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

AMBASSADOR ALAN EASTHAM

Interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy
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Q: Okay, today is the 28th of July 2010. This is on behalf of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training and I am Charles Stuart Kennedy. You go by Alan?

EASTHAM: Yeah that's fine, terrific, Alan or Al either way.

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

EASTHAM: October 16, 1951 in Dumas, Arkansas.

Q: Where is Dumas?

EASTHAM: It's a small town in what nowadays is occasionally referred to as L.A., lower Arkansas. It's in the Mississippi delta near the confluence of the Arkansas River and the Mississippi River, about 90 miles south and east of Little Rock. When I was growing up, about 3,500 people lived there.

Q: Okay, we'll come back to Dumas and that area but first tell me something on your father's side; what do you know about that part of the family?

EASTHAM: On my father's side, in fact on both sides of the family, my people are part of the westward migration. The part of the country that I grew up in was pretty much unsettled swampland until around the 1870s or the 1880s, when the railroad was punched through from north to south. As was the case in many parts of the country, the railroad brought little towns and it brought a certain amount of commerce, economic activity, and settlement. My grandfather on my father's side grew up in the hill country a little bit to the west of the flatlands where I grew up. He moved to Dumas, Arkansas, around the turn of the century between the 1800s and the 1900s, to work as a clerk in a general store. He subsequently bought a bit of farm land and was a land owner basically with quite a few tenant farmers who worked for him. He also made "furnish" loans to small landowners. My grandmother grew up in Hamburg, Arkansas, another town to the southwest. She went to the University of Arkansas and became a school teacher and came to Dumas around, I don't know when, around 1910 probably. They married and my dad was born in 1923.

He, like most of the rest of his generation, wound up in the service, in the Army Air Corps in the Second World War. He came back after the war and set up a little electronics repair business, since he was trained as a radar technician.

Q: Where did he serve?

EASTHAM: He, I think, ended the war out in the Pacific. He was part of the surge that anticipated the planned invasion of Japan in late 1945. He didn't join the army until around 1943, I guess; he went one year to college and that didn't work out, and I think he joined the army around 1942 or 1943. At the end of the war he might have gone as far as Guam or Okinawa.

Q: How about on your mother's side? What do you know about her family?

EASTHAM: On my mother's side, my grandparents came from the eastern U.S. over several generations. I have the impression that they moved west each generation. My family lore has it that they were in Alabama and then came to Mississippi. In fact, all my great-grandparents on that side, with one exception, were born in Alabama. My grandfather was born in Mississippi. When he was a young man, before the family moved to Arkansas, he was in the Mississippi National Guard. He was part of a Mississippi National Guard unit that was sent to Europe as a road-building unit during the First World War, and he mentioned to me that he had been in Belgium, and in fact I have a unit history that confirms this. I believe he was already in Arkansas, about 17 or 18 years old, with his parents, when his unit was called up. He came back and settled in Arkansas after the First World War. He farmed around 160 acres or so during his prime and owned about 80 acres when he died. They lived east of a town called Winchester, about 7 or 8 miles south of Dumas.

My mother went to nursing school and became a nurse and then came back to Dumas to work in the hospital.

Q: I think it is typical of the times that neither of your grandparents well one grandmother went to college and became a school teacher but both grandfathers didn't go to college.

EASTHAM: That's right.

Q: When you say farming what do you mean by farming?

EASTHAM: Hard work farming cotton, soybeans sometimes. My grandmother had about a half an acre garden that fed the house and she did a lot of canning. They tried cows, and I remember early morning milking and putting the milk can out by the road to be picked up. One of my earliest memories, though, is the day they put down their cows because of hoof and mouth disease. There was a big fire involved to dispose of the carcasses, and even though I was only about three years old, I remember that very clearly.

Q: Your father was in electronics and had an electronics store?

EASTHAM: That's right.

Q: In Dumas?

EASTHAM: That's right. He sold radios and repaired radios when they had tubes in them, from a shop behind my grandfather's finance office, where he handled his farming business.

Q: Oh yeah this is when the radio was the means of reaching out.

EASTHAM: Yeah, but he had the first television in the town too; television reception arrived when I was pretty small. They said they taught me to say, "Television is the coming thing" to customers.

Q: Okay well let's talk about Dumas; what was it like as you recall?

EASTHAM: Well, when I was growing up, I remember it as a town with a lot of divisions. Obviously I don't know it currently, because I've been away for about forty years or even longer than that actually, and I haven't spent more than two nights consecutively there since I joined the foreign service. But when I said divisions, I meant in several ways. It has a railroad running down the middle of it and the highway used to run along the railroad until they built what was called the new highway, soon to be a four-lane highway, which moved everything about a mile out to the east. It had another division in that it was a thoroughly segregated community. Approximately, I think, half African-American and half white, with three or four Chinese families and a similar number of Jewish families. The social divide between black and white was pretty complete.

But it is a town that has changed a great deal over my lifetime. When I was a child I remember the farmers all coming to town on Saturdays; Saturday was a huge day for the merchants in the downtown area with cars and mules and wagons parked all along the railroad tracks there. People would come into town in the morning and go back after dark. You could not walk down the sidewalk without bumping into people on Saturday evening. That doesn't happen any more. In fact most of the downtown stores are either gone for good or closed on Saturday. Saturday trips to town faded away in the mid-1960s.

Q: Of course a lot of people did mule wagons. I know in the '40s my farther had a slow lumber concern in Meridian, Mississippi, and I'd stayed there a couple times watching the wagons with mules come in Black and white; for a lot of people that is how they got around.

EASTHAM: Then you had in the '50s the increasing mechanization of farming, which caused a lot of the population to seek other work and, of course, the little town did a lot

of struggling to try to put in light manufacturing industries to accommodate people who were losing their employment on the farms. Now, you know, it's very easy for some guy and his two sons to farm 5,000 acres or 10,000 acres or something like that with equipment and one or two help. They don't need repeated applications of labor as they did before. And the result is that the population in the county has dropped by about half since 1960.

My dad at one point actually farmed a piece of my grandfather's land in the sense that he hired the workers, directed the work, and handled the financing and the sale of the crop. One of my memories of about five years of age is going out there for the cotton picking where we had lots of people with big sacks picking cotton and my dad sitting at a table at the end of the day with stacks of quarters in front of him to pay them for their day's labor, based on how may pounds of cotton they had managed to pick out.

Q: Okay as a kid in the first place were you the only child?

EASTHAM: No, I have two younger brothers.

Q: Where were you in rank order?

EASTHAM: The oldest.

Q: What was it like as a very small kid; what did you do?

EASTHAM: Oh I don't know. It seems to me sometimes I might have idealized some of this, but I recall it as sort of straight out of To Kill A Mockingbird around there, you know, hot summers, church, school, the great crises we made of small matters. Life and death. I remember the summers in particularly and how the weather always seemed to change around Halloween. I remember when we first got an air conditioner. That was kind of a big deal; there was one room in the house that was air conditioned at that point. But you know you do kid stuff, there was a place we used to go where some guy had some dogs penned up and we'd go bother his hunting dogs. We had BB guns and the whole works. Occasionally I would stay with my grandparents on their farm at Winchester. They had a privy and a hand pump out the back door when I was small. All that changed over the years.

Q: I take it you were kind of turned loose in the town.

EASTHAM: Yeah, pretty much. There were a lot of kids in the neighborhood, so loose meant not loose as a solo but loose in a pack.

Q: Loose in a pack, yeah. Were you much of a reader in the early days?

EASTHAM: Yes. I read a lot and, in fact, I won the library prize one summer for the largest number of book read. It turned out somehow I taught myself to read very fast, very quickly. I think I read 80 books over the summer.

Q: Did the librarian take an interest in your reading?

EASTHAM: Well when my grandmother retired from teaching that's what she did; she became the librarian. So I spent a lot of time in the library because both my parents worked...

Q: Yeah.

EASTHAM: …and that was a handy thing to do since she had the library open every afternoon, so I would often go there after school. It was less than a block from the elementary school.

Q: Do you recall in the early days any books or book or anything that really grabbed you?

EASTHAM: Oh let me see, Penrod; the Penrod series. Kipling's Captains Courageous.

Q: Booth Tarkington.

EASTHAM: Booth Tarkington.

Q: Penrod and Sam and others.

EASTHAM: And at one point when I was ten or eleven I was a big science fiction reader and read all of the Robert Heinlein books, Starship Troopers, Podkayne of Mars, Red Planet. That persisted for six or eight years and then led me into the Stranger in a Strange Land books later on.

Q: There were also science fiction magazines then.

EASTHAM: Those weren't available in Dumas. Before science fiction, I was a comic book addict. Comics cost six cents in those days, same as a soft drink, and I used to read them and then sell them to the barber shop for three cents.

Q: How about school what was school like?

EASTHAM: It was pretty much a standard school experience. I started with Mrs. Vivian Adams' kindergarten. We called her "teacher." This was a kind of day care thing that you could start when you were about four, kindergarten. It was in her house; she had a big back porch where we all sat around a table for our snacks and put our heads down for a nap. It was especially important since both my parents worked.

There was no public kindergarten, of course, you started school in the first grade and that was it. I just went straight up through it and did well enough in high school to get a decent set of grades to go out into the world with; I was in the band, no sports.

Q: In religion was your family…?

EASTHAM: Methodist.

Q: Was religion an important part or was it just Sunday's or…?

EASTHAM: It was expected, not open for discussion, that you would be in church on Sunday and up to a certain point the kids would go to Sunday school. My grandmother taught one of the women's Sunday school classes at the Methodist church. That was a big part of her life and she spent her Saturdays with the Bible and reference books writing out her lesson for Sunday.

Q: Where did your family fit politically?

EASTHAM: In Arkansas? Everybody was a Democrat, there wasn't anything else. I didn't even meet a Republican until I was about twenty years old. Everybody down there at that time, we are talking about the '60s here basically, all the candidates for local office ran as independents; there was no need to hold a primary, everybody ran against everybody else in the general election. Like I said, there were no Republicans until the mid-1950s when Winthrop Rockefeller came along. Everybody was a conservative Democrat. This was the era when the two senators from Arkansas were Senator Fulbright and Senator McClellan, both of whom were fairly well-known. That was the legacy of reconstruction, about eighty years of absolute rejection of any Republican presence except in the Northwestern corner of Arkansas. So everybody was a conservative Dixiecrat, a conservative Democrat.

Q: As a small child was there any mixing with the African-American half of the town?

EASTHAM: No, there wasn't. The schools didn't desegregate until my senior year in high school, during the Nixon administration. At that point, desegregation was under "freedom of choice" in Arkansas where Black kids were in theory free to choose where they went to school. In our case, I believe, there were three Black kids who came over to the white high school at the time and graduated with me. It must not have been very pleasant for them because they were pretty isolated. I had a Black teacher, who, bless her heart, taught me to type. I recall that some of my family thought it was pretty scandalous that I had decided to take her class, but I really wanted to learn to type. The tension between the races during the Civil Rights Movement years had the effect of reducing whatever interaction might have existed, so in this period, the late 1960s, it was pretty difficult. I had some Black acquaintances because I used to have to work Sunday mornings at my dad's radio station, a business he started in 1966. One of the Sunday morning program offerings was eight or ten gospel quartet programs. Each of them had 15 minutes, and we got this done before the white Baptist church broadcast at 11:00. They were back-to-back from about 8:00 to 10:00 on Sunday mornings. We had hoped to make a little money through business sponsorships, but that didn't work out very well, so we just put them on the air. I got to know some people that way. Aside from that we had

occasional women who worked in the house and that sort of thing, but I didn't really know any Black kids.

Q: What sort of work would you do on the radio?

EASTHAM: The usual stuff, open the thing up and talk on the radio and run the place.

Q: Did you pick up a patter or not?

EASTHAM: No, not really. It was small town radio from a different era. My dad's radio station was modeled on what he had known in the 1950s so it was a very strangely-formatted thing with a lot of different kinds of programs and different kinds of music. The programs came in 30 minute to one hour blocks, so it seemed that every few minutes you would have to do something completely different.

Q: In high school did you get involved in any extra curricular activities?

EASTHAM: The band and I think that was pretty much it.

Q: What did you play?

EASTHAM: Tuba, because I was the only kid in the eighth grade who could carry it in the marching band. It required some heft to tote that thing around.

Q: And you can't drape it over the shoulder.

EASTHAM: Yeah you can; these were sousaphones actually.

Q: Sousaphones.

EASTHAM: The marching ones would go over your shoulder.

Q: Was football a big deal?

EASTHAM: Friday Night Lights. It was a great big deal and still is.

Q: How did the team do?

EASTHAM: I don't know. I think my senior year we did rather well. I don't remember how well we did but I seem to recall it being considerably better than it had been for quite a while.

Q: Well then were you pointed towards anything?

EASTHAM: Pointed toward? No we didn't point it was sort of…

Q: Drift?

EASTHAM: Well, you get out of school and then you do something else. They always pointed me toward college. That was the first point, that I going to go to college.

Q: I mention your grandmother must have…

EASTHAM: Yeah, she pushed a bit and so that seemed natural. I almost joined the Army at one point. This sounds very strange and alien in this era, but my draft number was 38, and Vietnam was in full swing.

Q: Oooh, that means you were prime meat.

EASTHAM: Absolutely, and fortunately after two years of a college deferment the draft went away during the Nixon administration, and, therefore, I didn't have that to worry about anymore. But at one point I actually did consider joining the army to get that out of the way.

Q: Where did you go to college?

EASTHAM: I went to Hendrix College in Conway, Arkansas.

Q: Good heavens I never heard of that.

EASTHAM: Well it's a nice little school. It's a little larger now than it was at that point. When I went there it was about 800 students; it has a historic Methodist affiliation. I didn't exactly know what I was going to study. We were Methodists, that's where my father went for his short college career, and that's where I wound up. I would have preferred, however, to have gone somewhere else but we just flat couldn't afford it.

Q: How about the University of Arkansas?

EASTHAM: I never was attracted to the University. It never entered my mind to go to the University of Arkansas.

Q: Well then at Hendrix College what was campus life like?

EASTHAM: It's a small school in that the dorms were a little old but it was nice. The first year I didn't have a car so I was pretty much stuck to the campus, which is in the town of Conway, Arkansas; it's not a terrible place to live. It was 1969, however, and that was a strange year; that was the year of Kent State in 1970 I guess.

Q: In the spring of '70.

EASTHAM: Yeah, and it was a peculiar year because of everything that was going on outside. The Vietnam stuff was going.

Q: Did that penetrate?

EASTHAM: Vaguely.

Q: Because some places really almost didn't feel the movement and other ones really absorbed it.

EASTHAM: No, it was not absorbed, it was noticeable but it wasn't obsessive.

Q: What were you majoring in?

EASTHAM: I tried biology and chemistry, with a view toward medical school, and I quickly learned that wasn't going to work. I delayed that as long as possible and I finally wound up getting a degree in philosophy with the aim of going to law school.

Q: Was it an all male school?

EASTHAM: No, no, mixed, coed.

Q: Did you get involved in campus politics at all?

EASTHAM: No, I think I joined the Young Democrats for a while. Some friends of mine thought that was a good thing, so I did that, but I kind of kept out of all that. My wife, whom I met at Hendrix College, has been over the last 35 years dumbstruck at the small number of people from the campus that I actually knew.

Q: I went to a school of 1100 college and there were people I didn't know for example, the owner of the New York Yankees Steinbrenner, or something? He died just a few weeks ago and he was two years behind me.

EASTHAM: Really.

Q: The name never even crossed my radar until somebody said I see one of your college guys died; well it was strange.

EASTHAM: You would think someone with an outsized personality as Steinbrenner would have come to your notice.

Q: Probably ranted and raved in his corner and I was quiet in my corner.

EASTHAM: Right.

Q: While you were in college did the outside world intrude much? I'm thinking about one the Vietnam War; how did you feel about that?

EASTHAM: Well, I felt like everybody else did. It was a great sword hanging over all of us because of the prospect of being drafted. That was the only angle I saw. It was not anything that I cared about from a policy point of view or from any concern about what we were doing. It was just a question of this looming thing and that you might be drafted and have to go.

Q: What about the outside world? Did events in the Soviet Union or China grab your attention while you were in college?

EASTHAM: There were several of us in the last two years of college who would watch Walter Cronkite every night; we were fairly religious about that. It was almost a worship service to watch Walter Cronkite, so I guess we soaked up some facts about the world from that. Looking back on it, it's very interesting to me how episodic the evening news was. You took a bit of something that Cronkite would report and it would be just a bit of what happened today. There was no sense of the flow of events, and I didn't have a sense of "Okay, that happened yesterday, this happens today, what's going to happen tomorrow?" That's a very different way of looking at the world from the way I look at it all these years later.

Q: Did the Foreign Service diplomacy cross your radar?

EASTHAM: Not in the slightest. I was aware of it but it was not something that I ever thought about.

Q: When you were in college did you think of anything as to what you were going to do after you got out?

EASTHAM: Yeah, this is going to take a minute but I had it all figured out.

Q: Oh.

EASTHAM: My last year and a half in college I got interested in the study of psychology and I did pretty well at it. When I was graduating with that philosophy degree I had in mind to stay in Conway and to finish up a degree's worth of psychology, either at Hendrix or at the state school across town. After that, I had my eyes on going to Vanderbilt for their doctorate in clinical psychology; I thought that would be a pretty interesting field. Unfortunately, my family had different plans. My dad called me right before graduation and said, "Look somebody quit and I need you to come down here and work at the radio station for me." Well, there goes my plan, at least in the short term, so I did. I packed up all my stuff and I moved back to Dumas.

Q: How long did you do that?

EASTHAM: That would have been June of '73. By October it had become very, very clear to me that there was not enough cash flow to support one family, much less two or three. So I started looking around…

Q: Were you married by this time?

EASTHAM: No, not yet. But I started looking around for other things to. I applied to the law school at the University of Arkansas. But one day, I was sitting in the radio station opening the mail and there was an envelope from the Board of Examiners of the Foreign Service containing a little reel-to-reel tape and a letter. It said, "We are trying to broaden our recruiting for the Foreign Service. Would you please run these public service announcements on your radio station?" Inside the envelope was a copy of the exam booklet and the application form to take the exam for the Foreign Service. So I remember very, very clearly looking that thing and I thought that seems like a hell of an interesting way to make a living; I filled it out and mailed it back that afternoon. Just like that. I took the exam a couple of months later, in December of '73. But by the time the Foreign Service got around to me to offer me a job in November of '74, I had gotten married and had moved to Fayetteville and enrolled in the law school at the University of Arkansas.

Q: You say you took the written and the oral exam?

EASTHAM: I did. I took the written in Little Rock in December and then I got a letter in February or March saying I was eligible to take the oral. I went to New Orleans in June of '74 take the oral exam. There was a traveling team at the Trade Center in New Orleans.

Q: Do you remember any of the questions asked of you?

EASTHAM: I remember one question about visas. But I did this in my own clueless way. I thought the oral exam – I don't even know if they called it an "exam," come to think of it – was just sort of to see if you had all your parts. We were 20 minutes into it before I realized I was being tested. I remember the moment it occurred to me that there was a test going on. Maybe my extremely relaxed attitude toward the oral was in my favor. In any event, one member of the panel slept through it, so that's probably how I slipped through with this guy sleeping through the whole thing. There was one other person on that team who I subsequently knew as a colleague in Nairobi, 25 years later.

Q: Who was that?

EASTHAM: Her name was Elaine Schunter.

Q: Oh yeah, I know Elaine. Actually I was on the Board of Examiners the next year and I remember Elaine then. Actually, I knew Elaine in Vietnam, I think.

EASTHAM: Okay. I knew Elaine later I think it was in Nairobi that we overlapped shortly.

Q: I knew her in Vietnam yeah.

EASTHAM: I think she came out as a WAE (When Actually Employed) to fill in as the Admin Counselor.

So after the oral exam, I went through the background investigation. An investigator came from Miami and visited us in Fayetteville just after we moved there in August of ’74. Then in November, Dick Dertadian called me, you must know him as he was the registrar at BEX (Board of Examiners) at the time. He called me about ten days before finals began at the law school. It was my first semester. He said, “Can you come up next Thursday?” I said, “Look, I have been working my tail off for nine weeks now to do this law school thing and I would really like to take the finals, what have you got in January?” He said, “Just a minute.” He put down the phone and he walked over and I heard a noise on the phone that I subsequently learned was the opening and closing of a Mosler safe. He came back and he said, “Yeah, you’re high enough on the register that I can offer you a position in January (this was 1975). If you come up in January that will be fine and I will offer you a job.”

So I remember that afternoon. It was a gorgeous fall day in Arkansas. I called my wife who was working at the phone company and I said, “We’re moving to Washington in January, I’m going to join the Foreign Service.” She said, “Fine.” I walked out to the car and I drove over to the Registrar’s office at the law school and I dropped Hillary Rodham’s criminal law class because I didn’t want to take that final. She, the current Secretary of State, had at that time just joined her to-be-husband who was running for Congress in northwest Arkansas that fall. She had the unfortunate duty of trying to teach 125 first year law students criminal law.

Q: Good heavens.

EASTHAM: I had sort of lost the thread in that class and I really didn’t want to take that final because I hadn’t learned anything yet. So we moved to Washington and started off in the Foreign Service in January 1975.

Q: January of ’75 how would you describe your entry class?

EASTHAM: It was interesting. I suspect it was a typical entry class at the time; there were just over 50 people. I don’t remember how many precisely but there are still as of this week there are three of us left and as of next week there will be two, since I am leaving the service on Saturday. There were a number of women who were older than the norm; they called themselves retreads. They were women who had been obliged under the pre-1972 rules to resign when they married. In 1975, they were bringing a lot of these women back on board as officers because we had unfairly obliged them to quit when they married. We had college teachers, a former Mormon missionary, a couple of Cuban refugees. I was among the youngest in the class; I think there were three of us who were 23 or something like that. That accounts, I think, for the duration of the 35-year career that I am just finishing up.

Q: How did you find the introduction to Foreign Service?

EASTHAM: Well I think I found it just as everybody always has, including the current A-100 class in the building just over there. It was extraordinarily confusing and ridiculously complex. What I've learned since is that large organizations are not necessarily logical. At risk of stating the obvious, every aspect of the Department of State has a history. It's like a ship that sails around the ocean collecting barnacles. A lot of the things that the State Department does are not done for any logical reason. Look at the financial part, for example. There are a lot of stupid rules that are there because somebody decided to steal some money; therefore, we do something in a stupid or convoluted way because some person stole some money. It's also an organization that has a culture that is largely incomprehensible to the rest of the world, including our colleagues in other government agencies in Washington. Now in these days it's particularly incomprehensible to the people who are coming in.

I found it at that time very, very difficult to figure out what we were going to be doing. I think I figured it out later, but the A-100 -- I think they called it something else when I came in -- the A-100 experience was to my mind not particularly useful. I have to say I think that we were not treated like the young Gods-in-formation that they treat them as now; we were not anything special. The attitude was, "Okay, junior officers, you have to put up with them for a while until you can get them to learn to comb their hair." Now I find there is so much ego-stroking that goes on with the junior officers that they all have some very strange idea of where they fit in the world. This is not to say they are not capable; they are superb. But often they don't know how much they still have to learn.

Q: I was interviewing a man yesterday who came into the Foreign Service in 1954 and this is during the height of the McCarthy period. So the few officers they hired didn't go through any training. He said he was mopping the floors at Columbia University as a grad student earning some money and three weeks later he was in Taipei with probably $50 a week as disposable income living like a king with servants and everything else as chief of the consular section and had not training whatsoever.

EASTHAM: Wow, that's a little bit more sink or swim. I came in as a consular officer based on a box I checked that I was…

Q: I would have thought that the very fact that you were in radio would have made you USIA.

EASTHAM: I didn't think about it, I didn't think about USIA. What I was applying for was the four cones of the State Department; USIA was something different. I don't recall if they even tested USIA in the same process in those days.

Q: I think we did but I'm not sure maybe it was a different test.

EASTHAM: I just read the paragraph on each of the four cones in the exam booklet and it seemed to me that the consular part was the thing I knew the most about. I knew for sure from college that I didn't know anything about economics. I knew for sure that the

political part was not something for which I had any particular background, and I was wrong, since that's where I spent most of my career. Nor did I have a background for administrative work. So I figured that was something that dealt with people would be the thing where I most likely would succeed. I took the consular course, which that was long before ConGen Rosslyn or whatever they call it now; the consular course was dreadful, it was awful.

Q: Very dull.

EASTHAM: Well if you have a lecture on the rules for transmission of citizenship, you die enduring that. But that one turned out to be something I needed to pay attention to, since I was confronted in my first tour with an infant who was born stateless, which was a pretty astonishing thing. But the course was dreadful stuff; I don't know how they would have presented it in any different way because the idea of interactive learning was just not there. Also we were not taught the mechanics of the job; when I started doing the work, I did not have any idea how to put a visa in a passport or how to make a passport book.

Q: At that time were there many women in the class; you said there were some.

EASTHAM: There were quite a few, the retreads, and there were quite a few women who were coming in just out of university; I can think of two or three who are still around or have recently retired. There were I guess you would have to look it up but it was probably a quarter women, 25 percent, something like that.

Q: Did you have any idea…I take it you really hadn't been outside of Arkansas, had you been?

EASTHAM: Not much, no, not much at all. I'd been to Washington once. I had also been admitted to the American University Law School, so I came up and had a look; didn't like it very much though, and it would have been a financial challenge.

Q: Did you have any idea of where you wanted to go?

EASTHAM: No I didn't. For my first assignment, the way it worked was that you could express a preference and you would have to base it on something. You would say okay here is what I would like to do and why, but you didn't really get much say about it at all. What I remember is I told the career counselor "Look, I need a language for tenure. I would rather not learn Spanish so if you would like to send me to Kathmandu or Tehran, I would love to go via language training." Now I thank my lucky stars I didn't wind up in Tehran, because I guess that although I would have finished my assignment by the time the revolution really started up, that would have made me a Persian speaker and that would have been a completely different career path. Three of my classmates did go to Tehran, along with three who were assigned to Vietnam but who didn't make it there; Saigon fell in 1975 before they finished their training. I wound up going to Kathmandu

via language training. I remember when we left Dulles it was the first time I had ever been on a jet, and off we were to Kathmandu.

Q: What language were you learning?

EASTHAM: Nepalese.

Q: Really, right from the start?

EASTHAM: Yes.

Q: What is Nepalese based on?

EASTHAM: Sanskrit, it's in the same family as Hindi, Hindi-Urdu, it's a first cousin to Hindi, Urdu, Bengali, Punjabi and the other north Indian languages.

Q: So you were in Kathmandu from when to when?

EASTHAM: We got there August of 1975 and I had a three month period of in-country language training. FSI was kind enough to hire a teacher and do the languages in country mainly because there weren't any materials available here and they thought it would be better to learn the language there. It didn't work out quite that way but we had a period from say September to October when I did nothing but language training; the embassy was very clear that they had no claim on my work during that period. Then we stayed from August of '75 and we left in May of 1978. Now that was mainly because my job was a hard-to-fill. It turned out to be a horribly hard to fill position and they had a very difficult time finding somebody to take my place.

Q: Your job was what?

EASTHAM: I was the sole consular officer.

Q: This is during the period where an awful lot of young Americans were heading off to Nepal and all on the drug trail.

EASTHAM: When we got there, long-term foreign residents said it had dried up, but still in those days you could travel overland from Istanbul to Kathmandu; it was not a hard thing to do. My wife, for example, at one point she and a friend of hers took an overland bus from Delhi to Kabul via Pakistan, via Swat Valley and several other side trips. It was no problem, you could go on from Pakistan to Kabul, on through Iran, and out to Turkey on the other side.

Q: Who was the ambassador when you got there?

EASTHAM: When I got there it was a very distinguished career officer who had been around South Asia a long time by the name of Bill Cargo; he just died in the last two or three years.

Q: He lived down in Annapolis.

EASTHAM: We had a very short period together because I got there in August but I didn't really start work until November. He left the next summer; Gerald Ford appointed a political ambassador to take his place. He was replaced by Marquita Moseley Maytag, who was in Kathmandu for the Bicentennial. I understand she was the former spouse of Bud Maytag who was the chairman of Continental Airlines at the time. She had come out as a member of the delegation for the king's wedding in 1972. She had worked Republican circles to get herself appointed ambassador but she was only there for a year because in '76, of course, we had an election, Jimmy Carter came in in '77. Jimmy Carter then appointed Doug Heck, another career officer. He had been a member of the Satterthwaite Mission, which had opened diplomatic relations with the Nepalese in the 1950s. So Doug came in in 1977 and then I left in 1978 in May. I was there nearly three years simply because they couldn't fill the position.

Q: All right let's talk about the position. In the first place what was the situation overall in Nepal when you got there?

EASTHAM: At that point it was a very poor, cheerful, happy kingdom. The king was in full control, there was no opposition to speak of or if there was opposition they were exiled in India or whatever; it was not a particularly repressive state. There were a lot of young people coming through, there was a fair amount of tourism. There were a couple of interesting issues. The year before we got there the Nepalese army had gone up into Manang in northern Nepal to clear out the last of the Khampas, Tibetan rebels who had been harassing the Chinese across the border for many, many years. Based on press accounts they had been supported at one point by the U.S. government in various ways. They raided Chinese posts and attacked traffic on the Chinese main highway going across Tibet just north of the border. Times had apparently changed so in the early '70s the Nepalese army went up there and cleaned them out, finishing up the armed Tibetan resistance. What you had in Nepal was a poor developing country with tenuous links to the rest of the world but with very nice people, nice population and a magnificent physical setting, if you could get in a position where you could glance at the mountains.

Q: Alright let's talk about consular work there. This is a hard position to fill, why?

EASTHAM: Language. It was a language- designated position and you know even in those days people could see there was no profit in learning Nepali; it's a one-country language that is not of much use anywhere else. The consular work was very interesting and something that I had never expected I would have done; it was quite eventful. I think we had a dozen death cases during my time there and every one of them has a story.

The one that was the most interesting was the first one I had in December of 1975. There was an American woman who was killed, murdered, gruesomely, along with the man she was traveling with. The murderer was a man who had prior to and subsequently conducted a crime spree through Thailand and South Asia; he is presently awaiting today, the 28th of July 2010, a final ruling in his murder case in Kathmandu. It is absolutely unbelievable to me that I begin my career with this character and in theory I am going to end it with him. He's reached his final appeal against a life sentence for murder. That case was my first consular death case and today there is supposed to be a ruling in the court. I stayed in touch with her parents for a number of years after this happened.

Q: Is he an American?

EASTHAM: No it was never clear to me what nationality he was. He had a Sikh father and a Vietnamese mother and he was Francophone, spoke French. He came to Kathmandu on a Dutch passport that he had taken from one of his victims. There are all sorts of stories relating to him; he killed some people in Bangkok and subsequently went on to jewelry heists in New Delhi, he is said to have befriended a group of French tourists, went to dinner with them in the restaurant of their hotel, and told them they were all going to get sick unless they took this special medicine he gave them. They all took it but, being French, they lingered too long at the dinner table and they started collapsing and passing out from the drug that he had given them at the dinner table at which point chaos ensued and he was arrested. Then the foolish man about four years ago returned to Kathmandu. This was 30 years after the first murder of which he was accused. He came back and somebody recognized him and he was arrested. Anyway, that was a quite celebrated case. There is a book called Serpentine by a guy named Tommy Thompson that covers much of this stuff.

But we had people fall off mountains, we had helicopter rides and all sorts of fun stuff. I took several corpses down to the river side and cremated them. I took several corpses and put them in coffins and sent them back; it was an interesting job.

The visa work was not much. We did maybe 400 non-immigrant visas in a year and maybe a dozen immigrants.

Q: Was there the equivalent to a hippieville or had that era pretty well gone by?

EASTHAM: Well Freak Street was still there. What's happened now is the center of the backpacker culture has moved from what they used to call Freak Street to another area of Kathmandu; maybe three-quarters of a mile away. But it was there then and it is still there now. I was just reading about…

Q: Did you find yourself involved in the care and feeding of drug people?

EASTHAM: Oh yeah of all kinds. The unfortunate part was they often didn't come to my attention until they were dead. We had a couple of people with various mental illnesses and that was hard to deal with. There was a lovely lady, a social worker, her name was

Winnie Thuma; how do I remember that when I can't remember people I met yesterday? Winnie was the social worker at the Shanta Bhawan Missionary hospital in Kathmandu. She was always very, very good to take people in trouble, since there was virtually no other mental facility or medical personnel in Kathmandu at the time. They were a little quick with the Thorazine, I thought, but they were very, very nice and accommodating whenever you had a problem.

Q: It was still the era where if you had somebody who was a bit difficult you could essentially have them sedated and put them on a plane and send them away.

EASTHAM: That was hard to do because somebody has to pay and you know if you have an escort you have to buy two tickets. My favorite thing to do was to try to get them to go to New Delhi to get them out of my hair, number one, but also there is a legitimate reason; there are more facilities and they were more able to deal with it in New Delhi than we were in Kathmandu.

I recall one day I got a call from a hotel downtown. He said, "There is an American here and he's standing in the lobby." I said, "What's he doing that's bothering you with standing in the lobby." He said, "He's not doing anything, he's just standing in the lobby with his eyes closed." I said, "How long has he been there?" "Four hours."

So I thought I'd better go have a look at this so I went down to the hotel and standing in the lobby right in front of the desk is a fellow with his hands clasped in front of his waist, he's got his head bowed and his eyes closed. I called him by name; he had been staying in the hotel and they knew him. I called him by name and I said, "Is there some way I can help you?," that sort of thing and he was non-responsive but he was standing there. So I called up my friend at Shanta Bhawan and I said, "I need your help with something. I've got somebody who's behaving inappropriately over here." They came over, the doctor and the social worker, and they tried to get this fellow's attention and make him move; he wouldn't move, he was sort of catatonic but standing.

By now it had been six hours and so they said, "Yeah, okay we'll take him." They started to lead him by his arms and started moving him toward the door and he resisted a little bit, he pushed back a little bit. They said, "Okay, we'll sedate him," and they pulled out a syringe and the Thorazine. At that point Mr. Catatonic said, "Hang on, this is getting serious." He came out of his catatonic state and we talked to him. He said he was meditating, going to reach Nirvana or some such. I told him, "Look, next time you do this why don't you do it in your room so it doesn't bother these people. They are really concerned." But there was no reason to do anything other than let him go. I had a fair number of ridiculous cases like that.

There was another case that comes to mind, a fellow who died. I never knew what happened and I never found his stuff. He was taken to the hospital in a confused state, got up on the table and never regained consciousness. The hospital said, "Look, either he's diabetic and he's in a diabetic coma or he's got a skull fracture. The x-ray doesn't show a skull fracture so we need to verify that he is diabetic." This fellow had been in the office

a few weeks before to have something done with his passport, and I made him give me his next of kin's address before I would do whatever he needed done. He gave me his mother's address, so I had it in the file, even though he had told me he had not seen or been in touch with his mother for twelve years. So I went through a big rigmarole of trying to find his family in the U.S., without success, through the folks in Consular Affairs in the Department, but he died in the night. They autopsied him and sure enough there was a great big skull fracture on the back of his head that didn't show up on the x-ray.

So I went around trying to figure out whether he fell or was pushed, if you get my meaning, but I never found where he was staying or where he left his things. He had a reputation as being belligerent and threatening; one man told me he had threatened to kill his dog for barking at him. I sent a death notification telegram off to his mother, but I never got a reply. I sent a telegram to the Department asking them to try to find her, but they still couldn't do so. In those days, we had a mortuary freezer in the Embassy Medical Unit, so I put him in there. We spent weeks, both in Kathmandu and the folks in Washington, trying to figure out what to do because there was no money, no next-of-kin instructions, and we were obviously going to have to dispose of the body in some way eventually. But one day a postcard came in addressed to me from someplace out in Kentucky. It was from his mother. She said, "I haven't seen him in twelve years. Please donate his body to medical science and throw away his things." It was from his mother, a postcard.

Q: Oh boy.

EASTHAM: But I never figured that one out, quite.

Q: How did you find the Foreign Service after all this you and your wife?

EASTHAM: We were kids, we were enjoying it a lot because we did get to do a lot of interesting stuff. Carolyn took that six-week ride on the bus from Delhi to Kabul with another Embassy wife, and she and that same friend took another trip and went by train all the way down to Cape Comorin on the east side of India and back up the west side of India to Delhi. We went to Bangkok and Sri Lanka a couple of times; there was a lot of traveling. I found the Foreign Service congenial.

It was particularly interesting to have those three ambassadors, two of the all-time dignified serious professionals sandwiching the political ambassador who was nice enough but didn't meet the descriptors of the previous two. I learned an awful lot from Bill Cargo about being an ambassador, about how you carry yourself. I remember seeing him one Saturday morning in the commissary and realizing that he did have something other than a white shirt and a tie to wear. He had on his Saturday clothes and it humanized him in a way I had never understood. Ambassador Heck was a tough operator. He was a maneuverer, one who wanted to get things done. A very thoughtful guy and I liked him a lot. The political ambassador in the middle, Mrs. Maytag, was nice enough but not particularly serious. She hosted her friend Lowell Thomas at one point.

Q: Yeah. She was the one who had sort of affairs an all that wasn't it?

EASTHAM: It wouldn't surprise me.

Q: There was one woman political ambassador, probably not Mrs. Maytag, but she had sort of blatant affairs, which resonated throughout the Foreign Service stories about that.

EASTHAM: I don't recall that.

Q: It doesn't sound like her?

EASTHAM: Well, maybe, but I don't remember anything like that. She brought her teepee with her and set it up in the back yard of the ambassador's residence. She was from Jackson Hole and lived there until her death. As I said, she was nice enough but her sense of the appropriate was a little bit wacky.

Q: Was Ambassador Heck married at the time?

EASTHAM: Yes, he was married to Ernie (Ernestine) Heck.

Q: because I knew Ernie quite well in Vietnam before she was a Foreign Service officer. It was a pretty professional group there.

EASTHAM: The DCM when I arrived there was Tony Quainton...

Q: Good heavens.

EASTHAM: …who went on to do five either chief of mission or assistant secretary level jobs. Tony Quainton was my first boss.

Q: Director General of the Foreign Service.

EASTHAM: Absolutely, head of DS (diplomatic service), let's see where did he serve. He was in Kuwait, he was in was it Peru?

Q: I know he was in Nicaragua.

EASTHAM: Yeah, Nicaragua.

Q: And he was in Central African Republic.

EASTHAM: That is where he went from Kathmandu. I believe he had been chosen as DCM in Kathmandu by Carol Laise who then left Kathmandu to become the Director General. She, I think, was the DG at the time when he went to CAR. That was his first Embassy, Bangui. I subsequently worked for him when he was the head of the Office for

Combating Terrorism. From there Tony was supposed to go to be the DCM in Rome and Secretary Haig heard about it and he said, “Given the attention that this administration has given to the problem of combating terrorism we can’t send our terrorism man to be the deputy; we are going to send him to Nicaragua.” This was a challenge because Tony went to a country where it had just been revealing we were mining the harbors.

Q: You may want to read his accounts.

EASTHAM: He’s done this?

Q: Yes, I’ll show you how to get to it. Well then but I take it the Foreign Service you became addicted?

EASTHAM: Well, no it wasn’t quite like that. I always thought that I would do this until I was about thirty in the hopes that people would start taking me seriously and then I would see if I wanted to do something else or not; the addiction part came later. I had a really hard time getting out of Kathmandu to find a job because for several reasons, I wanted to go to Washington. First of all, we had been out of the U.S. for three years continuously; in those days, you were not permitted to go to the U.S. on R and R travel, and it was not possible to telephone from Kathmandu. So we had not seen our families or talked with them for three years. Also, I had this unfinished project which was law school. I had dropped out of law school to come into the Foreign Service and that was the project that was still in my mind. So I had a really hard time coming back to Washington.

Finally, I took a job in the Bureau of Public Affairs. At the time it was the Office of Public Programs, which was an office that arranged speaking engagements for Department officials. We organized conferences and meetings outside Washington, partnering with other institutions on topical subjects. When I arrived there in 1978 they were just finishing up the Panama Canal Treaty as the topical subject of interest and we were just about to launch into SALT, the Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty. That would have been in the middle of 1978, June or so. We floundered around trying to convince people that the Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty should be ratified until December, 1979, when the Soviets invaded Afghanistan and President Carter pulled the treaty back from the Senate. So that was not a very interesting period because what we were trying to sell wasn’t really saleable.

Q: Did you do anything with your law?

EASTHAM: Yes, at Georgetown University. I started Georgetown Law night school in the fall of 1978 and I finished it in February of 1982.

Q: Why was that it did you want to be a lawyer?

EASTHAM: Well my mother always used to say to me “Get your elementary teaching credentials so you’ll have something to fall back on.” In my case, I didn’t make it

elementary school teaching credentials. I made it a law degree from Georgetown University just in case I decided I wanted to do something else.

Q: How did you find law?

EASTHAM: Well, Georgetown Law convinced me I didn't ever want to be a lawyer.

Q: Why?

EASTHAM: I couldn't figure out how you would make it practical. They offered a little short course at Georgetown that was interesting; I never took it but it was for people who were about to graduate called How to Find the Courthouse. Because in law school you don't learn anything about how to do the law; that, I guess, is what paralegals are for. I mean what you learn in law school is what the law is or what it kind of is because you might be able to change it or make it different or get a judge to say it's not exactly like that. It was a tremendously interesting academic discipline but I didn't find it something that I would necessarily want to do for my whole life. The Foreign Service is a lot more interesting.

Q: Who was in public affairs that supervised you?

EASTHAM: There was not very much supervision. At the time the assistant secretary was Hodding Carter and there was a Deputy Assistant Secretary named Bill Dyess, who subsequently went on to be the ambassador to The Netherlands, if I recall correctly.

Q: He was.

EASTHAM: He died; he's not alive any more.

Q: Bill and I took a field trip through Eastern Macedonia and Bill's rather fastidious and Eastern Macedonia is not the place for a fastidious person.

EASTHAM: During my time in that office there were three different office directors: first for a short period Jim Montgomery, and then David Fischer took it for a while, and the third one was Tex Harris who is a famous character.

Q: Tex was kind of fun isn't he?

EASTHAM: Yeah, at that time Tex was recuperating from his experience from where was it? Argentina?

Q: Argentina.

EASTHAM: I've never talked to Tex about this, but if he had to take the job as office director of the Office of Public Programs in public affairs he was pretty far out of the field. He had been pushed about as far as you could be pushed and not fall over the side.

Q: Yeah, he identified very much with the anti-Junta group that disappeared in Argentina. In fact, he was sort of the point person on that and our ambassador wasn't too happy about it.

EASTHAM: Well, Tex was being a good soldier, he came in there and he tried to organize the thing in a way that made sense. Tex had such big ideas that there was a lot of resistance from it because the office was not an entirely Foreign Service office. In fact, I think at that time I was the only Foreign Service officer in there and like I said, I had a hard time getting back to Washington; well, no, my boss was Foreign Service, a fellow named Ken Longmyer. There were not any other Foreign Service people, it was mostly a civil service office and they had been doing things the same way for about 100 years. This notion that we would pick up on particular things where we needed to lobby -- a word I shouldn't use -- but where we needed to increase the level of public understanding of the issues confronting us as in the Panama Canal Treaty, highly controversial in Congress and the SALT treaties even more controversial in some ways, that was a new approach. What they had been running before was pretty much just a speakers' bureau, you know, somebody calls up "Can we get an expert on Macedonia to come out?" The speaker's bureau would say sure, and they would call the Macedonian desk. That was a very simple thing but the idea that we would reach out and try to have a measurable impact was new. At one point I saw a Congressional district map with the districts where we needed to work marked. We also had no substantive background on anything and did not have access to the telegrams or any other documents; those stopped in the front office and never made it down to us.

Q: I interviewed Gayle Magee, a retired Senator, who was recruited to go around and lobby.

EASTHAM: I remember the first day or week that I was in that office Ambassador Bunker came around.

Q: Ellsworth Bunker.

EASTHAM: He had been charged with the duty of pushing the Panama Canal treaty; it was his job at the time. He came around to present the people in the office with an award for what they had done to support the ratification of the Panama Canal Treaty. It was very interesting in that I had never met Ambassador Bunker, although because of the connection with Ambassador Laise in Nepal, we had all heard stories about Bunker and the airplane, when he was in Vietnam and his wife Carol Laise was in Kathmandu.

Q: He was my boss in Saigon when I was consul general there at on point.

EASTHAM: Did you ever take the plane to Kathmandu?

Q: No I never got there. Well you passed the law exam and were admitted to the bar and all of that?

EASTHAM: Graduated in February of ’82 and in June of ’82, the District of Columbia bar.

Q: Then what?

EASTHAM: Well at that point I couldn’t stop law school, so I did about half of the work for an LLM, the next degree after the law degree. Finally I just got tired of it and at that point we were ready to go overseas again. By then I had served in public affairs, gone back to work for Tony Quainton again when he was the counter terrorism coordinator…

Q: So let’s talk about that.

EASTHAM: Yeah.

Q: You were doing counter terrorism from when to when?

EASTHAM: That was from 1980-1982.

Q: What did terrorism mean in that period?

EASTHAM: A fascinating question. We debated the definition of terrorism endlessly. But it was clear to me that “Palestinian” was what it meant in those days. We had spent years and years dealing with Palestinian hijackings, so that was the office’s mindset. The Iranian hostage crisis had just begun, but that wasn’t yet being called terrorism. That was the Carter administration. We had not come into the Reagan administration yet, so terrorism didn’t mean Sandinistas yet. We were on the other side of things in El Salvador; what it meant was Palestinians; the whole thing the reason for being of the office for combating terrorism in the State Department was Palestinians. One of my little jobs there was to talk with and think about the people in Congress who were interested in terrorism. Senator Javits was, at that point, creating the famous list of state supporters of terrorism; it was fascinating how he did it. There was an exchange of letters that created that darned thing. Congress would not enact the list. There was no support for it, because the main thing that would have been affected by sanctions under the legislation was the sale of large commercial aircraft and there were interests on the other side of that. Senator Javits wrote to the Department and said, “If you had a list, who would be on it?” He obliged the Department to answer and the answer came out Syria, Iraq, Libya, who else? Those were the core three ones and you wound up with this famous list, which has now evolved into legislation. Once the State Department answered that letter saying “Here is who we would put on it” the surprise factor was reduced and they got legislation requiring the State Department to do it. But it was very much a Javits thing and very much anti-Palestinian.

At the time we were in the middle of the Iran hostage crisis; that started November 4, 1979, so it had been going on for six or seven months before I came to the terrorism office. I recall the Office for Combating Terrorism was completely excluded from that

operation; we had nothing to do with the Iran hostage crisis. I was the NEA guy, looking after the Near East and South Asia account in that office. We had no role at all. It was all being handled way high up in the administration and the State Department implementing body was the regional bureau and particularly the Iran desk. I remember I was sent to look for Henry Precht at one point. He was the director of Iranian affairs in the Department. I went to his office and in those days the doors in the State Department were not all locked. There was nobody at all in the office, and there was dust on the desks down there, because the entire staff of the Iran desk was upstairs in the Operations Center working on their hostage crisis; but we had nothing to do with it.

Q: What were you doing? In the first place what were the Palestinians doing?

EASTHAM: Hijackings, it was all about aircraft hijackings. That particular hijacking technique had been used an awful lot in the '70s, if you recall that dramatic hijacking in Jordan; we did a lot of task force operations regarding other hijackings. I remember the hijacking of a Pakistan International Airlines flight that ended up in Kabul and a Pakistani diplomat was shot and thrown out of the plane, there were maybe a couple of Americans there. We spent a lot of time handling hijackings and hostage-takings, not Iranian in nature.

We were also the keeper of the flame of the "We will not negotiate with terrorists" policy every day and that was a little bit more controversial than you would think. No one would complain about that as a matter of principle, but when you had a terrorist holding a hostage or something, it becomes a lot more subtle and nuanced as to how you would talk to this guy or are you negotiating or what are you doing, you know. There were all sorts of nuances and subtleties and that all we were trying to ensure the safety of hostages and we were trying to do that. We are not negotiating, we are talking to them about sending them pizza and that sort of thing.

But we also were working on a legislative thing and I had a very small role in this. During the Vietnam era, we had authority from Congress to use U.S. funding to train foreign government personnel in counter-terrorism techniques. But in the period of trouble in Latin American at one point the Congress, the Senate, passed an amendment to the Foreign Assistance Act prohibited training of foreign security forces, police. Police training was prohibited; we couldn't spend a nickel. During my time there, we were trying to get that prohibition loosened to enable us to do counter-terrorism training for police who were often the first responders in these incidents. So we spent a lot of time talking to people on the Hill. There was a leftish tendency on the Hill, and there was a particular House subcommittee chairman who was dead set opposed to the idea of training police anywhere, anytime. We managed to make a reasoned justification for so doing and they relaxed. They didn't take the prohibition out entirely, but they carved out an exception for it about 1983 that enabled us to do that.

Q: In the first place you were located within the secretary's office weren't you?

EASTHAM: Bureaucratically, yes, although that changed around 1982 when it was moved to the Under Secretary for Management. Physically, no, we were down on the second floor on the C Street side of the building. We were a long way from the Secretary of State.

Q: You might call it outside the loop I mean you had an office but were you really doing anything?

EASTHAM: Yeah, we staffed those task forces for the hijackings. We were trying to get the legislative fix in place. Ambassador Quainton and then Bob Sayre who took over from him when Tony went to Nicaragua chaired the interagency counter-terrorism group, which was an interesting vehicle for discussion at least. I'm sure there were some organizations that never acknowledged the State Department had any role in this as far as domestic law enforcement was concerned. We had that interagency group which was chaired by the Coordinator for Counter-Terrorism and we had a lot of interesting meetings with the CIA people from what subsequently evolved into the counter-terrorism center. Justice was there, and the FBI, two separate entities. There was even, as I recall, an associate attorney general who used to come to those meeting named Giuliani.

Q: Robert Giuliani.

EASTHAM: Rudy Giuliani.

Q: Yeah.

EASTHAM: He used to actually come to those meetings during one period; it was his job to come to the counter-terrorism group. At one point the CIA representative was Bill Buckley who, of course, was murdered in Beirut a few years later. I think the main achievement during that period was probably to lay the groundwork for the coordination that you see now, on a much, much, much larger scale in terms of how things work.

The Reagan administration really pumped it up, too. I remember when the Reagan administration came into office, Ambassador Quainton had to shoot up there and brief Al Haig about the first day he was in office about what our counter-terrorism policies looked like. I sensed a real flourishing of the status of that particular bureaucratic entity because of the emphasis that Reagan and Haig put on the thing.

Q: I take it terrorism didn't include what you call militant Islam at the time. I mean this is pretty secular…

EASTHAM: That didn't exist. That's a new thing. The thing that is al Qaeda now…well let me put it a different way; my view. The sentiments and the passions that manifest themselves in whatever al Qaeda is now were channeled through the Palestinian cause at that point. Subsequently there was a calming of passions there. In '82 you had the first Lebanon war and you had the departure of the PLO from Lebanon, they moved to Tunis, their operations were disrupted a bit and it wasn't really until the Afghanistan resistance

got cranked up in a big way a couple of years later that you saw the redirection of this thing away from the Palestinian cause toward something which is less geographically and culturally fixed to something that is more global. I used to see it when I got to Peshawar.

Q: It's an Egyptian base…

EASTHAM: It is all out of Egypt, it came out of Egypt. It's a new thing and it has basically changed the nature of political Islam in the time that I've been in the State Department.

Q: Okay, well I think this is probably a good place to stop. We will pick this up next time; where did you go when you left counter-terrorism?

EASTHAM: I took a desk officer job; I was the Sri Lanka desk officer.

Q: Okay, we will pick up Sri Lanka.

EASTHAM: Okay.

Q: Today is the 29th of July 2010 with Al Eastham. We left off as you were going to be the desk officer for Sri Lanka. How long did you hold that job?

EASTHAM: Well for only a year. What happened was very interesting and I thought it was a bit illuminating. I was finishing up two years in the office for combating terrorism, two years of task forces and airline hijackings and legislation and I was sent along on a trip to Europe as a minder for someone from the Department of Defense who had a different idea about combating terrorism than the State Department did.

Q: How did that work out?

EASTHAM: Well it was a Reagan administration fellow from the Defense department who had the terrorism portfolio and he decided we would go to Germany and Italy. We were doing those terrorist problems at that time.

Q: The Baader Meinhof…

EASTHAM: The Baader Meinhof, the Italians Red Brigades exactly. Tony Quainton wanted someone from the State Department to go with this fellow because he viewed the policy portfolio particularly with the Italians and the Germans as something that was within the purview of the State Department and not the purview of the deputy assistant secretary of Defense with two minders from his side.

I also went along on another one, a Congressional delegation that reflected the split on the Hill about terrorism. In that case we also went to Italy and Germany for discussions. It was a CODEL with both Democrats and Republicans on it to talk about how to deal

with terrorism. So we did have a role in diplomacy on the international response to terrorism.

In any case, one early morning I had been overnight in the Operations (OPS) Center dealing with a hijacking in Kabul as the overnight member on the task force. Ambassador Howard Schaffer came up to the OPS center and he was looking for me; he found me and he said, "I know you bid for the Sri Lanka desk job and Tony and I talked at church and we decided that you are the right person for it." This was my first experience of how it works.

Q: They talked where?

EASTHAM: At church over the weekend.

Q: Well I've heard people say this is the way it used to work. I was in a urinal next to Lloyd Henderson and he said, "What are you up to? I said, "Oh I'm supposed to go to so-so." He said, "Oh, you don't want to go there." Then all of a sudden the person…

EASTHAM: I had one of those later in my career but not the urinal story but it's a breakfast room in a hotel.

Q: First, before we leave the terrorism thing, where was the divergence would you say with the Pentagon people?

EASTHAM: Well it's something that's persisted to this day. There was a tension about the tactical aspects of how to deal with the terrorism problem as it presented itself in those days, which was aircraft hijacking and kidnappings. It was a much different picture, the tactical picture was very different. There seemed to be at the time a tension between those who would prefer to resolve the underling causes, i.e., the problem in the Middle East and Israel and the Muslim world; on the other hand those who saw terrorism as essentially as something you dealt with incident by incident and without the political aspect of moving back and trying to resolve fundamental causes. That was the issue at the time.

It was not irreconcilable but it was also not possible to find a way to sort it out, especially since even at that time the Middle East track was pretty fairly established and there was not very much you could do to nudge that in a direction that would be more satisfactory to the Palestinians.

Q: Okay, then you went to the Sri Lanka desk; you did that for how long?

EASTHAM: One year.

Q: What was the situation in Sri Lanka? Was it Sri Lanka at the time?

EASTHAM: Yeah, we used to describe Sri Lanka as "positioned on the runway, ready for takeoff" because President J.R. Jayewardene, had adopted a set of free market export oriented policies that were quite to our liking in sharp contrast to the Bandaranaike family's rule. We put in a bunch of money into it, we were doing a serious rural development program, and we were trying to support their effort to build up a textile industry so that they could export to the United States. Unfortunately, it was right at the end of my time as the Sri Lanka desk officer in 1983 that the Tamil problem surged up. The Tamil insurgency got hot all of a sudden and that, of course lasted for the next what 25 years on and off and seriously retarded the ability of the Sri Lankans to move up the industrial ladder from textiles to other light manufacturing to whatever, aircraft and automobiles, as might have been expected at the time in 1982.

It was probably one of the best jobs I'd ever had for the simple reason I was in charge. Nobody outside the regional bureau gave two figs about the state of relations between the United States and Sri Lanka and even less about my other country, which was the poor pitiful Maldives. I used to hear from the textile people in the government occasionally, but never from Congress or other agencies. There was an extremely effective and very nice ambassador in Washington, a gentleman of the first order named Ernest Corea, the Sri Lankan ambassador. He was a power; he really knew how to get things done and he would call me every day, once in the morning and once in the evening, just to get a picture of what I was up to, what was going on. He had been a journalist, so he was not at all bound by protocol, an attitude that I appreciated very much. It was a very satisfactory job because I was able to control what happened with respect with Sri Lanka. I think one of the unfortunate changes in the Foreign Service at this date, July of 2010, is that those kinds of jobs are no longer desirable. When I was at that grade as an officer, being a country desk officer was a positive ticket punch; it was something you needed to do to move ahead. Nowadays, at least in my recent experience in the Africa bureau, it is absolutely impossible to fill those jobs, no one wants them and I think that's a horrible shame that the culture of the Department has changed to such an extent that for whatever reason the young officers don't believe that is a positive career move.

Q: It's the guts of the business.

EASTHAM: You would think. My feeling is that things have become so layered and sliced up that there is no position any more where the desk officer is given the latitude to be in charge as I was with Sri Lanka during that blissful year. Nowadays, all decisions are made by at least a deputy assistant secretary. Everything has to go through an even more wretched clearance process than was the case when we did it on paper. It is so easy to add bureaucracy by email that I don't think there is much job satisfaction in being a desk officer anymore. In the Africa bureau, for example, most of the desk officer slots and I think this is a true statement, it may have to be verified but, a majority and if not a majority very close to half of the desk officer positions are filled by people in personnel categories other than Foreign Service officers as in science fellows, Presidential Management Interns, WAEs in some cases who are hired back to come and work as a desk officer somewhere for a short period because they simply can't fill the positions. But I found it blissful to be the Sri Lanka desk officer.

Q: Were we looking upon the potential for opening Sri Lanka up to better trade locations? Were we seeing that as maybe a wedge of somehow maybe setting an example for India which was very tightly controlled and very old school what do you call it mercantile? I don't know if that words attractive.

EASTHAM: No there was not a real connection between what we wanted the Sri Lankans to do and what we wanted the Indians to do and I will come to India in a minute. But the Sri Lankans, at that time, were much more like Singapore or even South Korea in terms of the model they wanted to follow. They were comparing themselves not to India but to the emerging countries of Southeast Asia.

Q: Which were beginning to move into the early days of textiles but lapping into the electronic assembly business?

EASTHAM: That's correct but the Sri Lankans never got there.

Q: But that was sort of the goal?

EASTHAM: That's right.

Q: Who was our ambassador there do you know?

EASTHAM: Let's see at the time, let's see, what was his name? It was a very nice gentleman who served twice as ambassador there. He was a political appointee, Ambassador John H. Reed.

Q: Was he the governor of Maine by any chance?

EASTHAM: I believe so.

Q: I think I've interviewed him and his name escapes me. Anyway, what did you talk about with the Sri Lankan ambassador?

EASTHAM: Well he would give me the news. There was an election campaign going on in that year and President Jayewardene was inaugurated for his second term in February of 1983. I went out for that and I stood on Galle Face Green next to the ocean there in Colombo and attended his second inauguration. So in the first half of my time on the desk there was an election campaign going on and that was Jayewardene vs. the nominee of the Bandaranaike family basically. Jayewardene won big and we figured that his second term would be a consolidation of the first. The way they were trying to start was by attracting Hong Kong investment to do manufacturing in a country that was not yet quota bound on wool sweaters; they weren't yet tied up in a textile quota. The idea was they had these special export processing zones. The ambassador would call me and tell me what was going on with that.

We had a couple of intriguing incidents and this is a minor thing in diplomacy but it was illustrative, I think, in how things work. One evening a political officer in the embassy in Colombo was at a social function of some sort, and he was talking to one of Jayewardene's nearest and dearest, a journalist. They got into a little argument over whether someone they were talking about had gone to school here or had been married to so and so, some sort of biographics about a third person. The political officer said, "Oh no, I'm sure I'm right. When I go in the embassy tomorrow I'll check the file." The next morning appears a newspaper article by the journalist who was his interlocutor saying U.S. embassy keeps files on Sri Lankan personalities. The day after that, the embassy was informed that the political officer had been declared persona non grata. It was just silly, just flat silly, but the decision had been made by President Jayewardene to kick out this spy, the guy who was keeping the files on Sri Lankans. We decided in Washington that we would go tit for tat on this and that if they were going to PNG, this is when we used to be the United States of America, we did this stuff, we don't do this stuff any more. But we decided we would kick out the political officer in the Sri Lankan embassy in Washington.

Now this was a spectacle because this was the sweetest little country. We had outstandingly good relations with Sri Lanka. It was not one of the problem children in the region, of course, and this is 1982-1983, those were as usual Pakistan, Afghanistan under Soviet occupation, India which was hard to deal with and we were doing tit for tat diplomatic expulsions from Sri Lanka, probably the country along with Nepal with which we had the most cordial and friendly relationships in the region. So we called in the Sri Lankan ambassador to see Larry Eagleburger, who was the Under Secretary for Political Affairs at the time, and the Ambassador brought along the sacrificial lamb, the political officer, as his note taker. So we had to scramble a little bit up on the mahogany corridor to figure out how to leave the note taker in the waiting room; so I ended up sitting with this nice fellow, who has been a friend of mine for years, Nanda Godage. Nanda and I sat for ten minutes in the outer reception room and I heard some activity down at the end of the corridor in the Under Secretary's office and here comes the Sri Lankan ambassador. In those days you could smoke up there, especially in Eagleburger's office, and I saw the Ambassador light a cigarette coming around the corner and by the time he got up to the reception room outside the Secretary's office he had smoked it down to the butt; it was about 20 yards or something like that. So they went downstairs and then the Sri Lankan ambassador showed what he was made of. He did some kind of magic. I have no idea of what his magic was, but the next thing we knew Eagleburger called the assistant secretary up to his office and said, "Okay, our guy has to leave, their guy can stay." I never understood the magic but clearly the Sri Lankan ambassador had figured out how to get back to Eagleburger and get him to reverse the decision that he had already made, but our guy had to leave.

We then did some fiddling around within the embassy staffing in Colombo and we filled in right behind him with a capable political officer without any problem and we didn't suffer from this. But it was just flat silly. It was the sort of thing that should not have happened and didn't need to happen and, looking back at it now, it reflected a certain

erratic management style on President Jayewardene's part that I believe was subsequently reflected in some of the actions that he took later on during his second term.

Q: We had people like Frank Carlucci got caught in Tanzania and somebody else in an absolutely similar thing in Pakistan on a telephone call saying something happened. He said, "You know I've got to have some ammunition to respond to this." Well this was immediately touted as….

EASTHAM: Weapons.

Q: …weapons deal rather than information.

EASTHAM: Otherwise it was fine. I had another portfolio during this year. In addition to being the Sri Lankan, Maldives desk officer I was the India political-military officer and that meant that I had to learn quickly about nuclear weapons. As is well known, the Indians first tested their nuclear capability in 1974; now we are nine years later and there was a whole web of sanctions and restrictions on the Indians. There were some U.S. companies, Lockheed, in particular, who wanted to do big business deals, aircraft deals with the Indians even in those days. But there were restrictions in place as a consequence the Indians having tested a nuclear weapon in 1974, the so-called peaceful nuclear explosion, a nuclear weapon. So we had a horrible series of memos, it was the worst experience in my life in trying to make policy on Indian nuclear. We once did a memorandum that required 37 clearances that had two major options each with three suboptions. I wish I could see that memo again sometime because I was so wrapped up in it that it took me nearly four months to get it through. In the end, I believe, Secretary Shultz didn't choose any of them. He chose another course of action altogether.

We had during that time, right after I came on the desk and I had very little to do with this, but Mrs. Gandhi came to Washington. My particular duty with respect to Mrs. Gandhi's visit in late 1982 was to work with the security people and Protocol to figure out what to do with the kids; the kids being her grandchildren, Rajiv and Sonya's two children Rahul and Priyanka. We wound up with one of the assistant chiefs of protocol taking them to the National Zoo during the meetings at the White House, but there was a big fuss with the Indians because the Indians wanted them to go to the zoo with a protective detail and we figured that an assistant chief of protocol plus one could probably handle two kids of about eight and ten years old to go out and look at the elephants. But the Indians were very, very, very strange about that. This is during the time the Indians were all tangled up in the Punjab with the Sikh insurgency.

Q: Which eventually killed her.

EASTHAM: Yes that's right. To my recollection in '82 they had not yet done the operation in the Golden Temple.

Q: That is when they ripped it down.

EASTHAM: Well, no, they just went in and cleaned out the Akali Dal, a particular Sikh group that had managed somehow to occupy the temple but it was very bloody and a very, very, very nasty operation. But the violation of the temple precincts by the Indian Army was what precipitated the hatred that eventually led to Mrs. Gandhi's bodyguard shooting her to death, which happened during my next assignment.

Then the second year in the South Asia part I took over as the political officer for India, which meant that I left Sri Lanka and took over as political for India.

Q: Before we leave Sri Lanka, what about the Tamil equation in there? The Tamil Sinhalese equation, what was going on when you were there?

EASTHAM: Well it was really, really interesting; there is a ton of nuance in that. It may appear that you have a majority/minority situation and the Sinhalese majority are Buddhist and guardians of the faith; they are the so called lesser path of Buddhism, not like the Tibetans. If you look at it this way, then the minority is the Tamils, who are Hindus. But as I said, there is a ton of nuance, because you have two kinds of Tamils. You have Tamils who have been there as long as or nearly as long as the Sinhalese, well established, very important erudite culture up in northern Sri Lanka; that's one sort of Tamil. Then you have another kind of Tamil, who are the descendents of people brought over as laborers by the British during the colonial period to work the tea and coffee plantations up in the highlands. You had a split between the so-called estate Tamils, those brought over from India initially to work on the estates. So you could look at the basis for the conflict as a majority Sinhalese/minority Tamil thing.

That is one way to look at it; but it is more complicated than that. The Sinhalese view themselves as a minority because they look at 50 million Tamils or maybe 70 million by now, in any event a very, very large number of Tamil people 26 miles across the Palk Straits in Tamil Nadu who are just hanging out waiting to push the Sinhalese into the ocean. So you've got a situation there where the ruling ethnic group in Sri Lanka, the Sinhalese, very much considered themselves in the way some Israelis do, or as some Rwandan Tutsis do, as a beleaguered minority in their own territory under threat from an aggressive majority from elsewhere. And in addition to the ethnic divide, there was the religious aspect. The most hard line of the hard line in those days in Sri Lanka were the Buddhist priests. You had a Buddhist clergy that was extremely hard line about asserting Sinhalese language rights and asserting that the state of Sri Lanka should benefit the majority population, which is the Sinhalese. So you had a recipe where the default setting of the government was to accommodate that view and take steps to ensure that the Tamils stayed in their place; that would be a good way of putting it, in their place.

There was also stereotyping. The Tamils were viewed by many Sinhalese as having gotten a better deal under the colonial period. The British had favored the Tamils in terms of education and in terms of jobs during the colonial period. Many Sinhalese felt that this gave the Tamils advantages not available to Sinhalese. Then you add to the mix the charismatic and revolutionary leadership of the Tamil Tigers in the assertion of the right to a Tamil state, Tamil Eelam, in northern Sri Lanka. That war persisted until very, very

recently, the last year or so, when the Sri Lankan government finally managed to go up and to clear it out, finish off the military guys. Unfortunately, they are under intense scrutiny now, 2010, for the actions that they took during the final offensive into northern Sri Lanka to take care of it. They are resisting, if I am reading the press correctly, accountability for the civilian losses that occurred during that final push.

It was very, very difficult; you are looking at it from the outside and you wonder why these people are doing this. But passions were so high on both sides that they went very quickly to war.

Q: Did we feel that we had any role in this or was this just regret or what?

EASTHAM: No, the problem was that the Eelam people, the Tigers, used tactics which were reprehensible to us and so we never got on the negotiation track, we never ever thought about trying to pull together. I believe there was a Norwegian who for a long time tried to do that; he managed to achieve some small successes but the hatefulness was so vivid.

Q: Just to give an idea what was so reprehensible?

EASTHAM: Oh car bombs and it was a Tamil who killed Rajiv Gandhi with a very nasty device strapped to her body.

Q: It was a young girl.

EASTHAM: It was a very nasty war and the Sri Lankan army had media control; they had the high ground on the media but nobody wanted Sri Lanka to split up. You know we collectively, the United States, have a bias against striking out into the unknown and creating new territories. There are very few cases where we've gotten behind this. We supported the new territories that were formed out of Yugoslavia, but that took a war or two as well. And of course Sudan.

Q: Well at one period we were trying to keep it together. This was President Bush and the so-called Chicken-Kiev speech.

EASTHAM: Yeah but we have a bias against that. The only current case that I am aware of where we are trending in the direction of a creation of a new state is Sudan.

Q: Well in Macedonia too.

EASTHAM: Okay, I don't know that area at all.

Q: No sometimes it makes sense. Anyway, okay so you move on to go to India. Could you talk a little about who was dealing with Indian affairs up the ladder in the State Department and then we will come to where you were?

EASTHAM: Well when I became the political desk officer for India, this was prior to the creation of the South Asia Bureau in the State Department, so the South Asia portfolio was in the hands of a deputy assistant secretary in the Near East bureau; I don't recall who was the assistant secretary right at that moment, it was either Nick Veliotes or Dick Murphy but I don't recall which one of them was assistant secretary at the time because we were so focused on the deputy assistant secretary who had almost an independent reporting chain up. It depended on the priorities assigned by the assistant secretary who was dealing with Arabs, Israel, oil, Iraq, Iran all that stuff and really didn't have time to do very much with South Asia. At the desk level, we were forever running up the stairs to see the deputy assistant secretary, but only rarely did we talk to the assistant secretary. I presume the deputy kept him informed.

I do not recall the assistant secretary for the Near East and South Asia going to South Asia so it was pretty much in the hands of the deputy; it was almost an independent bureau. That was accepted upstairs on the seventh floor and when they needed to talk about India or Pakistan or something like that they would call up the deputy assistant secretary. Subsequently as the Afghan profile got hotter the assistant secretaries got a little bit more engaged but they tended to defer very, very, very much to the deputy assistant secretary.

Let's see, we are now in the Reagan administration. Secretary Shultz was there for a long time and Larry Eagleburger, I believe, was the Under Secretary for Political Affairs in the first term and in the second term Mike Armacost came back as Under Secretary. It was during the Reagan second term that things got really interesting with respect to Afghanistan and Pakistan. At the end they did engage significantly all the way up to the President on the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan. But most of the decisions were taken at the Under Secretary level; it was pretty much the Under Secretary for Political Affairs who had the portfolio and it was up to him to keep the Secretary on board, in the loop, or whatever you want to call it. I suspect the Secretary would say differently but that was my perception from down below, that the highest it went most of the time was to the Under Secretary.

Q: Who was in charge of Indian affairs during your time?

EASTHAM: Indian affairs was a big mess because you had a major, major disconnect. You know the Indians believe that the Democrats favor India and the Republicans favor Pakistan so at that time we were in the Reagan administration. We had a monstrous big program of military assistance going with Pakistan in consequence of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and it was a little frosty with the Indians, to tell you the truth. There was no one person in charge; you had a huge barrel of people who had something to say about India. The trade people, AID people, the non-proliferation people and in my view they exercised an inordinate and outsized influence compared to what they should have, since we knew so very little about the Indian nuclear weapons program which was proceeding, of course. Things were sort of drifting and at that time and our whole focus in South Asia was on Pakistan and Afghanistan. There were some little things going on but most of it

was just marking time. Vic Tomseth was the office director, and Howard Schaffer was the Deputy Assistant Secretary.

Q: Did you have much contact with the Indian embassy?

EASTHAM: Yes, some. I used to deal with the political counselor and the DCM quite a bit and occasionally would be included in things at the ambassador's residence but not very much.

Q: Was the Pentagon interested in India?

EASTHAM: Yes the Pentagon was a passionate supporter of Lockheed selling C-130s. The Indians were toying with Lockheed; I never thought it was serious but Lockheed thought they were serious about enhancing their military lift capability by buying a bunch of C-130s. My view was, by golly that was a good idea because it would have marked a step where the Indians would get out of that Russian stuff, which was where their historical military supply relationship was at the time. I thought airplanes would be good but we never could get past the export control act. We have a legislative or regulatory requirement that we maintain the ability to approve resales and we reserve the right to cut off spares at any time. The Indians wanted an iron-clad assurance that they would never be short of spare parts under any circumstances even if they went to war with Pakistan. They had memories of 1972, when Bangladesh became independent, that the U.S. cut off military supplies to both India and Pakistan.

Q: Yeah rightly so. Then you did this for how long with India?

EASTHAM: It was just a year, one year.

Q: So in a way things were rather static at that point.

EASTHAM: Pretty much. I do not recall anything major that occurred during the period 1983-1984. There was the perennial issue of fuel for the Tarapur reactors. We were doing a lot of hard bureaucratic slogging to try to improve things but there was just not the momentum on the Indian side; all the action was on the Pakistan side. We were selling Pakistan F-16s. That was the big symbolic piece of the package in those days and it was quite stark to the Indians that we were selling the Pakistanis, at that time, our most capable military aircraft and we couldn't even get over the hump to sell them some slow moving C-130s that are just good for hauling trash.

Q: So then where did you go and when?

EASTHAM: I went to Peshawar in August of 1984. I went from the Indian desk to be the Principal Officer in Peshawar, Pakistan.

Q: Okay you were there from when to when?

EASTHAM: For three years from 1984-1987.

Q: I was thinking Peshawar in our oral history program because in the draft transcript of an interview I did with Eleanor Constable at one point in the draft the transcriber heard "and then I was in the shower with Ali my driver."

EASTHAM: You know you can pronounce it two ways; it depends on which Pashto you speak whether you would pronounce it Peshawar or Pekhower.

Q: Okay well however you pronounce it could you talk about the significance of that city and that area in the Pakistani equation.

EASTHAM: Sure. Peshawar is the centerpiece, the capital if you will, of what used to be called the North West Frontier Province, which this year 2010 has been renamed as Khyber Pakhtunkhwa; it's no longer the Northwest Frontier Province. What they've renamed it is the province of Khyber because it is the road to the Khyber Pass. It is the grand trunk road of Rudyard Kipling, the great romance; the road runs through Peshawar to the Khyber Pass. Pakhtunkhwa is the land of the Pushtoons, and the land of the Pathans pronounced in the guttural Pashto. It is romantic as all get out, it is absolutely a fabulous place to go, it's the crossroads of the world and it has never changed, maybe it is changing now, but it is a fascinating place.

The United States had a long engagement there. There is a gent named Frances Gary Powers who took off in an airplane in Peshawar in 1960.

Q: This is the famous U2 pilot.

EASTHAM: That's correct. When his flight was shot down over the Soviet Union, he had taken off from Peshawar, heading for Norway, overflying the Soviet Union and he was shot down in April of 1960, thereby derailing U.S.-Soviet relations for a while. This was during the time of the Central Treaty Organization, CENTO, one of the containment entities of the Cold War. We had a "communications facility" at a place called Badaber near Peshawar. There were several hundred American personnel there with families; there was a school, there was a housing compound, there was a swimming pool and all that stuff. Unfortunately, and this is a historical point that I want to make. Lately, even people who should know better have conflated the Badaber communications facility with the U2 operation. To say that we had an airbase in Peshawar is not true, never happened. But the lore in the State Department is we used to have a base in Peshawar; yes, we did but we didn't fly airplanes. The Powers operation as I've been told over the years was a self-contained deal. The aircraft would fly in a day or two before the operation. It would fly in after dark; they would pull it into the hangar that we had at the Peshawar airport and hide it. C-130s full of equipment and technicians would have arrived the day before, they would get the thing ready for the mission and it would leave early, early, early in the morning. Just as the sun was coming up the aircraft would leave, the technicians and all would pile back in their C-130s and they would leave and there would be no trace of the

operation except an empty hangar, which seemed like a pretty neat way to do it if you are going to do something like that out of Peshawar.

But we've had a long engagement up there. The British took Peshawar, Pakistan, sort of by accident. They didn't really want to contend with the Pashtun frontier. They got into that area of what is now Pakistan as a consequence of the collapse of the Sikh Kingdom in the middle part of the 19th century. They didn't want to go any further; they did not want to play the great game directly adjoining the Tsar's Russia which had great influence in Afghanistan at the time. But the Sikh Kingdom ran from Kabul to Lahore; it was a very short lived kingdom and only lasted two or three generations. When it collapsed, the British, as they usually did, moved into a power vacuum. The sons of the last Sikh king, Ranjit Singh, were fighting over the territory and the one thing the British hated worse than being adjacent to the Russian Empire was being adjacent to an unstable place so they moved into Peshawar in about the late 1840s, early 1850s.

They were there until 1947, of course. In the early part after independence in 1950s and 1960s there was a significant separatist movement in the Northwest Frontier Province. This was largely because the Durand Line, a border drawn by a British agent between Pakistan and Afghanistan, splits the Pashtuns, it splits the ethnic group. So you have a significant population of Pathans on the Afghan side and a significant population on the Pakistan side. There was an independence movement, a movement to create an independent Pashtunistan. That has largely gone away, I think, in the recent era but the value of the Northwest Frontier Province was its proximity to Afghanistan.

When I got to Peshawar in 1984 we were in a situation where the Soviet Union had sent its troops into Afghanistan in December of 1979. We had gone through the last couple years of the Carter administration with the famous Pakistan President General Zia-ul-Haq's response to Jimmy Carter's offer of a small amount of assistance when he said, "Peanuts," which was a nifty response to Jimmy Carter. The Reagan administration came into office and very early on decided to confront the Soviets more aggressively. There had been a support program for the Afghan resistance to the Soviet invasion since the Carter administration but the Reagan administration stepped it up substantially in large measure with the active encouragement and even some bullying and intimidation by Congressman Charlie Wilson.

Q: Who was a Congressman; there was a book and a movie called Charlie Wilson's War.

EASTHAM: Well I knew Charlie quite well; you know he just died a few months ago. Charlie came out three or four times in the three years that I was in Peshawar and I got to know him quite well. He was quite an interesting fellow in his personal life and in the unique position that he occupied in Washington. But what was going on in August of 1984 when I got to Peshawar was that the war was in full swing. There were seven recognized resistance organizations.

I can use the word mujahideen but that word means a different thing in 2010 than it meant in 1984; the meaning is completely different. But there were seven resistance

groups and my job as I perceived it was to maintain contact with all these groups and to try to provide a, shall we say, diplomatic entry into what these guys were up to, what they were thinking about and particularly how their politics worked. As distinct from the information that was available on other channels where you had a situation where you had people who were running a substantial program of assistance to these guys who were also reporting on their successes and failures. It is the nature of human beings that if one is responsible for a successful program, if your job is to make a program successful then what you report on is its successes; you don't talk about its failures or what doesn't work. So my job was to get to know these guys.

My Pakistani sidekick out there, my friend and highly valued colleague the late Dr. Massoud Akram, always chided me for not paying enough attention to Pakistan; he used to tell me basically I was not doing my job with respect to the nuances of the Northwest Frontier itself. I spent way too much time thinking about what was going on in Afghanistan. But the priority of Washington was clearly Afghanistan; Washington didn't much care about the Northwest Frontier of Pakistan. It is ironic that now that's where a major part of the war is being fought against al Qaeda in 2010.

It was a very small post; when I arrived there, there were basically two of us and a secretary; there were two State officers, one USIA officer, and an office assistant. The other officer was Margaret Scobey who is presently the ambassador in Cairo; she's done very well. Our job was the normal consular stuff; we did visas, passports that stuff, representation to show the American presence in the Northwest Frontier and the Afghan piece, which was the most interesting by far of everything we did. We got frequent visitors; there were a couple of million Afghan refugees in the Frontier Province at that time, which generated great interest in senior officials to come out. The attorney general came, Ed Meese, at the time; we took him up to the Khyber Pass. The chairman of the Joint Chiefs came out and CODEL after CODEL after CODEL so for a two person post we were very, very, very, very busy. Later on we started to add personnel.

About 1984 the Congress decided to authorize a substantial program of cross-border humanitarian assistance wherein we were supposed to try to deliver humanitarian aid into Afghanistan. I believe that the idea behind that was to soften the military aspects of what we were doing to push the Soviets out of Afghanistan. It became quite substantial and that brought in quite a few American NGOs; it brought in a new person with USAID whose job it was to run the cross-border program. At the time, we also had a USAID office there, a DEA office, and the public diplomacy office, which were separate from the consulate. One of the disadvantages of working in a consulate under those circumstances is that everybody else reported to somebody else in Islamabad. I had very little control over what people were doing in the province. The AID office was doing mostly counter narcotics, which I don't think they got enough credit for that, that worked. I don't think there is any opium being grown in Pakistan nowadays and it's profitable to remember that 25 years ago Pakistan was the world's largest supplier of illicit opium and it was being grown out in the tribal areas where the war is being fought now. That is gone; there is no opium there; it has all moved across to Afghanistan for reasons that are probably obvious. But USAID was doing mostly development in the tribal areas and opium. We

did a lot of Afghan public diplomacy. When we added the humanitarian assistance function we got a lot of new U.S. NGOs who were grantees of USAID who enhanced the American presence. It was kind of a wild west atmosphere out there; there was a lot of jargon: the Muj are doing this, the Muj are doing that and people would "go inside," meaning to go to Afghanistan. It was quite an interesting mix of war stuff.

Q: It attracts what's the term the cowboys; people who are thrill seekers and operators when things are opening up. I used to see this in Saigon for 18 months.

EASTHAM: Well there were lots of different kinds of people. There were medical workers and people who just came for the adrenalin rush; quite a few not very stable people but it was a fascinating time. The Frontier itself in those days was fairly easy to get around in. You could do some spectacular stuff, if you got permission; you could ride the train to the Khyber Pass, you could drive up to the Khyber Pass. We used to take visitors to the Khyber Rifles mess for a nice lunch.

Q: You are talking about the…

EASTHAM: CODELS, Congressional delegations.

Q: CODELS but by the mess you mean this is a military outfit the Khyber Rifles were the Pakistani Frontier Force.

EASTHAM: Yes, the Khyber Rifles. Their headquarters was up in Landi Kotal, on the western end of the Khyber Pass near the border and they put on a nice show with tribal dancing and swords flashing and goat on a spit; there was a lot to do. The mountains of northern Pakistan are an extension of the Himalayas and it is pretty gorgeous up there. We used to go to Chitral, which is in the northern areas of Pakistan in the high mountains and it was a great nice place to go if you were willing to make the effort to go. Of course, that's all closed off now; nowadays you would have to cross through an area where, for example, 60 days ago two Americans were killed by an IED.

Q: A roadside bomb.

EASTHAM: Exactly, it's just not nearly as accessible as it once was. There were some interesting moments. I recall the day that the first Stingers were used against Soviet helicopters in Afghanistan. I didn't know anything about the Stinger program and I only know what I read in the press about the covert program.

Q: You might make clear what a Stinger is.

EASTHAM: Stinger is a heat seeking, heat guided surface-to-air missile, which was highly controversial at the time it was introduced, but Charlie Wilson bullied it through. The Reagan administration decided to provide Stingers to the Afghan Resistance because they were suffering greatly on the receiving end of fire from Soviet helicopters. There was a day, you could probably look up what day it was, it's well known now, when they

shot down two or three helicopters at the Khost airport in Afghanistan. The Russians did not see it coming, they had no idea that the Stinger was about to hit them. The results of that day were two helicopters burning on the runway at the Khost airport; two or maybe three. The CIA subsequently presented the grip stock from those particular missiles to Charlie Wilson; Charlie told me he had it and that that was one of the things that they had done. But it was electric in Peshawar because the Afghans all knew that something new had come and it was something new that was going to make a difference; it was going to make the cost of that war very, very much more expensive for the Russians. I think that was the turning point, I think it was about 1985, I don't know what the day was. It is easily available in published materials. That was a moment when Afghan resistance morale was really, really high.

There was another phenomenon at that time that was not quite so positive from the point of view of what we were doing and that was the importation of this new kind of Islam to the Afghans. The Afghan jihad, the fight against the Russians, caused a great rush of arrivals in the Northwest Frontier Province and in Afghanistan of people with a new kind of idea about Islam. In my view it is an idea that came from Cairo. One major influential person in this was a fellow called Sayed Qutb who wrote several books. He was executed by the Egyptian government. But his ideas filtered through the Muslim Brotherhood and several other organizations. It came to the only place in the world where this new kind of jihad was being fought and that was Afghanistan. What you have now in 2010 in my view is the consequence of that Afghan War and the importation of a different view of Islam than had been the case before. Now we encouraged that, it was fine with the United States of America in 1984, '85, '86, '87 for the Afghans to be motivated by that spirit of jihad and self sacrifice. Unfortunately, in my view what was happening at that time was that the foundations were being laid to what subsequently became al Qaeda and which has brought us so much misery and expense.

Q: Were you seeing this happen?

EASTHAM: Yes, I looked up the other day…I sent an unclassified telegram to the State Department in mid-1986. There wasn't any email or any of that stuff, so you had to communicate by telegram and I sent it to INR, to the Bureau of Intelligence and Research in the State Department. I said, "What is this? We are hearing about the Takfiris and the Ikwanis, the Ikhwan-ul-Muslimeen, the Muslim Brotherhood. We are hearing about this the Afghans are expressing concern about this new thing that's coming. What is this?" Never got a reply but at least I was on the record of asking; I remember being concerned about this new thing. It was something that was not, not, not in the Pashtun way of doing things.

I recall a couple of years ago when the very recently-arriving phenomenon of suicide bombing appeared in Afghanistan. I remember thinking how absolutely inconceivable it would have been in 1984-'85 for an Afghan fighting the Russians to blow himself up; that would never have happened. It was not in the culture and now we are seeing it; it's all over Afghanistan, it's happening in tribal areas and it has even moved into Pakistan. That is a new thing and I don't know what you do about it. We saw it in other places, but

it would be something that really, really urgently needs serious study because it is something completely new; it wasn't there before. Only if we understand it can we figure out how to stop it.

Q: You got a couple million Afghan refugees. I know I've talked to people like Ernie Heck and others who used to come over and come back and interview. We had a constant flow of people talking, newspaper, TV types and everything else. How did you deal with all these people?

EASTHAM: Well we dealt with it like we deal with everything there. We dealt with it through the Pakistan government. We very rarely talked to refugees. We talked to Afghans who lived in Pakistan who were political activists or resistance figures but the refugee program like all other programs was conducted through the Pakistan government. So I had second hand relations with Afghan refugees, if you will. One of the big organizations in the Northwest Frontier at the time was the ICRC, the International Committee of the Red Cross, which was the primary provider of surgical services for wounded Afghans. They had a huge operation involving doing amputations, fitting prosthetics, setting fractures, healing bullet wounds and all that stuff. If you could make it to Peshawar you'd get quite good medical care from the International Committee of the Red Cross.

Q: Was it the Red Cross and not the Red Crescent?

EASTHAM: Yeah, it was the Red Cross; it was the International Committee of the Red Cross; of course, that's an organization that's changed over the years. When I first knew them in Peshawar they were all Swiss; the International Committee of the Red Cross did not employ other than Swiss nationals on its international staff. They had lots of local hire people, doctors and technicians and that sort of thing, but the committee itself, the delegates so-called of the committee, the international staff, were all Swiss. That thing has changed a lot now. The ICRC has turned itself into a more conventional NGO or international organization. They hire lots of local people or people from neighboring countries and that sort of thing. I think that has diluted the mission of the organization a little bit. They were big on surgical stuff and they also interacted with the foot soldiers of the Afghan Resistance in an interesting way. One of their core missions was what they called dissemination, which is training in principles of international humanitarian law. What do you do with a prisoner? How do you conduct yourself in a combat situation? They were very aggressive in terms of trying to train as many of the Afghan frontline resistance people as they could in principles of the international law of war.

Q: Were you getting any results of this, i.e., Soviet soldiers prisoners?

EASTHAM: We used to hear about them; I never ran across any myself. Once or twice somebody came and tried to swap me one; that was something we could not do much about. You could just report it. There was a fine line and a lot of these guys you would hear about were defectors, Soviets or maybe Muslim Soviets who had gone over but I never came across one directly and I suspect there probably weren't very many of them.

Q: Did Osama bin Laden come across your radar?

EASTHAM: No he did not ever. I was there in that period when he was supposed to have been around. In fact, I spoke to a reporter the other day and he told me he was writing a New Yorker article about that 1987 period. He told me that Khalid Sheikh Mohammed was in Peshawar the same time I was.

It was interesting there was one well-funded Arab relief organization there, I'm thinking it might have been Kuwaiti or styled itself as Kuwaiti or something, but we had very little to do with them. I recall once I felt that we were not covering that part of it adequately so I invited those guys to come over for a reception, and a couple of them did turn up. I felt bad about that evening, however, because it was for a reception or something and they probably regarded a reception where the attendees were mostly foreign relief workers and international organization people as an unmitigated evening of debauchery because this was a hard-drinking, hard-living crowd. I suspect it was a little bit less dignified than it should have been to suit a staunch Arab conservative. But we never had much luck with those guys.

We had a problem communicating with them, we had no common language with these characters and I didn't have anybody who could translate Arabic and they didn't have anybody who could translate English. So we were reduced whenever we encountered one another to sort of hand signals or something. It was as a practical matter very difficult to talk to these guys.

Q: Did you have any feel for the work of the Pakistan military intelligence side of things which right now, of course, has been portrayed as being the support of the Taliban and all of that?

EASTHAM: Well, okay that's a later period supporting the Taliban. I could come to that later on.

Q: Yes but at this time?

EASTHAM: At that time 100 percent. There was a guy who is in the current news of 2010, a fellow named Colonel Imam who I think I only met once in that period. He was the Pakistani colonel from the Inter Services Intelligence organization (ISI) who ran the Peshawar office. He was the one we usually saw when Charlie came; when Charlie Wilson would come out, it would be Colonel Imam who would corral the Afghans for Charlie. He was the one ISI headquarters would tell, "Congressman Wilson is going to be there at 2:00 p.m. on Tuesday and we need to get these guys together." So if we were going to meet them all together we'd go to some warehouse and there would be a big table set up in the middle of it; you are obviously going into a Pakistani military facility of some sort. I think it's well known and I only know this from reading subsequently because I was not briefed into the covert program at the time that, in fact, the Pakistani

intelligence agency was the logistics organization that handled what was going on in terms of covert supplying the Mujaheddin at the time.

Fast forwarding a little bit after the Russians left Afghanistan it seemed to me, and I was in a position to be able to see this, that the Pakistanis were unwilling to give up this handy tool that they had developed, which was the capability to train and equip an insurgency in a very efficient way. After the Russians left Afghanistan we dropped out, we quit, we walked away from doing this sort of thing with respect to the Afghans and the Pakistanis seem to have, in my opinion, and it is nothing more than an opinion, they seemed to have decided to use that tool against India by feeding Kashmiris through it to cause trouble for the Indians in the Indian part of Kashmir.

Then, subsequently, there may indeed have been some engagement by the Pakistanis in support of the Taliban. I recall talking to a senior Pakistani politician who was influential in Benazir Bhutto's government, when the Taliban came into being. He told me when the Taliban popped up it was inevitable that Pakistan would support them because they were just too good to believe in terms of what they could do in terms of Pakistani interests. My gut tells me today it's inconceivable to me that as a matter of policy the Pakistanis are backing people who are fighting the United States in Afghanistan. That is not possible; therefore, 96,000 documents or whatever that leaked last week in 2010 had a lot of, in my view, a lot of what Afghans believe in it. You know Afghans believe they've always been manipulated by foreign powers. People say Afghans are fiercely independent; the Afghans themselves think they are victims of conspiracies by foreign powers, always, that is their self-told history. The flavor of the day nowadays is either the Pakistanis or the Americans; one or the other or both, are engaged in some kind of conspiracy to manipulate, control, direct, divide Afghanistan. I may be naïve about this but I just can't imagine the Pakistanis as a matter of policy supporting people who are fighting the Americans in Afghanistan.

Q: Back to Charlie Wilson do you have any Charlie Wilson stories? How did he operate when he was there? What was your take on Charlie Wilson?

EASTHAM: I really liked Charlie. Charlie was a neat guy and Tom Hanks played Charlie to perfection in that movie.

Q: This is this movie Charlie Wilson's…

EASTHAM: Charlie Wilson's War. It was interesting I didn't see it from the same angle. A fellow by the name of George Crile wrote the book Charlie Wilson's War. Crile is dead now but I knew him; he came out to Peshawar, usually when Charlie was there, to film stuff and he was there occasionally. He was more or less an independent video producer who did some work for CBS. Charlie was such a vivid character, he was about 6'4", thin and he had fought alcohol all his life. He had had a drinking problem, he was famous for the pretty girls that he had working in his office and all that stuff. Charlie hated the Soviet Union; he was an anti-Communist, absolutely to his core.

I'll tell you a couple Charlie Wilson stories. Charlie came out one time and he brought his a beautiful young woman with him. There are some pictures in various books of this woman in an ankle length fur coat in the arms bazaar at Darra Adam Khel. I was there; I was the host for that visit. It was a party of three, Charlie and the woman and the colonel, there is a U.S. Army Colonel who just died about two weeks ago who was his regular military escort. They arrived in Peshawar on the U.S. embassy defense attaché plane which was a C-12, it's a Beech King Air military version. At that time, there were two of these aircraft in Islamabad, one assigned to the Defense Attaché and another attached to the Office of Defense Cooperation, the military aid office.

We did the usual things. We went to Darra Adam Khel, the famous gun-making town. We met with the various Afghan resistance leaders. We went to the ICRC hospital where they were doing all this repair work on wounded Afghans. It was normal Charlie stuff.

Then Charlie said, "I need to straighten out this airplane business." He phoned the ambassador at the time who was Deane Hinton; and, well, there was some back story. Before he left Washington Charlie had gone to the Pentagon and said, "You know I've got this really complicated schedule in Pakistan. I need to go from Islamabad to Peshawar to Lahore to Karachi and the Pakistani International internal flights don't work for me so can I use the defense attaché plane?"

No less a person than the military assistant to Secretary Weinberger, one General Colin Powell, had told Charlie yes, Congressman you may use the plane, your military escort may use the plane but the woman can't go. She is not an official member of the delegation, not your wife, she is no relation, she is not official, and we can't let her ride on the plane.

So Charlie had arrived in Islamabad and he went to Ambassador Hinton and he said, Deane, I don't want to go on that Pakistan International Airline flight. Can you get the plane to take me over to Peshawar? Ambassador Hinton, of course, always an accommodating fellow said, "Sure." And they put him on the C-12 and sent him to Peshawar. When the colonel who flew the plane sent in his mission report he got a rather tart message back from the office of the secretary of Defense saying, in essence, "Don't do that again. Don't take the woman."

Then ensued the most violent tantrum that I've ever seen from a grown man. Charlie was on the phone with the ambassador yelling at him about the airplane. The ambassador did not give him satisfaction about the C-12 coming to pick him up the next day to take him to Lahore. Charlie hung up the phone with such violence that he knocked the lamp off the table and he broke the phone. Then he went on strike and he said, "I'm not going to the dinner hosted for me by the governor of the Northwest Frontier Province, I'm not going." So about ten minutes later Ambassador Hinton called back and he said, "Let me talk to Charlie." I handed the phone to him and Charlie said, "Uh huh, yeah, yeah okay." He hung up the phone.

The upshot was that the ambassador had arranged for President Zia's Falcon jet to come pick Charlie up the next day and take him to Lahore. Of course, Charlie couldn't turn down an offer by his good friend President Zia-ul-Haq of the offer of the presidential aircraft but Charlie did get his revenge. He thought for a couple of minutes. He called the ambassador back and he said, "I want your plane too and I will meet the restriction and we won't put her on it." So the next morning we went to the airport and parked on the apron were President Zia's Falcon jet and the U.S. embassy's C-12. Charlie and the woman got in the Falcon jet and the colonel got in the C-12 and Charlie made that airplane follow him from Peshawar to Lahore to Karachi with the colonel on board.

His parting words as reported to me by the colonel when Charlie left the country are quite profane, and I don't think I will repeat them for the tape, but it had to do with "You better enjoy that airplane while you got it because that is a line item." A line item meaning something that Charlie in his position on the Defense Appropriations Sub-Committee of the House Appropriations Committee could delete or move. Sure enough in a subsequent fiscal year if I'm not mistaken, I know for a fact that the plane moved. It was transferred mysteriously in the appropriations bill from an appropriation for an airplane in Islamabad to an appropriation for an airplane in Cairo. So Charlie got his revenge.

Another Charlie story. Late in my tour, this would have been around 1987, here comes Charlie again. My guidance was this was going to be a low key visit; he is alone, no escort, everything is fine, and he will be there a couple days. So I went out to the airport, pulled up on the military side of the parking lot; there lands a Pakistan Air Force C-130 aircraft, steps come down, and here comes Charlie alone.

So I walked him over to the car and we got in the car and driving back to the consulate and I said, "Charlie, we'll go get some coffee or something." It was a little before eight in the morning, it as pretty early for him.

He said, "Al, I'm going to do something and you can't stop me." I said, "What is that Congressman?" He said, "I'm going to Afghanistan and there is nothing you can do about it, you can't stop me." I said, "Congressman, you are the Congressman, I'm not. You do what you want." We got back to the house and at that point I'd had some time to think about it and as we sat down to have a cup of coffee I said, "Congressman, there are two things I'll ask of you. One is to tell me who you're going with and, two, tell me when I should start to worry, if you don't come back."

He said, "No, I'm not telling you anything. You might try to stop me." So I said, "Okay, fine." So I'm scrubbing the schedule now, I've got a whole schedule arranged for him but he is leaving, going to Afghanistan. A few minutes later somebody came up from the front gate and said, "There is a car here to pick up Mr. Wilson." I said, "Okay, Charlie I'll see you later." I shook his hand and saw him off. The car drove away. Then I asked the gate guard whose car he had boarded, and the guard named the Afghan Resistance guy who usually went around in that car. I had a "Plan B" in my head to find out, but

didn't have to use it. So it wasn't a secret. He just didn't understand that it could not be covert for him to go with the resistance to Afghanistan.

I had invited 30 people to come for dinner that night so I'd decided to go ahead and have the dinner even though he was not going to be there. We were all sitting around the living room having a drink before dinner and in comes Charlie.

It was almost like a cartoon character; he had this big cloud over his head, he was not happy. He came in and he came into the living room and he said, "I don't know who's done this to me." I said, "Well what's happened?" He told me that on the way down to Kurram Agency, where they planned to cross, he had passed through the gun town of Darra Adam Khel. The Afghans he was with said they wouldn't issue him a weapon, so he made them stop and he bought a 9 millimeter Makarov pistol because, as he put it, by golly, he was going to shoot at a Russian, if he saw one. They got into Kurram Agency on the way to the town of Parachinar and an Afghan that he knew came from the other direction. The Afghan said in effect, Congressman, it is too dangerous, you can't go down here. The Shia and the Sunni are fighting; there is communal unrest, you can't go, you have to turn around. This was an Afghan of some note, and after arguing for a while, Charlie turned around and came back to Peshawar. Well it was very clear what had happened and Charlie very well knew what had happened. The Pakistanis didn't want him to go and they had set up this elaborate scenario to keep him from reaching the border in the company of this Afghan leader. That was in, I think, early 1987 and he finally made it in but it was off my watch, it was the next year.

Q: Were their Sunni Shia battles going on?

EASTHAM: Yes at several levels. Parachinar, in particular, Kurram Agency, was an area where there were two populations; there were Sunni and Shia and it was known for difficult communal relations there, especially after the arrival of the Afghan refugees, who were mostly Sunni. At the time I lived in Pakistan, in that period, there was also an organization which was just getting started; a very nasty anti-Shia organization of Sunni. Their tactics were quite awful. They were mosque bombers, assassins, and that sort of thing. It was not suicide bombing but drive by shootings of Shia as they were coming out of the mosque; it was pretty nasty.

Q: What were your take on the official Saudi influence at your time there?

EASTHAM: It was not evident. There were some Resistance leaders who were better positioned to get Saudi money than others. There was a fellow, still around, he's in Kabul; a fellow named Abdul Rasul Sayyaf, who was one of the seven Resistance leaders. He was an Arabic scholar; he apparently spoke beautiful, classical Arabic although he was a Pashtun like all of the Resistance leaders except one. He was able somehow to attract a great deal of Saudi money directly to him. I believe there are published accounts that during this period that the Saudis were matching us dollar for dollar on the covert side.

Q: Did you get any feel during this time any reports about the Soviet position? What was happening with them?

EASTHAM: It was hard to say. I was not following the Soviet angle on this very closely; I had enough to do following the war. I think though that the basic Gorbachev position to disengage from Afghanistan was probably made around 1987, if I'm not mistaken. They left in 1989 and I think they were trying to disengage and they had started a program of "strengthening the Afghan security forces." Do we hear something like that in the news in 2010? I believe that is the phase that the Russians were in at the end of my time in Peshawar. They were doing something very much like what one would naturally do which is strengthen the capability for the Afghans to do their own work. There have been published accounts since of a conversation the Gorbachev had with Najibullah who was in Afghanistan at the time in which he basically told him, "If you guys don't hold up your end of the stick this is not forever. We are not going to have the Soviet army here to keep you in power until you die." That was a turning point; I don't recall when that conversation was supposed to have occurred but I believe Gorbachev mentioned it in his own memoirs. I'm pretty sure they were on their way out the door by the middle of 1987 when I left.

Q: What was your relationship with our embassy in Islamabad?

EASTHAM: Let's see, I had an excellent relationship with the embassy. Deane Hinton was one of the best bosses I've ever had. He gave clear guidance, he was active, and he was just as sharp as he could be; I had great admiration for Ambassador Hinton. There were two DCM's during my time there. The reporting arrangement in Pakistan was I reported to the DCM and they were both very, very good.

I only remember one time I was pulled up short by the DCM. There was some stupid stuff going on out there; there was a big program of security enhancements after 1982. What happened? Bombings in Beirut, there were the so-called Inman Report and the so-called Inman money which was three or four billion dollars of security money shoveled out the door for security enhancements. I always thought it was closing the barn after the embassy had been bombed but we had a program.

One day I was sitting in blissful ignorance in my office in Peshawar and they called from downstairs and they said, "Mr. Qureshi from Turner International Construction is here to see you." I said, "Okay." So Mr. Qureshi came up to my office and he said, "We are here to start the project." I said, "What project is that exactly?" He said, "The project to replace the wall around your facility here and enhance your access controls." Now the Regional Security Officer (RSO) had very vaguely mentioned something like this to me months before, but he added the comment that there would probably not be money for it. I had not seen any plans, scope of work, any of that.

So I asked Mr. Qureshi what this would involve. He said, "That is going to involve fourteen months of construction, we are going to tear down your wall and build it up again and we are going to build an access control point. We are going to put an automatic

barrier for vehicles and that sort of thing." I said, "Fourteen months to replace the wall?" He said, "Yes and we are going to use every day of it. Where do you want to put the site office?" I knew nothing about this; he's ready to start. So I phoned the embassy in Islamabad and said, "What is this about?" They said, "Well all the posts in Pakistan are getting these security enhancements and that's what he is going to do." They were going to spend over a million dollars on this.

We went through a big fuss because there were some trees that I didn't want them to cut down and we had to do some serious heavy lifting with the local authorities to get permission to do the work, since no one had thought of that part. But at one point I sent a telegram to Washington saying, "Look, with the amount of money you are spending on this damned wall I could find a compound, I could find a place, buy it, refurbish it with a 100 foot setback between the building and the wall and give you money back. Why are we doing this?" At that point the DCM called me and he said, "Al, come on, cut it out." He said, "You are fighting a battle that doesn't need to be fought, just get with the program." I did and I endured living inside a construction site for the next year.

Q: Who were the DCMs?

EASTHAM: There was John McCarthy, subsequently ambassador to Lebanon, and then there was Alex Watson, the second one.

Q: John McCarthy right.

EASTHAM: Right.

Q: I've interviewed John.

EASTHAM: Yeah.

Q: Did you feel under particular threat?

EASTHAM: Yeah, well yes and no, I did not feel under particular threat until one day I was having lunch downtown. It was very rare for me to go out for lunch at a restaurant. I was at Green's Hotel and all of a sudden there was this big kaboom; I thought hum that's interesting and it shook the windows and stuff. So when I got back to the office I asked my colleague Dr. Massoud to find out what that was. Interesting story. Our compound in Peshawar was in the Cantonment, in the military camp, and on the rear side of the compound were a couple of housing units for Pakistani military officers. We had a good setback on the back where these Pakistani military houses were. The day before the bomb, someone had reported a car parked in front of one of the military houses. The police came and they looked at it, they determined it didn't belong there, and they towed it to the police station. In the police station they discovered by very unfortunate practical experience that the explosives that were in the gas tank had been wired to go off when someone stole the radio. In the impound lot some gentleman who had access to the impound lot of the Pakistani police decided he needed a new radio. He got in the car and

he pulled the radio and the damned thing went off. I was convinced that that was intended for us because where it was parked was the closest point of access to the consulate where you could park a car without being challenged by the Frontier Constabulary guards. I kind of figured that was for us. I don't think it would have done much damage; it probably would have broken the windows in the back of the house but I don't think it would have done any serious damage to us.

I never felt a particular threat, we didn't go around with a big detail; I had a bodyguard who went with me but he kept his pistol underneath his salwar kameez and I always thought it would be a real spectacle for him to have to drop his trousers to pull his gun; it never seemed very practical to have his weapon concealed under all that cloth, that Pakistani clothing. He wasn't a very good shot. We used to go out to the range occasionally and I was very much better at hitting the target than he was.

Q: I can't remember were you married or not?

EASTHAM: Yes, my wife was there.

Q: How did that work out?

EASTHAM: It was fine, it was fine.

Q: I mean was it difficult under the circumstances being a woman there?

EASTHAM: Not particularly and, in fact, we were talking about that at dinner last night with some friends. She drove, though she would get some ugly looks and commentary sometimes. The way she handled it was that we always used to laugh at the perceptions of life in Peshawar. There was some hugely important member of Congress, a woman, that the Embassy sent up to us one time and they made her get all garbed up with the head scarf and a salwar kameez and all that stuff; it was just comical because you didn't have to do that. My wife's idea was when she went out into town she was going to present, how would you put it, the memsahib way; she was going to try to do this the way the British would have done thirty years before when they were still around. It was not a problem for her. She never wore a head scarf, she would wear a hat sometimes, but the most effective thing and the biggest problem in the bazaar at that time was bottom pinching. Your average rural Pashtun guy from about the age of twelve never sees a woman who isn't his mother or sister. When they get about eighteen or nineteen or twenty, it is a little creepy, but they would do a lot of bottom pinching. We found that a most effective means of countering that was to go to the police store on Saddar Road, the mall road in Peshawar, and buy Pakistani police batons, riding crops, which were nice little bamboo things leather coated with a metal tip. They are about a foot and a half long towards two feet long. Those are just so handy for fending off bottom pinchers. I don't think she ever had to do use it, as she always had the stick in her hand. This was serious though, there was a murder in the gold bazaar one day when one of these pinchers manhandled an Afghan's wife. The Afghan killed him with a knife.

Q: I had a sixteen year old daughter when I was consul general in Naples.

EASTHAM: Did you need it Naples did you? I used to say the Pashtuns were worse than the Italians about that.

Q: What was your impression of the American media, your experiences because they would come out I mean you could always get these wonderful faces; there is nothing like this today Afghan, Pakistani elders with beards and hook noses and all that.

EASTHAM: On Monday night I went over to the District to see the documentary Restrepo, which is Sebastian Junger's new film on the year that he spent in the Korengal Valley at outpost Restrepo. He has done some gorgeous photography as you just described of the Afghan elders in photographing, filming the meetings of the American forces, the American military personnel in this little outpost when they are meeting with the local people. The American media were not very present in Peshawar; there was one guy who has died recently. A fellow named Kurt Lohbeck who was an independent and worked a lot for CBS who did a lot of work on filming the Afghan War. But there was not much media coverage; it was prior to my time there when Gunga Dan went in…

Q: Dan Rather.

EASTHAM: Dan Rather went in…

Q: He was the top CBS, I guess, correspondent well he headed the…

EASTHAM: He was their top evening news guy.

Q: Their evening news guy.

EASTHAM: I think the American media did not cover that war very well because it was dangerous. What you had was a lot of independents out there but they were not really independent because they were flogging their own view of the war, which was largely from an anti-Communist Cold War perspective. We were, after all, in that period creeping up on the end of the Cold War; we didn't know it but we were surely coming up on it. I don't believe I ever saw what now is called mainstream media out there; I don't remember anybody who wasn't sort of a stringer or freelancer or something like that. You never really knew who they were working for.

Q: I saw this in Vietnam I mean you had an awful lot of these stringers. They were sort *of misguided missiles some of them for one thing they were pretty amateurish and they had points of view that…*

EASTHAM: The two I mentioned already, George Crile who wrote the book about Charlie Wilson and Kurt Lohbeck were fairly professional. Lohbeck was a bit of an ideologue; he was a little right wingy you know, quite anti-Communist kind of a guy. But

I think they did a credible job of keeping the war out there but it was darn near impossible to cover it; it was dangerous.

Q: Did you get any high-level visits of people who came out and looked at the Khyber Pass from the Department of State or I won't say sightseers but pretty damn close to it?

EASTHAM: Yeah, it was close but no, they were always serious. We would put that stuff on the schedule just because it was such gorgeous, attractive stuff and there was a purpose of going out to the Khyber Pass. You would go to Michni Point which is the point overlooking the border at Torkham down the hill and you'd get a nice Pakistani major with a sand table who would give you a briefing about the deployment of the forces in the valley around Torkham where everybody was. You'd get the latest war story from up there and then you would go meet the colonel who was the head of the Khyber Rifles. Then in those days you could go down to the guns, if you wanted, to although it took a day to go to the gun market. Charlie always did it and very few others did. Charlie would come away with a Thompson submachine guy or a…

Q: What was the gun market like?

EASTHAM: It's a town where they sold nothing but guns and hash. They had two products for sale in that market and it was firearms and narcotics. I suspect they also sold a lot of opium at that point.

Q: Where did they get their guns?

EASTHAM: Everywhere, all over the place; they had the weirdest collection of guns. Charlie bought two of those World War II Mauser machine pistols? He bought two of those and he bought two of something that I'd never seen before. It was a drum-barreled submachine gun of some sort; it was not a Thompson but it was somebody else's manufacture.

Q: Well the Russians this is before the AK-47, this drum barreled sort of like a Tommy gun was a…

EASTHAM: yeah, Charlie bought one of those.

Q: …sort of their standard infantry weapon.

EASTHAM: They also manufactured guns. The Pakistanis are awash with small arms. There were perennial rumors there that the Pakistani government was going to register and seize all the AK-47s so my Pakistani friends in Peshawar would go and get the guys in Darra Adam Khel to make copies. They would make a country-built AK-47 and put the same serial number on it just in case the Pakistani government decided to seize the weapons. The plan was that if that happened, they would give them a copy and keep the real one. It was fascinating; there were three different prices for AK-47s. There was one

price for the Chinese in the grease brand new; there was another price for the Egyptian one in the grease new…

Q: When you say in the grease in or out of the case?

EASTHLAM: Out of the case, brand new weapon, as it was packed at the factory and it is all greased up for movement but you would have to clean it before you used it. Then there was another price for the used one Russian or Chinese; there was yet another price for the new one, there was a new little weapon that had just come out and it was a nifty little short thing, an AK-74. Those were highly desirable; they were concealable. I had somebody offer me AR-15s, M-16s would you call it, the U.S. military weapon. I actually went and got the serial numbers off of about ten of those ones that they were offering me. They traced it back to a U.S. depot that was overrun in April of 1975 in Vietnam; I actually managed to persuade DOD to find out where those guns came from and that's where they came from. They were captured by the North Vietnamese in April of 1975; so they came from all over the world. You could get an anti-aircraft gun, they had 12.5 millimeter, those big ones; there was just everything out there. They were using bar steel to make new stuff. They made shotguns; I have a shotgun that somebody gave me, which was made in Darra Adam Khel. They made little pistols, their own little 32 semi-automatics; there was a manufacturing operation in addition to a trading operation.

Q: Did you have any hippie type people hanging around there?

EASTHAM: No.

Q: At that time they had been pretty well cleared out?

EASTHAM: No, no, no, no you couldn't go through. That sort of thing went away after about 1970 probably in the Daoud coup in '78 or the Great Saur Revolution as they called it in Afghanistan; when you couldn't go through Afghanistan any more, that stopped. I never ran into anybody like that in Pakistan during that period.

Q: Well this is probably a good place to stop. Where did you go afterward?

EASTHAM: I went back to Washington and was on the staff of the Under Secretary for Political Affairs.

Q: Who was the undersecretary?

EASTHAM: Mike Armacost.

Q: So we'll pick it up then.

EASTHAM: Okay.

Q: Today is the 30th of July 2010 with Alan Eastham. We are still in Peshawar.

EASTHAM: We are just finishing up Peshawar. I want to say a word or two about the post in Peshawar. You asked me about how Peshawar fit in and I talked about Badaber and the Badaber Base and the Frances Gary Powers U-2 operation. That, of course, occurred long before I had anything to do with Pakistan or Peshawar.

Q: That was 1960.

EASTHAM: Yep and when I arrived in Peshawar in 1984 I found a two-officer, one-secretary post with a PAO and a USAID office. But the consular post itself I found myself was over the garage, literally. One of my predecessors, a fellow named Gus Velletri, had fended off an effort in the '60s to close the place. He fended it off by suggesting that money could be saved by giving up the rented office space downtown and putting the office over the garage of the residence, which he did. So we were particularly ill-placed to be an active and busy post because we didn't have any space. That was particularly acute when other agencies started adding personnel and needed space within what passed for our main building. In 1986 we had a plan that I thought was firm to build a new office building and I thought it would only take a year so I extended a year in Peshawar to see it finished and, darn it, they didn't even dig a single shovel of dirt before I had to leave in 1987. At that time I was supposed to go to South Africa; I was actually selected to go to Cape Town as the deputy principal officer but at the same time I was more interested in staying with the Afghan account so I was also under consideration for the special assistant job for the Near East and South Asia in the office of the Under Secretary for Political Affairs at the time under Mike Armacost. So that is the next chapter.

Q: So you went back to Washington working for the Under Secretary for Political Affairs which is basically number three in the State Department. You did that for how long?

EASTHAM: Two years. I was there from 1987-1989. It was an interesting time; there was some serious stuff going on. The main two things were what was called at the time the Tanker War when the Iranians were firing on Kuwaiti tankers that were coming out of the upper Gulf and the U.S. was helping the Kuwaitis defend themselves on this. The Kuwaitis were rich and clever enough to be able to do this themselves so they used to do all sorts of things. They had a barge rigged up that presented a radar cross-section that looked like a tanker, so that when those surface to surface anti-ship missiles, the Exocets, or whatever they were, were fired they would hit the barge with the bigger cross section and not hit the tanker.

This was in the context of the Iran-Iraq War, which was going on at that time. Basically the two sides were trying to deny each other their oil exports, and at the time the Kuwaitis were siding with Iraq.

Q: Also an Iraqi plane had hit a U.S. destroyer but it was considered to be sort of iffy as far as…

EASTHAM: Yeah, it was kind of friendly fire in a certain way. The Iranians were considered to be quite hostile at that point; there were lots of patrol boat attacks and that sort of thing going on.

One incident I recall was when the U.S.S. Vincennes shot down that Iran Air plane. It was quite telling. That happened on a weekend, I think, it happened on the 4th of July weekend in 1988, on July 3. We were all in the office on Saturday, the day after, as I recall, at least I was trying to help the boss figure out how to respond to it. He and Abe Chayes, who was the State Department Legal Advisor at the time, had a discussion about what to do. There were some decisions made about compensation of the civilians who had been on the Iran Air flight, that sort of thing. So Mike, Under Secretary Armacost, went on the talk shows on the Sunday of the following week. He was very clear he said, "Oh yes, we'll compensate the people who lost their lives in this crash." That was on Sunday. On Monday I was the duty officer, which meant that I had to go in at six in the morning and get things ready for the boss when he came in. It was very, very strange; I walked into the office and every phone in the office was ringing. The calls were just stacked up one after the other, after the other, which was crazy; we never got that kind of telephone response. So I answered one of them to see what it was. It was a number one irate, hot American saying that those damn Iranians shouldn't get a nickel for anything, they are all better off dead. That was a moment when, this was around 1988, I think, the 4th of July weekend. It was just horrifying because all of the calls were the same; that was nearly ten years after the Iranian hostage taking. The attitude in the State Department at the time was that we desperately needed some kind of a channel to the Iranians either front channel or back channel. But the politics wouldn't stand it. As far as I know and my knowledge is probably desperately incomplete on this but as far as I know we didn't have anything going at that time with the Iranians; but it was very clear that we needed something but it was also clear that U.S. public opinion would be very difficult.

The other thing that was going on besides the Tanker War and the instability in the Persian Gulf was the end stage of the Geneva negotiations on Afghanistan, which provided the paper cover, the treaty cover, for the departure of Soviet troops from Afghanistan. We were deeply engaged in that and I was very fortunate in terms of access because that negotiation was almost entirely in the hands of Undersecretary Armacost. He and his Russian counterpart Yuli Vorontsov were in fairly constant contact about this, about how to structure the thing and Mike had to handle the U.S. end of it because we were not over the Cold War yet in 1988-'89. The problem was there were a lot of people who didn't believe that the Russians were actually going to get out of Afghanistan; now how you could think that was a ruse and how they would cover up some ulterior other purpose is beyond me, but there was a serious negotiation that ran its string out at that point.

I remember the day Mike referred what was to be very close to the final text up to Secretary Shultz; he had kept the Secretary very closely informed, of course, but we were at the point where the darn thing was going to be scheduled for signing. Mike went up to see the Secretary and we didn't see him for a long time. It turned out what had happened was when Mike had gone through the document with Secretary Shultz, the Secretary said,

“Let’s go talk to the President about this.” So they got in the Secretary’s car and went over to the White House and briefed President Reagan. I’ll never forget Mike came back and he said, “You know this stuff is harder to explain than I had thought.” The specific concept in what became the Geneva Accords on Afghanistan was the concept of symmetry. There was a provision in there…there were two versions of it. There was positive symmetry and there was negative symmetry. Positive symmetry was, if you keep supplying your guys we will keep supplying our guys. Negative symmetry was, if you don’t supply your guys we won’t supply our guys. The problem was when they presented it to President Reagan he said, “Oh no, these are freedom fighters. We can’t stop supplying them.” So they went to positive symmetry; if you supply we’ll supply. But it was a very close thing to get the president’s approval on it.

Of course, what actually happened in the end was that the Geneva Accords were signed and the Soviets began to withdraw their troops, they pulled out their troops right at the end of the Reagan administration, right at the tail end. The question was then what you do next. It is my understanding when General Gromov crossed the Friendship Bridge going out of Afghanistan that the covert program ended, stopped, screeching halt. I’m not entirely sure that was what President Reagan wanted but it certainly did happen on our side. At that point, we had a wretched misconception; I would never subscribe to it and I had fought it for many months, well over a year. We collectively had convinced ourselves of the truth of a mantra and the mantra was: “The Kabul regime cannot long survive the departure of Soviet troops.” I don’t think that quite qualifies as a haiku but it surely was an article of faith, because it was in every set of talking points, in every briefing paper, in every intelligence report, in every official document of the era, despite a vigorous effort on my part to take it out. And of course it was wrong.

Q: That’s almost a replica of the one that just came out a short bit later and that was Saddam Hussein can’t survive after he was expelled from Kuwait.

EASTHAM: Yes.

Q: You know you get these things and we believe them.

EASTHAM: Well what happened then the Bush administration came in just at the moment when…

Q: Bush one.

EASTHAM: …Bush I, we had the transition and Bush I believed the mantra. As best I recall, and there is evidence to this effect, Secretary Baker believed the mantra when they came into office. So the first thing they did and it was literally their first action. We got the word a few minutes after the President George H.W. Bush was inaugurated and Secretary Baker was sworn in that the embassy in Kabul was to be closed. We had maintained the embassy in Kabul through the entire period of the Soviet occupation and when we had won the war, and the Russians had left, the Bush administration apparently did not want to be confronted by a hostage crisis or a catastrophe of some sort in Kabul in

the first months of the administration. So they basically said close it down, pull everybody out tomorrow. We collectively said, "We can't do that." We had to charter two airplanes from Indian Airlines to haul out all the stuff, they had to figure out how to lock the building, and there was a great deal of administrative work. So it took Jon Glassman, who was the charge at the time, it took him about a week to get out. But Mike Armacost had resisted that impulse for the entire time that I had been in his employ. Mike's view was that reporting and presence was what the State Department did, and in order to do this core work, you have to be there. It was just not possible to do it; it was not possible to resist it from the new administration when it came down as an edict like that. So we closed the embassy in Kabul, we cut off the material support to our Allies in the Afghan equation; we walked away.

Then, subsequently, in 1990, the first President Bush declined to sign the requisite nuclear certification to permit the Pakistanis to continue to receive U.S. assistance. The so-called Pressler Amendment, which was passed ironically not to prevent Pakistan from receiving U.S. assistance but to enable Pakistan to receive U.S. assistance, obliged the president to certify annually that Pakistan did not possess a nuclear explosive device. So up until the Soviet withdrawal, President Reagan had signed it; someone once said he held his nose when he did it, but apparently there was some ambiguity in the facts and in any case we needed the Pakistanis at the time. But President Bush the first chose not to sign the certification and all assistance to Pakistan subsequently came to a halt during the first Bush administration. Ironically when the closeout plan was designed by the mission in Islamabad, they said they needed $200 million new dollars in order to close out the program, to finish up what they were doing. It was quite an audacious bureaucratic move, I thought, if you had a congressionally mandated termination of assistance that you ask for more money to implement the termination but that is what they did.

In any event, the departure of Soviet troops, the closure of the embassy in Kabul and the transition to the first Bush administration all happened approximately at the same time; it was quite a dramatic moment. At that point Mike Armacost was nominated as ambassador to Japan, I believe. He was replaced by Bob Kimmitt who came in with Secretary Baker; I worked for him for the first three, four months of the Bush administration. That was quite illustrative. The two men had very different styles. They are both still living, so I probably shouldn't talk about them, but it was a lesson to me on policy analysis and action.

Armacost was an analyst, a thinker, an intellectual so his approach was to amass and organize information in his head to the point that he concluded, and probably correctly, that he knew everything that he needed to know about a particular question. At that point he would decide in his mind what was best for the United States of America. When he had done that he would test it against the politics of the do-able in Washington; he would then test the waters to see if this was something that was possible to do.

Bob Kimmitt was very different. Bob Kimmitt would start with the politics, with the do-able and proceed to the optimum do-able rather than finding the optimum in an abstract

sense and applying the politics to that. I learned a lot from those two men about how things worked at the top level.

Q: Looking at the results of this did the two different approaches come up with about the same answer?

EASTHAM: Yes, I think so. I think that I like the one about concluding what is right first and then testing the politics because I suspect the politics of a particular issue is more malleable, more adjustable, more fluid, more plastic than a fixed reality. I always thought you limited yourself a bit if you went for the politically feasible, the line of least resistance or the clearest path in the politics and then chose your course of action based on what you thought was doable.

Q: Well let's talk about Armacost first. How was it working for him?

EASTHAM: What do you mean?

Q: What was his style of management? How effective did you find him within the…

EASTHAM: Extraordinarily effective. He didn't do everything; there were a lot of things that he didn't take on but that's natural. It's been my experience that every administration takes about a year or a year and a half to parcel out the portfolios. At first when a new administration comes in everybody has to do everything and it's real slow. You can't get a decision because there are so many people who think their piece of pie is being nibbled away at by other people. Then, at some point about the one year mark or maybe the fifteen month mark, they figure out that nobody is going to suffer if they divide up the work. In those days, of course, we were in the second term of Reagan; the Reagan administration at that point in my view was a little tired. They had run out of ideas, there had been the scandals. They were still doing a lot, this was after all the period during which Ronald Reagan was getting to know Gorbachev and all of that and things were opening up with the Russians. But the atmosphere around was just a little stale; they kind of ran out of stuff to do, they didn't have any new ideas; they realized that they were on the way out. They were surprisingly not particularly engaged in a special effort to pass things along after the election to the new president, to Vice President Bush.

Q: In many cases it came closer to almost a hostile takeover. It was an odd period; these are talking cheese or something.

EASTHAM: I'll give you an example: Right at the end of the administration, I think it was in December after the election, President Reagan nominated a man to be Ambassador to India after the election. His name was John Hubbard, and he had been someone Reagan had known from California; he had been the President of the University of Southern California and had spent several years in India as an education advisor. This gentleman was nominated with only weeks left in the administration. He spent months trying to get somebody from the Bush team to tell him that he would be able to stay a full term as ambassador and they never would do it; he never got the word that it would be

President Bush's choice to continue him as ambassador to India. In fact, he went out under a recess appointment and served for less than a year. We knew it was going to be Republican to Republican and it was after the election, of course, and we were getting ready for the transition and all that. There was no sense of handing something over to your brother; there was a sense of okay well here comes a new team. It wasn't as aggressively hostile, I guess, as it might have been if a Democrat had won. There was no sense of camaraderie or we're all on the same team and we are passing this on; maybe there was at the highest levels but we didn't see it at the level I was working at.

Q: Were you sticking pretty much to the Afghan brief or was that…

EASTHAM: And the Near East, I had the Near East as well.

Q: Near East.

EASTHAM: Except not Arab-Israel. That had been parceled out; that was not something Mike dealt with.

Q: Of course, when one looks at it in various administrations often the Arab-Israel thing has been delegated to a small group of people.

EASTHAM: Well sure at that time it was the same small group of people. It was Dennis Ross, Aaron Miller, it was those guys who were doing it then and they are still around now; not government but they are still doing the same stuff. Those fellows were around for a long time but it was Dennis who was the lead on most of the Middle East stuff. We didn't do that but Mike had all these other responsibilities too. We were stove piped within the office.

Q: I was wondering whether you were feeling any of the effects of what was happening in Europe at the time because we are talking about you are on the cusp of the collapse of the Soviet Union. It was certainly in Germany and Czechoslovakia, Hungary and all; did this translate at all with what you were up too?

EASTHAM: No, I didn't see it. We were so focused on the Afghanistan thing. My colleague who dealt with Europe and the Soviets and I worked very closely on the Afghan thing together because of the Soviet angle. I don't remember what Armacost had to do with the rest of the world; there was a lot of Panama, there was a lot of Central America at the time that he dealt with and I'm trying to think about Africa. He didn't have much to do with Africa.

Q: Did India play much of a role?

EASTHAM: No, at the time we did not recognize very much of an Indian role in this and, in fact, we saw the Indians as being not particularly helpful on this. They, of course, had their own strategic interests. The Indians have always wanted to be able to blunt Pakistani influence in Afghanistan. The Indians would love to be able to leapfrog over Pakistan and

have an influential presence in Afghanistan. There is this concept that the Pakistanis were enamored of at the time but that I haven't heard much about lately. It was called "strategic depth," Their existential threat in life was the Indians and they felt that they needed to have friendly relations with the Afghans and with the Iranians in order to have "strategic depth". Now I never knew what that meant. There was a hint at one point that part of the Pakistani war-fighting plan, had they ever gone into a full fledged conflict with India, would have been to pull a great number of their aircraft back into Afghanistan and Iran to be able to fight the Indians without worrying about the Indians destroying all their airbases, which would certainly be one of India's prime objectives in a generalized conflict. But I remember talking to a Pakistani general once. And this is probably one of the times I said something that wasn't very good for me. I was trying to understand strategic depth and he wouldn't define it, he just said we need strategic depth, we need strategic depth. I said, "What are you going to do if you go to war with India? Are you going to move Lahore?" You know, ten miles from the Indian frontier for goodness' sake, Lahore is the biggest and most important capital of the province containing the largest ethnic group in Pakistan. Lahore is not the biggest and most important city in Pakistan; that would be Karachi. But it is right on the border and what does an abstraction like "strategic depth" buy you when your second most important city is right there on the frontier. So I always thought it was a war fighting concept but the Indians were very much aware of why the Pakistanis wanted to, if not control, at least have substantial influence over Afghanistan. That was certainly part of it; the Indians wanted to blunt that to the extent possible and perhaps take away one of their key strategic pillars.

During the course of the negotiations the Indians were not involved. The Geneva Accords were signed under a four party format, if I recall; it was the Pakistanis and the Kabul Regime, with the Americans and the Russians as "guarantors" of the agreement that got the Soviet army out of Afghanistan. The Indians were on the edge of it and, if I recall correctly, they were not particularly helpful.

Q: What I'm trying to think about is if your colleagues were dealing with the Soviet Union was this just too much of a war? Had they decided to cut and run or was this too much of a strain on them or what was our feeling about why the Soviets were trying to get out of that?

EASTHAM: I think in the first instance that the people who were in charge, Gorbachev and the others who were in charge at the time, in the period between say 1986 and 1989, had concluded that Brezhnev's decision to go into Afghanistan was misguided; it was a relic of an earlier period. And public opinion was turning against them; it was hugely expensive. I once saw an estimate of double digit billions of dollars that they spent on this enterprise. We spent much less than they did. They lost quite a few soldiers, it came to the point there it began to affect small towns and public opinion in the Soviet Union. It just wasn't the kind of country that they wanted to be in. I saw a column yesterday in the Post by Jack Devine who used to be the head of the counter terrorism center in CIA and his column yesterday talks about how what is happening currently in Afghanistan is following the Soviet playbook. There is certainly some resonance to that; the idea of strengthening the Afghan security forces that you have a guy that you believe in, you

have some confidence in as the political leader of the country who is Pashtun. Najibullah was very similar to Hamid Karzai in some respects. It just didn't work so the Russians left. What was their alternative? They really didn't have any good alternatives but to leave. The column yesterday was making a comparison to today. I don't know if the circumstances are all that different. You can feel right now in the United States the sentiment building in opposition to this war for the same reasons that twenty years ago opposition built in the Soviet Union to the enterprise that they had undertaken. I'm not suggesting that there is a moral equivalence. Nobody flew an airplane into the Kremlin to provoke the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, far from it, but the consequences, the pictures it presents itself right now for the United States is quite similar to that which was presented to the Soviet Union during that bad period when they had 120 thousand troops in Afghanistan.

Q: Was there any feel for us going into Afghanistan?

EASTHAM: Why? That's a devilish question.

Q: I've interviewed I think it is John Taylor who is a political officer in Kabul when they came in and he said, "What the hell are they doing?"

EASTHAM: I think it came as a surprise to everybody. Most surprised of all was probably Jimmy Carter…

Q: Yeah.

EASTHAM: …who had staked his presidency basically on the prospect of better relations with the Soviet Union. I don't know the answer to that. I suspect that Brezhnev in his dotage, the Russians had come to conclude that there was some kind of a fiendish American plot in the region that was about to topple their guys and they decided to pump it up. They didn't trust the leadership of Afghanistan at the time and I guess they decided they would have a change and try again with some troops in there; but it's unfathomable to me why they did it. You know you can read a lot of rhetoric about this. There are people who thought the invasion was their thrust to the sea to bathe their feet in the warm waters of the Indian Ocean and all this stuff.

Q: Yeah, the terrain and all and going through Afghanistan and through Iran both of which were not really very pleasant countries to deal with.

EASTHAM: Yes, there was one fortunate aspect of this though. When the Reagan administration came in they, of course, created CENTCOM (United States Central Command); they restructured the U.S. government's way of looking at the region. They did a war plan in which all the planning assumptions of the early and first term of Ronald Reagan were that there was a chance of a war that would be over Middle Eastern oil, over the oil of the Persian Gulf. So they premised a worse case scenario in which the United States would have to fight the Soviet army in Iran without the cooperation of the Iranian government. It was a hell of a deal. That's pretty serious business, to think about how you

would do that. In one way it was fortunate, though, because the war we actually fought, the first Gulf War, was the same thing with Russian equipment and stuff moving south to the Persian Gulf. It was just a little bit west of where we thought we might have to do it, in Southern Iraq instead of Southern Iran. It was actually a salutatory thing because then we had what we needed in order to push back the Iraqis when they went into Kuwait.

Q: Question. When you were back in Peshawar but also with Armacost; what was your reading of Pakistani powers that be and their attitude toward India? Did they feel that India was going to gobble them up about Kashmir? You are talking about military and political leaders what were you getting?

EASTHAM: In that whole period when I got to Pakistan in 1984 Pakistan was under the leadership of Mohammad Zia-ul-Haq. Then when I went through three years in Peshawar and then I went to Armacost's office. In the middle of my tour, in August 1998, Zia-ul-Haq was killed in a plane crash along with Arnie Raphel and Brigadier Wassom and most of the leadership of the Pakistan army. At that time, the military leadership of Pakistan viewed India as its sole existential threat; they viewed India as a threat to the existence of Pakistan. These were the guys, you have to recall, who had lost the war over Bangladesh. Many, many of the leadership of the Pakistan army around Zia-ul-Haq were taken prisoner in 1972 when the Pakistan army surrendered in Dhaka; 95 thousand prisoners of war taken when the army in East Pakistan surrendered.

Q: Armies weren't that big in those days.

EASTHAM: No but…

Q: I meant that meant a real hit to the officer corps.

EASTHAM: They were all exchanged after the war, but the trauma for Pakistani officers of surrendering your force, that would be something that would stick with the Pakistani officer for the rest of his life; so they were quite hostile to the Indians.

Let's see, Kashmir at that point was not yet the flash point. In the 1980s, Kashmir and the line of control and the whole issue of Kashmir was pretty dormant. The only aggression with respect to Kashmir at that time was what we used to call "cartographic aggression;" the exchange of maps showing each side's maximum claim. They would do things like the Indians would tear out the page of Newsweek, if it had the wrong map, if it had a map that showed any part of Kashmir as Pakistani. With respect to Kashmir they had settled down to a durable impasse, I thought, where there was no point of convergence that could be discussed between the two parties. The Indian view was the Maharajah's accession to India had been a complete and thoroughly legal act and, therefore, all of Kashmir was part of India, the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir, and that only a portion of it was under the illegal occupation by the Pakistan forces.

The Pakistanis, on the other hand, took the position that the final status of Kashmir was obliged to be settled through a plebiscite under the 1949 Security Council Resolution and

that, therefore, the issue was not settled. So their maps all had sort of shading showing status indeterminate but there was no aggression going on. It was only after the Afghan War wound up in the early 1990s that the actual insurgency in Kashmir began to heat up and, therefore, the Indian occupation forces were augmented and were stronger, they were more aggressive thereby leading to significant tension between the two countries again over Kashmir.

Q: Well then did you get involved after the Soviets pulled out of Afghanistan what did you do?

EASTHAM: Oh well by then we were in the transition to the Bush administration. Bob Kimmitt was putting together a new team of assistants, staff people, and so I pretty much drifted off to my next assignment.

Q: Which was what?

EASTHAM: Well, I went to Nairobi. Originally I was assigned to go to the War College for a year, senior training. One day I was sitting in my office doing my work and the phone rang. It was the DCM in Nairobi and he said, "I see you've bid on the political counselor job out here. The ambassador and I would like to have you come out and take that job if you are willing." Well at that point I was already on my way practically to the War College so I said, "Oh, yeah, interesting let me think about it." So I went and looked on a map because I had no idea where Nairobi, Kenya, even was. After thinking about it and for largely financial reasons I decided to take up the assignment and go to Nairobi which was one of the best decisions I've ever made. I had zero experience in Africa, I'd never set foot on the continent and was sent out as political counselor there.

Q: Okay this would have been when?

EASTHAM: 1989, in the middle of the year.

Q: And you went there until when?

EASTHAM: 1992, March.

Q: What was the situation in Kenya at the time?

EASTHAM: Well Kenya was almost a stereotype big man state in Africa. It had only had two presidents, there was Jomo Kenyatta who was there at the founding and then his successor when he died was Daniel arap Moi who came from a quite small minority ethnic group in western Kenya. Moi and his close people had pretty much managed to maintain control, for at that point in 1989 Moi had been in power for 14-15 years. He was the chief, he was the head of things and there were a lot of people who were making money under his name. Kenya is a relatively rich country in Africa; they have a functioning economy. There were a lot of people getting very wealthy from various corrupt deals, but it was fairly peaceful, the tourism industry was thriving, the people

were fairly prosperous, it was not a bad time at all; there was hardly anything going on politically. There were a few interesting opposition guys, a couple of journalists and they were periodically thrown in jail or prevented from traveling and that sort of thing.

We had one very interesting episode in which the Kenyans agreed to take in a group of anti-Qadhafi Libyans who had somehow been encamped in Chad. They agreed to take them, if we would pay, for a temporary period while resettlement was arranged for these guys. There had been a change of government in Chad and they were viewed as under threat because the new government in Chad was much more friendly to Muammar Qadhafi than the previous government had been. So there was a kind of moral obligation on the part of the U.S. to take care of these guys and the Kenyans were very good about it. Kenya was an outstanding platform for things like this. It was a stable regional hub where we had access, where we had an agreement for the use of Kenyan airfields and ports for U.S. forces and it was extremely handy in certain instances.

I recall when the embassy in Mogadishu was evacuated and overrun. It was right at the moment of the first Gulf War when the forces were building up in the Persian Gulf and Jim Bishop was ambassador in Mogadishu at the time. He actually asked for U.S. military support in the form of a company of rangers or army or something to come in to defend his compound because he was unable to defend it. The decision was made that they should be evacuated but then the question was how. So what the U.S. government did was it turned around one of those Marine amphibious vessels that was far, far up in the northern Gulf; this ship was subsequently to participate in the so-called feint, where a successful effort was made to convince Saddam that we were going to go ashore with the Marines in Kuwait City, which we didn't. But one of those ships came all the way down the Gulf, went around the corner, came running down toward Somalia and they launched two big helicopters with marines on board at the furthest point that they could have; simultaneously they launched a fueling aircraft from Saudi Arabia. They refueled the helicopters full of marines twice at night over the Arabian Sea to put them in at dawn over Mogadishu, to land them in the embassy compound at dawn to begin the evacuation. At the same time, they put an AC-130 gunship up over Mogadishu for force protection, to take care of anybody who might try to shoot these helicopters down. I remember we were in the defense attaché office listening to the radio traffic; they had access to the coms between the ship and the helicopters and the AC-130. Somebody turned on a surface-to-air missile fire control radar in the city of Mogadishu and it was a near thing. Jim Bishop, as I recall, phoned whoever it was who had the radar controlled surface-to-air missiles and told them to cut that out because he was about to die; the AC-130 was just about to put down a bullet carpet on top of him. They got the helicopters in and, of course, the ship was steaming toward the coast; they evacuated all the Americans from the embassy plus they went out and got the Russians and a whole bunch of different nationalities of diplomats who were very unhappy when they were put off the ship in Muscat because the ship was going right back where it started; it was going to go back and participate in the first Gulf War. But it turned out to be very handy because the tankers and the AC-130 were not able to go back to Saudi Arabia; they recovered in Mombasa, Kenya, where we had access. It was a very handy thing to have the Kenyans there.

Kenya at that time was just beginning to think about democracy and it took nearly another darn ten years for them to get to the point where they had a free election, which they have done. Now they are in a bit of a mess with the inconclusive result of the last election; they are now preparing for another one. First they have to get through a constitutional referendum now. I quite enjoyed Kenya, there was enough to do. We had an interesting ambassador. Elinor Constable was there for the first year and then along came Smith Hempstone who wrote a book, Rogue Ambassador: An African Memoir.

Q: Both of whom I've interviewed.

EASTHAM: You've interviewed Smith?

Q: Yes and Eleanor.

EASTHAM: Okay. I'll go have a look at Smith's one if it is up on the Library of Congress. Smith was very entertaining. He's died, of course, but he was a very, very interesting fellow to work for. He had his own very definite ideas about things.

When he arrived his understanding of Kenya was more reflective of his earlier years in Kenya in the 1950s and early '60s than it did the reality of Kenya in the 1990s at the beginning of the decades of the 1990s; but he quickly adjusted to it; but there was a lesson in it. When he arrived, it was very clear that the role he wanted to play was to be a sort of confidant, advisor, someone who could really talk to Daniel Arap Moi as a friend and to help him in what he needed to do.

Unfortunately, Daniel Arap Moi didn't want any friends of that sort, especially the American ambassador. Smith was sort of rebuffed by the establishment in Kenya; he was kept at arm's length. When he started speaking out on the atrocious things that the Kenyans did sometimes, he found himself not only at arm's length but almost completely ostracized and without access, although he could still ask Moi for special favors for the U.S. Moreover, he did not have the full support of the Africa bureau. There was actually an effort to remove him, which did not succeed because there was never anything so egregious as to justify removal and, in fact, Smith had quite a few people who thought he was doing the right thing.

Q: I think one sentence that rang through the corridors of Washington was I think when we interviewed in Mogadishu is " if you like Lebanon you'll love Mogadishu".

EASTHAM: Yeah, that was a leaked cable. Another was Smith's coming out as a human rights advocate, which would never have happened had President Moi cultivated Smith a little more. Smith had gone back to Washington for the annual Chiefs of Mission Conference. They took him around and he talked to some people on the Hill and various others in Washington. When he got back to Nairobi, he had a long-scheduled speaking event at the Rotary Club.

It was a speech about economics and U.S.-Kenya economic relations, that sort of thing. The econ counselor at the time wrote a dreadful speech with lots of economic statistics in it, and to top it off, Smith was not a particularly good public speaker; when he was given a text he tended to read it and mumble. He didn't do much with that speech, it was okay, it said what it needed to say but it wasn't anything that would excite you and Smith's delivery would make it even less so.

But Smith decided he would add a sentence at the end of that darned speech and he said something to the effect, I've just come back from Washington and during my consultations there I found a very clear tide, I think that was the word he used, a very clear tide in the Congress and in the administration to tie U.S. assistance, to provide U.S. assistance to countries that respect the human rights of their people, practice democratic procedures and that allow the full participation of all their citizens in civic life or something like that.

I didn't go to the speech but you could hear that thing reverberating around Nairobi from the moment he finished it at lunchtime. Apparently it just horrified all those ethnic Indian fellows who were in the Rotary Club that the U.S. ambassador would introduce such a blatantly political topic as respect for human rights into a speech at their club.

The next morning the newspapers put it above the fold. And there was a sad and unfortunate coincidence because Smith gave that speech on the same day that a number of the opposition leaders announced the formation of an opposition group to take on Daniel arap Moi. The newspapers made the juxtaposition that the Hempstone speech had been coordinated with the opposition leaders in order to produce a maximum impact on behalf of their opposition candidacy against Moi. This was absolutely not true.

In any event, the Kenya government went ballistic. The foreign ministry went crazy, they called us over and they said what is he doing? We noted that he didn't say anything about Kenya, talking about this tide in the Congress to provide aid only to countries that practice democratic institutions etc. He didn't say a word about Kenya in that sense but they took it that way and they very nearly expelled him.

I got on the phone to Washington and I said, "We absolutely got to have a statement from the podium at the press briefing today, today, today not tomorrow, not next week, today that expresses the full confidence of the Department of State in Ambassador Smith Hempstone. Otherwise, they will detect that there is not full support in Washington and they will throw him out." So we got a statement of some sort, but I suspect it was controversial because there were people in the Africa bureau at the time who would have been absolutely delighted to see Smith Hempstone thrown out, but it was a mini crisis. His relations with the Moi's people were never really very good after that. And at the end of his tour, one of the most widely reprinted photographs of Smith Hempstone was one of him being inaugurated as a Kikuyu chief sitting on a stool with a cow tail fly whisk in his hand. The subtext of that is that that is the single most annoying thing that he could possibly have done with respect to Daniel Arap Moi, who was not Kikuyu and who viewed the Kikuyus as his greatest political adversaries. So for the American ambassador

to associate himself in that way at the end of his tenure was perceived by many establishment Kenyans as another slap.

I subsequently went back to Nairobi and happened to be in Nairobi for the departure of a subsequent ambassador. This took place at a 4th of July reception at the residence. Moi attended, and he gave one of the strangest speeches I have ever heard. President Moi spent his entire speech – the real speech, after he had read his bland text -- commenting on how the successor ambassador had been such a better ambassador than Hempstone. He railed and railed and railed against Hempstone in contrasting him unfavorably with the Foreign Service officer who followed him. It was very uncomfortable and strange.

Q: Moi really didn't like the United States very much did he? I mean I know I've interviewed Pru Bushnell who had a rather personal experience there but she talked about when she left there it was not a friendly departure at all.

EASTHAM: No, but I think that is all over the continent. Diplomacy in Africa is very peculiar, based on my own limited experience with it. In countries that are authoritarian or trending in that direction there is always an effort to limit the role of the U.S. ambassador. The ideal U.S. ambassador in an African big-man authoritarian country is someone who gives a speech about every three to five weeks announcing a large donation of aid and saying, "We love you a lot." Aside from that they do not want to hear from us; they don't want to hear from us on human rights, they don't want to hear from us on present conditions, they don't want to hear from us on the absence of medical care or the fact that people are starving to death. They want the American ambassador to be like the other Africans and be a cheerleader for whoever is in charge; that in part was the dilemma of Kenya at that period. Moi thought he was doing the right thing, he was surrounded by people who told him he was doing the right thing and he didn't want any interference from the Americans telling him otherwise.

Q: What was your impression of Eleanor Constable as the ambassador?

EASTHAM: I didn't know her very well. I went out on a couple trips with her. She had some physical frailties in the sense that she was not unhealthy or anything but her vision was quite bad and that limited some of the things she could do; she had to adjust around her eyes. When I arrived she was in her last part; she was in her final year. I had the impression she had a kind of light touch on it; she wasn't running the embassy, she was not engaged with the embassy staff. She did the coordination of the interagency part of the country team but there was one thing that really rankled in that period. She and the DCM had elevator keys; this was in the embassy that was subsequently blown up. That embassy was, if I recall correctly, was four floors above ground and three floors below ground. The garage was on the second underground level and when the ambassador and the DCM would get in the elevator they would pull out those elevator keys and bypass all the floors in between as though they didn't want anybody to ride on the elevator with them. It was not like we were going up and down the World Trade Center building where you might stop on 20 floors or something; this is a four story building for goodness' sake.

A lot of people commented on that and that was seen to be rather symbolic the way that embassy was run.

Q: How about at one time and I can't think of his name, but a darling of the United States was a labor leader in…

EASTHAM: Tom Mboya.

Q: Yeah. How about say was the labor movement of any importance during your time?

EASTHAM: No, my experience has been that with the possible exception of South African, maybe and I'm not even sure about that, the labor movements tend to be co-opted in Africa. That certainly is the case in the country I just came from, Congo Brazzaville. The labor movement is largely a function of the establishment and the labor leaders are susceptible to being influenced, shall we say, but I don't recall an organized labor movement in Kenya at the time. We had a labor officer in the embassy and there were quite a few little programs for labor leaders to visit the United States and that sort of thing but there was no substantial collective bargaining that I recall in all of Kenya.

Q: What about the British community? I think back to stories about Happy Valley and all that sort of thing but what was going on; not just the British but the expat? Was there a significant and important expat community?

EASTHAM: Yes, when we got there having already served, my wife and I, in Pakistan and in Nepal, which was under substantial British influence during the hereditary prime ministership. One of the observations she made early on when we got to Nairobi was, "well this is an ex-British colony but they're still here." It was a very, very interesting community; they were a little bit insular. Some people were able to make lots of good friends in the community. The Hempstones were good friends with people they had known from the '50s and '60s; the DCM had quite a few friends.

Q: Who was the DCM?

EASTHAM: The DCM was George Griffin who was very kind in inviting me to come out there but he was a South Asia guy from way back. George had a long history; he was the target of a Soviet inspired propaganda campaign through one of their front newspapers in India that basically had blood on his hands when he was the political officer in Kabul.

Q: I think I've interviewed him.

EASTHAM: Yeah but George was the DCM. He had lots of friends amongst the expat community there. The British business interests were extremely important in Kenya at the time. There was a substantial American community too; we had some acquaintances who were Americans wealthy people from Texas who had a big ranch up in the highlands. I suspect what had happened was that Jomo Kenyatta had decided at independence to

reassure the investor community, the British community; he pretty much let them continue. Land ownership was not hard and even after independence you could still buy or lease a large ranch property up in the north. Adnan Khashoggi at one point had 50 thousand acres of Kenyan countryside; it was a fairly friendly business climate.

Q: I remember there used to be a saying that Kenya was for British officers and Southern Rhodesia, Zimbabwe, was for other ranks. In other words the upper classes of the British society went to Kenya whereas Southern Rhodesia Ian Smith and all came from enlisted ranks.

EASTHAM: It may be I don't know. I know a lot of the Zims they call themselves. We knew a lot of them, white Zimbabweans, who had moved just far enough to get away from Mugabe. There were a bunch of them farming in Malawi. In Kenya, there were a lot of British around and they all came out…you would go to the horse races once or twice a year and then there was a Christmas fair down at the golf club and that would bring them all out. It's important to note that a lot of them had Kenyan nationality. The British community from all over the country would show up and you would see people you had not heard of; it was a very difficult community to get into for an American. I suspect it would take more years than I had to be friendly with those guys.

Q: Was it a different political society in Mombasa?

EASTHAM: Yes, although Mombasa was, how would you put it, polyglot would be a good way to put it in that there were lots of investors who had put in resort seaside properties. There were lots of fishing businesses and that sort of thing and people would have sport fishing businesses. The Asian community is quite important, and the Swahili culture in Kenya is basically headquartered in Mombasa.

Q: That would really be the coastal trade people.

EASTHAM: And it was quite different; lots more Muslims down there than you would see in Nairobi and a different sort of a street crowd. You had several different sects of Muslims. The women wore different kinds of veils and that sort of thing. Lots more Swahili spoken down there. Nairobi tended to be an English language town whereas on the coast Swahili was very important.

Q: We had naval facilities didn't we in Mombasa?

EASTHAM: At one point there was a naval communications facility of some sort but that was pretty much closed out by the time I got there; they had had space for it at the consulate. We had an access agreement at the port and at the airport and we actually had a warehouse; we had a warehouse and a landing stage, it wasn't a facility. But what we had was an air-conditioned warehouse, a helicopter landing pad with two of those circles that they draw for landing and a boat dock; that was about all we had.

Q: How did the Kuwaiti invasion and our response to it play in Kenya?

EASTHAM: The reason we had the access agreement in Kenya was that CENTCOM war plan that I mentioned just a few minutes ago; the idea was that Mombasa would be important in terms of flow of material in case of conflict. At one point my understanding was we actually went in and blasted out the coral in the Mombasa harbor to make it possible to turn a carrier; you could steam in and then turn it around and steam out. They had to dredge and enlarge the depth of the harbor to do that. But in terms of the Kuwait invasion not one box of meals-ready-to-eat or anything went through there; there was no role for Mombasa at that point. I think that was largely though because at that stage we had begun the use of Diego Garcia. I think that the intention of having access on the East African coast had indeed shifted further out in the water.

Q: I think also in Muscat and Oman prepositioned a lot of things.

EASTHAM: Yes, but there was no role for Kenya or Mombasa in the actual event.

Q: Around the world CNN was pretty big. Was CNN going when you were there?

EASTHAM: Yes, sort of. There still wasn't any satellite TV at that time but as I recall the Kenyan television network, KTN, used to run CNN over its air facilities for a while. I do not think we had satellite at that point even; I don't think there was readily available satellite TV at all.

Q: So it wasn't I mean the military side was kind of a world wide spectator sport watching that. But that didn't have much play in Kenya.

EASTHAM: No. I remember watching that stuff but I don't remember how whether we saw it, delayed or whether we actually had a satellite feed of some sort. I just don't remember whether there was satellite available at that point or not.

Q: What was your reading on Moi?

EASTHAM: I thought Moi was not a bad leader actually. If I had wanted to give him advice I would have suggested that he look at the extraordinary wealth that was being accumulated by some of his closest associates. Extraordinary in the sense of hundreds and hundreds of millions of dollars that was being skimmed off of various things that were going on in Kenya at the time. From the point of view of the functioning of the country and the general policies that Moi followed it would be corruption and human rights that I would fault him for. The general direction of the economy was fine, there was a lot of business activity, things were thriving, there was no overt government interference and people could go about their lives. But he was extraordinarily sensitive to criticism; he would react to it in the domestic sense with his domestic critics and took the form of over the top human rights violations, harassment, arrests and that sort of thing; money was just blatant.

Q: What about criminality?

EASTHAM: That didn't start until later. There was a fair amount of petty crime in Nairobi and, in fact, we had one successful break-in at my house and one unsuccessful one. The violent crime, the carjackings and the shooting and that sort of thing didn't really start until about 1990. I suspect you had a blowback from the trouble in Somalia; weapons became more available in Nairobi, Kenya. At the time there were significant gangs of Somalis -- they called them Somalis, who knows who they actually were -- but Somali poachers out in the north eastern part killing elephants by the hundreds for ivory. They all had weapons and the weapons eventually made it into the Nairobi urban area so people started getting killed in home invasions and in carjackings. That is still happening but we never worried much about it, there was never violent crime until a little bit later.

Q: Kenya's neighbors Sudan, Ethiopia, Somali, Uganda, and Tanzania have much influence?

EASTHAM: At the time there was a huge UN operation providing relief in southern Sudan. It was called Operation Lifeline Sudan and it was under UNICEF. They had a huge base at a place called Lokichogio in far northern Kenya; airplanes, trucking and all that sort of thing to put relief into southern Sudan for the war, drought and floods and famine and all the horrible things that happened to people in there.

I had just arrived basically within a month or so when Omar al-Bashir took over in Sudan; that was in September, if I recall correctly of 1989; of course, he's been in power ever since. But the Kenyans were much more sympathetic to the southerners than to the northerners in Sudan. Occasionally we would meet with John Garang when he came down to Nairobi. The Kenyans would host him.

Q: He was the leader…

EASTHAM: Leader of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement, it means southern Sudan people. He would come down and accommodations were provided by the Kenyan government although they didn't want anybody to know about that. It was fairly simple to see Garang when he came down. We also hosted Jimmy Carter for a month during that period; it was over November-December, what year would that have been? Probably 1990 or '91. The former president was doing two sets of peace negotiations. He was doing a thing between the Ethiopian government, the Mengistu government at the time and the Tigrayan Peoples Liberation Front, to try to tone down the war between the government in Addis and the Eritreans, the Tigrayans and the Oromos. President Carter came and did that and he also had something going with the North-South conflict in Sudan because the war was under way on that front as well. Nairobi was handy for that sort of thing.

Uganda was, as I recall, there was nothing going on with Uganda; everything was normal, commerce was going back and forth, no problem. Tanzania was a little distant. My sense was that Kenya and Tanzania were always rivals in East Africa. At independence you had basically the East African community, which broke up

acrimoniously. They were very leery of forming up again into a regional economic body. Of course, now 20 years later that's been overcome and I think the East African regional economic grouping is probably going to move very quickly and probably outpace a couple of the ones that have been in existence for a while; but at the time it was pretty cool.

Q: Also Tanzania had taken quite a different course under Nyerere with his socialization of moving into collective farms and that whole thing.

EASTHAM: They came to realize that that stuff doesn't work; it took them a long time. By 1989 though Nyerere was gone; I don't remember who was president in Tanzania at the time, it just didn't cross my screen. It was not a relationship that made much difference to tell you the truth.

Q: Well you left there in '93?

EASTHAM: '92.

Q: Then where did you go?

EASTHAM: Well I had a hard time getting an onward assignment. During the time I was in Nairobi the then director general imposed a new requirement for promotion in the senior Foreign Service; at this point I was on the verge of promotion. He put in a new policy that gave me a new title, which I just loved. According to the director general I was now a "Language Deficient 01."

Q: Oh my God.

EASTHAM: Well, through no fault of my own I had learned the Nepalese language for my first tour and had managed to get off the first tour language probation with Nepali. My assignment pattern had been such that in fifteen years I had never learned another language. The Director General, Ambassador Perkins, happened to come out to Nairobi and I got an appointment with him. I said, "I'm perfectly willing to learn another language. How do we sort this out?" He said, "Oh, I understand." He then left and I never heard from him again. So as I was leaving Nairobi I didn't bid on any African positions or any South Asian ones because I needed a language. I put in my request for twelve different positions, at my grade, with hard language designations. I said, "Okay I'll learn Czech, I'll learn Hungarian, I'll learn Bulgarian, I'll do any of these hard languages, whichever you want." Well, it turned out that it was worse than that. The director general had decided to actively punish officers who were "language deficient 01s" by instructing the people who did the assignments that people in this situation could only go to service-needs positions. So I talked to personnel and said what have you got for me here, I haven't heard anything from you. They said, "Well, you could be the fisheries officer in Mexico City or you could be the labor officer in Caracas or we've got two really cool narcotics coordinator positions in Lima and La Paz; so which of those four jobs would you like?" I said, "Hang on here I'm the political counselor at a class 1 embassy and

while that doesn't entitle me to anything I would rather at least stay as a political counselor or go up be a DCM or something. I am willing to study any language you want to teach me." They said, "You didn't read the instructions. What we will support you for is service needs positions, so which of those four jobs would you like?" So at that point someone important from the African bureau came out and I threw myself on his mercy. He said, "I've got a deal for you. We'll teach you French and you can go to Kinshasa as the political counselor." So I did. I wound up in Kinshasa in the late Mobutu period.

Q: Okay, you were in this is still Zaire.

EASTHAM: At the time it was Zaire.

Q: And you were there from when to when?

EASTHAM: I got there in October of 1992 and I left in April of 1994. So it was not quite two years; it was a year and eight or nine months.

Q: You were taking French before you went out?

EASTHAM: I took seven months of French in between. That is why I left Nairobi a little early because I needed to start the French; I took French at the Foreign Service Institute. At that point Kinshasa was in evacuation status, it was an ordered departure; therefore no families. So my wife and my two kids moved to Arkansas for the duration. I had assumed that this would be sorted out but what had happened about a year before I got there was what they called charmingly in French, the "premier pillage," the first looting. This was the first time that the Zairian Armed Forces, unpaid for many months, had decided to collect what they were due from whoever had anything. This was in late '91. There was a big uprising by the army and a general disorder that resulted in the looting of stores and homes and that sort of thing. So the embassy had come down from a very large Cold War establishment. We weren't over the Cold War yet which had, if I recall correctly, prior to the first looting there were about a thousand Americans and family members in Zaire. In a period of 72 hours it went from over a thousand to 26. When I got there, we were 24, no families.

It was very peculiar because we had all this infrastructure; we had this huge infrastructure that was built for a large embassy. The mission had included a huge military mission, a big aid mission, a Peace Corps presence, everything and we were just rattling around in there like a few peas in a can. When I got there, for example, the ambassador had decreed a 10 p.m. curfew. We all had to be tucked in our houses by ten o'clock at night; yet at the warehouse we still had a 24-hour gas pump. There was some guy who slept over there all night in the theory that somebody might come up and get some petrol at the embassy pump. Lots of infrastructure like that was just so excessive. We were not doing a very good job of reducing it and consolidating it. We had what we called ghost vehicles, the Centers for Disease Control had closed its office at the time of the evacuation. It was very clear they were not coming back. They didn't know what to do with their vehicles so they

just turned them over to the embassy; there were ten Land Cruisers that we had no use for.

It was an interesting time politically. Mobutu had been pressured to agree to one of these sovereign national conferences; this one under the chairmanship of Archbishop Monsengwo of Kisangani. The Archbishop was out there every day on the radio and TV all day long in his droning way, going through the parliamentary exercise of creating a transition document from this national conference of some sort of new political dispensation. To some extent, this was theater because Mobutu had no intention of allowing anything to happen that would disturb his rule. He never came to Kinshasa. During my nearly two years there he was in Kinshasa for a total of three days.

Q: Was he on a boat or something?

EASTHAM: No, he was in his place up in the north amongst his people. I think that after the first looting he didn't feel secure in Kinshasa so he lived in the north; it was a long way, it was over a thousand miles up there. It was a two hour and forty-five minute plane ride in a twin-engine prop plane. It was something approaching a thousand miles to get to Gbadolite.

Q: It sounds like a pretty country.

EASTHAM: But the only time he came down was at the time of the second looting, which I was there for. It was a fascinating day; it was very, very tense and the atmosphere was bad in Kinshasa. The State Department regional psychiatrist had come up to visit us from Pretoria. Melissa Wells was the ambassador.

She had set up a meeting of all staff, all of us, minus a couple of marines, were supposed to be in the room for this group session with the psychiatrist. I was trying to finish up a telegram and the phone rang. It was the ambassador and she said, "Get down here." So, okay, I went to the meeting and the psychiatrist decided she would get us to open up about what the situation was like and this sort of thing. I remember telling her I said, "It is bad out there, it's about to pop, something is going to happen." That was at eleven in the morning and about one in the afternoon we started receiving reports that substantial groups of the army had gone to the central bank with their guns to get their pay because again they hadn't been paid for six months. A few minutes later you could hear the shooting and our main task was to get that psychiatrist on the boat and get her back over to Brazzaville, which was to get her out of our hair so we didn't have to deal with a TDYer when we were dealing with what we were about to do. There was unrest during the afternoon but about 5:30-6:00 we decided everything was calm so the security office gave the okay for people to go home. I remember driving home. It was dead quiet. There was nothing going on, there were no cars, nothing in the main area of Gombe, the downtown of Kinshasa. I got home and settled in and the all of a sudden my radio went off. They said, "Get your suitcase." We were always supposed to have a bag ready to move to consolidated housing we called it. "Get that suitcase. We are going to consolidated housing." It turned out that the calm was deceptive. What had happened was

Mobutu's generals had ordered that the downtown part of Kinshasa where we lived and worked be sealed off so that the looters couldn't get into it.

But then a group of mutineers had broken through anyway and the loyal Mobutu troops had chased them, found them, killed them in the street next to the French embassy, looked up to see who was watching them, and shot dead the French ambassador through his office window. The French DCM had called up to then the American DCM, John Yates, and he said a very touching thing, "John, do you have any coffins? My ambassador is here dead on the floor."

Q: Whoa.

EASTHAM: It was a lesson I learned a long time ago, that when people are confronted by something that is impossible, just impossible, to deal with it they often go to the smallest thing that they can control. In that case, the French DCM's case, it was, "What am I going to do with this body; I need to put it in a box." In any case, we were then in for three bad days. I spent two nights in the embassy listening to the shooting out in the street.

Q: Were you able to be armed and ready to resist any…

EASTHAM: No, we weren't going to do that, we were not under any particular threat. Our houses were under threat of being looted but the office buildings and the places…we had a system where we were in two locations. We had two apartment buildings in two different areas of town, and we moved everybody into one or the other of those apartment buildings so we could keep track of everybody. We had two places where we could do business, the main embassy building and one other building where we had the ability to communicate with Washington. We split it in a way where we had one person from every function on each end of town. So it worked okay. We just went to ground; we stayed inside until we knew that things had calmed down.

That was the only time that Mobutu ever came to town during my tour. I'm pretty sure that he came to Kinshasa during that period because he wanted to show that he was in charge and he wanted to fend off the arrival of French or Belgium paratroopers as had happened the year before, under the rubric of protecting the foreign community in Kinshasa. So he had to show that he was in charge and he came down to Kinshasa for a few days.

He did one of these particularly Mobutu things. He said, "I will assure the safety of the foreign community. In fact, I'm going to make my yacht available to assist in the evacuation of the foreign community from Kinshasa across the river to Brazzaville." The only problem was that once he made that offer the officials interpreted it as the yacht being the only way that foreigners could leave. The Belgian community was in a panic, they thought that they were going to be loaded onto that boat, taken out to the middle of the river and thrown into the water. They were deathly afraid of getting on Mobutu's boat for some reason and they didn't want to do it and there was a panic. The Belgians had to

negotiate it back to enable whoever wanted not to go on Mobutu's boat to go on the regular ferry. That was the point at which we knew that Mobutu's reign was ending. This was January of 1993.

It was a few months later that John Yates and I went up to see him. Of course, this was the transition, the Clinton administration was just coming in about the time this happened. You had had a change of government in France; you had a leftist government in France…

Q: Mitterrand.

EASTHAM: …you had the Clinton administration in Washington, the Belgians didn't matter very much or have much influence with Mobutu, but we managed to have for a very brief moment a coordinated position amongst the French, the Belgians, and the Americans on the question of Zaire.

That manifested itself in a joint demarche. All three of us had a common text from Washington, Brussels and Paris and so the three ambassadors got on the airplane and went up to Gbadolite with this demarche. Ambassador Wells told a wonderful story about it. She said as they were riding up on the plane they decided that the French ambassador would make the presentation even though he had been there the shortest time and he had not met Mobutu. Part of this was also he was going to present his credentials.

So Ambassador Wells said, "Mobutu is a nice man, he's got wonderful manners, he's very polite and solicitous of things but he has a quirk. When he gets angry he takes off his hat." Of course that was his famous leopard-skin cap.

So as she described it they went up to Mobutu's palace in the jungle and they went out to the air-conditioned summer house or glass house out in the garden where he always received his distinguished visitors. They started in on the demarche and the French ambassador gave a summary of it and then he handed over the paper. Mobutu put the paper on his glass table and he started reading the pages. He got down to the point about stopping unauthorized withdrawals from the treasury in favor of the Presidency, and at that point he took off his hat. He took his chief's symbolic stick, his baton that he used to carry, and he literally started banging on the paper, banging on the document that he been presented by the three ambassadors. So I guess that didn't go very well.

Subsequently John Yates allowed me to go along when he went up to see Mobutu to make a demarche on behalf of the Clinton administration. This was after Ambassador Wells left post. The Department, in its wisdom, decided that we should demonstrate how unhappy we were by not nominating an ambassador, and so John Yates became the permanent charge'. We flew for two hours and forty-five minutes up to a place called Moyale, which was the home of Mobutu's national security advisor, to present a letter from President Clinton to Mobutu. That was the only time I ever met the man and he was as described, polite, considerate to some extent, a little distant maybe but engaged and he

didn't look unhealthy although by that time he was certainly suffering from prostrate cancer; the prostrate cancer that killed him.

Q: What did you do as a political officer again in a country which is ruled by one man?

EASTHAM: Well, I spent a lot of time with the opposition guys of which there were quite a few, some of whom are now in government. There are two guys that I used to spend a lot of time with when I was there. One of them is the foreign minister and the other is minister of economic development or something like that.

We would try to understand the movement of the national conference, what was going on there whether or not it was going to achieve anything.

The Mobutu people didn't much care about the United States or what we thought about them.

But by then Mobutu had run out of money. He didn't have any money at that point. He had a large entourage, there were a lot of people who depended on him for a living and it became evident to me after a while that something had developed that I called the franchise state. The way he would compensate people for services rendered was to award them a franchise. There was, for example, one general who had the frozen chicken franchise. When I arrived in Kinshasa, the first day or two I was there. I went out seeking a super market to buy some supplies. I was looking for chicken and they had no fresh chicken but in the center of the store was a huge freezer case with little frozen chickens for about $9 apiece that came from Belgium. The frozen ones were always available but you had to look for fresh chicken. What kind of country can't grow chicken? Well, it turned out that chicken was franchised, there was someone who had the frozen chicken franchise for the country and they used the power of the state to prevent any fresh poultry industry from developing. So chickens were a cottage industry, not a product that went to market in an organized way.

Similarly, there was another guy with the egg franchise. His thing was that he supplied eggs to that huge city and he also had monopoly control of the feed. He had the only feed plant for chickens in the country. So he himself, that guy, could prevent others from coming up as significant egg producers because they couldn't get any feed. It was a very, very complex place.

Q: By the time you were there Zaire earlier on had the reputation of being sort of dominated, on the American side in the Cold War, and a base for the CIA. I take it that had long outlived its reputation.

EASTHAM: Yes, that is very true. As a point of fact, the Clinton administration decided they were going to make an example to Mobutu so when Ambassador Wells left they consciously decided not to replace her. They were going to send a signal to Mobutu that it's not business as usual. What is not known is that they did the same thing with the CIA station. They pulled the chief of station as well and told Mobutu that they were severing

the liaison relationship because it was not business as usual. I don't think that's a widely known fact but that is, in fact, what happened. It served no purpose. Mobutu didn't care. Sending that signal was ineffective, it was not something that served to modify his behavior.

Q: In many ways by the time you got there the Soviet Union either was in the process of or had disappeared.

EASTHAM: Well it came down while I was in Kenya so by the time I got to Zaire that is correct.

Q: The Soviet Union I think was in '92 when it ended. Zaire had always been the center of our Cold War posture in Africa.

EASTHAM: Well, but when I got there in 1992 we were pretty much disengaged. USAID spending had stopped. When I arrived in 1992 the USAID mission was one fellow, an administrative officer whose job was to safeguard the property. That didn't work very well in itself, since the USAID warehouse was the subject of what we called a "spontaneous distribution" during the looting in January, 1993. There were no programs, there was nothing, there were no program officers, and there was no funding in any sector. It was finished. So we had basically given up our own influence. We had basically said to Mobutu, We are out of here, buddy.

Q: It was pretty much over wasn't it. Would a failed state be a correct definition of it?

EASTHAM: Oh, yeah, but it had failed long before. It failed when the copper prices went down in the late '70s. You know Zaire had been a failed state since Ali and Frasier fought and all you had was the continued deterioration. They had a very brief period of about twelve or fourteen years when they were relatively flush in terms of national income and when they had some prospect for economic development.

But Zaire was the first place where I encountered this thing that I've seen all over the parts of the continent I've visited is what I call it the 'used to' phenomenon. There are so many things they 'used to' do. That was very evident in Kinshasa, they 'used to' fix the roads. Zaire was very fortunate to have had Morrison Knudson, Bechtel and whoever else, who managed to install a very robust and durable electrical power supply for Kinshasa from the Inga Dam; so we had electricity most of the time. We didn't have water, we didn't have roads without pot holes, we didn't have a very good school system and there were a whole lot of 'used to's'; we 'used to do' this. That was the problem with Zaire at the time, the continual decline of the physical infrastructure and the human infrastructure needed to make that big country work but they never quite got to the point of making it work before the decline started setting in. It's begun to come back lately but at that time it was in what looked like terminal decline; the mines were not functioning, people were selling off the mining equipment to make a few bucks. They'd sell perfectly usable mining equipment worth hundreds of thousands of dollars as scrap for export. A

lot of that stuff is now working in the mines in northern Zambia and in South Africa because it was shipped across the border thoroughly corruptly.

Q: Was there anything going around in Rwanda or what was the other country?

EASTHAM: Burundi.

Q: Burundi on the other side or whatever?

EASTHAM: Well see that was at the end of my tour. I left Kinshasa a little bit early and, in fact, I'm thinking it was around the first week of April of 1994. I missed the Rwanda genocide by about ten days because that is largely considered to have started around the tenth of April of 1994. What was happening when I departed post was that the Rwandan Patriotic Front had advanced substantially down towards Kigali; there was a negotiation going on about what to do about the Hutu-Tutsi problem. The triggering event for the genocide and the substantial flow of refugees out of Rwanda into eastern Congo was the shooting down of President Habyarimana's aircraft in Kigali, which occurred in April of 1994. In fact, I went on leave and I remember seeing this stuff happening and I called out there and I asked John if he thought I ought to come back, if they needed somebody because the embassy was still in that desperately short-handed situation of the ordered departure. But we had known for a better part of a year that something was going to happen that would lead to a large refugee influx into eastern Congo. What was unclear was what would trigger it; then we got to the trigger point and we found out what triggered it and caused the flow. But it wasn't what we expected. We had expected Tutsis, and it turned out that most of the refugees were Hutus, including a lot of bad guys, the perpetrators of the genocide and the ex-FAR/Interahamwe. The Rwandans had to react to this by sending their army into eastern Congo, and of course that was horribly destabilizing and it's gone on since then. It was very hard for us to cover events in eastern Congo from Kinshasa. It was a thousand, fourteen hundred miles and there was hardly any way to get there.

I remember John Yates telling me once about riding back from Goma to Kinshasa on top of sacks of potatoes in an old Russian plane. He didn't have a seat or a seatbelt and sat on top of the potatoes in the cargo hold.

Q: Well then you left there in we are talking about 1990…

EASTHAM: 1994.

Q: '94 and I guess this is as good a place to stop.

EASTHAM: Yep.

Q: Where did you go though?

EASTHAM: Bordeaux.

Q: Bordeaux oh my God.

EASTHAM: Yeah. It's a good place, a good transition because it is a completely different story.

Q: Okay well we will pick it up then.

EASTHAM: Okay.

Q: How did you get assigned to Bordeaux?

EASTHAM: Getting assigned to Bordeaux was difficult, as is usual for me. I had trouble getting an onward assignment out of Kinshasa for some reason and I didn't particularly want to stay in Africa at that time. I had a very difficult time getting an assignment and, in fact, it was a decision by the career development people. One of them said they felt sorry for me in Kinshasa trying to get out. I also talked to two or three colleagues who said, "Oh yes, they tried to assign me to Bordeaux but I didn't want to go." However, I found Bordeaux to be a very interesting and exciting place at least in terms of the political and economic reporting.

Q: Well now you were in Bordeaux from when to when?

EASTHAM: I was in Bordeaux for a little less than one year. I went to Bordeaux in 1994 and I left for New Delhi in 1995.

Q: What position did you have in Bordeaux?

EASTHAM: I was the Consul General in Bordeaux, which was not saying very much because it was a post of two Americans and about nine French nationals within the post. That said, it was a full-up consulate general; we provided all of the services that are normally provided by a Foreign Service consulate.

Q: Could you describe what the political/economic situation was in the area represented by Bordeaux?

EASTHAM: Of course, when you think of Bordeaux you think of the wine and I had the same misconception when I got there. But, in fact, the Bordeaux consulate had an enormous consular district, including most notably the area around Toulouse down to the Spanish border.

Q: The aircraft industry and all that.

EASTHAM: Where the aircraft industry is centered. I found the aircraft industry to be, in fact, one of the more interesting parts of my job. Of course, the wine was important and there was a certain historic value to the post, subsequently closed, in that the first of my

predecessors as consul general in Bordeaux went to post with a commission signed by George Washington prior to the adoption of the Constitution of the United States. I was the 44th and last Consul General in Bordeaux.

Q: My God. Did you know that the threat of closure was hanging over your post when you went there?

EASTHAM: No I didn't really. There was a Washington thing that was going on at the time; it was, of course, the beginning of the closure threat that had come along with the entry of the Clinton administration to power. There was apparently a dispute between the administration and Senator Jessie Helms who was at the time chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee over the State Department budget or perhaps it was the authorization bills since Senator Helms would have been more responsible for authorization than he was for budget. But that culminated in an agreement apparently between Senator Helms and the administration that the administration would have to close fifteen posts. Now that was an absolutely brilliant piece of work on Senator Helm's part; the point of view of reducing the State Department in the first place to define it as fifteen posts globally set the regional bureaus against one another for how many posts would actually be shut down. There was a continuing struggle to come up with a list of which posts would be closed. And I always thought it was all about politics, since nobody ever asked me if I could figure out any ways to save money. I tried to volunteer to reduce the budget by 20% and was told not to talk about that. In any event, the post's closing was not actually announced to us until the middle of 1995, June of 1995, just as I was about to leave. I had been told by Avis Bohlen, who was the DCM in Paris at the time, that this was being dealt with at a higher level. I did hear that Pamela Harriman, who was Ambassador Harriman at the time, Ambassador to France, was working it directly with the highest levels of the administration. Someone even once told me, I can't confirm this, that she had mentioned the issue of the continued presence in Bordeaux to President Clinton, without effect, apparently. But we had all assumed that the post would continue in existence until Ambassador Harriman came down in June of 1995 and told us that it would be closed.

It subsequently closed in early 1996. Now well before we learned it would close, I had found an opportunity to go to New Delhi for my dream job. But once I was assigned to go to New Delhi, which happened in February or March of 1995, it became very peculiar to me that the Department was not taking any steps at all to find someone to replace me. So I had very high suspicions that something was going on in the post; the Department was doing absolutely nothing to choose another consul general. The post was subsequently closed at the beginning of the following year, in 1996.

Q: Well let's talk about your view of the aircraft industry in Toulouse and elsewhere; that's Airbus and all that. Did we consider it a hostile power or what?

EASTHAM: Well at the time the answer was yes. There were a couple little things going on here. At the level of public discourse Airbus and the United States were not speaking to one another because this was the period following President Clinton's personal

intervention with Saudi Arabia, which resulted in the Saudis splitting a large commercial aircraft order between Airbus and Boeing. Airbus, in what I considered to be an exercise of hypocritical self-righteousness, labeled the presidential intervention on behalf of Boeing to be somehow outside the bounds of commercial propriety; they neglected to mention what the French had been doing in terms of making the sale prior to President Clinton's intervention. So we were basically not speaking to one another.

However, at the level of the consulate general in Bordeaux we had a very interesting thing going on. The visa waiver program, in which citizens in European countries can travel to the United States without a visa, depends on those European travelers traveling on a commercial airline which has signed an agreement with the U.S. immigration service to permit this to happen. If you go on your own airplane you have to have a visa and that meant that when Airbus was sending its employees across the Atlantic via its own aircraft each and every one of them had to have a visa in their passport. They got those visas at the U.S. consulate general in Bordeaux. So we had an arrangement that every other week a driver from Airbus would come down with a copy paper box full of passports, maybe 100-150-200 passports from Airbus employees and he would sit on the sofa in the entry way of the consulate and wait while we processed those; it was a day when we actually closed to the public so that we could process only Airbus visas. In exchange for this arrangement I got lunch with the CEO of Airbus once a quarter. It was an explicit arrangement. We chose not to talk about it in public but we had very good relationships with Airbus. So during the time I was in Bordeaux, I went to Toulouse to have lunch with Jean Pierson, the CEO of Airbus, three times. It was ordinarily not particularly insightful but I did have some contacts lower down in the company as a result of those lunches and that resulted in two very positive things.

On one occasion Mr. Pierson told me, and you will remember this was in 1994, that airbus was going to build that big airplane, the one that has now made its appearance as the A-380; now this was contrary to everything that was known about Airbus's intentions. In fact, at that moment there was a go-slow program between Boeing and Airbus to decide if they could make a big plane together. At the time the thinking was that something bigger than the 747 would have a very, very limited market and, therefore, it would be beyond the financial resources of one of the companies but perhaps not beyond the resources of two. I remember when Mr. Pierson told me this, he linked it to reforming the company, changing Airbus from what they called a GIE, a group of economic interests, a sort of coalition of individual companies, into a proper corporation that would raise its own capital in the capital markets. That was the sole precondition that he mentioned about building the 380; to transform Airbus into a corporation. I think that was subsequently what was done.

I went back to the office and wrote a telegram about this. The next day I got a call from the Boeing European office and they asked me to tell them what he had said. I said he told me they are going to build that big airplane. The Boeing people said, "No, that can't be true." I said, "I report what I hear and I heard something that was very clear." They said, "Can we come down and see you?" I said, "Sure, how about tomorrow morning at nine o'clock." So they hopped on their corporate plane in Brussels and flew down to

Bordeaux and we had a rather contentious conversation wherein they denied it was at all possible that the CEO of Airbus had actually said this. But events have, of course, proven that I was not the fabricator they thought I was and that Mr. Pierson was making an accurate prediction. It may have taken a little more time than he perhaps thought it would, but that plane is flying.

The other interesting thing that was going on at the time was quite sad and tragic with respect to the aviation sector in Toulouse. It was the developments in the company ATR, which stands for Regional Transport Aircraft, ATR in French. ATR had manufactured an aircraft which crashed; I believe it was on Halloween day of 1994 in Indianapolis. It was a particularly horrific crash as the plane fell from a great altitude and it was highly contentious in terms of the investigation of the causes as these things usually are. ATR was pointing toward the pilots as the cause of the crash; the pilots' groups were pointing at the aircraft design, specifically its performance in icing conditions. It was extremely contentious, and there was an FAA investigation and litigation. The company went so far as to try to demonstrate the aircraft's behavior in the specific icing conditions by flying an ATR behind a specially equipped C-130 that was spraying yellow-colored water on it to see what the icing characteristics were. The end of the story was that ATR basically went out of existence; they now don't manufacture those planes anymore as a consequence of that crash and the uncertainty of that investigation. A lot of the planes are still flying, but that particular turboprop commuter aircraft stopped being made. I spent a fair amount of time talking to the company trying to report their perspective; not because I believed their perspective but because I did feel that it was not being adequately reflected in the press coverage at the time of what had actually happened in this instance.

Q: Well now Airbus is a consortium which includes the British, the Italians and all those others doesn't it?

EASTHAM: Airbus was a consortium at the time. Airbus has now transformed itself into I guess it's called EADS, which is a corporate structure, which has the ability to sell stock and to borrow money on its own, which is something it did not have at the time I was in Bordeaux. They were highly depended on launch subsidies so-called from European governments, basically industrial support. They did not feel that they could raise at the time the $8-10 billion that it would take to design and begin and manufacture that large aircraft which is now the A-380.

Q: Well I mean but with Airbus one does think of the French of taking the lead. Were they really the major controller or spokespeople or what have you for Airbus?

EASTHAM: Pretty much at the time, although there were different nationalities reflected in the management structure. For example, there was a fellow, John McMahon, an American, who arrived in Toulouse in 1994 just about the time that I arrived there who is still there. He is their senior vice president commercial. He handles all the sales and is responsible for all of the maintenance and upkeep, customer follow up with the company so if you want to talk to senior management about buying an Airbus you, in fact, are going to talk to an American.

Q: Did the Airbus people in a way try to use you or they must have known you were presenting their ideas but did you have the feeling that they were looking to get somebody to present their perspective on things?

EASTHAM: No, not really. I did not get that; Airbus had contacts at a level in the stratosphere of American industry and American politics, government; they really didn't need me in Bordeaux to project their ideas. They were quite sophisticated. At the time, they were touting the fact that they sourced parts for Airbus planes from the U.S., all over the U.S., sort of like the Pentagon splitting up procurement among as many congressional districts as possible.

One little thing that I did do was the other way around. The commercial department came to me, the Foreign Commercial Service office in Paris. They said, "Hum, we hear you know some people in Airbus. We are having a problem. We are trying to do some materials for U.S. industry on how to sell to Airbus, how to put American companies who wish to manufacture components of aircraft for Airbus actually in touch with the right people in Airbus." They said, "After this business with the Saudis, Airbus won't talk to us. How can we fix that?"

I managed to find a door to open in Airbus with someone who was in a position to help to provide the information to Commerce Department on how to do this. I managed to put them in touch and Commerce finally managed to publish this little brochure. That was more difficult than I would have thought it would be. I pretty much had to get the CEOs acquiescence as otherwise the buying people would not talk to a U.S. government agency. So it worked the other way around, I was doing what I'm supposed to do which is promoting U.S. government interests with the host; in this case with the French government.

Q: Well how about another contentious issue. Did you get into the Frankenfood business? This is the manipulation of food through…

EASTHAM: No, that didn't come up. The only contentious food issue was a very small one. There were French maize producers, corn producers, who were very unhappy with us at the time. They inserted that the world corn market was no good for their product because of U.S. agricultural subsidies. So I had a couple of little protests of ten or twelve people come and stand up in front of the consulate holding corn stalks complaining about what they felt was the U.S. dumping of corn into the foreign market and affecting them very badly. The GMO issue did not pop up.

Q: GMO, genetically modified organisms or something like that.

EASTHAM: By far more contentious in Bordeaux was -- and I never got involved in this but it was amusing to follow -- was the issue of a particular wine tasting in California that stirred up a ruckus. The story is as follows: I got to Bordeaux and I realized that wine was a huge business there and it was not something that was extremely important to the

United States but certainly important to the region. So I was looking for an opportunity to write a wine cable. I wanted to do a cable reporting on where wines fit into both the relationship between the region and the United States and also into the region.

One morning I was reading the local newspaper in Bordeaux and there was a front page editorial by the wine critic about how the wicked Americans had chosen to reclassify the Medoc wines; the ones that are labeled as first growth, second growth, those terms, which derive from an exercise that occurred in 1855 based largely on the price of Medoc wines in the Bordeaux wine trade. Apparently a group in California had re-tasted the Medoc wines and re-classified them. The editorial wound up saying that essentially we French know a lot more about wine that the Americans because they were making wine when the Americans were still playing at cowboys and Indians. I thought, ah, there's my hook. So I wrote a cable that keyed off this rather vicious editorial about the uncultured stupid Americans to write about the wine, its economic value, how it is marketed, and the importance of the 1855 classification to the marketing of the wines of the Medoc. I sent it off and I never got any reaction from the Department about it, it was more basically something for the record, standard economic reporting, something that was fun to write and that perhaps would convey some of the flavor of Bordeaux and the region. But it had an unintended consequence. Subsequently I was told that during the decision-making process about which posts would be closed, the famous fifteen, the then-Under Secretary for Management, Dick Moose at the time, was charged with making the main recommendation to the secretary. He had asked for selections of the reporting traffic of each of the posts that were under consideration. Someone -- not my friend, I guess -- in the Department reportedly chose to put the damned wine cable on top of the pile. The reaction by the Under Secretary reportedly was, if that's all he's doing, let's close it.

Q: Oh boy.

EASTHAM: I don't know if that is a true story or not but it sounds like how Washington works.

Q: Well this is a problem. It's easy to get flip about things of this nature and probably somebody's idea of a joke. What about the politics of the area?

EASTHAM: Well it was also pretty fascinating to realize that just at the moment that we were quite publicly, it was a public issue in France, trying to decide whether to close Bordeaux or not, the Foreign Minister of France was running for mayor of Bordeaux. There was a mayoral election underway. The mayor of Bordeaux had been the mayor since he was sent to Bordeaux by de Gaulle after the Second World War; a gentleman named Jacques Chaban-Delmas. He was a famous Resistance figure and he was sent down basically to quell the prospect that the region would go with the Left. Bordeaux has some parts that are significantly Socialist, Communist enclaves, should we call it, with significant leftist sentiment. Chaban-Delmas was sent down to manage it and he'd been mayor since the late '40s for nearly 50 years up into the period we are talking about between 1994 and 1995. Earlier, he had been very vigorous, a rugby player, but by this time the poor man was in not very good health. I met him once and he was suffering from

various orthopedic problems, arthritis and that sort of thing; he was quite ill. So Alain Juppé, who was at that time the Foreign Minister of France, was running to replace him as mayor of Bordeaux. In any event, Mr. Juppé was elected, and as of now he is still the mayor. The region was not very, how shall I put it, there was not one political tendency that controlled the Bordeaux area, the city itself is very conservative, quite Rightist and some of the surrounding suburbs were quite Left and, in fact, there was one suburb that was led by a Green.

I found France's politics to be extraordinarily diverse. One department in my consular district, La Correze, for example, had the phenomenon of rural Communism. This was a phenomenon that the farmers, the peasants, the farm laborers had taken up the cause of collectivism, a cause of basically a Communist idea, which had been capitalized on after the Second World War. The mayor of Tulle, the administrative center of La Correze, Jacques Chirac's home department, was, in fact, a Communist and there had been a Communist mayor ever since the post-war period. But that didn't stop them from being French. In France you can pursue, you can be Left, you can be Right but in the final analysis they're all pulling in the same language.

Q: Did you find was there much in the way of I won't say anti-Americanism? We didn't have the Iraq War that came a decade later but did you find the intellectual or the British would call them the chattering class in the area sort of genetically set to distain the United States?

EASTHAM: No, not at all, not in the slightest. Everyone was always completely polite and there was really no public issue. This was after the first Gulf War and it was to my recollection there was no burning issue in the area that caused opinion to sway one way or another about the United States. The thing that I found with the French people that I ran into was the ordinary people whose fascination was sort of strange aspects of American culture. The cowboys and Indians, for example, the clothing, the music, the American culture was quite prevalent in France at the time; no one rejected it or said anything much about it. You heard a lot of complaining about McDonald's but the McDonald's three blocks from the consulate, if you walked by there at lunch time they had six lines going and they were all out the door; there was not an empty seat in the place. At the same time that French commentators and intellectuals disdained "McDo," It didn't stop them from eating the hamburgers.

Q: José Bové was not your area?

EASTHAM: No, that's a name I don't know. The one little terrorism issue was ETA, the Basque separatists across the border but that was being treated at the time as rather a police matter between France and Spain. I found it difficult even to find people to talk with about it. I would go down to Bilbao and Bayonne on the French side; it was fairly dormant at the time and it was treated as a police matter.

Q: Were you running into or was it developing the problems of what do you call the outer suburbs, the banlieues, my French is poor, immigrants coming in particularly from North Africa and not being assimilated.

EASTHAM: Yeah, there were a couple of neighborhoods; it's actually more in the center of Bordeaux…

Q: Ah.

EASTHAM: …where that phenomenon is evident. Amongst the consular corps in Bordeaux were, as I recall, Morocco, for sure, Tunisia maybe. We had consular colleagues who were there to look after their own residents but there was not a hostility towards… this was prior to the riots that have occasionally erupted in France during the last few years. But there was not a hostility, there was an on-going dialogue in the press and amongst the public about solidarity and integration, how to integrate the new arrivals fully into French society and about equality and fraternity with those other things about how do we make these people proper Frenchmen in the sense of sharing the same sort of calm and cultural values and those sorts of things. This was long before the French were debating headscarves.

It seems now that you have got me thinking about this that perhaps there were fewer immigrants in the country fifteen years ago than there are now. But it feels a good bit more as though it was a bit more tolerant at that point. Perhaps more than it is now.

Q: How did you feel about having to leave?

EASTHAM: I left purely for personal reasons because I had this wonderful opportunity to go to India; I felt horrible about closing the post. The idea that the post would close I think was a gross error on the part of the people who were running the place at the time. Okay, you can argue in a time of budget constraints that we have to make tough decisions but for goodness sakes the post had been there for 200 years; it played an important role in providing services to the Bordeaux population and to the 10-12 thousand Americans that we had identified who actually lived in the consular district. It was an important platform for projecting American values, for projecting American interests but that said, the post had been declining for quite a while. The foreign commercial service had pulled out its person over the objections of the embassy in Paris. What they did basically is they took their American commercial officer and sent him off on a long TDY and he never came back. There was no decision that FCS should not be present; it was a unilateral decision on the part of the foreign commercial service to have a presence there no longer. So half of one floor of the building was gathering dust as a commercial library that had at one point been fairly thriving enterprise, but they decided they needed that position in Paris; for what reason I don't know. Our public affairs person was a French national, interested mainly in culture.

Also the embassy in Paris was to my mind never attentive to anything that happened outside Paris. I thought at the time that it was an embassy that had taken on one of the

more pernicious aspects of French society and culture, which is the centralization of functions in the capital.

Also, I've often used the Embassy in Paris at that time as an illustration of the phenomenon of a large embassy. Here's how it works: It is place where there are so many people and whose functions are so divided into such small pieces that people spend the entire day fighting over their piece of the embassy's work rather than actually doing it. I often thought that in the Embassy in Paris, there were some parts at the lower levels that could go home and feel that they'd done a satisfying day's work without ever making reference to France or the French the entire day. The front office didn't see it this way. But it looked to me like a highly centralized American effort there and one, which was fortunately in part reversed a few years later when Ambassador Rohatyn went there and pioneered this concept of the American presence post, which are inadequate substitutes for full fledged consular offices. But at least it reflected the idea that there should be an American presence somewhere outside Paris and Marseilles.

Q: Well then you left there to go to New Delhi. What was the job in New Delhi and when did you go?

EASTHAM: I went to New Delhi in mid-1995 to be the political counselor. At the time in my view, it was a job I spent my entire career up to that point preparing to take. When I went to New Delhi I felt that it was a job in which the job and I were completely suited to each other. It was a job that I had coveted ever since I first became aware of how the service worked and I was very, very happy to go to Delhi as political counselor in principal.

Q: Did you feel at the time that our personnel system had gotten off on this idea that you had to have more you might say administrative supervision aside and all? I mean did this fall within the idea that it was sort of outside the path to upward and onward or not?

EASTHAM: No, what happened is I'll tell you the full story.

Q: Sure.

EASTHAM: Inside this is how it works in the department; maybe this will be interesting. When I got to Bordeaux it was an at-grade job for me. I thought the position was one grade over graded; it was a 01 position but it probably should have been an 02. It had historically been a senior officer's job back in the old days; the Bordeaux position had been a retirement job for a number of senior officers who were not going to be ambassadors. A lot of my predecessors in relatively recent times had been guys who were doing their last tours. In any case, I got there and then I was promoted to the senior Foreign Service within six or eight weeks of arriving in Bordeaux. I suddenly realized that a three-year tour in Bordeaux would eat up nearly half of my eligibility for promotion to the next grade of the senior service. Since I realized very early that I was in an over-graded position there was very little chance that that would contribute to my further advancement in the service. So I called up someone in personnel and said, "Look,

I realize I’m committed to be in Bordeaux for three years. How about let’s figure out a way to make it two?” He said “Why are you so pessimistic? Why don’t we look for something for next year?” I said, “Well I didn’t want to do that but as long as you are volunteering.” So we went down a list of service needs vacancies.

Now you see here, I’m trying to use service needs to move on, whereas going out of Nairobi three years before, I had complained about being forced into it. In any event, these were positions at the senior level that had been identified as urgently requiring people and there was a position in Khartoum, there was the position in Kinshasa which I just had, and there were several of them. Then he got down to the bottom and he said, “There is the political counselor position in New Delhi.” My reaction was, “Who do I have to pay to make this happen?”

So we started talking about it and it turned out that the assistant secretary responsible had someone in mind for this position but that person was not, however, in the senior Foreign Service, so it would have been a stretch for him. So we wound up in a big argument between the assistant secretary for the region and the director general’s office about whether I would go or not. It was eventually resolved in my favor; it was an unusual outcome for a senior position of one of the bureaus to be filled over the express written objection of the assistant secretary of the region. There was a memo to personnel, that did not refer to me by name but that argued that I was not eligible to be assigned because I still had a long time to go in Bordeaux. I guess the word was probably out by that time that the post was to be closed, and that probably helped me with personnel. But to my knowledge, there was no consideration of effective management, the right person for the right job, etc. It was all politics.

Q: Who was the ambassador?

EASTHAM: Frank Wisner, one of the greats of the service.

Q: Yes and the DCM?

EASTHALM: The DCM was Matt Daley.

Q: Did you know these people?

EASTHAM: No I didn’t know either one of them. I had met Wisner in Washington as a back-bencher in several meetings but I had never talked to him. He had decided to stay out of the personnel issue; he was going to leave it to the system to produce a political person.

Q: Refresh me, did you have Indian experience?

EASTHAM: I had the regional experience. I’d been in Kathmandu for three years, I’d been the India desk officer from ’83-’84 and I was in Peshawar from ’84-’87 and this was coming back to the region.

Q: At that time was there a South Asian bureau?

EASTHAM: Yes.

Q: Did you feel a part of it? Were you a member?

EASTHAM: Well I was trying to get back into it because it had been created after I left the Under Secretary's office. I think it was created while I was in Nairobi; anyway, I was away.

Q: Okay, so you served there from when to when?

EASTHAM: I served in India from 1995 to 1997.

Q: How would you describe the situation in India both American-Indian relations and also politically within the country at the time.

EASTHAM: Well this was a period of great turmoil in India. We went through a period where we had three governments within a month or so at one point in the second year of my tour there. The ambassador was trying very, very hard to strengthen the relationship; I think he was a bit frustrated with it sometimes because there were structural problems in Washington with a big structural problem being the issue of non-proliferation and the Indian nuclear weapons program. Pakistan was not such a big issue although there was a great deal of tension because of some unrest in Kashmir; there was significant unrest in Kashmir at the time.

In fact, this characterized the first five months of my tour. I was virtually one hundred percent occupied with the problem of Kashmir for the following reasons. In early July of 1995 a group of foreign tourists were kidnapped in the mountains outside of Srinagar by some of the Kashmiri anti-government militants; among them was one American, along with a German, a Norwegian, and a couple of Brits so it was a mixed group. By the time I arrived there a few weeks later there was a full-up crisis management structure that had been created with daily chiefs of mission meetings, ambassadors of all the countries affected. There was a great deal of support from the Indian government. They had helped us set up an operations center in Srinagar, which at one point had fourteen foreign diplomats in residence in the guest house in Srinagar attempting to manage this thing to try and get these people away from their captors and it was coming on winter. It was quite an extensive operation from July/August when we got there up to about March of 1996 when we began to realize something dramatically awful had happened to the kidnapped people.

Q: How did we work with the Indians? This was purely a military police matter wasn't it?

EASTHAM: Yes, but cooperation with the United States is always a political matter in India. We had a good relationship with the Indians at the local level in Srinagar but occasionally needed a little push from Delhi; in that case either the ambassador talking to the secretary of interior or the interior minister or with the military. There was also, obviously, an intelligence element to it as well. But the question was how do you negotiate this thing? It was interesting one of the channels that was used to attempt to influence the behavior of the kidnappers was via Pakistan to an Afghan by the name of Jalaluddin Haqqani who, as we speak in 2010, is one of our foes in Afghanistan; but at the time we were in a position to talk with Mr. Haqqani directly to attempt to elicit his support in communicating with the Kashmiri militants who were holding these people in India, Kashmir.

Q: Well how did this resolve itself?

EASTHAM: We don't know precisely. It resolved itself, we think, at least this is my theory with very little factual basis, but I think it resolved itself in December of 1995 when there was an encounter…encounter is a term of art in India that means a police ambush. There was an encounter between the police and a Kashmiri militant in which the Kashmiri militant was killed. We believed that the gentleman in question who lost his life in the encounter was, in fact, the leader of the group that was holding the kidnapped foreigners as well as their only communications link to the other leadership, shall we say, in Pakistan. When the adult supervision and the communications were removed, the best theory that I have is that the kids, the armed teenagers who were holding the foreigners, did what kids do, they took them in the woods and got rid of them. Unfortunately, no trace of them has ever been found, to the great sadness of their families. At one point the family members came to the conclusion that they were never going to see their family members again so they started moving on with their lives and that was sort of the end of it. It was a totally unsatisfactory resolution for something upon which we had spent so much time and effort over a period of months and months and months, not to mention a couple of million dollars of U.S. government money. It was extremely unsatisfactory but so far the matter is still up in the air and still open.

Q: Well how would you describe the political situation in India when you were there as far as parties and their interaction with each other?

EASTHAM: Well most of the time I was there the Right, the Bharatiya Janata Party of Mr. Atal Bihari Vajpayee, was in charge; Mr. Vajpayee was the prime minister. The Congress Party was in opposition and they were very frustrated by that because the view on the part of the Congress Party that they were the natural leaders but there was very little that they could say about it. Late in my time there they had an election and there was an inconclusive election in which Mr. Vajpayee was beaten by another gentleman whose coalition lasted a very, very short time. Then Congress came back in but it was a period of some instability in politics with at the time the rightist the BJP in the dominant position.

Q: How did we view the BJP? Were we concerned about the religious, nationalistic tendencies within it or not?

EASTHAM: No, they were people we could do business with. There was no reason to single them out. There was some discomfort and expressed unease on the part of some of the minorities, particularly Muslims in terms of this because you have, for example, one of the main leaders, number two in the BJP, Mr. L.K. Advani, whose role in the mosque destructions of the earlier period was quite prominent. You had this period where this component subsequently made up of the BJP, being a little more concise, were engaged in physical historical revision by destroying mosques built during the Mogul period on sites of significance to Hindus. For example, in Mathura, there is a mosque built on the exact traditional site of the birthplace of the Hindu god Lord Krishna. This mosque is still there, though it is heavily guarded by the Indian police. You have the same thing in Ayodhya where the Moguls built a mosque on top of the birthplace of the God Ram, in the traditional Hindu view. So in the BJP and its rise to power some more radical components of the BJP were determined to uncover the traditional Hindu sites by destroying the mosques. That was one of the apprehensions during the rise of the BJP, what will these guys do? Well they turned out to be responsible government people. Probably you can argue about that because at a subsequent point in our conversations we are going to talk about the resumption of nuclear testing under Mr. Vajpayee. At the time, in 1995, the Indian government was composed of people who were reasonable, who were governing India in a nationalistic way but who were also responsible and respectful of the diversity and the communities that affected the population.

Q: Well when you got there the demise of the Soviet Union had that left India a bit at loose ends or not?

EASTHAM: I didn’t see evidence of that. I thought the Indians were actually sincere about non-alignment, particularly after Mrs. Gandhi’s rule. They always felt they were nationalists even as far back as Mr. Nehru who, along with other leaders, invented the concept of non-alignment. In a funny way, their non-alignment was our problem, not theirs. Their reaction to the demise of the Soviet Union was to worry more about spare parts for their military equipment they had bought from the Russians than any sort of ideological commitment angst about whether they might meet the same fate. They were not worried about it, even as they began to think about the implications of the “sole superpower.”

Q: In the beginning India had always been this closed economics structure. Was there a palpable change while you were there?

EASTHAM: Yes. India was at that point beginning to open to foreign investors and there was a very interesting episode involving the Ford Company. I believe the Mahindra Corporation was negotiating with Ford to produce Ford automobiles in India. They were running a competition amongst the states of India to determine where to put the Ford plant. It looked as though Bombay had it all locked up and it was just fascinating to watch the chief minister of Tamil Nadu snatch it away from Bombay; that was a huge

investment. One American investment in India that we were trumpeting at the time turned out to be a very, very bad sour deal, which was the Enron power production plant on the western coast of India, the Dabhol power plant. The investment was controversial, largely for nationalistic reasons – angst about having a foreign company controlling what was expected to be a large portion of India's power sector, which up to that point had never been considered as anything other than a government-owned enterprise. It was a significant investment both because of its size and because it represented a change in Indian government policy. However, in fact, I don't think it ever started producing power, and of course, a few years later Enron ran out of steam and crashed in a big way.

Q: Yeah. Did you feel you were on a steady course, an upward course or what with Indian and American relations at the time?

EASTHAM: Yes, although some of the old frustrations were still there that sort of how would I characterize it? Over the period we are talking about I go back to my direct involvement with India I go back to 1982-1984, or there about, and in 1995 it was very different. In 1982, for example Mrs. Gandhi came to the United States and it was not very good, it was okay, but it was just cold, there wasn't much consequence to it. In '95 we felt that we were on a positive track, things were moving, Ford was coming in, Enron was there, the Indian states were asserting their right to pursue foreign investment without the strict involvement of the Central government authorities in New Delhi. It was kind of on a roll, it felt good. Pakistan was not such a constraint because, of course, three years earlier we had basically ended our military economic assistance to Pakistan; the Indians were not unhappy about that. They conveyed a feeling that things were returning to their natural order, shall we say. Also the traditional Indian view, I have no idea in 2010 whether it is still the case but, the traditional Indian view was the Democrats were good for India. At that point we were two and a half, three years into the Clinton administration and things were feeling not bad. There was a feeling that we were moving on.

Q: How did you find dealing with individual politicians?

EASTHAM: I found the Indian politicians to be quite accessible, particularly the folks from the younger generation. Some of the old line pols were a little bit hard to take, somewhat theatrical and not very open, but the younger guys were certainly accessible. There were lots of Indians I'd gotten to know over that time period. Of course, shall we say, the politicians in India at that moment were a bit less important to me than, for example, the Indian officials in the ministry of external affairs, which is a world unto its own.

Q: When I think of India and again I go back a long way I've never served there but you think of so many of them gain their credentials as officials and politicians at the London School of Economics view of Fabian socialism and all that stuff. Had that affected the ministry of external affairs?

EASTHAM: Oh yes the external affairs ministry is one of the best diplomatic services in the world. I have no idea how you can conduct foreign relations in a country as huge and

as consequential as India with that small number of people. That said, their point of view was decidedly London School of Economics and decidedly traditional, paper bound and somewhat indecisive. It was clear that the external affairs ministry, the senior people, the office director people, and the foreign secretary had a lot of decision-making influence and that affected the minister who had little to say. But from the point of view of ideology the older generation of Indian officials were very, very tied to a kind of world view. In 1995, that was beginning to go away after the end of the Cold War, but it had not much gone by that time from the ministry of external affairs.

Q: What about China? How did China fit into that?

EASTHAM: Well at the time the Indians had correct but not very consequential relations with China. The main thing to the Indians about China is that China was a close ally with Pakistan; China supports Pakistan. China occupies territory, which by rights is Indian both on the Pakistan side and on the East. So they were cool and correct with China and there was a long memory for the war in 1962.

Q: Were we making any efforts to bring these two giants together or were we content to let them go in their own way?

EASTHAM: Content to let them go their own way. Remember fifteen years ago our own relationship with the Chinese was developing shall we say at that point.

Q: Well then I assume the nuclear issue took up a lot of your time?

EASTHAM: No, not really. There were a couple of issues where discussions were pretty well closed off at any but the highest level. The two issues were Pakistan and the nuclear issue. On both of them we had gotten to a point where we and the Indians knew exactly what each one was going to say to the other and there was no new ground to be plowed. So it was a little bit sterile. There were not very many good ideas floating around there on the nuclear issues. In fact, that didn't break loose until 1998.

Q: Did you begin to feel the impact of the Indian migration to the United States as the Greek lobby and the Irish lobby and the Jewish lobby, etc.? Was there beginning to develop an India lobby that was discernable?

EASTHLAM: Yes there was. It was interesting there were a couple of politicians who came to India at that time. There was one Congressman from Ohio and there was former Congressman Solarz from New York and I believe there was someone from New Jersey, I can't remember the name, who came out to India during that period. It was clear that they had discovered the value of the India community in the United States. I sat next to a U.S. Congressman at a lunch given for him by the ministry of external affairs in Delhi. I asked him, "Congressman, how did you come to India?" He said, "Well I was running for reelection for the first time and I was traveling around the district and I noticed in these small rural towns all the doctors are Indians." He said, "I started thinking about that and I started thinking if I could make something of that for fundraising and it turned out I

could." Well what he meant was that his district doesn't care anything about Indian issues so he could say anything he wanted on the national stage about India, he could take India's side on any issue and with a little bit of publicity that could be used to raise money for his campaign. So he got lots of contributions from outside his Congressional district to support him because he took a pro-Indian position; he was viewed as a pro-Indian Congressman. No one in his district except this core group of Indian immigrants cared anything about India and so it was a very cheap issue. There were several other members of the U.S. political establishment who behaved like that. It's a political calculation that's a perfectly legitimate one today. It's not entirely risk free because it turns the Pakistanis loose on you.

Q: Yeah.

EASTHAM: The Indian lobby, so to speak, was mainly in terms of fundraising for individual members of Congress; Steve Solarz was a genius at this, at using his India connections for fundraising, for developing political support. He also had an Indian community in his district. He, of course, was the one who sponsored at the behest of the Indian community, the legislation to create the bureau of South Asian affairs. The perception was that if there was a bureau for South Asia then India would be at its center which is not an unreasonable assumption; so it was Solarz who pushed that through. My view on that when it passed was that I'd rather be the hind end of something than the front end of nothing. The bill was passed and, of course, we've moved on even further by the combination of the Central Asian states in the Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs.

Q: Well is there any other issue that you dealt with there? I thought this might be a good place to stop for this session. Is there anything else we should talk about in India before we move on?

EASTHAM: I don't thing so. I'll come back to some more when we talk about Pakistan because we are going on to Pakistan next.

Q: Okay, so you left India when?

EASTHAM: I left India in 1997 and I went to Islamabad as DCM.

Q: Okay, so we will pick it up then.

EASTHAM: Okay.

Q: Today is the 8th of September 2010 with Al Eastham and Al we are in 1997. You left India for where?

EASTHAM: I left India where I was political counselor to go and be DCM in Islamabad, Pakistan.

Q: All right in the first place who was the ambassador when you were there?

EASTHAM: It was Tom Simons who had been mainly in European affairs and had served as Ambassador in Poland.

Q: Yeah, well then you were there in '97 until when?

EASTHAM: I was there for two years 1997-1999.

Q: What was the situation at that time?

EASTHAM: Well the situation at the time was Nawaz Sharif was the prime minister of Pakistan as leader of the Pakistan Muslim League. I would say that my period there was characterized by the uneasy relationship between the civilian and military and, of course, it was a very, very important time because of the Indian episode of nuclear testing that provoked a corresponding Pakistani response.

Q: In the first place how were you used as the DCM?

EASTHAM: Well it was a little different between the two ambassadors; we also changed ambassadors half way through my tour; William Milam came along. Tom used me as the sort of chief of staff, chief organizer, and I can recall two episodes where in he gave me tasks relating to the management of the things that he wanted his DCM clearly to do. One was just after I got there was to try to help the consulate in Karachi to work through some very, very, very difficult personal conflict issues that were impeding the work of the post. The second was the management of the ordered departure or you might say evacuation. We were put on ordered departure in August of 1998 as a consequence of the U.S. response to the East Africa embassy bombings.

Q: That was in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam?

EASTHAM: That is correct. The Clinton administration had chosen to respond to the bombing of those two embassies by firing quite a large number of cruise missiles into Afghanistan. The only way to do that was to fire them from the ocean across Pakistan territory; there was a lot of drama associated with that.

Q: In the first place I realize on personnel matters can you go into at least what the problems were in general terms maybe in Karachi?

EASTHAM: Well the problem in Karachi was not as uncommon as you might think; I've seen other posts in the same condition. I won't name any names but unfortunately it would be fairly easy if anyone wants to go to the trouble of figuring out the names of personalities. The consul general was a brilliant political officer who just was not able to manage the consulate in terms of its people. This is not wholly his fault; the post's circumstances were extremely difficult and made up most of the problem.

The reason I say I've seen this in other posts was that Karachi had been an employee-only post, no families, for quite a while. There were some peculiarities to its working conditions. I think they are building a new consulate now so I'm not revealing any state secrets but the consulate had been built in the 1950s as an embassy; it had been built to be the U.S. embassy in what was then the capital Karachi; subsequently Pakistan moved the capital to Islamabad. But it was built in a very 1950's-'60s style as a glass fronted modernist office building right on a main street. The threat of a car bomb was dramatic in Karachi and it finally did happen a couple years after I left Pakistan. The consulate office building was evacuated from the front side, it had been built for a very large number of personnel, it was not being used fully so no one had an office on the street side of the building; everyone was in the back of the building.

There were some rather pathological security measures where every employee who had business to do or something to do in an office on the exposed side of the building had to sign a log book and record how much time they spent there, of course that was intended by the security officer to deter people from going to the front of the building. They had a randomized shuttle system of getting back and forth to work. No one ever knew what time they were going to work or what time they were going to go home; thus, there was a certain sense on the part of the people there that they didn't have control of their lives. Their office space was tightly regulated. Moving back and forth to the office and, of course, the randomized office shuttle was because several Americans had been shot to death during their commute a couple of year's earlier in Karachi.

As a consequence of that, Karachi was very difficult to fill, there were people, as always happens at posts that are perceived as dangerous or difficult, disease ridden or even not very interesting, most people just chose not to go there. Therefore, most of the people who went to Karachi were there for reasons quite apart from wanting to do the job in Karachi; they'd come for the danger pay, they'd come for the extra allowances, they had come because they couldn't get a job anywhere else, because of reputation issues or performance issues, because their marriages were breaking up, and so forth. So you had a very, shall we say, eclectic group of people in Karachi at that time and they had fallen into a pattern of interpersonal conflict that made the post rather dysfunctional. The consul general, the principal officer, either didn't recognize it, didn't want to deal with it or didn't have a strategy for dealing with it. So my assignment from the ambassador was to try and straighten this out. I did not succeed fully, but I managed to make a contribution to keep the lid on it until the natural process of transfers, the comings and goings, had resolved the issue.

Q: Well then let's keep with Karachi for a while as far as was Karachi different from Islamabad? I mean it was a major city wasn't it?

EASTHAM: Yeah, Karachi is a great sprawling place, At the time, it probably had nine or ten million people in it and it's got more now, fifteen years later. The post itself was less active than Islamabad. There was some commercial work to be done but unfortunately you couldn't count on having a well trained economic officer there to do it. The consulate work was fairly limited; there was not as much activity in Karachi as

Lahore. Karachi had changed so much when I was first in Pakistan in the 1980s. Karachi had over 70 Americans at the post; it was a regional center, there was a regional AID office, there was a regional communications office, it was easy to get around. By the time I came back to Pakistan ten years later that had all changed and Karachi had become a very difficult and threatening city to live in and it had come to be regarded as so dangerous that all of the regional things that had once been there went away. So you had a pretty much State Department only consulate with just the bare minimum of personnel; you had the principal officer, the political officer, an economic/commercial officer and consular officer, a management officer, a GSO, a couple of communicators and a couple of security officers and that was about it. It was fairly minimal as posts go. They really searched for what they were supposed to be doing in Karachi.

Q: Was there a strong fundamentalist Islamic core in Karachi? Was this where it was at that time or not?

EASTHAM: Well it was developing. You know Karachi is one of the most fascinating cities of the world in terms of its history and development. At the end of the British period it was a very small town, not much to claim. However, it grew exponentially after the mass migration of the partition. In the case of Karachi, a large group of people who called themselves Muhajirs, which means refugees in Urdu, arrived. These people were Urdu speaking Muslims who had come to Pakistan from India at the formation of Pakistan; they were mostly from Uttar Pradesh, from central India, from the Delhi area and Urdu speaking. They came to Pakistan and they found there really wasn't a place for them. Pakistan, of course, is made up of its own ethnic groups; there are four main ones the Punjabis are the majority, the Pushtoons or Pathans, the Sindhis from Sindh province and the Baluch. So all of these Urdu speaking people from Uttar Pradesh came over and they found that there was no real place for them. When the Punjabis came across they were ok, aside from the horrific violence on the way in Punjab, in terms of their reception. They were just moving from one part of Punjab to another but the Urdu speakers didn't have an ethnic home. So most of them, many, many of them moved to Karachi thereby displacing and outnumbering eventually the local population, the people from Sindh.

By the time we are talking about, the late 1990s there had been a further accretion through the population of Karachi of more than a million Afghans. They call them Afghans in Karachi, they might have been referring to either Afghans from Afghanistan or Pashtuns from the North West Frontier Province but in any case this population of ethnics from the Pakistan North Western Province boundary had come in and settled and had basically taken over the national truck transportation system, which was centered around Karachi's port. So you had a very volatile mix of a smallish population of original people who had been there before the partition and a huge population of relatively recent emigrants from northern India and another population from Afghanistan; it just made for a horrible mess because there were ethnic conflicts, there were resentments about relative position of these ethnic groups, there was a lot of violence and that is the sort of environment in which off-beat points of view can flourish, namely fundamentalist Islam.

Now we saw it somewhat later in the case of Daniel Pearl. The Daniel Pearl story happened right around the corner from the old consulate.

Q: He was a newspaper man who was beheaded.

EASTHAM: Yes.

Q: It was awful.

EASTHAM: The consulate, this was a later period, was car bombed as I recall there had been a car full of Americans gunned down on the street in 1995 and just assassinated right on the street. The perception was it was a horribly, horribly dangerous place.

Q: What were we expecting from Karachi? Was this a matter of flying the flag or was there anything that we could act upon or useful that was coming out of our people there?

EASTHAM: There was the port, the business center. It was the largest city and it made a lot of sense to have a presence there. The consul general, at the time, was very, very active, out in the community and with political figures. There was a political movement for example on the part of the Muhajirs; they actually formed themselves up to their quasi- ethnic group with this odd term calling themselves refugees. They displayed some ethnic solidarity and at one point there was a terrorist group that was gunning down people from Sindh. And the Sindhis resented the way these new arrivals from India moved in and took over majority control of Karachi. So it was important from a reporting point of view to understand what was going on down there.

Also it was a business center; that is changing over the years as people move north. Islamabad's lifestyle and physical setting and weather are much to be preferred over Karachi and also it is the center of gravity in the country where the government is. A lot of people are starting to move their headquarters and their main operations from Karachi up to Islamabad; but that was not the case.

Q: What was the political situation in Pakistan at the time? Sharif was he a dictator; did he have political support or what?

EASTHAM: Sharif was Punjabi first and foremost. He had wrapped himself in the flag of the Muslim League and he claimed to be carrying on the legacy of Muhammad Ali Jinnah in terms of Pakistan. He was a bit of an autocrat although he had been elected and his brother was chief minister of Punjab. Sharif was a pleasant enough man, I met him on a number of occasions. I thought he was a credible administrator, though he occasionally made inexplicable decisions, or at least decisions we did not understand. The problem with Nawaz Sharif and with Benazir Bhutto was that neither of them could satisfy Pakistanis for very long. This was Nawaz two, they called it, because it was the second time he had been prime minister, the first time he had been sandwiched between the Benazir Bhutto administrations; this was his second term. Of course, he subsequently was pushed out of office by what I call the accidental coup of General Musharraf, which

happened some months after I left Pakistan. Nawaz Sharif's prime ministership was characterized by his consistent effort to gain control and consolidate his authority over all of the institutions in Pakistan which might pose a threat to his government; his governing style. That included the office of the President of Pakistan, the court system, the legislature, and most importantly the Army, which was his ultimate undoing.

Q*: With the army one reads the accounts of Pakistan it is as though the army is an institution all by itself and within that institution is the intelligence arm, which has its own policy. How did we view it at the time you were there?*

EASTHAM: The army, well, we were very happy that we had a democratic administration in place in Pakistan, that is rare enough and Nawaz was elected. But in point of fact he was engaged in an effort practically from the first day of his administration to get control of the army by getting a loyalist, someone who was beholden to Nawaz himself or to some member of his family in as chief of the army. That was ultimately what did him in. We knew it was tense, there was a lot of tension between Nawaz and General Karamat, and I'll run you through that.

When I arrived in Pakistan the Chief of the Army Staff was General Jehangir Karamat, a true gentleman of the old style and a very, very nice man. He was subsequently Ambassador to Washington. But General Karamat was certainly aware of Nawaz's desire to play a greater role in personnel decisions at the top level of the army and that Nawaz was in cahoots with members of the army in terms of manipulating the appointment system so as to line someone up with a greater degree of, shall we say, felicitous interaction with Nawaz once General Karamat decided to retire. General Karamat was also philosophically…he was the author of a proposal to create a so-called national security council of Pakistan which would have membership shared between politicians and civilians and military in a way that has never been the case in Pakistan; it has always been the case that there is tension between the civilian side and the military side in governing that country. Of course, Nawaz Sharif didn't see it the way that General Karamat did. Nawaz Sharif thought that this was the military trying to insinuate itself relatively unconstitutionally and permanently into the civilian decision procedures to enable the military to participate in civilian political decisions.

However, events conspired to poison the relationship between General Karamat and Nawaz Sharif. One aspect of that was during the cruise missile episode I mentioned to you, which occurred in late August of 1998. What happened was a very bizarre set of circumstances partially instigated by the United States. That was a few days after the East Africa bombings, and we had been told to send away all non-essential personnel and all the family members. We put over 200 people on a DC-10 and sent them away after a decision from Washington came down. I always thought, well, nothing like signaling what you are about to do by withdrawing your personnel from the combat zone; but that was what Ambassador Pickering and others decided to do.

In any case I was sitting in my office one day and the non-commissioned officer from the defense attaché's office came in and said, "Why is General Ralston coming here

tomorrow?" General Ralston was at the time Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. It turned out that the defense attaché office, as a matter of routine, had been contacted by the air operations people to tell them that this VIP (very important person) aircraft with this four-star Air Force general on it was going to come to Islamabad in the early evening of the following day and that they would be leaving about midnight. We were obviously not supposed to know anything about it or at least I'm not sure whether the ambassador had known about it or not. But in any case what subsequently emerged was that General Ralston had been sent out with the express mission of having dinner with General Karamat in the evening during which we were going to fire the cruise missiles across Pakistan into Afghanistan. The idea being that if someone during dinner someone came rushing in and said, "General, general the Indians are attacking," General Ralston could say to General Karamat, "Hang on, it's us, not the Indians."

Q: Oh God.

EASTHAM: That was the idea. So, we didn't pay any attention to it, we pretended we didn't know about General Ralston showing up but it turned out, according to a Pakistani who told me about it later, as General Ralston was leaving Nawaz Sharif was arriving and they ran into each other out on the airport VIP apron or something like that. Nawaz saw that the Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs had come to see General Karamat and he did not know about it. Well when he woke up the next morning or was awakened during the night to learn that there had been a major U.S. attack on Afghanistan flying across Pakistani territory without Pakistan's, permission the suspicion on Nawaz's part was extreme, along the lines of "General, you must have known about this and you didn't tell me?" That was one element in the extreme suspicion between Nawaz and Karamat that poisoned their relationship and that, I believe, eventually lead to Karamat's resignation and General Musharraf's appointment and the accidental coup by General Musharraf that lead him to take over as chief executive and president of Pakistan.

Q: What was considered a nice little touch turned out to be quite a way to worsen relations?

EASTHAM: The unintended consequences of that action were profound. It was profound in the sense that, okay, it wasn't determinative but, in my view, it did contribute significantly to the atmosphere of suspicion and mistrust that characterized the rest of the coexistence of Karamat and Nawaz Sharif..

Q: Well how did we view the Pakistani intelligence service, which I take it is part of the military?

EASTHAM: Yeah, the Pakistani external intelligence service is called the Inter Services Intelligence Directorate, ISID. The ISID had been for a long, long time a close partner with the United States and various communities. I do not know if they even existed at the time of the Frances Gary Powers U-2 misadventure over Russia but you know I am using this as an illustration of the kind of relations we have always had with the Pakistanis.

Q: Yeah.

EASTHAM: It was a totally joint agreed operation, no problem, everybody knew about it. There have been similar things, different things over the years that have been done. During the Soviet occupation in Afghanistan, which, of course, was done earlier than the period we are talking about, the Central Intelligence Agency and the ISID were very, very close partners in terms of responding and helping the Afghans to fight the presence of Soviet troops in that country. Following the Afghan War I do not know the state of the cooperation between the CIA and the ISID but it is always the case all over the world that there are contacts between intelligence organizations so that would have been a normal thing during this period. The ISID in my view, is often times unfairly maligned; however, it is difficult to determine when they are being unfairly maligned and when they are being fairly maligned because the nature of that organization. They have been accused by the Indians of fomenting the insurgency in Kashmir. They have been accused recently of maintaining a relationship with Afghans who are on various lists as enemies and as legitimate targets of U.S. military in Afghanistan. It is very difficult to understand to what extent those tales are true. I suspect that the Indian part is, but I don't know about the Afghan part. But they are not the omnipotent, all-seeing agency, by any means but they do have a substantial capability to conduct covert, paramilitary operations in the region and even further afield.

Q: Again, we are going back to the time you were there. What was happening in Afghanistan as far as we were concerned sitting in Pakistan?

EASTHAM: Well for the first year we weren't sitting in Pakistan. Up until that cruise missile strike in August of 1998 we traveled frequently to Afghanistan. It was the embassy in Pakistan that was responsible for paying the Foreign Service nationals, I believe there were fifty of them, who were maintaining our property in Kabul. I, myself, went to Kabul three times, I went to Kandahar twice and I went out west to Shibergan and Mazar-i-Sharif in Afghanistan. I went up north to Taloqan, the headquarters of Ahmed Shah Massoud, to meet with him when he was at war with the Taliban. So we were quite active in Afghanistan. We made a judgment after the cruise missiles that it was simply too dangerous; the prospect of retaliation or kidnapping after the cruise missiles strike was just too high, so we stopped. The first year I was there those of us who were bitten by the Afghan bug would take every opportunity to get on a UN or a Red Cross flight and go over. Now as to what was going on, the Taliban was in control of the south and we used to go over to both Kabul and Kandahar and we would meet with Taliban officials. I came to know the Taliban "foreign minister" quite well; I talked to him a number of times in Kandahar. We would even go and see the virtue and vice minister. There was a ministry for promotion of virtue and suppression of vice, which was their sort of social enforcement. We would go see them and remonstrate and scold them about the treatment of women and all these brutal punishments, stoning and executions in particular that they used to do in public, in the stadium, to no effect at all.

Also we had a role in making sure that our employees in Kabul were taken care of. We even had offered limited consular assistance over there. We actually had an Afghan who

was a consular assistant who would go out and look for American citizens who needed some service or he would at least be able to put them in touch with us so we could try and help him. We actually did quite a lot

There was not a great deal of active fighting; the front lines had stabilized by that point between the Taliban and the Northern Alliance. There was very little in the way of active war but there was a great deal in the way of human rights jaw-boning and attempts to influence the Taliban when we were there. Our main concern, of course, was Osama bin Laden on terrorism. I recall a conversation I had with the "foreign minister," a fellow named Wakil Ahmed Muttawakil. The telegram reporting that meeting has been published on the website of the National Security Archive at George Washington University. I recall very clearly, it was the first day of Ramadan I believe in 1998 in November in which I raised with him, as I always did, our request that they hand him over to us. I mentioned that he had with him what I called those wicked Egyptians. The foreign minister looked surprised as I think he was not expecting me to call someone a wicked Egyptian. He went on and on and on again about if we would show them the evidence they would consider extraditing bin Laden that he was a guest in accordance with Pashtun tradition, but that if he was behaving badly they would do what had to be done. I told him it looked as though they were in league with him. And then I told him, I said to the foreign minister, "We know he is going to hit us again and when he does, God help you."

Which, of course, is exactly what happened.

Q: Were you getting reports? I realize you were just one of those but you are sort of on the front line. Were you getting a feel about the bin Laden organization? They had already done the African embassies and I don't know if they had blown up the Cole…

EASTHAM: This was after the East Africa bombings but before the Cole.

Q: Bin Laden was very prominent in all our concerns?

EASTHAM: Yes he was and we were hunting for him. I have seen published reports, I have no personal knowledge of this, that by the time we are talking about here and especially at the time of the cruise missile firing into Afghanistan the President had already signed a lethal "finding" with respect to Osama bin Laden. He had been indicted in the U.S., and was being hunted actively, and I am aware that there was some planning going on for covert operations for when they did find him.

Q: Looking to the east what was going on as far as we were concerned in Kashmir? Was this I won't say a trumped up cause but was this a cause that was begin particularly plain in order to justify the military or what?

EASTHAM: No, in fact what was going on in Kashmir had begun to settle a little bit. When I went to Kashmir during my India tour immediately preceding the trip to Islamabad Srinagar was basically a capital under occupation. There were sandbags and

hardwire and military checkpoints, patrols, curfews and all the things that one expects from a war zone. A couple of years later the focus, my attention, had shifted away from the insurgents in Kashmir, particularly the anti-Indian sentiment that was manifested in violence in the valley of Kashmir and the surrounding area. The Indians and the Pakistanis had become somewhat aggressive toward one another along the line of control, and there was a very nasty series of border clashes that occurred during my time there and continued a little bit later. It was sort of escalatory and you couldn't tell who struck first because each side has its own version of who, usually the other side, had escalated the level of violence. It culminated in the famous Kargil fighting and it took well over a month, I think, for the Indians to dislodge the Pakistanis from the high point that they had occupied. This was just as I was leaving, if I am not mistaken in 1999. It had come nearly to war with the Indians bringing in their air power and bombing these Pakistani positions; the Pakistanis fighting very, very hard to maintain them.

The problem in that case was that the military post that the Pakistanis had taken over had been occupied in previous years by India. What happened is the Pakistanis had gotten up there in the high area more quickly in the springtime than the Indians had, and when the Indians came up to occupy their traditional post they found somebody was already there and they started shooting at each other and it just went up and up and up. Now the Pakistanis said that was because the Indians had been shelling the road on their side and they decided to occupy that high ground to be able to suppress the Indian artillery fire, the Indian artillery that was firing on their supply road. The Indians said, "No, no, no, no, no the Pakistanis have occupied this so that they could shell this other position." It just went on and on and on escalating series of mutually exclusive rationales for just bloody minded killing. That went through three fighting seasons, three summer seasons during the time that I was…

Q: Were we or anybody else in the international scene playing a role in trying to stop that?

EASTHAM: Yeah, everybody was trying to stop it but there wasn't much you could do. Particularly that third year they had gotten the bit between their teeth and they were determined to fight it out. Eventually, Nawaz Sharif flew to Washington; this would have been in the summer of 1999, I believe, it was the Fourth of July weekend. Nawaz Sharif flew to Washington and Bill Clinton didn't have anything else to do so he received Nawaz over the holiday weekend and got engaged, and managed to persuade Nawaz to disengage. You see, Nawaz needed the cover of Bill Clinton and this was again back to my earlier point on distrust between the military and the civilians. Nawaz always asserted that he didn't know what was going on up there; that the military didn't tell him. The military would say in private that yes, we did, we briefed him with a map; he understood it and he said he understood it, we asked him questions and he knew exactly what was going on. Nawaz was accusing the military of not telling him about exactly what they were doing. So when he had to tell them to back off, he needed Bill Clinton behind him.

Q: Did Nawaz have any military background himself?

EASTHAM: No, none at all but once they got in the soup with the Indians Nawaz needed the soothing balm of super power, Bill Clinton, to back down from it. He needed to be received by Clinton; he needed the cover of American mediation, both for the Indians and for world opinion as well as his own internal public opinion and most importantly to be able to tell the army the Americans made me do it.

Q: What about during the time you were in Pakistan how did you view the effectiveness of the role of our embassy in New Delhi dealing with the problems there?

EASTHAM: Well I had just come from New Delhi and it was a unique situation. I didn't come out with the one-sided perspective. I knew how the Indians were, knew all of the players of each side, I knew how they operated, the mind of the foreign minister, how they did their decision-making and all that stuff. I brought that to Pakistan with me and so nothing surprised me on the other side. Let's see, I believe that Ambassador Celeste arrived about that time and Wisner departed. Celeste, of course, was not a career officer; he was director of the Peace Corps, Governor of Ohio, and is presently the head of Colorado College in Colorado. He really opened up the embassy in terms of making it a somewhat less buttoned-down sort of place than it had been before. I never had a problem with the embassy over there. In fact, it was full of good friends. The deputy chief of mission was Ashley Wills who had been the Public Affairs Officer when I was over there, the political counselor was Eric Tunis who I had known; he had replaced me there and had been consul general in Lahore when I was in Pakistan the first time, and I had known him for twenty years.

It was Eric who called on the famous day the Indians tested their nuclear weapons; that was one of the more fascinating incidents; this was in May of 1998. Eric called me one day from New Delhi and I was in charge because Ambassador Simons had gone off for a long-postponed vacation that he had wanted to take in Central Asia. He had gone up to Samarkand and Bukhara, for sightseeing. So Eric called me and said, "You'll never guess, Prime Minister Vajpayee just went on the TV and announced that India had tested several nuclear weapons." My reaction was, "Eric, cut it out. What do you want?" He said, "No, it's true."

Q: Oh my God.

EASTHAM: I was the charge in the embassy at the time and I thought well, okay, I need to think ahead here; it was about three o'clock in the afternoon and Washington was just about to wake up, they were not in the office yet so I knew I had a little bit of time to think about what the likely implications were going to be for U.S.-Pakistan relations. I figured okay, there is going to be a lot of phoning around, highly likely that the President may want to talk to Prime Minister Sharif. So I phoned the prime minister's diplomatic advisor, Tariq Fatemi, who also happened to be Americas Director General at the Foreign Ministry and said, "Tariq, where is he? There's been this nuclear testing and I would like to know where he is in case somebody would like to talk to him." I got a laugh from the prime ministers diplomatic advisor. "This catastrophe has happened and you think your people are going to want to talk to the prime minister? Not on your life. It's none of your

business where the prime minister is and it's your fault that the Indians are testing this weapon. And you must have known about it and didn't tell us!" I thought, "Hmm. This is going to be interesting."

Well about nine o'clock in the evening (about six hours later) I was called in to see the diplomatic advisor. I went over to the foreign ministry, and the interlocutor, the same gentleman who had hung up on my earlier in the day, preceded to ream out the United States of American by saying, "You guys know everything, you know when a small bird flies over, you knew the Indians were going to do this and you didn't tell us. What kind of friends are you? Blah, blah, blah and on and on and it's your fault."

I said and I subsequently reported this, "Tariq, you really don't want me to put that bucket of shit on somebody's desk in Washington the first thing in the morning. You have the opportunity here to take the high ground, you have an opportunity to show that you are better than they are, you don't have to go tit for tat with them. What I would like to see happen is you just think about it and don't make any decisions until we have a chance to talk at a senior level."

So I sent in a NODIS (no distribution) telegram to Washington, which I would love to see a copy of someday, and maybe I'll ask for one. My basic thrust was that I presumed that our policy objective in these circumstances was to try to persuade Pakistan not to test in return. Therefore, my tactical advice was that we might as well get the President of the United States involved in this now, because that is where it is going to go anyway.

The next morning I was told that a large delegation headed by Strobe Talbott, who was at that time the Deputy Secretary of State, would be getting on a plane to come to Pakistan late in the afternoon my time; morning their time in the East Coast. Well it turned out my dear friend from the foreign ministry was doing his level best to block Strobe Talbott from coming out and I had to fight a running battle throughout that day to try to get someone in the government of Pakistan to get the prime minister of Pakistan to say it was okay for Strobe to come to Pakistan.

Q: Why did they want to keep him away?

EASTHAM: Because he knew what Strobe Talbott was going to try to do was to persuade the Pakistan government not to test nuclear weapons in response. And they thought the Prime Minister might be susceptible to that argument.

Q: Did we know pretty well where the Pakistani's stood nuclear wise at that point?

EASTHAM: Well not in the details as far as I know, but we had certainly known something since at least since the first President Bush declined to certify under the Pressler Amendment that Pakistan "did not possess a nuclear explosive device." When the president declines to sign a statement to that effect what are you saying? That they have a nuclear device, of course you are.

Q: Yeah.

EASTHAM: It took the Pakistanis 17 days.

Q: Was there sort of the feeling with you and others that they had been, particularly the nuclear buffs or whatever you want to call them, hawks in the Pakistani military, were thirsting to be able to get out and try this stuff and show their stuff?

EASTHAM: Well, yes, that was prior to the decline and fall of Dr. Khan, who had been busily selling Pakistan's nuclear technology all over the world. Of course they wanted to test. It was the ultimate demonstration of shall I say the power and potency of the Pakistani state. The Indians gave them the perfect opportunity to do it on a level of moral, not even equivalency, but morale superiority to India by doing it more in regret than in anger. The Indians could not have done a more felicitous thing for the Pakistanis, to test and give Pakistan a chance to fire off theirs.

Q: Why did the Indians do it at that time?

EASTHAM: I guess the most pungent theory was that the BJP recognized it was in a perilous political circumstance and that there was an electoral or at least a political reason behind it. I don't think there was any particular scientific or strategic need to demonstrate that it was going to work. But the most cogent argument that I'd ever heard was that it was essentially political.

Q: Well in a way when you think about it this is a nuclear impasse; there is no where to go after that except exchange in nuclear weapons which doesn't make any sense on either side.

EASTHAM: No, no it doesn't and it probably will never happen but a lot has changed in the intervening years. We now have managed to slip around the corner of the non-proliferation law with respect to civilian nuclear cooperation with India, to the great unhappiness of the Pakistanis. Nobody is talking about moral equivalency for the Pakistanis with respect to civilian cooperation. I am sure the Pakistanis feel as grieved as they possibly can be that India is now in a position to benefit from U.S. cooperation and develop civilian nuclear power capability whereas we have declined to do so with Pakistan.

Q: Were you aware at the time of Mr. Khan's entrepreneurship or whatever you want to call it, dealing out nuclear…

EASTHAM: Yes.

Q: …business.

EASTHAM: Yes. That program was under very intense scrutiny of all kinds and in particular his activities were being very, very closely monitored to the extent it was possible.

Q: Was there concern about it slipping into the hands of terrorists?

EASTHAM: No, that wasn't the sort of thing he was doing. What he was doing is flogging his technology to governments and that is enough of a problem to worry about, as a threat to the nonproliferation regime. At that time I do not recall any particular discussion of the terrorist thing. Most terrorists don't have the kind of money in the first place and second they don't have the industrial infrastructure to be able to use what he was selling; I don't know of any terrorist organizations that have uranium mines to produce feed stock or uranium centrifuge enrichment plants or reactors to produce plutonium.

Q: Was there a ground swell of patriotism now we've got our weapon too so we are pretty hot stuff as far as the Pakistan body politics was concerned?

EASTHAM: Absolutely and that applies both to the weapons as well as the missiles. In fact, they call it indigenous but there is some indication that it isn't, in fact there is some public information to the effect that they got missile technology from North Korea. The same phenomenon applies with respect both to the weapons and delivery systems including missiles.

Q: With the mutual testing and all what happened to our relations with Pakistan? Did they shut down or what?

EASTHAM: Yeah, until September 11. It was very interesting; we had nothing going with the Pakistanis during this period in terms of aid, or in terms of substantial programs. We were suspicious of them in terms of their relations with the Taliban, we were suspicious of them because of the escalatory thing with the Indians, we were suspicious of them because of the alleged sponsorship of terrorist organizations in Kashmir, we were suspicious of them because of their relationships with various unsavory characters other than the Taliban and the extent; you know you could just go on and on and on. We had no aid program; we had no military cooperation, in terms of programs there was nothing going on.

Q: Did we feel that there was an alternative or things had gone so bad that there was something on the horizon, a different regime that might come in that might be better, or did we feel that this was the way it was going to be?

EASTHAM: Well no the only potential….you already had Benazir I, Nawaz I, Benazir II, Nawaz II; what's next, Benazir III? If anything she was a less capable prime minister of Pakistan than Nawaz. She was no great hero, at least in the view of the United States; Benazir was erratic, egotistical, consumed by the complexity of her own life, burdened by her family. At this point, Pakistani politics was at a dead end. The only possibilities for

leadership were Nawaz Sharif and Benazir Bhutto, and she very well might have come back had she not been killed.

Q: Were we in a way looking for a black knight from the military?

EASTHAM: Well, no, nobody wanted that, although from my point of view and I will talk about this later on, but from my point of view Musharraf was not half bad. He stayed on too long, but at least he managed to change the system sufficiently that there was a possibility of change and democratic leadership envisioned.

Q: After the nuclear business did in a way the embassy just sort of I won't say shut down but go on freewheeling, sort of sitting there doing anything? Was there much that could be done?

EASTHAM: Well there is always something that can be done in Pakistan. Like it or not the United States and Pakistan have a relationship that is of long duration and it stands unique in terms of its complexity; there is always something the American Embassy is doing in Pakistan. Whether it is jaw-boning about something or whether it is intelligence, consular work, or something horrible to deal with. We were not on pause by any means. The more significant problem with Nawaz when we drew down to 22 or so people in anticipation of the cruise missile attack, we really did wind up some stuff and put it on ice; we basically closed the entire DEA presence, a lot of people there. Because we were given a limit from Washington just how far down we had to go in terms of personnel numbers, it was almost impossible to avoid cutting entire sections but basically we decided we would have one person per office or agency or section there; that was not received too well by a lot of agencies.

Q: You left there in '99?

EASTHAM: Yes I left there in…when did I leave…I left there in June of 1999 and went directly back to the Department to be the principal and only deputy assistant secretary in the South Asia bureau.

Q: In a way you didn't feel you were leaving on a high note did you?

EASTHAM: Well it was okay it was the most interesting place I was ever assigned to in my career. You do get an adrenalin rush every day in Pakistan; we were hopeful we could do things with respect to Bin Laden toward the end. It turned out that the last year of the Clinton administration was much like the last year of every administration. It gets sort of too tired to do very much.

Q: Looking a it at that time did you feel that you had a life long profession of dealing with these two countries India and Pakistan; like dealing with other parts of the Middle East where there is never going to be a solution and we run around and try to be nice or try to make things less bad?

EASTHAM: Yeah, I thought so. The thing is it's always the case that the Pakistanis want the Americans there on their side and the Indians want us not to be too much there and especially not to be on the Pakistani side. So we were actually not in a position, had not historically been in the position of being very helpful with respect to the difficulty between the two.

Q: Was there any other country or organization that was playing a more useful game?

EASTHAM: Not that I recall.

Q: This is thing that keeps coming to me is that we are not always the best but if we weren't there nobody would be doing something.

EASTHAM: Well that's right. The Chinese are in the same position except the Chinese have always clearly chosen the Pakistanis and the Indians have a relative nasty history with the Chinese. The Russians were always on the Indian side, the Europeans don't matter very much, the British liked India better, but there is not anybody who goes out and is able to work with both to solve problems.

Q: Well Al I think this is probably a good place to stop here.

EASTHAM: Okay.

Q: We will pick this up in 1999 when you are going back to the what do we call it now Central Asia…

EASTHAM: It was the South Asia bureau.

Q: The South Asia bureau and you were the PDAS or whatever.

EASTHAM: That's right.

Q: All right and you did that for how long?

EASTHAM: I was there from June of '99 until the last week of August 2001.

Q: All right. Today is September 14th, 2010 with Al Eastham. Al, where did we leave off?

EASTHAM: Let's see, I believe we were leaving Pakistan and going back to Washington.

Q: This would have been when?

EASTHAM: It was early 1999. I was asked to cut my tour in Islamabad short by a year and come back and be the Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of the South Asia bureau.

Q: Who was in the State Department? You might explain there was an assistant secretary for South Asian and Pacific affairs?

EASTHAM: No, it was the bureau of South Asian affairs which had been created…

Q: Oh that's right.

EASTHAM: …oh in 1993 or 1994, which was composed of eight countries with India and Pakistan in the fore of it; it was a very small organization bureaucratically in terms of the regional bureaus of the State Department. In fact, we didn't have our own financial and personnel office; we continued to share that with the Near East bureau from which the South Asia Bureau had been separated by legislation in the early 1990s. So the bureau was responsible for India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, Maldives and Afghanistan and that was the total geographic responsible to the South Asia affairs.

Q: At that time what was your feeling about how it worked and fit into the bureaucracy of the State Department?

EASTHAM: I had the luxury of not having a feeling about it because that was true reality. I had earlier been skeptical of the need for such a thing. I may have mentioned that my feeling earlier that it was better to be the hind end of something than the front end of nothing in terms of bureaucratic clout. Historically, at least historically in my career, South Asia had been much more a source of trouble and of limited rather than real core U.S. interests. Of course, that has now all changed but unfortunately was still the case in 1999 when, in fact, we were still in the period where relations with Pakistan were not going very well and our relations with India were still under development. There was not much money appropriated for programs in the South Asia area and we had to deal with a lot of problems with very scant human and financial resources.

Q: When you say we had few resources to deal with the problems what do you mean in State Department terms of resources?

EASTHAM: Well I'm talking about appropriated funds under the foreign operations appropriation, which means the funds would go to USAID to conduct various programs around. There was the huge aid program to India, of course, because there had historically been huge aid programs in India but that had come to be expected and it just continued. That was all appropriated from development assistance, which was perceived to be in the domain of USAID and USAID resisted any effort by the State Department to say anything about what was in the development assistance program. The economic support fund account, which was much more a State Department controlled amount of money was very small from 1990 until after 2001, in the neighborhood of about $5-15 million or something like that. For a region with a population of well over a billion people it doesn't even rise to peanuts. It might be chicken feed but it was hardly worth even thinking about it in terms of having a significant impact on events of the region.

Q: You say AID was sort of an autonomous entity working in India?

EASTHAM: AID was pretty much autonomous all the time. I mean the people were very nice to one another but essentially the program allocation decisions, the basic rationale for conducting programs under the development assistance account was all developed in USAID and was only shared on a very cursory basis with the State Department in a normal course of development of the program consultation process leading up to it. So we really had very little to say about how it should be run.

Q: Before I leave that from your position did you feel it was on the right course doing the right thing or was it off on a tangent?

EASTHAM: Let me put it this way. I thought our aid program had little impact. Don't misunderstand me on this: I don't mean that it had little impact in terms of its impact on human lives. In fact, it did. USAID used to say quite often that the United States government provided a daily meal to two million Indians, which was a great thing. What I mean when I say it had little impact was that it had no impact on the shape of the political and economic relations between the United States and India, nor on India's economic development. The Indian government behaved as though it didn't care whether the U.S. government provided assistance or not. In fact, in this period we are talking about India was doing very well, as it has done since. The monsoons have been good for a number of years, India was sitting on a very large surplus of grain, something in the neighborhood of twenty million tons of surplus. They had been having trouble for several years ensuring that the wheat produced in great quantity in Punjab was actually distributed around India to where it was needed or to ports for export. They had inadequate rail transport to move the quantities of grain that were being produced; so India had huge grain reserves but yet the United States of America was still feeding Indians. Every once in a while I'd ask the question of why, if India had such vast quantities of surplus food, we were still feeding Indians. I never quite got an answer other than, well, we've always had a food program and, therefore, we have a food program. Of course it was P.L.480, which isn't a normal program, but this didn't seem to me to be very sensible way to run a railroad. But my questioning it was outside the parameters of the division of the responsibilities between the State Department and USAID in 1999-2000.

Q: But it does seem rather odd at the turn of the century I mean we had been wresting with aid over the years that here is something which was almost untouched by human hands; it just was sort of the fact of life almost.

EASTHAM: Yeah, it was, and what had happened was that by this time and you know if you look back on it and my time of reference on this is actually from about 1985 onwards, which was the first time I paid attention to how the foreign assistance programs were affected. What happened in 1992, of course, was the end of the Cold War but our budget cycle doesn't accommodate the ability to change away from the Cold War mentality, the Cold War spending pattern, to something new. Even harder to change is the mentality of the United States of America because we had two aid programs basically. We had the development assistance account, allocated under the direction of

US Agency for International Development, which wanted to run a relatively pure development program, humanitarian assistance, development assistance and all of the sectors of human endeavor in which the questions of politics would be invisible at worst and by preference not there at all. Then you had another allocation of funding called the Economic Support Fund, the ESF program, which was the purely political part, the Cold War tool, if you will, that was intended to support our friends during the time when we faced the global competition that was the Cold War. So you had the State Department running ESF and USAID talking about development issues. It so happened that in the grand scheme of things the South Asia bureau had hardly any influence on the development assistance account. That was over in USAID, and they didn't answer the mail.

It was a time when one could question the relevance of the South Asia bureau at all if it was not able to direct resources that were made available for employment in support of U.S. national interests in that region. Now the significant reforms came along later it was quite a bit later but I think that the situation that I just described persisted after 1999 which is the year we are talking about, for another several years.

Q: Well as the principal DAS your job was really to understudy the assistant secretary or did you have a specific area?

EASTHAM: Well that division of responsibilities of my experience is largely dependent on the status of the assistant secretary. In my case the assistant secretary was a political appointee, a fellow named Rick Inderfurth whose formal name is Karl F. Inderfurth. Rick had had a broadcasting career and was brought in to government in the first Clinton term to serve as one of the second tier ambassadors in the U.S. Mission in New York. Rick had worked for three or four years in New York with Secretary Albright. She was the U.S. Representative at the UN. When she became Secretary of State he came down with her to take over the South Asia bureau. Now it was not a geographic area that he knew very much about and, in fact, Rick's strongest skills at the time were presentation; he was very, very good at absorbing an issue and transforming it and telling it. He was very, very, very good at that.

He did not know much about the State Department, he needed someone who knew how to handle the various recruiting and personnel issues that came up, to shepherd stuff like supporting choices of ambassadors for various posts. There was a lot of internal stuff that he needed assistance with. We also had a very small office; there was the assistant secretary, the deputy assistant secretary and then we had one additional position as senior adviser to join us up in the executive office of the South Asia bureau but it was basically three people and support staff. We only had at the time; I guess we had three offices, subordinates, to the assistant secretary. We had the India, Nepal, Sri Lanka office and we had the Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh office and then we had an office of regional and public affairs, and that was it. We were very small; we were sort of squeezed into a corner of the building. The offices downstairs were a little bit squeezed and were carved out of the Near East bureau space over time. Of course, that is all changed and the South Asia bureau is a huge thing with an enormous staff, but during the period I'm

talking about we were very, very much the smallest, I think, at least relative to the other regional bureaus in the Department.

Q: Did the smallest and the limited number of countries play a role, say, in the secretary's staff meetings?

EASTHAM: No, and we were very fortunate that Rick Inderfurth had an excellent relationship with Secretary Albright. He had pretty much immediate access to her whether it was by a phone call or by informal written communications outside the system; he had very good access to her. At that time the secretary, in my recollection what two years and a couple months that I served in this position, Secretary Albright only occasionally but maybe once a week or less actually chaired the secretary's staff meeting. That part of the daily work at the State Department was run mostly by Strobe Talbot.

Q: Did Strobe Talbot have any affinity or insight into South Asia?

EASTHAM: Strobe's orientation on South Asia was very, very nuclear. One of the enduring frustrations, not about Strobe personally, about the way of the State Department was our difficulty in achieving consistency in our policies with respect to the Pakistani and Indian nuclear programs. Now it was in some disarray at this point because…

Q: Where stood it?

EASTHAM: Well as previously mentioned both had now tested; both India and Pakistan were overtly nuclear. Of course, neither one of them ever signed the non-proliferation treaty so theoretically at the level of international law, it was perfectly legal for them to develop and deploy nuclear weapons. But we really didn't like this. So we kept bouncing back and forth over what our policy should be. Sometimes we would talk about engaging them in dialogue, other times we referred to "cap and roll back" as our policy objective. Of course, neither India nor Pakistan wished to put a cap on its nuclear program until they had reached some strategically significant level of nuclear capabilities, whatever that was. We certainly didn't know what that level was, and I suspect they didn't either. They didn't like the idea of a cap and they even less liked the idea of a roll back but yet you had the non-proliferation folks in the State Department go up to the Hill and testify that our objective was to cap and roll back and it was very hard to talk to them when what you said we were going to talk to them about is putting limits on their freedom of action.

Q: Was there any sign that what represented the leadership of either state that there was unlimited nuclear stuff didn't bring anything except expensive and dangerous?

EASTHAM: Unfortunately, from the Indian point of view there were a whole lot of reasons to have a nuclear program. And there was a lack of symmetry between the Indians and the Pakistanis. The Indians would say, "Hey, we are in a dangerous neighborhood out here, we've got nuclear guys all around us. We've got Russia, we've got China, we've got Pakistan. We need to have a deterrent capability at least sufficient to suit our particular geographic and geo-political status. However expensive that is it

doesn't make any difference because our national security is at stake." Of course, the Pakistanis were the same way, evidenced at the creation by Mr. Bhutto's famous statement back in the seventies, "We'll eat grass if we have to but we will have it." The Pakistanis never talked about their Chinese ally as a threat but their strategic notion was that they, more than the Indians, needed a deterrent, they needed a deterrent against the Indians because of their own assessment of the Indian program, which, after all, had been demonstrated way back in May 1974. The Pakistanis had been working ever since that nuclear test to create a deterrent that could be effective against the Indians. Now what had happened in the late 1990s was that the unspoken deterrent, the ambiguous deterrent, what they called the "recessed deterrent," of a program in being but whose nature and scope was unknown. It had suddenly become more explicit with the actually physical test of the weapon by the Pakistanis. Now that doesn't solve the problem of ambiguity, it just confirms the reality. It doesn't resolve the ambiguity of what it is that you are facing in terms of the capability on the side of your potential adversary. So in a lot of ways the resumed testing made it worse because it provided energy for those who would argue that there was a bomb gap or something like that or a fissile material gap recalling the missile gap of the 1960s.

Q: Yeah.

EASTHAM: …in Pakistan where pretty much the same situation except that the debate was never conducted in public. It was always conducted in secret, and as military planners always do, they had to make the worse case assumption. In other words, in assessing the Indians, the planners on both sides would have to work out what they thought the other side's capability for producing fissile material, the limiting factor, would have been. They would have assumed that the other guy had X number of centrifuges or X reprocessing capabilities of plutonium. They would assume that everything would work perfectly all of the time from a date, and you would have to just arbitrarily choose one, because it was not publicly known when the production of fissile material might have started, and once you choose the date, assuming everything working perfectly, how many kilos of fissile material do they have? Divide that by however many kilos you think it might take the other guy to make a bomb and you get the number of weapons and then you start building your program based on that worst case assumption which was undoubtedly wrong on both sides. It was impossible to introduce any transparency on it; so it was very difficult. They were both working on a program that responded to something that was unknowable. So the only agreement they have in this area now is to exchange a list of nuclear facilities once a year.

Q: Was there the feeling that maybe, I say this politely, the settlement of Kashmir could stop the whole business or had it taken its own life?

EASTHAM: It had taken its own life for sure. At risk of oversimplifying, Kashmir had become so intractable that in the first place, one of the parties believed that there was no dispute. From the Indian side, the accession of Kashmir to India was perfected, and the only dispute was the illegal Pakistani occupation of part of it, plus Pakistan's support for separatists in Kashmir. On the Pakistan side, the accession of Kashmir was imperfect, as

had been evidenced by the UN Security Council Resolution in the late 1940s, which calls for the status of Kashmir to be resolved by a plebiscite to be conducted to ascertain the will of the Kashmiris. Under those circumstances there was no traction possible to make it less intractable because the two had managed to perfect along the way their mutually exclusive view of both the origins of the dispute and the possibility of its resolution. In other words, it was a truly perfected zero sum game. I always felt in my own opinion that Kashmir was important but it did not have very much to do with the national dread that led the two sides to move towards over-armament, shall we say, and towards development of nuclear weapons. There have been some new ideas in the decade since then, and I hope that those developments change the equation for the better.

Q: In a way, didn't the introduction of nuclear weapons almost ensure that the there wouldn't be any more wars between India and Pakistan?

EASTHAM: Oh I never thought that. They've come awfully close over the years. In the most unexpected way during my time within the fold, shall we say, of South Asia there have been at least three cases where just the smallest miscalculation could have resulted in a general war between them. Right now at this moment that we are speaking in 2010 I see it trending in that direction again. But nuclear weapons do not make the world safer, or even safer for conventional war. It might have been in the case of the U.S. and the Soviet Union just out of sheer blind luck but in the case of India and Pakistan I don't think there is any assurance in that. There are such disparities in the two countries that it is always possible for the issues between them to rise up to the surface and to express themselves territorially; that has been the case and I will give you an example.

During the earlier Kashmir insurgency during which I had direct experience in 1995 in New Delhi and following, culminating in the Kargil episode with Nawaz Sharif's visit to Washington, there was an insurgency in Kashmir which led to an Indian security crackdowns, security pressure against the Kashmiri population particularly in the valley, the Vale of Kashmir, Srinagar; but also along the frontier, along the border. As the two sides crept up closer to each other and they started doing silly things like occasionally firing mortars at the other sides there is a tendency when the rhetoric gets very heated and Indian accusations of Pakistani interference and Kashmir supporting terrorists and whatever, the Pakistani media covering what they called human rights abuses and atrocities by the Indian security forces against the Muslim population in the Valley of Kashmir, is a tendency for the soldiers themselves to get a little excited.

Q: Yeah.

EASTHAM: At the same time you have a hot insurgency in Kashmir and you have an increase in border incidents where there is a lot more firing or shooting or shelling and a lot more mortars across the border, a lot more tension that occurs along the line of control. It has not occurred along the line of international boundary between India and Pakistan as it is understood, everybody knows where it is it's just up in Kashmir where the dividing line between the two is disputed, where you have this trouble. I'm seeing

right now in 2010 there is another insurgency heating up in Kashmir. Will it be far behind for the border to heat up as well? I would submit probably not.

Q: How did you view the two parties at the time because we've talked before about this but particularly the Pakistani intelligence service has often been sort of made a villain as always trying to pull and set things up and that it is a power unto itself. But during the time you were PDAS how did we view it?

EASTHAM: There was a significant change during this period. After I arrived in whatever it was, mid-1999 in Washington, to take up this position; it was not very long maybe six months, before what I called the accidental coup took place wherein Musharraf ousted Nawaz Sharif. The proximate cause of that was Nawaz Sharif's attempt to take over the army, to control the army leadership. An aspect of that was his attempt to muscle the ISI as well. The Inter-Services Intelligence Directorate was the chief Pakistani external intelligence service, but it also had an internal role. But the army in Pakistan, whether you like it or not, whether it is right or wrong, has been historically, since the beginning, the only effective organization of government in Pakistan. It has proved that when the politicians go to the mattresses and I'm using that mafia metaphor …

Q: True.

EASTHAM: …intentionally it is always the army that that pulls the country back together. It has happened and whether you like martial law or not, it was Ayub Khan's era and people still pine for the era from 1959 until 1969 of the first martial law by Ayub Khan. Zia-ul-Haq, whether you like it or not that he had the prime minister arrested, tried, and hanged, Zia-ul-Haq led the country through a very, very difficult time when the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan and the Russians were on Pakistan's frontier. I seriously doubt the politicians of Pakistan would have been able to show the kind of nerve and muscle that existed during that decade. Musharraf's time in charge of Pakistan may be a bit too recent to make a commentary about but you have to say that he did a capable job in running the country and I do not think that he carries the entire responsibility for the coup, the takeover. Let me back up a bit.

There had been an attempt in early 2000 by Prime Minister Sharif to appoint someone, a general officer, to be the head of the Pakistan Army Corps in Quetta. This attempt was done without the full concurrence of the senior army selection process apparently and apparently particularly without the clearance of the chief of the army staff Pervez Musharraf. Now the Corps Commanders lead the boots on the ground in the various regions of Pakistan, so they are the barons of the Army. In addition, there had been another incident of some sort, it was never entirely clear to me what the basis of the dispute was, but in the months leading up to Musharraf's coup, Musharraf's takeover of the government of Pakistan, there were a number of incidents that lead us to understand that Sharif was trying to install friendly officers in key positions in the Army. Just before Musharraf's coup, we thought it was patched up, there had been a big meeting, it was widely reported in the press that Musharraf and Sharif had met and then a couple of days later Musharraf left the country for a trip to Sri Lanka. On his return as his aircraft was

flying around India approaching Pakistan they were given the word that orders had been given that Musharraf's plane was not to be allowed to land in Pakistan and that someone else had been appointed chief of the army. Things had changed in the army, in other words the coup, if you want to call it that, was Sharif's civilian coup within the army. Now it maybe was within the prerogative of the prime minister to remove and appoint the chief of the army but that is not without a certain risk, as was demonstrated in this case. Musharraf had interpreted this action on Nawaz Sharif's part as an effort to kill him because they were kept circling for a long time and the plane was very low on fuel when it finally landed in Karachi. Musharraf, obviously, did not want to land in India and so he circled for a long time. What had happened in the interim was that the army took over. I can just imagine the scene wherein the plane finally lands, almost out of gas, and General Musharraf comes down the steps and through the jet way and is greeted by the Karachi Corps Commander, and that officer says, "General, we have taken over. What are your orders?"

Q: Oh boy.

EASTHAM: I really think that that is what happened. Nawaz reached out to try to control the tiger and he couldn't stay on it and he was therefore eaten. And at that point Musharraf got on the tiger; Musharraf didn't have much of a choice, but he got on it.

Q: Well how did we react?

EASTHAM: Well we condemned it of course. We called for an early restoration of civilian rule and blah, blah, blah and how long did it take? Six years? Totally ineffective and, in this case, we were comfortable dealing with someone like Musharraf, I used to meet him occasionally in the social circuit when I was in Pakistan, and he is a thoughtful, if a bit blunt, man. I had lunch with him one day out in Rawalpindi when he was Army chief, at the Murree brewery owner's house. He was a person with whom we could do business. Now this was in October of 2000, and so we didn't have any particular business to do with him for about a year. We were in transition, you've got to remember that this happened at a moment when we were having an election and it was the Gore-Bush election that was going on at the time. So we were not reacting to much of anything.

Q: The problem in dealing with Pakistan that we realize probably a military government is more effective, less dangerous, less corrupt than a properly elected civilian government yet we have to go through the dance of supporting the civilians.

EASTHAM: No, I don't want to go quite that far. We have gotten along with military governments in Pakistan in the past because they happened to be in power at times when we needed Pakistan. The first one, Ayub Khan, was in power during the worst days of the Cold War period when Pakistan was part of the Central Treaty Organization, which was a containment device intended to wall off the Soviet Union in accordance with George Kennan's view, as modified by Truman and Eisenhower, of what we would have to do to limit Soviet expansion of the world. The second one was Zia-ul-Haq and we didn't get along very well with him the first couple years but we surely got along with him well

after the Russians moved into Afghanistan. Musharraf was another one and the Bush administration came in and didn't think very much of Pakistan; I was there and I know about it. They didn't want to have anything to do with Pakistan, just in general. The new administration seemed to be living in the first Bush administration, worth recalling that second Bush's father had allowed the Pressler Amendment to go into effect and limit U.S. assistance to Pakistan. The people who came in to the Bush administration of 2001 were veterans of that period; that's what they thought about Pakistan, that Pakistan had been lying. Pakistan had never been honest with us about its nuclear intentions or probably with respect to anything and, therefore, why should we care very much?

The White House -- and we are up to 2001 now -- the White House had a very different attitude because President George W. Bush was fascinated with India. One of the more interesting things that we did was to invite the Indian foreign minister to Washington fairly early in the administration. The White House seized on this, and a meeting that was scheduled to be with National Security Advisor Rice turned into a session in the Oval Office; Foreign Minister Singh spent 45 minutes with President Bush, this was in April of 2001. Our president was fascinated with India, he really wanted to do something to improve the relationship to fulfill what he thought was a major opportunity for business and people-to-people interaction.

Q: You were PDAS from when to when?

EASTHAM: From early 1999 until the end of August of 2001.

Q: What about the other countries in your area? Were there any issues particularly?

EASTHAM: Yeah, there were a lot of issues, there weren't very many that got State attention from the United States. There was the Maoist insurgency in Nepal which was a pretty much internal thing and the decision was not made until well into the Bush administration to supply the Nepalese army to enable the army to resist the armed insurrection/insurgency by the Maoists; so we were not doing very much at all except calling all parties etc., etc.. There was not much going on in Sri Lanka at this time, I don't recall it rising very high in our attention, nor Bangladesh; we were just doing the necessary work in regard to Bangladesh. Let's see, Afghanistan we had very little engagement and it was still the Taliban time; we had a caretaker policy toward it, just keep it where it is and keep trying to convince the Taliban they should do right both with respect to the bin Laden problem as well as the questions of human rights that had been so acutely worsened under the Taliban. We provided a great deal of humanitarian assistance.

Q: We knew bin Laden was in Afghanistan at the time?

EASTHAM: Pretty much thought so, but if you recall there was not much done about it. The key feature of my tenure as the PDAS was the transition to the new administration. I came in in 1999 and we were building up toward the election at that point and you had the Bush-Gore election and it ended strangely. The Clinton administration was as all

administrations are at the end of a second term, a little tired. There was not a great deal of creative thought going on, they'd lost a lot of energy and there were some things that happened with respect to bin Laden that were never acted upon.

We had the embassy bombings and nothing really happened. The cruise missile strike was inconclusive. There was not a very clean handoff from the Clinton administration to the Bush administration on terrorism. Dick Clarke has written about this period and he was there. The problem with bin Laden was we couldn't figure out a way to get our hands on him or anything else. It was a huge information challenge with respect to bin Laden's organization, with respect to the command structure, with respect to its planning, respect to his physical whereabouts.

Q: How about the Tamil thing down in Sri Lanka?

EASTHAM: Well that was going on but the main focus of it was human rights advocacy. We were doing a lot of advocacy work particularly with respect to the Colombo government because that was a particularly brutal and ugly war on both sides. But it was a fairly low-level insurgency and it didn't impinge on U.S. interests except for human rights and terrorism.

Q: Well then how did the transition go? In the first place it must have been very frustrating during what is traditionally the transition period watching people counting ballots.

EASTHAM: Yeah, well it was interesting. There was a caretaker attitude on everyone's part and the country's attention was focused on the Florida business and the law suit. We were all doing the necessary preparations for what would happen on the 19th of January of 2001 and fortunately it was resolved before the 19th of January. But, of course, everybody's attention was on that and not really on anything except housekeeping work in terms of the transition. When the transition actually occurred, one day Rick was there and the next day he wasn't. Then one day Secretary Albright was there and the next day it was Colin Powell and that transition when it actually occurred was extremely positive from the point of view of the State Department. Colin Powell and I think this applied during his entire tenure; Colin Powell was the Secretary of State who had affection and respect in the building in a way that no one had since George Shultz.

Q: How long did you go into the Powell period?

EASTHAM: I was acting from the 19th of January until the 31st of May. What happened on the 31st of May was that the new Assistant Secretary Christina Rocca was confirmed and sworn in; then I continued in the PDAS role from her entry into office from the end of May until the end of August. So that was June, July, August, another ten or eleven weeks after she actually came in.

Q: What was her background?

EASTHAM: She had initially been an officer of the Central Intelligence Agency and had taken a congressional program to work on the House side with then Congressman Sam Brownback of Kansas. When Congressman Brownback was elected to the Senate in Kansas, she followed him over to the Senate and was his foreign policy staff person. She came to the Department directly from the staff position with Brownback.

Q: What was your position of her grasp and direction of the bureau?

EASTHAM: Well that's a complicated question. I had known her before she was nominated and, in fact, when I had learned of her appointment somebody told me she was the one who was going to come I called her because I had known her before and gotten along with her just fine. I thought she had a good grasp of the issues. She was very Pakistani. I mean that if one could say that someone in Washington official was an advocate for Pakistan, she would be one of them. That was reflecting her boss' view, Senator Brownback was also very Pakistan oriented. She didn't know much about the rest of the region and she had no experience at all at what Rick Inderfurth was best at, which was making the case and public advocacy and that sort of thing. She didn't have any experience in public speaking and in fact had spent 18-19 years at the Central Intelligence Agency where one is trained and oriented not to talk about anything in public. She had a very steep learning curve to get ready to do media appearances.

I also had the impression that she may have had prior professional contacts with Rich Armitage, the deputy secretary of State but I don't think that she had become connected with Secretary Powell in the way that Rick had been with Secretary Albright. It was a bit of an adjustment in terms of the relationships between the bureau and the top leaders in the State Department. The problem though was not one of her, it was a problem of the orientation of the administration. They were in a time warp; it was as though nothing had happened since 1992. All of the world had gone by, the rise of the Taliban, the changes in Pakistan, the changes in India, things that were done during the Clinton administration were regarded as a nullity. It was very hard and in hindsight I probably didn't do a very good job of it, in that it was very hard to get senior attention to South Asia. I felt that they needed to make some early gestures in the direction of India and Pakistan. It was unconscionably difficult to convince them of the value that would have. By a month into the administration, the Indians were starting to say, when are we going to hear from these guys? They would say it to me at the official level. The prime minister was wondering what was going on and asked do you have anything to say about India or Pakistan or is there anything you want to know? Then we would get nothing.

I just proceeded along and I think I surprised the Secretary of State; it was probably not favorable to my future when I proceeded to implement a decision we had made in the previous administration, which to comply with a Security Council resolution to tell the Taliban to close their office in New York. We had already made that decision, we had given them warning that we were going to do it unless they complied with the Security Council Resolution. I called the Taliban guy down from New York and told him he had to close his office. I sent a note up to the Secretary; obviously he hadn't read it by the

next staff meeting. I mentioned it in the staff meeting and he asked me, "When did we decide that?" I guess I didn't handle it very well.

So I decided in March that something needed to be done as an interim measure with respect to both India and Pakistan but all of the countries. So I was discussing with John Byerly who was running the Newly Independent States part of the State Department, the so-called stans, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan and it turned out we were having the same problem. The stans were, like India and Pakistan, wondering where the administration was too; they hadn't heard from them. Of course, after the breakup of the Soviet Union they had a great focus on our policy and they were beginning to feel a little lonely as well. So John and I cooked up a trip wherein we would both go out to our respective countries and then I would come up to join him in the countries bordering Afghanistan for a substantive discussion on Afghanistan. John and I went out and did this thing in March or April of 2001 simply to reassure our country partners that the administration was just going to take a little more time before they started inviting people to Washington, calling them, etc. but that was symptomatic of the early start of the State Department Bush administration; they had to learn.

Q: Yeah well in the mega picture obviously India should dominate our concerns.

EASTHAM: President Bush understood that from the first day and that's why I did manage to persuade Secretary Powell to invite Indian Foreign Minister Jaswant Singh at the time to come to Washington and we did get him into the Oval Office. It was quite an interesting subterfuge and it was something the White House staff set up. They didn't tell me it was going to happen. We went over to the West Wing ostensibly for a meeting with then National Security Advisor Rice and we went into the Roosevelt Room and sat down delegation to delegation and she came to sit down across from the foreign minister. I thought, what a peculiar conversation, because she was clearly just marking time, she did not engage substantively, she kept talking but she was not engaging in any particular subject. Then there was some signal that I didn't see; someone opened the door behind me and she stood up and bang, in comes the President of the United States. We did introductions and handshakes all around and then in an incredible gesture the president said, "Well, Mr. Minister why don't you come into my office and let's talk." So in they went, I didn't get to go in, it was a very small group and so he was in there for about 45 minutes. I have to say I know Jaswant Singh when I was in New Delhi; he was in various important positions in the BJP government. I had been to his house and knew him fairly well and I had never seen him so ecstatic as when he came out of his 45 minute session with President George Bush in the White House. So that was the kind of thing that they did. The Indian foreign minister was received in the Oval office as a clear signal of the administration's regard for India. The Pakistanis were out in the cold.

Q: I guess you didn't have time to see this develop very much did you?

EASTHLAM: No I didn't. At the end of August I was informed by Assistant Secretary Rocca that it was her intention to change the team in the South Asia bureau and that it was not her will that I be part of it. So I left on very short notice having found another

job. I sort of regret it and wish it had been handled a little better because I would very much have preferred to been present in the South Asia bureau for what happened about a week after I left, which was September 11th.

Q: Where did you go?

EASTHAM: Well someone took kindly to me and offered me a job as the special negotiator for conflict diamonds; a position that was ad hoc and intended to do one particular thing which was to do the best we could to solve the problem of proceeds from sales of rough diamonds contributing to war. I took that job for nine or ten months from August to early September 2003.

Q: Okay then we will pick this up the next time when you are doing that job and we will talk about the issues and what was going on; of course 9/11 and all of that.

EASTHAM: Right.

Q: Okay.

Q: Today is the 23rd of September 2010 and this is an interview with Al Eastham. Al where did we leave off?

EASTHAM: I think we left off at the end of my tenure as principal deputy in the South Asia bureau did we not?

Q: I think so. We can always fill in if we find that doesn't work. When did that period end?

EASTHAM: Well in late August of 2001 I think I noted in the last conversation I was told that I should move along away from the South Asia bureau and go find something else. When I inquired as to when that should take place I was told that it should take place as soon as possible and I should find something else to do, which put me in a real quandary. But I left that job right around Labor Day at the end of August early September of 2001.

Q: I just wanted to nail this down. We have this fancy personnel system which is putting the right person in the right place and all that and then you get stories such as yours where somebody say "move on chap."

EASTHAM: That's exactly what happened. The exact words as I recall them were "I'm doing some team building and you're not in it."

Q: Well this was a change of administration obviously.

EASTHAM: That's right, and it was within the Assistant Secretary's prerogative to make changes to her bureau. She spent some time in June, July and early August thinking about

what she wanted to do with the South Asian bureau. She made a trip out to the region and when she returned from the trip she told me she felt that I should move along.

Q: Again just to get a feel I'm not trying to pinpoint any person except trying to get a feel for the process. What was she bringing to the table when she was appointed to that job?

EASTHAM: Well she had been very active in the context of serving as a member of Senator Brownback's staff on dealing with the problem of Pakistan. She and some of her colleagues up on the Hill had been active in attempting to overcome some of the legislative, and even administrative obstacles that presented themselves with respect to Pakistan, particularly the quandary of the legislation relating to Pakistan's nuclear program, the so-called Pressler Amendment and its aftereffects in particular, and she had been quite active in that part of South Asia policy. I do not believe that she had any direct experience. Her career experience prior to going to the Hill for first Congressman and then Senator Sam Brownback was as an employee of the Central Intelligence Agency.

Q: Had she worked on Pakistan there?

EASTHAM: Not to my knowledge but I don't know that. I don't know what her substantive focus was in the intelligence community.

Q: Did you feel as you were in this that you were out of synch personally or the policy was out of synch with the new administration or how did you feel about that?

EASTHAM: No, it came as a complete surprise to me. I did not up until the point where I was told that I should move along, I did not have any inkling that I was out of synch. In fact, I was told the contrary so it came as a complete surprise to me and took me a minute or so to realize that I was being told that I was being fired. But there was no substantive justification or any discussion about the reasons what might have been behind it aside from this question of team building.

Q: Of course, one of the factors that sometimes comes in, and I don't know if this was part of your situation is that when a new person comes in, particularly from the political side, they really don't like to have somebody who has been handling the business. They feel threatened. Do you think...

EASTHAM: I have no indication of that, I never felt that and I don't know what the precise reasons were for me being removed in this way. It presented quite a problem for me because this decision was about one week after the completion of the deliberations of the D Committee for that year; the D committee makes the initial cut that decides on what career officers will be proposed to the White House for nomination to ambassador for the following year. Somewhat to my surprise and chagrin this decision to remove me from that position or to ask me to leave that position had already been vetted with the director general and my successor had already been recruited which…

Q: And you had not been informed?

EASTHAM: In no way.

Q: Boy. Who succeeded you?

EASTHAM: My successor was Michele Sison, who had also succeeded me as deputy chief of mission in Pakistan; she was in Pakistan at that moment.

Q: So she was a real Pakistan hand too?

EASTHAM: Yes, based on that decision and based on the job that she had held at that moment in Islamabad. She had some South Asia experience and prior to coming to Islamabad she had been recruited out of the Consul General position in Madras (Chennai), in part at my suggestion, by Ambassador Milam to take my place in Islamabad. I put my weight in favor of his recruiting her to come and take my place because she was extremely capable, still is. I believe she is ambassador to Lebanon as we speak. She was an extremely capable and highly personable manager of people and resources. She is one of the best officers of the service and you can't do better than that to recruit a better officer to come and take your place in a place like Islamabad.

Q: Well now so there you are floating. What does one do when one is in your position?

EASTHAM: Well I was specifically directed to go and speak to the principal deputy assistant secretary of the human rights bureau. I did that as a good soldier and I went over and saw the people in HR and I was told there were plenty of excellent opportunities for me immediately available including service on the interview teams at the board of examiners and the possibility of serving as a senior inspector in the inspector general's office of the State Department.

Q: Well these are sort of parking lot positions. I mean there is nothing wrong with them I've served on the board of examiners myself but these are off to one side.

EASTHAM: That's exactly right and I got the clear message that this change had been blessed by both the Director General, in fact, and by the Under Secretary for Political Affairs. So I was to be put in a parking spot. That wasn't what I wanted to do; I did not feel as though I wanted to go off to one side as was clearly the building's intention for me.

Q: Did you feel sort of looking around had you pissed somebody off to use a diplomatic term or…?

EASTHAM: Yeah, I might have. I was not on the absolute best of terms…I really did not like dealing with the snake pit that was the seventh floor at that moment although you have to. I had made some mistakes along the way since the new administration had come in. Specifically, I did not understand the need to develop a personal face-to-face relationship with Colin Powell, at the time, or Deputy Secretary Rich Armitage so I had

not spent a lot of time polishing up that set of relationships other than attending and contributing to the morning staff meeting that Secretary Powell chaired every day during that period when I was acting assistant secretary. Furthermore, I was not on the best of terms with Marc Grossman who was the undersecretary for political affairs at the time. I got into a little fuss with him in trying to solve that policy problem at the beginning of the administration that I mentioned it the last time. About March of 2001 the Indians and the Pakistanis and a lot of others started asking where are these guys. We have not heard from the new administration yet on our questions and we would love to know what their thinking is about us. So I did a couple of things. I believe I mentioned the trip I took to the region to reassure our counterparts that the administration was there and that they were diligently preparing to engage with the world and that it would just take a little bit more time; but here I am and what would you like to talk about.

The second one was I arranged for or persuaded Marc Grossman to invite the Indian Foreign Secretary to come for the longstanding more or less annual consultation between the foreign secretary and the undersecretary for political affairs. Unfortunately in the correspondence relating to that I made some mention of the need to consult with people at all levels and someone on the Seventh Floor, a person who is still a serving U.S. ambassador, forwarded one of my emails to Grossman with the comment, he thinks you are chopped liver or something like that as though I was denigrating the under secretary's role and responsibilities in the administration. That was sort of out there when Assistant Secretary Rocca decided that she wanted to make changes in the South Asia bureau. So part of it was my own fault for not cultivating the garden, shall we say, with the new people who had arrived with the George W. Bush administration.

Q: Chopped liver remark it sounds like you have a normal check list that you would send. I can't see…

EASTHAM: I told the undersecretary for political affairs, who was the equivalent of the Indian foreign secretary on global issues, that this consultation was something that he must do in the orientation of the Indian government at that moment. The then foreign secretary had basically gained the position, as all of them, do by virtue of seniority. She was a very unassuming and sort of meek woman who, unusually for an Indian foreign secretary, did not play a powerful role in the Indian government, but I maintain it is necessary for us to talk at that level. From the Indian point of view, I think it was a successful gesture, but somehow I managed to make it into a negative rather than something necessary that might not be as productive as some other activities that the undersecretary might do but it is something he had to do. That was probably a question of inadequate salesmanship and failure to engage in puffery on my part.

Q: Did you feel that this new administration…we all know the problems it had in dealing with not too much later with the Department of Defense and the secretary and particularly and the vice president and all but in this early period did you feel there are an awful lot of people jockeying for position?

EASTHAM: Well my experience over probably the last twenty years of my career over the period that I've become aware of what happens during the transition to a new administration is that there is a rule and I think that you can probably confirm this with observation during any transition period including the one we are in now. The Obama administration is well into its second year and they are taking a bit longer I think, than a lot of administrations. What happens at the beginning of an administration is that everybody who comes in with the administration wants to do everything and as a corollary of that because everyone is trying to grab a piece of every issue it slows down, things get really slow, the nexus of power on any particular issue is very fluid. It doesn't necessarily match the organizational chart of U.S. government or of the State Department; relationships are being established and the work has not yet been divided up.

In the second year, we see this division of responsibility solidify and my observation only refers to the top of the State Department but I suspect it's the case in many other parts of the Department as well that they divide things up; the secretary does some things, the deputy secretary or secretaries, as is the case right now, do other things. The undersecretary for political affairs, based on a certain number of key issues these assignments may be made in the morning staff meeting with the secretary of state nodding. But if you are in that meeting you know that something just changed because the Secretary just told that guy to handle it and it may not be the person you would choose based on the position descriptions contained in the legislation or in the regulations that set up a particular office. So that is what was going on at this period is that we were in the "everybody does everything" period of the Bush administration.

Q: You are in this period of flux and you are cast loose. What happened to you or what did you do?

EASTHAM: I was very lucky; I had gotten to know all of the assistant secretaries by virtue of going up to the staff meeting every day with the secretary and I'd been doing that more or less frequently since I had arrived back in Washington back in 1999 and so Tony Wayne came to me after one of the staff meetings. Now Tony Wayne was, at the time, the assistant secretary for economic and business affairs and he walked up to me and he said, "I hear you are not going to be with us very long. I have a job if you would be interested in it for short term. It's a special position (what they call a Y position, which mean an indefinite off-the-books position, if you will and comes out of central funding rather than out of the bureau's own budget)." He said, "It has to do with conflict diamonds." So I said, "Tony, I am not an economic officer, I have never in my life thought about working in the EB bureau (the economics and business bureau). Are you sure?" He said, "I think you would be really good at it. It's a short term thing and you can do it for as long as you want and it should be really interesting." I said, "Let me look into it and see what the job entails and I'll come back to you."

I did and I went and talked to one fellow who was a staff officer working on conflict diamonds and I talked to the policy person who would be guiding me on this, Anna Borg, who was a deputy assistant secretary in the EB bureau at the time, and I thought well, that sounds pretty interesting. It was to serve as the U.S. representative to something called

the Kimberley Process which was a tripartite setup, with the three parties being governments, NGOs and the diamond industry to attempt to do something about the problem of diamonds fueling conflict. The Kimberley Process had been launched by the State Department Africa bureau a year or two before. The EB bureau took it over because it dealt with trade regulation first and foremost. It had gained considerable momentum during the period between say January and August that we are talking about of 2001 and we were about to embark on a series of international meetings intended to produce a regulatory text that provided an agreement for a system of regulating the trade of rough diamonds to ensure that proceeds of rough diamond sales did not go to warlords and others who were interested in fueling conflicts. So I took the job.

Q: Could you explain a bit about what was the diamond system was when you took over, what did you learn?

EASTHAM: The problem was that in Sierra Leone, Liberia, rebels had taken territory where rough diamonds were found and were selling those diamonds to earn funds that they used to fuel rebellion. Well, there was no regulatory system for rough diamonds. Rough diamonds were traded without regard to any sort of regulation except the normal maintenance of customs records for revenue purposes and it was quite a fascinating negotiating process. The idea had been triggered and intellectually sustained in a way by a group of non-governmental organizations most particularly an outfit called Global Witness from London but also an NGO called Partnership Africa Canada, which was based in Ottawa, I believe. Those guys provided the advocacy piece and the passion for solving the problem of diamond resource revenues contributing to wars and their associated atrocities in Africa; in fact, they had a larger objective. So you had the NGOs and then you had industry. The diamond industry was a fascinating piece of work. You had the mining sector divided into two pieces; there was the hard-rock mining industrial mining sector more or less personified by a couple of huge companies that do hard rock diamond mines.

Q: These are used in drills?

EASTHAM: Using explosives and drills and big trucks and grinders and quite high tech equipment in some cases. They said, “Look, we are not the problem. We produce our diamonds in our mines, we have control over the stream of diamonds as they move out of our mines into world commerce. Why are you bothering us?” This had been the earlier attitude of big companies like DeBeers, there’s a big Russian mining company, some mining in Canada, and there are a couple of Australian mining companies that produce diamonds in this way. The problem was in the other sector, which is the artisanal so-called mining sector which you find in Sierra Leone, Liberia, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. I just mentioned three trouble spots you might notice.

The geological process is that all diamonds were produced about a billion years ago in the center of the earth. They are extruded to the surface of the planet in geological formations called kimberlite pipes. Kimberlite is a rock term, a geological term, for a particular kind of rock that is extruded up from the center of the earth basically and

comes to the surface. Artisanal diamonds are found in areas where kimberlite pipes have eroded over millions of years and the diamonds have washed down an alluvial stream bed on the surface of the earth and, therefore, are available for mining close to the surface using techniques involving nothing more complicated than a bucket and water. It is those artisanal mines that were, and to some extent, still are, the problems in terms of generating diamond revenues for rebels.

Q: You are also dealing with something I've heard of since Rhodes and company have been dealing with a very highly controlled monopoly or at least an agreement of people. Diamonds, I've told, are really not that rare but the industry makes them; the artisanal are made to appear rare. Is that right?

EASTHAM: Well by the time I got into this the DeBeers company was totally and completely committed to the Kimberley Process. You are talking about DeBeers there.

Q: Yeah.

EASTHAM: The De Beers company had initially been very reluctant about this; they had taken the attitude of look, our diamonds are clean, they come out of a mine, they came mostly from mines in South Africa and Botswana and a couple of other places. This is not a problem for us so you need to talk to someone else. In fact, De Beers took some steps to restructure their flow of diamonds to the world market; they stopped buying Sierra Leone diamonds. I met a lot of De Beers executives during the ten or eleven months that I did the diamond negotiation and every single one of them cut his teeth on buying diamonds in Sierra Leone, sitting behind a counter and buying diamonds brought in by little guys who brought them in in a poke, wrapped in a piece of paper, that's where all De Beers executives started, buying diamonds from Sierra Leone and Angola. But they had restructured, they had stopped buying those diamonds; De Beers relied only on its own mines. They said, "We know where our diamonds come from you've got to go talk to somebody else. This is not our problem." But De Beers had come to realize that a diamond has no intrinsic value, a diamond has no intrinsic value.

Q: Yeah, it's just pretty.

EASTHAM: The undersecretary for economics and business, Al Larsen, and I used to have a lot of fun talking to him about this because he had risen, of course, to the top of the service but one of his first tours had been as an economic officer in Freetown, Sierra Leone. So he knew quite a bit about the artisanal diamond business and diamond trade from his early career service in Sierra Leone. One day he said to me, "I was thinking about diamonds again this morning. You know a diamond is a funny thing. If you buy it in the store it costs a lot of money but you can't eat it for lunch or drive it to work; it doesn't have much value." Of course, there is the long history of the brilliant and most successful advertising campaign of the 20th century by De Beers in the United States, that "diamonds are forever" advertising campaign. The term I heard a lot when I was doing this job was that diamonds are an aspirational product.

Q: What a wonderful word.

EASTHAM: Seriously, it means you want to be the kind of guy who buys your girlfriend a diamond. The marketing strategy that De Beers was undertaking during this period 2001-2002 was in association with LVMH, which is the marketing arm for Louis Vuitton luggage, Moet and Hennessey; Moet champagne and Hennessey Cognac. They were marketing diamonds entirely as a luxury thing, entirely as aspirational product. The idea was to milk as much value added out of this product as you could possibly do; a product, which has only a value calculated in emotion rather than its intrinsic use for the maintenance and sustaining human life.

Q: Well besides paying a lot of money for luggage.

EASTHAM: That's right. So that was the marketing strategy that De Beers had. Now the first meeting that I went to associated with this diamond thing was held in the De Beers headquarters on Charterhouse Street in London, which is where the vault is that contains De Beers' 3 ½ or four billion dollars in diamonds. It's the Grand Central Station of the diamond industry. Now De Beers has changed a bit over the ensuing years, but De Beers had a system whereby they marketed their diamonds, sold their diamonds from the De Beers Company to the manufacturers through a system called sight and that word is sight, S-I-G-H-T. There clients were called sightholders and the word means that every five or six weeks the sight holder gets to look at some diamonds. They go into the De Beers headquarters and they meet with their De Beers salesperson who is the person who has a long-term relationship with the client. They are taken into a room and there are diamonds displayed on the table; they call it, quite quaintly, 'the box'. They get a sight of the box. In the old days DeBeers would ask one question: Do you want it? And after they had gotten a look at the box the answer was yes or no, you buy the whole box or you buy none of it. It was the only way that De Beers was able to maintain the market in diamonds was by the mix of diamonds they put in the boxes for their 150 or so sight holders. If the price of some particular kind of diamond was too high or too low, DeBeers would adjust the quantity offered to the sightholders in the box. More, the price would go down as the diamonds entered the market; fewer, the price would go up. Since they had something in the order of eighty percent of the world diamond market passing through the London headquarters, they were very much able to control and maintain the price of diamonds. One of my friends in the industry, a sightholder, once told me it was a very strange world where he walked into a room about to spend up to $10 million, all or nothing. And of course if you said "no" too often then you might lose your "sight."

Q: Were these diamonds cut?

EASTHAM: No and that's an important point for me to make. With the Kimberley Process we were dealing only with rough diamonds; diamonds out of the mine prior to entering into what is called the manufacturing process. The market is segmented; I started off with the mining segment of it and then after the mining segment there is a kind of middle segment of diamond traders who are centered in a lot of different places around the world. They used to be almost one hundred percent in Antwerp or New York; now

Tel Aviv is a big sorting center, Dubai is becoming bigger and bigger and there are several other places around the world that are trying to get into the diamond sorting business. But here is the problem. At Christmas, Zale's or some large diamond retailer – Wal-Mart, for example -- Wal-Mart the biggest diamond marketer in the United States of America is Wal-Mart…

Q: Good God.

EASTHAM: …by volume, by dollars.

Q: Oh.

EASTHAM: If those guys want to sell 50 thousand, let's say, one carat of a certain grade, brilliant cut engagement ring, they've got to come up with the raw material for that. So you have an ultimate customer who is in retail, then you back up from that and you have the manufacturers, you back up from that you have this segment of traders of exchange houses who are responsible for assembling the raw material for the manufacturers to be able to satisfy the requirements of their customers. There is no place in the world where you can just buy ten thousand pieces of raw stock that can be cut into one carat, brilliant cut engagement rings. You have to go to Antwerp or Tel Aviv or Dubai and ask a trader to get it for you. There are these rooms wherein there are big lighted tables and lots of diamonds that are sorted and are traded in a way that enables the manufacturers to acquire the raw stock that they need to do the cutting. Now a manufacturer may on spec do the cutting and then sell it back to a trader who then sells it to Zale's or Wal-Mart or some other intermediator based on having already been manufactured and graded. It is real complicated and the horrible part of it from a regulatory point of view is that you are dealing with literally millions of small pieces of diamonds that are mixed in every conceivable way by this intermediate trade. There is no way to keep up with where the given diamond came from once it goes into one of those little packets that has 600 one quarter carat, brilliant cut diamonds in it; you can not tell where a diamond came from once it gets into that trading system. So that was the challenge that we were dealing with. If you meant to regulate the diamond trade, you needed to regulate from the source to the customers, but the reality you encountered was that middle segment of the trade where diamonds are moving around in a way where no one cares about the origin of it; they care about the size and quality. They don't care about where it came from, nor are they able to tell.

So what we decided to do was to clean up the whole flow. The only way we could figure out how to do this was to associate the major producing and consuming countries with a system in which whenever rough diamonds moved across international boundaries they were accounted for, accounted for in the sense of declarations made of a legitimate origin rather than coming from an artisanal source associated with a rebel group that was fueling conflict. So over the period from when I started in September 2001 up until March of 2002 we held a fairly intense series of negotiating meetings in which we tried to come up with a system that would meet the regulatory requirement that had been perceived, which was to insure that only clean diamonds made it into the intermediate step of the trade. It

also did not place an inordinate burden on the trade. The problem with that middle section of the trade is that you have high volumes of diamonds moving around and very low margins. If you have someone who is selling a packet of rough diamonds from his stock to another one's stock he is probably making two percent on the transaction. If you add a record keeping requirement into that intermediate part of the trade, if you could do that with a treaty, which I doubt, that required all diamonds wherever to be accounted for with respect to origins you would probably destroy some financially weak companies by adding to their interior costs in a way that destroyed their margin. So we were very conscious of that and the industry never let us forget it.

There were a lot of other subsidiary issues involved. The NGOs wanted us to deal with problems of diamonds being used as a vehicle of corruption, diamonds used as payments off the books for illegal services. The industry didn't want to do that and they did not think that they could figure out a way to do that with respect to their particular way of doing business. Now as we speak this year in 2010 there is an effort to broaden the scope of Kimberley regulatory system to capture diamonds that were produced in mines wherein there may not be conflict but there may be human rights violations and a specific case that has come to the table within the last few months is the case of the Marange Mines in Zimbabwe where there is forced labor and a lot of different things going on. But we were trying to deal with diamonds and conflict, not all the ills of the world.

Q: Do you want to describe what caused this. Why was this a particular attention at the time? What was going on?

EASTHAM: I can tell you after I took the job and started working on this particular project I would describe it to my friends outside of government when they asked what I was doing these days; I'd say I was working on conflict diamonds. They would make a particular gesture involving using one hand to chop off the other.

Q: Yeah.

EASTHAM: There was quite a lot of very graphic imagery particularly about Sierra Leone in the late '90s relating to the use of child soldiers, the brutality of cutting out people's tongues and cutting off their limbs and leaving them to be a burden to their families and unable to live a productive life. The perception was that this cruelty was fueled by the illicit trade of diamonds in Sierra Leone. That was the problem we were trying to deal with, the maiming and brutality that was taking place in Sierra Leone and in a couple of other places. We could clearly see that the proceeds of rough diamonds were contributing to this. The diamond industry, by the way, De Beers came along on this project because they eventually came to realize that if you thought that the campaign against wearing fur was bad, wait until a militant NGO starts running a campaign against blood diamonds. You saw the movie, which came along quite a bit after we had already partially solved the problem, but the industry was desperately afraid that they would get caught in an advocacy situation where every diamond was perceived as a blood diamond and their industry would collapse. That would have been pretty dramatic if people stopped buying diamonds. It would be a couple million people out of work and a massive

capital investment mining loss and a whole lot of disruption. The national economy of Botswana would collapse, for example; that was one of the two principles that we adopted during the course of this negotiation. One was to stop use of proceeds of diamond sales as a means of financing wars. The second was to preserve the legitimate diamond industry on behalf of those who earn their living in it.

Q: By the way maybe his time had passed but was it Maurice Tempelsman a big player in this at one point or not?

EASTHAM: I went up to see Tempelsman; Tempelsman was doing something interesting. Tempelsman had been big in diamonds earlier but Tempelsman at the time was a bit controversial because he was working on man-made diamonds. There is a General Electric proprietary process by which you can make a diamond. Chemically and physically it is undistinguishable from a natural diamond, one dug out of the earth. It involves temperature and pressures that are unimaginable to me but it can be done to make diamonds. There was a labeling controversy underway at the time. There was a controversy between the natural people and the manufactured people about whether a manufactured diamond was actually a diamond. There were some people who felt that their industry was threatened by the development process for man-made diamonds and Tempelsman was on the man-made side of it, as I recall. He also had a lot of history with Africa; I actually flew up to New York and had lunch with him one day to talk about this stuff. It was interesting he invited Ted Sorensen to join so we had a very nice session in his beautiful office there in New York City; New York City high grade top end business culture is not something I know very much about, quite an exposure to his gorgeous art collection and his beautiful office, private dining room and private cook. The personality of someone like Theodore Sorensen was another addition and Mr. Tempelsman.

Q: Who had been an aide to John Kennedy and Tempelsman was also certainly the escort of Jackie Kennedy for many years.

EASTHAM: Right. They were both very engaging and perfect gentlemen and host; I quite enjoyed the conversation with Mr. Tempelsman. Then I actually went over to 45th Street, 44th Street or something like that where the Hasidic guys have all of their diamond trade. Then I went over to 5th Avenue where the actual trading firms are located, a little bit more upscale than that. I went to New York several times to talk to the industry about what we were doing. There was also an element of the UN. The whole process of Kimberley had been kicked off by a UN Security Council Resolution so what we were doing was something, in fact, that was mandated by a UN resolution. We had to go and consult with the secretariat where I spent a good deal of time.

Q: The African bureau was Sierra Leone with Liberia and Botswana?

EASTHAM: Botswana was not a conflict.

Q: Botswana was not a conflict…

EASTHAM: Botswana is the shining example of what diamonds can do in a positive sense. The government of Botswana is actually a ten percent equity holder in the overall De Beers corporation and they have a huge big mine in Botswana operated by a company called Debswana, a combination of De Beers and Botswana, which has probably the most modern diamond mine in the world; They have an automatic sorting system. It's interesting they drop tons and tons of rock into one end of the plant and diamonds come out the other end and at no point after it is dropped is that rock touched by human being. I envisage it as a little box of diamonds at the other end; I had an opportunity to go to the plant once but decided it was more important for me to stay back and write a reporting cable on the meeting I had just ended in Gaborone. Apparently the diamonds fluoresce when exposed to certain wave lengths of ultraviolet light and so if you crunch the rock up small enough you can automate the sorting of diamonds by involving this particular light, a sensor and a burst of compressed air that kicks the diamonds off to a chute on the side. To give you some idea of the massive quantity of rock involved, a really, really good diamond mine produces one carat per ton of rock.

Q: My God. Well also too that eliminates the problem one used to hear in South Africa of miners or Africans…

EASTHAM: It's not just a South Africa problem. It's everywhere. When you put humans and diamonds together the former steal the latter.

Q: Yeah, well they are very small and what the hell.

EASTHAM: Yeah. It was quite interesting. I have to tell you one piece of it. My job change occurred in the last week of August in 2001 and when I accepted the job Anna Borg then said to me, "Okay, you've got to go to London next week because there is a meeting with Kimberley next week." So I was sorting out my departure from the South Asia bureau and there was a meeting that was being held and I told Assistant Secretary Rocca that I would do one or two last things before I was no longer in the South Asia part.

So I flew to Geneva and attended a meeting of what was called the Bonn Group; this was on the weekend of something like I will have to look at the calendar but I believe 9/11 was on a Tuesday and on that preceding weekend I'm guessing it would be the 8th and 9th of September 2001. The Bonn Group had been convened by the Germans and the Italians, I believe, ostensibly to discuss Afghanistan. Its real purpose was to put the Iranians and the Pakistanis in the same room together with a sprinkling of Europeans, Japanese as aid donors, as well as the Americans and the Russians. So we met on the weekend in Geneva. It was quite dramatic on the Sunday morning. We were sitting in the meeting in Geneva and someone came running in and handed a cell phone to the head Iranian delegate. He put the cell phone to his ear, went pale and he and his delegation stood up and left the room. Now what they had just learned was that Commander Ahmad Shah Massoud, the military commander and political leader of the Northern Alliance in Afghanistan…

Q: Oh yeah.

EASTHAM: …had just been assassinated. He had been blown up in Northern Afghanistan, which in retrospect was a preparatory step for 9/11. It was very, very clever to take out the main leader of the Northern Alliance in preparation for what was to follow, what happened on that Tuesday. So from Geneva we concluded that meeting and it didn't go very well after that, principally due to lack of direction and lack of attention from the Iranians. So I went over to London and on the Monday went to the preparatory meeting with industry at De Beers's headquarters. On Tuesday, September 11, we convened a plenary meeting of the Kimberley Process which was probably 150 people in a grand multilateral negotiating session at the Twickenham Rugby Stadium out by Richmond and Windsor, somewhere out on the Heathrow Airport side of London.

On September the 11th we were coming back from a dreadful lunch, it was sort of boiled chicken or something. We were walking into the room to reassemble for the afternoon session and on the industry side, among the New York guys, every single cell phone rang at once. Of course, it was their family and friends calling from New York about the first plane hitting the tower.

Q: Yeah.

EASTHAM: So we had an unpleasant afternoon because there was no TV to watch there and there was no way to figure out what was going on. Then the phones all rang again when the second plane hit the second tower; we adjourned for the afternoon. The next day we reconvened but the meeting was quite unsatisfactory; nobody was focused on doing what we were supposed to be doing. But I found myself stuck because, of course, at that point all trans-Atlantic traffic had stopped and I was pretty much stuck in London. Assistant Secretary Rocca called me and she said the Iranians want to meet again and we are not sure we can get anyone else over. So I said that would be fine and I can go and do whatever you would like me to do since I'm not going anywhere anyway. She said, "I'll come back to you." I stuck around a couple of days, I went over to Antwerp and went to the diamond center over there and got a good look at how that middle part of the industry worked. Then I went back to Geneva and by that time trans-Atlantic opened up and I was joined by Ryan Crocker. The two of us went into a meeting room in Geneva convened by the UN by Francis Vendrell, who was the UN Special Envoy for Afghanistan at the time. Vendrell took us into a small office and he sat the two of us down across from the two Iranians who had been in the meeting the previous week and he said, "You guys have a nice day" and he left. So Ryan and I sat across the table from these two Iranians for I guess three or four hours talking about Afghanistan face to face.

Q: What was the issue and what were you doing?

EASTHAM: Well this was post 9/11.

Q: Yea, yea.

EASTHAM: The Iranians had figured us out. Without breaching any confidences I'm going to generalize about what they talked about. Basically they said, "Look, we know that you are now going to go into Afghanistan and you are going to try to kill this thing at the source and that's okay with us (well not so much that that is okay but we are not going to raise any objections about that) but please remember that we have important equities in Afghanistan as well and those equities are centered around the Persian speakers in the north and the Northern Alliance, which, of course, has just been decapitated with the assassination of Commander Massoud. So while you are doing what you are going to do please keep our equities in mind."

Q: So obviously you reported this back.

EASTHAM: I presume Ryan did.

Q: Yeah.

EASTHAM: By this time I was not dealing with South Asia anymore so I proceeded onto my new job. I half expected to be called back but it didn't happen so I went on to my next chapter.

Q: To put this into perspective with the blood diamonds who were the bad guys that we were particularly trying to stop from using this? Or was this a huge group of people?

EASTHAM: We were to some extent engaged in a closing-the-barn-door exercise because, if I recall correctly, that by the time we had gotten into serious negotiations on the Kimberley Process the actual practical cause of concern was being dealt with by the peacekeeping forces under British leadership in Sierra Leone. What we were doing was attempting to keep it from happening again. Charles Taylor is the name that comes up most often in association with it and there is not much difference between, in terms of diamond production, Liberia and Sierra Leone and Guinea; those three have about the same problems in porous borders and they were susceptible to violent conflict; but that was the nexus of the problem. There was not much expectation.

Then you had the DRC which was a different problem. The Democratic Republic of Congo has a lot of artisanal mining but it does not manifest itself in financing rebel movements and groups except in a small way. Now they have other mineral resources that are, in fact, used to advance political groups that are inimical to the operation of defective governments of the central authorities of the DRC; but that is not necessarily a diamond problem, that's a problem of gold and other minerals used in electronics and that sort of thing. So we were to some extent engaged in an effort to regulate a problem that had been solved by other means, at least temporarily.

Q: You mentioned that the Russians had diamonds and the criminality of the Russian system was, I guess still is, very much apparent.

EASTHAM: And every time one of the NGOs or someone from our government would say something like you just said, the industry would in every case intervene by saying that while that may be an unfortunate problem, it is not on the table in this room.

Q: Do you know why?

EASTHAM: They were willing to deal with blood diamonds. Blood diamonds were a threat to the viability of the entire industry. They could not see a way to deal with diamonds as a means of transfer of value, transfer of funds, and transfer of money in a global sense. They could not see how you would deal with that and I never thought it was a very big problem anyway. You read about lots of fiction, lots of spy fiction and thrillers about the precious diamonds, the black diamonds and blah, blah, blah and all this stuff about people being paid off in diamonds and that sort of thing. You know what, if I were going to use diamonds as a means of compensating someone for an illicit transaction I believe in my mind that I would have to be prepared to lose at least 25 percent of value in the transaction. You've got to know what you are doing to buy and sell diamonds, you have to know what you are doing, you have to be in the trade. For Joe Smuck off the street to be paid in diamonds for planning a terrorist operation is just nuts. Nobody would do it because the transaction cost is so high. In the first place you have to smuggle diamonds across the international border, which is easy enough, you might get away with it but then you have to find somebody to sell the damned thing to. You are trying to sell it and there are very few diamond dealers in Antwerp, for example, that you could just walk in the door, knock on the door, get through their security and talk to somebody and say, "Look, I have these diamonds, would you buy them?" They are not going to do it. If there are dealers who would countenance this, they are very, very few and you would have a hard time finding someone who would regard that as a serious proposition not either a) something illegal that you could get into bad trouble for or b) a police sting to see if you were crooked. I just never thought that was practical.

Q: Yeah.

EASTHAM: Now criminality at the high level, whether it's in Russia or whether it is someplace else is a different matter. The taking the skim off the top, getting a percentage of the auction value, manipulating a diamond auction and this sort of thing; sure, that happens. But the notion of attempting to deal with illicit financial transactions intermediated by diamonds presents even greater challenges than corrupt transactions facilitated by cash. The industry did not believe it was a problem and did not want governments intruding into their businesses any more than governments, say tax authorities, already do.

Q: This has been a fascinating account of something that I'm sure before you never really thought about and I certainly never thought about. This is one of the things I think particularly this oral history thing keeps uncovering these facets, to use the term, facets of diplomacy that one never thinks about.

EASTHAM: I'll tell you that was one of the best jobs I ever had. I really, really enjoyed it. I never had done a multilateral negotiation before, a multi party negotiation and we had multilaterals with countries, we had the industry in the room, we had the UN in the room, we had permutations of the relationships. For example, the interplay between the European Commission and the member states was absolutely fascinating to watch. What happened was in March of 2002 we reached agreement on the basic scheme, and I had polled the various agencies about whether or not we would be able to implement this kind of thing and they said, "Oh yeah, sure, we can do that." So I went and signed the understanding in Ottawa a bit ceremonial thing and I brought it back to Washington and it turned out that what was going to ensue next was a great, enormous food fight in Washington with all the agencies trying to avoid taking on the task of regulating the diamond trade. They didn't want to do it and that was the proximate cause for my looking for my next job.

Q: By the way did you ever think, Al that really this whole thing you were a big participant in what amounted to the sex industry. This was an object that was used to promote sex.

EASTHAM: That's the most cynical expression, the most cynical expression of the diamond industry that men buy diamonds to exchange with women for sex.

Q: Well, man is involved in producing an object that women want.

EASTHAM: Well that's the most cynical view of it. But I don't understand the diamond trade and I guess I understand there is really a role for emotion in buying a diamond that isn't there when you're buying a Toyota car.

Q: Apparently I saw one of these fact things or something that pointed out that really the diamond engagement ring really was not a particular object until maybe the 1910s or '20s or so.

EASTHAM: That's right.

Q: Before that this is something if you had a lot of money and you were a princess or something like this but it only got a few people. Wal-Mart would not have been in business would not have had anything to do or been in this until…

EASTHAM: That's right, that's absolutely right. There is a lot of money in diamonds; there is a lot of value added at every step. It's a fascinating thing; it's one of those industries where the market remains.

Q: Okay, well let's pick up with when and where and what happened for the next time? When did things change for you, what's the next thing we are going to be looking at?

EASTHAM: Well the next thing is I became the director of Central African affairs in the Department. I moved into Central African affairs in I don't know May or June of 2002.

Q: Great. Well this is going very well.

EASTHAM: All right, great Stu.

Q: Okay, thank you.

Q: Today is the first of October, 2010 with Al Eastham. Al, where did we leave off?

EASTHAM: I think we wound up the Kimberley Process.

Q: Yeah we did the diamond business.

EASTHAM: Yeah.

Q: So what are you up to now?

EASTHAM: Well after nine months or so doing Kimberley I realized the fun part of negotiating the agreement was over and that we were going to have a hard bureaucratic slog to implement it so I decided to try and get back into a regional bureau. I moved over from the Kimberley job to become the director of Central African affairs in the African bureau in the Department.

Q: Now what did you do with the diamonds?

EASTHAM: I handed them off to somebody else.

Q: You didn't get any models of diamonds?

EASTHAM: No, none at all and nobody ever offered me a diamond the entire time. I don't believe that I ever saw a rough diamond except in the sorting room in Antwerp. It was an interesting job because there was some abstraction in terms of the actual physical object that we were attempting to regulate.

Q: Yeah. Okay so you are off to what Central African affairs?

EASTHAM: Central African affairs.

Q: And you did this from when to when?

EASTHAM: I started in Central African affairs in the middle of 2002, around June 2002. I wrapped it up in early 2005 when I was preparing to go out on my ambassadorial assignment.

Q: Listen what at that time, because it does change, did Central Africa consist of?

EASTHAM: Well it has not changed; it's the same now and it has been for a long time. The biggest country in the central African organization as the State Department organizes it is the Democratic Republic of Congo, formerly Zaire. Then you also had many of the countries surrounding it; it was actually the southern most of the countries of the sub region as we viewed it. It also had Congo Brazzaville, Gabon, Central African Republic, Chad, Equatorial Guinea, and Sao Tome & Principe and did I say Cameroon?

Q: No you didn't.

EASTHAM: Plus two more, Rwanda and Burundi.

Q: Rwanda, Burundi.

EASTHAM: Yeah.

Q: Well, okay when you arrived there what was going to be your main focus.

ESTHAM: Well I thought it was going to be the Democratic Republic of Congo because there was, in point of fact, pretty much of a disturbed situation in eastern DRC. The main challenge was the implementation of a peace agreement that had been reached maybe a year earlier before I came along to the job called the Sun City Accord, which was intended to put an end to the civil war that was occurring in the eastern Congo. The implementation of that agreement was unaccountably difficult because everyone had a different point of view as to what it meant. In fact, the reality was there was basically a proxy war going on in eastern Congo between Uganda and Rwanda but carried out largely through surrogates with support being provided to various militia groups by Uganda and Rwanda. The conflict was over resources of the eastern region; in particular at the time there was a fight going on over some newly discovered gold,

There was also an issue of what we believed to be the presence of the Rwandan Armed Forces, Rwanda army, in eastern Congo which was a consequence of the genocide and the fact that after the 1994 genocide in Rwanda a large number of former Rwandan army personnel, largely Hutu, and a large number of the so-called Interahamwe, which was the militia that played a large role in the genocide against the Tutsi's, had fled to eastern Congo. The Rwandan government under President Kagame had attempted to enlist the assistance of the Congo government and of the international community to attempt to neutralize these guys, to attenuate, reduce, the threat that they believed was posed to their national cohesion, national existence, as well as the existence of what was left of the Tutsi community following the genocide. From the Rwandan point of view the efforts of the international community had not been effective. Therefore, what we believed had happened was that the Rwandans had covertly introduced a substantial military force into eastern Congo whose mission was first and foremost to protect Rwanda in depth away from their frontiers and also when the opportunity presented itself to neutralize and kill the more notable pockets of the genocidaires, as they called them, people who conducted the genocide in Rwanda and had established themselves in eastern Congo. Now there also

may have been a subsidiary benefit to Rwanda in terms of engaging in the movement of valuable minerals produced in eastern Congo out to Rwanda and to world markets.

Q: You say this is where you will treat with this and then we will move to other things. How did this work out the time you were there?

EASTHAM: Well it didn't work out very well. We didn't really have a point of engagement with the Rwandans on the question of their presence. The United States at the time, the U.S. policy strongly reflected the view that the presence of Rwandan forces was extraordinarily destabilizing to the Congo itself because it basically stood in the way of anyone else's efforts to resolve this situation because it gave the Congolese parties an external enemy to point to. Therefore, it prevented us by engaging with them. It stood in the way of being able to talk to the various contending political forces in eastern Congo, those that were supported by the Rwandans were smug and happy and those that were opposed to the Rwandans would say. Look, you get the Rwandans out of the way and we'll talk. So it was extraordinarily destabilizing. By then the relations between the Congo government, the Kinshasa government and Rwanda were quite poor after having had a brief moment of sunlight when the Rwandan army supported the overthrow of Mobutu and the installation of the elder Kabila as president of the country.

From that time the Rwandans had come increasingly to distrust the Congo government and to believe that the Congo government was at a minimum not doing all it could to reduce the presence of the genocidaires in eastern Congo. At worse that they were in collusion for some reasons that were never entirely clear to me. So we took a number of initiatives during this period, all in the context of the existing peace agreements, to attempt to create a forum under U.S. sponsorship where the Congo, Uganda and Rwanda could sit and talk with one another. The idea was to open up a discussion about Rwanda's real national security requirements with the others and to try to bring about effective action with a goal of getting the Rwandan's out of the Congo and putting forward a peace process of some sort within the Congo that would work and to let the UN take the lead on attempting to pacify and stabilize the situation out there.

It was unaccountably difficult; it was particularly difficult to attempt to discuss Rwanda's national security with the Rwandans. The trauma that they had gone through ten years earlier; what are we talking about seven or eight years earlier had really made them inflexible. They were almost messianic in their view, they knew what was right and what was right was to do what they were doing. So if you questioned their perception of the necessary actions to protect Rwandan national security not only were you questioning their actions, you were also to some extent being sympathetic with the genocidaires. I found myself the subject of personal criticism from the Rwandans on this subsequently because I was arguing what was, in fact, U.S. policy at the time, which was the Rwanda's national security demanded only that Rwanda defend itself at its borders rather than extending itself out into the eastern Congo.

Q: At some point it continues bubbling up about mass rape and this sort of thing. Was this going on too in this area or was this a later thing?

EASTHAM: It was extremely unstable. It was a war zone from all along the border and the problem, of course, is where you have a war zone you have inadequate reporting in actual events. The UN mission at the time was not focused on eastern Congo yet, as they are now. They were focused at the time on political events in Kinshasa. There was a great deal of turmoil in terms of political arrangements in Congo. Kabila the elder had already been assassinated, and his son had taken over, but his son was a young man and he was perceived as being vulnerable to challenge by the other barons in the Congolese political establishment. So there was a great concentration on the maneuvering and the ins and outs of Kinshasa to the detriment of maintaining a robust and pervasive presence in eastern Congo and to the detriment of providing accurate information.

I recall at one point during my tenure as the Central Africa director being designated to attend the announcement by the International Rescue Committee of their first big report on the number of deaths caused by the war in eastern Congo. I question their methodology because they did not include….what they said was that the conflict and instability in Congo has caused several million deaths. I think as we speak today in 2010 they are up to around five million. At the time the first report they announced it was in the neighborhood of two or three million but their methodology was to include all of those who died because they didn't get adequate medical care or who died because they didn't have adequate nutrition in addition to those who actually died as a direct result of conflict. They were not stating anything that we didn't know because it was an extraordinarily unstable part of the world and a place where you didn't have access because you didn't know who was around the next corner on any road or track. There was very little ability to get out and take a look at what was going on. I am sure, absolutely certain, and this NGO report confirmed it, that women, children, and civilians were very much the victims of what was going on at that time in eastern Congo. What we were trying to do was to reduce the violence and reduce the uncertainties in eastern Congo so that the UN and the humanitarians could do their business.

Q: Could we get any Foreign Service people in the field out there?

EASTHAM: We didn't at the time. Since then the State Department has managed to put a little establishment out in Goma in eastern Congo on the Rwandan frontier but at the time we were restricted to occasional visits into various places. We relied largely on the UN for information about what was happening there and we relied on the UN to get to places. It was easiest to go to the major cities where the UN had flights available and it was almost impossible to go to places where they didn't. There were a lot of places that we had no one go to for many, many years; now it's quite a bit better because there is an actual presence in eastern Congo and the UN has shifted its center of gravity away from Kinshasa toward the eastern Congo so there is much greater access now but at the time it was very, very hard.

Q: Well by this time had, I call it the Congo, evolved into a non-economic, non-political just a mass of state or not or was there anything there?

EASTHAM: Well that had happened before Mobutu departed and before he died. The heyday of Zaire, as it was, was in the mid-1970s and from the mid-1970s until the late 1990s was a continual process of decline. As I told you when we talked about Zaire earlier, I have a theory about a lot of places in Africa and measure their level of progress by how many used-to's I hear when I go there as in they used to have a bus or they used to have running water or there used to be electricity. Zaire, the Congo as it became, is one of the places with the longest list of used-tos that I've ever seen and that decline has continued until quite recently. It was around the time of the famous rumble in the jungle in the early 1970s; it's been downhill ever since. Our problem was one of lack of information and lack of direct access. We simply had no one who was an expert on what was happening and we had no access to decent information about conditions in any particular area and the further you got from Kinshasa, the less you knew about it; that was true as early as 1992 when I lived in Congo, in Zaire, but it had gotten much worse by the time I came back in 2002 and started working on it from Washington.

Q: Well now what happened to the Congolese from all accounts they are a very bright people and all. What happened to them could they go out of the country or did they just sit in the hut or what?

EASTHAM: The problem was not the people so much as it was the capital. The country was systematically looted for so many years and there came to be the pervasive, this is my point of view and no one else's but, there was a pervasive culture of acquisitiveness, of rent-seeking that pervaded the place. I used to see the half-built buildings in Kinshasa, this is earlier when I lived there, and you could tell what happened was if you say you budget $10,000 to build something, if somebody steals forty percent of that before the thing is completed it is not ever going to get finished. So you saw that all over Kinshasa things that started and not finished, things that were incomplete because of the sheer magnitude of the corruption. There are some fabulous historical stories about grand thefts in Congo that have taken place over the years. One overseas Ambassador's residence was sold, without reference to the authorities in Kinshasa, and the proceeds have never been found. There were just some stupendous stories about corruption and the problem is that the cost of corruption rises so high that it stymies economic performance and economic development. I'm absolutely convinced that's what happened in Zaire as a direct result of leadership by example of President Mobutu.

Q: Is there any possibility of doing like the blood diamonds going after…I assume most of that corrupted money is piled up in Switzerland or France but I mean is it completely out of reach?

EASTHAM: Well Mobutu had spent all of his. I think he died in relative poverty, it was clear to me as early as 1992, of course, he was dead by the time I came back to the dossier but it was clear to me at the time that he had spent it all; he was out of money. His control mechanism was not cash payments anymore it was sort of franchising. He would give the right to a particular business opportunity to someone in exchange for political support or in exchange for something else. Then the power of the state would be put behind that businessman's enforcement of his monopolies. He was using franchising

rather than cash even in the mid-1990s. So when the government change happened they had nothing really to fall back on in terms of external reserves or in terms of budgetary resources. The revenue system had broken down as a consequence of corruption and the place had just fallen apart.

In terms of looking for the money outside, well. that's pretty much a global problem, that's something that certainly needs to be addressed but as far as I know the one serious effort to go after Mobutu's money led to naught. I haven't seen anything recently affecting that Congo; there was a little effort in France to attempt to at least elicit an explanation of what they call biens mal acquis, ill-gotten goods but the French courts declined to accept jurisdiction on that and so that went nowhere as well.

Q: Well then we will leave Rwanda and the Congo as being basket cases but you said you had other areas that took even more of your attention.

EASTHAM: I have always felt that it falls to the regional desks to pay attention to counties that don't get attention from anybody else. I had a bunch of them in my handful there in central Africa. Of course, we spent a lot of time with Rwanda and Congo but it turned out that Burundi was also in need of some good work. Fortunately, we had an excellent ambassador, who was my predecessor as director, in Bujumbura who was very, very active in trying to, without any resources to speak of, in trying to keep the peace process and the presidential election on track.

Q: Who was the ambassador?

EASTHAM: Jim Yellin. He had been working Burundi for many, many years and was doing a really good job. Burundi had some of the same ethnic and social tensions as you find in Rwanda. Jim worked very, very hard on that; he at present is still doing that, working with the special envoy for the Great Lakes of Africa. Then we had countries that don't get much attention at all in the United States. Gabon, for example, we had a visit to Washington by the now deceased president of Gabon Omar Bongo; we worked that with Secretary of State Colin Powell's schedule.

We had a visit by the president of Equatorial Guinea in a very strange context and this one is worth elaborating because it is such an illustrative story. Equatorial Guinea was a desperately poor country whose only natural resource historically has been the production of cocoa and even that was in decline. You had a desperately poor country until some American companies went in there and discovered oil. Now say ten-twelve years after production started Equatorial Guinea has what may be the highest per capita income on the continent. It is by GDP standards a very, very wealthy country, they have lots and lots of oil revenue and it was interesting.

When they signed up with these American companies the companies said, "Okay, let's sign an agreement on this and when we start producing oil and you start getting your revenues what shall we do with it? Where shall we put the money?" The Equatoguineans, having been so poor for so long, and having been just barely able to maintain an embassy

in Washington said, “Put the money in the embassy bank account in Riggs Bank in Washington, D.C.:

So by the time I come into the story in 2002-2003 the Riggs Bank checking account of Equatorial Guinea had a balance of something in the neighborhood of $750 million and they were using it like their national treasury. There was apparently a system of, say for example the president of Equatorial Guinea wanted to build a road or buy a Land Cruiser or something like that. They would send a fax to Riggs Bank and say okay, here is invoice number so and so please cut a check for $40,000 to Toyota Motor Company and pay them this way. They were using it like a treasury.

Unfortunately, it turned out that Riggs Bank was also carrying the bank accounts of former President Peron and it became a scandal that Riggs Bank was pandering to dictators, etc., etc. Just at that moment there was a scandal between Riggs and Equatorial Guinea. There was a Riggs Bank official who was responsible for the African embassy accounts, including this huge one belonging to Equatorial Guinea, and the president’s family all had their bank accounts at Riggs Bank by this time. He was their point of contact for their banking operation. One day this Riggs official is talking to the son of the president and he says, “Oh gee, my wife just had a wreck and she wrecked her minivan and I don’t know how I am going to pay for it. Could you loan me $40 thousand?” says the banker to the client. The client in a moment of expansive weakness says, “Sure, just write yourself a check.” But instead of writing the check for $40 thousand the banker writes himself a check for $140 thousand. Some time passes and the Equatoguinean, the son of the president figures this out and counts $100 thousand short. They in high dudgeon decided to go to Riggs and ask them to fire this gentleman. President Obiang flew to Washington, and he actually met with Colin Powell, but the main thrust of his visit to Washington was to remonstrate and to request that Riggs fire this man for having stolen $100,000. Imagine his surprise when he walks into Riggs Bank and in the context of Peron and all this scandal affecting Riggs Bank, Riggs Bank says we no longer want your business. What do you want to do with the money?

I’ll never forget the meeting with Secretary Powell, the president and the secretary were sitting in the outer office facing each other across the fireplace and they had a conversation, a nice pleasant, polite conversation and then the Secretary Powell said, “I understand that you are here about some banking thing.” President Obiang smiled reached up and patted his breast pocket and said, “It is all taken care of” as though he had a check for $750 million in his pocket. That money left and we haven’t seen it since; my understanding is the Obiang family and Equatorial Guinea now do their banking in Europe. Of course, the next thing that happened was Riggs Bank collapsed and no longer exists; in part because of the scandal involving Equatorial Guinea.

Then we had a sort of a coup, a kind of a partial coup, in Sao Tome, which is a country I’ll guarantee you the vast majority of Americans have never heard of. It was a very strange little coup and was resolved in a beautiful exercise of regional cooperation. Some guys from the army, what passes for an army in Sao Tome, while the president was out of the country, seized the radio station and broadcast an announcement that they had formed

a junta. They are Portuguese speakers so I guess they used that word and they were taking over, and national salvation and all this stuff. It just so happened that the president was on his way back but he was in Nigeria. So the next thing that happened was the Nigerians sent an envoy over and he went to see the major who had conducted the coup or at least had seized the radio station. He said, “Look, here is the way it is going to be. We are going to tell you that we are going to bring your president back and you are going to go out to the airport and you are going to form up an honor guard, you are going to roll out a red carpet, you are going to welcome him back and he is going to get in his car and he is going to go to his office and he is going to resume his job as the president. If you don’t agree to that then the next thing that happens is the Nigerian army will arrive. Which do you want?” Which I thought was a terrific way to end a coup; so President de Menezes was restored to authority by the simple expedient of the exercise of Nigerian power. I thought it was a great thing.

In the rest of the countries, one interesting issue was the Chad oil pipeline. It was a big project which was in mid-course when I arrived in this job, which was the construction of a pipeline from Chad crossing Cameroon to the ocean to remove Chadian oil. It was a great exercise involving coordination by the World Bank, EXXON Mobil was running the pipeline part, and there was a coalition of NGOs in this sort of trilateral thing who were there to insure that there was no major environmental damage done by the construction of the pipeline. It worked very well except that they didn’t proceed at the same speed. EXXON Mobil, of course, had huge money at stake, consortium of oil companies were financing the construction of this 700 mile pipeline or something like that. The World Bank was supposed to be providing training, expertise and institutional strengthening to enable Chad, which never had anything like this before, to be able to effectively manage and utilize the revenues that were going to come from the oil. The World Bank was still writing its project document when EXXON Mobil finished the pipeline, which I think contributed greatly to the end of the story which was the conditionality, the good government, the effective monitoring control of what the revenues were spent for broke down largely because the oil and the money started flowing before the control mechanisms were actually set up in Chad. But that was a great success at least the physical part of putting in the pipeline. We had a lot to do with that; it is something most people didn’t know very much about as EXXON Mobil had built the pipeline to bring Chadian oil to the world market.

Q: Did have problems with local people trying to siphon oil off?

EASTHAM: No, none of that. They did not have that problem and I don’t know why not given the history of that sort of thing not very far away in Nigeria. As far as I am aware, they did not have a problem of that sort with the Chadian oil being brought out. One reason was maybe it was there is no history of selling oil in Cameroon, Cameroon doesn’t produce very much oil and the main part of the pipeline was through Cameroon; there is nothing you could do with crude oil in Cameroon. There are no refineries to sell it to, you can’t move it, you don’t have the infrastructure, the pipeline and the ships to divert it to if you did figure out a way to steal it so this was not a problem.

Q: Things seem to be undeveloped in certain areas.

EASTHAM: Yeah. Let me see. The other three I've never quite figured out the Central African Republic, Gabon and the Republic of Congo Brazzaville. They were in a category all their own. Congo Brazzaville and Gabon were fairly wealthy, one at peace, one recovering from the Civil War, countries with existing oil production and very much under French tutelage. The Central African Republic was very difficult to get a grip on. It too had had a civil war, the place is hard to get to, the capital is extremely dilapidated, and they have apparently nothing, or very little, in the way of natural resources to speak of. They are probably the most profoundly land-locked country on the continent, they are deep in the center of central Africa and, therefore, have great difficulty getting commodities in and out even if there was something they produced the world would like to buy.

We had a very interesting episode. One Sunday morning I was at my gym working out; I was on the treadmill when my cell phone rang. It was the deputy secretary of state at the time, Rich Armitage, and he said, "Say, tell me about the Central African Republic." I thought, Oh my god, what's this about? By that time President Bozizé had taken over, had led an armed group down from Chad and expelled President Patassé and took over as president; he's since been elected as president, sort of. So I said, "Well, I've met the man. He seems as though he is well intentioned at least. He is a military man and a fairly straight forward type of guy." The deputy secretary proceeded to tell me the night before Secretary Powell had been on the phone with the French foreign minister trying to solve the problem of what to do with Jean-Bertrand Aristide, the former president of Haiti. The French foreign minister said, "Ach, let me find a place for him, a place where he can go." They had reached an arrangement that the South Africans had expressed a willingness to offer him temporary asylum, but they didn't want to do it right at the moment it was needed because they were about to have an election and they didn't want the presence of Aristide to complicate their electoral process. So the French foreign minister had taken it on from the secretary to find a place. He had called back on that Sunday morning and said, "Central African Republic has agreed to take him." Now what Mr. Armitage wanted me to do was confirm that directly by getting in touch with President Bozizé and ask him if this was, in fact, the case. It wasn't that he didn't trust the French; it was just we didn't know this guy. The top levels of the State Department had very little idea of anything about Central African Republic, they just didn't know anything and neither did the assistant secretary for Africa. So it came down to me since I had actually been there.

Anyway, I spent the rest of the day working with the OPS Center trying to get through to President Bozizé and I finally talked to him and he said to me, "Well, yeah, I told Omar Bongo that." It turns out that the French foreign minister had phoned the President of Gabon and said, "Will you allow Aristide to come for a while and President Bongo said oh no, no, I can't do that but he had called Bozizé. President Bozizé said to me, "Why don't you guys call me directly, why did you have to talk to the French and then talk to Bongo? You could have called me directly, it would have been fine." In any case, the next thing that happened was that Aristide was already in transit, he was already in motion away from Haiti and they flew him in. He was flown in to Bangui, the Central

African Republic and the Central African Republic government picked him up, took him off the airplane, gave him a nice place to stay but they didn't quite know the terms and conditions. They didn't know if they were supposed to…was he free to communicate? Was he free to leave if he wanted to? Do you Americans want anything from us on this? Or what are the parameters on this? We are willing to do tell us but we don't quite understand it. Then they started immediately started getting mixed signals because certain members of Congress started attempting to intervene with them on…

Q: Well Aristide was sort of the darling of the Black Caucus wasn't he?

EASTHAM: Well I recall that Congresswoman Waters was one of the most active on this and there were a couple of others. In fact, I believe I spoke with the member of Congress myself and she made some sort of distant-from-the-truth, shall we say, accusations about his being help prisoner and this sort of thing. He wasn't but neither did he have any options, he stayed there for a while until eventually the South African government was prepared to accept him; as far as I know he is still in South Africa. It was an interesting little episode of all of a sudden Central African Republic becomes the weekend's work for the State Department in support of this effort to stabilize the situation in Haiti.

Q: Well it sounds like you are running around with a bunch of I won't say unruly countries, but ones with very dispirit problems.

EASTHLAM: Absolutely, there was not central theme to that region. It's quite interesting because it's a vast area, there are thousands of miles between Rwanda and Sao Tome and Principe and the two have nothing in common. They don't speak the same language, they are not the same people, they don't share history; it was a very problem centered time. And the resources of the U.S. government were focused only on Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of Congo; we had no aid resource available for any of the other countries on any effort of human endeavor. We were simply out of the game and it was interesting to be in that position where I would travel out to the region; I was the only person who ever went to Central African Republic, but as I said, somebody needed to pay attention to it. It was a pain to get there; there was only one flight a week, from Paris. You could sort of figure a way to get out but formally you could only fly in there one day a week; there was one flight a week from Paris. There was a second flight that stopped there but in theory couldn't take on passengers but you could get permission if you started early enough to actually to board the Air France flight and go on to Chad or something.

It was hard to get to, there were no issues that directly engaged the interest of the United States, there were no resources available and we had a pitiful little embassy, with great people but not much to do and not much to do it with. For example we evacuated the staff of the embassy in Bangui during my time there. When President Bozizé came in he brought an armed force down from Chad and there was some fighting in Bangui when he took over. It was an interesting episode. The ambassador at the time was not a State Department officer, she was a career government employee but from another agency. The situation got really unstable and the first inkling that we were going to have a complex

problem was that the attack on Bangui did not come to the embassy's notice nor to the government's notice until Bozizé and his men reached the twelve kilometer mark from the center of Bangui. No one knew that an armed force intent on a coup was coming down the highway until they were within, what is that, five miles of the capital. It came completely by surprise and the ambassador had very little contact with members of the government, we had no contact with members of the attacking force and there were wild rumors around in town and finally I was talking to the ambassador and I said, "Look, let me just walk you through this. You are not talking to the police, you can't get them on the phone, the foreign minister doesn't answer the phone, you can't talk to the president, you are hearing that both the government and the rebels have gotten a resupply of ammunition, you can still hear shooting. What does that add up to? From my point of view you are in the dark and you don't have enough information to be able to judge whether it is safe or not much less to be able to make a determination that you and your staff should stay there. What do you want to do?" She said, "Well, let me think about this." So some hours later we talked again and she said, "I think we are going to have to go." So we did what was necessary in the State Department to trigger a non-combatant evacuation operation, which involved in this case sending a C-130 and an advance team in down from Europe and putting all the people on the aircraft and flying them to somewhere, I forget where they went. So we closed the embassy.

Unfortunately, after we had triggered the movement of the C-130 and the advance team and all that stuff she called back and said, "It is all okay. I've talked to the police, I've talked to the foreign minister, the rumors were not true, and there is no active fighting. It is okay, we'd like to stay." I said, "I'm sorry a decision has been made and you are out." Then it took us forever to get that embassy opened again. It took at least two years to get people back in there; it was very difficult to do. We wound up sending in one officer who was just sort of heroic about the whole thing but was unable to do very much because he was alone; it was one officer and our local staff, of course, but it was a very, very difficult moment. That ambassador actually never went back to post; her assignment ran out before she managed to convince people that it was actually safe and reasonable to go back to Bangui.

Q: Well obviously you had a lot on your plate but it was so dispirit. But what was your feeling about that particular time in the State Department and the interest, it was Secretary Powell?

EASTHAM: Let me see I was actually there toward the end; we went to the second term and Dr. Rice came over as secretary of State during the time I was there.

Q: Did you have any feel from the secretary's or from the White House or anything was there much interest in Africa or did you feel that you were out there on your own?

EASTHAM: I hate to be a cynic about it but in the first term it was very clear that the framework of the policy was related to the previous administration, in that it was expressed in terms of the intention of the White House that President Bush would shake more African leaders' hands in his first four years than Bill Clinton had done in eight.

Thus the policy was built around personal contacts and around large initiatives, presidential initiatives. In fact, eventually at the end of the Bush administration it came to the point where we didn't now how many presidential initiatives there were, because everything to do with Africa was very cleverly associated with the President. This was for funding purposes, so that you can make an argument in the budget debates that this is a presidential initiative and it needs to have a bigger pot of money because this is something the president is personally associated with. The most notable of those is the President's Emergency Plan for HIV/Aids Relief. PEPFAR, as it is known, was the biggest thing we were doing in Africa at the time.

In terms of African issues, it was Sudan, Sudan, Sudan. I remember during this period going to the morning staff meeting with the assistant secretary who was Constance Newman at the time. I remember sitting down in the meeting and she started the meeting and they did some important business and then went around the room as they usually did, went around the table. I remember looking her in the eye and saying, "This is the office of Central African affairs reporting to the bureau of Sudan affairs."

Q: Yeah.

EASTHAM: Because the great sucking sound in the Africa Bureau was Sudan, because it was eating the personnel, the money and the time of the leadership of the Africa bureau as well as to some extent the White House. That was the most important thing they spent all their time on it. There was this sort of strategic calculus, which is still a fact, it is still the way that the African people organize themselves but there was this strategic calculus that Sudan was the most important thing. Countries like Gabon or Central African Republic really didn't get any attention from anyone except in a hard crisis of some sort. So there was this skewed policy but that's historically been the case in the Africa bureau; things are always deformed by crisis, they are deformed by the things that newspapers report. The killings, the civil wars, the conflicts and that sort of thing; it's not a particularly rational approach.

Then the second level of discrimination, the second level of sorting within the Africa policy is the strategically important countries, which are you can count them on one hand; Kenya, South Africa, Nigeria, maybe Ghana and Sudan and DRC but otherwise it's crises. Everything else, the whole rest of the continent, the other 35 countries of the continent, either don't receive any attention or they are somebody else's problem, as in France.

Q: I was wondering did you sense at that time that the French were disconnecting or not or this was still Mitterrand wasn't it?

EASTHAM: No…

Q: Or Chirac, it was Chirac.

EASTHAM: Chirac, yeah it was Chirac. I didn't get a sense of any such thing. Chirac was still a France-Afrique guy. The signs of change didn't really begin to appear until Sarkozy came in. The France-Afrique is still there, the French are trying to disengage from some of the expensive things. They are trying to reduce their defense obligations to their part of Africa, they are trying to reduce their governmental footprint particularly their military presence in West Africa but at the same time, they're trying to increase their commercial ties and business connections with Africa. At the same time, they are trying to reduce the political part and the military part.

Q: Did we have any policy of really trying to do anything in your area about business ties other than if there is oil we would say go ahead fellows?

EASTHAM: No, there really wasn't. We made a lot of noise about AGOA, the African Growth of Opportunity Act, but central Africa was the place where that was least effective. There was really not any significant light manufacturing or textiles or food stuff or anything that grew up as a result of the trade concessions under AGOA, at least in central Africa; very, very, very little. In fact, only oil from Gabon and the Republic of Congo.

Q: Well Al this is probably a good place to stop for this time. Is there anything more we should cover in this Central Africa before you move on?

EASTHAM: No, I don't think so, those were the significant developments. I faded away from it at the end, largely because I got sick and was really out of action as of late March or early April of 2005 and by then I was on my way to Malawi as ambassador, in any case. I abruptly left the job as I was completely unable to go to work for six weeks for health reasons. But the next is the confirmation process and getting out to Malawi.

Q: Okay, so we will pick that up the next time.

Q: Okay today is the 12th of October 2010 with Al Eastham. Al, you have finished Central Africa and you are off to where did you go as ambassador?

EASTHAM: I went to Malawi.

Q: Malawi.

EASTHAM: Lilongwe. It was an interesting exercise in getting that particular job. During my time in the Central Africa office I had been considered for several chief of mission posts but the decision process in 2004 was the more fruitful one leading to the 2005 nomination as ambassador to Malawi.

Q: Okay, can you explain where Malawi is and its role in our interest in it and where was the situation there?

EASTHAM: I frankly knew nothing about Malawi before it came on the screen as a possibility for an ambassadorial appointment. It's located in south central Africa, more southern Africa or eastern Africa than central. It borders Mozambique, probably its longest border, but it also has borders with Tanzania, Zambia and that's it. It's a small country of about 13-14 million people, a long skinny country with a great big lake, Lake Malawi, which lies between the Malawian land part and the Mozambique side and a little bit of Tanzania up in the north. It's largely agricultural country and at the end of the British colonial period it was a part of what the British colonials called the Federation of the Two Rhodesias and Nyasaland, with Malawi being the Nyasaland part. The only connection really with the United States over the years had been from missionaries and stamp collectors who were very interested in having the rather rare Nyasaland stamps. When the three countries became independent from Britain Southern Rhodesia, which became Zimbabwe through a rather rebellious path on the part of the white settlers, Zambia and Malawi had orderly transitions from British colonialism to independence. Malawi was spared a lot of the trouble that accompanied some of the transitions during the decolonization of Africa. As a consequence, it has never known a war, has known little in the way of internal strife except during the transition from its long time president for life Hastings Kamuzu Banda to a democratic system in the early 1990s.

A very interesting little country, lots of American connections in the form of missionaries the American Anglicans are big there and, in fact, there was an Anglican bishop of one of the dioceses in Malawi who, in fact, was American. The Presbyterians are big, they've got a university there and, of course, during the time I was there Malawi reached the headlines in a new way because of the decision of Madonna to adopt child from Malawi.

Q: Madonna being you might explain.

EASTHAM: Madonna the pop star.

Q: An American pop star.

EASTHAM: … who decided around 2006 to adopt a child from Malawi and she subsequently adopted another one so she has two Malawian-origin children in her household. But there is not much trade with Malawi. Malawi's largest bit of business with the United States is a rather unfortunate one. It's a large supplier of tobacco to the American cigarette industry; Malawi is one of the largest tobacco producers in the world. But it's a country that doesn't come up on the screen very much. It's a country, particularly in the African context, that doesn't hit anybody's inbox because they don't have wars and it's in a fairly peaceful neighborhood these days.

Q: What sort of legacy had Banda left it?

EASTHAM: Well not much. Hastings Banda was a rather oddly interesting man. He was brought in from exile; he had been living outside Malawi for many, many years. He came in at the time of independence and became the president and subsequently went down the road of having his party become the sole party and then the sole party elected him the

president for life. Then the man had the good fortune or the bad grace, whichever way you want to take it, to live to be 100 years old.

Q: Ouch.

EASTHAM: So the country knew a period of stagnation and decline during the 1980s when Banda was in his 90's and very, very lacking in the government skills that enable a country to move ahead. He had some peculiarities too. He insisted on certain forms of dress for women; knees and calves had to be covered, as I recall, by a skirt and not by pants. There was a requirement on entering Malawi at a port of entry that men's hair be shorn to a certain length. He set up a school which is called Kamuzu Academy named after him in his vision to be the Eaton of Africa and to produce a couple of hundred fairly well educated young Malawians every year to run things. It was not much of a school system. The Malawians up through the 1980s had very little in the way of opportunities for even basic or secondary education. The university education was very limited as well. It was a country that was held back by some of the peculiar policies of essentially a man who became more dictatorial as he became older and as his tenure lengthened.

Q: Was Malawi able to stay away from the Zimbabwe-Southern Rhodesian business?

EASTHAM: Pretty much. Malawi was the odd man out under Hastings Banda in all of the turmoil in southern Africa leading up to the big events, first the independence of Zimbabwe and second the end of apartheid in South Africa. The Malawians feel a need to be accommodating to Zimbabwe; they don't say bad things about President Mugabe and they are not critical at all of the way the direction he has taken Zimbabwe particularly over the last six or seven years. Malawi was also odd man out in the apartheid struggle; they maintained diplomatic relations with the apartheid government even during the period when the Front Line States had broken off those relations and were supporting even militarily in many cases but certainly the refuge and safe haven the leaders of the liberation struggle in South Africa. This meant, of course, that after the end of apartheid things were a little bit chilly with the new government in South Africa because they did not perceive that Malawi had given its full support to them.

Malawi did a good business with the apartheid government. The South African government at the time built large sections of the infrastructure of the new capital of Lilongwe when the capital was moved from Blantyre a couple hundred miles north to Lilongwe. They built the complex of offices that today houses the government of Malawi or large parts of the government of Malawi. They were very much a contributor to Malawi's governmental functions. There is a sentimental attachment to the Malawians on the part of the South Africans; it is a very poplar place nowadays for white South Africans to vacation. They drive up to the lake and see Africa like it used to be; that is a poor not very wealthy developed Africa with a great deal of rustic charm. It' a very safe place, a place where you don't have to worry about driving your vehicle and that sort of thing, it's a kind of exceptional country in a tough region.

Q: You were there from when to when?

EASTHAM: I stayed there from 2005-2008.

Q: Well now the whole South African apartheid regime had collapsed and all this for some time. Other than becoming a sort of I won't say the Disneyland but the never-never land for the South Africans was there much affect on Malawi?

EASTHAM: A little bit in that this is not unique to Malawi; it is something that characterizes the entire southern part of Africa. There is a lot of money in South Africa that's looking for a place to invest. It's interesting because South Africa has highly competitive industries that produce light manufactured goods and processed food products plus wine, of course, and a lot of different things. The South African commercial enterprises are beginning to colonize the southern part of Africa in terms of retail sales. I had been in Malawi for about a month and I remember suddenly having a mild epiphany and I asked someone, "Why is it everything I eat comes from South Africa?" The supermarkets, the outlets for food are pretty much all of the things like cheese and canned goods and even a lot of fresh products; fresh vegetables were shipped up from South Africa and were making it at least half way up Malawi. They weren't quite making it to the northern part of the country yet although the South African chain Shop Rite had tried to put a supermarket in the northern capital of Mzuzu but they had not made a success of that and they closed it. You could see a great deal of South African influence.

There were a lot of South African vehicles on the road; vehicles manufactured in South Africa had a seriously advantageous situation in Malawi. That's a pattern that I think you see all over the southern part of Africa these days; there are a lot of South African business looking for opportunities on the continent and nobody else is competing. You couldn't imagine, as was the case 50 years ago, that Chevrolet, General Motors, would be marketing cars in Malawi but yet the South Africans do it. There are lots of examples of that in machinery and even fast food. There are South African fast food chains that are starting to spring up in places where McDonald's doesn't even know where the country is. That's a tendency that I think will continue. As African personal incomes start to get higher, people are more able to afford this sort of thing that South Africa has to offer in terms of diversity and quality of processed food stuffs and light manufactured items.

Q: As ambassador from the United States did you get into the commercial business or wasn't there much you could do?

EASTHAM: There was very, very little. There were a couple of small American enterprises there. There was a railway that was concessioned to a consortium of American companies. The railway was mostly in Mozambique because it ran from the Mozambican port of Nacala to the Malawian frontier across Malawi and up to a free-trade zone on the border with Zambia. There were great hopes for this railroad in terms of its potential as a means of transportation. Malawi is landlocked and they are bedeviled by the cost of transportation. It costs around $10,000 to send a standard sea shipping container to or from the port of Durban, which is the most accessible port to Malawi;

from the port of Durban to Lilongwe. It costs $10,000 to bring a container by truck and can take 3-4 weeks….

Q: Ouch.

EASTHAM: … because of delays crossing borders to get from South Africa. To get to Malawi you have to go from South Africa to Zimbabwe, from Zimbabwe to Mozambique, and from Mozambique to Malawi. There are lots of delays and bureaucratics and lots of money involved in this and it's a real dilemma for the Malawians. The only sectors that have managed to defeat that problem are the large volume shipping sectors and by that I mean tobacco, tea and sugar. Transportation is a really high cost item in the business plan if you wanted to get into business in Malawi for importing or exporting substantial quantities of goods and time is another factor as well.

The very small apparel industry in Malawi, which was dominated by people of Indian ethnic origin, was constantly bedeviled by this problem. They were exploring using the train but it was really not reasonable from the point of view of time to use the rail, to go to the port of Nacala and then ship from Nacala to Durban and then put it on another ship from Durban to Cape Town and from Cape Town put it on another ship from Cape Town to Savannah or New York or Baltimore or somewhere like that. The theory was that if the Nacala rail line could be made more efficient it would benefit Malawi greatly. Unfortunately, they didn't pay the kind of attention to it that one would have expected. Neither the company that had the concession nor the government was very interested in making substantial investments in improving the road bed, buying more locomotives and buying more rolling stock and making the thing actually work. So finally just after I left Malawi the concession was sold off to a group of Mozambican investors. I wish them luck because that's a very important thing for Malawi.

Otherwise, the American business community there was mostly dealerships. There was a fellow who was a John Deere dealer who was a good friend of mine but I don't think he sold more than four or five pieces of machinery in a year. The big parts of the export of tobacco sort of took care of itself; that was a very well organized business. There was some sugar moving out of Malawi into the United States but the Malawian imports from the United States were very, very small. Some machinery and generators and that sort of thing but there was no business, no investment, nothing except the railroad to talk about and even now the rail road has gone away.

Q: What did you do?

EASTHAM: Well the aid stuff.

Q: Oh yes.

EASTHAM: The main activity of the United States in Malawi was providing assistance. Incredibly for this little country that nobody has ever heard of, during the period that I

was chief of mission there our program was something over $100 million a year every year.

Q: Good God what was that per population?

EASTHAM: Well it's a lot; it was $10-$15 per head per year. We were second behind the British and the European Commission was number three, I believe. We had quite substantial programs particularly in health. Approaching half of it was in the health sector because Malawi had and still has an HIV. Their rate of infection is in the neighborhood of 12-13 percent which means there are about a million Malawians who suffer from HIV/AIDS. They had abysmal statistics in the other indicators of human well-being. Their maternal and infant mortality was off the charts because of a lack of medical care and they had a serious problem of endemic and pervasive malaria. I once saw some statistics that indicated that fifty percent of the Malawian population had one case of malaria treated every year.

Q: Ew.

EASTHAM: Treated. Now given that there was very little medical care available the only way those showed up was because they somehow came to the attention of a health post or something like that. The vast majority of malaria in that country would not have been treated at all and therefore would not be included in that statistic. So you could basically say that the number of malaria cases in the country in a year probably exceeded the population two or three times over.

Q: What causes this were there particular forms of mosquito's or what?

EASTHAM: Yeah, the presence of the mosquito was the main part but it's a fairly temperate climate, the mosquitoes flourish all year round. There is a six month coolish dry season and a six month warmish rainy season in Malawi but with the dry season being a little cooler; there is never desperately bad weather. The mosquito thrived all year round, there are no screens on the houses, there was lots of stagnant water in the tributaries that feed the lake even during the dry season and in the wet season the whole country is wet and warm and provides an ideal environment for mosquitoes. There were no effective counter measures against them. There was no spraying program, there was a little program of treated bed nets, the ones with the insecticide in them, and those were generally successful but the distribution of those were only focused on small children and their mothers. So the rest of the population just didn't do anything to prevent malaria.

We had some very interesting episodes out there. One of the Bush presidential initiatives was the President's Malaria Initiative. When that started, they talked about three things you can do about malaria. The main thing was those bed nets. The second thing was treatment with drugs to stave off mortality. There are still effective drugs that combine artemisinin therapy that still work fairly well. But during the period I was there the World Health Organization changed its recommendation regarding something called indoor residual spraying. In prior years and after the scare in the 1950s and 1960s of the use of

DDT, the World Health Organization had recommended against the use of DDT even in the limited spraying context of spraying the interior walls of the house. Spraying the insecticide on the interior walls of the house serves the same purpose as the bed net; it breaks the vector. When a mosquito bites a human being after it has its meal it's sort of full and bloated and can't fly very far. So it flies away from its victim, the source of the blood, but it lands on a wall or something. If you can poison that wall and kill that mosquito when it is taking that little break for digesting the blood meal it's just had, it won't go bite somebody else and infect them with malaria. So it has a substantial effect in breaking the vector. But when the DDT scare came in the WHO said, well, we'd better not do the spraying now. They had gone through a series of changes with that recommendation. They recommended spraying with a different compound that doesn't have the persistent environmental effects of DDT. While I was there they recommended that DDT could be used in a limited and carefully controlled program of indoor spraying. Now we thought what a good idea that would be.

Well it turned out that the Malawians floated a little trial balloon about possibly doing a pilot program using DDT in this context. The tobacco industry went crazy because they didn't want their product to be contaminated with a few parts per million even the possibility of a few billion parts per microgram or whatever of the chemical DDT because that would affect their market. It was very interesting to have that discussion with the tobacco guys; the idea being that Malawians who grow tobacco sometimes store their tobacco in their house while they are waiting to market it and it might pick up some traces of DDT along the way if the house had been sprayed. This from someone selling tobacco for cigarettes.

The HIV question, of course, presented some of the same things and I really got quite deep into the details of the AID program out there; I'm sure to the discomfort at a bare minimum to the USAID chief in Malawi. It always seemed very interesting to me. I had to get deep into it because one of the things I found about being chief of mission in Africa is that most people don't understand what the chief of mission does. I used to liken it to the mission is trying to build a wall, we are trying to do something, we are trying to create something and my job every once in a while is to bring you guys a brick. If you need me to do something, if you want me to highlight something, if you want me to make some noise about something, come to me. If I don't know what you are doing, I can't do that for you, I can't suggest it, I can't volunteer it. So I used to go four or five times a month to the AID mission for aid program review meetings. I had a lot of engagement with the AID people with some success, I think, in terms of making the program more effective.

We were also working on the Millennium Challenge issue with the Malawians and it was my job…the brick that I had to bring was adequate economic reform on the part of the Malawians to get them into the universe of countries that would be considered to have adequately good governance to propose funding from the Millennium Challenge Corporation. That was a new initiative designed to make funding available to countries that were in the good governance category, let's put it that way, and measured by external indicators. I had a lot of fun working with the Malawians to try to get them into the zone

where the Millennium Challenge would look at them and then I went to Washington and lobbied on their behalf with the management of the Millennium Challenge Corporation to get Millennium Challenge to think about Malawi as a place they might consider making an investment. That was a decision that was made right as I was leaving Malawi.

Q: Did anything come up on the radar of the Department of State or were you out there and it was sort of God bless you and let us know when you are coming back?

EASTHAM: No, the little secret of the State Department in the Africa bureau is that there are about ten countries that the department actually guides and cares about; every other one is left to the resources of the chief of mission. In Malawi I was very fortunate to have a large AID program as a legacy AID program that had been going for a long time and therefore there were bureaucratic imperatives in Washington that kept going. With respect to just about everything else, I was on my own.

Q: Did you have a Peace Corps?

EASTHAM: Yes, we had a Peace Corps program of something at any given moment of about 100-110 volunteers.

Q: The medical situation the aids and malaria must have made you nervous.

EASTHAM: No, not with the Peace Corps volunteers. They know what they are doing, they are tough. You know that in the present day Peace Corps and this creates a bit of a dilemma, for a volunteer to come down with malaria is prima facie evidence that that volunteer has not been taking their medicine and therefore is a terminable offence. A Peace Corps volunteer is very, very likely to be sent home if they come down with malaria because that means they are not following the rules. So most of them did, the dilemma part is if a Peace Corps volunteer doesn't take their preventive medicine and comes down with malaria they are likely to conceal it from the Peace Corps so that they don't get sent home.

Q: Aw. In the military we went through this through the years with venereal disease.

EASTHAM: Yeah. We had a very good Peace Corps program and I don't recall any incidents or difficulties with Peace Corps in the three years I was there.

Q: Why did aids hit Malawi so hard?

EASTHAM: That's a subject of research and I don't think the scientists had…you know, everybody's got an opinion about it; I have an opinion about it. Historically, well let me give you a short answer. The short answer is that Malawi's aids epidemic is dependent on the South Africa aids epidemic because Malawi has historically been a source of migrant labor. There are a great many Malawians who leave Malawi to go and work in South Africa. During the apartheid period there were lots and lots of Malawians who worked in mining, there were a lot of Malawians who went underground to mine gold and whatever

else in South Africa. They left their families behind in Malawi and therefore they were prone to taking up a second family, in taking a second wife or a temporary wife or whatever you want to call it or frequenting prostitutes. Then they would take their leave every year and go home to Malawi and bring the thing back with them.

Also in Malawi it was very clear that aids was a rich man's disease; it was a disease that was more likely affect those who had some disposable income, i.e., a mine worker who had made a bit of money working in South Africa than a person who was still an African subsistence farmer and trying to scratch a crop of tobacco or a crop of maize out of the ground on a field somewhere forty miles down a dirt road. The reason for this was with disposable income people were more likely to take up mistresses or to engage in promiscuous behavior and therefore to catch the virus.

One of the major factors in southern Africa's epidemic is the practice of multiple concurrent sexual partners, which creates networks through which the disease can spread. All it takes is one lie for the disease to enter into a group of people who are concurrently engaged in sexual relationships with one another. There was a study a number of years ago that was done and it could be anywhere in southern Africa but it happened to be done on an island in Lake Malawi wherein a group of researchers went for several years and managed to chart the sexual behavior practices of the population of this small island. They found once they drew a diagram of who was sleeping with whom or who had been sleeping with whom that, in fact, over sixty percent of the population of the island was in one network of sexual relations and this was thousands of people...

Q: Good God. Oh boy.

EASTHAM: …that you could trace.

You also had the absolute lack of medical care; they were late to notice the epidemic in Malawi because of the shameful state of availability of medical care to people there. There were bad blood practices, there was considerable scope for infection in medical facilities; it was just a big mess. I'm convinced that a major cause was the number of migrant workers who spent their entire working lives in South Africa coming back every year or two to families in Malawi.

Q: Was there any denial type thing that had happened in South Africa about this time but was there any of that going on in Malawi?

EASTHAM: By the time I got there, no. It was quite recognized and the leadership talked about it and they were committed to the ABC theory of aids prevention, abstinence, be faithful and use condoms; that's the ABC prevention strategy. The president, when I was there, was Catholic and so it was notable he endorsed all the elements of that but they were not denying the existence of aids. They were quite willing to blame it on foreigners as something that had been imported to Malawi from someplace else, which was true. It is just that their finger pointing sometimes was pointed in the wrong direction; but they did not deny its existence. In fact, they struggled a bit against the folkloric remedies that

you see in Africa in a lot of places. They were very, very determined to attempt to move the disease out of the traditional medicine and folk medicine and magic that permeates Malawian society and into a modern medical context even lacking the resources as they did.

Q: How about the mortality rate when you were there. Had some of the treatments cut that or how bad was it?

EASTHAM: Oh it was just beginning to. There was effectively no treatment until the early part of this decade in Malawi. I believe that when the United States began spending money on HIV treatment in Malawi, actually the Global Fund was doing most of that, but we were funding some aspects of it, we were not buying medication in Malawi for a reason I will tell you in a minute. At the beginning, when they first determined that Malawi had a serious aids problem there were fewer than a thousand Malawians receiving treatment and those were Malawians who had the wherewithal to go to South Africa or to be treated in private clinics. Now one of the main objectives of the HIV program as it developed in Malawi was to set goals for ramping up rapidly, scaling up rapidly a program of a mass treatment available to ordinary Malawians. They did it in a funny way in which I think these days would be subject to significant criticism.

The Malawians took a hard=headed look at their medical system. You know the traditional medical model of treating a disease is that someone doesn't feel very good or they are showing some symptoms and they go to the doctor. The doctor takes a blood test, determines the cause of the illness and hands over a prescription, which is then taken to a pharmacy to be filled. That's how they do it in South Africa where many, many people have medical insurance. The Malawians quickly realized they couldn't do that so they treated the disease as a public health problem. What that does is it strips away a lot of the medical myth of it. What would happen in the Malawian case is that someone would feel bad, feel sick, somehow decide to go and that is one of the most complex parts of HIV/AIDS is how do you get the patient to realize that something is wrong because most people who have aids in the African context don't want anybody to know about it, don't want to think about it and don't want to acknowledge that anything is wrong. Anyway, you get them in the door for voluntary counseling and testing; you test them and determine they are positive. What happens in the Malawian case is that at least this was three or four years ago and I don't know if they changed it yet but instead of going for a blood test to determine the actual magnitude of the infection by determining the T-cell count the Malawian patient goes to a nurse who has in front of her, most of them are women, a long list of questions to ask. How do you feel, have you lost any weight lately, are you coughing, do you have any skin lesions, is there anything going on with your skin, a whole long list of questions related to aids symptoms. She puts a check in each box that the patient answers yes and if it is over a certain number the nurse then reaches into a drawer and pulls out a bottle of medicine and says, "You are now on aids treatment. Here is your medicine, come back next month." There is no blood test, no nothing, the only test is positive or negative and the treatment algorithm is based on clinical symptoms rather than a lab test. The reason for this is the Malawians couldn't

afford it, they couldn't do this, they did not have the resources either personnel or physical to be able to treat people in the medical model.

Their goal was to get up to 200 thousand people on treatment. They figured that 200 thousand is about the right number in terms of the general thinking about the lab disease and the clinical disease. They were making good progress toward it in 2008 when I left. But they are a shifting landscape in HIV aids, there are shifting guidelines and shifting program goals and things are done differently so it is probably very different now. They were doing a very good job in getting as many people on treatment as they could possibly do.

Q: Did you find that you all were sort of plugged into a general aids task force throughout Africa?

EASTHAM: That's the irony. I was going to tell you about why the United States didn't buy the medicine and it was because of a peculiarity in the design of the overall program which was the President's Emergency Program for HIV Aids Response, which was called PEPFAR. The Bush administration's program of PEPFAR was designed in a peculiar way. At the beginning of it it was designed to be a quick impact, fast program if one needed to be set up in a hurry and so a decision was taken between the White House and USAID to identify what they called focus countries where most of the initial money would be spent; they chose twelve countries in Africa. I never understood this and I was told once I was in Washington and asked the question, "How did you pick the twelve." The answer was those are countries where USAID had health programs underway that could be scaled up to spend substantial new money for HIV aids. But it led to some interesting results.

Zambia, next door to Malawi was a PEPFAR focus country, similar population size, similar infection rate to Malawi. Malawi was not a focus country; we got very, very little HIV aids funding. The entire funding for the health program was in the neighborhood of $20-25 million, not all of that was PEPFAR money it mostly came from USAID's health budget. Zambia, on the other hand, was funded the last year I had account of it was probably 2007-2008 the last year I had any account of how much PEPFAR money was going to Zambia was $191 million.

Q: Good God.

EASTHAM: In other words, in Zambia we were spending more than ten times as much on HIV aids than Malawi and there was no difference between the two countries in terms of their population size or the infection rate, which are the two key things you should look at when you are allocating funding. Similarly, look at South Africa. The last year I had a notion which is probably three years ago of how much money is being spent in South Africa even when the South Africans health minister was denying HIV aids the U.S. government was spending $700 million on HIV aids in South Africa; one year funding, go figure. I don't understand it; I was just ambassador to Malawi. I do my best with what I consider to be inadequate money to address the problem.

Q: Off on a different subject. Did the terrorist network reach your area or not?

EASTHAM: No, no and we couldn't figure out any way that it would. There was nothing of value that would interest a terrorist in Malawi. We had an old fashioned embassy and we still do, as far as I know; rather old fashioned and very relaxed embassy without the high walls and stuff that you see now. The way I would characterize the whole time there was it was like being in the 1960s. One day I looked around and we'd gone through an assignment cycle, this was my second year in Malawi. One day I was sitting in the country team meeting and I realized that it was Leave It To Beaver. The entire embassy was made up of middle aged white guys with a wife who stayed at home and 2.1 kids; it was the most amazing throwback. There was nothing pernicious or discriminatory or anything like that about it, it was just the way it worked out. Malawi was a nice place, it was safe, the weather was good, there were a couple of choices for decent schooling for small children and people just naturally gravitated there. We were not afraid of terrorists; there were no terrorist scares ever during the time I was there. We had no tragedies except one but no great difficulties with American citizens, no al Qaeda or any of that stuff. We had a good dialogue with the Muslims; Malawi has about ten to fifteen percent Muslim population mainly down south left over from the days of the penetration of the Swahili culture into the African interior in search of slaves. The Malawians were all staunch church going Presbyterians, as best I could tell. It was actually a very, very pleasant place to spend three years, easy to work with, easy to see the president if I needed, call up the finance minister and see him in fifteen minutes, it was the easiest place I'd ever worked.

Q: Was there any problem with human rights or things of that nature?

EASTHAM: No, nothing in particular. The Muslims complained that their views were not adequately considered but nobody interfered with their right to worship or any of that sort of thing. The democracy part, the elections, the president didn't want to have local elections, he didn't believe in the value of government being down at the local level so he just didn't have the elections. He thought it was too expensive and Malawi couldn't afford to pay salaries and travel allowances and buy cars for all those people who would be elected; so he just didn't have elections. The parliamentary elections were fairly okay within the African context, better than many. There was no great repression, freedom of speech was there, there were no limits. There was a fairly straight-laced main stream line of thought in Malawi. If you didn't get too far out of that, judged by custom, not by law, then freedom of expression was there. Their democracy was okay. After I left very recently, just within the last few months, there has been a fuss about gay rights, but that was not an issue when I was there. The opposition in the parliament didn't have a majority and they complained that they were being suppressed but it was kind of like that's democracy, isn't it.

Q: Yeah.

EASTHAM: Politics was a little hardball and a little funny but nothing that would rise to the level of a really serious infraction.

Q: Well then you left there in what 2008?

EASTHAM: 2008 and then we came to the last assignment.

Q: Which was?

EASTHAM: To Brazzaville, the Republic of Congo.

Q: So you were there from when to when?

EASTHAM: From October 2008 until July 2010.

Q: That's always been some sort of a trouble spot there. What was happening when you were there?

EASTHAM: Well not much. They had a presidential election in the middle of 2009, the outcome of which was entirely foreordained. Brazzaville is a recovering society; their last outbreak of serious violence and it was so serious that it destroyed the city of Brazzaville pretty much, was in 1997. So by the time I got there in 2008 things were coming back. Even over that two year period there was a great deal of new construction, construction fences all over town, lots of new buildings coming on line, a new water plant being built, water supply was being fixed. There was a lot of money being spent on infrastructure to replace and modernize that which had been destroyed in 1997 or neglected since. You really got the feeling there was a lot of money sloshing around in the Republic of Congo. It's an oil country and they produce something in the neighborhood of 300,000 barrels of oil a day, which brings them a substantial income and enables all the spending on infrastructure. The Chinese were in it in a big way too. They had provided something over a billion dollars in various loans and credits to do infrastructure projects in the Republic of Congo. They were going great guns building roads, building the power plant, building a new terminal at the airport, doing all sorts of things under Chinese financing in addition to the billions worth of oil money that was coming in.

I went to see the finance minister around the budget time last year and he told me, "Look, I don't quite agree with this but this is the way the president wants it. We have a government revenue of $6 billion this year and our government expenditure is going to be $3 billion. We are going to save $3 billion and put it in the bank; this is for the contingencies for the future." That's the sort of economy it was where there was plenty of money sloshing around.

But Congo Brazzaville is a very strange place. President Sassou-Nguesso has been in power basically since 1979 with a little hiatus of five years from 1992-1997. There was a free and fair election during that wave of democratization that swept through Africa in the early '90s and he lost. I suspect that's not something that will happen again while he's

alive. He came back to power during that Civil War that destroyed the city of Brazzaville, which was provoked by a presidential election in 1997. This time around, as of now, he's been in power again for thirteen years and shows no sign of letting it go. He maintains close ties with the French, he's the leader, the elder, in the central Africa region and the country will just continue. It's got plenty of natural resources, it's got beautiful forests but the infrastructure is dilapidated and they don't produce anything to eat.

Q: One looks across the river where Mobutu took all this money and was paying everybody off. Are they a different breed of cat?

EASTHAM: Well it's a much smaller country. The Congo Brazzaville in absolute terms it is vast but the population is somewhere around four million people whereas on the other side of the river, Congo Kinshasa has a huge territory and a much larger population. The Brazzaville side is also more how shall I put it? It is quite different from the Kinshasa side in the sense that it is more French. Congo Brazzaville is solidly within the zone of former French Africa and there is just a very different atmosphere about it. Kinshasa, as we used to call it Kin-en-face, Kinshasa across the river, was more chaotic, less organized, less disciplined whereas Brazzaville has a considerable French tradition that still lives, it still exists. There are some unique things about it whereas the country of the Democratic Republic of Congo is so large as to be almost ungovernable by size; it's a thousand miles from Kinshasa to the Rwandan frontier, whereas Brazzaville is easily manageable, it's not so big and the population is mainly centered along the main road between Brazzaville and the port of Pointe-Noire on the Atlantic; so they present very different management challenges. They were brought into independence not in the chaotic way that happened in the Democratic Republic of Congo but in a rather more orderly progress through the French.

Q: Well at one point wasn't Congo Brazzaville a dedicated Marxist country?

EASTHAM: Absolutely, they were more Communist than Lenin for some reason. They made the wrong choice in the early '60s right after independence. They decided they would go the Socialist route and that didn't work for them as it didn't work for most countries that tried it. It didn't work to such an extent that the United States broke relations with them and did not resume for about fourteen years. So the list of U.S. ambassadors since 1960 is very short because for about a quarter of that period we weren't there. But after 1990, after the collapse of the Soviet Union they changed their spots, they went away from that Marxist business and moved toward a more relaxed capitalist road. Now there are a lot of barnacles on the ship of state in Congo Brazzaville and they are red barnacles. They are red barnacles that are regulatory and repressive laws that are still on the books and still to some extent enforced from that Communist period; price controls and import quotas and all these things that in the modern world you really don't need to do. But they still do them in Congo Brazzaville because that's the way they've always done things from the early 1960s. But that was all swept away when those sponsors of the thing, the Russians and the Eastern Europeans went their other direction.

Q: How were your relations with the government?

EASTHAM: Cordial. They were very excited just after I arrived there, of course, it was the election of Barak Obama and there was considerable excitement on the part of the Congolese about that particular advance. They would like to have good relations with the United States; they would love to see more American investment, more American business. I think there are not very many Americans who are willing to take the kind of risks and endure the kind of petty nonsense that it takes to do business in Congo Brazzaville, except in the petroleum sector where there are several American companies present. But the Congolese would like nothing better than a ringing endorsement from the Obama administration for their good governance but, unfortunately, they are not going to get it because the administration nearly two years into their term has made it very clear that one of their key factors in looking at Africa is the degree of democratization in any particular country.

Q: Were you able to get around much?

EASTHAM: It is as difficult to travel in Congo Brazzaville as I have ever seen in any country, possibly including Afghanistan. I think this will improve in the next few years, but when I was there it was awful. We did make an expedition up to the north to go see a troop of lowland gorillas but that was a major undertaking involving a three-hour flight in an old airplane, a four-hour ride in a motorized pirogue, two hours in a four-wheel drive vehicle and four hours on foot through a flooded forest.

Q: Good God.

EASTHAM: That was a serious expedition, it's hard to travel in Congo Brazzaville even to get, I hate to say this because it's a shameful thing for the Congo people but to get from the capital to the port, the capital being 300 miles inland or so or 350 miles from the ocean up the river to get from the capital to the port there is no way to go other than to take an airplane; you must fly. The highway doesn't work; you can drive it if you are willing to drive for two days on a dirt road. The railroad doesn't work; the railroad timing is even less predictable than driving time. So the only way to travel between the two main cities in the country is to fly. I didn't like that very much because the airlines you were flying on were, shall we say, somewhat motley. They were flying aircraft you'd never seen before with pilots of nationalities that were uncertain.

Q: Oh God.

EASTHAM: It was okay but you weren't going on United Airlines or even South African Airlines, which is one of my favorite airlines on the continent. It was tough there was no assigned seating, you'd run and scrum to get on the plane it was just a real nuisance. At the time it's a 45-minute flight but the getting to and from was not the easiest thing in the world and there was nowhere to drive. There was hardly any use for a car in Brazzaville except to go to the grocery store. There were very few places to go. You could go north up toward the president's place but there was one little park up there that I suppose you

could go further, if you wanted to. The attractions were in the cities, the people all lived in the cities and to get to the wild life areas was an all day drive on a dirt road.

Q: Had aids hit the place yet?

EASTHAM: Very low, less than three percent and don't ask me to explain that, I don't know why.

Q: Maybe because they didn't have good roads.

EASTHAM: No, it was because of the conflicts, because of war.

Q: Oh yeah.

EASTHAM: But no, aids was quite low and not really perceived as much of a problem.

Q: How were the oil people being treated there?

EASTHLAM: Oh they could do anything that they wanted. The oil industry was the favorite child. In my entire time there, I never heard a complaint from the oil people. They did whatever they wanted to do as long as they paid their taxes and participated in the accountability mechanisms that made the revenue flow to the government. There were no problems, business was easy, which was very surprising to me that it was that smooth. Now anybody else who wanted to set up a business outside the oil sector risked being pecked to death by ducks in terms of the degree of difficulty in starting a business or keep it functioning. But the oil sector was very, very well treated; it was smooth and efficient.

Q: Well then you left there just a little while ago.

EASTHAM: I retired from Brazzaville. I left Brazzaville a year early largely because I didn't have anything to do.

Q: So what are you doing now Al?

EASTHAM: I am teaching.

Q: Where are you teaching?

EASTHAM: I am teaching at Hendrix College in Conway, Arkansas.

Q: What are you teaching?

EASTHAM: Well, this semester, my first semester here, I'm teaching two courses. One a survey course on U.S. foreign policy and a second course on comparative African foreign policy, which turns out to be a contemporary international issues in Africa course because

materials are difficult to come by to enable them to compare and contrast African countries foreign policies.

Q: Well it sounds like you have a very fine future for yourself there.

EASTHAM: Well they actually pay me a little bit too.

Q: How do you find the student body?

EASTHAM: They are pretty good. I have two classes and each of them has around twenty students in it; I have no freshmen they really upper class. Quite a few of them are international relations majors so they are serious, they are fairly engaged; it's okay. I have a few who don't care anymore.

Q: Goes with…

EASTHAM: But the majority of my students are very, very, very attentive and sharp and work.

Q: I hope you will direct them to our oral history because we've covered 168 countries.

EASTHAM: Okay.

Q: You can tell what we are doing here and all and this is typical. If they are interested in any countries they can go to our website, ADST website, and get a list of where people served in a country.

EASTHAM: Okay.

Q: And ones of people who had served in Brazzaville, for example.

EASTHAM: Right.

Q: And also on the Library of Congress, if they Google frontline diplomacy. That's my plug.

EASTHAM: I knew that and I've actually already mentioned that a couple of times to a couple of kids who were researching stuff. I actually pointed one kid specifically in that direction.

Q: Good. Okay well then I want to thank you very much.

End of interview