war was going to continue and some internationally supervised agreements would be necessary to really bring the majority into real control. I remember going up to the Hill and briefing Solarz and other Congress people, but I don't remember talking to any of the conservatives. It made sense for me to go back to Rhodesia, but the Department then argued -- actually it was Tony Lake's office -- that it would be sending the wrong signal if I took my wife and children with me, as the Department had previously agreed. It would send the message that we were really accepting what had happened and were well on our way to diplomatic recognition of the Muzorewa government. So I reacted very strongly. I think in the Foreign Service the times that you really get to define yourself as a person and as an FSO are when you stand up and say, "No, go to hell. Screw you. I'm not going to do that."

Q: Yes.

DAVIDOW: That's what I said. I said, "We had a deal. I'm not going to go back there and live without my family."

And they were talking about at one point, "Well, we could send your family to Pretoria or Johannesburg. You could come down and visit them once a month."

I said, "No, I'm not going to do that." And. I went away on holiday, because I felt they had really gone back on the agreement. And *(laughs)* also, my wife would not have accepted it. And about a week or so later they agreed. And so in July or August I went back to Rhodesia with my wife and kids. It was an interesting plane ride up from Johannesburg, because the guerilla groups had obtained anti-aircraft missiles and had already shot down one or two commercial airlines. So the way you landed in Salisbury at that time was to fly over the city and then just dive like a bomber and go straight down. It was a pretty frightening. But we got off the plane and there were some reporters at the airport. And I said to my wife and two little daughters who were five and six, "Look, you guys walk over there," because I really didn't want any pictures of them taken, given the sensitivity in Washington that I had just barely overcome about their accompanying me.

Q: Oh boy.

DAVIDOW: And I remember my little girl saying, "Look at Daddy. He thinks he's such a hotshot. He won't let them take our picture. He wants all the attention for himself."

Q: (laughs)

DAVIDOW: When we got there, we had a lot to do -- get the girls in school, rent a house, and set up an office in the house. My wife Joan technically became an employee of the embassy in Pretoria and she took care of the bookkeeping and supplies and what have you. And the way we handled the finances was that every once in a while I'd go down to Pretoria and get a fist full of cash and then bring it up and basically carry it around in my pocket or, lock it up in our house. And every few weeks Pretoria would send up an accountant and I would run around like an idiot balancing the books. Of course we did nothing wrong, but it wasn't the traditional way of running a sort a State Department office. That period, mid-'79 until the following spring, April of 1980 was probably the most exciting and productive time I think I ever had in the Foreign Service. Salisbury, soon to be renamed Harare, turned out to be a wonderful place to live. We made a lot of friends, both white and black. The Rhodesian Africans for a variety of reasons were more amenable to contact and were less suspicious of foreign whites than South African blacks had been. My daughters wound up going to a very British-like private school -- complete with their uniforms -which was a great environment for them, though much stricter than their U.S. schools had been. And I was extraordinarily busy. In the fall of '79, the British called for a conference in London of all of the actors in the Rhodesian mess, that is the black internal parties, the whites, the guerilla groups. And for about two or three months they met at Lancaster House, and finally worked out a deal that involved the British

reassuming control of Rhodesia during a transitional period, the guerillas coming back into assembly points in the country, a new constitution, elections, etc.

Of course, the Conference was fascinating, but I was in Harare, which was about the worst place in the world to try and figure out what was happening, because the news we were getting was very slanted and incomplete. When the agreement was reached in September, I was actually kind of surprised. I did not think they would actually get it done. And I always wondered how it happened. A few years later, when I spent a year at the Center for International Affairs at Harvard, I actually studied what had happened in the Lancaster House Conference and wrote a small book about it, which needless to say, did not become a bestseller. And I learned more about the tactics the British used to force the parties to an agreement with some help from the U.S. But the British were pretty sensitive about us sticking our nose in it. The embassy opened officially on Independence Day in 1980, and shortly after, an ambassador came, Bob Keeley. And I stayed on until 1982, which was kind of unusual in the sense that often when there's a chargé or a DCM running things and a new ambassador comes, there is friction. But I got on very well with Keeley, though not so well with Mrs. Keeley who was something of a personality -- enough said on that. And we stayed there for two more years at a very exciting time in Zimbabwe when there was a lot of hope for this new country and our new embassy was much involved. It was an extremely productive time in my life.

I had, I had mentioned in a previous conversation that I almost strangled Steve Solarz on one occasion.

Q: (laughs) Yes.

DAVIDOW: Well, the independence celebration in Zimbabwe in April of 1980 was a major occurrence in world affairs. A gigantic American delegation led by Andrew Young and Averell Harriman came. This was pretty much close to the end of Harriman's life, and the Carter administration was using him a lot as a representative, e.g. to Tito's funeral and other events where he was trotted out as the grand old man of American diplomacy. But he was stone deaf and had really lost some of his mental acuity. But Mrs. Harriman kept a close watch on him. But our very small embassy had to take care of him, as well as Andrew Young, a large CODEL, and a flock of people from the State Department, and elsewhere. It was one breathless moment after another.

When the plane landed at midnight and hundreds of people disgorged, we had a notice printed saying that , "As of six a.m. tomorrow morning you can change money at the hotel where you're staying. (Somebody had come up from the cashier's office in embassy Pretoria). And then before you leave you can turn the money back in." And actually everything was so rough that what happened was when people would turn money back in, I would give them a personal check. I would take their Rhodesian dollars and give them a dollar check. But Solarz read this note saying that he could get money at six a.m., and felt that wouldn't be good enough, because he was going to be up at five a.m. meeting all of his contacts in Rhodesia. He needed money immediately. So while I was running from pillar to post welcoming the delegation, he wrote me a check for $350 and I gave him the

equivalent in Rhodesian money. Then a few days later, after this incredibly hectic, difficult, somewhat emotional, ultimately successful delegation visit, he was the only person who did not turn his money back in. So I was standing at the foot of the plane saying goodbye to Harriman and Mrs. Harriman and Andrew Young, Dick Moose and 30 other congressmen, and Solarz comes up to me at that point and says, "OK, I want to give you back the money now."

And I said, "Steve, I can't do that. I'm busy."

And he put up this big stink and he gave me all of the money I had given him. Every last cent. He hadn't spent a thing. And I sat there, I remember, on the hood of a car figuring out what he was giving me back. And I wrote a check to him, I think it was for $349. And he looked at me and said, "It should be $350, because you gave me that money and I haven't spent any of it" I'm sure he was probably right. It was just an error in the calculation I came up with. And here I was, you know, trying to deal with all of this that goes along with delegations. And he's hustling me for a *buck*. So I took it out of my pocket and I threw it at his face and I almost lunged at him. And I said, "Take your fucking buck and get out." And *(laughs)* that was it. So it's maybe not a funny story for other people --

We really loved Zimbabwe. It's a beautiful country and there was such hope -- all gone now, I'm afraid. People were coming back from exile to try to build a new government and economy. Mugabe was saying the right things at that time about reconciliation of whites and blacks. And we were all building something worthwhile. And we enjoyed it.

Q: I'm going to backtrack a bit. But was there the feeling that OK, you know, since about 1960 all of us in the Foreign Service and elsewhere were thinking that eventually Africa really is going to blossom forth. Was there that feeling at this time?

DAVIDOW: Well, definitely, because Zimbabwe was seen as a place that was going to make it. There was such great hope for Zimbabwe because other countries had gotten their independence 15 or more years earlier in the mid-'60s with nothing near the level of economic development that Zimbabwe had. And most of Africa was in pretty bad shape. There were some countries that were doing better than others, Ivory Coast of course, Kenya. But the initial excitement that accompanied African independence had dissipated. And of course there were people all around the world, certainly the whites in South Africa who kept saying, "Well, we told you so. You can't give government to black people." But Zimbabwe was much better prepared, ironically because of those 15 years, for independence with many well-trained people, a functioning economy, and excellent agricultural and mineral sectors. We all thought that if Zimbabwe could go well, this could serve as a positive sign for South Africa itself. There was a real sense that this is good for Africa.

Q: Well now, going back to when you took the job in Washington and dealing with it, I assume that Senator Jesse Helms of North Carolina was a burr under your saddle, or a pain in the ass, to put it --

DAVIDOW: Well, he was a negative force for many years and I had to deal with him -- or more precisely his staff -- on both Africa and Latin America, and they were just plain malicious.

Q: Sticking to the black and white business in Africa, did you get a feeling of what was motivating him? Was this just a handy club to hit the State Department over the head with, or was it a southerner not believing in blacks could govern, or what?

DAVIDOW: Well, I think it was both of those. He was a racist, no matter how he tried to mask it in his later years. But there was another factor. I think what motivated Helms greatly was his fervent anti-communism. He looked at South Africa as a bulwark against Soviet communism and its African puppet states. In my view, he was always unhelpful. At the Lancaster House Conference in 1979, which finally brought about the agreement that led to the elections in Zimbabwe, two of Helms' staffers went over to London and conspired with right wing conservatives in the Conservative Party, to the right of Margaret Thatcher, who were trying to sabotage her. And these staffers from Helms were going around London encouraging the right wingers to fight against their own government because Helms would ensure that the U.S. would never support a black government led by the guerillas in Rhodesia. And the British Government became so incensed that they actually came close to kicking out of the country these two clowns. I think Cyrus Vance actually called Helms and pleaded with him to get these guys out of London. The whole issue of southern Africa, which I think history will view as a question of decolonization, was for many people in the United States, like Helms, just another element in the East/West struggle. And they saw the whites in South Africa as our allies.

Q: Again, going back, you said you spent a year on the Hill.

DAVIDOW: Yeah.

Q: What did you get out of that? What were your experiences there?

DAVIDOW: Probably my experience there was less valuable than that of many other FSOs who've been on that program for the State Department. I was pleased to get selected. But I noticed in the attitudes of some of the other FSOs and other government agencies that their basic motivation was to establish themselves as Executive branch bureaucrats with great Hill contacts. You and I know people like that. And I just found that kind of careerism objectionable. I was really interested in finding out how the Hill worked. So I made a conscious decision when I went up there that I wasn't going to try to do foreign policy. I went to work in the office of Rep. Jim Jeffords, who was a Republican from Vermont and a very decent liberal guy and -- who years later left the Republican Party and became an independent. I worked basically on constituent issues, on domestic Vermont issues. I discovered something I had not known. Although I had grown up in Massachusetts, I had not realized that Vermont is one of the poorest states in the country, in ways that actually rivaled Mississippi. I also got to understand a little better the way the Hill views the executive. And there's a lot of disdain. In fact, there's a

lot of mutual disdain. People in the executive branch, especially in the State Department, tend to view congressional staffers as shooting from the hip, of thinking they know it all, of not really understanding the world. Both sides felt that the other really did not understand reality, and, of course part of the State Department resentment was that the Hill, while it really could not make policy, could nevertheless screw things up, throw monkey wrenches, slow down processes and generally obstruct. I know that this is a great oversimplification, but, frankly, it is one that I never abandoned.

I worked for Jeffords for about six months, and found it pleasant. But I generally kept away from international stuff. Then I switched over and worked on the staff of Senator Max Baucus. And that was less pleasant. Baucus was a distant figure, kind of cold. And, I really didn't enjoy that. But he did ask me to do one thing, which ironically turned out to be very interesting. He had this idea -- now, this was 1979 -- that the United States should create a North American Free Trade Association with Canada and Mexico. And he asked me to put together a hearing on this. Now, I have to tell you -- and here's the irony as I ultimately wound up serving in Mexico -- that I thought this was about the stupidest idea I'd ever heard. Sure, I could see doing something with Canada, because our economies are so complementary. But come on! Mexico? What would we buy from Mexico? What would the Mexicans sell to us? I was incredibly ignorant. But I got two or three academics or others who were interested in the topic to testify in favor of it at a hearing which attracted no public attention. Baucus was able to tell his constituents in Montana, where there was a lot of interest in free trade with Canada that he had done something useful. A report was published, and then forgotten. But I think I have the distinction of being the organizer of the first Senate hearing on what became NAFTA. I'm sure I made a point of that in my biography that I used while I was ambassador in Mexico, even though I didn't tell many people that I thought the idea of NAFTA, in 1979, was bizarre at best. All of which says a lot about how little vision I had. But I did not finish out the time I was supposed to spend with Baucus, because it was at that point that The White House and the State Department decided that, under pressure from Helms, they would send someone to Rhodesia.

Q: Well, considering your later assignments, the more senior positions, did this give you a better feeling for what you were dealing with as far as the American government?

DAVIDOW: It did. And I have to say that I think throughout my career, with many exceptions, I really did not have great respect for Congress as an institution as it dealt with foreign affairs. Over the years I got to know various people, not so much members of Congress, but staffers, many of whom became my friends. But, generally I did not have respect for Congress. And I'm sure that influenced the way I did my work. I always thought viewed Congress as a pain in the ass. I think other Foreign Service Officers, who were more calculating than I was -- realized that they Congress could be a helpful tool which had to be cultivated, but I just could never really bring myself to do that.

Q: So if you think of anything else you'd like to say about your time in Zimbabwe, we'll pick it off when you left. Where did you go?

DAVIDOW: Well, at that time, immediately after Zimbabwe, I got a year at Harvard on a program at the Center for International Affairs. I am having a problem in talking with you in trying to sort out when events actually happened. Because I was involved in Africa, Southern Africa, for the better part of two decades, everything sort of gets mixed together. The Zimbabwe experience stands out. But I'm going to have to try to remember whether what I did in 1985 as opposed to 1992. But I'll try to get that.

DAVIDOW: From Zimbabwe. So it was 1982-83.

Q: And what was the purpose of this Harvard excursion?

DAVIDOW: Well, for years, the State Department would send one person to a program at the Center for International Affairs at Harvard, which was the fellowship program, which had about 20 international academics, journalists, diplomats and military from various countries. And it was a very easygoing program. We would have one seminar a week amongst ourselves and then we were encouraged to attend any classes we wanted to attend at Harvard. And then we all had to write one major paper. And so it was a very pleasant environment. My wife and I and our two kids lived not in Cambridge, but in Belmont. We had a very nice house, but the unfortunate part was that I would come home in the afternoon from Cambridge, always with the intent to turn around and go back into Harvard after dinner to attend a seminar or speech. More often than not my good intentions dissipated and I did not take enough advantage of what Harvard had to offer. Twenty years later we went back on a similar program. Of course we did not have small children at that time, and we actually lived within walking distance from Harvard Square and took much more advantage of the environment. But it was a very good year and I was able to do some research and I actually wrote a paper, which much to my surprise, people encouraged me to publish.

Q: What was the subject?

DAVIDOW: I had been in Zimbabwe when the peace agreement on Zimbabwe had been negotiated at Lancaster House in London in late 1979. I decided to do was use that time at Harvard to figure out what had happened, and, after a lot of research I came to think that the British had really done a superb job of mediation and that was useful to me because after returning to the State Department after Harvard I spent most of the next decade involved in various other mediations in Southern Africa. I'm getting ahead of the story.

Q: Yeah, but go ahead.

What I discovered was that we sometimes have a naïve view of mediators, and think of them as simply honest brokers, neutral. But in reality at Lancaster House and later in southern Africa, the mediators were principal actors, not just neutral observers. And what I learned at Harvard and then watching Chet Crocker in the State Department was that mediators have to be not only skillful, but forceful, and be able to win the trust of all sides. What each side in a negotiation wants is a strong actor as a mediator who can

deliver the goods for their respective interests owing to his real or perceived influence on the other side.

Q: Where did you go from Harvard?

DAVIDOW: I went back to the African Bureau. And at first, I became the Director of AF Regional Affairs Office, which was sort of a catchall shop responsible for Pol-Mil affairs, human rights, and what later became known as global affairs. And it was also supposed to be the policy planning center for the Africa Bureau. And I have to say, in that regard, because I had then and have now a fairly low tolerance for most policy planning documents. I just didn't have the mind for it. I still couldn't possibly tell you the difference between "goals" and "objectives ". I was always much more interested in the problem of the day than in thinking about tomorrows which usually never came.

Q: Is it that situations and policy planning never come out the way you plan for them? And so you're going to have to get very pragmatic and spur of the minute at the time anyway?

After about a year, an opening occurred and I became Director of the Office of Southern Africa. That was more to my liking. It was an extraordinarily active time in our policy, and on a daily basis there were problems and negotiations both in the field and at home. The Assistant Secretary for Africa at that time was Chet Crocker, who I respect very much.

Q: Yeah, I've had a long set of interviews with Chet. And of course he's written his book too.

DAVIDOW: He has one of the best minds that I ever worked with. And so it was good to be associated with him, but also, the whole issue of Southern Africa, including sanctions on South Africa and the wars in Angola and Mozambique were getting a lot more attention in Washington. The Reagan administration was highly divided between pragmatists and Cold War ideologues. Crocker was strongly supported by George Shultz in looking for pragmatic answers to the various regional crises. And then you had DOD and the CIA who really did not understand Southern Africa and tried to fit it easily within the whole East/West confrontation. The administration was also under pressure from the left, and increasingly the center, of American politics that saw Crocker's emphasis on constructive engagement as immoral. Crocker believed that in order bring South Africa along, both in the regional context and domestically, we had to build a certain level of trust with the white government. The Hill was almost never very helpful. There was very little middle ground. If you looked at the House subcommittee on Africa, everybody was a 100-percenter, meaning they either were from the far right and had a 100% American Conservative Union rating or from the left with a 100% ADA score. There was no bipartisanship or consensus, and that made trying to conduct complex negotiations with international actors that much more difficult. As the Reagan years progressed, public rejection of apartheid grew and the push for sanctions against South Africa increased.

I didn't think sanctions would actually have much effect on South Africa, though I didn't enjoy fighting against them on the Hill or in public debates. In retrospect, they were probably useful in convincing de Klerk and others toward the end of the 80s that deepening isolation of South Africa was clearly in the cards, if there was not profound change.

Q: In my discussion with Crocker, he describes how he actually had to develop this almost espionage system to find out what the CIA was doing. That you know, it wasn't the KGB, it was the CIA that was a major problem for him.

DAVIDOW: That was the case. And also the Department of Defense, although he did something I think pretty clever on that. He actually brought into the negotiations a guy named James Woods who was a DAS (Deputy Assistant Secretary) for DOD with responsibility for Africa. And Crocker kept him pretty close. But you're absolutely right because again, the CIA was essentially locked into a Cold War mentality and specifically alarmed by the fact that there were about 50,000 Cuban troops in Angola. Bill Casey, at the head of the CIA, pushed strongly to have the Clark Amendment which had prohibited U.S. from supporting any of the groups that were fighting in Angola repealed. And finally in 1985, it was repealed by Congress and the CIA reinitiated a supposedly covert, but widely publicized, program of support for Jonas Savimbi and UNITA.

Q: Well, by this time had you pretty well felt you'd shed your ARA credentials and were you a full-blown African man?

DAVIDOW: I had left ARA in 1974 and spent the next dozen years or so in the Africa bureau, dealing almost exclusively with southern Africa. I was looking for a change.

Q: How did you see South Africa at the time? Did you see what, you know, eventually happened coming down the pike? Or was this sort of a Never Never Land idea, or what?

DAVIDOW: No, I saw it coming down the pike. But I did not believe change would happen as quickly as it did. I think that this is always a problem in trying to predict the future. One can readily identify the forces at work, pro or con for a regime, but it is more difficult to have a feel for when the big crack in time would occur. This was the problem in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe as well. In South Africa, black domestic opposition was increasing as was violence prompted by the ANC and others with bases outside of the country. The white government was very brutal in its repression. It tried to talk a good game, but frankly, the government of the day in South Africa, led by P.W. Botha, was stuck in the apartheid trap that they had built for themselves since 1948. The U.S. had had some sanctions on South Africa since the mid-'70s, including an arms embargo. But starting in the '80s a move developed in Congress to put on deeper economic sanctions. And interestingly enough, this became bipartisan. So while at the same time Congress was supporting the CIA to help us fight to support UNITA in Angola, which was also supported by South Africa, they voted to increase anti-apartheid sanctions on South Africa itself. And finally, in '86 Congress passed the sanctions bill. President Reagan vetoed it, but Congress, overruled the veto, which was one of the very

few times in modern years that Congress overruled a presidential veto on a foreign policy issue. This was a real wake-up call for the new leadership in South Africa, led now by De Klerk who moved to legalize the ANC and other groups and release Mandela from jail and give independence to Namibia. These had been our goals all along, although a lot of opponents of constructive engagement never accepted that. And still many people think that it was the sanctions alone that brought about change, but I think that if the South African whites had not been able to grasp at the straws offered by constructive engagement, the change would have taken much longer.

Q: Well, Chester Crocker had a great deal of opposition, not only in, you know, sort of the Jesse Helms side of things, but even in newspapers and I think in the State Department. When you went in there, did you feel that he was going to be an effective person, or was he sort of out of touch, or what?

DAVIDOW: No, I didn't think he was out of touch. He was criticized in the press, because constructive engagement was seen as somehow supporting South Africa in maintaining apartheid and its intentions toward its neighbors. In reality, Crocker saw constructive engagement as a way of building up South Africa's confidence, so it could be prepared and willing to make the necessary moves both in the region and at home. The classic example of this was his concept of linkage, which he introduced fairly early on. The South Africans argued that they had to stay in Namibia to fight what they saw as the communist onslaught coming from Angola and the Cuban troops there. Crocker's idea was to work out a deal to get the Cubans out of Angola in return for the South Africans pulling away from Namibia and granting it independence. It was a long and arduous negotiation that went on for several years, but eventually he was successful. The Cubans were tired of being mired in Angola and the South Africans felt that they had bigger fish to fry in South Africa itself rather than in the desert of Namibia. So, it finally came together, but it would not have, if it weren't for Crocker and US policy. I had a lot of respect for Crocker as I had for his predecessor Dick Moose who was ideologically very different. In the Foreign Service -- and I guess this is a logical place to say it -- I never had my own agenda. I mean I know that sounds pretty naïve, self-serving or perhaps even amoral. But, when I look back on it now, I was always loyal to my bosses. I don't think I had the reputation of a Caspar Milquetoast. People expected me to offer my thoughts, and I did. But essentially, I argued about tactics, not strategy. I was a good soldier and never had my own ideological agenda. Maybe that was a failing, but it was the way I was. I think there's a class of FSO's, some of whom have been tremendously successful, who made their careers by establishing their own policy, their own ties, their own career associations. And then there are others, that I see myself in the class with, who were very much team players. And I took a lot of grief, you know, from friends and others for supporting Crocker's policies

Q: You mentioned that a lot of the media was in opposition. Did you feel that the media got for the most part what Crocker was after, or were they going for you might say the cheap shot of putting Crocker down as sort of a minion of reactionary Reagan, or something of that nature?

DAVIDOW: The media took a lot of cheap shots. But on the other hand, you had enough people in the Reagan administration running around Washington just spouting very conservative, pro-South African views. So on the surface, Crocker's policy looked like it was implementing this kind of mindless anti-communist, right wing claptrap approach, when in reality, it was much more nuanced. But that was a very difficult distinction to make. And I don't think many journalists or politicians were willing to go out of their way to tray to understand a subtle approach.

Q: For a Foreign Service Office, you've got a very good introduction or observation point of an extremely contentious issue where all sorts of things are coming to play.

DAVIDOW: Well, exactly. It was the game of six dimensional chess in the field as well, because we were dealing with multiple actors in South Africa, Namibia guerilla forces, the Angolans, the Cubans, Britain, France, Germany, Canada, and ourselves. And then there were also all sorts of UN issues. So it was a very multifaceted international problem and Washington was not unified, which confounded both our friends and our adversaries. Reagan's instincts and the advice he was getting were generally wrong. If it hadn't been for George Shultz …

Q: Yeah. I think that George Shultz was a tower of strength for you all.

DAVIDOW: Definitely. No question about it.

Q: Do you think he subscribed or was reserved on the issue, or how? What was your impression?

DAVIDOW: George Shultz, like the very best foreign policy practitioners, looked at this mess in South Africa and asked "how do we fix it in a way that serves our interests?" It was an essentially pragmatic, non- ideological approach. I didn't really have much contact with Shultz, but one day Crocker said, "Come on up, we need to go talk to the Secretary."

And I said, "Chet, you know, it's difficult for me because I've got to leave here no later than 3:30 because I am meeting my wife at Dulles to leave for a European vacation."

He said, "Nah, come on, the meeting's at 3:00 and it won't last long. Come on up."

So we went into Shultz's inner office. Just him, Crocker and myself . And for some reason Shultz had an empty calendar and was very reflective. And he started to talk and talk and talk. And here I was this middle grade officer, constantly staring at my watch. And finally, at some point I just had to get up and say, "Excuse me, Mr. Secretary, I have to go," which of course in the State Department you never do. But I was more afraid of my wife than I was of the Secretary. I'm sure as I left George Shultz looked at me, thinking, "Who the hell is that guy walking out on the Secretary of State.

Q: OK, well that gives us -- you finished, you're walking out on George Shultz.

All right, where do we go from here?

DAVIDOW: Well, that would have been -- I was working with Crocker, so I think from there I went to Venezuela as DCM from 1986 to 1988.

Q: All right. Let's talk about Venezuela and that period. 1986. What was the situation when you went out there?

DAVIDOW: Well, in the mid-'80s, Venezuela was seen as one of the beacons of democracy in Latin America. It had had a democratic government for over 20 years or more. There was an alternation between two major political parties, and both of those political parties were active in promoting democracy in other countries through their political organizations which were center right and center left. Venezuela was seen as a strong ally of the United States at that time. And of course it was a major provider of oil to the United States, which has always been the most important factor in U.S.-Venezuelan relations.

Q: Well, first place, who was the ambassador when you went out there?

DAVIDOW: I was asked to go out there by Otto Reich. Otto was a conservative Cuban-American Republican who had worked as the political appointee in the Reagan administration, and he had run the Office of Public Diplomacy for Central America, which was basically designed to convince the American people of the wisdom of Reagan's policies in Central America. And Otto was rewarded for that work with the ambassadorship to Venezuela. I think he was hesitant about choosing a DCM who had been working in Latin American Affairs, because many of the people in the bureau had a lot of questions about his office and its close ties with Ollie North and other red-hots in the White House. Otto was and remains a great friend of mine, but --

Q: Yes, I've interviewed him part time and I have been trying to get him back again. If you talk to him at any point, remind him that I have an interview sort of pending with him.

DAVIDOW: OK, I'll do that. And so I think the fact that I had had some early experience in Latin America, my first two posts, but really hadn't worked in Latin America for a dozen years, was attractive to Otto. So he chose me and I went down as the DCM. And we got there pretty much at the same time.

Q: You know, you're pointing to a phenomenon which was quite noticeable when the Reagan administration came in, whether it was the influence of Jesse Helms or what have you, it came in almost as a hostile takeover. Nowhere else, but certainly on this, it was not a happy take over of the bureau and all. Did you feel any repercussions of this?

DAVIDOW: Well, I, I did not personally, because I was at that time in the Africa Bureau. And so -- which really wasn't very much affected by the same kind of, of bitterness that we saw in, in say, Latin America

DAVIDOW: And so by, by the time I got back into Latin America in 1986, during Reagan's second term, some of that right wing hostility toward the Foreign Service had diminished. Although Reich was conservative and particularly rabid about Cuba, he was a sensible guy with a great sense of humor and we got on very well.

Q: Well now, when you got to Venezuela, actually both of you arrived about the same time.

DAVIDOW: Right.

Q: Did you feel that there was something on your in basket, any major problems that you really had to work on, technical or political, or what?

DAVIDOW: The relationship was a pretty good one. We were working very closely with the Venezuelan government, which at that time was headed by President Lusinchi. We were working with them to support democracy in Latin America. They were active in Central America as well. They maintained a tense relationship with the Cubans. The big issues in Venezuela at that time were economic ones. They related to the petroleum trade and U.S., foreign investments. But it was a fairly placid period in terms of the U.S.-Venezuelan relationship.

Q: One of the things I've talked to people who served in Venezuela later on, you might say during the times of troubles or just before, but who've said it goes way back, the discrepancy between the money class and the poorer class was very obvious and really sort of a nasty one. Did you feel that or was that people looking in hindsight?

DAVIDOW: I think maybe more so in hindsight. But I do think we missed a great deal, most of us, in our perspective on Venezuela. There were vast differences between classes. And also, not withstanding what I've said about Venezuela being the model of democracy in Latin America, I think we did not understand that a lot of Venezuela's democratic image was just veneer. In point of fact, the government was tremendously corrupt. There was a lot of class antagonism. Because of its oil, every Venezuelan believed that Venezuela was a fabulously wealthy country, which, in reality, it was not. But that was the general perception. And there being so much poverty convinced people, particularly the lower classes, that they were being robbed by the corrupt politicians and the upper class (which was partially correct). So that later when Chávez came along, the poor in particular were very disposed to go along with him, because they had a great sense of grievance. I'm sure there were people in the embassy who understood that and maybe even I understood that, but I don't think we viewed Venezuela in the time that I was there, 1986 to '88, as a pre-revolutionary country in any way.

Q: Well, often when you got to a country like that, there's several Junior Officers who are seeing things in sort of the spirit of the times. I mean was this rising, bubbling up to the surface at all in the embassy?

DAVIDOW: I don't really think so. We had some bright Junior Officers. I think they may have looked at the Venezuelan political scene with less cynicism than some of the older officers, but basically I think it was just that most of us did not realize how hollow the Venezuelan democratic system was. But frankly, compared to other countries in Latin America it looked pretty good. And keep in mind that for all of its corruption, Venezuela was still a democracy in the sense that there was a free press and there was very lively political debate. So, I don't think we were being very stupid, but clearly there were things going on in that society that we did not fully capture. Shortly after we left in 88, there were big riots in Caracas over the government's intention to lower the subsidy on gasoline. The "Caracazo" of 1989 was quite violent and should have alerted us all to how fragile the system was.

Q: When you got there, did you have a feeling that maybe the wealthy class, the oil rich and all had kind of taken over the social contact with the embassy? This often happens in a country with discrepancies. You know, the wealthy people, they've got the ranches to take you to and they've had the contacts over the decades and all. And was this much of a factor, or not?

DAVIDOW: Of course what you're saying is often the case. In most embassies at most times it is the upper middle class and the wealthy class that have the most contact with embassy officers. In most societies, these are the people who make decisions, who run things and who would most naturally come into contact with the embassy. Of course, the danger of this is that sometimes societies change rapidly and dramatically and the outs become the ins. Therefore, it is always important to have ties and contacts with the outs, but it is often not easy to do so. In Venezuela, at least during the time I was there, while we had some contact with the very wealthy, in point of fact the very wealthy were spending much of their time in Paris, Miami and New York and not in Caracas. Our most frequent contacts were in the highly energized political class. It was the supercharged political environment that occupied us more than the upper classes. Although we certainly knew and had contact with some fabulously wealthy people, for instance the Cisneros family, which was world-class wealthy. But generally speaking, I think Otto, myself and others, got deeply involved in following the politics of Venezuela. It was interesting and full of all sorts of rogues, scoundrels and fascinating people.

Q: Well, now the Reagan administration, by the time you went out there was heavily involved in Central America. We're talking about Nicaragua and El Salvador particularly.

DAVIDOW: Correct.

Q: That must have occupied much of your efforts.

DAVIDOW: By the time I got to Venezuela, that was somewhat winding down. What actually did occupy a lot of Otto Reich's attention was the fact that a number of the people he had worked with in his previous job in public diplomacy were involved in the Irangate issue.

Q: Oh yes.

DAVIDOW: And so Otto spent a good deal of time watching that on television and being concerned about his friends and himself. Although I don't think he was ever called to testify. And indeed his role in that had been fairly minor one. He not been directly involved in Irangate. My job in Venezuela was very much a typical DCM job. There were a lot of things that Otto, as Ambassador, just did not want to get involved in and I spent a lot of time trying to keep him informed and briefed. And as I said, I had a good relationship with him although he can be a very excitable personality. Otto would read the morning newspapers, as we all would. And it being Latin America, somebody would be damning the United States for some crime or another. And Otto would have a staff meeting every morning during which he would frequently say to the Public Affairs Officer, "I want you to write a letter to the editor of that newspaper and tell him to go to hell six ways from Sunday."

And the guy, a very experienced PAO named Guy Farmer, would say, "Yes sir, of course." Then Guy and I would meet shortly after and come up with a strategy to keep Otto from doing something that he would regret.

During the course of the day he would calm down and I would talk to him and he would agree to not getting into an open fight with the newspaper editors. But one day I realized that about 3:00 in the afternoon that the Public Affairs Officer had not been at the morning staff meeting. And the Information Officer had been there and he was less experienced. And I called him at 3:00 and I said, "Did you send that letter to such and such editor that the Ambassador asked for?"

He said, "Yes sir, I got it out right away this morning."

And I said, "Well, you go find it and dig it out of the mail. That letter was never meant to be sent." I think that he had to go to the editor's office and cajole the secretary to giving it back to him.

But that's the kind of thing that we were involved in.

Q: Yeah. What was the influence of Castro while you were there?

DAVIDOW: Well, not much influence directly in Venezuela. The Venezuelans had had a rocky relationship with the Cubans. Castro had tried to kill one of the first democratic presidents of Venezuela, Rómulo Betancourt. And the relationship was always a very tense one. I think we probably got a lot of information about Cuba from the Venezuelans and probably the Cubans got a lot of information about us from the Venezuelans as well.

Q: Well, OK. Well, we're examining people involved in foreign affairs. And looking back on it, I know as usual how easy it is to miss things, because it's always looming there and you know there, you know, there are all these forces that want to take over. But do you have any -- were there any elements or things that maybe you'd missed that you could have picked up, do you think? Or?

DAVIDOW: I think in some ways, Venezuela was a more difficult place to pick that kind of thing up than even perhaps a more repressed society. I know that sounds contrary or counterintuitive. But if you're a Political Officer in Venezuela and you're going to the annual meeting of the Young Christian Democrats or attending parliamentary debates and monitoring frequent elections, that's the world that you focus on, not the underbelly of society. If, however, you're in a country where political discourse is limited, where people are getting picked up by the Secret Police, then if you're a good Political Officer or DCM, you're looking at those other things. I think in Venezuela, we got lulled into thinking we were dealing with a well-established a stable democratic society. And it wasn't until 1989 when they had the Caracazo, that there was a wake-up call of some sort. But in reality, I think the embassy did not predict the disaffection in some elements of the military which led to two coup attempts a couple of years later.

Q; Well, you keep mentioning that basically there had been a change. It had not always been this apparently well-democratized society. Had there been a change in Venezuela some years before you got there?

DAVIDOW: The big change in Venezuela came in 1958 when they kicked out their last dictator. They had had a succession of dictators and quasi-dictators, like most of Latin America, through the 19th and 20th centuries with short periods of democracy. And from the 1960s through the 1980s while Latin America generally was marked by the communist takeover in Cuba, leftist insurgents trying to gain power in various countries and then by military governments that were in many cases quite brutal, Venezuela, looked pretty damn good. It had democratic government and it was neither communist nor a military state.

Q: Well, OK now, when you were there, how did you view the situation in Colombia?

DAVIDOW: There was real concern about Colombian drug gangs operating inside Venezuela. There was also a lot of tension between Colombia and Venezuela about unresolved border disputes. But when I was there in 86-88 the drug issue did not have the same saliency that it obtained just a few years later in terms of our relationship with Colombia.

Q: Were there claims either way between Colombia and Venezuela regarding border?

DAVIDOW: There was a continuing rhetorical conflict between the two countries, which would blow up periodically about the maritime border out to the western part of Venezuela, near Lake Maracaibo. There would be a month or so of gunboat diplomacy,

in which Venezuelans and the Colombians harrumphed at each other over the border. But that calmed down after a while. By the way, I don't think the problem has ever been resolved and could blow up again in the future.

Q: Did Brazil cause any problems?

DAVIDOW: No. Succeeding Venezuelan governments, up until today with Chávez, have always had this dream of better relations with Brazil, viewing Brazil as a potential great market for Venezuelan products. There had been throughout the years an effort to promote both agriculture and some industry in the south of Venezuela, using giant hydroelectric schemes to produce electricity for smelters, etc. But the product of those plants did not generally go into Brazil. So, Brazil was there, but more as a sort of aspirational goal for Venezuela rather than as a real factor. For the people who ran Venezuela, the wealthy people and the political class, they were very much oriented toward the United States. If you asked a Venezuelan of that category, "Where's the best place go for holiday weekend", the answer would inevitably be Miami. Which is a different answer than you would find, say, in Mexico. A Mexican would say, "Hey, have you gone to that town or that village or over there?" Venezuelans, especially wealthy ones, looked to the U.S., had their ties there, sent their kids there for schooling, etc. And, of course, the US remained Venezuela's principal market for its largest (really, its only) export -- petroleum.

Q: Were visas much of a problem for your Consular Section?

DAVIDOW: Visas -- visas are always a problem. And in Latin America, I would have to spend a lot of time on various visa issues. And yes, they were a problem in Venezuela in a variety of ways. There were a lot of Venezuelans who wanted visas and were refused them because the Consular Officers suspected that they were not bona fide tourists. This was standard throughout Latin America and much of the world. And then you had many cases of Venezuelans who clearly had the financial capability of being a tourist in the United States, but who had for one reason or another been refused by the consular officer, usually because the Consular Officer did not have a good feel for where these people fit into the society. And many of them would wind up calling the ambassador or calling me when I was DCM. Then we would have to do this dance with the consular section because we never wanted to seem to be pushing them around. And I understood it. I had started as a consular officer and I understood the problems of being a vice consul very well. But you know, quite often you'd have some Venezuelan teenager have his visa application refused because the inexperienced vice consul would ask for financial records from the kid who would be the son of the local Rockefeller, known to everyone in the country except the consular officer.

Q: Yeah.

DAVIDOW: So for all Latin America up to this day there's tremendous visa problems. When I went to Mexico -- I'm getting ahead of myself -- the first place I stopped on the first day I got to the post, even before I went to my office, was the consulate. I wanted the

junior officers in particular working there to know that I took what they did seriously. I'm not sure they appreciated my gesture because most of them did not understand how uninterested in their work most ambassadors are. The whole consular mess has not really changed very much since I was a vice consul in Guatemala in 1970. It's a grueling job, it really is.

Q: Well, how did you feel about -- was Washington, being so close to the United States with commercial ties and all, this sometimes can get us more involved in local affairs than we want because of connections to the United States. Did you find this was a problem during this time?

DAVIDOW: Well, I wouldn't say it was a problem. I think that most Venezuelans and certainly most politically active Venezuelans thought that the United States was a lot more powerful and a lot more intrusive than we really were. That was the case in many countries, particularly in Latin America. But by that time, '86 to '88, Venezuela was ticking over pretty well on its own.

Q: Well, how did you find the Political Section work? Were you able to have enough money to get the officers out and around the country?

DAVIDOW: Yes, I think so. I think they did a fair amount of traveling. And we had some really excellent political officers at different times, including Donna Hrinak, who was political consular when I was DCM. And then of course Donna went on to become a very successful ambassador. Venezuela was generally seen as a good posting, pleasant living, decent housing, interesting enough country. So it tended be bid on and sought after by good officers.

Q: Well, were we working with the Venezuelans to get them to do anything in Central America?

DAVIDOW: Very definitely. We had very deep ties with Venezuela through the CIA. These had been built up over the years, particularly because successive Venezuelan governments had seen themselves as having a security threat from Cuba. And Cuba even then was muddling around with certain left groups inside Venezuela. The two major Venezuelan political parties had their surrogates active in one way or another in Central America. And on the surface, Venezuelans would often be called upon to run USAID training programs for the judiciary or the police in those countries. Sub rosa they were also maintaining strong contact with the governments in Central America who were fighting against Cuban-supported guerillas. There was a very strong level of cooperation in Central America. After I left in 1988, Carlos Andrés Pérez, who had been President of Venezuela and then came back for a second term was very much involved in Haiti and worked very closely with the American administration on trying to promote change there. Venezuela was seen as an ally within Latin America that punched above its weight on international matters.

Q: How about, did it look like oil was going to run out, or was this a diminishing asset or were they looking for other stuff, or how stood it?

DAVIDOW: There was constantly in Venezuela a refrain among all the political parties that we really have to find ways to turn our oil revenue into productive purposes through industrialization or through the promotion of agriculture. And there was some progress in this direction during the '60s and '70s, using oil money to develop steel and aluminum industries and to really increase hydroelectric capability. But the economy was almost totally focused on extractive industries and particularly oil. At this point, in the mid-80s the oil industry had been nationalized for about 20 years. The three state oil companies were operating fairly well because they had maintained much of the personnel and professionalism of the private companies (Shell, Esso, etc.) that they had when nationalized. But it was clear that the companies needed more operating capital to develop. However, it was taboo to talk about bringing in private investment. What was remarkable was that when we came back to Venezuela in 1993, the conversation had shifted and the country was ready to discuss allowing private investment. It was a dramatic shift. But I'm getting ahead of myself.

Q: Well, I'm told that both Colombia and Venezuela, but even more Venezuela, had a gun culture of, you know, you went to a nightclub you checked your pistol, which you were always carrying with you. I mean was this a problem or was this true?

DAVIDOW: This was true and there were many armed people. Not so much as I had seen years before in Guatemala, but a lot of politicians had bodyguards, a lot of politicians carried guns, a lot of citizens carried guns. And there was a lot of street crime. And I remember one of our officers came into the embassy one day very shaken because he had witnessed a murder on the street right in front of the embassy. (A thief on a Vespa had stolen a woman's necklace and was getting away when the woman's husband pulled a gun and killed him outright.) One didn't see that often, but every Monday morning the newspaper reported on the number of violent deaths in the city, and it was always about 30 or more. The lack of decent policing was emblematic of a government that just couldn't seem to get itself organized. The Colombians, for instance, always looked down on Venezuela and would say in a rather disparaging way that , "Venezuela is a Caribbean country. Colombia is an Andean country," meaning that Colombia is a more serious, better functioning place, notwithstanding the fact that Colombia had for decades suffered from much greater levels of political violence than had Venezuela.

Q: Well, during the time you were there, how did you view within Venezuela the influence of the drug market?

DAVIDOW: We were aware that Venezuela was becoming a major transit point for drugs coming out of Bolivia, Peru, and particularly Colombia and heading up toward Florida. . We saw the first evidence of cultivation of coca in western Venezuela near the Colombian border. We were also aware that drug-related corruption was growing, particularly in the police and the National Guard. And working with the Venezuelan

authorities was something that occupied a great deal of my time. In later years drugs would become much more important, but in the mid-'80s it was already a factor.

Q: Well, then you left there when?

DAVIDOW: '88. I was only there for two years.

Q: You know, as you leave a post, did you ask yourself, whither Venezuela? Were things going nicely and was there really a call to even ask that question?

DAVIDOW: I don't think I asked myself that question. It seemed to me that in comparison -- and I say this again -- with much of the rest of Latin America, Venezuela was in pretty good shape at least on the surface. It had a steady source of income and a democratic government that seemed to be the envy of many Latins elsewhere. I would have had to have listed Venezuela as one of the most successful Latin American countries at that time. But, obviously given future events, it was a hollow sort of progress that ultimately led to Chavez.

Q:. So where did you go after you left Venezuela?

DAVIDOW: After Venezuela, I went back to Africa and I served as ambassador to Zambia. It was my first ambassadorial assignment.

Q: OK. So how did you get the Zambia job and what were you doing and what was Zambia like?

DAVIDOW: I had been in Venezuela as DCM for about two years, but as you remember, I had spent 15 years working on Southern African affairs. So when the Africa Bureau was looking for its new ambassador to Zambia, they asked me and I said yes. It would not have been my first choice, but it was my first ambassadorship and --

I thought I should take it.

Q: -- you don't turn those down.

DAVIDOW: Actually, I had turned down one 7 or 8 years before. We were reopening our embassy in Equatorial Guinea -- rightfully recognized as the worst place on earth -- and the bureau asked me if I wanted to be considered for the job. I'm pretty sure I could have had it -- there wasn't much competition -- and I spent a sleepless night thinking about it. But in the morning, it was crystal clear to me that it would have been a ridiculous sacrifice to have to separate from my family to go to a hellhole that no one really cared about. The potential title of ambassador had clouded my thinking for about 24 hours, but I snapped out of it and I said no.

It was one of those times in the Foreign Service when I said no, when, in effect, I refused to sacrifice family to ambition. At my swearing-in for Zambia, I made reference to a

poster that I had framed and I had in my office for many years. It was of Victoria Falls from the Zimbabwe side, looking towards Zambia, and in the faint distance there was a single dim light. It reminded me of the light on the pier opposite Gatsby's house and I made some reference to it. I think I was referring to Gatsby's self-creation and maybe thinking that in a way I had created my self from not auspicious (but not difficult) origins to be going off to be an ambassador. If that was what I was thinking, it constituted a lot more public expression of ego that I was accustomed to, but maybe I was kind of full of myself at that point. The reference was so convoluted that I can't imagine anyone really understood what I was talking about.

Q: OK. Do you want to talk just a bit about the early years of Zambia before you got there and all?

DAVIDOW: Zambia had formerly been known as Northern Rhodesia. And it peacefully got its independence from Britain in the early 1960's. It was still led by its founding president, Kenneth Kaunda, who ran a one-party state. It was a fairly easygoing autocracy in the sense that the level of repression was not very high. But he was the boss and that was it. Almost immediately after getting its independence, Zambia was thrown into a difficult situation because Southern Rhodesia led by Ian Smith, declared its independence in 1965 and created a white minority regime, with which Zambia had very, very difficult relations. By the 1990's, Kaunda had become one of the leaders of Africa and was considered a crucial player in trying to bring about negotiated settlements in Rhodesia, and in other conflict areas. He was also seen as a great spokesman in the West, in particular, against the white regime in South Africa. But he did manage to maintain sub-rosa relations, both with Smith and with white South Africans, which made him a "player" in western eyes. When I got there in 1988 the economy of Zambia was in bad shape. Kaunda had been in office by that time for almost 25 years. The country inevitably had all of the problems that come with one party, great man rule. Especially one in a conflict zone with a guiding ideology created in the London School of Economics. In other words, it was a quasi-socialist basket case. Of greater interest to us was not so much our relationship with the Zambia but rather that it was also the home base of the African National Congress, Nelson Mandela's organization. And when I got there in 1988, Mandela was still in jail in South Africa. We could see that the situation in South Africa was bubbling. De Klerk had replaced Botha as Prime Minister. Actually the most important part of my job was keeping in touch with the ANC headquarters.

Q: Well, when you arrived, would you *say the bloom was off the rose with Kenneth Kaunda, that the initial hope for Zambia at Independence had disappeared.?*

DAVIDOW: Of course, but our relationship with Kaunda was a good one, except for the fact that he was always criticizing us for supporting South Africa. But we felt we needed Kaunda and the other Front Line presidents - Tanzania, Botswana, Mozambique, and Angola, as actors in negotiation. And also, as I said, the situation in Zambia, although it was an economic disaster and politically a one-party state, was not the kind of horror show that one found in other parts of Africa, the Congo or other areas where you had really just horrible governments. So certainly we had no great expectation from Kaunda,

but we did recognize that he could possibly be an important factor in negotiations and an important conduit to other actors, particularly the ANC, both of which maintained there headquarters in Lusaka.

Keeping the Front Line States involved was crucial. In fact, at the Lancaster House Conference in 1979 which had brought about the peace process in Zimbabwe, it was Samora Machel of Mozambique who put the final squeeze on Robert Mugabe when he told him that he could continue the war against Ian Smith, but not to count on Mozambicans to bleed and die for him any more.

Q: Well, were we overtly supporting any of these movements

DAVIDOW: We did not support the South African guerrilla organizations either overtly nor covertly. Our support which was supposedly covert, but known to everyone, went to Jonas Savimbi and UNITA (National Union for the Total Independence of Angola) which was another area of conflict. We were -- generally we were seen by the ANC in South Africa and by almost all other liberation groups and black governments (except perhaps UNITA) as opponents, as enemies. Their strongly held idea, which was very firmly ingrained, was that the United States supported South Africa. And our policy at that time of constructive engagement, that is, trying to work with South Africa in order to promote change there and negotiations in the area was almost universally perceived as support for South Africa. So we were not anyone's heroes in that part of the world -- not even the South African whites who were suspicious of our motives as well.

Q: Well, I want to get my timing right. Who was Assistant Secretary for African Affairs when you took the Zambia job?

DAVIDOW: Chet Crocker.

Q: I've interviewed him and, you know, he talks about his problems in the Reagan administration with his constructive engagement, with the -- essentially the CIA running a completely different foreign policy. And as you were saying, our constructive engagement was considered to be pro-South African, when really the thrust of it, I take it, was really quite different. How did you feel about this?

DAVIDOW: I thought it made sense. I felt that our principal goal in that region was to try to act as the facilitator of peace negotiations. Rhodesia had been settled, but there was still violent conflict in South Africa, Mozambique and Angola. South Africa could not be ignored. And if we were going to have any influence, it made sense for us to maintain contact with the South Africans. I've always felt about diplomacy that you don't have the discretion to be very picky about who you deal with. You, have to deal with the realities of the situation. And I do think that maintaining contact with the South Africans, and letting people like De Klerk know that there might be a way out, both domestically and internationally, that the United States would be in there for the long run, was helpful. It became more difficult to convey that to the South Africans, especially after Congress passed sanctions in 1986 and then overrode Reagan's veto. But, I thought we had a role

to play in that region, and I think we did. Not just under Crocker, but under previous governments as well.

Q: Well, when you went out there, were you getting various people involved in African Affairs telling you to be sure to do this, be sure to do that? In somewhat conflicting -- I mean were you leaving behind sort of a conflicted bureau or State Department?

DAVIDOW: Well, Washington is almost always a conflictive place, but I took my guidance from the Africa Bureau of the State Department and it was pretty clear what I was supposed to do. Its not that I had specific instructions because as you know while people outside the State Department think that when an ambassador's sent out into the field he's got detailed book of instructions, in reality you're largely flying by the seat of your pants. But one of the things that I was certainly trying to do was to establish a dialogue with the ANC. And my predecessor, Paul Hare, had had such a dialogue. It was not easy because most of the people in the ANC headquarters in Lusaka were committed revolutionaries and did not trust the U.S. in any way. The ANC was a strange organization at that time, because when it left South Africa in the early 1960's, it had taken with it, as its controlling ideology, it's bible, so to speak, something called The Freedom Charter which was, in effect, a communist manifesto.

Q: Really?.

DAVIDOW: Keep in mind that many of the best minds in the ANC, particularly the whites and the Asians who formed a small but influential part of the organization, were committed communists. For years, the South African Communist Party had been outspoken in its opposition to apartheid, while other white political groups accepted it in one degree or another or timid in their rejection. The Freedom Charter, for instance, called for a South Africa in which the state would control all of the principal elements of the economy. Most of the ANC types in Lusaka led fairly isolated lives, and many of them, up until the late 1980's, could not accept that that kind of ideology was proving to be a total failure everywhere else in the world, particularly in the Soviet Union. So there was a great deal of suspicion of the United States, and downright hostility as well.

But there were people in the ANC with whom one could have good conversations. And in particular, the man with whom I had a very good relationship was Thabo Mbeki. And Mbeki was their international man. He was in charge of dealing with the rest of the world on political matters. He traveled constantly, but Lusaka was his home. Of course, he later followed Mandela as the second black president of South Africa. He was well-schooled, well-traveled, a charming guy. I remember one night he came to our house and our teenage girls were there on holiday. He sat at the piano and serenaded us all. He understood that the ANC leadership in Lusaka was not really ready for the modern world, that they were sticking to the decrepit Soviet era ideology. And so he encouraged me to meet with as many of them as I could. And we had many conversations in the living room of the residence. I would like to think that people came to my house because of the brilliance of my language and point of view. In truth, I think they came because I had more Johnnie Walker Black than anyone else in town.

Some of the visitors were really extraordinarily radical and argued that when they took over South Africa they were going to create, although they didn't use these terms, a new Soviet Union. And Mbeki realized just how impossible this was. He realized that there would have to be accommodation with the white economic power structure and the rest of the world. So it was an interesting period really.

Q: Well, had any of these ANC leaders, particularly proponents of the Soviet system, had they been to the Soviet Union and seen it in action?

DAVIDOW: I think many of them had visited and some had studied there. And like much of the rest of Africa, much of the rest of the third world, during the Cold War, the Soviet Union for all of its problems was viewed as a superpower on par with the United States. Certainly if you were coming from Lusaka, which was a pretty small town and you wound up in Moscow going to school, you felt like you've gone to a great metropolis, which indeed you had. There was also appreciation for the support the Soviets were giving the ANC and the armed struggle. I don't think that there was a general perception of just how weak the Soviets were and how decrepit their society was. Well hell, we hardly realized that ourselves.

Q: Well, when you arrived there, how were you received by Kaunda and his government?

DAVIDOW: Oh, Kaunda was always extraordinarily charming. He was always very polite, solicitous, all in all a fascinating man. He had dealing with foreigners down pat because there were always delegations from the international community and from the United States, antiapartheid groups which would travel to Zambia. They would be received in the State House, which was the old British governor's residence, which had deer and peacock roaming the grounds. Kaunda would host them at dinner or lunch. Kaunda never drank himself, but he would serve wine. And while he was complaining about how the South Africans were strangling his economy, if anybody thought to lift the napkins from the bottles, they would see that they were South African wine bottles. And usually he would finish every presentation by doing three things, crying, singing, and personally pouring tea or coffee for each of the guests. And all of this was immensely attractive to his visitors, almost all of whom were predisposed to commiserate with him. In my contacts with him he was always very pleasant. He was generally available. If I had to see him I would get to see him, which is not always the case for an ambassador. His immediate staff in the State House were open to me and I could see them as well. But things did not get done. The Zambians had spent a lot of time dealing with white colonialists and then with the West. It wasn't so much that the government was incompetent (though in many ways it was), it was just that they had their own way of doing things, or, more often, not doing things, without ever being candid.

But, I felt very welcome in Zambia, but it was a difficult environment. For my wife and I it was very much unlike South Africa and Zimbabwe where we had lived before. It was a desperately poor country. Lusaka itself was really something of a dump. But again, compared to other places Africa, it was ok. I remember my DCM was a great officer by

the name of Marshal McCallie. He and his wife and served mostly in Central Africa, in the Congo and elsewhere, and when they came to Lusaka they felt they were pitching up in paradise. Coming south to Zambia from the north, it looked pretty good. If you came up from South Africa and Zimbabwe, it looked pretty bad. We were comfortable there, but we were without our kids for the first time and that was difficult. Our girls were teenagers and one went to private school in the States and one stayed in Venezuela to finish her senior year of high school. So it was a difficult time I think personally for the whole family.

Q: Well, did you feel the hand of the London School of Economics in the Zambian government?

DAVIDOW: Of course. Much of Africa, particularly Zambia and Tanzania, paid the price of LSE influence and the idea of creating socialist states with state-run industries and utilities led to totally screwed up economies.

Q: Well, Zambia had minerals, was that it?

DAVIDOW: Right. Zambia had a great wealth of minerals, particularly copper. At one point, it was one of the world's largest copper producers. And they had private companies in there, particularly Anglo-American from South Africa. And even American companies like Phelps Dodge. But generally, the economy was run on a socialist model that was pretty much of a mess.

Q: Well, how did they get their copper out?

DAVIDOW: Well, that was difficult for them because they could not have direct trading contact with Rhodesia, which was right to its south. So copper would go out via South Africa, but through a circuitous route, through Botswana and then down into South Africa. It was a costly process.

Q: Well, were we doing anything in the aid business there?

DAVIDOW: In terms of aid, Zambia was per capita one of the larger aid recipients in Africa for many years, again because of what we saw as the geopolitical importance of the place and the need to maintain good relations with Kaunda. Also, we arrived at the beginning of the AIDs epidemic. The results were horrifying. At first, the Embassy did not understand how to deal with problem, either in terms of assistance or in dealing with our own personnel. The previous DCM (and I am talking about in the mid-80s before we became more knowledgeable) had read somewhere that AIDS could cause dementia and he wanted to fire any employee of the embassy who was HIV positive, especially drivers, because he felt that they might just go crazy one day while on the road. We brought a lot of common sense to the scene. But it was a tragic situation. We probably buried one employee or a member of their families every week while we were there. The embassy's carpenter spent most of his time building caskets for employees and their immediate family members. This became an established part of the of the FSNs benefit package.

One of the lighter notes in all of this was how we tried to scare the hell out of the Marines about sex in Zambia. Every new Marine received a stern talking to by the Gunnery Sergeant who headed the detachment. Then the embassy nurse, an extraordinarily frank woman, would talk to them. Then, the DCM, and finally me. The message was always the same, though the language was more refined in some conversations: "do not get sexually involved in Zambia." By the time they left my office, they were shaking. God only knows what effect the talks had, but I don't think we ever had a Marine contract AIDS in Zambia as far as I know.

Q: Well, in a small one-party state such as that, what do Political Officers and the like do?

DAVIDOW: We spent a lot of time on regional affairs, meaning what was happening in the countries around us, the negotiations processes, contact with Zambian government over this various international meetings, and, of course, following what was happening in the ANC. We did not spend a whole lot of time worrying about what was going on in the Zambian parliament, because that was largely dictated by what Kaunda decided on any given day.

Q: Well now, was there much sort of radical influence there? I'm thinking of Gaddafi and all. I mean was there essentially concern about what we would today call terrorism or anti-Americanism coming from outside?

DAVIDOW: In comparison to today it was really a rather simple time. Zambia was surrounded by countries in conflict, but Lusaka itself was a pretty peaceful place, although there was a fair amount of house break-ins. But we were not confronting what so many Foreign Service people have to deal with today.

Q: Well, I would think that Lusaka would be ort of an R&R (rest and relaxation) place for all the war and factions and the various states around you.

DAVIDOW: Well, not all of them because some did not have good relations with, with the Zambian government. For instance, there was always a very tense relationship between Zambia and Jonas Savimbi and UNITA of Angola. And we were supporting Savimbi in a very open covert program run out of the Congo. We respected Zambia's territorial rights. Savimbi did not always do so. And periodically, UNITA would try to mount operations out of Western Zambia, and this was trouble for Kaunda, because he wanted to maintain good relations with the government in Luanda. He did not like Savimbi, but he really couldn't do much about it. So on occasion, Zambian territory became a battlefield between UNITA and the government in Luanda. And similarly, Kaunda had no relationship with RENAMO, one of the factions in the Mozambican civil war. But in terms of supporting ZAPU, which was Nkomo's group in the Rhodesian struggle, and the ANC, they were in Lusaka and throughout Zambia in force and received a lot of help from Kaunda. (ZAPU had returned to Zimbabwe in 1980, six years before we went to Zambia).

Q: Was there any spillover, or was it just too far away, between Hutu and Tutsi problems?

DAVIDOW: No, not really. Except those kinds of issues would periodically become topics for us because Kaunda was seen as one of the grand old men of Africa. So, frequently he would be called to take a leading position in the Organization of African Unity or in the United Nations. We would have to pay attention to how Zambia voted and try to convince them that we were on the right side of things.

Q: This UN vote, particularly in Africa, the list of what we wanted to support became sort of the be all and end all for many of our ambassadors in Africa. Were you getting anywhere with this?

DAVIDOW: During the Reagan years, Ambassador Jeanne Kirkpatrick at the UN would keep score. I was always going in to see the Foreign Minister about some vote in the UN. And the Zambians saw themselves very much as part of the non-aligned movement, which really wasn't non-aligned and found itself siding with the Soviets and Chinese more so than with the Americans. But Zambia's importance to us in terms of regional issues and Kaunda's prominence gave it a sort of protection.

Q: Did you get many visits from Congress?

DAVIDOW: We were constantly being visited by CODEL's and other groups. During the time I was there, the African American Institute (AAI), the biggest group that focuses on Africa and lobbies in favor of better relations with Africa, and, in those days, was very much opposed to South Africa and apartheid, had a giant conference in Zambia. Several hundred leading African American politicians and others came, and, it fell to us to take care a lot of them. I remember calling on Jesse Jackson as a courtesy, and he couldn't have been more bored by my presence. We also had a lot of visitors from the State Department who would come and check in with Kaunda because he was seen as a player.

Q: Well, were you finding these visitors -- I'm not thinking of the State Department people, but others -- were they coming in and basically fairly naive of what we were trying to do, or?

DAVIDOW: Maybe naïve is not the word. But they for the most part were very committed to their antiapartheid positions, which I understood clearly, and saw Kaunda as a great statesman in this regard, and the Reagan administration as an adversary. And as I said, Kaunda played that role to a T. But in point of fact, I don't think he was particularly effective internationally. Domestically, his economy was a mess. But he did put on a good show.

Q: Well, now did he have any significant contact with the white South African government?

DAVIDOW: Yes, he always maintained sub-rosa contacts with them. And at times, the South Africans would be more interested in contact with him than at other times. Periodically, through the 80's, and even before, the South Africans would mount diplomatic offensives. And, of course, because South Africa controlled Zambia's access to the sea, Pretoria's power was great. But the relationship was always tense and sometimes very ugly. The South Africans actually staged commando raids in Zambia, including Lusaka itself, against the ANC headquarters and some of the ANC camps. So it was a very, very rocky relationship. The South Africans would put out the story that the violence in Zambia was the result of internecine ANC struggles, but that was patently false.

Q: How about the British?

DAVIDOW: The British had all of the concerns that we had. Plus, Kaunda was an important actor and player in the Commonwealth of Nations. The British at that time, and still today to a degree, saw the Commonwealth as an important entity to deal with, because it was the remnant of the British Empire. So they had all the same reasons for keeping up a close contact and, and being as supportive as possible with the Zambians, plus they had this Commonwealth link, which they took seriously.

Q: Well, did you find yourself working closely with the British?

DAVIDOW: Yes, we stayed in very close touch with the British. They were in effect the only other diplomatic mission that knew what was going on and could be counted on for intelligent conversation. There were some other individual diplomats, who were pleasant, and a few were knowledgeable, but really only we and the British were well informed. We actually had good relations with the Russians. Their ambassador was a political appointee who had never served in Africa, but he and his wife were thrilled to be in Zambia. They saw it as a sort of paradise and spent a great deal of time tending their garden and harvesting the kind of fresh vegetables they never could get in Moscow.

Q: Well, I know the Scandinavians, particularly the Swedes, had a fairly big footprint in Tanzania. How about Zambia?

DAVIDOW: They were big donors. And that was all for the good, I guess, although many of their projects -- just as many of our projects --were failures. But they were highly regarded and they spent a lot of time in southern Africa giving away money. There were always interesting people floating through. A particular swami had captured Kaunda's attention. He was set up in a nice house and I would visit him from time to time and we would commune about eternal verities. I assumed he was telling Kaunda how nice a person I was. But the conversations were surreal.

Q: And you left when?

DAVIDOW: Well, I left in early 1990 after being there for only 18 months. And that was a classic Foreign Service story. When Mandela was released from prison, the leadership

of the ANC very swiftly abandoned Lusaka and went and set up shop in South Africa. So, Lusaka became a much less interesting place after Mandela got out of jail. Then there were some difficulties in the Africa Bureau, which at that time was run by Hank Cohen. And you know, without getting into detail, because it relates to a particular individual, the guy who Hank had chosen to be PDAS was perceived by people on the Seventh Floor as not up to the job. And this was particularly acute because Hank Cohen loved to travel and wasn't there half the time. And this other fellow was having more contact with Baker and Eagleburger than many other regional PDAS's were having. And it wasn't working out. So they pushed Hank to replace the fellow. But Hank, who has many great qualities, did not like to work on these kind of personnel things. So he never got around to telling the fellow that I was about to be replace him, that he was losing his job.

Q: Oh God.

DAVIDOW: I had been contacted by Director General Ed Perkins and was already packing out Zambia, but I guess it wasn't well known. The PDAS was getting ready to take a 10-day trip to Africa and one of the other DAS's (Irv Hicks) finally went in to his office and said, "You know, you really ought to talk to Hank because when you come back you're not going to have a job," and that's how he found out that I was replacing him. It was a horrible, horrible thing. I felt sorry for the guy. But when he returned I was in his office and he had to go to some other place.

Q: Well, you left when?

DAVIDOW: April of 1990.

Q: Well, did you feel the fall or the collapse of the whole Cold War, Soviet structure, which is just beginning at that point? I mean was that resonating in Africa?

DAVIDOW: Yes, of course. But we were somewhat distanced from it all. We knew what was going on. We had local TV, but depended very heavily on the BBC radio news. But I remember very much watching Mandela walk out of prison. We were in Zambia and that was a very moving and exciting time. So we were aware the world was changing. Although Lusaka was not the center of the world, it was sort of an interesting place to be. It is hard for young officers today to realize how isolated we were in so many ways. It was a different life. The weekly movies at the Marine House were the highpoint of the social scene for many of the employees. We weren't upset to leave Zambia. Our kids were not with us, and it was difficult having two teen age daughters thousands of miles away.

Q: Oh yes.

DAVIDOW: We got a hardship allowance in Zambia, which was I think was 10% of salary. But we spent almost all of it on phone calls to the States and Venezuela to talk to our kids. And I would go crazy, because my wife would be there on a Sunday afternoon talking to our daughter about usual mother-daughter stuff like what dress are you going to

wear to the dance, and I'm sorry so and so is being mean to you at eight dollars a minute. *(laughs)* I would be pacing back and forth. And I think we spent the entire hardship allowance on telephone calls. So when we they asked me to go back, we said yes, but of course it was the usual State Department bait and switch. Ed Perkins, the Director General, called me in early April and said, "Would you come back and be the PDAS in AF?"

I asked "When?"

He said, "Oh, in the summer."

And then once I had agreed they called me five days later and said I had to be there by the following week. So I think I negotiated two weeks, but we were back in the States by late April of 1990.

Q: OK. Let me make my announcement. Today is the 1st of October, 2012 with Jeff Davidow. Jeff, could you talk about your time as PDAS?

DAVIDOW: The return to Washington threw me in to an environment which was at once very familiar and extremely challenging. I went back to work with many of the same people that I had worked with previously in the Africa Bureau and, of course, had been in contact with while I was in Zambia. So, on that front, the return was pretty comfortable. But it was a new job, and it involved me much more than ever before with the Seventh Floor. In part, this was because I had a higher position than previously, but also there were two other factors. The Assistant Secretary for Africa, Hank Cohen, was a man who loved to travel. He was indefatigable. (Travel in Africa is always strenuous, but he loved it). This meant that I was in charge of the Bureau for a great deal -- I would say 40-50% of the time and this meant I had a lot more contact with the 7th Floor, and, it was a very formidable leadership team up there; Baker, Eagleburger, Bob Zoellick, and Robert Kimmitt.

Actually, I got on with them fairly well. They were a pretty humorless bunch and I think they found me somewhat strange, but, more to the point, I knew when to bother them and when not to. Baker had no real interest in Africa, and, if I could convince him that I was minding the store, he was happy. Every morning, he had a staff meeting, and would go around the trouble asking each of the bureau representatives to brief him on what was happening. I learned that the less I talked, the better off we all were. Of course, when necessary, I would speak up, but I was pretty careful.

The only time that I really got in trouble at a staff meeting was when I announced what I thought was (and it truly was) a major development. Hank Cohen had gone off to London to mediate peace between the Ethiopian government and the Eritrean rebels. Their war had been going on for decades, and peace was essential as the Eritreans were about to enter Addis Ababa and there would have been a blood bath. Hank, without consultation with Washington, brokered a peace which involved the creation of a new state, Eritrea.

It is not often that a new state is created, especially one that owes a lot of its independence to an American diplomat, so I proudly announced this at staff meeting. The reaction was absolutely contrary to what I had expected. I had not realized that at this time when Baker and Eagleburger (who had once been ambassador to Yugoslavia) were trying to maintain the fiction of a united Yugoslav state, any news about the US acquiescing in, much less promoting, the dissolution of an existing nation would be bad news. His reaction had nothing to do with Ethiopia which he did not care about, but rather with the precedent it might set. Baker blew up. He started to grill me and clearly dissatisfied left the staff meeting and went to his office where he called Cohen in London and read him the riot act. Cohen, with great equanimity, said what was done was done, and, in any event, it was a necessary step. And, obviously, Yugoslavia was falling apart on its own and didn't need any encouragement from Ethiopia and Eritrea.

The period 1990-93 while I was PDAS and often running the Bureau was one of continuing chaos in the region. I spent more nights than I wanted to in the Operations Center managing crises, some of them very frightening. In August of 1990, Liberia was in the middle of a civil war and our embassy was about to be overrun. The carnage in the country was horrible, and we had to ask the marines to go in to evacuate the embassy and other American citizens. I was on the phone in the Operations Center talking to our ambassador in Monrovia, Dennis Jett, who like me also had a lot of Latin American experience. We were talking about the imminent arrival of the marines when some busybody security guy in the Operations Center told us that we couldn't be talking about such issues on an open line as the rebels could intercept our messages. This was absolutely ridiculous. They had neither the capability or the interest, but to get him off our backs I convinced him that if Dennis and I spoke in Spanish, the rebels would not be able to understand us. I'm sure that our conversation about "helicopteros" would not have fooled anyone, if they had been listening, which they weren't.

There were several other evacuations, including Sierra Leone and some other countries I cannot recall now. The most harrowing for me, and perhaps in FS history was saving our embassy in Somalia in January, 1991. This has been much written about because it involved moving an aircraft carrier from the Middle East and launching the helicopters from a distance of over 400 miles and refueling them in flight at night. But the situation was dire. The ambassador, Jim Bishop, was one of the coolest heads in the FS, and when he told us that "they are coming over the walls," he was not exaggerating. He gave the order for the Marines to shoot and they did. The Mogadishu chief of police showed up at the compound and fearful for his life he entered with live grenades and held up Bishop for whatever he could steal. Bishop gave him the keys to the ambassadorial Cadillac in order to get rid of him. It was very tense. Robert Gates, who was Deputy Defense Secretary, told the Operations Center that his Defense Attaché in Somalia had let him know that things were not quite as bad as Bishop was reporting. Based on my general low opinion of DATTs and their ability to size up unfamiliar circumstances and my high regard for Bishop, I insisted that we had to go ahead with the rescue plan. (I think Gates would have gone ahead anyhow. The rules of Washington bureaucracy are such that if he had called it off and things went bad in Somalia. He would have been destroyed). I

remember going to the airport o greet the embassy staff when they finally got home. Very emotional.

Perhaps even more harrowing was the night we lost an embassy, or should I say, we lost contact with it. I had worked for years on the Angola problem, supporting succeeding assistant secretaries. Ultimately a peace process and elections were achieved. In September, 1992, Jonas Savimbi of UNITA who we had supported for many years, first to help him fight the Soviet-backed MPLA, and then later to keep him more or less willing to participate in elections, refused to accept the election results. Fighting broke out again. The small number of UNITA officials in Luanda made a run for it and were killed. Others decided to come to our compound and look for prisoners to take as shields in their getaway efforts. The compound was little more than trailers, and the last words I heard from our staff was that they were that they were going to hide to avoid the UNITA soldiers who were breaking in. We then lost contact with them. The only communication we had with Luanda was with the British ambassador who was also pinned down. For about 8 hours we heard nothing, and I was convinced that a dozen or so Americans had been kidnapped or worse. In fact, they hid under the trailers while UNITA searched for them and the MPLA fired mortars into the compound -- one of which bounced off one of the trailers without exploding, I remember that my stomach was in knots and that a diet of tension, donuts and coffee had me dry heaving over the toilet in the little bathroom in the Operations Center. Undoubtedly, it was one of the worst nights of my life, and the relief when we finally made contact with our people, who were all safe, was immense.

There was always a crisis in the Africa Bureau. In Chad, rebels supported by the Qadhafi made a successful dash for the capital. The CIA had about 400 anti-Qadhafi Libyan rebels training there and making forays into southern Libya. They had to be gotten out or they would be killed. With great courage, the CIA sent in a C-130 and the pilots loaded all 400 on one plane and flew them out -- first to Nigeria where the ambassador thought that they could stay and then to Kenya. It was absolutely nail-biting adventure. The plane was built to hold half that number of people. Ultimately, the 400 hundred were allowed to enter the US as refugees, over the objections of the Refugee Bureau, which saw them as cutthroats. I've often thought that I'd like to know what happened to those men once they were settled in the US.

And while all this was going on, we were trying to broker a peace in Mozambique between the government and RENAMO, a particularly thuggish guerrilla movement, and we were following closely, if somewhat ineffectually, terrible violence in South Africa between the ANC and Buthelezi's Inkatha as the country moved toward the elections that brought Mandela into office.

The three years that I spent as PDAS were very busy and frequently just plain scary. I was not disappointed when I was asked to go to Venezuela as ambassador. The nomination was made by the Bush White House, but was not acted upon by the Senate. I had to wait through the elections of 1992, Clinton's inauguration, and several more months before the White House re-nominated me.

Q: How did this appointment come about?

DAVIDOW: It was a normal rotation. The previous ambassador had been there for about three years and it was time for a new ambassador to come in. And I think I was chosen because I had recently served in Venezuela from ’86 to ’88. And I was something of a known quantity to the 7th Floor because I had had a lot of contact with the leadership as AF PDAS.

Q: Well, now Venezuela, you know, for so long had been sort of a friendly country. I would have thought this would be a prime political spot for a political ambassador.

DAVIDOW: The situation in Venezuela had gotten very tense, and it would not have made sense to send a political appointee. Indeed, I replaced a career person. In 1989 there had been major rioting in Caracas, and then in 1992 there were two coup attempts, one led by Hugo Chávez. So by the time I got there in mid-1993, the president of the country had been kicked out of office by his parliament. It was a very tense, difficult situation. There was a interim president, a distinguished old judge who had been put in the job and was just holding on as the country was getting ready for elections. And those elections were in doubt because there were all sorts of rumors and concern that the military, this time the senior ranks of the military, would stage a coup, particularly if the leftist candidate was elected. So I went down with very specific instructions to let the military know that the U.S. government would not support any military coup and that our goal was to promote free and fair elections. We did not ever say we would institute sanctions, but it was clear that if the military got involved and tried to overthrow the government or dispute the results of the election, we would react strongly. And that message got through, it got across. And that was an important time for us. I think the first four to six months that I was there through the election were quite difficult, very tense. As it turned out, the election was won by a former President of Venezuela, Rafael Caldera. The military had initially also been opposed to him, but finally they accepted him. At the time, I thought that Caldera had won fair and square, but in the years since, I’ve begun to think that the leftist candidate might actually have won and that the powers that be united to support Caldera and fix the vote to make him president.

Q: Why had they been opposed to him?

DAVIDOW: Well, Caldera had been president before (in fact, he had actually run (unsuccessfully) for president for the first time in 1936. He was a founder of the COPEI party, the second largest one in Venezuela, allied with internationally with the Christian Socialists. But by 1993 he was out of favor in his own party and he put together a coalition with a lot of smaller groups, including the communists. And this scared a lot of the people in the military. All in all, it was a good exercise in the utilization of American influence as we made clear that we would not accept military involvement. Even before I went down to Venezuela, one of their leading admirals came to Washington and a number of us from The White House and State Department had a meal with him. And he started to talk about the potential need to overrule their election results. And we came down on him like a ton of bricks. It was also a challenging time for me, because the

PDAS in the America's Bureau was the guy who I had replaced in Venezuela and both he and the NSC Latin American fellow were very excitable types and were always roiling the waters in Washington. I had to spend a good amount of my time in the run-up to the election calming them and others down.

Q: Just to get a feel, what difference did it make? I mean were they were worried about you and whether you had the steadiness to pull to the line, or were they just excitable, or what?

DAVIDOW: I think they were excitable. They may have doubted my ability. They were getting constant communication from sources in Venezuela, because there were so many Venezuelans who had good ties with the U.S. government that they would get these reports that a coup was imminent. I must have been woken up 15 times before the election in the middle of the night saying, "We hear that the tanks are moving."

And I would make a few phone calls and say, "Go back to sleep. The tanks are not moving."

It was one of these times when Washington was just too much involved. And I really resented having to spend as much time as I did basically keeping them from going off the deep end. Of course, they were worried what a coup would mean, the challenge it would present to the Clinton White House, and the perceived "failure" of US policy.

Q: Well, now in the first place, you were there from when-to-when?

DAVIDOW: I was there from '93 to '96.

Q: OK.

DAVIDOW: And so we got to the elections. That worked out fine. There was a transfer of power. Caldera proved to be a very weak president. The first thing he did to gain favor with the left was to release Hugo Chávez from prison. And so, there was the whole question of how the U.S. government would deal with Chávez, and our position was that he was a coup plotter and we did not want to have any contact with him that would somehow validate his illegal activity. So he kept sending me messages wanting to meet, and I kept refusing. And I came under pressure from the American business community in Venezuela who said, "Oh, you really should meet with this guy. Maybe we can make him a functioning democrat." But we did not. And I do not think we would have changed Hugo Chávez in any way if we had had contact with him. Later when he formed a political party and got into the legitimate political process, my successors did meet with him, but I didn't meet him until many years later (when he upstaged Obama at a hemispheric summit in Trinidad in 2009).

Q: Well, at the time when he was released, sometimes you know, a coup plotter is not a particularly effective -- would not seem to be a particularly effective person, because he's already got that stigma. And coup plotters have to be kind of back in the shadows.

DAVIDOW: Well, I think there were two things that worked in Chávez's favor. First, when he was arrested on the day of his coup attempt, the government foolishly gave him the opportunity to make a public statement. And he came across as a very dedicated, intense, charismatic young man who said " I'm going to jail "for now", and that created an expectation that he wasn't through. Second, what had become apparent by this time -- and had not been so visible when I left Venezuela in 1988, was that its vaunted bipartisan political situation in which the two major parties alternated power had basically proven to be pretty hollow and there as a lot of public dissatisfaction, especially with the rampant corruption. In the election that Caldera won, the new parties got more than 50% of the vote, outpolling the combined tallies of the traditional two major parties. It was as if we had an election in the States and the Republicans and Democrats together got less than half the vote. So the Venezuelan model was running out of steam and here was this charismatic lieutenant-colonel who was like the proverbial man on the white horse.

Q: Well, were we troubled by the situation, which from what I gather, the people I've talked to, had prevailed for decades and that was a tremendous discrepancy in wealth between the upper class and the lower class.

DAVIDOW: That was the major problem. Venezuela had been one of the original recipients of Alliance for Progress assistance back in the '60s. But later because of its oil revenue, it was no longer eligible for American assistance. What you had in Venezuela, was a tremendous inequality in how the wealth of the country was distributed. And this was exacerbated by very high levels of corruption. And basically this two-party system that I described was a way that the political elite would get together every few years and divide the spoils. The party that won the biggest share of the vote would take the majority of the spoils and the corruption, but they would make sure that the other party also got something. Now, under Caldera, something happened which was very interesting. He was a fairly old line Latin American leftist. But he understood that the oil sector needed financial help in order to develop. The oil sector had been nationalized in 1968. And a little less than 30 years later he started the process of allowing private investment back in. The American oil companies for the most part were interested in doing that, and the process to allow that was handled in a very transparent way. So while Caldera was not an effective president, he did bring about this infusion of new capital and new actors in the oil industry, and that was to the good. And as the Ambassador, I had to do a lot of encouraging and convincing of many oil companies that they should participate. There were a lot of high level executives who back in 1968 had been junior engineers in Venezuela and had been given a few weeks to leave the country. And the scars were very deep. But I did my best to encourage the oil sector to develop. Looking back on it, I may have been wrong because when Chávez came in, he renationalized what had been privatized. So the companies that had been very skeptical when I was making my arguments may have been right. But my position seemed to be the right one at the time.

Q: Well, how did you find American oil interests playing in Washington and on you?

DAVIDOW: Well it was a major economic and bilateral topic. In some ways, Venezuela was as active in the U.S. as the American companies were active in Venezuela. PDVSA, the Venezuelan state oil company owned CITGO. And at one time CITGO was one of the largest, if not the largest, chain of gas stations in the United States, many of them franchised but still a very large number owned, in effect, by the Government of Venezuela. And Venezuela also owned refineries here. So, there was a very intense energy relationship between the two countries.

And the relationship seemed to be transparent, open and above board. I'm not naïve, but I think the days of big American oil, pulling all the strings in foreign countries, was pretty much over. So the important thing was to make sure that as the bids went in and the negotiations took place that there was a strong support for the oil companies, and in doing so we let Venezuelans know that the U.S. government was supporting them in their efforts, in that we wanted American companies to get some of these contacts as well. I think it worked out quite well and there was no arm-twisting that I'm aware of. During my time there, we did manage to screw up on the petroleum front in one big way. Venezuelan oil shipped to the US contained a certain additive that environmentalists were opposed to. After much negotiation, Caldera himself called me at home (something he rarely did) and said that he accepted our negotiating position to lower the additive which would cost Venezuela a fair bit of money. It was major victory for our diplomacy, but the White House, in attempting to save the seat of one congresswoman, Marjorie Mezvinsky, who had a refinery in her district, backtracked on the agreement. (Quite unrelated to this, her son later married Chelsea Clinton). But I lost a lot of face with Caldera because of our double-cross.

Q: Oh yeah, I'm listening. How did you find your embassy? The people around you? Were you mixed in opinions, or how?

DAVIDOW: I think it was a fairly homogeneous embassy -- no major policy disputes or divisions. We had some very good people. What was also developing at that time was real concern about the spillover effect of narcotics from Colombia. And we had indications that the Colombian drug traffickers were spending more time and taking over more land on the western border of Venezuela. And so, we upped our activity in terms of the FBI and the DEA. And I don't know how successful we were because there was a fair amount of corruption and just plain inefficiency in Venezuelan law enforcement and the military. What was kind of fun to observe, and my wife and I always commented on it, was that when we had been in Venezuela five years earlier as DCM, we had been treated politely, but certainly the movers and shakers of Venezuelan society, particularly the business community, really did not pay much attention to us, which was fine with us. But when we came back, everyone reminded us of how they had been our strongest friends and what have you. Because now that we were ambassador, you're much smarter and better looking than you've ever been before.

Q: Oh yes. Well --

DAVIDOW: Actually, something funny happened on the last night that I was there as DCM. The head of the major political party, asked me to come to his house for drinks. And he invited the very top levels of that political party, including the sitting president and the former president. One of them was frank enough to say to me at that time, "Well, we've come because there's a chance you'll come back and be ambassador here some day, so we want to send you off properly." At that time I had no intention of coming back.

Q: Well, what was the situation on the ground? I mean you had this discrepancy in wealth. But what about demonstrations, violence, discontent, what have you?

DAVIDOW: There was high level of violence and criminality. And that was a problem in Venezuela. But there really wasn't, as I recall, demonstrations, riots and strikes. Caldera, finished off his term in 1998, (after I had left Venezuela) and by that time, the political parties were just so weak that they almost fell apart. For instance, the candidate of one of them was a guy who was an old party apparatchik who was absolutely convinced he was going to win because it was his due. And the other major party had fallen on such bad times that their candidate was the former Miss Universe, who had no political training. She had a really nice figure. But the people went out and voted in Hugo Chávez because they were fed up.

Q: Well, did we see hope for a solid democratic party that would try to do something about, what I take it was considered a mess Venezuela was in?

DAVIDOW: That was our hope and that was one of the reasons we were encouraging U.S. investment in Venezuela. We thought that maybe there was a way that this oil money could be utilized for a better educational system and other social programs, but it didn't happen. And the dissatisfaction grew, the political scene deteriorated, and that opened the door for Hugo Chávez to come in.

Q: Well, did we see the hand of Cuba or its Sandinistas in things that were happening?

DAVIDOW: I can't remember if we had evidence of Cuban support. It would not surprise me if there was. But Chavez was a homegrown phenomenon. He won because he was an attractive candidate and he was offering something different.

Q: Were we watching the Cubans?

DAVIDOW: Oh, we're always watching the Cubans. You know, during the periods before Chávez, the Venezuelan government was always watching the Cubans as well. They had diplomatic relations, but there was a lot of distrust of Castro, because he had been involved in promoting guerilla activity in Venezuela in earlier years, and it was a difficult relationship. Also, the Venezuelan government maintained a lot of fairly twisted ties with anti-Castro Cubans, some of whom were pretty violent thugs.

Q: How about the Junior Officers? Often you can turn them loose to mix and mingle with the more liberal appearing groups.

DAVIDOW: I think our Junior Officers had good contacts, probably not very good or extensive with Chávez's people. Keep in mind, Chávez recruited a whole new class of political actors. And they were not the kinds of people, even from the traditional left, that we knew. So I don't know how effective they were. But Venezuela was a fairly easy country for young officers. It was not difficult to make contact and get around.

Q: Well, I'm told that there were problems with threats of violence. How about that for you and the embassy staff?

DAVIDOW: No, we were OK. I don't recall being particularly worried about any sort of political violence. But we were very concerned about common criminality. We made the decision that embassy employees would live in apartments because they were safer and we phased out most rentals of houses. Also, during this time we were engaged in building a new embassy in what I thought I was a very poorly chosen location. And it was chosen because there was plenty of land around it. But the streets leading to it and the whole traffic flow was really horrible. So when we opened the embassy, it caused immense problems with the neighbors and with the traffic and what have you. And it was one of these new embassy buildings, a real fortress, that was not in any way appealing. While I was DCM. they actually chose the spot for the new embassy. I was very much against it, and I was actually pushing for another plot of land. Finally I was overruled, particularly by the ambassador and by the State Department. And I remember thinking quite clearly "Aw, the hell with it. If they want to build their damn embassy there, they'll regret it." But of course I returned five years later and I was the one who had to live with it.

Q: (laughs) How did you find the difference between Venezuelan, this type of society that congregates around the Ambassador between the time you left and you came back? The same people?

DAVIDOW: Yes, very much the same people. We spent a lot of time with the political class. And we also had good contact with the, the business community which was very much involved with the United States. Most wealthy Venezuelans -- of whom there weren't that many, but they were an important part of society -- had their apartments in, in Miami. And they were very much focused on the U.S. That's where their kids went to school and where they spent their holidays. They were not objectionable people for the most part, but both the political class and the upper economic class did not represent Venezuela. And we would do our best to reach out to the rest of Venezuela through our USIS programs and other activities, but I don't know how successful we were. We facilitated visas for the Venezuelan youth orchestra -- which has now become quite so famous a system of musical training that even Chavez did not mess with -- to make their first trip to the US.

Q: Did you have any programs that would reach down into the less influential class to take their sons and daughters and get them exposed to American institutions?

DAVIDOW: We did spend a lot of time on visitors programs. We had libraries in several cities. We did the traditional USIA kinds of things, some of which were beneficial. We did a lot of student counseling. But some of the programs were the usual USIA crap, e.g. bringing in a collection of modern dancers that would usually just baffle the audiences rather than convince them of the value of American art.

Q: Well, it's still early days. But what about computer, internet communications? Was this beginning to change the landscape?

DAVIDOW: The landscape was changing, but it was still very much under control in the mid-90s in the embassy. The chain of information had not yet fallen apart. The profound change in how the Department operated did not come for a few years more. I became very aware of how communications changed the way the department operated several years after I retired when I went back to work in the Department for just three months at the beginning of the Obama administration. Somebody would draft a paper or a telegram and would immediately send it out to 20 people for clearances and everybody would comment on it, and then each of the 20 would comment on the other 19 comments, and so on and so on. It moved quite frankly too fast for me. I liked the old system in which somebody drafted and it went to his section chief and it went to the DCM, and analogous situations in Washington. Of course, it was frustrating because things moved slowly, but it was less chaotic. I know I sound like an old curmudgeon, and, in this sense, I guess I am.

Q: How about, were your officers seeing a change in society in, in Venezuela at the time?

DAVIDOW: I think in, in retrospect, we probably were becoming more aware of the tension in society. And I we saw this during the electoral campaign of 1993, that poor people were no longer being controlled by the two major parties, but were looking for other leaders, other voices. And I think that was a major development. I don't think we necessarily remember great changes about life on the street. But maybe there were and I just don't recall.

Q: How had the situation in Central America -- were there any reflections on it? By this time the Sandinistas had been voted out, I think.

DAVIDOW: Well, the Venezuelans had always maintained a strong involvement in Central America. And the two political parties had been very much involved in training of their ideological colleagues in Central America. During the Contra War,, the Venezuelans been generally supportive of U.S. efforts. But there was a change under Caldera. Under previous presidents, particularly Carlos Andrés Pérez -- who was the President who got kicked out of office in 1992 -- Venezuela really tried to establish itself as a major actor in Latin America, and particularly in the Caribbean. Pérez was very much involved in cooperating with the U.S. in Haiti. But when he left and Caldera ultimately came in, they pulled their horns back and became quite inward looking. So there was a change and no longer did we get great support of the Venezuelans for what

we were trying to do. I remember at one point a delegation led by Deputy Secretary Talbot came to Caracas to get the Venezuelans to state their support for military intervention in Haiti. I had explained to the Department that they were operating on old assumption. If they had come a couple of years before when a different president was there -- because Carlos Andrés Pérez was very close to George Bush's father -- it would have been a different response. But now the political environment had changed and the Venezuelans gave them the cold shoulder. They really did not understand in Washington how things had changed. And they weren't listening to us in the embassy.

Q: Was Senator Helms a factor in this period?

DAVIDOW: Of course he was a major factor in all things having to do with Latin America, ultimately culminating or reaching his high point with the Helms-Burton legislation against foreign companies that invested in Cuba. But I don't recall any particular Helms related involvement in Venezuela.

Q: What about Colombia? How stood things in --

DAVIDOW: There's always been tension stemming from unresolved border conflicts with Colombia dating back to the early 19th century. And periodically, those flare up. And there was a continuing dispute over the maritime frontier and periodically Venezuela or Colombia would send a navy ship and for a few weeks it'd look like things would really blow up. But then they'd calm down. The relationship was essentially a good one with Colombia which included a lot of cross border trade and tremendous amounts of smuggling. But Venezuela really had no, no major problems with its neighbors, except that the two countries, for a variety of reasons, were never really able to coordinate their anti-narcotics activities.

Q: How about with Guyana?

DAVIDOW: During the time I was there that was not an issue. Venezuela on paper continues to claim part of Guyana. When Chávez came in, he actually changed the Venezuelan flag, which had six stars on it, and he added a seventh star to represent that portion of Guyana, which he wanted the world to know was Venezuela's claim. But he hasn't done anything about it.

Q: How about the issue of drugs?

DAVIDOW: Big issue, because we saw the drugs coming from Colombia and we saw drugs being grown in Venezuela. We were concerned because the Venezuelan authorities were not efficient and there was a high level of corruption. Keep in mind that in the '80s and '90s, the major route into the United States from Colombia was through the Caribbean to Florida. And so Venezuela was right on this path. Later, when we squeezed Miami, the route into the United States moved over toward Mexico. But this was a major issue. We spent a lot of time on drug topics with the Venezuelan government, with its military, and with the National Guard which was the military force most involved in anti-

drug campaigns and also most involved in drug corruption. So I would say oil and drugs were the big issue.

Q: Well, how did you feel and your officers feel about Venezuelan authorities and the drug problem?

DAVIDOW: Well, we really did not have much confidence in them. And in fact, when I got there in '93, our relationship with the National Guard had really fallen on hard times because of our suspicions of them. And I made a point of visiting their headquarters and restarting the relationship. It's like the old joke about the guy who is warned that the poker game in the bar is crooked but plays anyways because it is the only game in town.

We did training, we exchanged some information and helped with spraying programs. But there was always suspicion that a lot was going on that we didn't know about.

Q: How about contacts with the military? Did we feel that they were a growing influence of Chávez?

DAVIDOW: We had good contacts with the military leadership. In fact, we had a military office on the main base in Caracas and we did a lot of training because we had sold a lot of arms. Some of our younger officers would come back with reports of dissatisfaction among younger military, but, for the most part the dissatisfaction, where it existed, was not revealed to us, or if it had been, our military people did not have the capacity or political radar to understand it. But in point of fact, when Chávez came to office, he came through an election, not through a military coup.

Q: Well, how did you and your wife find social relations there? I mean your life there?

DAVIDOW: It very active. Being the American Ambassador in Venezuela is sort of hard work, although Mexico would prove to be even more onerous. You're constantly being sought after for this event or that. And we were very active. We did a lot of entertaining and we opened our home to the embassy personnel and to all elements of the mission, the Commerce, Agricultural, and other agencies, so that they would know that we supported them all

Q: After your tour in Venezuela as ambassador, where did you go?

DAVIDOW: I went back to Washington to be Assistant Secretary for Latin America.

Q: So who was President and Secretary of State then?

DAVIDOW: Well, Clinton had won in '92. And Warren Christopher was Secretary of State.

Q: Now, so how did you feel about this job? This is a pretty major job.

DAVIDOW: I did not want it *(laughs)*. I was in Venezuela, had been there for less than three years, was hoping to get another overseas posting, but I was asked to come up and meet with Mr. Christopher. I told him that I really did not enjoy working in Washington and I would prefer to stay overseas. And he thanked me for my point of view and a couple days later I got the job.

Q: So there (laughs) -- so none of this finagling -- well, tell me. How did you find the bureau at that time? ARA Bureau, had it become Western Hemisphere at that time, or?

DAVIDOW: It became Western Hemisphere Affairs after I left. But the bureau was in very bad shape because the Assistant Secretary and three of the four Deputy Assistant Secretaries were all leaving at the same time. So we had a real problem of staffing for the front office.

Q: Was this political, that they were leaving all at the same time?

DAVIDOW: No, they were going on to new assignments or they were retiring. There was nothing political about it. It just happened. These things sometimes do happen in the State Department. I would have been delighted for any and all of them to stay on. But, I had to put together a new front office, and that entailed the usual robbing of individuals from other places and trying to get the right mix. And I think we did put together a new good team, but it was very difficult.

Q: First place, why don't we talk about maybe the people who got on the team? How did they come about?

DAVIDOW: Well, I'll just talk about one of them, because it's a funny story. I really felt the need for a good person to be the economic DAS because I felt less capable in that area than in others. It was very difficult to find anyone of the right rank and right experience. And finally, I heard about a guy who had just been assigned to go up to New York to be our number two in our representation to ECOSOC, which is the UN's social and economic committee. Brain Samuels was a very bright fellow. He didn't have any Latin American experience, but he was an excellent economist. And I said, "Wouldn't you rather be a DAS?" which was a higher ranking position, and he responded affirmatively.

The problem was that that position in New York had been empty for quite some time and the U.S. Ambassador there, a woman named Madeline Albright, became really angry when I stole her appointee.

And I remember getting a call from the head of management of the State Department, Dick Moose who had been my boss years earlier when he was assistant secretary for Africa. Dick warned me. He said, "This doesn't make sense. Madeline Albright's going to be the next Secretary of State when Christopher leaves, and you're pissing her off."

And my response was, "Dick, I'm sitting in the office right now at 10:00 at night in a job that I really didn't want, and when Ms. Albright comes, if she wants my job, I don't really mind if she takes it." And as it turned out, when she did come on as the Secretary of State, she and her staff were at first pretty frosty to me, but we actually became good friends. When you get into positions like that, you really have to spend a tremendous amount of time on personnel issues. It gets down and dirty pretty fast.

Q: Well, what were you hearing about Madeline Albright as you got on, you know, you came on board? I mean obviously the corridors must have been full of chitchat about that.

DAVIDOW: The chitchat was that she was the next logical appointee to be Secretary of State. I came on board in mid-'96, that is, before the election of '96. And it was expected that after the election Christopher would retire. I think he had actually publicly said that. And the most logical person to come on -- to replace him, and it seemed to be almost unanimous consensus, was Mrs. Albright, who was up at the UN and had done an excellent job up there and would become the first female secretary of state.

Q: Well, as you saw it -- first place, let's talk about the organization of ARA. Were there any glaring problems there, outside of getting the team in place?

DAVIDOW: No, the bureau had been well run. My predecessor, Alec Watson, had done a very good job, and the middle and junior levels were well-staffed. The problem was in the front office at the DAS level because of the simultaneous vacancies. In addition to this economics officer that I mentioned, Bryan Samuels, John Hamilton, who was an old ARA hand, came to handle all of Central America and the Caribbean. He was excellent, and I really never had to worry about getting involved in those countries. Peter Romero, who had been ambassador in Ecuador came up as PDAS. And then Arturo Valenzuela, who I had worked with before, and who would later, in Obama's first term, become assistant secretary, was an academic at Georgetown who came in as a political appointee. It was a strong team.

Q: Yeah. By the way, I saw in the paper I think yesterday a little notice saying Peter Vaky had died.

DAVIDOW: I saw that. I've seen him a couple of times in recent years at various events. And he, he was looking a bit feeble. And I guess Pete must have been -- you know, he was well on in years. Sorry to see him go.

Q: Well, OK, let's take the hemisphere. What was sort of on your plate?

DAVIDOW: There were several important issues that marked our policy in the mid '90s. In a way, it was a good time for U.S. relations with Latin America. The Cold War was over, and we could focus on issues that weren't the product of our competition with the Soviets. The big thrust of our policy was to promote democracy, sound economic policies and regional integration, the latter both within Latin America and with the United States

through a hemisphere-wide free trade agreement. On the democracy front, the Organization of American States adopted a democracy charter in 1998. No longer would the countries of the hemisphere deal with governments installed by military coups. In retrospect, that approach has been nibbled away in recent years and the region has not come up with a way to deal with the deterioration promoted by governments which are democratically elected, but then become autocratic and chip away at democratic rights, e.g. Venezuela. And even within the generally positive movement, there were still attempts at military coups, for instance in Ecuador and Paraguay, but we played a useful; role in keeping the military in their barracks and patching together civilian-based resolutions.

Looking back, on the economic front, Latin America has been more successful in maintaining the kind of responsible economic policies -- which became known as the Washington Consensus. There has been some backsliding and a lot of rhetoric aimed at "neoliberalism," but for the most part governments have stuck to the basic tenets they adopted in the 90's, e.g. independent central banks, phasing out unnecessary subsidies, reducing the number of wasteful state-owned enterprises, etc. And this was not a process without difficulty, but I think we saw more unanimity of action and opinion during that period than we had seen before. Now, it wasn't perfect, sometimes the very movement towards economic reform would hurt segments of the society, particularly the poor, and this of course created popular unrest.

On the economic integration front, we actively pushed for countries to work together, for instance Argentina, Chile and Bolivia on energy cooperation. But we were not successful in moving toward a Free Trade Area of the Americas which had been established as a target at the first Summit of the Americas in Miami in 1994. We had to confront the vast differences in the size of the economies, traditional suspicions about U.S. motives, and real opposition from Brazil which saw the Free Trade Area as a real challenge to its protectionist policies and international ambitions. Generally, though, I think that we had a well-defined policy and things were generally moving in the right direction in Latin America in the 1996-98 period.

Now, Cuba was as always a special case. We were always looking for ways to promote democracy there, and I recall that we were very encouraged by the prospects that we hoped might emerge from the Pope's visit there in 1997. The Vatican asked us to be less aggressive and leave it to them to put more "oxygen" into the Cuban scene. The Pope was not successful. Also, our policy was self-defeating -- we tried to convince the Cuban government to allow us to promote some minor activities, e.g. academic exchanges, but defended these programs on the Hill by saying that they were designed to undercut Castro. The response from Havana was predictable. And what really complicated our relationship with Cuba and much of Latin America, which tends to sympathize with Cuba, was the Helms-Burton legislation. This was a law instigated by Senator Helms in the Senate and Mr. Burton in the House, which in effect, penalized third country companies for operating in Cuba, especially if they were operating with a property or businesses that had previously been owned by American companies. It also took on as obligation of the US Government to fight for compensation of expropriated properties of

not only Americans, but of Cubans who later became Americans after the expropriation -- a damned foolish idea. And most importantly, it enshrined the embargo into law which could only be changed by Congress. Up until that time, the embargo had been in place by executive order and could have, theoretically at least, been done away with by the president acting on his own.

So Helms-Burton, which probably had relatively little practical effect on Cuba, became a real focal point for anti-American activity and pro-Cuban actions throughout the hemisphere. It was seen as the most radical form of American intervention and imperialism. So within the general context of things moving fairly well in Latin America, we also had this Cuba issue, which really ate up a tremendous amount of time, because Helms and his supporters on the Hill kept pushing the Department to take more actions against foreign companies, which they saw as falling within the purview of their legislation. In fact, the Department was not looking to make trouble with other governments over Cuba, so we moved slowly, very slowly. But on two occasions, as the official with specific responsibility according to the law, I had to write to the presidents of one large Canadian company and a Mexican company, and tell them that they had lost their visas to enter the United States. Again, I don't think this really had a hell of a lot of impact on Cuba or Cuba's economy, but it really made for a lot of noise.

Q: Well, how did the Canadians and Mexican people respond?

DAVIDOW: Oh, they were outraged. This was seen as the real ratcheting up of anti-Cuban policy in the United States. By the time I left the Assistant Secretary job I was so fed up with Helms-Burton that I made fun of it a my swearing-in ceremony as ambassador to Mexico. I concocted a silly sorry finishing with a pun on Hams-Bourbon. The attendees at the ceremony laughed. It made the Al Kamen column, but I never heard from Helms or Burton about it.

Q: Were we concerned about a Castro collapse and what would happen in terms of a massive refugee flow to the U.S.?

DAVIDOW: This was always a matter of concern. It had been for many years, from the time of the Mariel boatlift. And the policy of the United States in relation to Cuban immigrants is of course different from our policy in relations to immigrants from every other country. A Cuban who makes it to U.S. territory and gets his foot on dry land, is automatically granted permission to stay in the United States. So the U.S. Coast Guard was involved in intercepting boats at sea and turning them back to the Cubans as a way of discouraging further migration. We were always very much aware of the potential of a collapse in Cuba. Of course the Miami Cubans, the anti-Castro forces, were always convinced that whatever year we were in would be the last year of Castro.

Q: Well now, what about, you know, your old friend down in Venezuela? He was sort of the Gaddafi of the Western Hemisphere, wasn't he?

DAVIDOW: Well, he had not come in -- while I was in ARA, Chavez was not yet in power. He was first elected in April of '99, by which time I had already left ARA.

Q: Well now, how about -- I guess Bolivia was a problem.

DAVIDOW: Well, Bolivia's always a problem. Actually, the other big issue for us while I was in that job was our relationship with Mexico and the whole issue of narcotics, which was becoming every year more conflictive. At the center of the conflict was again something imposed on the administration by the Hill, which was called "the certification process." Under this legislation, each year the United States would have to assess every country that had an important role in narcotics trade, and certify whether the country was doing its utmost to cooperate with us in the fight against narcotics. In some countries this was easy to do. We could say OK, this country has a problem and drugs are going through, but the government is really anxious to work with us. Mexico was a continuing problem, because although the relationship with the Mexican government on anti-drugs was growing, it was still marked by great suspicion on both sides. The DEA and the FBI had no faith in Mexican law enforcement. And the Mexicans, true to their national mentality, were very reluctant to get too much involved with the United States on this issue. The flow of drugs continued and there was continuing pressure from the Hill to decertify Mexico. Decertifying would be a presidential decision that would in effect end cooperation with Mexico on a wide variety of topics, not only drugs. Decertification would be totally counterproductive, because here we were trying to build a relationship in Mexico, and there were people in our own Congress saying, "Let's just cut 'em off at the knees." Frankly, the U.S. government would use the threat of decertification to try to get greater cooperation from Mexico. But in point of fact, I think both the U.S. government and the Mexican government realized that decertification would be a disaster. In any event, it was always the hot issue and at the top of Mexico's grievances with us and a major topic in the press of both countries.

Q: Well, what sort of -- when you took over the job, I suppose Mexico was at the top of the list, wasn't it? As far as relations?

DAVIDOW: We established good relations with many Mexicans. And actually we were helped in this by an interesting guy. General Barry McCaffrey had been appointed by the President as the Head of the Office of National Drug Strategy. And he realized that we had to have good relations with Mexico. And we were able to set up what we called the high-level contact groups with the heads of agencies from the U.S. and their counterparts in Mexico. So we were able to build better communication with the Mexicans. Attorney General Reno was also superb. She was the only cabinet officer that I felt comfortable calling on the phone out of the blue to discuss issues with. But there was always some drug-related crisis or another to deal with, not just in Mexico but throughout the region.

Of course, the country that was, along with Mexico, most on our minds because of drugs was Colombia.: They were still in very bad shape. But we were getting cooperation from the Colombian government more so than we had had in the past in the fight against narcotics. But we had taken away the U.S. visa of the President of Colombia Samper and

the relationship was a very complex one. Also, there were strong actors on the Hill who felt we weren't doing enough. They were right-wing Hill types. And they had a personal animus against our ambassador there at the time, Myles Frechette. And Myles was doing a very good job. But he had a lot of enemies. I protected him as best I could, but it was a very difficult time. The problem was is that there were people on the Hill who felt we weren't being tough enough on the Colombian government, and that Myles was too soft. This was all tied up in the certification issue which I mentioned before in relation to Mexico. Frechette was a very tough guy. But some people you just cannot satisfy.

Q. And elsewhere in Latin America?

DAVIDOW: During this time, we were also trying to establish better relations with the Southern Cone countries of Brazil, Argentina, and Chile. President Clinton made a trip to those countries, which was fairly successful. In fact, most presidential trips are successful. At a meeting of the OAS in Chile, Clinton and others pushed through the hemispheric charter on democracy which I referred to above.

The visit to Brazil was interesting because it was an example of how political leadership is willing to throw professional diplomats under the bus when it suits them. I didn't need to be reminded of this, but it was kind of shocking to see it up close and personal. The Brazilians, like most Latins, are pretty prickly and easily inflamed and pushed around by their own press. Just before we got there, someone in the Brazilian press thumbed through the US Department of Commerce's annual business summary for Brazil, and from this 300-page document, which as far as I know, nobody has ever read, picked out a sentence which stated that corruption is endemic in Brazil. Now, at the time, this happened to be true.

But it became this gigantic issue for the President's trip, almost forcing the President to have to call off his visit to Brazil. So when we got there, Clinton was asked about it by the press. He had two options. One was supporting the ambassador who had said, "Look, it's not the most important thing in the report, but it is true, and we are working closely with the Brazilian government to address these issues." Or Clinton could disavow the report and the ambassador which is what he did. He said, "I've talked to our Ambassador. I'm sure he regrets that wording." It was a really pretty ugly case of political expedience, and, in reality a missed opportunity to make an important point.

We kept trying to improve our relationship with the southern cone countries. And that actually led us to one of the biggest mistakes during my period. And it was because on that occasion I was inattentive and let the White House get away with a fast one. The NSC advisor on Latin America was an absolutely brilliant guy, but he did not know much about the region. One of the big issues that had come up during this period was that the Chilean Air Force wanted to buy F-16 fighter planes. The Chilean military had a lot of money because when Pinochet left office -- or I guess even before he left office, by law 10% of the earnings of the National Copper Company would go to the military. And so they were flush with money and they wanted to buy the most advanced fighter planes. There was a lot of opposition to this, both in Chile and in the U.S., that did not want us to

be arming Latin militaries in this fashion, and particularly the Chilean military, which was held in bad odor because of Pinochet years. My position was, basically it's a democratic country, and if they want to piss away their money on new planes, who are we to say no, given the way we throw around money ourselves for new military hardware and toys? And this debate went on in Washington for years.

One day I got called by the White House. I went over. And the NSC guy had concocted a scheme by which they would, on the same day, give authority for the Chileans to buy these planes, but to show Brazil and Argentina that there was nothing hostile in this, they would throw some bones to those two countries. With Argentina, the idea was to name Argentina a most favored NATO friend. I can't remember the exact language. But basically, we said that Argentina could buy the same kind of military equipment that any NATO ally could buy. And for Brazil, we issued a statement going pretty far forward toward acknowledging Brazil's right to have a seat on the UN Security Council. The language was typical diplomatic mealy-mouthed. So this guy in the White House came up with this grand design in order to cover the selling of F-16's to Chile, and in order to make their two biggest neighbors happy we would do these other things. I agreed to it, because I was pleased about the F-16 decision and simply saw the other two elements as innocuous and pointless. The package was presented to me as already having been cleared by the President. So I went along with it. I did not think it was a good idea, and what I should have done was try to put a halt to it and get the Secretary of State involved. When it came out, it blew up in our face, -- the only people who were happy were the Chilean military because they were getting their planes. The Brazilians rightly felt that we were playing word games with our statement on the UNSC. And nobody could understand what this new "alliance" with Argentina would mean. Secretary Albright was getting bombarded from all sides. She really tore a strip off of me. And I didn't blame her. Ultimately, we patched it all up, but it was poorly handled and I blame myself for being inattentive and letting my guard down.

The brouhaha served to remind me, though I did not need any reminder, how much I really disliked working in Washington. The place is full of brilliant -- and not so brilliant -people with their own agendas who feel passionately about issues that I, for the most part, didn't give a damn about. I hated the bureaucratic back and forth, the inevitable drafting and redrafting -- whether we were "happy" or "glad" in a document. As assistant secretary, I spent much less time working with foreign government than I did dealing with the Hill, in fighting with other agencies and sparring in the Department with other bureaus -- particularly INL, the narcotics bureau. That's not why I was in the Foreign Service. And so there was constant friction in so many of our relationships within the department and between the department and other government agencies. And that's how I spent my day. Some people like that, and I guess I was fairly successful, but I didn't enjoy it and took no pleasure in winning bureaucratic battles that I always felt were hardly worth fighting. So that period was very challenging - a real pain in the ass. I began to think seriously about retiring.

Q: Let's move from the tip to the top of Latin America. Did you feel that Chile and Argentina, had they pretty well resolved the Straits problem and all that.

DAVIDOW: This was a period in which there was tremendous progress in Latin America in dealing with outstanding border issues. And Chile and Argentina, pretty much on their own, in effect resolved all of their outstanding border disputes. One area that we got very much involved in was the border between Ecuador and Peru which the two countries had been periodically fighting over for 400 years. It was one of those intractable problems that nobody ever felt could be resolved. However, because the situation in Latin America was moving in general favorable directions, we were able to lead an effort along with Brazil, Argentina, and a few other countries under the auspices of the United Nations, to promote a border settlement between Ecuador and Peru. And of course the skepticism that this could ever be accomplished was immense, because the full weight of history was against us. Little Peruvian schoolchildren and little Ecuadorian schoolchildren would learn that their country's greatest enemy was the other country and their armies existed to fight each other. But through the work of an absolutely gifted American diplomat, Luigi Einaudi, an agreement was actually signed. It was an important development because it seemed to symbolize a new maturity in the region. And more importantly, in the last 16 years, as Peru and Ecuador have gone through all sorts of changes and challenges, that agreement has held. The border is not an issue anymore. Something that had been the stuff of patriotic speeches for hundreds of years disappeared overnight.
Another topic that we had to deal with during that period was the seizure of the Japanese Embassy in Peru. And I remember that Fujimori came to Washington and at the request of the Japanese, President Clinton asked Fujimori not to take any action against the embassy until he had discussed it with the Japanese government. I remember clearly Fujimori saying, "Definitely. Of course." But he had no intention of doing that, because when the time came to attack that embassy in that daring assault, he never told the Japanese, because he was afraid they would tell him not to do it. Thank God, we had no Americans in that embassy as hostages. If they had been in there, the whole dynamic would have changed and the pressure for action on our part would have been intense.

Q: How did they get out?

DAVIDOW: It was the most accidental situation. Our ambassador had been there. It was a reception. But he walked out before the guerillas came in and took it over. And I think there were a couple of lower ranking people there who managed to escape during the takeover itself. So the net effect was that there were no Americans there. Most of the hostages were Peruvian. Some were foreign diplomats -- I can't remember the numbers -- but it was a crises, but not one we were obliged to take action on

Q: Well, how about Argentina and its financial situation?

DAVIDOW: Under President Menem, Argentina tied its currency to the dollar -- in fact the dollar became legal tender. But the economy really could not support the dollar and things came crashing down. Sorry, I don't understand economics, so "things came crashing down" is about the best I can do. Our relations in general were excellent. Their foreign minister described them as "carnal," which won him no points at home. .But I do

remember that Clinton went to Argentina and while there met with the leaders of the opposition who he charmed.

Q: Yeah. Well, Bolivia?

DAVIDOW: Yeah, the problem with Bolivia at that time was that the President of Bolivia, Hugo Banzer, was actually acting in a fairly responsible fashion in his relations with us. And all he wanted was a White House meeting. And the White House didn't want to give him one, because he had been a rightwing dictator at one point who, internationally was held in pretty low esteem. Just fielding those requests was an almost fulltime job.

Q: Well, Paraguay, that was beginning to slip, wasn't it?

DAVIDOW: Yes, in Paraguay there was a weak democratic government that had taken over after the dictator Stroessner left the scene. We received indications that it looked like the military was going to take over. And I remember spending the whole night in the State Department as we tried to make contact with the military to tell them that if they tried anything like that, they could expect no support from the U.S. Fortunately, Arturo Valenzuela, who was one of the deputy assistant secretaries, had met the Head of the Paraguayan Air Force at some conference. And we actually got the guy on the phone and conveyed the message. And I don't think the head of the air force was particularly involved in coup planning, but the fact that he could go tell the other generals to put a sock in it was very helpful and we avoided a coup there. The other time that I dealt directly with a coup was in Ecuador. On one day, Ecuador had something like three different presidents. The President was thrown out, the Vice President, claimed the job, and the Chief of Justice said he should really take over. I was having lunch with some American businessmen in Washington and I kept getting interrupted by phone calls from our ambassador in Ecuador, who was reporting that the military was about to leave the barracks. And I kept telling him, "You're going to go talk to them and tell that under no circumstances can they do that."

And finally after being interrupted at lunch three or four times, I went back to the table and felt obliged to explain to the people who I was dining with why I had to keep getting up. They were fascinated by this. And one of them said, "Well, who's in charge of the Ecuadorian Military?"

And I responded, as a joke, "Well, I think right now I am," which was really not at all humble and not true either. But those were the kinds of things that we had to deal with. But as I say, generally speaking, I think it was a good period in our relations with Latin America. A lot of, you know, daily conflict. But on their own, Latin America was moving in the right direction.

Q: Brazil?

DAVIDOW: Brazil is always difficult, but as always, we wanted to have better relations with them. Brazil has always been a difficult country for us. It has its own sense of style, its own sense of Brazilian exceptionalism. I always felt that Brazil was the France of Latin America. It treats itself in the same way, as the most important country in the continent. And it was difficult to get things done with them. And there were also numerous trade issues - steel, orange juice, other goods - that while not so large would get magnified. The Brazilians saw themselves as a counterweight to American imperialism and led the charge against the Free Trade Area of the Americas, effectively killing it. It was at this time that they created Mercosur with Argentina, Paraguay and Uruguay, which, I think, has really not turned as hoped for them.

Q: I've interviewed Peter Romero and he was saying that, you know, the -- and I may be misquoting him -- but saying that when you talked to anybody from the Brazilian Foreign Minister or the equivalent, it almost seemed to be, you know, we're in opposition to you.

DAVIDOW: I think that was generally the case. We had strong feelings that the attitude of the Brazilian government, and particularly the Brazilian Foreign Ministry, was essentially hostile to the United States. That they were not looking for cooperation, but rather were searching for opportunities to assert their own nationalism by confronting us.

Q: Wasn't it essentially the same in dealing with the Mexican Foreign Ministry?

DAVIDOW: I think that was quite clearly the case. The theology of Mexico demanded that they emphasize the central rule of the PRI (Partido Revolucionario Institucional (Institutional Revolutionary Party)) in protecting Mexico from enemies to Mexican sovereignty. And, of course, there was only one enemy - the United States.

Q: The colossus to the north.

DAVIDOW: Yes. So there's a built-in tension there. I think it's gotten better in recent years. But, just as we're talking today, the outgoing President of Mexico announced as one of his last gestures -- because he's leaving office next week -- that he wants to change the name of Mexico from the Estados Unidos de Mexico, the United States of Mexico to the Republic of Mexico. And the reason for that is that he feels the current name (for the last 200 years) gives the impression that they are too close to or imitative of to the United States. And even a president like Calderón, who cooperated in many ways with us, has that streak of Mexican nationalism. The Brazilians are very much the same, but it's a little different, I think. The Brazilians are not just worried about their sovereignty. They are really convinced that they should be seen as a major world power.

Q: Yeah. We at the Foreign Service have always been told how good the Brazilian Foreign Service is, but I don't really hear about -- except an occasional outstanding diplomat, much in the way of Brazilian intervention or stepping up to the plate in world events.

DAVIDOW: Well, actually they have done a fairly decent job. They took a leading role in resolving the Ecuador-Peru border dispute and for years they have been a key country in the UN force in Haiti as well as in other peacekeeping operations. So they do have a sense of international responsibility and they are active, much more so than the Mexicans.

Q: How about Ecuador and Peru during your time?

DAVIDOW: Well, the, big issue for us was the resolution of this border dispute. And that was very difficult because we had in Ecuador at the time a President who had been elected, but who was close to being certifiably nuts, by the name of Bucaram. And he finally was forced out of office. And then in Peru, we had Fujimori and while we supported, or appreciated Fujimori's efforts against Sendero Luminoso (The Shining Path) and other guerilla groups there, the fact of the matter is that Fujimori let his Chief of Security run roughshod over human rights. There was a lot of corruption. And so we were dealing with two governments that were really in bad shape.

Q: Did -- I can't remember -- there was a brief flare-up of a war. Did that happen during your watch?

DAVIDOW: That happened just before I got there. And that's what resulted in the push for a peace treaty that we were able to negotiate, and finally to delimit a border that had not been defined for 400 years.

Q: What about Central America?

I have to admit I really didn't spend a great deal of time working on Central America or the Caribbean. After many years of conflict, it had generally receded as an issue in Washington. Also, John Hamilton, the DAS for the region was superbly competent, knew all the actors, and, most importantly had the infinite patience that I lacked. In general, we were in a period trying to recover from the wars and help establish decently functioning democracies, not an easy task in an area that had not seen much of that in its 200 years of independence. In Guatemala, for instance, we were very much involved with the United Nations in sponsoring a commission on truth and justice to reinforce the peace process. In Nicaragua, we had a democratic government in place, but the Sandinistas, who had been thrown out in elections, were a continuing political threat, and they eventually did take over. The Central American countries were not really stable. They were not at war, but they really weren't at peace either.

Another issue that occupied a lot of time was what turned out to be a failed negotiation to keep using the Canal Zone for anti-narcotics activities after we handed it back to the Panamanians. Gen. McCaffrey had the idea of creating in the zone a sort of campus to be manned by the US military, DEA, FBI and representatives of all of the drug fighting agencies of Latin America. It was not a bad idea, but neither the Panamanians nor the U.S. military were really in favor of it. Our military was never too pleased to be involved in the drug war and was not looking for a continuing role. They killed the proposal by

insisting that the "campus" would have to be surrounded by gates, that the military would have to wear uniforms, that they would have to have a post commissary, etc. In other words, they wanted to recreate the Canal Zone and the Panamanians would have none of that. We actually had very good negotiators, first John Negroponte and then Ted McNamara, but they could make no headway primarily because of the stubbornness of the Pentagon.

Q: Well, let's look at the, the economic landscape there. I mean -- oh, first place, was Canada part of your parish by this time?

DAVIDOW: No. It wasn't. Madeline Albright wanted it to be a part of my parish, and I dragged my feet like a true bureaucrat. I never thought it made sense, frankly. Most of the important relationship with Canada had to do with NATO and our relations with Europe. I understood the argument for incorporating it into the western hemisphere bureau, but I just didn't want to take on another responsibility. But as soon as I left, my successor thought it was a really great idea. So, Canada (which was against the idea) became part of ARA. And that's when they changed the title of the Bureau to Western Hemisphere Affairs.

Q: Well, you know we'd gone through I think in the '70s a terrible economic debt crises and all in Latin America. How stood it during your time there?

DAVIDOW: During my time, things were going relatively well, as I said, because government after government was adopting rational economic policies. They had realized that they had had a lost decade during the '80s in which government economic policies, which were heavily dependent on subsidies and state-owned enterprises and heavy debt. So the governments were changing. But there were obviously countries still in difficulty. But the general trend was a good one economically during that period.

Q: Haiti must have --

DAVIDOW: Oh, Haiti was a continuing saga. We had a superb ambassador there.

Q: Who was that?

DAVIDOW: Name of Bill Swing.

Q: Oh yes.

DAVIDOW: And if you were to interview anyone, you should interview Bill Swing.

Q: Where is he now?

DAVIDOW: Bill is Head of the Organization of International Migration. He's got to be in his late seventies and he's still jetting around the world every day as head of this UN organization doing a wonderful job. It's difficult to remember the exact details, but we

were dealing for much of the time with a government headed by René Préval. Préval had been Aristide's chosen successor, but Aristide was trying to come back. And there were all of the problems of Haiti, plus a political situation in which there was just no consensus among the parties. And so there was a continuing crisis there. There was a lot of interest in the White House about Haiti, because President Clinton was personally involved and concerned. So that was a big topic at all times, although quite frankly, there were other people in the Department who were more involved in Haiti than I was

Q: Well, how did you find President Clinton and you might say his, you might say his entourage, and their interest in Latin America? I know when Henry Kissinger was involved, you know, had no interest at all in it.

DAVIDOW: Well, I was extraordinarily fortunate in the following way. In the Clinton White House, his first Chief of Staff was a man named Thomas "Mack" McLarty, a soft-spoken, very smart, very pleasant Arkansan. And he stayed as Chief of Staff for a couple of years. But then he got tired of the constant White House staff bickering and felt that he wanted to do something else. And at that time, the United States was organizing the first Summit of the Americas to take place in Miami in December, 1994. The organization of this had been left to certain people in Miami, and it was really screwed up in the extreme. McLarty was given the job of straightening the whole thing out, which he did. And he discovered that he had a real affinity for Latin America. So he got himself appointed as Special Representative for Latin America in the White House. Now, there've been other attempts to have Special Representatives to Latin America, and they've always failed. But Mack succeeded, and he succeeded brilliantly because he had direct access to the President. People would ask did I feel like the State Department was being cut out. And quite to the contrary, Mack was always very cooperative. He looked to us for a great deal of support. I probably saw him in his office at least once a week, and we had a very full, very cooperative agenda. And it was great to have someone so close to the President, that if we had a particular problem in Latin America or a particular issue, Mack would carry our water for us while the NSC, which was under Sandy Berger, who I also respected, had many more things to worry about. I found that it made my job much easier, rather than harder, having an immensely competent and friendly person literally at the President's right hand. When Mack left the job of Chief of Staff, he still kept an office in the West Wing, even though he was dealing only with Latin America.

After about a year and a half in the ARA job, largely because I did not like the unending and useless give and take of Washington, I let the Secretary know that I would probably be retiring in the summer of 1998 after two full years of the job. And she, of course, told me that that was not going to happen. And I said, "Yes, but it is." And she said, " no, it isn't," and we never really revolved that. But then the U.S. Ambassador to Mexico, a former Congressman by the name of Jim Jones, who had done an excellent job there and who had been instrumental in getting US congressional support for NAFTA, decided he wanted to leave the job. He had been there for three or four years. He informed the White House, but the White House never got around to thinking abut a replacement for him until he left, which would have been I think sometime in 1997. And so the DCM ran the embassy for a year. And he did a good job, but the Mexicans of course were convinced

that we were somehow trying to insult them by not sending an Ambassador. We weren't trying to insult them. We were just being our usual incompetent selves, because the White House would not focus on the issue. Ultimately, the President decided -- and you'll remember this -- to name his as his ambassador to Mexico, William Weld, the former Republican governor of Massachusetts. He had resigned to run against John Kerry for the Senate and had lost. He had been a strong supporter of NAFTA and Clinton felt that appointing a moderate Republican to an important embassy would be a smart move, much like President Obama did when he appointed years later Huntsman to China. Well, there was a problem with Weld. He was a very liberal Massachusetts Republican. And he did not get on with the conservative Republicans in the Senate, particularly Jesse Helms. The White House did not do its homework and go up and get Helms' approval for the nomination before they announced it. Helms really disliked Weld for many reasons, but was particularly outraged when, during his election fight against Kerry, he tried to present himself pretty much as someone who really did not differ very much from Kerry, both were moderate guys. In one debate, Kerry said, "You know, Bill, you're a decent fellow. But when you get to Washington as a Republican, you're going to vote for Jesse Helms to be Chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee."

And Weld responded, "I'm not sure I'll do that. I don't really respect him," or words to that effect.

Q: Ouch.

DAVIDOW: And so a few months later Jesse Helms had his revenge. And he refused to give Weld a hearing. So for four or five months, Weld was front-page news and was swinging in the wind in Washington. It got to be a big political issue. And finally, he withdrew his name. And the White House skidded around for a few more months, and finally one day I bumped into Sandy Berger over at the NSC. And he said, "Look, we've been looking for a political guy to go to Mexico, but that has not worked out. Will you go?"

And I said, "Well, Sandy, I'm thinking of retiring."

And he said, "No, but why don't you go?"

And I said OK. So in mid 1998, I wound up going to Mexico. Which I think is probably a good point to end the conversation for today.

Q: Well, let's talk about your Mexican Embassy. You were there from when to when?

DAVIDOW: I was there from 1998 to 2002, which was a very interesting period, because it was the last two years of the Clinton administration, and also the last two years of the PRI domination of the presidency in Mexico. And then we had two new presidents come in, Fox and Bush. So my stay there was pretty much divided in half as I dealt with four presidents and a very changed political situation.

Q: Absolutely. Let's take our time on this now. Who was the previous Ambassador?

DAVIDOW: The previous ambassador was a former congressman named Jim Jones from Oklahoma. He had been Chairman of the House Finance Committee and president of the American Stock Exchange before he came to Mexico. I assume he was chosen because he had a lot of contact on the Hill which was important in gaining support for NAFTA. He had good contacts in Washington and came to be well-respected in Mexico. But there was a gap of close to a year after he left and my coming.

Q: I had a long interview with him. Lot of fun. He worked with -- President Johnson was on his staff and involved with Indian tribes and --

DAVIDOW: That's right. A charming guy who began as a junior staffer to Johnson and has wonderful stories about his time in the White House.

Q: Well now, you were of course in a key position. But at the same time, Ambassador to Mexico often is a political appointee. Did you feel the hot breath of somebody breathing down your neck or not, or --

DAVIDOW: Well, they finally got around to looking for someone to replace Jim after he had given them decent notice and had actually left the post. And as I told you yesterday, the first person they chose was William Weld, who was the former Republican Governor of Massachusetts, who had resigned to run against John Kerry, and lost. But Weld was out of favor with Jesse Helms, and Helms would never give him a hearing. Probably six months or more was wasted in that process. Then they tried to recruit another politico, an elderly man who had just retired as mayor of Houston. And somebody in the White House went to see him and it became apparent that he wasn't right for the position. His wife wanted to be Madame Ambassador, but the man asked two revealing questions. Of course I don't know this first hand, but I heard it from the person who talked to him. And the two questions were would he have to go out in the evenings and would he have to get involved in all of this narcotics stuff. He didn't want to do either.

Q: (laughs)

DAVIDOW: So finally, in frustration, the White House did what it usually does when they don't know what else to do. They looked for a Foreign Service Officer. And I'm not saying I was the best choice, but I was sort of a logical choice, because I had been Assistant Secretary for a couple of years, and had been already ambassador to Venezuela, and was known to Berger and others from White House meetings and travel with the President. And I had done a lot of work in Washington on Mexico. And also, the assumption was -- which was correct -- that it would be easy to get me confirmed by the Senate. And that, that proved to be true, though some staffers tried to block me, but without much support from members.

Q: You obviously knew the territory, but how stood relations would you say with Mexico when you went there?

DAVIDOW: Well, the relationship with Mexico was, and still remains an extraordinarily complicated one. It is subject to periods of real friction and then things get better for a while, then the friction returns. The Mexicans have an attitude towards the United States which is often described as love/hate. I don't agree with that. It is not love/hate. There's very little love and there's very little hate. It's just that to Mexicans, we are both a threat and an opportunity. We're a threat because our culture threatens to overwhelm them. Our economy and our political weight in the world is disproportionate to theirs. But we're a great opportunity as well, for trade, for immigration, for culture. So there's always an ambivalence in Mexico. In the United States, generally we don't pay much attention. And of course that's the greatest insult of all to somebody, when you don't pay attention to them.

Now, when I got there, the whole environment was complicated by the drug war and the perception in Washington that the Mexican government was not doing enough to cooperate with us because there was too much corruption in the government. And there was particular tension because we had just announce that we had run a money laundering sting operation within Mexico that had resulted in many Mexicans being arrested in the United States for money laundering. The U.S. law enforcement agencies operated under very strict restrictions in Mexico. This was a product of Mexican suspicions about us as well as the net effect of a case in the mid-80s when the United States in essence kidnapped a Mexican citizen in Mexico, a doctor who had allegedly been involved in the torture and killing of a DEA agent. The kidnapping, which was patently illegal under international law, had become a great cause for Mexicans. And the only way the U.S. was able to maintain its DEA agents and other law enforcement people in Mexico was to agree to all sorts of restrictions. And one of the restrictions was that no operation could be undertaken in Mexico without the approval and cooperation of the Mexican government. And when I got there, we were in the midst of a real crisis over this particular Customs' sting operation that they ran without the knowledge or participation of the Mexican government. It was called Operation Casablanca and really caused a major kerfuffle in the Mexican press. Of course, the focus was entirely on the misdeeds of U.S. law enforcement and not on the fact that Mexican bankers were up to their necks in money laundering. The net result was that there was a very frosty relationship when I got there. But the irony is -- and this is what I think marked the relationship for many years -- is that while we were still quite often at each other's throats, the level of cooperation between the two countries was increasing dramatically every year in all sorts of things. Even in narcotics.

There was great progress on the trade front. NAFTA was relatively new, just half a dozen years old. Bill Clinton had literally saved the Mexican economy during a financial crash in 1994. And so you have this strange relationship, which has always existed and still exists, of two countries that are really joined at the hip, doing a lot together but all within an underlying context of friction and tension. And so when I got there, it was a period of tension. And then of course, any new ambassador from the United States that comes in is immediately vilified in the press by the many opinion writers and columnists, because of some dark chapters in the history of American ambassadors in Mexico. I was, for

instance, compared to the ambassador at the time of the Mexican Revolution, Henry Lane Wilson, who in Mexican folklore is blamed for the assassination of the President of Mexico at that time.

Q: Madero or?

DAVIDOW: Yes, Madero. And so when I got there, I found a strained relationship with elements of the Mexican government that were not that willing to cooperate, particularly the Foreign Ministry. And yet, at the upper most level of the Presidency, let's say, and the business elite, and the economic ministries, there was a great level of cooperation, because there was an understanding that Mexico's future depended on its contact with the United States.

Q: Well, did they -- you know, I've been in embassies where when a new ambassador is named, the chattering class figures this person is going to be a hardliner or this person's going to be not. Were you typed do you think when you came?

DAVIDOW: Actually, I knew many of the Mexican officials because I had been working with them in my job as Assistant Secretary. But in the press, which is looking for negative things to say, I was typed as a hardliner. Because I had been in Chile in 1973, I was labeled as the guy who overthrew Allende, which would have been a pretty good trick for a 26-year old junior officer. And there was always that kind of atmosphere in the press, looking for something that I said or did to use as an attack vehicle. On the other hand, Mexicans are the most courteous people in the world. I was never personally insulted. I found dealing with many critics, both in and outside of government to be really quite delightful.

Also, for a new ambassador, getting a handle on the management the embassy -- and at that time it was one of the largest embassies we had in the world -- especially counting our 10 consulates in the country -- was a major effort. We had over 30 government agencies represented. And that provided very specific challenges. Plus, we were seeing in our consular sections over two million people a year. And that was something that I spent a lot of time working on when I got there. In fact, the first day that I arrived at the embassy -- and this was a certain amount of showmanship on my part -- I had my Cadillac pull up to the embassy, and rather than going to my office, I went to the Visa Section because I wanted to let our employees there, particularly the junior officers, know that they were at the top of my list in terms of things to be concerned about. And over the years that I was there, we really did a lot to improve our treatment, not only of the consular staff, but also of the applicants. For instance, when I got there, the waiting area for visa applicants, which is sort of very large shed, was referred to by everybody as "the barn." And I let the word get out that I would not accept anybody calling it the barn. A barn is for animals. This facility is for Mexican citizens who are coming to get visas. We fixed up the room and spent a lot of time streamlining our processes. The junior officers took the lead and they were great. I am concerned that many ambassadors don't spend much time on things related to consular or administrative matters, and that is a big mistake.

Q: Well, let me tell you. I spent five years in Yugoslavia as Chief of the Consular Section. And my first year, I was there a full year with George Kennan. And I think I was able, with a lot of arm pulling and all, I got him to come once to the Consular Section. Around Christmastime. But he went past our door every day of his working time, but he never came in except once.

DAVIDOW: Yep.

Q: I mean that's the old Foreign Service. And of course all of us in the field of consular affairs, take note of this, as I'm doing right now.

DAVIDOW: Of course I was aware of that. My first job in the Foreign Service had been Vice Consul in Guatemala. Even with all the technological changes what the junior officers were doing in our embassy in Mexico 30 years later was identical to what I had to do in Guatemala. You get a few seconds to size up a visa applicant and then more often than not, you have to find a pleasant way of saying, "No, you're not going to get a visa." It's grueling work, and it really bothers me when it's not given the appropriate attention. I think that generally an ambassador has an obligation to help his staff do their work. They want to feel useful and important and ambassadors, like Kennan perhaps, who are lost in their own worlds aren't really doing their full job.

Q: Well, all right. First place, you must have been aware of, you know, our embassy in Mexico -- there are two things that particularly stick in my mind. One was, what was his name, the movie star who went there?

DAVIDOW: Gavin.

Q: John Gavin. Who had what they called the temple dogs, sort of a couple of people from outside the Foreign Service who sort of handled the flow in and flow out.

DAVIDOW: Right.

Q: And this left a lot of bad feeling. And the other was Patrick Lucey and his wife from Wisconsin who left a very bad impression on the embassy. When you first arrive, you have to sort of set the atmosphere. And you must have been aware of these sort of bad examples.

DAVIDOW: Well, I really had no knowledge of Gavin and Lucey in that regard. But, I do think leadership on the part of an ambassador is largely a question of personality. When I was in Washington, I was asked a couple of times to come down and talk to the ambassadorial training class about how to be an ambassador. And basically, my pitch was, "Just don't be a jerk." But as you know, some people are born jerks and they're never going to change. I always felt that it wasn't that hard to treat people decently. I don't want to sound like I'm St. Francis of Assisi -- but in my perspective there are two kinds of ambassadors. There's the ambassador who believes he really is the only

important person at the post and that everyone exists there to serve him. Then there's another type of ambassador, which I think I was -- who recognizes that everyone at the post would like to think that what they are doing is important, whether they're the agricultural attaché or the vice consul or the political officer. And quite frankly, they would be able to do this important work with or without the ambassador being there, but that the ambassador's role quite often was to make it easier for them to do their jobs. For instance, when the agricultural attaché comes to an ambassador and says, "The government is really messing us over on apple imports and the Minister of Agriculture won't talk to me," I, as ambassador, was able to pick up the phone and talk to the Minister and help the agricultural attaché try to get things sorted out. And I always thought that was one of my principal roles. I realized that there were task that maybe only I could do, but I also saw myself as running an organization that I could help. And I think a lot of ambassadors forget that or just don't know it.

Q: Well, what did you see as -- what were sort of the various elements that you particularly had to deal with when you got --

DAVIDOW: Well, the biggest element unfortunately was the whole anti-narcotics issue. It was the hottest element between the two governments. And within the embassy it was very complicated because we had many agencies involved in law enforcement. We had the DEA, the FBI, ATF (Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives), INS, CIA, DIA, IRS. The Justice Department had a legal attaché, and the list went on. And what I found was that the level of cooperation among these groups was limited and communication was limited. Each organization maintained its own lines of communication with their favorite Mexican office and with their home offices in Washington. It was a mess. The old Foreign Service concept that no cables left the embassy without the approval of the front office had collapsed under the weight of new technology. Agencies argued that they should be able to send operational" messages to their home offices, and, it turned out, almost everything was operational, as opposed to "policy."

I really tried get the agencies to communicate more with each other. And this was difficult. All of us who were involved knew it was difficult. Now people outside of government after 9/11 always ask why couldn't you connect the dots? Well, you're not going to connect the dots if you're not talking to each other and sharing information. And I think as a government, we are now doing a better job. But certainly what I found when I got to Mexico City was a dysfunctional system in which the law enforcement agencies were not communicating with the intelligence agencies and vice versa. Law enforcement was concerned that somehow the CIA would use the information that it got from them to barter with the Mexican government or otherwise screw up the chain of evidence. And the CIA was always worried that law enforcement would burn their sources. Because I had some very really competent people running the CIA Station, the INS, the DEA and FBI office while I was there, we were able to improve that a lot. And I spent a large percentage of my time on that kind of internal coordination.

I was also meeting constantly with Mexican authorities. I was the principal contact with the Attorney General of Mexico. And I would go over to his office at least once a week to talk about specific cases. Within the U.S. government we had our problems of coordination, but they were issues of bureaucracy. In the Mexican government the lack of coordination was the result of distrust. The Attorney General of Mexico absolutely did not trust anyone except a few people in his office and the President of the country. And so when I went to see him to talk about a specific arrest or extradition case, he would get up from his desk and go to his personal safe and get out the file. That was the only file he trusted. And so it was a really difficult situation. And periodically there would be blow-ups. Our agencies would get caught doing things that the Mexicans would object to or the press would distort what we were up to. It was a tough environment. We were always on very thin ice. And there were a lot of people in Washington, on the Hill and elsewhere, who were hoping that the ice would crack so that they could come down on Mexico (via decertification, for instance) for its poor performance on the narcotics front.

Q: What was the drug situation when you got there?

DAVIDOW: The growing and smuggling of marijuana into the United States had been going on for decades. The big change was that in the 1980s the U.S. was able to effectively put an end to a lot of the shipment of narcotics coming out of Colombia to Florida. And that resulted in much of the cocaine trade moving to Mexico. It was like squeezing a balloon. And so starting in the '80s through the '90s there was a tremendous influx of drugs, particularly cocaine, coming up from Colombia into Mexico, to then be transshipped into the U.S. The difficulty in terms of management of this problem was that for the most part, the agencies in Washington, particularly the DEA, had no trust in Mexican authorities. They thought they were all corrupt. I remember the head of the DEA in Washington, a man named Tom Constantine, told me once when I visited him that, "You could not fill a school bus in Mexico with honest cops." And this bitterness, particularly between the DEA and Mexican authorities, made cooperation very difficult. The DEA was filled with very bitter people -- and I think even today, they're bitter -- about the murder of their agent in the mid '80s in Mexico. And of course, there was a great deal of corruption. And time after time, one of our agencies in Mexico would tip off the Mexican police or the Attorney General's Office about drug deals and within a very short period of time, the operation would be blown. Criminals would not be arrested. If they were arrested, they paid enormous bribes to get out. So all of this was taking place within the context of the certification debate in which every year the U.S. government would have to state whether Mexico was really helping us or not. The truth was that we really had to certify Mexico. We had no choice because our other equities in the country demanded that we keep the relationship on an even keel. But, of course, the administration could never say that, so we played chicken all year, driving our cars headlong toward each other.

Even though State and the White House realized that decertification would be a disaster, the DEA kept up a constant barrage against Mexico and colluded with the Hill proponents of decertification. This placed the White House in a bad situation, because it had to appear open minded and neutral. But clearly, the White House was on one side,

DEA was on another. And I, as the ambassador, was getting beaten up by both sides. There were times when I really wanted to lace into the Mexican government and say things publicly about their lack of effectiveness. But I knew that to do so I would be supporting the proponents of decertification in Washington and I would be slicing the throat of our own policy. So, I was constantly dancing around the subject and must have looked incompetent at times (or permanently) to the heavy breathers on either side of the issue.

Q: What were you getting from your consuls general in the field and all?

DAVIDOW: The consuls general in the field were so thoroughly occupied with this incredible visa burden that we got relatively little from them on this topic, which was OK, because I really did not want the consul general in Guadalajara or Monterey or Merida to be running around putting his life in danger, trying to figure out who were the chiefs of the local cartels. Prior to my arrival, we did have one CG who saw the drug war as his personal crusade, and when his righteous anger was not responded to with direct action by the embassy or the Mexican government, he became very bitter and began to see himself as a whistle blower. But this was essentially before my time, and I just had to sweep up some of the mess that he left. He was a courageous guy, but in way over his head. By and large, the consul generals performed admirably, but there were exceptions. One of my greatest regrets is that I did not fire the CG in Guadalajara who was verbally abusing the staff. We had several conversations and I sent the DCM up there to counsel the CG, but despite promises, there was no improvement. I should have canned the person, but I temporized and that was a mistake.

The big consular challenge in Mexico was providing new border crossing cards ("visa lasers" as they were called) to millions of Mexicans who had been using antiquated documents -- their own and other people's -- to cross the border. Under no justification could the dozens of different types of passes people had obtained over the course of half a century be seen as effective documentation. It was a situation ripe for fraud. And Congress insisted that we change. In the years that I was there, in addition to new visas, we had to change out over five million of these border-crossing passes. And each one required an interview, fingerprints, a photo, and paperwork. It also meant that the old process, in which somebody who had had a visa for many years would just send their passport in to get the visa extended, because they had to come into the embassy as well. This is now pretty standard operation in most countries. But we were the first starting in the mid '90s to do that. So when you ask about what kind of reporting we were getting from the consuls general, mostly we were getting complaints about lack of manpower, overworked staffs, and not having enough office space. I spent a lot of time on that and trying to ensure that both applicants and consular officials were humanely treated. If an applicant were bullied or treated discourteously that became the image of the United States not only for him but for his whole family.

Q: How about Americans caught in, caught in various things, including imprisonment?

DAVIDOW: We had a large American prison population in Mexico, probably the largest number of Americans in any foreign country's prisons. I would get involved when t seemed to me that there was clear injustice being done. For instance, even back in the '90s, the Mexicans were very concerned about guns entering from the United States. This problem has become even worse in recent years, because since we gave up the assault weapons ban, tens of thousands of deadly weapons have made their way to Mexico. On occasion, Mexican police or customs would catch people trying to smuggle these things in. And I really didn't have much sympathy for some guy getting caught with ten AK-47s in his car. But there were other cases as well of inadvertent smuggling. This was a particular problem along the Texas border where a good old boy would cross from El Paso to Juarez for some tacos for lunch, forgetting that he had a shotgun in his pickup. We had a case of an elderly minister who was moving his household from California to Texas and decided to go in and see a bit of Mexico. And he had an old rifle in his car. And these got to be very ugly cases because these people were essentially innocent, if ignorant, and many of the cases got a lot of attention in the U.S. press which often made it more difficult for the Mexicans to deal with them quickly. We also had a lot of instances of young people going to Cancun or elsewhere for spring break and getting caught with marijuana or having marijuana planted on them by local cops. There was always something going on, but most of it was handled by the various consular sections, but sometimes I would have to get involved.

Q: What about parents of these people in prison and Congress and all. Would they come to you often or?

DAVIDOW: Yes, from time to time. In fact, in Mexico I did not really get involved with parents so much, because we had such a large consular staff. But it did happen. And it certainly happened to me in other posts in Guatemala and Venezuela where we would have cases of people who were thrown in jail. And you know how it is. The parents come, you explain the situation. They're absolutely convinced that their kids are being framed, even when you take them to see the kids and they admit the crime. But that's standard procedure for consular officers.

Q, Let's take the first half of your time there. This was PRI, wasn't it?

DAVIDOW: Yes, it was.

Q: How stood things with -- I mean we'd been dealing with the PRI for 70 years or so. How stood things then?

DAVIDOW: Well we had good relations with government basically. And I have to say that even though the PRI was famous for corruption, it had some very competent people in the government, world-class bureaucrats. The PRI had done a very good job over the 70 years in power of co-opting people into government including some of the best minds in Mexico. But the problem with the PRI was that, on the political level, they spent their time protecting themselves and protecting their hegemony, which was starting to break down. The first non-PRI governor had been elected in Baja, California in the late 80s.

And in 1997, that is, before I got there, in congressional elections the PRI had lost their majority in Congress. The structure of the PRI was essentially designed to keep themselves in power and not to admit failings. And this gave great protection to corrupt officials. I'll give you a classic example. We knew, and the Mexican government knew, that the Governor of Quintana Roo, which is the area on the Caribbean, was a thief. He was up to his neck in narcotics. And the evidence was quite strong. But in order to prosecute him, the government would have had to go to Congress and get a special order to take away his legal protection. And they never wanted to do that, because it would hurt the image of the PRI and he might implicate other high level officials. So the day before he was due to leave office, and when everybody including us were ready to pounce on him, he disappeared from the country and was not found for a couple of years. There was a general unwillingness on the part of the political elite, and the population, to recognize how bad the drug situation was and how it was getting worse. The general Mexican attitude was that this was a problem in the United States. "If you can stop demand, there would not be any supply," was the usual argument.

The most trouble I got into in the press was when I gave a speech to the Mexican alumni of the University of Southern California. And I got the inevitable question, which is, "How come you're always talking about Mexican drug lords, but you never arrest American drug lords?" I explained that we do arrest Americans and we had over a million in jail on drug charges. But in point of fact, the drug lords are in Mexico, not in the United States. The people in United States are in retail. And I tried to explain that, for instance, the guy who owns the Toyota dealership in Mexico City might be a very wealthy and influential person, but all of the important decisions about Toyota - what the car looks like, its corporate financing, marketing, - are made in Japan. And just like the drug trade in the U.S., the big decisions are made in Mexico. And so the next day in the press, it was reported that I had intimated that the owner of the Toyota dealership in Mexico City (who was a well know politician) was a drug dealer. They had completely missed my point.

But also in that same speech, I said, "Look, Mexico is becoming lawless. And you are running the danger of having a situation which is a lot like Sicily, in which there are parts of the country not controlled by the government." And this was picked up in the press and it became a great cause célèbre. There were calls for me to be PNG-ed (persona non grata). And the Foreign Minister said she would call me in and complain. So I arranged to be out of town and she called in the DCM and like all of these press-generated crises, it eventually calmed down. But my message was on the record and generally ignored for nearly a decade. And the core of the problem was that the Mexican government was generally incapable or unwilling to pursue the narcotics dealers forcefully. And at the same time, I really could not talk about that failure too much, because that would give ammunition to people in Washington who wanted to decertify Mexico, which would only make the situation worse.

I hope I'm explaining myself, but it was a complicated relationship in which and I was criticized by people in DEA and others in Washington as being soft on Mexico. I wasn't soft on them, I just didn't want to blow up all the chances for cooperation.

Q: Well then, might as well move to the next thing. But I'll come back to other issues. But let's continue on the drug thing. When the PAN (Partido Acción Nacional (National Action Party)) came in, was there a change regarding narcotics?

DAVIDOW: Well, I think there was a general change when the PAN came in due to the fractionalization of power in Mexico. There was a time when every public official in Mexico, from the President down to the lowest dog catcher, was in the PRI. And there was tremendous vertical integration. But that started to break down. So you then had governors who were from PAN, mayors who were from other parties, and an absence of a PRI majority in Congress. And that helped to loosen the system a bit in terms of law enforcement and cooperation with us. And we saw over the years, even under the PRI, that cooperation was getting better. But still not enough. The big change came not with the election of Fox in 2000, but with the advent of Calderón in 2006. That has turned into the drug war that we are dealing with today.

Q: Well, today is the 18th of December, 2012 with Jeff Davidow. Let's talk about Vicente Fox.

DAVIDOW: In July 2000 Fox won the election and the PRI moved out of national power over the next few months. We went into a period of intense activity, because we had a new president in Mexico, Fox, and a new president of the United States, George Bush, by the beginning of 2001. Now, for Bush, who was not at all experienced in international relations, Mexico was a country with which he already felt some affinity. Many Texan politicians, because they've grown up near the border and have probably had a Mexican cook making them tortillas, have a sense that there is a special relationship with Mexico. And so, Bush very early on in the first month of office decided that he wanted to get together with Vicente Fox. And it was billed as the "Meeting of the Two Cowboys." In point of fact, Fox has a vegetable ranch. He's really not a cowboy and neither is Bush. But the idea was that these were two guys with similar backgrounds from the border who could reach agreements and build a new relationship. And President Bush was really excited about this. So within six or seven weeks of becoming president, they met at Fox's farm in a Guanajuato. Now, there were many issues and no sense getting into them all, but the really big question that dominated the meeting, and then much of the rest of Fox's presidency, was, of course, immigration.

Now, the White House understood this to be a politically sensitive topic in the U.S. And indeed, before they even made the trip, Condoleezza Rice, the National Security Advisor, told the press that, "We're not talking about amnesty," meaning we're not going to consider how to make those 12 million or so undocumented aliens in the United States legal residents. The political fallout of that for the Republicans was judged to be too great. At the meeting, Bush and Fox agreed that they would form a high level committee headed on our side by Secretary Powell and Attorney General Ashcroft and on the Mexican side, by Foreign Minister Castañeda and another high official. They would come up with a plan to deal with immigration before June 2001. In other words, they had a three or four month deadline. There were a lot of subsequent meetings, mostly at the

level of officials. But it became apparent to me that, at the time, there was no way around the political opposition that was, we heard, coming from Karl Rove and the domestic political advisors who were telling the President that he really could not do anything on immigration and should wait until at least after the midterm elections of 2002. And so the process went nowhere. Meanwhile, the Mexicans were arguing strongly for a comprehensive immigration agreement that would not only legalize people who were in the U.S., but make it easier for others to come in. What the Mexicans never truly understood was that this really wasn't a negotiation. Because the decisions on immigration were totally in the hands of the United States and there was little or nothing Mexico could offer in return. (The Mexican Government was certainly not politically able to try to stem the flow of emigration.) So there was a lot of activity, a lot of press, a lot of recrimination. And here we are a dozen years later, and the situation has not changed in any appreciable way. In fact it has gotten worse because it was not attended to. And, of course, after 9/11, there wasn't any chance at all. It was a moment of lost opportunity.

Q: Well, you know, but if you're a Mexican politician, you have to sort of understand the American situation on immigration, I would think. I mean, you know, it's -- Congress has got it. It's not a popular subject. I would think that there would be, you might say, more understanding.

DAVIDOW: In some ways I think both Bush and Fox were naïve at the very beginning. They felt they could find more common ground and bring their respective populations along with them. But they really could not. And you're right that Mexican politicians should be more understanding. There had already been some important changes in the ways that Mexicans looked at emigration. Although the PRI, would periodically complain about the way Mexican migrants were being treated in the States, the general attitude of previous Mexican governments had not been one of great concern. From their point of view, Mexicans living in the States had made the decision to leave and were really no longer their problem. In point of fact, most Mexican politicians looked on immigration to the U.S. as a safety valve, eliminating from Mexico a lot of people who were obviously unhappy with their situation there. Fox changed that. He started referring to Mexican migrants as heroes, people who really represented the best of Mexico. And he felt that he had to push hard for a full comprehensive settlement. But the U.S. side was not ready to, to deal with the amnesty/legalization issue.

Q: Well, what -- during the time you were in Mexico, what could you do about it except to sort of explain the political dynamics?

DAVIDOW: Well, that's what I did. But the situation which was bad, was made worse by press and politicians who would continually distort reality. I think many Mexicans felt that there was a conscious policy on the part of the United States to mistreat the Mexicans in the U.S. So every time there was an incident or a killing along the border, this would become a cause célèbre in Mexico. At one point there were groups of vigilantes on the U.S. side who would go out and "hunt" migrants, that is, they would patrol the border, stop people who were obviously crossing illegally and turn them over to the border

patrol. What I didn't understand for some time was that most Mexicans, when they read the headlines about hunting migrants, actually thought that there were people on the U.S. side taking their guns and going out and shooting people. I tried to explain the reality, but without much success and absolutely no sympathy for our position from the Mexicans. But it was hard to defend against the Mexican argument which is essentially that these people would not go to the United States if our system did not welcome them with jobs. And in point of fact, they, they are correct. The argument is a variation on the one used to deny responsibility for the drug trade -- if you people stopped using drugs, we wouldn't be sending them north. As the jobs have disappeared in the U.S. in recent years, migration from Mexico has gone to a point where today there is actually a net zero flow. As many people are going back to Mexico as are coming in from Mexico. I think this is a function of our lousy economy, but many experts argue that the economic development within Mexico is making emigration from there unnecessary. We'll see what happens when our economy recovers. I think you may be right in saying that the Mexicans don't understand our position. But we really don't understand theirs either.

Q: Was there anything you could do, you know, as ambassador, I mean outside of talk about it?

DAVIDOW: Well, in, in Washington, once it became apparent that there wasn't going to be a global resolution, I continued to push for small steps that could have made life better for large numbers of Mexicans already in the United States. And at times, even the Mexican government rejected those small steps, because they wanted to keep the pressure up. I'll give you a specific example. At one point, Congress was faced with the possibility of approving a piece of legislation that would allow Mexicans already in the U.S., and who had already received approval or notice that they were going to get a green card, to not have to go back to Mexico for their interview at a consulate. Many did not want to take the risk of leaving the country, so they chose to live in illegality. The new law would let them change status in the U.S. And this would have helped half a million Mexicans. But the Mexican government put the word out on the Hill to friendly Democrats that that they did not want to see this happen because it would take the pressure off the larger issue. Bush found out about that and he was totally steamed. But there was no meeting of the minds really. There was a lot of talk about how we have to solve this problem, but very little was done. The situation as it continues today is essentially a hypocritical one. It works, but with a lot of pain. I live in California. One of the largest industries here is agriculture. Eighty percent of the farm workers are here in an undocumented status. Mexicans look at that and say, "Hey, you guys aren't serious about legal immigration. You want to use our labor because it's cheap." So we do have to come to grips with this.

Q: Well, was this used in Mexican politics to enhance the anti-American feeling of some politicians?

DAVIDOW: It wasn't so much a policy of the Fox government to encourage anti-Americanism. But you had daily in the Mexican press a steady drumbeat of criticism of the U.S. for mistreatment of migrants. And then individual politicians would pick up on

that and make it a big issue because you can't lose votes in Mexico by criticizing the gringos.

Q: Well, were you faced with the problem, particularly in Texas, of when a Mexican national gets in trouble, and the police arrest him and don't inform the Mexican Embassy? I'm a consular officer, and this sends shivers up my spine because I think of Americans, how they would suffer by this.

DAVIDOW: Well, actually you've outlined one of the biggest problems we've had that's gone all the way up to the Supreme Court in the United States. The fact of the matter is that there are -- especially in Texas -- many people on death row who are foreign nationals, mostly Mexicans, who are there without having ever had their consular officers informed of their arrest. And I agree with you. In fact, I have signed a number of petitions and briefs for court cases on this arguing that international treaties have to take precedent over local state law. But so far that hasn't held sway. And just a few years ago, Texas executed a Mexican in that very position. He was certainly guilty of the crime, but had not received any consular assistance. And Mexicans are aggrieved by the lack of consular access, just as we get upset when we see Americans being treated poorly overseas.

Q: What sort of response could you give when you have that situation? I mean you're the ambassador and then we were obviously flouting the Geneva Convention?

DAVIDOW: We would just have to defend ourselves as best we could. It was obviously something I did not want to talk about very much, because like you, I felt that we were on the wrong side of the issue. Almost on a daily basis, there were reports of Mexican migrants being mistreated by U.S. officials. There were a lot of deaths up near the border, mostly on the Mexican side because the migrants really were targets for criminals up there. But every time there was a border patrol incident in which a Mexican would die, the Mexican assumption was that it was just plain and simple murder. In my experience, most border patrolmen were doing a pretty good job. But they were apprehending hundreds of thousands of people. And one can easily imagine that there were going to be some pretty frightening situations that might result in death. So that was a constant part of our life. And, of course, hundreds of Mexicans died every year from natural causes in the attempt to cross the border, and, in the Mexican mind, these were all our fault as well.

Q: You were in Mexico on 9/11.

DAVIDOW: OK. Well, 9/11 was something of a watershed in Bush's relationship with Fox. And a lot of analysts will say, "Well, the inappropriate Mexican action on 9/11," which I will explain, "really killed any hope for immigration reform." My view is that that hope had been killed many months before for political reasons in the U.S. The Mexicans truly screwed up their public response to 9/11. Pretty quickly, Fox sent a fax to Bush expressing condolences, but then things got out of hand.

The Foreign Minister of Mexico, Jorge Castañeda, a brilliant man but with an unfortunately large mouth and ego, was caught on the street by the press and gave an

impromptu statement that mucked things up. To be fair, he had lived for many years in New York City, and I think that he was truly upset by what happened. The questions were the usual stupid ones asked by the Mexican press which were a variation on how will America's reaction impinge on our sovereignty and is there some way our support for the gringos could be transformed into advantage for us?.

He responded, "Hey look, this isn't the time to start bargaining with the U.S. We should, really help them. This is a horrible act." So far, so good.

But then the press immediately asked, "are you going to send troops to the United States to help?"

And Castañeda said the correct thing, which was, "Well, the United States hasn't asked for our help." But then he felt obliged to add in the same sentence, "And if they did ask, we wouldn't give it to them, because our tradition in Mexico is that we don't send our troops out of the country," so forth and so on. He could have found a better way to answer the question.

His words caught the attention of the U.S. press and resulted in stories that Mexico would refuse to help us. Something he said to cover his flanks with the Mexican press became a very negative story in the U.S., though, of course, in those days immediately following 9/11, we weren't paying that much attention. But Mexico managed to stand out as the one country that seemed to be dissing us. This came at a time when, President Bush was telling the world that, "You're either with us or with the terrorists." The Mexicans got themselves tied around their own axle, and they did not know how to get out of it.

So finally, about 10 days later, Fox went up to Washington to pay a personal call and express his condolences. But the general view in Washington, because of the initial mishandling was that Mexico was not acting in a friendly fashion. Although in reality, they were very responsive to any requests that we might have about searching for terrorists in Mexico (there were none) and helping us in other ways. But the relationship was soured.

And then it got even more complicated as we prepared to go to war in Iraq. And you will remember this effort by Bush and Cheney to get a number of votes in the Security Council. One of the things that Fox had done under the influence of his Foreign Minister was to get Mexico on the UN Security Council. Previously, PRI governments, with some exceptions, had stayed off of the Security Council because they realized it was a recipe for confrontation with the United States. Given the political thinking in Mexico, the anti-American attitude, being on the Security Council would inevitably bring about a bumping of heads. But Fox did not understand this and his Foreign Minister was looking for his own greater glory. So as I was leaving Mexico in the summer of 2002, the whole issue of how to get Mexico to support us on the necessary resolutions as we move toward war became a hot issue. But Mexico refused to support us. And I had told Washington that Mexico would follow the French lead. If France supported a resolution, then Mexico would have enough political cover for Fox put up with the domestic heat. But if France

would not do it, then Mexico would not either. And that's exactly what happened. So there was a lot of bitterness in the Bush White House against Fox and Mexico.

Q: Well Jeff, something I've noted in my interviews that go way, way back. People who've served in Mexico call attention to the fact that the Mexican Foreign Ministry is sort of the bastion of anti-Americanism while we would find cooperation in other ministries.

DAVIDOW: That was very much the case under the PRI government. The Foreign Ministry, which really didn't have very much to do, spent most of its time thinking up ways to defend the country's sovereignty from the predacious Americans. The first foreign minister I had to deal with, Rosario Green, came from that Third World tradition, which was anomalous for a country that was becoming our second largest trading partner(after Canada). President Zedillo appointed one of his close aides to be the Deputy Foreign Minister. And it was the Deputy Foreign Minister who actually ran the relationship with us. The Foreign Minister would periodically complain to the president. but she could not do anything about it.

Under Fox, this changed. And the brilliant new Foreign Minister, Castañeda, had a very different attitude. But at the same time, he was egotistical and did not really understand the U.S. as well as he thought he did. In fact, he did not even understand Mexico as well as he thought he did. He was a very bicultural person, but as sometimes happens with such people, they're neither fish nor foul. So while there wasn't the instinctive anti-Americanism coming out of the Foreign Ministry, there was still some of it and Castañeda, who always harbored hopes that he would ultimately be president, played on it. For instance, Fox had gone to Washington on September 5th and 6th just before 9/11 for the first state visit of any president under Bush. And most Mexicans were happy to see this. But to protect his left flank from charges of cronyism with the Yankees, Castañeda came up with the idea of announcing during this successful visit by Fox, that Mexico was going to withdraw from the Rio Treaty

The treaty had been signed right after World War II to provide for the collective defense of the western hemisphere. It was essentially a moribund document and it really didn't mean anything. But here was a way for Mexico to say, "Well, even when we're looking for better relations with the U.S., we're not going to follow their lead in military matters." So they announced during the Fox visit their withdrawal from the Rio Treaty. And nobody in the U.S. Government really paid a whole lot of attention to that, and it was seen for what it was, a bow in the direction of traditional anti-Americanism. After 9/11, the U.S. went looking for every international treaty that we have in order to garner political and moral support. No one in Washington had mentioned the Rio Treaty for years until Castañeda did. And then five days later, it's a cause célèbre because we feel we need it. In fact, Mexico was still a member, and we did nothing with the treaty, but 9/11 called attention to Castaneda's misstep.

Fox wasn't independent in the sense that he really let Castañeda dictate a lot of the relationship with the U.S. And so Fox would constantly give speeches berating the U.S.

about lack of progress on immigration when a better politician would have realized that it was time to call a halt to that, because it only served to call attention to his own incompetence or impotence. So things got bitter toward the time of my departure in mid-2002, and got worse after I left. But all of this is ironical because every year Mexico's ties, commercial ties, cultural ties, people ties, with the United States grew stronger and stronger. That's just the nature of the beast.

Q: Well Jeff, now we're talking in sort of retrospect. But did you ever have a chance to sit down with the Secretary of State or the National Security Advisor or, or the President and say, "Things are going this way, this is what we -- maybe we could try this or that?"

DAVIDOW: I would often send in NODIS cables basically outlining the situation and suggesting what we could do and how we could help the Mexicans from digging themselves into deeper holes. One never knows who reads those cables, but certainly within the Bureau and in the NSC, people paid attention, but the latitude for action was often very limited. I found Secretary Powell to be very, very open but then of course as we got closer and closer to the Iraq War, everybody's attention disappeared.
I was always fairly careful about what I put in cables, and I did not encourage my Political Section to report just for the sake of reporting, largely because -- and this refers mostly to the situation under the PRI -- there were so many enemies of the PRI in Washington, particularly on the drug issue, that anything that was critical of Mexican government in a report was likely to get leaked immediately to the Hill. So rather than not tell the truth, we were careful about what we would write.

Q: Well, did the -- first place, let's talk about this anti-PRI attitude. What was PRI doing on the drug situation that aroused the ire of forces in Washington?

DAVIDOW: On the one hand, there was greater cooperation than there had ever been before. No doubt about it. But yet, the continuing situation in Mexico was marked by a great deal of corruption, and the limitations on our personnel served to make it difficult for them to do their jobs. Often with the connivance of Mexican authorities, we skirted the limits. For instance, no American law enforcement officer was allowed to carry a weapon in Mexico. I'm not going to say whether they did or not, but their Mexican counterparts at the working level would have found it pretty strange if they were not carrying. Enough said on that. Most of all, the problem was the continuing corruption that made the Mexican Government ineffective in fighting against narcotics. My view was things were improving and we had to encourage that. It wasn't the glass half empty/glass half full. In fact, the glass was mostly empty. But we were filling it up, drop by drop. And we had to look for ways to encourage greater cooperation. But the certification process really poisoned the atmosphere under the PRI and, indeed, through much of Latin America.

Q: Were the PRI taking a different attitude than the PAN on drugs?

DAVIDOW: Well, they were the government. It really wasn't a topic for political debate within Mexico. The real question was whether we were getting the kind of cooperation

that people in Washington felt we should be getting. And the general view, especially in the DEA, the FBI, Department of Justice, was negative.

Q: Did you sense that the drug lords were getting stronger, extending their sway, or infrastructure, what have you, during the time you were there?

DAVIDOW: That was a concern and I had to walk the fine line between alerting the Mexican public to the growing strength of the drug lords, and not giving more ammunition to the anti-group in Washington. I think the last time we talked I told you about how I was vilified in the press in Mexico for -- actually, I was misquoted, but the fact was I said that large parts of Mexico were becoming like Sicily and the government was losing control. And for a government that prides itself on sovereignty issues, they should have been more worried about controlling their own territory. Fox continued the slow improvements that we had seen under Zedillo, and things were getting better. And then when Calderón came in 2006, long after I had left Mexico, the nature of the relationship changed. And the Mexican government became much more willing to coordinate with us on anti-drug activity.

Q: Well, one of the things that's always pointed out to any American representative from these drug importing countries that we're not doing enough to stop the drug use in the country and that we're the market and we should stop it. How'd you respond?

DAVIDOW: Well, that's an argument that gets made by Mexicans in every conversation there is. There are facts contrary to that. We have a million people in jail on one form of drug charge or another. And we spend vast amounts of money in the United States on anti-drug activity. I do think that they have a point in that we don't do enough about education on drugs in the U.S. But the general Mexican attitude -- and it parallels their view on immigration -- is that we should change our own culture. The problem is on the demand side, not the supply side. Well, that's a pretty easy argument to make. It can be refuted, but there's a lot of truth to it.

Q: What about Americans coming to Mexico, not so much flying in to Mexico City and all, but you know, driving from the border down to Monterey and other places? The problem of Americans being waylaid both by criminals and by the police and all. I mean was this an ongoing problem?

DAVIDOW: Yes, there was always the chance of getting hassled, hustled and robbed by bandits or the police. The most likely victims of that were Mexicans -- many of whom were U.S. citizens, driving back to Mexico during school holidays to visit their families. I think for most American tourists, Mexico was, and ironically today among all of the violence, remains a safe place to visit. But, we would have cases that our consular officers would have to handle frequently of people getting held up for bribes. In fact, it happened to me once. After I left Mexico, I went back with my wife on a holiday and we were driving with friends from Mexico City to Acapulco. A cop pulled us over and tried to shake us down by threatening to arrest us and then offering to let us go if we "could

find a way to help him." But we got out of it. I took the chief cop aside and said, "You -- do you know who I am?"

And he said, "Yeah, you're the ambassador."

I said, "I'm not the ambassador anymore, but I know the ambassador. I could probably help you get a visa to the United States."

He said, "You think so?"

I said, "Give me your name and number, and I'll make sure that the ambassador has it. So when you call him, he'll know you." And of course he gave me his card and all that, and we didn't have to pay him anything. And I thought it was a pretty cheap way out of the mess. Of course I never did anything about it, but you know, that kind of petty thievery is just endemic. By the way, for your own information, there's a front page story in today's New York Times, I don't know if you've seen it, about bribery in Mexico on the part of Wal-Mart.

Q: I saw something --

DAVIDOW: You should read it. Quite an incredible piece of reporting.

Q: Yeah. Well, in, in Congress, did you find -- were there sort of cliques of anti-Mexican, pro-Mexican?

DAVIDOW: Definitely. Generally speaking, in Congress, you had very few people who were willing to spend time on Mexico and look at it in a realistic fashion. You did have some pro-Mexican legislators, many of them who were Mexican American. And they were helpful. And then there were the antis, a lot of conservative Republicans, a lot of law and order people. I always found in dealing with both Latin America and Africa, that there was very rarely middle ground and that the extremes predominated. That was always a big challenge.

Q: Now, turning to the sort of border management with water, free trade, trucking, etc. How were things going on that?

DAVIDOW: Well, I think that basically after NAFTA was signed there was a lot of euphoria about how the border was going to become more integrated. And there was progress, but in point of fact, over the years life on the border has not gotten much better. This could be measured, for instance in how much time it takes to wait on the Mexican side of the border just to cross over to the United States. Every day on the news in San Diego where I live, they give the border wait times -- usually around two hours at the San Ysidro crossing, just north of Tijuana. So things got tougher, and they got much worse after 9/11. And we had a lot of trade issues which were almost always the result of special interests in one or the other of countries throwing their domestic political weight around. You mentioned trucking, where the U.S. refused to implement NAFTA

provisions for over 15 years because of pressure coming from the Teamsters. There was and continues to be a lot of friction on the border. On the other hand, a million people and tens of thousands of cars and trucks cross it every day. So, trade and the border are conflictive issues, and, as ambassador, I had to spend a lot more of time dealing with problems than I would have liked to do.

Q: How about water?

DAVIDOW: Water was a big issue, particularly when George Bush came in and in the last days of the Clinton administration. We have a treaty with Mexico about Colorado River water. We are obliged to provide them a certain quantity every year, and they are in return obliged to provide us with a quantity of water from rivers on their side of the border. And the Mexicans for years were not complying with their obligations. It was a time of drought and our position was, "Look, we understand that you may have to cut the amount that you give us, but you cannot give all of it to the Mexican side and then just give us the dribs and drabs that are left," which is what they were doing. So this got to be a very ugly issue, particularly in Texas. And I remember when Bush came to that first meeting at Fox's farm, they actually spent as much time talking about water as they did about immigration. These are hard issues. In point of fact, there are a lot of mechanisms already established on the border to try to make things better. But, we have not lived up to the hope of NAFTA in really promoting integration. Just the customs paperwork on the border is from the 19th century. It's gotten better in recent years, but it's still not what it should be. We're still stuck in a tremendous bureaucratic mess at the border, and the security and immigration issues have made it worse.

Q: Were we concerned about Mexico -- this is particularly post-9/11 -- as being an entrée for terrorists?

DAVIDOW: Periodically people in Washington will talk about that, and of course the U.S. government has worked closely with the Mexican government. But in point of fact, I used to joke that for an Arab terrorist to try to get into the United States across the Mexican border, he would have to hire an alien smuggler and run the risk of being taken out into the desert, beaten up and abandoned, as so often happens. The border is too dangerous for terrorists. If you're a terrorist from the Middle East, it's easier to get into the United States from Canada than it is from Mexico. That's happened on at least one occasion.

Q: Did you find -- were there people sort of going back and forth between the north and south and comparing the Mexican side of NAFTA and the Canadian side and what we were doing and not doing?

DAVIDOW: Well, after 9/11, there was an effort to try to coordinate better and to come up with policies on both the northern and the southern border that would protect security. But actually, there's really no trilateral relationship. We have our ties with Canada. We have our ties with Mexico. Mexico and Canada have certain arrangements and treaties and ties. The level of trilateral integration, even now coming on 20 years after NAFTA, is

minimal in the extreme. And by the way, the Canadians get just as angry about our border bureaucracy as the Mexicans.

Q: Moving to another subject, did you find that the PRI was sort of regrouping itself and getting rid of some of the dinosaurs and becoming more responsive during its time of being out of power?

DAVIDOW: There was some of that. But not as much as you would think. Many in the PRI felt that they had lost in 2000 because President Zedillo was too much of a political reformer, too open to the other parties. The candidates that they put up in 2000 and 2006 were very much of the old school. The PRI has modernized somewhat. It has a younger leadership now. But what has really changed in Mexico is not so much how the PRI governs itself, but the fact that it has a lot more competition than it had in the past. The press is freer, the political opposition is more active, and civil society is flexing its muscles. So I think the political parties have had to change, but I'm not sure how deep the change has been.

Q: Well, how did you view sort of the class system, if you want to call it that, in Mexico? Where was the clout, the opinion makers, the workers? How would you describe Mexico in those terms?

DAVIDOW: Mexico is, of course, a society where money rules, but, when I compare it to some other countries, it seems to me that it is less unequal and unjust. For instance, I compare it to Venezuela, where I think the class system is much stronger and less porous. Chávez in Venezuela has been so popular because the poor in that country really had more grievances than let's say in Mexico. Over the years Mexico has made efforts to bring greater opportunity to its society for education and better jobs. That does not mean it's an egalitarian society. Far from it. People with money in Mexico make the decisions. The political system is designed to serve private interests. But the political parties, particularly the PRI, with their great patronage machines have offered a way out of poverty for many people. The indigenous have been the most disadvantaged. They make up about ten percent of the population and they are very poor, Guatemala poor. It is a class based society, but less so than others that I've seen.

Q: How about the universities? Were sort of American thoughts -- do we have a fairly free exchange with the universities, or were these as they had been at some point almost no-go areas for Americans?

DAVIDOW: The national university in Mexico City, UNAM (Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México), which has a gigantic enrolment, is in many of its faculties, particularly in the humanities, still pretty much a no-go area. In the sciences, it's different. But what we've seen in Mexico in recent years is that fewer and fewer poor kids are getting in to universities. They used to be the great equalizer, but not so much anymore. UNAM for instance accepts most applicants and it is overwhelmed with students. The quality of teaching has really gone down. Employers now are prejudiced against graduates of UNAM and prefer to hire from the many private universities where

the middle and upper classes congregate. In the private universities, modern teaching and American approaches are very much accepted.

Q: Well then, Jeff, is there any subject that we haven't covered, do you think?

DAVIDOW: No, I can't think of any. I think when I go over the transcripts, Stu, I'll probably find a lot of things to put in and stuff to take out, but I think we've put -- I think we've done a pretty good job over these past many months. I want to thank you for being so patient.

Q: Well, I want to thank you. And I do encourage you to, you know, your transcript is your creation and we really encourage you to expand. You know, I think I should say more about this or you can think of examples or personalities or anything you feel that will make it meatier, do. What have you been doing since Mexico?

DAVIDOW: Well, I left Mexico in 2002 and I went up and spent the year still in the State Department at Harvard where I did a little teaching and some research. I wrote a book about Mexico. I was not sure what my plans would be. I knew I could stay in the Service, but I had hit my sixtieth birthday. And I thought for a variety of reasons, personal, family, financial, that it might be a good time for me to move on. And so I was offered a job here in San Diego running a think tank on Latin America. And I accepted that and within a couple of days I got a phone call from Secretary Powell offering me the ambassadorship in India, which is something I had long been interested in, because when I was in grad school, I had spent an academic year there. It was a very, very tough decision for me. Should I resign, take this job in San Diego, or should I stay in and go to India? And finally I decided it was time to make the break. But it was not an easy decision. . And so in the summer of 2003, I left the State Department, came out to San Diego, where I ran the Institute of the Americas for eight years. When I left State, I wanted to make a clean break with Washington. I did not want at that time to be one of those people hanging around the Washington talk circuit. Of course, I kept my friends in the Service and would visit Washington frequently.

When President Obama came in, I was asked to come back and spend three months organizing a meeting of all the Western Hemisphere presidents called the Summit of the Americas. I did that right at the beginning of the Obama presidency and everybody who I met in Washington just assumed that I wanted to get back into government. And I did not. I was by that time quite happy living in San Diego and I was not looking for a government job. So I did that and I continued in my job at the Institute of the Americas until about 18 months ago when I retired again. And then at that time I was offered a job by a consultancy in Washington called the Cohen Group, headed by former Secretary of Defense Bill Cohen. I still live in San Diego and travel to Washington practically every month.

Q: What was your think tank's specialty?

DAVIDOW: It's an organization that has existed on the campus of the University of California San Diego for 30 years. It's autonomous and doesn't belong to the university which gave us a lot of freedom. The Institute organizes meetings, seminars, and conferences that bring together governments and the private sector in Latin America. For instance, we have a very strong energy program. So we'll organize a conference on energy issues in Brazil and attract members of the government, Brazilian legislators and others to meet with academics, and international and local businessmen to try to exchange opinions on government policy.

So I did a tremendous amount of traveling in Latin America after I retired from the State Department. And it was an interesting job, but after eight years I was doing the same things over and over again, so I chose to retire. And much to my surprise, I was then offered another position, which I'm doing now.

Q: Did you find a changing American -- I'm talking about U.S. attitude through your San Diego working and all, towards Mexico than you may say some years before?

DAVIDOW: Well, San Diego's sort of a strange place, although it's right across the border from Mexico. It doesn't have a lot of contact, strange as it sounds. San Diego developed as a navy city and tourism city. Recently it has become very high tech. It's not like El Paso or Tucson or other places near the border that are much closer in terms of trade and activity with Mexico. I think what I found here in San Diego, which I would have found almost everywhere in the United States, is that people really aren't that interested in Latin America or foreign policy. When we first got here it was hard to find people who spoke our language, who had had similar experiences. But, that's ok. San Diego compensates in other ways. I knew my life would be different out of the Foreign Service. And I tell younger people who ask me whether they should retire or not that they will never find another job as full and rewarding as their Foreign Service career. If they are prepared to accept that and get on with their lives and find new things to do, then they are ready for retirement. But if they are going to mope about the good old days, they should stay where they are until they have to be carried out feet first.

Q: Well, OK. Well Jeff, let's -- I guess this pretty well ends it.

DAVIDOW: I think so. And once again I really do thank you. You do a superb job.

Q: You've given some great stuff. And I want to thank you, and Merry Christmas.

End of interview.