

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

AMBASSADOR AUBREY HOOKS

Interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy
Initial Interview Date: September 5, 2009
Copyright ADST 2012

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Background

Born and raised in South Carolina
Race relations
Brevard College; University of South Carolina
Vietnam War
Senator and Mrs. Strom Thurmond
Marriage
Entered the Foreign Service in 1971

Tel Aviv, Israel: Rotation Officer 1971-1973

Ambassador Walworth Barbour
Operations
Congressional delegations
Relations
Menachem Begin
Environment
Relations with Consul General Jerusalem
American visitors
Post 1967 War euphoria
Internal travel
Ultra-orthodox Jewish community
Reporting

State Department: Foreign Service Institute (FSI); 1973-1974
Polish language training

Warsaw, Poland: Consular Officer 1974-1976

Edward Gierek
Relations
Immigrant visas
Fulbright Program
Polish public
Secret Police

Housing	
Travel	
Social Security checks	
Culture	
President Ford visit (1975)	
State Department: Education and Cultural Affairs	1976-1978
East Europe Exchange Programs	
Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary	
Helsinki Accords effect	
Dissident Adam Michnik	
Polish priests	
Exchange program transfer to USIA	
Transfer problems	
State Department: FSI; Economic training	1978-1979
Ankara, Turkey; Economic Officer	1979-1983
Coffee shortage	
US Ambassadors	
Economic problems	
Political violence	
Military coup	
Economic stabilization program	
Turgut Ozal	
Rcevit	
Turkish press	
Government	
Ataturk history	
Iranian revolution	
Kurds	
Iranian refugee visas	
Cyprus	
Denktash	
Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA)	
Armenia	
Immigration to Europe	
University of Michigan: Applied Economics training	1983-1984
Masters Degree	
Port au Prince, Haiti: Economic/Commercial Officer	1984-1987
Ambassdor Clay McManaway	
Baby Doc	
Ports closing	
Economic problems	

Corruption	
Government	
Industry	
Illiteracy	
US Policy	
Haitian lobby	
Papa Doc leaves	
Ambassador Brunson McKinley	
Aristide	
Race issues	
Dominican Republic	
Duvalier fortunes	
Economy	
State Department: FSI: Hebrew language training	1987-1988
Tel Aviv, Israel: Economic Counselor	1988-1991
Intifada	
Economy	
US financial aid	
Palestinians	
Rock-throwing	
Ambassador Tom Pickering	
Ambassador Bill Brown	
Relations	
Embassy divisions	
Israeli society	
Israeli security	
Prime Minister Shamir	
Likud	
Government	
Kibbutzim	
Israel/Washington relationship	
Israel/Egypt relations	
Israel/Jordan relations	
Religion	
Jewish homeland	
Russian Jews	
Arab minority	
Israeli Arabs	
Congressional visits	
First Gulf War	
Evacuation dilemma	
Missile attacks	
Soviet Union collapse	
Schooling	

Environment Housing Peace prospects	
Rome, Italy: NATO Defense College NATO's future Countries represented The French Evaluation	1991-1992
Helsinki, Finland: Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) Operations Human Rights Soviet Union commitments French European Union Poland	1992
Warsaw, Poland: Economic Counselor Economy Changes from 1970's Environment	1992-1995
Senior Seminar 72-74 Evaluation Course content Lessons learned	1995-1996
United States Ambassador to the Republic of Congo (Brazzaville) George Moose Oil Missionaries US policy President Lissouba Politics Sassou French request troops Conflict Military looting Citizen evacuation Communications breakdown Congo River EUCOM team Peace Corps volunteers War dangers	1996-1999

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Embassy move to Kinshasa Troop lack of discipline Violence and looting Rescue attempts Task Force Vince Valle Embassy Safe Haven Staff resilience Lessons learned Demand for reparations Sassou/Lissuba rivalry Gabon President Bongo Ambassador Liz Raspolic Kinshasa conference Angola involvement Mission to Bangui, Central African Republic 	
<p>New York City, NY: Member, US Mission to the United Nations African Affairs</p>	2001
<p>State Department: Director, African Crisis Response Initiative</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Marshall McCallie Pentagon/State differences Recruitment of African members Force training and supply Coups d'état Teaching peacekeeping skills African troops' evaluation Participants UN Peacekeeping operations French 	1999-2001
<p>Harare, Zimbabwe: Chargé d'affaires</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mugabe regime Ambassador problems Environment White farmers Economy Tribal influence Military Thebo Mbeki Elections South Africa US policy African countries policies United Nations 	2001

Walter Kansteiner

United States Ambassador to the Democratic Republic of Congo 2001-2004

President Joseph Kabila
Former President Lurent Desiree Kabila
Country divisions
Jean-Pierre Bemba
Rubera
Rwanda army looting
Le Groupe des Singes
Contact with rebel groups
Internal travel
C-12 aircraft
United Nations
Deteriorating infrastructure
Mineral wealth
Corruption
Economy
Belgians
Mobutu legacy
Squandered wealth
US policy
South Africa role
Sun City conference
Walter Kansteiner
Sources of information
Foreign Embassies
P-5
Human Rights
Lumumba
Rwanda refugees
Angola
International Agencies/Organizations
King Leopold of Belgium
Congo under Belgians

United States Ambassador to Cote d'Ivoire 2004-2007

Houphouet-Biogny legacy
Henri Konan Bédié
Recent history
Geography
French presence and influence
US policy
Lebanese
Official protocol
President Blé Gbagbo

Contact with rebels
French attacks
US citizen killed
UN troops
French Ambassador Gildas Le Lidec
French/Cote d'Ivoire confrontation
US and foreign evacuation
Street violence
Problems in evacuations
Young Patriots
Relations with President Gbagbo
Elections
European Union
Assistant Secretary Jendayi Frazer
Gbagbo's flash visit to Washington
Mme Otto-Toure
US economic interests
Religions
Internal travel
Prime Minister Guillaume Soro
Government of National Unity
Commandant Wattao
Political Parties
French bashing
French President Chirac
French African Policy
American school
Yamoussoukro Basilica

Retirement

2007

Duties of an ambassador
Business operations
Comments on Foreign Service

INTERVIEW

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

HOOKS: I was born in Mullins, South Carolina on May 18, 1948.

Q: Let's talk a bit about your family. Where did the Hooks come from on your father's side?

HOOKS: My family is from Horry County which is the largest and most rural county in South Carolina. Originally, according to family legend, the Hooks family came from Belgium and presumably the name was Vanderhoek or something like that. Vander was dropped and became a first name; I have cousins and uncles named 'Vander Hooks'. That's the family tradition.

My mother's maiden name was Floyd, and the Floyds were mostly Irish, according to family tradition, possibly from northern Ireland.

Q: How long were the Hooks in South Carolina?

HOOKS: A William Hooks appeared in the first federal census in 1790 in South Carolina, but I don't know when exactly the first Hooks arrived in South Carolina. I have been able to visit the grave of my great, great grandfather, Patrick Hooks who was born in 1805. According to family legend, he or his father or grandfather was born on a ship coming over from Belgium, but I don't have any documentation to that effect.

Q: Were the Hooks farmers or merchants or what?

HOOKS: They were farmers.

Q: What type of farming?

HOOKS: In that area of South Carolina, the basic cash crop for over a century has been primarily tobacco. Other crops grown by most farmers in the area were cotton, corn, oats, hay and that sort of thing.

Q: How about the Civil War? Did that ring loud or did you hear many stories about it or not?

HOOKS: No, growing up I heard nothing about it. It was not an issue that was raised in the family context.

Q: How about on your mother's side? You say they were Irish. What do you know about her family?

HOOKS: Not a lot in terms of historical background except that they had been in the same county, in the same community that my father's family was from, for many generations. My great-great-grandfather Frederick Floyd is buried in Horry County.

Q: How about your grandparents on your father's side? Were they farmers?

HOOKS: They were farmers.

Q: And on your mother's side?

HOOKS: They were farmers.

Q: And down through your father, was he a farmer?

HOOKS: He was a farmer.

Q: Your mother and father, how far did they get in education?

HOOKS: My mother was the first in her family to finish high school. My father never went to school.

Q: At all?

HOOKS: No, not at all.

Q: Did he read and write and all that?

HOOKS: No, he never learned to read and write.

Q: Now, was this a problem? How did your mother feel about this? Did she make sure you were going to get an education?

HOOKS: Unfortunately, my mother died from cancer when I was two years old, so I was raised by my paternal grandmother Eppie Sarvis Hooks. My paternal grandparents lived with us in the same house when I was growing up.

Q: '48, the Depression was over and this is post-World War II. How were living conditions at the time? You know, when you first recall. This would be the early '50s.

HOOKS: The Depression had left echoes within my family. The small savings that they had had back in the '30s had been lost. My father only went to first grade for a few weeks because of the poor economic situation of the family. He was the only son and therefore he remained on the farm to work.

Q: Was this a poor area of South Carolina?

HOOKS: Horry County was a very rural county. It was the largest and probably one of the poorest counties in South Carolina. And as you know, South Carolina was one of the poorest states in the Union. My family was from the back side of the county, so it was really the poorest part of a poor county.

Q: What was the race situation at that time that you recall?

HOOKS: The composition of the population at that time was basically white and black; whites were in the majority, but there was a substantial black population. There were almost no immigrants coming into that region. I mentioned my family is from Horry

County. That is where they lived when I was born, but actually I grew up in a neighboring county called Marion County. My family moved to a farm located there when I was two years old.

Q: Was it of the same farming community and all that?

HOOKS: Correct.

Q: What was home life like? Did you have brothers and sisters?

HOOKS: Home life was complicated in the sense that my father remarried following my mother's death in 1950. My mother and father had three children; I was the second. When my mother died, my oldest brother was five, I was two and my sister was only eight months old. A few days before she died, my mother asked my father's sister to take my eight-month-old sister home with her and to care for the baby until she (my mother) recovered. My mother obviously felt at the time that she would recover; unfortunately, she didn't. My paternal grandmother assumed responsibility for raising my brother and me, while my sister remained with our aunt and grew up there.

Two years after my mother's passing, my father remarried and had seven children with his second wife. We were therefore two rather distinct families living in the same house. That led to a lot of friction.

Q: What were living conditions like? Were you able to have enough food on the table and decent clothes to wear?

HOOKS: Food was very basic, the typical things that farm families in that area of South Carolina ate. In the summer, of course, it was more plentiful because, after all, we lived on a farm and could raise fresh vegetables such as beans, corn, collard greens, cabbage, etc. In wintertime things were very basic, sometimes just rice and dried beans, that was it. I don't recall ever a day in which we didn't have at least something to eat, although sometimes it might be just rice and fatback (a fatty layer of meat along the back of a hog) on the very worst days. Generally in the wintertime almost inevitably there was rice and lima beans, which I still like. They were dried beans and thus easy to store. We did not have refrigeration. But lima beans are relatively cheap and fill you up, in addition to nutritional value and fiber content. We ate eggs as they were available from the chickens we raised, and we ate chicken about once a week or every two weeks. We acquired electricity when I was a very small child. We never had a refrigerator or a telephone or a television when I was growing up. And we never had running water in the house when I was growing up.

Q: What was the community like?

HOOKS: We lived on a farm. It was located about three miles away from the nearest town.

Q: We are talking about your early elementary school years as a farm kid; did you have much contact with the town?

HOOKS: Basically, I grew up on a farm. I had contact with children in the neighborhood but very little in the town. I went to town from time to time with my father and my grandmother, but we did not spend a lot of time per se in town, so I was very much a farm boy.

Q: When did you start working? I assume you worked on the farm, didn't you?

HOOKS: Of course. I started working on the farm when I was about four years old, including working for the neighbors, especially during the tobacco harvesting season. Harvesting tobacco was a family affair and families help each other because the tobacco had to be harvested during the course of one day. Therefore I worked in the tobacco for my father and for the neighbors as well. Today people talk a great deal about child labor, but children growing up on farms have traditionally played a critical role in providing for the family.

Q: What about education? Did you go to a school in Marion?

HOOKS: I did not start my education until I was six years old because, in those days, kindergarten was private and obviously my family was not in a position to pay school fees to send me to kindergarten. So I started school in the first grade in Nichols Elementary School. Nichols was a small farming community in Marion County just across the Lumber River from Horry County, very close to where my parents and grandparents grew up.

Q: What was the school like?

HOOKS: The school was a traditional brick school, two stories high, and it was only through elementary school. Nichols did not have a high school. For high school children were bussed to Mullins, the town where I was born, which was located in the middle of Marion county. With a few exceptions, all the students were poor farm boys and girls.

Q: Were you exposed to much reading at home?

HOOKS: None, or almost none, I should say. My father could not read nor write because he didn't go to school except for about a month. Interestingly enough, his father, however, was able to read, and there was a newspaper called the South Carolina Market Bulletin published in the area which published information about the sale of farm equipment and farm animals. It offered a free subscription and it came once a month. I do recall my grandfather would put on his glasses and read that newspaper. Other than that, there was no reading at home. We had absolutely no books in the house except for the Bible which had belonged to my mother, and no one ever read it until I read it as a teenager.

Q: Politics? Was your family involved in politics? I assume they were democrats if you had a choice or did it even make any difference?

HOOKS: They were not democrats because they were not that engaged in politics at all. They were too preoccupied with the issue of economic survival and dealing with the ordinary problems of life. I do recall that, when I was in high school, I accompanied my father to the courthouse in Marion following an election. The officials were counting the votes and we were just there as part of the crowd. My father did not vote in that election; our presence there was more a social activity than a political activity. He was not politically engaged. You have to remember that he was uneducated and therefore did not read newspapers; we did not have a television. Therefore his awareness of politics was limited to what he heard from neighbors.

Q: How did you find the teaching? Did you take to school?

HOOKS: I loved school. I wanted to learn. Even though my grandmother was illiterate, she could recite the alphabet and count to 100. She taught me to recite the alphabet and to count to 100, so I had that advantage when I went off to the first grade. I could not write the letters or the numbers, but I at least could recite them.

I enjoyed school very much. First of all, if you are a farm kid, you get a break from working on the farm when you go to school. That in itself was a big incentive to go to school. And when you came home from school, you don't just put your books down and watch television. You had to go work in the fields until it was dark, particularly in the fall and in the spring. I enjoyed going to school because I was excited to learn. I met kids my own age in a large group. It was exciting for me to learn to read and to discover a whole new world. In fact, this became a door through which I could escape from the circumstances in which I lived and see what life was like beyond my own small world.

Q: In the farm community, was pretty much everybody in the same boat so you didn't feel that you were sort of the poor cousins left out or something?

HOOKS: Not quite. First of all, there are two things that you have to keep in mind: even in a small farming community like that in traditional, rural South Carolina, much of the land was owned by a small number of families. My father was a sharecropper, which means that he owned no land; he farmed someone else's land and gave them half of the crops during the harvest season as rent. We had some relatives who owned small farms, but my family was the poorest of the poor in the sense that we were sharecroppers. Even in the rural communities you had those who were sharecroppers and then you had those who were landowners. Some landowners lived in the nearby town and often had professional jobs. But in every farming community there were class differences, primarily between landowners and sharecroppers. In our community there were also African-Americans, most of whom were sharecroppers. A few had jobs in factories in Marion or elsewhere but lived in our rural area where housing was cheaper.

Q: How would you characterize the teachers and conditions in your elementary school? Were the teachers the usual maiden ladies or what?

HOOKS: I think it was a combination. My first grade teacher was a very elderly Miss Rogers who had never been married, but my other teachers to the best I recall were all married and oftentimes had children in school as well. Sometimes they lived in the town and sometimes they belonged to the landowner class and their husbands farmed.

Q: Did the teachers encourage you? You were coming out of a rather unpromising background, but were the teachers encouraging you or seeing in you something, well, we are talking about someone who had been ambassador a number of times already so there should be something there. Were they seeing that or not at that time?

HOOKS: Yes, I have to give my teachers credit for encouraging me. Many of them gave me special attention as I was a very good student. I was basically a quiet kid, fairly reserved, very determined, however, and I was there to learn. Reading became my passion. I think teachers appreciated the fact that I was a serious student; I always did my homework except when I missed school for extended periods when I had to work on the farm. When I was in high school teachers began to prepare me for college even though I had no hope of going to college because of the financial situation of my family.

Q: In Marion did you have access to a library as you learned to read?

HOOKS: That's an interesting question. There was a library of course at the high school I attended, and I borrowed books on a weekly basis from the library. However, I did not get a library card from the public library in Marion until I was a junior in high school because I didn't have transportation to get to the library. The lack of transportation is a serious problem for a boy living on a farm outside town.

Q: Did you have any reading material at home?

HOOKS: Well, occasionally people would give me a book or throw one away that I could recover, so I acquired a handful of books. I may have had ten books. Black Beauty I recall was one of the books given to me. When I was in school, of course, teachers would always lend me books because they could tell that I wanted to read, but in the summertime I did not have access to any library so I simply read over and over again the books I had on hand.

Q: With all these kids around, your brothers and sisters, grandparents and all, was the family sort of overwhelming when you were at home?

HOOKS: You know, when you are born into that situation, you don't see it as overwhelming. It's just a natural process. In fact, many of our neighbors had families equally as large. Of course, I was one of the older children and we just make adjustments for the latest arrival. Poor people do not see their situation in the same light as middle-class people observing from the outside. Poverty was just the natural order of things.

Q: Given the circumstances, were you able to be somewhat of a loner, get up in a crook of a tree and sit there and contemplate or read or something?

HOOKS: When I had free time, yes, I was a loner in the sense of taking a book and reading. My father used to say, “Aubrey, all you ever so is read” because whenever I had free time I would generally find a book and look for a corner where I could read. In the daytime that was no problem. At night time we didn’t have lamps in our house. We simply had a light overhead in the only room with heating, and so I would try to get where I could read, but it was certainly not under the ideal conditions of having a lamp close by. It was simply a bare light bulb hanging from the ceiling, typical for homes in that region.

Q: Did you begin to develop a longing to get out and see, I won’t say the world, but to get out and see Marion, in other words, something beyond where you were?

HOOKS: Absolutely. To me the grass was always greener on the other side. I always longed to travel. However, until I was in college I had only been to the edge of North Carolina, to the neighboring county. I read travelogues and I read histories by the dozens. Those were my favorites. I loved learning foreign languages and through books I got to know other worlds. My aunt asked me when I was nine years old what I wanted to do when I grew up, and I replied that I wanted to travel to the “farthest states.” My imagination at the time could not grasp the possibility of traveling to a foreign country.

Movies, I never went to a movie until I was in tenth grade, and that was part of a classroom activity. I was a junior in high school when I went to a movie downtown for the first time with a friend.

Q: You didn’t go Saturday night to the movies?

HOOKS: I didn’t have transportation. I didn’t have money. Going to a movie on Saturday night was a luxury that I could not afford.

Q: I remember about this period or a little earlier during the late ‘40s being in a small town in Mississippi watching the country folk come into town by mule cart.

HOOKS: That wouldn’t have worked to drive into Marion with a mule and to leave the mule hitched for two or three hours while I went to a movie. Furthermore, I didn’t have money, not even the twenty five cents you paid in those days, so I never went to a movie until I was in the eleventh grade, and then I went only on rare occasions.

Q: Where did you go to high school?

HOOKS: Marion, South Carolina.

Q: How did you get there?

HOOKS: I rode the school bus. When I was a senior in high school I drove the school bus. In South Carolina in those days juniors and seniors who had drivers' licenses, which almost everybody did, drove the school bus. I received a small salary, which, as I recall, was about thirty dollars a month. That for me was a wonderful amount and allowed me to buy the basics, such as toothpaste and deodorant. I spent very little of that money for entertainment.

Q: What was the high school like?

HOOKS: Marion High School was a traditional high school in a small southern town. I first started high school in the eighth grade. A couple of years later the schools in the county were consolidated and the eighth grade was moved to a middle school. Marion High School had about 500 students, and my graduating class had exactly 100 students. The class before mine was slightly larger, like 105 or 107, but that was the range.

I recall when I was in high school that I would read with amazement about high schools with 5,000 students in New Jersey or Chicago where you could take basket weaving or ballroom dancing. In my high school that was hardly the case. First of all, it was a very traditional high school in South Carolina. We spent lots of time diagramming sentences in English class and going over math skills. It was very traditional in its approach, and it was only subsequently after I left high school that I realized it really gave me an excellent foundation, because we didn't go with the latest trend, we didn't do a lot of extracurricular activities. It focused on the basics of English and math and science. I have to say that in my high school, by and large, we had very good and very dedicated teachers. On the whole, I would give the high school very good marks for encouraging the students, for the quality of the teaching, for the quality of the administration, and I look back fondly to that time in school.

Q: By the time you got to high school things were beginning to change. Particularly growing up, did you play with black children? Was this part of the society or was it separate? How did this work?

HOOKS: As a sharecropper, of course, we had white neighbors and black neighbors. The landowning families in the area were, of course, all white with a few exceptions. Growing up as a sharecropper kid, I played with both black kids and white kids. Of course, when it came time to go to school, there were separate school systems and it was only in my senior year in high school, in 1965-66, that token integration began. There were four black students in my graduation class in 1966, the first class to have black students. The next year full integration occurred, and to the credit of both communities, it took place without any serious incidents.

So, during the week and the weekends, my playmates were as likely to be black as to be white.

Q: From your family were you picking up, was it 'we are all in this together'? What were you picking up from your elders, your father, stepmother, grandparents about the race situation?

HOOKS: It is interesting how we looked at the race situation. There was a certain dichotomy in the way white people looked at this issue. In general there was generic racism that you find throughout the South, and elsewhere for that matter. I use the term generic to mean a general sense of whites seeing black people in negative terms. Interestingly enough, at the same time, there were real friendships between the races on a personal basis. Our neighbors we saw as our friends. They helped us and we helped them in terms of harvesting tobacco and cotton and other things, and I played with their children. We knew black people as people, not just as members of a broad category. But on a more generic level, yes, racism was rampant.

Q: In high school were there any teachers that particularly struck you as being, later looking back, influential?

HOOKS: I think many of my teachers were influential in terms of encouraging me. I recall my tenth grade English teacher who did extra work with me. I kept in touch with her, as a matter of fact, until she died in her 80s. I had an eleventh grade history teacher who also was very encouraging. I would particularly like to cite a physical education teacher and counselor named Billy Wesley who focused my attention on the possibility of obtaining scholarships for college. He diligently lobbied a scholarship committee on my behalf.

The person who really helped me in terms of scholarships was a man named Carlyle Rogers. He had driven the same school bus I drove but six years earlier. He was the nephew of the lady who owned the farm that we worked on. So he was of the landowner class. When he returned from college he occasionally came by to visit me because he heard I was a good student. He once asked me whether I wanted to go to college. I replied: "Yes, but I have no money. It's not possible for me to go to college." He pointed out that there are all sorts of possibilities to obtain a scholarship.

He began to encourage me and said basically, "You keep up the grades and there will be ways for you to go to college." I think that finding a scholarship for me became a mission for him. I was fortunate that in the county where I lived, there was a scholarship given by a local businessman every year to one student from that county to attend Brevard College, a junior college in North Carolina. This man's name was Mr. Boshheimer; he owned a local textile factory. In my senior year, thanks to the efforts of Carlyle Rogers and Billy Wesley, I won that scholarship. By the way, I learned recently that a distant cousin was Mr. Boshheimer's secretary, and she informed him that she knew me and that we were related. I did not know that at the time.

Q: What was the role of your stepmother? I mean, outside of taking care of seven kids, it sounds like she was pretty busy. Was she an influence or not?

HOOKS: It's kind of interesting when you look at a home in which you have two distinct families; it always leads to certain problems. It was very difficult for my stepmother to come into a home which was already an existing family, so to speak. She is still alive by the way. She is 91 years old and in quite good health. When we were growing up, my grandmother, rather jealously perhaps, kept my brother and me as her charge. My stepmother was not an authority figure for us, which posed problems for her, of course. Once I finished high school, those things begin to slip into the background, and now I always go to see her when I visit the area.

Q: As a young Southern boy growing up in a poor area, was there much fighting? As a kid I sort of always instinctively kept away from Southern kids because they fought more than Northern kids, you know?

HOOKS: I don't recall a lot of fighting. Naturally there were a few fistfights that occurred in school, rather rare I would say, not the norm. In talking to my kids when they were teenagers, I learned that there were more problems in the major high schools here in Northern Virginia than there were in the high school I grew up in.

Q: In high school did you date or was this done?

HOOKS: It was done, and starting about age seventeen, I started dating when I could get transportation.

Q: You went to Brevard College. What was it like?

HOOKS: It was a small college. It had about 800 students in those days. It is located in Brevard, North Carolina, which is in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains, a beautiful, beautiful area. For me it was an exciting opportunity for a number of reasons. First of all, I was going to college, which I could only dream about when I was in high school. I was growing up and getting away from home, which was a bad situation for me. I saw a new life on the horizon with unlimited opportunities. I was very excited. I was dealing with the unknown, but the unknown held the promise of a better future than the world that I grew up in. Brevard was a small school that provided a friendly environment, and I loved it. I loved the opportunity to meet new kids and to engage in after-school activities, something I could never do in high school.

Q: Was this a religious school?

HOOKS: Brevard College is associated with the Methodist Church, but it was not a religious school. Obviously, in a small, southern community so many people are religious, although not everyone is, but it was not a religious school.

Q: Was your family religious? Was there a church you went to?

HOOKS: My family was not religious, and I don't recall my father or my grandmother ever going to church. The only time they ever set foot in a church was to attend a funeral, of which there were many when I was growing up.

Q: One always thinks of the rural South with everybody singing in a small wooden church somewhere.

HOOKS: People have all sorts of misconceptions about the South. One of our neighbors, a black neighbor, was actually a lay preacher. I do not recall, as I mentioned, my father or my grandmother ever going to any religious service as I was growing up.

When we went to visit my aunt who was raising my sister, my sister went to church, picked up my cousins coming along the road, and I would sometimes accompany her to the local Baptist church. That was my only exposure to any formal church services. When I was 16 years old, friends from high school invited me to their church and I began regularly attending church at that point in my life.

Q: Well, then junior college; what sort of courses particularly grabbed you?

HOOKS: I was particularly interested in history and foreign languages. In my sophomore year I had a political science professor who said to me, "Have you thought of the Foreign Service as a career?" So my first question was: What is the Foreign Service? She gave me a very quick explanation of it, and I thought that sounded exciting as a career. As she turned to walk away she remarked offhandedly, "I didn't pass the Foreign Service exam, but I am sure you will." I thought, here I am a sophomore in a small junior college in North Carolina, not in the Ivy League schools, and here you are with your PhD, you didn't pass the test but you are expressing confidence that I will. That sounds a little strange.

It was one of those conversations that she could not know the import of, but it changed my life forever. When I transferred at the end of that year to the University of South Carolina, I decided to shift from history into international relations because I really wanted to pursue the dream of the Foreign Service. Again, the grass is always greener on the other side. I wanted to travel; I wanted to see the world. I wanted to experience things far beyond the world of Marion. I loved learning foreign languages, and so I thought that this would respond to the aspirations I had in life.

Q: You mentioned foreign languages. I would think it would be difficult to get any exposure from teachers or anyone else in foreign languages.

HOOKS: It was. In fact, other than a German lady married to a farmer in our area who had served in the U.S. Army, I was not aware of any foreigners living in Marion County.

Q: She was a GI bride.

HOOKS: She was a GI bride, and she was the only foreigner I knew of in our community.

I was very fortunate. When I started taking French in high school, South Carolina introduced closed circuit television, and one of the courses offered was French. The teacher was actually French. So for 30 minutes a day, we had classroom instruction all in French by a native speaker.

My teacher in the classroom was there at all times and she was responsible for the second half of the class. She was already close to 60, an unmarried lady who had studied French and Latin when she had been in college 30 or more years before that, but she had never traveled outside the United States, had never been to a French speaking country and therefore could not speak French. She could read it, she could translate it, but she couldn't speak it.

30 minutes of instruction a day on television was marvelous; it was all in French, not a word of English. Children can learn foreign languages very quickly if they are taught well. I was well prepared for studying French in college. I also studied Spanish in college, then added Russian. However, I decided to major in international relations as I thought that was the best way to prepare myself for the Foreign Service.

Q: When you got to the University of South Carolina, what was it like? By this time I think of Strom Thurmond and resistance to integration. What was happening at the University of South Carolina?

HOOKS: I arrived at the University of South Carolina in 1968 and it was already integrated. Blacks were a growing minority on campus. In 1971 the first African-American student was elected student body president of the University of South Carolina. I think that is an indication that race was not a major issue on campus.

Q: In a way you were a new generation coming in.

HOOKS: We were a new generation, and when I was there, the issue was not race. The issue was the war in Vietnam.

Q: You got there really about the time it started to heat up. How did you view it initially and how did you develop during these critical years?

HOOKS: I had many cousins who went off to Vietnam, one of whom was killed there. His name is now on the wall of the Vietnam Memorial. I was someone who thought: If I am called and drafted, I will go. As the war went on, I began to have more and more questions about the way the war was conducted. When I was at the University of South Carolina, there was growing anti-war sentiment which led to demonstrations on campus.

The growing anti-war sentiment led to some interesting experiences. One such experience was the phenomenon of professional agitators. I recall a student from New Jersey in my Russian class who was part of a small group that took over the administration building. He was one of those with a megaphone in front of the building agitating, yelling to the

assembled crowd: “Come into the building and save what we have won for you, what we have gotten for you.” He wanted to pack the building with students in order to reinforce his position. I was not one of those who wanted to go into that building. However, I found it very interesting to observe what was happening. The National Guard was lining up on a nearby street. This student and others tried to talk people into occupying the building, and then they locked the doors with chains as they left the building through a backdoor. Of course, this student never came back to class again.

The anti-war feeling on campus was getting stronger by the day and fed on similar movements on other campuses in the United States. During the major demonstration I just referred to, the campus was under a nightly curfew. I recall an incident when I was on the porch of one of the dormitories, which we understood was acceptable as the National Guard had instructions not to enter the dormitories. However, the National Guard suddenly came through the dormitory and tried to block the entrance to the building from the porch. They proceeded to round up everybody on the porch. At that time I did not want to be arrested, so I took a dive between two of the soldiers blocking the door and got a rifle butt to the head. I managed to get past the soldiers and back into the dorm. Because of the excitement I didn't feel any pain; however, when I touched my head, my hand was covered with blood. But I was not among those who were arrested.

Q: As you were looking towards doing this, I know you said you were taking Russian, what was your focus? Was the Soviet Union sort of the focus?

HOOKS: Soviet studies: Soviet history and Soviet politics.

Q: How do you feel looking back on it? What sort of education were you getting out of that?

HOOKS: It was a very good education. I think a serious student can get a good education at almost any school in the United States. Obviously, some schools are better than others, but a great deal depends on the student. At the University of South Carolina we had some very good and talented professors. I felt the education I received was very good and, as a matter of fact, prepared me well for the Foreign Service.

Q: You were there your first year at the University of South Carolina when . . .

HOOKS: When I arrived in September, 1968, at the University of South Carolina, what was the big item? The big item at that time was the very recent marriage of Senator Strom Thurmond to the former Miss South Carolina, who had just graduated before I arrived.

Q: Strom Thurmond was about how old at that time?

HOOKS: Strom Thurmond at that time was about 66 and his wife was 23 or so. When I arrived she had just graduated from the University of South Carolina, either in '68 or '67, I don't recall which year, and so many people on campus knew her personally. Strom

Thurmond was already a legend in South Carolina. During the homecoming football game that year he came out with his new wife on his arm, and instead of coming in the entrance where his seat was located, he entered on the far side of the stadium and walked across the field. Of course the crowd loved it and broke out into wild applause.

Around the football field was a small fence, probably three and a half feet high. Strom Thurmond, mind you, 66 years old, walked over with his young wife to this fence, picked her up and set her down on the other side of the fence to the applause of the crowd. Strom Thurmond then backed up about ten, twelve feet and ran and jumped over the fence, easily clearing it. The crowd went wild. Strom Thurmond, if he was anything, he was a showman.

Q: He played this out until he was what? In his 90s when he retired from the Senate?

HOOKS: I think he was actually 100 years old.

Q: You were taking international relations at the time. Was there a political science branch in international relations or were they both together?

HOOKS: They were separate. As a result I took most of the courses in the international relations department but I also took some political science courses.

Q: Did Africa cross your radar at all while you were there?

HOOKS: It did not. I was thinking at that time primarily of Russia and the Middle East, and that was what I felt would be the most fascinating, the most interesting. I recall some people encouraged me to focus on Latin America; it was the continent of the future. However, I was thinking in terms of the Cold War and that it would be far more interesting to focus on Russia and Eastern Europe than it would be to concentrate on Latin America or Africa.

Q: Of course, in '68 when you started there, while Strom Thurmond was squiring his new bride around, the Soviets went into Czechoslovakia. Did that send signals? Was that a matter of discussion?

HOOKS: Absolutely. It was very much the focus of discussion in all the international relations and political science courses that I took. It was like an echo of 1956 in Hungary.

Q: When you got to the university, were you able to find out more about the Foreign Service?

HOOKS: I did, as a matter of fact. First of all, while studying international relations I began to do research about the Foreign Service to get some sense of what it was like. I had never traveled outside the United States, I had never been to an American embassy, but I found the whole idea of the Foreign Service to be extremely fascinating. As I read

about it, the opportunity of living abroad, working in embassies, dealing with different cultures and people from diverse backgrounds really appealed to me.

Q: I would think where you were there would be a Jewish merchant in the town. Every town had a well-respected Jewish merchant or two there but that was it.

HOOKS: Correct. There were only a handful of Jewish families living in Marion as I was growing up, and they were very much integrated into the larger community. In fact the businessman who gave the Brevard scholarship was Jewish. In terms of diversity, the University of South Carolina was a new experience; there were foreign students there and a very diverse student body: African-American, white, Asian, etc. I found that to be very interesting and I looked forward to going into the Foreign Service.

Q: I remember during the mid-'70s when I was in the senior seminar and they were going through this big thing of being very open to diverse industry, it was like Mercedes and Toyota and anyway all sorts of foreign workers were coming in. Was this happening while you were there?

HOOKS: In fact, it was when I was in high school that students from the North began moving into our area. I was in the eighth or ninth grade when it started. We had a few families, mostly the supervisors for textile and other types of factories that were opening up in our area. In the beginning we had only a handful of kids from New Jersey and Massachusetts, but the numbers gradually increased from year to year although in absolute terms the numbers remained small.

Q: Was South Carolina beginning to feel the textile crunch as things were starting to move over towards Asia and all that?

HOOKS: When I was in high school that was not a phenomenon which we experienced in our area. Spartanburg was known as the textile mill town par excellence in South Carolina, but almost every town had a textile plant. In fact it was just the opposite phenomenon, at least in the '60s that I experienced, where for the first time there were people from New Jersey and Massachusetts migrating into our area to work, primarily as plant supervisors for new factories being built. There was a Brach's candy plant, and DuPont put up a new plant, so this was a new phenomenon of essentially opening up job opportunities for young, high school graduates that just didn't exist before.

Q: Was this at all tempting to you?

HOOKS: No, particularly after I learned that I had the possibility of going to college. My goal, as a matter of fact, before I earned a scholarship, was to go into the Air Force. Again, I saw the Air Force as a way of escaping from that particular environment and having a chance to travel and see the world. I, of course, had cousins and friends who had military experience, many of them in the Army, but I felt the Air Force would be a great way to travel and see the world.

When I finished high school, I got a job at Myrtle Beach working in a fast-food restaurant, and that to me was a new experience because I was independent and no longer working on the farm. Two of my best friends joined me, and we shared a house and worked in the same restaurant. I did that for two summers. The next two summers while I was in college I worked in a textile factory in Mullins, the town where I was born.

Q: What were you doing?

HOOKS: Basically putting tee shirts into boxes and placing them on rollers where they could be easily accessible to fill orders that were coming in. It was a tiring, monotonous job but it allowed me to save money for the coming year at college.

Q: I take it factory work didn't grab you too much?

HOOKS: No, it didn't grab me although it was certainly a step up from working on the farm. Everything is relative and I think one of the interesting things in life has been the impact that my work experience has had on my career. Even when I was an Ambassador of the United States of America, if there was something that I was required to do and my initial reaction was: "I really don't want to do that," I would often times quickly think: "but you know, I'd much rather do that than go back to the farm." Almost everything in life is relative. Whether it was the Human Rights Report or an Economic Trends Report, I found that writing them was a piece of cake when I thought back on my experiences working on the farm and in the textile factory.

Q: You graduated in 1970. Was the draft breathing down your neck?

HOOKS: It was not breathing down my neck because, if you recall, on December 1, 1969, there was a national draft lottery. My birthday being May 18, I drew the lucky number 278. It was really quite high and so there was less a sense that the draft was breathing down my neck.

When I finished undergraduate school and got a scholarship to go to graduate school at the University of South Carolina, I informed my draft board that I was aware that there was no student deferment for graduate school, but that I would like to continue my studies. I received a most unusual letter from the draft board in Marion which basically said: "You are right. There is no student deferment for graduate school but as long as you are in graduate school we will make every effort not to draft you", which I found very unusual. And in fact I was not drafted.

Q: In 1970 what did you do?

HOOKS: I did a lot of things in 1970. I got married June 6, 1970 to a girl that I met at Brevard College. I worked in the university library in the summertime and then I began working as a teaching assistant starting in the fall.

Q: Can you tell me a bit about your wife? What was her background?

HOOKS: She was from Tarboro, North Carolina. We met at Brevard College. All her roots were from farm families, but her parents' generation had received an education and had become professionals. Her mother, for instance, was a school teacher and her father was an accountant. It was very much a middle class family.

Q: How did you come into the Foreign Service?

HOOKS: Let me first tell you how I heard about the Foreign Service. While I was at Brevard College, Professor Willoughby Jarrell, my political science professor, stopped me in the hallway one day and out of the blue asked whether I had ever thought of the Foreign Service as a career. My first question was: What is the Foreign Service? She explained to me what it was: work as a diplomat in American embassies around the world, learning foreign languages and living in different cultures. I was fascinated. That was one of those life-changing conversations that one occasionally hears about. I determined immediately to major in international affairs rather than history in order to make myself more relevant for a career in the Foreign Service. In 1969 I took the written exam, which in those days was given once a year in December, and I took it at the central post office in Columbia, South Carolina on a cold, rainy Saturday. I passed the Foreign Service written exam and then was invited to Washington in July of 1970 to take the oral exam, which was held here in Rosslyn.

Q: I was giving the exams in the mid-'70s at the same place, and I assume at the time they knew your background. Did you have the feeling they were playing to your strengths or weaknesses because, as you know, you are up against kids coming out of Georgetown or Fletcher? For one thing I assume you probably didn't realize what you were up against.

HOOKS: Oh, I realized what I was up against.

Q: You did?

HOOKS: I did. As a matter of fact I debated long and hard before coming to Washington whether I should make the effort. I was working, my wife was working and we had a very small nest egg, a few hundred dollars, less than a thousand, but enough to pay for an airplane ticket, the stay in a hotel, and for taxis. Because money was scarce, I asked myself: "Do I really want to use this little money I have to go on this wild goose chase?" As you just mentioned, I had to compete with graduates from Harvard and Yale and Princeton and similar schools, some with graduate degrees and experience traveling and living overseas. Some already spoke several foreign languages fluently. I had none of that background.

However, I was very determined and, secondly, I felt that this was one of those 'what if' situations. If I didn't go, for the rest of my life I would be asking myself "what if...? In order to be able to answer that burning question, I decided to go to Washington and face the test. I had the money, I decided to give myself this gift.

I came to Washington, and because I had never been to Washington before, I stayed in a hotel not too far from National Airport. I was told traffic was terrible. This was in 1970, if you can imagine. I left my hotel early in order to catch a cab to Columbia Plaza in Rosslyn. I arrived almost an hour before the time for my interview. In those days you could simply go into the building and wait. It was a new building (Pomponio Plaza East), not yet completely finished. I think the floor where I was taking the exam was almost empty, and I stood by the window and contemplated the view across the river, waiting for people to show up to give me the exam. All the while I thought to myself: I have nothing to lose because I obviously am not going to pass this exam. I was fixated on the advantages that so many candidates had compared to me. I had a very thick southern accent in those days and the work experience I had was irrelevant to the Foreign Service, or at least it seemed to me at the time. How does working on a farm or a fast food restaurant or a textile factory help prepare you for the Foreign Service? Actually, today we would look at that work experience in terms of diversity and the fact that it represented a large chunk of the American population, but in those days things were seen a little differently.

Having convinced myself that I had nothing to lose since the game was stacked against me, I think I was actually calmer when I went in and took the test. There was a panel of three sitting behind one table, and I was invited to sit behind a second table at the end of the room. They welcomed me to the exam, and began firing questions about U.S. foreign policy and history. I thought I was reasonably successful in fielding their questions, although occasionally I confessed that I did not know the answer to the question. The interview probably lasted 45 minutes, although it seemed like an eternity at the time. At the end of the exam I was invited to wait outside while the panel conferred.

I will never forget my final interview. Robert German, the head of the panel, had a wicked sense of humor because he called me to his office after a few minutes of consultation and explained to me how difficult it was to get into the Foreign Service. He cited statistics of the many thousands who initially took the written exam, and the small percentage that passed, and the fact that only a small percentage of those initially successful candidates made it through the oral exam. It's really nothing personal if you don't pass, he repeatedly emphasized. I was thinking the whole time, 'I am a big boy. Just tell me no and I will be on my way'. His concluding remark was that this particular panel had already interviewed 150 people and so far only 14 had passed. He looked very intently at me. He knew exactly what he was doing, and with a big smile he announced, "Congratulations. You are number 15."

Q: Who did this?

HOOKS: Robert German. He was obviously building me up for a negative answer, and when he said, "Congratulations, you are the 15th", it took me a second to realize what he actually said. I was expecting him to say no and suddenly he was saying yes, just the opposite of what I anticipated.

I walked out of that room obviously thrilled beyond anything I had experienced so far in life. I was thinking, ‘Wow, that positive response opens up possibilities that I have been dreaming of. At that point it merely added my name to a list of potential candidates for the Foreign Service, with no guarantee of a job. However, I had crossed the major hurdles of the written and oral exams.

I returned to the University of South Carolina to begin my first year of graduate school. There was a Foreign Service Officer in our department working in the framework of the diplomat-in-residence program. I had also taken a series of tests and applied for a job with the National Security Agency in Fort Meade, Maryland. The Agency was about to offer me a job, so I went to see the diplomat in residence and explained to him that my real dream was to work in the Foreign Service, but I couldn’t pass up a job offer from the National Security Agency unless I had something in hand from the State Department. He made some phone calls to personnel and found out that I was scheduled for the June class of 1971; however, there was a possibility that I might even be invited to join the class of March 1971, although that was not certain. Two weeks after the beginning of the second semester of graduate school, I received a phone call from the State Department. I was invited to join the March 1971 class.

So I did what I had to do -- jumped through hoops, the medicals, and the whole business - - to withdraw from the graduate program at the University and to come to Washington, and there I was in the Foreign Service.

Q: How did your wife feel about this?

HOOKS: My wife was very excited because she had already lived overseas. Her parents were getting a divorce between her junior and senior years in high school. Her mother had worked with a school principal who later joined the DOD school system and had become the superintendent of the DOD schools in Ankara, Turkey. He invited her to spend a year in Turkey teaching in the DOD school system. She accepted a position in an elementary school on an Air Force Base outside of Istanbul. Jean went to live with the principal’s family so that she could attend the high school in Ankara. Living in Turkey had been a wonderful experience for her, so she was just thrilled about the prospect of joining the Foreign Service.

Q: Do you recall any of the questions that were asked you during the oral exam?

HOOKS: I recall several of the questions. One of the questions had to do with the two major issues during the Administration of Andrew Jackson. One of the issues related to the question of secession by a state, something that South Carolina had already threatened to do. And the other had to do with renewing the charter of the Bank of the United States. I remembered the issue of secession, but the renewing of the charter of the Bank of the United States escaped my mind.

I recall that the panel chairman was quite explicit in his instructions. He told me to answer the question if I knew the answer, but that I should not try to bluff my way if I did

not know what I was talking about as that would count against me. So I talked of the issue of succession, but then confessed that I could not remember the second issue.

The last question I think was the most important one and probably made the difference in my being hired. Bear in mind that I was a farm boy from South Carolina. Here's the scenario. You are a vice consul in the embassy in South Africa (I had only the vaguest idea what a vice consul was) and a young South African has won a tennis scholarship to the University of Utah and he wants to talk to you about Utah. Tell him about Utah.

I presume Utah was chosen because I was from South Carolina. The question was designed to see what I knew about U.S. history and geography. What was not on my CV but which was an interesting development is that my best friends in high school were Mormons. There were two families in Marion who were members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, and they each had sons my age who were my best friends. There were also young missionaries that started coming into that area when I was in high school and I also joined the Mormon Church. Having talked a lot to these missionaries, almost all of them from Utah in those days, I had quite a sense of life in Utah. I had never been west of Brevard, North Carolina, but I knew the history of Utah very well. When I solicited clarification as to how to address the question, I was told to talk about anything I knew about the state, such as history, geography, and climate.

And so I launched into a presentation about Utah. If they had asked me about North Dakota, it would have taken about two minutes, stretching it, to give everything I knew about that state, but when it came to Utah, I could walk across the plains with the Mormon pioneers and talk about the early settlement of Utah. I talked about social life in the Mormon community, and about the snow and skiing opportunities, which was one of the favorite topics of the young missionaries.

I watched the members of the panel as I was talking. At first they showed polite interest, and then it was, "Who is this kid from South Carolina? Here he is speaking in detail about the history and the climate and everything else about Utah."

At the very end I debated with myself: should I tell them I am Mormon or not? I made a decision and concluded my own remarks by saying, "and being a Mormon myself", I could hear three thumps as their chins dropped to the table.

That was my final question and I think that my answer had a decisive impact. I think the real purpose of the exercise was not so much to test my knowledge but rather to see how articulate I was and how well I handled myself in a situation of stress. I felt I had nothing to lose because I felt I couldn't pass the exam. I was fairly calm, and I think at the very end, when I walked through this question about Utah, they were amused if not intrigued and I think my answer won them over.

Q: I wouldn't be surprised by the decision because they knew your background. Many of the candidates were city kids from New York or Boston, and the panel may have decided that the Foreign Service needed a little farming background. I don't think there was a

definite diversity program at that time. Plus I remember when I was giving the exam about 5 years later, a young man came from the University of West Virginia. He said he didn't take the New York Times. This guy had a lot of native intelligence and handled himself very well, and we passed him whereas with the same performance we would have failed somebody else, if they had been exposed, but he was very good on what he knew.

HOOKS: I think the State Department was beginning to look at greater diversity in the force at that time and I think those elements counted in my favor.

Q: So you started March, '71?

HOOKS: March, 1971. I think officially February 26 but I think the first day we showed up was March 1st.

Q: The A-100 class, what was your initial impression of the group and all? Did you feel you fit in or how did you feel about that?

HOOKS: First of all, we were a group of 19 people, the 93rd class; very small and from diverse backgrounds. I felt I had the weakest background in terms of travel and worldly experience. But I found people to be friendly. I was delighted to be there, and I felt this was the type of people I would like to work with in the future. It was a good experience.

Just before retiring I printed off all my evaluation forms, including the one from the A-100 class, and I think the person who evaluated me was rather kind. He pointed out that I was a country boy who was not initially at ease with all the people there, but he thought I had potential for growth. I thought that his assessment was interesting. I look back at the A-100 course as a great introduction into the Foreign Service and good preparation for starting a career. The weakest area of preparation was the consular course. I had never been in an American embassy and had never had a visa before. I was less than fully confident upon leaving the course that I knew what I would be doing when I got to post. Once at post, of course, you quickly begin interviews and you gain confidence. I think A-100 was a great welcome into the Foreign Service. It covered a whole gamut of things from the way the Department functions to table manners and protocol.

Q: Where did you want to go and where did you go?

HOOKS: I wanted to get to Russia. However, our class of 19 was given a list of 25 choices. Paris was on the list but that was specifically for someone with a PhD in chemistry who was coming in to deal with drugs; that assignment was already lined up for him. So we basically had 18 people competing for 24 jobs.

My first choice was Frankfurt, Germany, and my second choice was Tel Aviv, Israel. I got my second choice. In retrospect I was glad I did because Frankfurt was largely a visa mill, whereas the embassy in Tel Aviv offered me the opportunity to rotate through every section of the embassy. It was a fantastic experience, and I was there at the right time.

Q: My first post was Frankfurt. It was a big mill but it was a good place to learn. So what sort of training did you have before you went out to Israel?

HOOKS: The A-100 course and the consular course and that was it.

Q: You had not grown up in what could be, or been exposed to basically a strong, almost militant Jewish community. Did you have any feelings about Israel?

HOOKS: Only in a religious sense because the political situation in Israel was not something that people in my community discussed. It was only when I was in college, of course, reading history and international relations that I became more aware of Israel in the political context. However, even then most of my attention was focused on the Soviet Union and Vietnam. Nevertheless, I was intrigued by Israel. It was one of the reasons I listed it as my second choice. It was only when I arrived there that I really began to become much more versed in the background of Zionism and the establishment of the state of Israel and the conflict with the Arabs.

Q: Was there any conflict between going to Israel and the Mormon Church and the Lost Ten Tribes of Israel? There is that connection there. Did that come up in your thinking at all?

HOOKS: I wouldn't necessarily put it in that particular context. There is a close relationship between the Mormon Church and the Israel of the Bible. The Church has numerous prophecies concerning the establishment of the state of Israel. One of the early Mormon leaders went to Israel in 1841 to dedicate the land for the return of the Jews. Interestingly, there is a monument to him now in Jerusalem. But it was more the political and historical context which fascinated me.

Q: So you were in Israel from '71 until?

HOOKS: 1973.

Q: Who was the ambassador and what was the situation? How did you find Israel when you got there?

HOOKS: I arrived there at the end of May, 1971. Walworth Barbour was the ambassador at the time. Barbour had been in Israel about ten years or so; he was appointed by President Kennedy. He had been there so long that he knew everyone, often before they became known on the political scene. He was Boston-born and had been in the Foreign Service for close to 40 years. He was a very courtly gentleman of the old school.

I started off working in the visa section. We had a fascinating DCM, Owen Zurhellen, who went on to become ambassador in Surinam. Zurhellen took a great interest in junior officers, and he really mentored us in a great way. He used to play volleyball with us once a week, for example. He managed a great rotation program in the embassy. I worked for three months in the consular section, and then Zurhellen asked me to become the staff

aide to the ambassador. I think it was the one of the most fascinating jobs I had in the Foreign Service. I was Staff Aide for almost a year, followed by rotations through the commercial, economic, political, and citizenship sections of the embassy.

Q: Well, you said you were staff aide mainly working for Barbour? How did he operate? What was your impression of him as an ambassador?

HOOKS: He had the advantage of having been there for ten years already, so he knew every senior official in the government, he knew the history of the country better than most Israelis. The country at that time was less than 25 years old, so he had been there almost half the life of the country. He knew all the political actors, he knew all the issues inside and out. Because of health issues, he never came to the Embassy before 9 o'clock, and he always left shortly after 12 o'clock, although he often received people in his Residence in the evening. That's the way I thought all ambassadors operated but discovered later in my career that that wasn't the case.

Once he left the Embassy, I had to prepare his reading folder for the following day, and I learned quickly what he was interested in and what he was not. I went through all the cable traffic and selected the telegrams that he wanted to see. In the afternoon, if anything needed his signature urgently, I would take the document to his residence. Actually it was a wonderful time because I got to meet lots of interesting people and to follow key events very closely. Everything came through my hands and it gave me a great opportunity to see how an embassy works.

Barbour was a very bright man, a very courtly man, very reserved, perhaps even a bit shy, but he and I just seemed to click. He would often call me into his office and he would reminisce for a few minutes about various events. I had the impression he was pleased with what I was giving him. He would occasionally take me with him to special events and so it was a wonderful, wonderful experience.

Q: Was there a Mrs.?

HOOKS: There was not, which was unfortunate in many respects given his social obligations. He became dean of the diplomatic corps, which was quite unusual for an American ambassador, because he had been there so long. That honor brought more responsibilities for me. I met all the other ambassadors; I had to arrange farewell gifts and events for departing ambassadors. We had lots of visitors, CODELS and senators in those days, and so I ended up being control officer for a lot of those people. The Ambassador would receive members of Congress at his residence for drinks at 6 o'clock. That was his standard way of dealing with senators and congressmen.

And so this was my introduction to the Foreign Service. It was exciting. I can't imagine a better introduction to the Foreign Service and so I was thrilled with that first assignment.

Q: What was your impression -- obviously it was your first government but you couldn't have asked for a more active government -- of the Israeli government and how it operated.

HOOKS: Well, Israel was always a unique and special place, and even in those days, because of domestic interest in Israel, our relations with them were very unusual. As I mentioned earlier, we had a very large number of members of the Senate and Congress coming through Israel, and it was interesting to me to see how members of Congress became involved in our foreign policy, particularly in the case of Israel.

Israel was also a very pro-American place. It was very friendly. Golda Meir was prime minister; she herself was American at one time. We had such close relations while I was there. I recall one of the things the DCM did which I thought was really incredible: he would invite senior government officials to his house for dinner and he would invite all the junior officers to attend. I met Menachem Begin at his house for dinner. I recall he also invited the head of Israeli intelligence the very evening that an El Al airline was hijacked in Cyprus. Believe it or not, the guy actually came to dinner and was able to brief us on what was taking place while negotiations were underway, so we felt we were being involved in history in a very immediate sense, something that I had never experienced before. I found those events exhilarating and exciting, and I give the highest marks to the DCM for his mentoring of junior officers. It also created a feeling that being in the Foreign Service was not just a job. There is something unique about it. It is a mission, a call. You are involved not only in just closely observing history but actually involved in the making of history.

Q: In the embassy, especially among the junior officers, was there any questioning of the Israelis and their view towards the Palestinians and the West Bank and Gaza at that time?

HOOKS: No, there was not. This was before the intifada. I call this time the "golden age" of Israel in the sense it was after the euphoria of the Six Day War in 1967 but before the trauma of the Yom Kippur War (the intifada came later on in 1980s) and it was a time when the pioneering generation was still leading the country. Ben-Gurion was still alive; Golda Meir was prime minister, Abba Eban was Foreign Minister, Moshe Dayan was Minister of Defense. All those historical figures were there and I saw them. At Fourth of July receptions I shook hands with them. At the same time, Israel was a fairly poor country and hiking was the big thing. I came back there 15 years later in 1988 and of course it had really changed. It was Southern California located in the Middle East. I recall I was there for the 25th anniversary celebrations in 1972.

Q: Did you sense a divide between our consulate general in Jerusalem and our embassy in Tel Aviv in attitude or not? Or was that not during your time?

HOOKS: I do not recall a divide between the Embassy and the Consulate. I was staff aide to the ambassador at the time. I can't recall the consul general's name now but he came to Tel Aviv frequently to meet with the DCM and the ambassador and I would see him

there. I was never aware, and I think I would have been aware as staff aide, of any sense of division.

The Arab issue I think was seen in a different light in those days. Again, this was before the intifada, before the Yom Kippur War, and so it did not figure as a divisive issue. I don't recall any sense of division between the consulate in Jerusalem and the embassy in Tel Aviv.

Q: Did you get any feel for the pro-Israeli groups in the United States? I don't think AIPAC was as powerful as it later became; maybe it was but there were other groups including the religious right wing. Did you get any feel for that?

HOOKS: Yes, in two respects. One was again members of the House of Representatives and the Senate who came through, such as Jacob Javits, a strong supporter of Israel, who would meet with the ambassador and they obviously played a role. They clearly followed very closely what was going on in Israel and the ambassador regarded them as very important interlocutors.

Secondly, there were visits on a regular basis by distinguished groups, mostly of American Jews, who met with the ambassador for briefings and who would express great interest in various issues in our relationship with Israel. I thus became aware of the fact that there was a much larger domestic constituency for Israel, which I discovered later on did not exist nearly to the same degree in other countries I have worked in.

Q: What about you and your wife on the social side? How did you find that?

HOOKS: Israel is a unique and special place. Israeli society is very open, a friendly and gregarious society, so it was not like we were dealing with a very conservative and closed society. We met friends that we kept in contact with over the years. We went to Israel on vacation to visit friends at one point. So we had friends, Israelis and others that were there. We found at the embassy people who were open and friendly. However, there were still -- my wife reminds me -- very traditional Foreign Service people who had grown up in the old school from the '50s. I recall the consul general's wife wanted a formal visit from my wife and so on.

So it was a very friendly embassy and a very friendly host country. It was so easy to travel around the country on weekends. It was exciting to go off to the many archeological sites, one of the things I found fascinating, or to spend time in Jerusalem. I recall we received our car the very first week after our arrival, if you can imagine. The first thing we did was to drive up to Jerusalem to celebrate our first wedding anniversary. We spent the day exploring the Old City in Jerusalem. Israel really was an exciting place. Every weekend you could go places and do the things that are hard to duplicate elsewhere.

Q: How did the October War impact on you?

HOOKS: The October War came after we left. The October War was in 1973. We left in July of '73.

Q: Was there a feeling of while you were there of imminent danger of something happening or was the feeling that things were pretty well settled?

HOOKS: No. There was a sense that there was still a very imminent threat to Israel. Not, however, in the sense that it is so imminent that it was about to happen, but a general sense that there was still insecurity. Israel of course was riding high from the overwhelming victory of the Six Day War in 1967. The Yom Kippur War was still a long way away in the sense that it was a surprise to everybody, especially the Israelis. I think that the experience of the Yom Kippur War brought home again the fact that security in Israel is never permanent and can never be taken for granted.

Q: Did you get to travel in the West Bank or in Gaza?

HOOKS: In those days you could travel all over Israel and the occupied territories without any difficulty. Only Gaza was a little problematic. I went all over the West Bank.

Q: Did you get any feel at that time for the hand of the Israelis on the West Bank?

HOOKS: At that time there was not a sense of restlessness among the Arab population. There was a very visible Israeli military presence in the West Bank, but not in an oppressive sense. Clearly the Israelis controlled those areas, but there was freedom of movement. The situation was very different when I returned to Israel in 1988 when the intifada was fully underway.

Q: It was before a real settlement policy had gotten going?

HOOKS: That's right. It was before a real settlement policy, although settlements had already begun around Jerusalem.

Q: How did you view the strict orthodox community there?

HOOKS: The strict orthodox community constitutes probably about 15 % of the population and there were certain neighborhoods that were very orthodox, Mea Shearim being one in Jerusalem. There was a representative of the Chabad community, Rabbi Posner who was an American, who came to the embassy and maintained good relations with everyone. He invited us to visit their community, but in general we had very little contact with the ultra-orthodox Jewish community. Our friends were more on the secular side.

Q: What sort of work were you doing besides being the ambassador's aide?

HOOKS: I started off working in the visa section, doing visa interviews at an open counter. I then worked for a year as staff aide. After that, I worked very briefly in the

consular section in the citizenship side, followed by longer stints in the commercial, economic and political sections.

Q: On the consular side I would think that you would have been very busy with visas, citizenship and all that.

HOOKS: Everything is relative. In fact, it was not all that busy in the sense that we had one vice consul on the visa side who handled non-immigrant visas and the officer in charge of the visa section handled immigrant visas, so there were only two people in the visa section in those days. There were two officers on the citizenship side and the consul general managed the entire operation, so generally speaking it was not all that busy. Certainly a vice-consul could easily handle all of the non-immigrant visa work.

Q: When you were doing economic work, or what sort of work were you doing?

HOOKS: I did mostly spot reporting, dealing with the econ issues of the day: agriculture, industry, those sorts of things. I recall one of the interesting reports I wrote was about the flow of goods over land from the port in Eilat to the Haifa port as the Suez Canal was closed at the time.

Q: What was your impression of the economic possibilities of Israel?

HOOKS: Israel in those days was a relatively poor country but perhaps it was trying to overreach its grasp. It produced its own cars, for example. These cars reminded me of the old Trabant in East Germany, very cheap and not terribly efficient. But certainly tourism had tremendous potential. Computers had not entered the stage at that time so the whole business of software and information management was a thing of the future.

But certainly in terms of agriculture Israel was already a world powerhouse in terms of exporting fresh fruits and vegetables and flowers to Europe, but I think what particularly struck me about the Israelis is that they were so dynamic. They had developed drip irrigation which made much more efficient use of water. They were already involved in a number of projects in developing countries, sometimes financed by USAID, especially in the area of agriculture. They were very dynamic in that respect.

Israel has always been unique in having outside help, assistance from the outside that most countries don't have. What I found unique was the fact that they utilized so efficiently that assistance to invest in their future..

Q: Well, then you left there in 1970?

HOOKS: July of 1973.

Q: Where did you go?

HOOKS: I came back here to FSI to study Polish for a year and then in 1974 I was assigned to the Embassy in Warsaw, Poland.

Q: How did you find Polish?

HOOKS: Polish is probably the most difficult language I have ever studied. The grammar is very complicated. It is a highly inflective language. The pronunciation itself is also very difficult. I think it is probably the most complicated of the Slavic languages. It was a difficult language but the teachers were good and I found that when I arrived in Warsaw, I had a sound basis for doing the work I needed to do and I continued to study the language while I was there.

Q: You went there in 1974. And you were there for two years?

HOOKS: That's right. That's the first time, I went back later on.

Q: What was the situation in Poland and American Polish relations in '74?

HOOKS: When I arrived, Edward Gierek was the general secretary of the Workers' Party and our relations with Poland were relatively good because there was always a special relationship with Poland. On the other hand, there was the general tension endemic in relations with a communist country but one that we were trying to encourage to have a degree of independence from the Soviet Union. In the 1950s when there were problems in Poznan we opened up a consulate to have more contacts with the Poles. The very week I arrived in 1974 we opened up a consulate in Krakow which was a new stage in our relationship with Poland. The consulate in Krakow became more important than the consulate in Poznan because, when I returned to Poland later on, we closed the consulate in Poznan and the one in Krakow is now the only representation we have outside of the Embassy in Warsaw.

Q: Your job was what?

HOOKS: I was a vice consul, working in the consular section. In those days a vice consul spent the first year doing non-immigrant visas and the second year doing immigrant visas. We had a very large number of immigrant visas in those days. We also had a special procedure just for Poland because there were so many Poles who qualified to immigrate to the United States because of relatives here, but they could not get passports from the Polish authorities that would allow them to leave as immigrants. Therefore we had a procedure called "visas cameleon" whereby we would arrange an immigrant visa which we sent directly to the airport in New York, and then six weeks later the applicants would come in and we would give them tourist visas, -- a one entry visa -- and inform immigration service in New York. They would leave Warsaw as tourists but when they arrived in New York, they were immediately picked up as qualified immigrants.

Q: I remember about this time I was in the senior seminar and I did a paper on foreign consuls in the United States and talked to the Polish consul and he said, "You know, here in Chicago we've got the second largest city in Poland with Polish people here."

HOOKS: That was true then, I am not sure it is true now. Poles tended to move to areas where other Poles, especially relatives, lived. There are a number of cities with a large Polish population, such as Chicago and New Britain, Connecticut

Q: As a visa officer, how did you deal with the Communist side of things?

HOOKS: We had procedures for getting special dispensations for those who belonged to certain Communist organizations. Most of the time those going as immigrants, if they belonged to labor unions or other communist organizations, made the argument which we generally accepted that this was required within the framework of their work and therefore generally that did not pose a problem.

Right before I arrived in Poland at the end of June, 1974, a group of Congressmen wrote to the State Department that the visa policy was too restrictive in Poland. As a result of that intervention, the visa policy became less strict. While I was there we were giving more visas to Poles than had been the case beforehand. Immigration service maintained that there was not a serious problem with Poles working in the United States. That was probably not accurate because so many Polish visitors on tourist visas did work in the United States. We used to get a large number of the blue forms which INS sent for each person deported from the United States for working or for other reasons. So the Embassy was fairly generous in giving out visas.

Q: Well, Polish immigration, like Irish immigration, is extremely political and we have our immigration law and then we have our Irish immigration law and our Polish immigration law.

HOOKS: That's probably true.

Q: What was your impression of the people you were seeing, both immigrant and non immigrant? What sort of people were they? Were they mostly intellectuals or workers?

HOOKS: First of all, there was a little of everything: intellectuals, blue-collar workers, farmers. However, by and large the majority of people for historical reasons were fairly poor people, and many of them farmers or workers that came from the southern part of Poland. As you may be aware, historically most Polish Americans came from the Galicia area, a very poor, very densely populated and very rural, agricultural region. Those who could qualify because they had relatives in the United States generally came from that area.

Interestingly, they also came from the area of Bialystock. Somehow people coming from that area had had historical connections with the United States. There were obviously

people from all over the country, but I would say the largest concentration was from Galicia, the area east of Krakow.

Q: What about particularly the non-immigrant side? Was there a fairly lively exchange of university types going to the United States or not?

HOOKS: There was considerable exchange at that time, largely sponsored by the State Department, in the framework of the Fulbright program and other programs. We used to have quite a few Fulbrighters coming to Poland as a matter of fact.

Q: What was your impression of Poland while you were there, living there? Whatever the secret police were called? Was this a problem for you at all?

HOOKS: I wouldn't say it was a problem for me although it obviously required certain adjustments. What is interesting of course is that I had the advantage of being there at that time and then coming back later on after the system had changed, and we will get to that at a later stage. Poles, of course, have always been Poles. They are very charming people and quite different from their Russian neighbors, but in those days, I recall, when people talked, they tended to look around over their shoulders, something which struck me because I had just come from Tel Aviv. Israelis are so outspoken, saying everything they think and even things they don't think, and the Poles were very spontaneous and charming but they would look around over their shoulders. I recall that very well.

Security at the Embassy constantly drilled into us the need to be careful when talking on the telephone. We made certain adaptations in the sense that we became very discrete on the phone, giving very few details, and when I came back to the United States two years later, I had to overcome the habit of being very terse on the telephone and not getting into details.

I do recall that there was a Polish family that we got to know very well. The wife was working for an American company, and she and her husband came to our house once for dinner. We didn't see them afterwards for quite some period of time, and they sent a message to us through friends to let us know that they had had problems following their visit to our house. They asked us not to contact them. Later on we found out that they had been called in by the secret police because they had come to our house. That was in sharp contrast to later years. It was very difficult to invite people to your home in those days. And Poles were very reluctant to invite you to their homes because that generated questions from the authorities and from neighbors.

Q: Where did you live?

HOOKS: I lived in the Mokotow area of town, not far from the stadium, and not too far from the Russian cemetery going toward the airport.

Q: Is it an apartment?

HOOKS: We actually had a series of four townhouses, pre-war construction, and the Embassy still had them when I was there in the '90s.

Q: How about traveling around? How did this work out?

HOOKS: Traveling around was very easy; it was cheap, either by car or by train. In those days there were very few cars in Poland and so there was no problem in terms of parking in Warsaw, which is quite in contrast when I came back in the '90s. The policemen were generally very respectful of diplomatic status. I recall once the police were stopping cars and pulled me over and said I was speeding, but since I was a diplomat that was OK. Just don't speed again. I traveled around quite a bit. You could go anywhere, there were no major problems.

Q: You didn't have to get permission to go?

HOOKS: No, you did not. Unlike other Communist countries, in Poland you could travel. Obviously there were certain areas close to military bases with lots of sensitivity, but other than that you could travel around.

Q: Did you get to go out on social security trips and that sort of thing to see that if people were getting their checks or was somebody else doing that?

HOOKS: I did not do that. I did not work on the citizenship side so I did not go out on such trips. We did, however, have about 5,000 social security checks that came in every month, so a lot of people came in to pick up their check at the consulate.

We also had a special exchange rate at the embassy which, as I recall, was roughly double what the official tourist rate was. The US had sold wheat to Poland in the 1950's and the Polish Government was paying back in non-convertible currency, so we were using those funds for various cultural purposes and the maintenance of the embassy. That special exchange rate was eliminated just as I was leaving Poland in 1976.

Q: Who was the ambassador?

HOOKS: Richard Davies. John Davis who was later the ambassador in Poland was the DCM.

Q: Did they use the vice consuls for economic or political reporting at all?

HOOKS: To a very limited degree. We were encouraged to do so, but it was not always easy. First of all, trying to get out and about when you had a busy schedule in the consular section was complicated, and the political and econ sections in those days were fairly well staffed.

Q: Were you married at that time?

HOOKS: I was, yes.

Q: How did your wife find it?

HOOKS: She liked Poland and Poles very much. It was a great place for traveling; it was a great place for shopping. Given the favorable exchange rate, you could buy all kinds of things at very good prices. We established relations with East Germany in 1975. For the first time we could drive to Berlin through East Germany which in itself was quite an experience. I recall doing that several times. We would drive to Berlin and stay in the officers' quarters there, the air force or army, and do shopping and get our car serviced. It was a long trip each way, but it could be done over a long weekend.

Q: Was there much of an intellectual life like plays or receptions for art things and this sort of thing? Was there much of that going on?

HOOKS: One of the interesting things is that Poland has always put a great emphasis on culture. Polish are very intellectual in an East European kind of way. They had at that time really superb theater and excellent plays. Polish theater was not well known because few people know Polish outside of Poland, but there were really first class actors and actresses and very good plays. I recall the cost of a ticket was 25 or 50 cents at our exchange rate. That in itself was one of the pleasures of being in Poland in that you could go to see an opera or ballet or theater for 50 cents in the very best seats because the performance was being subsidized by the state.

Plus I might add that Poland has a very rich literature. There were also several very intellectual publications both for culture and politics. I always found them interesting.

Q: Did you make any connections with the artistic world there or not?

HOOKS: We did have connections with artists through USIS. USIA in those days had quite a number of exchanges that I referred to earlier, particularly on the Fulbright side, but also on the press and artistic side. There were quite a few such programs and I had some involvement with them.

Q: Did you get any feel for the hand of the state, security apparatus or military or what have you, as you were in Warsaw?

HOOKS: It was omnipresent and I have mentioned already how people reacted when they were talking in conversation. They looked over their shoulders when talking, even among themselves. For a bold remark people would be called in, they would be harassed. I mentioned the family that came to our house for dinner. They were called in; they were raked over the coals for going to the house of an American diplomat to the point that they were frightened about coming back again. Later on the lady did come from time to time after her husband died. He had a more sensitive position than she and belonged to the Party.

The police were omnipresent. As I mentioned earlier, we had special procedures for people leaving as immigrants. Trying to get a passport in those days was not a right; it was a special privilege.

Q: And then where did you go? This would be '76.

HOOKS: In 1976 I came back to Washington. I worked in Educational and Cultural Affairs until the end of 1978 when Education and Cultural Affairs was absorbed into USIA. In early 1979 I went into the intensive six-month course in economics at FSI.

Q: Let's take the time when you were in cultural affairs. What were you doing?

HOOKS: I was working on exchange programs with Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary. I was in charge of those cultural and educational exchanges.

Q: Our exchange program probably has been the major weapon with our relations with so many countries, particularly countries behind the Iron Curtain. What was your impression of the programs from the head office perspective?

HOOKS: The cultural exchanges were regarded as a way of reaching people that we might not have been able to reach otherwise. They tried to have an influence on affairs in Poland and to reach intellectuals and those who could influence policy in one way or the other. Poles were very eager to have contact with the West. Poland has always seen itself as part of the West and definitely not part of the East. So this was very important for Polish intellectuals as well. It was regarded in the State Department as a very important exchange. Poland was probably the key country in Eastern Europe, outside the Soviet Union. Poles were very eager to have ties with the United States and they had a long historical cultural tradition with the West. Many people had relatives in the United States.

Q: Was there any considerable effort to work on Czechoslovakia, especially with the intellectual class there which brought about the velvet revolution? We are talking about the late 1980s and all. Did we have any feel for movements in Czechoslovakia or did it appear to be pretty much in a deep freeze?

HOOKS: We were still in the wake of the events of 1968. As a result, while we had a very extensive program with Poland, we had a much more limited program with Czechoslovakia. I think the events of '68 were still weighing heavily on the political system and therefore had an impact on our relations with Czechoslovakia.

Hungarians are somewhat like Poles and we had a more vibrant relationship there, but with Czechoslovakia it was quite different. What I always found interesting in traveling to the various embassies in the region was that each embassy reflected in part the atmosphere of the country that it was in. I found the embassy in Warsaw to be much more open and dynamic and somewhat the same situation in Hungary. I found the one in Prague to be almost Czech-like in its atmosphere.

Q: Well, you do pick up these atmospheres. I mean, it is called localitis and after a while you are dealing with people and you pick up their vibes. During this time, this is about the time of the Helsinki Accords. Had they been signed?

HOOKS: They were signed in, I believe, 1975. President Ford came to Poland after the signing.

Q: Just trying to grab the atmosphere, did anyone realize how important these Accords would be, particularly the third basket?

HOOKS: My own view is that people did not; they were hopeful but they didn't realize the import it would have as relations evolved in the years to come. That was the purpose of it. No one, of course, could foretell how broad and how deep the impact would be, and no one could possibly imagine how quickly the impact would come. I think it was only in subsequent years that people began to appreciate the importance of that basket and the fact that it helped enormously to open things up in the Soviet bloc.

After the signing ceremony in Helsinki in 1975, President Ford came to Poland for an official visit. I worked with DCM John Davis in organizing the trip to Krakow, which included a visit to Auschwitz. We had two control centers; one in the embassy in Warsaw and one in the consulate in Krakow. I was actually the control officer for the Auschwitz portion of the trip. I visited Auschwitz everyday for about ten days before President Ford's arrival. I worked with the mayor of the city who wanted to build a path from the site of the helicopter landing, where the men's barracks had been located, all the way to the end of that railway where prisoners debarked and where the monument is located. The mayor did not start building the path until about 4:00 pm the day before the President's arrival, and it was raining and night was falling. When I pointed out to the Mayor the conditions under which the crew was working, he said they were used to it and didn't mind. I found his remark to be arrogant and I suggested that he didn't mind because he was not outside working in the rain and dark. Needless to say, the crew worked through the night and the path was complete the next day.

Q: How did that visit of Ford go?

HOOKS: The visit went very well. It was an indication of a high level interest on the part of the United States in Poland, part of our policy of reaching out to embrace Poland, so I think the Poles were excited about it.

Q: You were in Washington I guess when the new Pope was named?

HOOKS: Correct. Cardinal Wojtyla, Archbishop of Krakow. A colleague, Peter Becskehazy, who worked in the Consulate while I was at the Embassy, knew the new Pope quite well. As I recall when Cardinal Wojtyla was elected Pope, there was some question of Peter doing interviews on VOA to talk about his relationship with the former archbishop.

I think in the State Department this was seen as a very new and exciting development that had all sorts of possibilities. People at the time could speculate but obviously could not foresee how that would play out, just how important that would be in galvanizing the Polish people. Solidarity was established only two or three years later and the political situation Poland really started to move quickly. That was a very interesting time to work on Polish affairs.

I do recall during the elections of 1976 when there was a Polish dissident (Adam Michnik) who went to Paris and President-elect Carter's staff asked the State Department to provide a grant so he could come to the United States while he had authorization to be outside of Poland. However, the bureaucracy was so complicated that, by the time we were able to work it out in the State Department, it was too late. He was already back in Poland. I drafted the initial letter, which was very positive in tone, but it was mutilated in the clearance process. Ultimately, I had to take it to the Deputy Secretary for Political Affairs who exclaimed after reading the letter: This letter is gibberish! We can't send that. When I concurred with his judgment, he asked what I thought we should say. I told him that in my initial draft I saw this as an exciting opportunity and I repeated the substance of the letter. He replied that he thought that made sense, and that was the kind of letter we needed to send. As I reconstructed the letter from memory, he wrote down the text by hand, with some minor editing, and that is what I took back to my office. The head of EUR/EE, the Office of East European Affairs in the Bureau of European Affairs, nearly blew a fuse when I showed him the new draft. He was the one who had done radical surgery on my draft early in the clearance process. The new text went out, but it was too late, as I noted.

Q: Was there any exchange that we could help Polish priests going to the United States and back and forth? Was there much traffic of that nature?

HOOKS: There was some travel by priests that you refer to. I do recall we had cases of Polish priests coming to the US for periods of varying length, but that wasn't a major issue and there weren't large numbers. They were not automatically entitled to visas. In some cases they had overstayed their original authorizations, but it was a minor issue.

Q: While you were in Washington, did the exchange program get absorbed into USIA?

HOOKS: Yes, it did. That occurred in late 1978, and I was part of the transition. I only worked in USIS for about two months or so. I think that was a terrible transition. I thought it was badly planned and badly executed. Warren Christopher, who was Deputy Secretary at the time, talked about what a great transition that was. Those of us in the trenches felt it was a very badly handled transition in the sense that all the details were postponed until later. Well, you can imagine what happens when you do that: you run into problems.

As soon as we moved from State to USIS, all old procedures were immediately discarded, not over a period of days but in one day, while new procedures had not yet been worked out. You can imagine the chaos that created. There were people traveling

around the country on the exchange programs, and suddenly we were unable to continue programming them. Participants urgently needed per diem to pay their hotel bills. We couldn't bring people over who were already in the pipeline. Suddenly all the exchange programs were jeopardized. Furthermore, USIA was totally unprepared to absorb the people coming from State. People parked in any office space they could find. Sometimes there were four or five people in a small office; people were sitting in the corridors. That was just a minor inconvenience compared to the policy confusion in which we worked. It was a badly botched transition simply because those in charge wanted to postpone decisions that should have been made well in advance of the move.

Q: What was behind this? Just too much trouble or what?

HOOKS: I don't know what the rationale for it was, whether it was political or whatever. Once the decision was made to carry out the transition, it was a foregone conclusion that you had to make this happen somehow. You can't postpone decisions on details. Where is the devil's residence? In the details. Eventually it all worked out but in my view it was an example of how you had a bureaucratic merger that was completely bungled before it was finally sorted out.

Q: You went on to economic training. Was this somewhere you wanted to be? How were you looking at this?

HOOKS: This goes back to something I wanted to do when I came into the Foreign Service. When I entered the Foreign Service, I wanted to come into the political cone. However I was told that "the political cone is over subscribed, but we have a deficit in the admin cone and the consular cone. If you would like to come in one of those cones, we can take you right away. Once you get in, you can change cones easily." That was not true, by the way. Or was not true at the time; I don't know what the situation is today. I agreed to come into the consular cone. Once I got into the Foreign Service, I discovered you just can't say, "OK, I'd like to change over to the political cone." In those days you had to go through a process whereby you had a job for at least two years in the target cone before you could apply to go into that cone.

I was in the consular cone in 1972. How do you get into the economic cone? Well, you went to the econ course for six months, which guaranteed you an econ job at the end of the training, and once you had worked in an econ job for two years, you could apply to enter the econ cone.

When I was in Tel Aviv, I rotated through all the sections in the Embassy. It was a wonderful experience, especially my experience in the econ/commercial side, which was really fascinating. I decided that this was the career path that I wanted to follow. I had already lined myself up to go to Poland in a consular position, but I decided that after my assignment in Poland, I would come back to Washington and take the econ course.

Q: You took the six month course?

HOOKS: Yes, it was a six month course that later on became, I believe, a nine month course. It should have been a nine-month course because it was very intensive. It was highly regarded by those who took it before I did. I thought it was really superb and probably the best training that FSI did in those days.

Q: In later Foreign Service, life how did the course pertain to your work?

HOOKS: The econ course was designed to give you the equivalent of an undergraduate degree in economics. I went from that course to Turkey, and after four years in Turkey, I signed up for the university training program for a master's degree in economics. As I said earlier, the course was superb, especially theoretical economics.

Where I think it was perhaps a little deficient was in terms of actual Foreign Service work. For instance, how do you do an analysis of a national budget, an analysis that is relevant to the State Department? That's a major exercise I went through every year as an econ officer and that was not addressed in the course.

Balance of payments; how do you analyze the balance of payments to help determine major economic trends, and what is the relevance of that to the State Department?

Q: You finished the course and where did you go?

HOOKS: Following the course I went to Ankara, Turkey. As I mentioned earlier, when you were in the econ course, at least in those days, you were guaranteed an econ assignment, regardless of your cone. That was one of the main reasons why I wanted to take the course in the first place. My initial assignment to Turkey was for two years, but I extended for a third year so I could apply to the econ cone. I ended up staying for four years in Turkey, but I changed jobs while I was there, which made my stay even more interesting. It was a fascinating time to be in Turkey because Turkey was going through an economic crisis at that time (1979 – 1983). For instance, there was no coffee to be found in the market when I arrived in Turkey in 1979. Turkey, of course, does not produce coffee; Turks have a special way of preparing it, not a way of growing it.

There were so many things that made Turkey so interesting in those days. For instance, there was a coup d'état on September 12, 1980 when the civilian government seemed unable to cope with growing social unrest.

Four years in Turkey allowed me to set up my career plans: two years in an econ job, application to enter the econ cone, application to attend a graduate program in economics, followed by an economics job.

Q: Who was the ambassador when you were there?

HOOKS: We had three ambassadors when I was in Ankara. The first was Ronald Spiers, who later became Under Secretary for Management. The second one was James Spain,

who had been DCM there before. The third was Robert Strausz-Hupe, who was appointed by Ronald Reagan.

Q: What was your job?

HOOKS: I was working in the economic section. I was initially the junior guy in the econ section, so I had a grab-bag portfolio of things that I was responsible for. I dealt with all the science issues. I was also responsible for the petroleum sector and mining. In my second job, I dealt with macro-economic issues, such as budgets and balance of payments. That was more exciting.

Q: This was '79, what was the situation in Turkey?

HOOKS: The situation at the time was deteriorating very rapidly. When I arrived, the economy was in a tailspin, inflation was on the rise and so was violence. Strikes were practically paralyzing the country. Almost on a daily basis there were people being killed and bombs exploding in public places. Initially, the toll of daily victims could be counted in the tens. By the time the military took over a year later in 1980, almost 100 people or more were being killed daily in Turkey because of political violence.

Q: Who was setting off the bombs?

HOOKS: Primarily it was the left wing opposition. One of the trade unions focused more on a political agenda than on economic issues. However, there was a general deterioration in the political situation throughout the country.

Turkey has a checkered history in terms of political stability. There had been coups before; in fact about every 20 years there was a coup in Turkey. When I arrived, the violence was just beginning to increase and the break down in law and order and security therefore became an issue of growing concern. The military finally took over and in very Turkish fashion really clamped down.

Q: Was the embassy sitting around saying, "When will the military shoe drop?" Was that more or less the prediction or was there a lot of hope that the democratic forum could be maintained?

HOOKS: Well, I would say it was a combination of the two; on the one hand, there was hope that somehow democracy could be sustained and that Turkey could break the cycle of violence. However, there was also the realization that the Turkish military would only allow the situation to go so far before they stepped in. The military were already making it quite clear that either the politicians got their act together or the military would have to bring order to the country. They stepped in and did just that. That was in the Turkish political tradition and it was regarded, of course, as a failure of democracy in Turkey. However, the coup did help to stabilize the security situation. Furthermore, the military launched a stringent economic stabilization program and brought Turkey back to the right track.

Q: Economically, how did the coup affect things?

HOOKS: Prior to the coup, inflation was beginning to skyrocket into triple digits and the Turkish lira was being devalued frequently. Of course, unemployment was on the rise and consumer prices were going through the roof, shortages of basic commodities were beginning to show up in the market. In short, there was a general loss of control of the economy and a loss of control of the political situation that was leading Turkey more and more toward anarchy before the military stepped in. The military imposed tight security controls and a very conservative economic policy, and the Turks tightened their belts and put up with it.

Q: I'd appreciate your opinion on this. I have gotten the impression that there are some extremely talented economists, financial managers within the Turkish society who ended up in banks in Zurich and all over the place. Was this true? Was there much economic talent there or not?

HOOKS: There were in fact many talented Turkish economists, many with PhDs from American universities. Turgut Ozal, who later on became president of the country, was put in charge of the economic program. The problem of course was the lack of political will, and even the best and brightest can't bring about change when there is systemic failure. The economic history of Turkey is interesting in that it looks like a rollercoaster: irresponsible spending leading to rampant inflation, followed by very tight, very strict belt-tightening programs. In Turkey there is a different political and social culture and the Turks are very stoic. Introducing a very strict stabilization program does not lead to social disorder. The problem is that they could never seem to adopt a coherent economic policy over the long term in order to avoid the extremes of binge spending followed by an economic hangover.

Q: As far as a political system is, political discipline, what I gather begins to drift to opening up.

HOOKS: Correct. The two leading politicians at the time were Ecevit, a somewhat left-of-center intellectual, and Demirel, a right-wing populist politician. There was very little dialogue between them and very little sense of compromise. I think Ecevit was not very talented as a politician in the practical sense. His politics did not always work in the real world of politics. He did not understand the art of compromise. He simply did not know how to manage a country.

Q: Did you get any feel for the military as economic managers?

HOOKS: When the military came in, they recognized something had to be done on the economic side so they did put Turgut Ozal, an economist, in charge of the economy and introduced the stabilization program. The Turkish military is very strict and corruption is not a major issue in the military. Obviously, it exists everywhere but it is not a major issue in the Turkish military. Turks tend to be somewhat rigid and so for them the

primary concern was stability and security. The military cracked down very forcibly and very quickly, and made it very clear they were in charge and that the political games, the demonstrations and bombings were over. On the economic side they also introduced an adjustment program that stabilized the economy and prepared the ground for growth.

Q: Were we taking any stand on this?

HOOKS: We took the stand of course at the time of condemning the coup that took place. I think people realized as I mentioned earlier that this was a blow to democracy but clearly democracy was not working in Turkey at that time. There was a problem. The government was not functioning very well and so it was a regrettable step but one that in a sense led to stabilization in Turkey. There was a lot of concern where Turkey was going in those days. The government seemed to lose control of what was happening both with the economy and in the streets in terms of massive demonstrations. The number of people being killed was mounting daily. I recall that the Turkish media has a different approach toward journalism than we have here. On the front pages of the newspapers were large pictures in color of a woman standing beside her husband with an ax in his head, the victim of political violence. Turkish newspapers were, except for the leftwing *Cumhuriyet*, very colorful. You had all this in bright colors on the front pages and it was gory. I think there was a great deal of concern here and in Europe about where Turkey was going in those days. Everyone regretted the coup, but at the same time the coup reassured people that Turkey could now get back on track.

Q: Well, the military had the reputation of coming out of the barracks, taking care of the matter and then stepping back.

HOOKS: Correct. What they were just never able to do was to build up the institutions that would make it difficult for the irresponsible political class to go astray.

Q: Was there concern at that time about what we would call Islamic fundamentalism?

HOOKS: As you recall the events in Turkey coincided with what was happening in Iran. Therefore when events were going the wrong way in Turkey, there was concern what impact the events in Iran might have on Turkey's future.

Turks are not Shiites, they tend to be Sunnis for the most part and furthermore, events in Turkey were being driven more by the left wing than by the right wing because there was a right wing government.

But the question of fundamentalism in Turkey in those days was not a major short-term concern, but a concern of what events in Iran might have over a longer term.

Q: The events of November, 1979 in Iran; where were you? You were in Turkey?

HOOKS: Yes, I had arrived there in August of '79.

Q: How did that affect the embassy? After all, you were in an Islamic country, it was a neighbor and we had an embassy in hostage. How did that play out with you all?

HOOKS: It obviously had an impact on the way we did business. You have to bear in mind the historical context between Turkey and Iran. It is true that Turkey is a Muslim country. However, it is not an Arab country and it is not a Shiite country and, therefore, the Turks have always seen themselves in a different league from their neighbors.

Q: Well, of course, the Iranians are Persian too. I mean they are a different breed too.

HOOKS: Correct. Interesting historical parallels exist between Iran and Turkey. The father of the Shah, Reza Shah came into power in Iran about the same time that Atatürk came to power in Turkey. They took very different roads. Whereas Atatürk was invited to make himself sultan, he opted not to do so. He wanted a republic. He decided that Turkey's future lay with the West. He even changed the alphabet, something that today we take for granted, but there was a lot of resistance at the time, particularly among religious people who felt that getting rid of the Arabic alphabet was blasphemy. He suppressed religious sects, and even the well-known dervishes could perform only once a year in Konya. Atatürk was a general in the army. He was a better educated man than Reza Shah, who was a sergeant, and Atatürk was captivated by the West.

Iran was unable to break out of the traditional mold where every one or two hundred years a dynasty is overthrown by someone who established a new dynasty. Reza Shaw introduced reforms and changes in Iran, but he could not break Iran out of that traditional mold: he didn't change the alphabet, for instance. He didn't take a different approach toward religion. He just basically changed the dynasty. That is an oversimplification but it wasn't a revolution in the sense that Atatürk's was.

The events in Iran very troubling for the Turks. Suddenly the Shiites, who are regarded by many Turks as fanatical, were taking over the country. The question was whether the Iranian revolution would spill over into Turkey, and what impact events in Iran would have on the Kurds? After all, the Kurds occupy territory along the border in Turkey, Iraq and Iran. The Kurds were also highly concerned because minorities were not well treated by Ayatollah Khomeini, and the Kurds felt threatened by him even though they also were Muslim. Would refugees flow into Turkey? Would this lead to Iran trying to supply arms to Kurdish terrorists or whatever you want to call them, those who were resisting the government on the Turkish side? I think the Turks were very concerned about the events in Iran because Iran went from being a reliable partner to a country run by religious fanatics, Shiites who seem to have an almost missionary-type zeal.

The Turkish population in those days was still a very rural conservative society. Atatürk was trying to pull this society stuck in the 18th century into the 20th century. The Atatürk revolution is still underway.

Turkey also became a road through which many people fled Iran because they could go over the mountains by foot. In fact, the embassy began to take on the role of processing visas for a number of refugees who came through Turkey.

We had a fascinating situation while I was there. The Iranian permanent representative to the United Nations during the embassy takeover crisis in the 1970's came to the Embassy to apply for a visa. He had been teaching in some small university in the United States prior to the revolution. After Khomeini came to power, he returned to Iran, and became the Ambassador to the United Nations. He excoriated the United States shamefully in the United Nations, and then went back to Iran. He was arrested and thrown into prison, from which he ultimately escaped. What's the first thing he did? He headed to Ankara, came to the American embassy and demanded a visa. He was turned down. He went off to France and the U.S. Embassy in Paris gave him a visa without checking with Embassy Ankara, which technically was responsible for all visa questions concerning Iranian refugees. We had people coming, quite a few Iranians, as a matter of fact, although none as notorious as the Perm Rep.

Q: Was there an economic impact on Turkey?

HOOKS: There was not a major economic impact. There was some Iranian investment in Turkey and there was some trade that was disrupted for a period of time, but Iran was not a major trading partner of Turkey.

Q: You were in Turkey from when to when?

HOOKS: 1979 to 1983.

Q: How was the Cyprus situation while you were there?

HOOKS: The Cyprus situation was always a thorn in our relations with Turkey. The Turks of course were rather rigid about Cyprus and very sensitive to that issue. Having served in Turkey, I perhaps saw the Greeks through Turkish eyes somewhat. I found the Greeks to be difficult on a number of issues. I once heard a British diplomat refer to Greece as the footnote country in the EU because the Greeks were notorious for adding footnotes to drafts to note their disagreement. The Greeks badly handled the whole Cyprus issue and therefore have to bear a large responsibility for the current crisis. The Turks are difficult to generalize but the Turks tend to be rather forbearing to a certain point and then, when their limit has been reached, they respond in a very forceful fashion instead of a gradual escalation. This is what they did in Cyprus. Furthermore, the Turkish Cypriot leader Denktash was a mediocre politician and the Turks were stuck with him. The Greeks were so sensitive about any flights by Turkish aircraft over Greek islands and therefore NATO exercises became very sensitive issues in the Aegean.

Q: Had the arms embargo been lifted by this time, by the time you were there? I served four years in Greece and I left just before the thing blew up in Cyprus, just a week or two before, but I personally had very little sympathy for the Greek cause because the Greeks

did the damned thing. They started it and they bit off more than they could chew. But the Greek lobby is almost as powerful as the Israeli lobby. We put an arms embargo but had that lifted by the time you got to Turkey or not?

HOOKS: I can't answer the question with a great deal of assurance because I don't remember where that stood. I am sure the coup d'état in September of 1980 also led to certain restrictions in terms of military cooperation in spite of the fact that they were a very important ally in NATO and we had a number of bases doing all sorts of things all over the country. We had a very deep and broad relationship with Turkey.

A major issue for the embassy when I was in Turkey was the negotiation of a new SOFA with the Turks, but I don't remember what restrictions were on arms.

Q: Was there sort of an economic element to the Kurdish problem or not?

HOOKS: Anytime a significant part of the population is not fully integrated into society, the economy is severely impacted. In Turkey it was regarded more as a political problem, although it was interesting because the Turks simply denied there was a problem. Even the word 'Kurdish' was prohibited as was the Kurdish language, and Kurds were sometimes referred to as "Mountain Turks." It was all a part of denial of the problem. Well, the problem did exist; it was a real problem. I don't think the Turks have handled it terribly well. Frankly, they could have integrated the Kurds better into society, especially through education. A lot of Kurds have moved to Istanbul and kids being like kids everywhere, they want to talk like the kids around them. More social programs and more economic opportunity rather than discrimination would go a long way toward integration.

The Kurdish area is also the poorest area of the country. While when I was in Turkey, the Turkish Government started developing a huge dam project over the Euphrates River to encourage development in that area and to provide electricity to the national grid. And since that time I have seen encouraging signs that the Turkish Government and society are trying to come to terms with that issue.

Q: Speaking of denial, did you run across the Armenian non-genocide or genocide business or was this something that came up or not?

HOOKS: It did come up. If you recall, at that period of time an Armenian organization killed several Turkish diplomats, and each time that happened, the Turks were up in arms, so it was an issue. In Turkey itself, minorities in general and the Armenians specifically, were very sensitive to their status as a minority in the country and felt somewhat defensive about it. The Armenians, of course, felt their status was tolerated, but there was always the uncertainty about their future in Turkey. Any movement along the border with Armenia along Mt. Ararat was always a sensitive issue with the Turks.

Q: Did you as an economic officer or the economic section take a look at the Kurdish areas of Turkey and you know report on it? Did we have concern about how things were developing there?

HOOKS: We did. I recall making a trip out there. As a matter of fact I went to a Turkish refinery located in Kurdish territory and security was a major issue in those days. You couldn't travel at night without military escort, and there were attacks that did occur. That refinery, by the way, I always saw it as a microcosm of what Turkey is and what Turkey could be. The refinery was deep in Kurdish territory and many of the engineers had studied in the United States, and they had recreated a little corner of Houston, Texas around this refinery, with paved streets, gardens with flowers and houses, sometimes individual houses, sometimes duplexes, and kids out on their bicycles.

Q: These were Turkish kids?

HOOKS: Turkish kids, sons of engineers, technicians and so forth. Around this complex there was a wall with barbed wire on top of it. I remember standing there looking out into the town itself. The town itself was very drab and poor with not one single flower to be seen, not one tree to be seen in that city, with unpaved streets. In fact the engineers told me that they had offered to pave the streets but they could never get the mayor's agreement to do so. As a result, you had an example of what Turkey was in the drab town surrounding the refinery, but a small microcosm inside the wall of what Turkey could become. On the hillside surrounding the refinery, you could see what you thought were bushes; these were actually trees that had been cut down for firewood. The branches would sprout out, going further and further, in other words growing sort of horizontally rather than vertically. I was struck by the fact that with the proper management and investment, so much could have been done to improve the lives of the people in the area. As I went through little towns to get there, I saw the little adobe houses with pancakes of cow manure stuck on the side of these houses to dry out. These pancakes were used for cooking because of the shortage of firewood.

Q: Where did you go when you left Turkey in 1983?

HOOKS: I went to the University of Michigan for a year to work on a master's degree in economics under the university training program of the State Department. As I mentioned earlier, I took the six-months economics course at FSI before going to Turkey. I thought it would be good to continue that training and get a master's degree. That was a wonderful experience in almost every respect. It allowed me to get back into an academic atmosphere and away from the routine of work. Being in Michigan and the Midwest gave me a new perspective on the country and Washington. It was also an opportunity to study economics a little bit more rigorously.

Q: Let's talk a bit about Michigan. I think the University has a fairly rigorous program of sending many of its people out to train in foreign places, does it not? Teams going out to Africa to work. Was that the case?

HOOKS: Yes, you are right; the University of Michigan did have a very extensive exchange program with a number of countries around the world. It also did a lot of training paid for by USAID. One of their students had been Papa Doc from Haiti who

studied medicine in Michigan. He didn't complete his program because of his academic record, but he did study there.

Q: Were you taking standard economics or was there a special focus?

HOOKS: My master's was in applied economics. I of course had several years experience in the Foreign Service at that point. I joined the Foreign Service in 1971, and I had been 12 years in the Foreign Service and done economic work, so I knew how to tailor my program to what I wanted to do in the Foreign Service. I wanted to focus on balance of payments and trade issues. I knew what I would be doing when I left the University of Michigan, so I was able to tailor my program much more closely than many people would have been able to do, and therefore to focus my attention on the issues that interested me.

Q: Did you pick up an attitude from the academic side towards the government?

HOOKS: When you talk about academics, it is a little hard to generalize given the diversity of academics. There is of course a certain intellectual way that academics sometimes look at the government and government activities, but at the same time, when you are a practitioner, you also see where sometimes university professors have a certain intellectual disdain which perhaps isn't justified or doesn't fit into the real world. I found when I was ambassador, there are occasionally junior officers just out of graduate school who think they have solutions to the problems of the world, only to realize that issues are generally more complicated than they first see them. Generally there are good reasons why policies are developed the way they are. It is easy to be prescriptive, but human nature being what it is and the political culture being what it is, change is not going to happen overnight.

Coming back to Turkey, there is the whole issue of Turkish immigration in Europe, particularly to Germany, which we have not discussed. There are over a million Turks in Germany and the remittances to families in Turkey were a major source of revenue for the Turkish budget, as it still is today. For the German Government, there was the question of what to do with the Turkish population? There are kids born in Germany who are neither Turkish nor German, products of two societies but not belonging to either society. This was particularly acute when kids, particularly girls, living in Berlin would come back to small towns in Turkey and they just didn't fit in. They were used to a very different society. Of course in small, traditional society in a Turkish village, their behavior was seen as inappropriate. It could be something innocuous, just talking to a boy without family members being present. Many of these kids were neither German nor Turkish in their outlook. What was the identity of a kid born in Germany to Turkish parents but who was not entitled to a German passport?

Even when adult workers came back to Turkey, it was interesting to observe the difficulties they faced. In Germany they worked like Germans. However, when they returned to Turkey, their Turkish colleagues put tremendous pressure on them to work

like Turks: a more leisurely pace, longer tea breaks, a less rigorous approach to work. I read many interesting articles about this issue.

Coming back to the university, I found that university training was a great experience which I really valued at the time. The training gave me greater confidence in my analysis of economic issues in Haiti and in other assignments that I subsequently had.

Q: As we are speaking today of Haiti, word is coming out of a horrendous earthquake which may have killed thousands.

HOOKS: I think my career began to take a new and interesting turn in Haiti. I was in Israel between the 1967 war and the 1973 war, so it was a really quiet period of time in terms of security. I was in Poland at a time when it was also relatively quiet before the events of the 1980s. In Turkey I faced a country already in crisis. Events in Haiti were already in motion that would eventually lead to Baby Doc's departure in February of 1986. The first major event occurred in May 1984 just before I arrived in Port-au Prince. However, no one knew it at the time because there were always rumors that the government was going to fall. No one seriously thought at that point that Baby Doc's regime was in the final throes.

As the situation evolved, we began to see that something was different that had not been there in the past. Baby Doc did not clamp down as his father would have done, and he was not a skilled politician although he had been in power for 14 years. The economy was actually doing better than it had been for some time, but there was a political process underway that ultimately led to his ouster. Expectations were different.

I learned an interesting lesson from my experiences in Haiti. You can do dispassionate analyses of a political situation when you don't have a stake in it yourself. However, when it has an impact on your own family, such as the American school closing indefinitely with the prospect that your kids will lose a year of school because of the political problems in the host country, you have a different way of looking at events. It can sometimes be a problem when policy wonks offer advice about a situation in which they have no personal stake.

It was an interesting phenomenon to observe what was happening in Haiti; how the government didn't seem to take it seriously at first. I don't think the U.S. government took it very seriously at first either. Clay McManaway was the ambassador at the time, and he was very curious intellectually. We would often discuss what was happening in this country. He asked pertinent questions about what made this situation different from the past. I think that back in Washington, some people who had served in Haiti in the past adopted the attitude that we've been through that many times, you know. It will phase out and Haiti will go on. I think initially many of us felt that way as well, but came to realize that something was different. Things were obviously moving in a certain direction and ultimately Baby Doc came to realize that as well.

I worked in the economic/commercial section, and I found it interesting that the businessmen were among the first to say, “This time this is going to lead to something. This is going to lead to a change of regime.”

Q: Right now there is an awful lot of attention focused on Haiti as the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere. How did Haiti strike you as an economist when you went there?

HOOKS: Papa Doc was very successful in doing what he set out to do, which was to destroy the economy. Haiti had gone through a lot of instability. He decided the way to stop those trying to overthrow him was to weaken them politically and economically; you close all of the ports. Les Cayes had been a major port for Haiti and Jérémie had been a port. He closed all provincial ports, leaving only Port au Prince as the funnel that he could control. He set out on a deliberate policy of impoverishing the country.

It was already a poor country when Papa Doc came into power, but during the 28 years that Papa Doc and Baby Doc were in power, Haiti’s position on the list of the world’s poorest countries dropped dramatically. Haiti had been on the same level as Bolivia in the 1950’s. By the end of Baby Doc’s regime, Haiti had dropped down to where Niger was; competing with Niger for the dubious honor of being the poorest country in the world.

Haiti of course is one of those countries that has very limited resources, with a rapidly growing population that already exceeded five million when I was there. It is now around nine million, as quoted on CNN, and it was an example of how gross mismanagement and corruption brought the country to where it was. Corruption there was really a fine art.

Q: When you went there was there an economy to look at?

HOOKS: There was an economy to look at. First of all, there is always an economy to look at. You know, even in poor countries people live and work and engage in all kinds of activities. There is always some agriculture and trade. Not only that, there is an assembly sector in Haiti where 90% of the world’s baseballs were assembled at the time. There was growing investment in Haiti because of inexpensive labor. Teddy bears and other stuffed toys were being assembled as well. GTM was producing electrical switches.

The IMF was pushing constantly to bring about economic reforms, as was USAID, but reforms by their very nature tend to break somebody’s rice bowl. Often the rice bowls go back for generations and are part of the culture. That is difficult to change.

It was an interesting exercise to see this small, poor country and what had led it to where it was. From the perspective of the United States, we basically tried to maintain stability so that Haiti didn’t explode and come apart at the seams. The boat people were a major issue at the time and still is. I suspect after the events of today and yesterday, it will be an even worse situation as people look for ways of getting out of Haiti.

One of the things you also recognized when you are in Haiti is the bench is very thin. For example, when you look for qualified people to fill senior positions, how many people

are qualified to be president of the national bank? When starting with the premise that 90% of the population was illiterate, that disqualifies most people. Of the 10% that are literate, that literacy is a very flexible term. There are people who may have been in school for four or five years and can read and write their name and can read at a very elementary level, but when you talk to university professors, they will tell you the quality of French in the schools was absolutely abysmal. You did have a small elite that was extremely well educated. They had MBA degrees from the United States or from France and were very sophisticated.

I recall that a new governor of the Central Bank was appointed just before a visit by Congressional staffers. I went with them to visit the Central Bank and I told them beforehand, "I am taking you over there, not so that you will learn facts and figures from this gentleman, but that you will understand one of the key issues here in Haiti which is finding qualified people to do the job." The staffers asked detailed questions and the Governor did not always have the answer for them. I was doing the translating and occasionally he would say to me, "Can you explain to them? You know this issue very well." I would embroider a little bit on what the governor had said in order to assist the Governor in answering their questions. Afterwards the staffers made comments very critical of the Governor. I said, "Look, as I told you beforehand the purpose here was to understand some of the institutional problems that we face in terms of development of Haiti." That was an interesting experience.

Q: Was there almost an attitude of this is a basket case and there really isn't anything we can do but we have to try?

HOOKS: There was a realization that Haiti, given the lack of natural resources, does not have the potential to become a Denmark. The idea was to maintain stability in Haiti and eliminate some of the grosser corruption in order to provide a standard of living for people that would overcome some of the grinding poverty: safe drinking water which very few people had access to, enough food and perhaps some minimal medical care and education. It was basically a question of managing a very poor country with a population explosion and a long history of instability. The question was how to manage this problem that is located 300 miles off the coast of the United States.

Q: What was your impression of the Haitian American community? I mean the second generation, were they coming along with good education, that sort of thing?

HOOKS: The Haitian American community at least in those days was lobbying on behalf of Haiti but had very limited influence. It was not all that well organized. Most Haitians coming to the United States are very poor people although a few were from the lower middle class people and a few were well educated. We've had Haitian representatives in government in senior positions, but by and large the population is very poor and their primary concern is to find a job and send money back to their families in Haiti. Overall, the Haitian community is not a savvy, effective lobby like some ethnic groups. The Haitian lobby was not a major factor in terms of our relationship with Haiti.

Q: You were there from when to when?

HOOKS: From 1984 to 1987. I was there when Baby Doc left.

Q: How did things go after he left?

HOOKS: His departure left many urgent questions: Now what happens? Who takes over? Well, the only institution that could run the country was the military. A day or so after Baby Doc left, Ambassador McManaway said the military did not have the slightest idea of what to do next. They were caught by surprise when Baby Doc left. He asked his staff to develop lists of very practical things that could be done right away; some in the shorter term and some in the longer term.

The political counselor, the military attaché and I accompanied the Ambassador in his meeting with the senior Haitian military. We sat around a table and each of us took turns talking about what needed to be done. For instance, I offered a list of things that the military could do within a week, a list of things that needed to be done in the next three or four months, and ideas for them to consider in a longer timeframe over the next year or so. We didn't go out five, ten, fifteen, or twenty years to talk about development issues, but rather practical things that needed attention right away. We tried to give them some sense of the issues they were facing and some things they could do, such as meet with the business sector and reassure businessmen on investments and contracts. The head of state had just been booted out under non-democratic conditions. What's going to happen to the economy now? You need to reassure. You need to try to maintain your business climate and also provide a level of security. The process of *dechoukaj* became a phenomenon, which is the Creole word for 'uprooting'. The population was going to uproot those associated with Baby Doc, which of course led to violence and instability. There were frequent incidents of crowds attacking a home of some previous minister and carting him out and beating him and absolutely destroying the house.

Haiti had just had a change of a regime that had been in power for 28 years, when you combine Papa Doc and Baby Doc. How do you nursemaid the country to democracy? It didn't go very well. A new ambassador, Brunson McKinley, replaced McManaway. I think later on the State Department felt that he had not fully understood the situation there. He wanted Haiti to go to democracy on his watch, an expression he used, and I don't think he fully understood Haiti. The United States by itself just can't take Haiti to democracy. It was more problematic than that. Aristide was already on the scene. He was a Catholic priest when I was there, and he was already making outrageous political comments. Many of us felt that he was unbalanced mentally.

Q: He was a thorn in the side of the Americans because he had people who almost worshipped him as a man of the cloth and the people. He had quite a clique supporting him.

HOOKS: He did because people understood him. He was the guy who said, "I want you to know we are going to chase out the Mulattos." You do not want people to think in

racist terms. Aristide was already prone to making racist comments. Haiti, by the way, is a very race conscience society because race has always played a critical role in that country.

Q: I read a book about the United States' involvement in Haiti in 1810, something like that where we got on one side in the Mulattos versus the blacks, you might say, and we got involved in that. It goes way back.

HOOKS: It goes way back to the struggle for independence from France, and it has gone on constantly ever since then. It is a very sensitive issue in Haiti. I recall a woman who worked briefly at the embassy. Her father had been minister of finance under Papa Doc, and she said she was one of the first black girls to go to a certain school in Port-au-Prince because only light skinned girls were admitted prior to that. She is younger than I am so this was in the late '50s and '60s.

Haiti was a fascinating country caught in a warp of time with a fascinating history, very limited resources, always badly managed and now we see it has been dealt a severe blow by nature.

Q: Haiti shares an island with the Dominican Republic. I am told it is almost night and day. There is no real contact.

HOOKS: It is one of the few places where you can fly along the border and you can see the border from the air. On the Dominican side you see greenery and trees, and on the Haitian side you see a barren landscape. When you fly over the United States you can see where power lines are, you can see power lines going up through the Shenandoah Valley and you can see where the trees are completely cut away. This is the way it was on the Haitian side because people used it for firewood.

Clearly, there is a relationship between the two countries, although it has always been a very troubled relationship. Haiti, after all, took over the Dominican Republic for some 20 some years and ruled the Dominican Republic as an adjunct of Haiti. Trujillo had very poor relations with Papa Doc. You recall the famous sugar cane massacres where tens of thousands of Haitian migrant workers were killed in the Dominican Republic. Relations between the two countries remain strained.

Q: You were there when the Duvaliers left. There were stories that they had a hell of a lot of money stowed away in Zurich banks and in France and all that. Was there any effort or what about that presumption? How did that play out economically?

HOOKS: The Duvaliers had been in power for 28 years, so you can imagine they had stowed away some money; how much one could never ascertain. There were various estimates from 100 million to 400 million, as I recall. Was it ever that much? It would be difficult to say. You have to maintain yourself in power and Haiti is a poor country. After 28 years you do have a fairly sizeable pension fund, but how much it was, it is difficult to know.

There was an effort to recover some of that money. There was a lot of talk about recovering the money initially. There were some feeble efforts and it sort of got lost as other issues seized the limelight. It is very difficult to recover money that has been stashed away in secret bank accounts.

Q: Well, you know we have talked about this with Aristide again and again.

HOOKS: First of all, there is little political will to do so, and when you look at the replacement you think: if you get the money, what do you do with it? You transfer it from one Swiss bank account to another Swiss bank account? Where would it go? Somehow they lose political will and those coming into power quickly lose whatever moral standard they had as they begin to indulge in corruption themselves.

But what I find interesting in the United States and many other countries is that we almost have a “let bygones be bygones” policy almost. We don’t make a serious effort in helping to find lawyers who can identify where these funds are. We have been putting pressure on the Swiss to cooperate in recovering them. Unfortunately, these initiatives never seem to go very far.

Q: How about as an economist, you live by statistics. In Haiti I would imagine statistics would be hard to come by and hard to depend on.

HOOKS: Absolutely. You had very few statistics and the statistics that were published were very unreliable. They would indicate mostly direction but not magnitude. As a result you had to develop your own sort of consumer index by having employees check prices in the market on a monthly basis. As a matter of fact, I just spoke to a Haitian lady who worked with me in the econ section. She is now retired, living in Delaware. She went to the market on the same day every month to check on the price of basic commodities in the market. Combining that with a few other things, the cost of gas and so on, we developed our own index of what was happening in terms of inflation.

Q: All in all, how did you find your time there?

HOOKS: All in all, I found my time in Haiti to be a very interesting experience professionally in a number of ways. First of all, I was able to observe at close hand a poor developing country go through a severe crisis of getting rid of a dictator who had been there for a long period of time, all the social disruption that followed in its wake, and the difficulties of forming a new government and helping it to move in the right direction.

It was also interesting to see how U.S. policy is formulated in times of crises. Washington is always sensitive to the impact of a crisis on public opinion. The Embassy has to be ahead of the curve in order to keep Washington from taking over the decision-making process. Haiti’s proximity to Cuba and the United States, combined with the phenomenon of boat people, gave an importance to the crisis that would not have been the case had Haiti been located in Africa, for example. My experiences during the crisis in Haiti

prepared me well for dealing with crises in Brazzaville, Kinshasa, and Abidjan at a later stage of my career. It was a workshop, if you wish, in dealing with a crisis in a country.

As you know, anytime an embassy experiences a major crisis like that, it also impacts on people's careers. It is always a career boost if you perform well during a crisis. I received a promotion following that crisis, as did a number of colleagues. People get promotions out of these events because it reads well on a performance evaluation.

Q: Where did you go after Haiti?

HOOKS: I left Haiti in June, 1987 to study Hebrew for ten months in preparation for my assignment to Tel Aviv.

Q: How did you find Hebrew?

HOOKS: It was an interesting experience because of my career path. My first tour in the Foreign Service was in Israel. When I arrived in Tel Aviv in 1971, everyone urged me to continue studying French. They told me not to bother studying Hebrew as Israelis speak English very well. Furthermore, Hebrew is a one-country language and it was not worth my while to study it. I was concerned because I was still on language probation. I decided to opt for French lessons, which indeed stood me in good stead over the years. However, looking back, I would have advised an officer to study Hebrew. What is the most important language you can learn? It's the language of the country you are in. You never know what the future is going to bring.

At the beginning of the Hebrew course, I had the advantage of having been in Israel, knowing a little bit of Hebrew that I had picked up and what I had acquired through self-study later on. I was able to work out a special program for myself with the teachers because all the other students were beginners. I was in a class by myself and the teachers gave me instruction as they had time. Most days I had at least a couple of hours of instruction, some days I would have four hours of instruction, but some days I had no instruction. I worked on my own, and since I had studied a number of languages, I knew what I had to do. I felt like I made a lot more progress than I would have had I been in the class with other students, some less motivated than myself.

Q: You went to Israel and served there from when to when?

HOOKS: I went to Israel and served there from 1988 to 1991.

Q: OK, 1988 when you went there; what was the situation in Israel?

HOOKS: There were two things that I think were important at that time. First, Israel was coming out of a deep economic recession from the mid-1980s. The United States gave more than a billion dollars to bail them out of that problem and get the economy back on track. As a result, we had yearly economic discussions with the Israelis to try to keep

track of where they were because they don't rely on the IMF. They rely on the United States in times of economic difficulty.

The second thing is that the intifada started in May of 1987, just before I returned to Washington to study Hebrew. In fact, the intifada dominated our discussions throughout the year that I was at FSI.

Q: Could you explain what the intifada was.

HOOKS: The intifada is the Palestinian uprising in the Occupied Territories against Israeli occupation. Not the Arabs in Israel but the Arabs in the Occupied Territories, in the West Bank and in Gaza. The intifada started in May of 1987 and it continued throughout the years I was there. Prime Minister Rabin commented at the beginning of the intifada: "We need to break their bones in order to bring the intifada to a close." The Israelis could never quite understand what was going on. This was something new, they weren't accustomed to it, and they didn't know how to deal with it initially. They were caught between trying to suppress it and trying to maintain their image as a benign occupier. However, the intifada became a major force that ultimately led to autonomy for the Palestinians as the Israelis came to understand that they simply could not continue the occupation and taking over Palestinian land as before.

Q: In a way they were up against a significant number of children who were involved.

HOOKS: Well, it was a popular uprising against the Israeli occupation and it was something that had broad support. I think the Palestinians were maturing politically. They had already been under Israeli occupation since 1967. As you recall, I mentioned before that I was in Israel from 1971 through 1973. Israel's golden age was from 1967 to 1973. It was after the euphoria of the Six Day War, the old generation of pioneers were still around, but Israeli had not yet experienced the trauma of the Yom Kippur War.

The second time I was there, the Israelis were struggling with the phenomenon of the intifada. At the same time their economy was starting to take off and they were becoming like Southern California in the Middle East. So on the one hand, economically they had made gigantic leaps since the early 1970s. On the political side, on the other hand, they were struggling with a phenomenon which they did not understand, which no one understood fully and which was creating a new paradigm. It was putting the Palestinians on the map, politically, in a sense; not as a terrorist organization but as a popular organization looking for self-expression, self-determination.

Q: Quite different from setting off bombs and having young people throw rocks. There was that horrific picture that I can recall of a Palestinian man caught in crossfire sheltering his son with his body and the kid was killed.

HOOKS: That event came much later during the difficulties in Gaza. That occurred about five, or six or seven or eight years later. When I was there it had not reached that stage and Gaza was not autonomous although it had some sort of self government.

I think the intifada was a phenomenon which led ultimately to some degree of self-determination on the part of the Palestinians. While Arafat was alive, the PLO was important. The intifada was a phenomenon which was not PLO-controlled but sprang up at the grassroots level. Obviously, all the political organizations tried to make the most of it. It was very much a popular expression. I think because of that the Israelis were baffled as to how to deal with a new phenomenon involving young children in the streets throwing rocks.

In some cases rocks were defined as lethal weapons but for most people it is a disproportionate response to shoot people because they are throwing rocks, unless of course, they are endangering someone's life. It was a new phenomenon and it was therefore a change in the political equation in the Middle East to a certain degree; not radically but to a certain degree.

Q: The Israelis had always been portrayed as the good boys and now they are coming out as bullies.

HOOKS: They came out as an armed, trained military dealing with young men with just rocks, basically. Israel's image suffered from this situation but Israel was facing a serious dilemma. What could it do in such a situation? It could not just walk away and withdraw unilaterally from the occupied territories. On the other hand, Israel had to deal with it in such a way that does not lead to condemnation in the world community. The Israeli Government struggled with this situation and still does.

Q: Who was the ambassador when you arrived there?

HOOKS: For the first six months or so after I arrived, Tom Pickering was the Ambassador. He was replaced by Bill Brown.

Q: When you got there, how would you say the embassy officers were dealing with our position because we were so imbedded in the Israeli cause, you might say. Was this causing strains or what?

HOOKS: The intifada obviously led to a certain strain in our relationship with Israel because the United States was caught between wanting to be supportive of Israel's security and Israel's existence as a state, but at the same time not wanting to be seen as insensitive to human rights abuses. For example, in the United States if young people were throwing rocks, it would be unacceptable for the police to fire live ammunition into crowds. Sometimes the Israelis responded to the intifada very forcefully, sometimes less forcefully, but it was a conundrum for the whole time I was there.

Q: You had been there before during a time of euphoria, you might say. Was this really a different embassy, a different officer corps, a different situation? I mean the atmosphere within the embassy, was this you might say, looking at Israelis and saying, "You know,

they are an occupying force and they are not handling this very well.” I mean a distancing from the Israeli cause or not?

HOOKS: Given the pressures in Israeli society and the pressures of Israeli politics, the American embassy in Tel Aviv is the most intense embassy I have ever worked in. Obviously there is very close scrutiny by Washington. The popular expression in the State Department is that the president of the United States is the desk officer and therefore whatever is said and done gets amplified.

Israeli society is also very intense, very dynamic and I think people either love it or they tend to hate it. You find very few people who are just indifferent to Israel. There was no great divide in the embassy; it was just that some people felt the Israelis were over reacting and riding roughshod over the Palestinians, although there were those who felt the Israelis were under intense pressure and had a serious security problem to deal with. However, the killing of people demonstrating for what many Americans regard as a national right, which is self-expression, led to a serious quandary in a moral sense and a political sense.

Q: What was the government like when you went out there?

HOOKS: I think most of the time I was there the second time it was Shamir who was the prime minister. Israel had changed a lot since my first assignment. The first time I was there the old leaders from pioneer days were still around: Ben-Gurion was still alive although no longer in power, Golda Meier was prime minister when I was there the first time, Abba Eban was Foreign Minister. All of these personalities had moved on, either having passed away or basically retired by the time I returned the second time.

Shamir was never in the category of the early pioneer leaders. Begin had a great deal of respect, although he was really on the margins when I was there the first time because of his extremism during the War of Independence and his smuggling of weapons into the country to maintain a military force alongside Government forces after independence. His party Likud had never been in power. Likud came to power after the Yom Kippur War, but Begin was seen as somewhat of an intellectual and a man of a certain stature. He agreed to withdraw from Sinai, among other things.

Shamir was seen as a guy with very little vision and a much more difficult character to deal with. I think even pro-Israeli Congressmen found him difficult to deal with. He was not open for dialogue. He would speak of greater Israel, which is a curious expression to use. He was a hardliner; he was not a great statesman but he was in power and had to be dealt with.

Q: Had the Israeli government opened up the economy, or was it still sort of the heavy hand of orthodox socialism?

HOOKS: Israel had a kind of East European socialism, which is not surprising since all the early leaders came from Eastern Europe. The state for historical reasons was very

much involved in the economy when I was there the first time. The economy was very closed and very protected.

I recall a discussion once with the head of the Chamber of Commerce about the requirements for importing refrigerators. The requirements were such that foreigners could not export refrigerators to Israel because they could only be a certain size and the market was too small to justify producing a model that was just that size. This was obviously an effort to protect the market for Israeli production. The state was involved in many things.

After the events of the early and mid-1980s when the economy was really in crisis and inflation was skyrocketing, the United States stepped in with a huge economic aid package in return for serious economic reform. That is when the Israeli economy started taking off. When I arrived in the late 1980s, the economy was already starting to boom. A large number of government enterprises were privatized and the market was opened up to more imports.

The first time I was there of course the kibbutzim were in their glory days. Kibbutzim were located around the airport and in many of the areas around Tel Aviv that are now residential areas. It was still very much a rural society in some respects. That had changed by the time I came back. Starting in the late 1980's Israel began to foster the development of high tech industries oriented towards exports.

Q: What were you doing? I talked to Sam X who was an economic counselor there. We talked about his frustration because you report on the economy and suggest means of helping the Israelis and the Israelis and those in power would almost laugh at the economic section for bothering to do this because they'd present their own requests almost directly to Congress, which caused great annoyance and frustration. Was that going on in your time?

HOOKS: Of course this sort of thing did occur because the Israelis obviously had very powerful friends back here in Washington, but I think you also have to put it in context. Sometimes American embassies have perhaps an exaggerated sense of their own importance. As I mentioned earlier, the desk officer for Israel is the President of the United States. Bear that in mind. Just because you are in the economic section at the American Embassy in Tel Aviv and have some very good ideas, it's a rather inflated view of your own importance to think that those policies have to be adopted.

Israelis had their own sense of what they wanted to do and they knew they had powerful friends in Washington. They could do many things that no other country in the world could get by with. They knew when it came to political support they could go around the American embassy very easily and go around the State Department, for that matter. I think people working at the embassy had to keep that in mind. I know when I was there, I did an analysis of the budget, with particular focus on the amount of money spent on settlements in the Occupied Territories. Of course, this is a very sensitive subject. One of my cables was leaked in Washington because I had detailed the sums of money being

spent on settlements. The following year the Israelis tried to put those expenditures in the budget in such a way that they were not readily apparent.

The American Embassy in Tel Aviv is in a very sensitive situation. It plays an important role but it is only one aspect of a very intense relationship between Israel and the United States, and Israelis can and do go around the embassy on many issues. For example, defense issues were often dealt with directly with the Pentagon, not forwarded through the embassy. The Israelis have direct access to members of Congress and various other organizations, so it is a very broad, very intense, very deep relationship that goes far beyond the embassy. The embassy is an important part of that but it is not an exclusive channel of communication.

Q: I assume the Israeli economic statistics were first-rate, weren't they?

HOOKS: The Israeli economic statistics were very good as far as they go. Of course, they don't always take on certain sensitive issues like defense and the Occupied Territories. Some expenditures are not very evident; sometimes it takes a little digging to find them.

Q: I'm sure the nuclear program was . . .

HOOKS: Was another sensitive issue.

Q: Was there much Israeli-Egyptian economic movement?

HOOKS: After Sadat's visit to Jerusalem in the late 1970s, the door was open for trade to start. It was not a major factor when I was there, but ties were starting to be built. It had not reached the proportions that it became later on, today for instance, but the groundwork was being placed for an economic relationship.

Q: Was there much with Jordan?

HOOKS: There was very little with Jordan. Even in those days there was the official trade and there was unofficial trade. I didn't see it myself but I recall getting reports that in Dubai you could buy Israeli products like jams and preserves. Sometimes you could even find Israeli liquor, shipped there by some means, so there was the official trade and the unofficial trade. The extent of unofficial trade by its very nature is difficult to know.

Q: Did the religious sector have an impact on the economy?

HOOKS: In a society like Israel, religion plays an important role in everything, although not everyone is religious. No more than 25% and probably more like 15 - 20% of the population goes to synagogue. However, religion permeates the culture. There are some people who have a kosher home although they will eat non-kosher outside the home. There are all sorts of gradations. Then of course there are those who are totally unreligious and so forth. Religion had an impact on government policy, especially on the budget. The electoral system in Israel favors the religious parties because any party

receiving one percent of the vote could get into the Knesset. Because there is no majority party, the largest party had to form coalitions with small parties, many of them religious. The religious parties have a very well defined agenda: they want money for their school systems, and they were willing to go along on other issues as long as the Prime Minister was willing to throw money at their school systems.

However, the religious parties were very adept at playing politics. For instance, when I was there, the rabbis threatened to withdraw the kosher certificates for any hotels organizing New Year's festivities. New Year is not a Jewish holiday. It is basically a Christian holiday. We don't regard it as a Christian holiday but it is determined by a calendar established by the Pope and therefore it was a non-Jewish holiday. That sounds like silliness to an American, but in Israel it is a factor. If your kosher certificate is withdrawn, that puts you in a different category of restaurant. It has an economic impact.

Q: It shows you might say that the religious powers that be know how to twist the lion's tail from time to time.

HOOKS: I would say more than from time to time. All the religious parties have been very clever at playing the system and getting money for their favorite projects.

Q: How did Washington, the Economic Bureau, impact on your operation? Were you getting all sort of requests or were you pretty much following a routine?

HOOKS: The Econ Bureau was very much involved in the annual economic talks that I mentioned earlier. Ever since the mid 1980s when we had provided extraordinary assistance to help get the Israeli economy back on track and bring inflation down from triple digits, we met regularly with the Israelis to keep not only a sense of the pulse of the Israeli economy which the embassy could do, but to have very high level talks with the head of the Economic Bureau about where the Israeli economy was going and to keep them on track in carrying out the needed reforms. Washington was very closely involved in that. It was led by the head of E who came to Israel annually when I was there.

Q: Shamir sort of having been an ex-terrorist was a rather dour character. You mentioned he was difficult to deal with, but I would think on the economic side, did he have a hand in setting economic policy?

HOOKS: Shamir was not a charismatic figure. He was anything but. No one ever accused him of being a charismatic figure or of having a great vision of moving Israel forward. He basically wanted to keep Israel intact as it was and to keep the Occupied Territories for Israel. The dilemmas for him, as it is for many Israelis, is how to carry out the Zionist dream of the homeland for the Jews versus the reality of the world that you live in. Now, you can argue that you have to be unrealistic to start with. After all, the idea of taking Jews from around the world, bringing them back to Israel, sounded farcical even to most Jews in the early days of Zionism. It was the stuff of legends. However, Herzl's philosophy was that if you want it, if you can dream it, you can do it.

Shamir was not an economist and his focus was not on economics but rather on politics. He did not focus on the economy in terms of reform. The reforms that were introduced were part of the discussions between the United States and Israel in the 1980s, which focused on getting Israel to open up its economy more, focusing more on trade, etc. Those reforms were not driven by Shamir but were accepted as the cost of American aid to keep the economy afloat, although many Israeli economists knew there was no alternative in the long run.

Q: Was there much impact of Russian Jews coming to Israel at that point?

HOOKS: The Russian Jews were coming in large numbers and the question was absorption. The United States provided funds for housing and absorption. However, the Russian Jews were not yet playing the political role they started to play in the 1990s. They began to play a greater political role as their numbers increased. Their presence in Israel was already being noticed in the sense of newspapers and advertising in Russian.

Q: Were you seeing during the time you were there as a plus or was the process of integrating the Russians more of a problem than a plus?

HOOKS: I think it was seen by the Israelis as a very strong plus. After all, the mission statement for the state of Israel is basically to provide a home for Jews from around the world. The arrival of Russian Jews shows success of that mission statement, and I think they were seen as critical for having a larger Jewish population in Israel. After all, the concern was always a large Arab minority with higher birthrates. So the Russian Jews were seen as critical, or extremely important, let's say, in terms of carrying out the Zionist dream, which is an ongoing dream.

The Russian Jewish issue is a sensitive one because many Russian Jews came to the United States or went to Germany or elsewhere, so for Israel to get them to come to Israel was success of the Zionist dream. Those that went to the United States, while they can be helpful in the long term as part of a Jewish lobby, in a sense they were lost to Israel. There were times when more Russian Jews going to Germany than going to Israel which again was a rather curious phenomenon given recent history.

Q: What were you getting from the political officers in the embassy but certainly on the economic side, what was the role of the Arab Israelis? Were they seen as a plus, a minus, a contributing, were they seen as a potential menace or what?

HOOKS: The Israeli Arabs constitute a very interesting phenomenon. They are an important minority. They are over a million. In fact there may be close to two million so it is a very significant proportion. They have a high birthrate and for Israelis thinking in long terms, the long range, would they become such a large minority at one point to even constitute a threat to the Jewish majority in a political sense.

They play also an important role in the economy. They too have benefited from the growth of the Israeli economy. The United States had contacts with Israeli Arabs in Gaza

and the West Bank. There was obviously sensitivity during the intifada as to whether the Israeli Arabs would become participants in the intifada. By and large they have not. Obviously their sympathies lie in many cases with the Palestinians, with the people in Gaza and the West Bank. However, they also realize that the Palestinian political leadership is extremist at times and that getting themselves involved in the intifada would be very dangerous to the Israeli Arab community. With the exception of a few individuals, by and large they have not been involved in the intifada.

Q: What about American Jews coming to Israel? Did they have much of an impact on your work? Did you end up escorting a lot of people?

HOOKS: There used to be more congressmen in Israel than in Washington, particularly during recess time, but I think they travel less today than what they used to do. The Israelis always put out the red carpet for U.S. Congressmen. Many visiting American Jewish groups came to the Embassy for briefings. Tom Pickering and Bill Brown led these briefings. It was part of the broad and intense and deep relationship I was referring to earlier, a relationship in which the embassy was an important part but only one part of a very deep relationship.

Q: You were there until when?

HOOKS: I was there until 1991. I was there for the first Gulf War. We all have fond memories of spending time in sealed rooms with our gas masks on. The embassy initially planned to evacuate all dependents and many employees. However, Washington did not support that for political reasons. I was among those slated to leave. We were put together on a group of busses and traveled to Jerusalem to pick up people from the consulate before heading to Eilat in the extreme south of Israel. Actually we were going to an airbase down in the south because the airbase was out of range of SCUD missiles and therefore U.S. Air Force aircraft could would fly in and pick us up.

While we were en route to Eilat, Washington back pedaled on this issue. Mandatory evacuation was out of the question because of the message the evacuation would send to American citizens living in Israel. If the Embassy evacuated American embassy staff, the Embassy would be under the obligation to offer the same option to all American citizens living in Israel, of which there were quite a few thousand. We were therefore informed that those who wished to leave on the plane could do so, and those who wished to stay would be bussed to Eilat for the time being.

We went down to Eilat and then were in limbo for almost two weeks while the embassy and Washington tried to decide what to do with us. Of course, you can imagine there were all sorts of administrative issues; who should pay for hotels and food. Staying in a hotel in Eilat was quite an expensive proposition. Ultimately they brought us back to Tel Aviv because Washington did not want to continue paying the hotel bills in Eilat.

Upon our return to Tel Aviv, we faced the SCUD attacks. It was quite an interesting experience for all of us because we all had to have a sealed room with plastic even over

the electrical outlets, gas masks even for children. We had to teach children how to use the gas masks and make sure they could breathe properly. Initially we were in our room, preferably above ground as it was assumed that the gas would remain at ground level. That policy would change. We were advised to give up the sealed room because the SCUD missiles did not contain gas. Instead, we were instructed to take cover in our bomb shelter, which most houses had. Our bomb shelter was basically a stairwell down in the basement area which afforded greater protection in case of a direct hit. The children were initially terrified but, children being children, they quickly adapted. My children would count the explosions when Patriots were launched from the domestic airport located not far from our house. They could then tell how many SCUDS were coming in. It became a game, a way of coping with stress.

Initially they were scared as kids are and sort of whimpering when we went through this. The siren was blowing and not something too many American kids are used to, but they began to adapt to it. There is some psychological impact there but I think they learned to cope and then to turn the experience into a game. Obviously we wanted them to not be terrified but to make the best of the situation: the siren is blowing, we've got to put on our gas masks. We'd all head downstairs and put on our gas masks. They'd count, you know. It is a little bit difficult to talk with these things on but they would hold up fingers for each Patriot fired and each SCUD hit. So they adapted to it, but it was an interesting experience to go through.

Q: Were you aware of the battles of the gas masks? I understand both our embassy in Riyadh and in Tel Aviv, there was a shortage of gas masks for a while.

HOOKS: I am not aware of a shortage of gas masks at the embassy in Tel Aviv. We all received gas masks. I have six children, and we received a total of eight gas masks without any delay. We also received tape and plastic sheeting and instructed on how to use them to seal a room. I know in Israel there was concern about getting gas masks for everybody in Israel, but that issue never came up for American Embassy staff.

Q: Maybe it was more down in Saudi Arabia where there was a problem. I've heard accounts of Bill Brown and Chas Freeman, Bill being in Tel Aviv and Chas being in Riyadh, having exchanges on the subject of keeping the Saudis in the war and the Israelis out of the war because if the Israelis got involved in the war, it would screw up our alliances, strange alliances with Egyptian and Syrian troops as part of the greater war effort.

HOOKS: You recall Larry Eagleburger was sent to Tel Aviv to meet with the Israelis. The Israelis have always felt they had to respond to any provocation in order to maintain their credibility and to maintain a level of deterrence. The Arabs know that if they attack the Israelis, the Israelis will hit back and hit hard. They will hurt you. This is the Israelis' philosophy.

When SCUDS started falling in Israel, their natural reaction was to strike back immediately. However, Washington made it clear to the Israelis that, if they attacked

Iraq, it would ruin the whole coalition effort because the Arabs would not remain part of a joint war effort with the Israelis in fighting other Arabs. Larry Eagleburger explained to the Israelis that it was in their interests to sit on the sidelines and let the United States and the coalition take care of Saddam Hussein. That was the basic message, obviously stated much more diplomatically than what I have just said, but the message was very clear. The Israelis were clever enough to go along with that.

Q: Diplomatically it is a very interesting time.

HOOKS: It was a very difficult decision for the Israelis to make but the options were very clear. They had no choice in the matter. Although Israelis don't necessarily listen to us and could have done something on their own, they realized it would have been foolish to do so. They understood that when the United States military is beating up on the enemy, don't do anything to get the United States out of the fight. It was that simple. Naturally there was some talk that they could not stand by and let themselves be bombed. The Israelis really had no option in this in terms of getting involved. Had we not been involved in Iraq, they obviously would have had to react, but under the circumstances it would have been foolish to do anything.

Q: They also had problems for the area about what to do with the embassies because I think we made most of our embassy personnel evacuate in most of the Arab world at the time.

HOOKS: The evacuation concerns were based on fear that Arab populations would react to the United States bombing Iraq.

Q: But at the same time we had to keep the Americans, particularly in Dhahran who were involved in pumping oil. In an interview with Ken X who was consul general there, we were evacuating our embassies in the Gulf at the same time trying to keep the Americans on board.

HOOKS: Evacuation is a complicated process. The first to be evacuated are always minor dependents. Next are adult dependents, spouses for the most part. After that, staff members are evacuated depending on whether they play an essential role in the functioning of an embassy in crisis. In a crisis, the role of an embassy changes. The first priority of an embassy is the protection of American citizens. All efforts are concentrated in that direction. Everything else is secondary. Many functions are halted, or continued only on an emergency basis, such as visa issuances, education exchanges, etc. Consuls are the most important people during a crisis, although political officers and military attaches play a critical role in gathering information and maintaining contact with the host government and the various groupings involved in the crisis.

Q: And there are other problems when you start bringing people back if it is not done well. We had an awful lot of people from that war sort of in limbo from various places, very unhappy.

HOOKS: I have worked in a number of embassies where we have had evacuations, and I can tell you, it is a terrible thing to happen. It is actually easier not to be evacuated than it is to be evacuated, because if you are evacuated, you are in total limbo. You don't know how long it is going to last. No one can guarantee you it is going to last only 72 days, for example, and on the 73rd day you will be back at post. Most of the time you are in a situation where no one knows how long it is going to last. When families are involved, the lives of children are totally disrupted. The family can come back to Washington, but what do they do? Even if you have a house here, you generally have leased it out and you can't just tell the tenants to clear out. A rental apartment normally requires a long-term lease. A family has to decide whether to enroll their children in a local school, or just wait out the crisis.

I was chairman of the school board in Tel Aviv in 1991, and we had a tremendous problem trying to adapt to war conditions. We had to close the school down during all the bombing. No one wanted their kids to be in school during an air attack. Everyone wants their kids home. There is nothing more emotional for people than their children. Once the war was over, kids started coming back to school. Out of a school of 360, we only had about 50 kids present when we reopened the school. Afterwards, kids started drifting back. You can imagine how difficult it is to arrange a class program when one day a teacher is teaching three kids and the next day she's got five kids, and a week later 12 kids. It was a very unusual year. It destroys people's morale. For those who went back to post, there is always a dichotomy that exists between those who stayed and those who left, between those who were indispensable and those who were dispensable.

I faced that situation in Abidjan, and no matter what you do, you can never overcome the trauma. It is only overcome when all the actors involved leave post. We are so focused on American employees that we often overlook our local employees, who face the insecurity that drives the evacuation in the first place. Local employees often fear job loss as positions are sometimes cut out if an Embassy only maintains a skeletal staff or closes. This was not the case in Tel Aviv, but it is often the case in Africa.

Q: Chas Freeman also said that something he ran across with a few people who just lost their nerve during the crisis. He said the State Department didn't deal well with this issue. If somebody loses their nerve, do you want to have them as part of your team again. The State Department seemed to almost by-pass this problem. It is a test of character.

HOOKS: It is not a test of character. Character is something else. It is a test of people's emotional state and we will get into it when we talk about Brazzaville, where I went through an evacuation, and closing down an embassy in Abidjan. It has to do with people's emotional state in a given set of circumstances. People react differently at different times. A lot depends on whether you are able to keep people busy and reassure them. It is hard to know how people will react. Sometimes you see someone who is strong and outgoing, and you think that person would be a natural leader in a crisis. Some will be, some will not. Some people who are very quiet and who don't stand out particularly may step forward and be a leader, just as we have seen in every area of life. I

think it surprises you at times who steps forward and begins to shine as if their light has been under a bushel basket all these years.

I think most people, however, do surprisingly well. A lot depends on whether you can give people a sense of confidence that you know what you are doing. In the case of Tel Aviv, because of the confusion when Washington back pedaled on the question of evacuation, it created lots of problems. There was an attempted evacuation as people were told they had no choice but to leave, only to be told a few hours later that evacuation was voluntary. Some people did opt to leave, some of whom never came back. The impact was felt throughout the American community. It had an impact especially on the school, and it had an impact on morale. Those situations are only fully healed when all the parties involved move on. That is one of the beauties of the Foreign Service; people do move on after those situations and new ones coming in with a different attitude.

Q: Besides the Gulf War, you did have the collapse of the Soviet Bloc. Was that beginning to impact on Israel as far as great waves of former Soviet immigrants coming and all or was that felt much at your time?

HOOKS: It did not result in great waves of people coming in. Clearly more Jews were coming in than before, but the numbers did not represent a quantum jump.

The collapse of the Soviet Union was a big surprise to almost everybody. It led to many questions about the future, how the former Soviet Union would evolve politically. In 1990 – 1991, there was a lot of discussion about the new world order. There were questions about whether the United States was the only super power left. This was a process that was starting to evolve.

Israel was not impacted so dramatically as it might have been otherwise because it was associated with the United States. Their patron quote unquote was still very much intact, in fact was even stronger than before. They had limited relations with the Soviet Union. If anything, the breakup of the Soviet Union would likely result in less support for Arab states facing Israel. One of the big concerns at the time was the control of weapons, especially nuclear weapons, in the former Soviet Union, especially concern that they may fall into the wrong hands. There was also concern about keeping scientists employed in Russia so they don't go to Iran or elsewhere to work in nuclear facilities. There was a lot of uncertainty about the future.

Q: Compared to the time before, now you are more senior and all, how did you and your family find life in Israel?

HOOKS: Life was very good. This is one of the great posts in the Foreign Service. We loved living in Israel both times, I should add. First of all, the State Department sometimes does things really well, and one of those was to use the money that Israel paid for wheat and other things from the 1950s to buy housing for Embassy staff. In Herzliya Pituah and in Kfar Shmaryahu we had wonderful housing and a great American school.

The weather in Israel is perfect and there is so much to see and to do in Israel. While you can't drive to neighboring countries, at least you couldn't in those days very easily, you could still fly to Europe more cheaply than from the United States. In many respects it was a very good life for families. Israelis are very accessible, very friendly, and it is easy to get involved in Israeli society. If you are interested in history, geography, archeology, it was all there. As I said before, Tel Aviv is the most intense embassy I have ever worked in, and I think it attracted really great people in the Foreign Service, some very talented people and therefore I had great colleagues to work with. There was a great sense that you were involved in something really important. Israel obviously was very important to Washington. Decision-makers in Washington barely know where many countries are located, but everybody knew where Israel was. Everybody wanted to be informed, so the messages the Embassy sent back to Washington were looked at very carefully. It isn't enough to see on CNN that something has happened. Washington wants to know immediately what that means. The embassy was trying to put this in context.

Q: Was there a feeling while you were there that things would work out in the Middle East?

HOOKS: Your question is a very broad one and I have to say no, I don't recall anyone being so optimistic as to think that we were seeing the light at the end of the tunnel in terms of resolving issues. I think there was a sense that step by step some issues have been addressed, but some of the very fundamental issues have not been addressed yet. Relations with Egypt have come a long way. However, the question of the Palestinians has not been fully addressed and that is a fundamental issue, including the status of Jerusalem, permanent boundaries, returning occupied territories to Syria, etc. I don't think anyone was even dreaming that we were on track for peace in the Middle East. It is one of those situations where you try to manage a crisis and try to keep moving it forward. You kick the ball further down the field in hopes you will be able to resolve something. Some progress has been made since I first arrived in Tel Aviv in 1971, although the fundamental problems are still actively on the agenda.

Q: Career wise, did you want to be a Middle East hand or what? What were you looking at?

HOOKS: When I came in the Foreign Service, I wanted to focus on the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. When I left Israel at the end of my first assignment, I asked to go to the Soviet Union. Poland was my second choice. That was what I wanted to do in those days, and going back to Israel was not part of an overall strategy on my part. The Israel Desk contacted me when I was in Haiti to invite me to apply for an economic position in Tel Aviv. I was very interested. It was a great experience which I greatly enjoyed and am very glad I went. My original idea of focusing on the Soviet Bloc evolved over time.

Q: Where did you go after Tel Aviv?

HOOKS: I left Tel Aviv in 1991. I went to the NATO Defense College in Rome

Q: How did you find that? That's a six month course.

HOOKS: That's a six month course. Traditionally, when you get an assignment to the Naval Defense College, you are guaranteed a job within a NATO country. My situation was different. I went through this curious bidding process to get the econ job in Warsaw. I had just been promoted to the senior Foreign Service, and I was told that I had to have a year of training. Most people come back here to the National War College. There was only one position available at the NATO Defense College in Rome, and it was highly sought after. That was my second choice as I felt I had little chance of getting it. Jacques Klein was in charge of personnel in that area at that time. He called me and said, "Would you do me a favor?" I said, "If I can. What can I do for you?" He said, "Would you be willing to go to the NATO Defense College in Rome?" I said, "Yes. I would love to go there." He said, "Because everyone wants to go there, I have to get an assignment in Europe. You already have an assignment to Poland. Poland is not NATO now, but it is going to become a NATO assignment as Poland is moving quickly toward joining NATO. If you would take this job, that would solve the problem for me."

Q: Just get these other people out of the way?

HOOKS: It just basically solved two problems for Jacques Klein. So I said, "You got it." So that's how I went to the NATO Defense College. When I arrived at the NATO Defense College in 1991, the big issue was the future of NATO in the wake of the dismemberment of the Soviet Bloc.

Q: Poland was sort of number one on the list, wasn't it?

HOOKS: Correct. It is the most important of the East European countries and lies strategically right between the Soviet Union and Germany. Furthermore, Poland has a long historical relationship with the United States, and the United States wanted to bring Poland into the fold. When I was at the NATO Defense College, the major issue we were looking at and discussing was NATO's future. People were asking whether there was a role for NATO, given the new paradigm, or whether NATO was an anachronism that needed to disappear. Subsequently, NATO has been involved in Yugoslavia and other areas, but in those days, the very future of NATO was in question.

Q: What was the attitude of the people who were lecturing, running the thing? Were they saying yes, I mean were they sort of justifying NATO? Was that what they were doing or was there a real question?

HOOKS: It was a real question, and I think the Portuguese general who was the commandant and his staff were grappling with that issue. Certainly the preoccupation of most of our visiting lecturers was the future of NATO. Did NATO have a role to play and if so, how would NATO evolve in this new dynamic? Or would NATO disappear as part of the Cold War phenomenon? No one at that time had a clear idea of what would happen, although there were those suggesting that yes, the Cold War is over but we still need an anchor to maintain security as the whole, given that Eastern Europe and the

Soviet bloc were very fragile. That was the sort of discussion that was going back and forth in those days.

Q: Where stood France because France was part of NATO but it wasn't militarily in NATO and how was that reflected in the armed forces college?

HOOKS: We had no French contingent. We had contingents from all NATO countries except for the French. The NATO Defense College was first established in Paris. However, De Gaulle had told the NATO Defense College to move elsewhere. When we met with officials of the French ministry, there were those who regretted that France left NATO. They felt that France belonged to NATO and that basically de Gaulle's foolish pride had led him to decide otherwise. This was a very sensitive political issue. That issue has been resolved. France is back in NATO and participating in the NATO Defense College.

Q: I am told there was some impact that France had pulled out because when we went into Desert Storm into Kuwait and attacked Iraq the French hadn't been training their air force and they had a sizeable ground contingent they hadn't been training, so they were sort of out in left corner.

HOOKS: That's an issue that goes a little beyond the scope of what I was doing at the time, but I know from my experience with ACRI, when soldiers are involved in an operation that have not trained together and not worked closely together, there is generally a serious communication problem. The French had very different equipment. In fact their equipment was ill prepared for working in Desert Storm in those days, and the French were therefore at a disadvantage. They were not part of the NATO military structure. Communications were a serious problem.

The French had opted to leave the military structure of NATO, but I recall when I was visiting in Paris with the NATO Defense College, the military emphasized that the United States and France had been very close allies. I remember one speaker saying, "Yes, sometimes we are a difficult ally but when we are with you, we are really with you."

One of the questions as NATO evolves is what will this mean for France. France is an important country in Western Europe, what would France's role be in an evolving Europe, particularly given France's desire to be different from the United States and Russia? Obviously this situation has evolved to the point that France is back in NATO.

Q: Back in '79 and '81 when I was consul general in Naples talking to Admiral Crowe who at that time was based in Naples, he was saying that coordination with the French navy was perfect. The military can sometimes work it out and apparently they did a lot of drills together and all this.

HOOKS: The military, as I discovered when I worked with the African Crisis Response Initiative, is a club and they learn to speak the same language. They may be speaking French, they may be speaking English, but they all speak the same military language and

they can cooperate with each other. The problem is on a political level and the French military made this quite clear. The problem is a political problem; it is not a military problem. I was not following too closely what was happening in France in those days, but looking back at my own experience with the French, I doubt the French military would ever have pulled out of NATO had de Gaulle not made a political decision. The French military always felt that they had lost in that deal and they want to be part of NATO.

At the NATO Defense College, everything was translated into French despite the fact that there was no French contingent. There was one French committee because NATO tried to maintain the semblance of an international organization. I suppose a decision could have been made that France was out and therefore French was no longer the language of NATO, it was now English. German was never made one of the official languages. We were there in a strange situation. I myself ended up participating in the French-language committee.

Q: Did you know you were going to Poland after this?

HOOKS: I did. As I mentioned earlier, I already had my assignment to Poland and that was a long and involved bidding process. The bid process has changed over the years. I was recruited for the Warsaw job by DCM Johnson. I was the Embassy candidate for the job. However, the State Department personnel system had a priority candidate that they wanted to send to Warsaw, and that candidate actually got the job. I appealed to the DG, who accepted my appeal, and I was given the assignment. I had my assignment to Warsaw before I got the assignment to the NATO Defense College.

When I left the NATO Defense College, I had a six-months gap before I went to Poland because the NATO Defense College is a six month assignment. I would say it was a very good experience. It was great working with the other contingents from NATO countries. It was great to work in a military context. I have always had admiration for the military. It was very enlightening to look at issues from a military perspective.

Following the NATO Defense College, I was assigned to the CSCE which took place in Finland. I worked with John Kornblum who was head of our mission there. I was in charge of the second basket. The CSCE was a very interesting experience because it was working in multilateral diplomacy and it was very relevant to Poland, where I was going. This was an opportunity to get involved in the CSCE and European cooperation and to focus on a different set of issues than what I had done in the past. It was interesting to see how these large, international gatherings work, to see how things really are decided in the side rooms and the corridors before they are brought to the floor. You cannot make decisions and negotiate with too many people in a large room. You have to do it in smaller groups beforehand.

Q: The 'second basket' was what?

HOOKS: It was dealing with human rights issues.

Q: I would have thought the CSCE, all parts of the Helsinki Accords, there must have been very high morale because it was considered to be the key to the breaking up of the Soviet Bloc, wasn't it?

HOOKS: It is regarded as playing an important role in the political evolution of the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union made certain commitments and they were challenged to respect those commitments. Traditionally these meetings had been the scene of confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union, but at Helsinki we probably had more of a confrontation with the French than we had with the Russians.

The French had their own agenda, and that created all sorts of frictions in the European Union, because many EU countries were much more sympathetic to the US than they were to France. Once the EU reached a decision, it was very difficult to negotiate a common position in the larger CSCE forum because of the awkward decision-making process in the EU.

Q: OK, in your particular field, I would think we would all be singing out of the same hymn book on human rights and all.

HOOKS: On human rights there was less confrontation with the French. It was more on other security issues, military issues and so forth but on the human rights issue there was less friction.

Q: What were the problems with the French as you saw them?

HOOKS: I think the fundamental problem was that France was having difficulty adapting its position to an expanding and evolving Europe. As you know, France was one of the original six countries to form the European Community. After World War II, the Germans were basically looking for political cover and the French provided it. The French could do whatever they wanted to do and the Germans would pay. The French played an extremely strong role in the European Union. In fact they kept the Brits out. The Brits didn't want to go in originally, and when they finally decided they wanted to become members, de Gaulle said, "No, thank you." So the EU was really a French game. As the EU expanded, France's role was diluted and even more so with the reunification of Germany and Germany's willingness to be much more assertive than it was before.

So I think the French were trying to play a leadership role within the European Union and be the interlocutor with the United States. They were rather rigid at times and they were pedaling against history, because obviously history was evolving in another direction. The French wanted to maintain a distinctive European profile, independent of the United States, with France being the primary spokesperson. While there was no head-on confrontation on fundamental issues, there were constant frictions. We and the rest of the European Union spent more time trying to work with the French than we did with Russia. It was an interesting experience.

Q: What was your impression of a European organization? You know, everyone thinks about when Henry Kissinger said, "We got to take Europe into consideration. What telephone number shall I call?" Did you feel that Europe was really in favor of the CSCE thing coming together? Was this a real European, effective organization?

HOOKS: Even in those days it was clear the European Union was a very positive development in Europe and that it was growing in importance. While it is not going to be a United States of Europe, at least not in the foreseeable future, as the United States is here in America, it nevertheless was playing a very positive role in terms of economic engineering, in terms of political engineering, in terms of social engineering and forcing badly needed change on many countries, especially in Eastern Europe. We sometimes forget that it required the Federal Government in the United States to bring about the social and political engineering of the 1960s that was needed to respond to the civil rights movement.

Just think how East Europe has benefited from having so many of its regulations dealing with civil law, criminal law, human rights and economic issues radically reformed. Certainly Poland had to carry out badly needed reform in all those areas in order to qualify for membership in the European Union. If we thought we had a problem with the French, it was mild compared to the problem that the Scandinavians and the Brits had with the French in the framework of EU meetings. We all had to deal with the French in a certain way. EU members would sit for hours and hours and talk to the French, and it was basically the French against the rest of Europe.

Q: Did you get the feeling that you were watching the French learn to adjust to the fact that it was no longer going to be number one in Europe because the Germans up to then had sort of followed their initiative. Was this a growing pain?

HOOKS: I think it was a growing pain, yes. Anytime a person or a country is no longer number one, there is always a certain pain involved in that process. The French were going through a similar process in Africa, and it has been a painful process for the French and the Africans. I thought it was quite interesting what we saw during the second Gulf War when Chirac told the East Europeans, "You have missed an opportunity to shut up" because the Poles and others were quite supportive of the U.S. effort and against the French position. The French suddenly discovered to their surprise that many East Europeans saw the United States as the best guarantee of their security, not the European Union. There were economic and political benefits to being in the European Union, and each new member had its own ideas about the European Union. The Poles and other East Europeans were not prepared to just bow and scrape to the French. Relations within the European Union were changing. The French suddenly found they had to take the East Europeans into consideration, and it is a painful process for them.

Q: Was there a new Poland coming around? I mean, they were going to be a major power in the European Union and in the CSCE. Were they beginning to feel their strength?

HOOKS: I think one of the advantages of having served in Poland twice is that I had background from 1970s. I knew what Poland had been at one point under the Communist system. In 1992 I had a baseline on which to judge, a yardstick just how far they had progressed.

Poland had literally leapt from the Soviet bloc to the European Union almost overnight. Of course, Poland had come home in a sense as Poland always felt a part of Western Europe. Poland was blossoming like a flower in the early 1990s in the economic sense as well.

The economic transition in Poland was very painful. Most people benefited, but there are some who feel that they have lost. Poland has a lot of pensioners. The \$25 a month pension was suddenly worth very little. People in their 50s and 60s don't have the skills, especially computer skills, needed to compete in the job market.

Poland was changing rapidly in every sense. When I was in Warsaw in the 1970's, there were very few private cars and very little traffic in Warsaw. Traffic jams didn't exist in the language because it was a phenomenon Poles did not experience. Parking? You could park anywhere.

When I came back in 1992, that was no longer the case. There were traffic jams. Already, traffic was congested in Warsaw. It was difficult to find parking. We were fortunate in the Embassy in that USIS was located in what was the old archbishop's palace located right beside the Old City, and we could park there during the weekends. That was great for us, but for the average person it was very difficult to park.

Lights. I remember Warsaw in the 1970s as being a dark city in the sense there was very little neon lighting, very little advertising. There was little private enterprise and there were very few neon lights. If you drove down the streets of Warsaw you would see some street lamps but you didn't see the flashy, Times Square-type lighting. During the three years I was there in between 1992 and 1995, it was just amazing to see one store after another being renovated. Everything was "w remoncie," which is the word for being repaired, being renovated. Lights were popping up right and left and Warsaw was a much brighter city. A lot of people deplored all the commercial neon lights, and yet in New York that's part of the historical landmarks. It really does make a difference in a city when you have lots of flashy lights. It makes for a brighter, more cheerful, ambiance.

The quality of service in boutiques and stores was changing. Whereas before every little store had three people to serve the public, a client was an interference, an interruption of the personal chit chat of the salespeople because they got paid whether they sold or not. Now suddenly you walk in and find people who were friendly and would say: May I help you? and hurry and scurry around to get things, it was really making a big change.

Also the fact that people could travel freely, they were no longer in fear of the secret police as before. It obviously takes time to evolve beyond that. To give an example, what

had been the party headquarters was now Poland's Wall Street. That was where the stock exchange was located. Just think of that, what it meant symbolically.

One of the dark buildings down town that belonged to the Ministry of Defense, probably used for security issues, was transformed into the bright dealership of Mercedes Benz.

These were all symbols of very profound changes taking place in Poland. You could see changes in society as well. Overnight there were a few millionaires, although not quite on the scale you had in the Soviet Union. Poland was starving to be accepted into the West, to get into the right clubs and to be seen as a desirable ally. So it was really fascinating to be there at that time.

Q: In 1995 you have left Poland and where are you off to?

HOOKS: I am off to Senior Seminar here at FSI.

Q: How did you find it?

HOOKS: I thought it was one of the most wonderful experiences I had in the Foreign Service. Our year was slightly marred by the shutdown of the government several times as a result of the political struggle between Gingrich and Clinton at the time. A couple of our trips were cut short or aborted because of that. On the whole, I thought the Senior Seminar was one of the most remarkable experiences I had in the Foreign Service. We had some very talented people from different agencies that were in the Seminar. We discussed many of the current issues in the United States in ways that you simply don't get the chance to do when you work a regular job. We could bring in really top-notch people and discuss some of the burning social issues; migration, immigration, civil rights and what have you.

We traveled around the country. I got to know parts of the country I had never seen before in my life and got to meet some really interesting people. When you are in the Senior Seminar you get access to people you would not otherwise have. For all those reasons I was very sad to learn of the decision to discontinue the Senior Seminar only two or three years after I left.

Q: Did you get involved in any particular project?

HOOKS: We all had different projects. I recall we all had to plan a trip. We had committees that planned different trips. I was on the committee that planned a trip to the South, of which the highlight was the visit to New Orleans.

We of course also had our own individual projects that we worked on. My individual project focused on the National Archives and its management. The Archives had a unique situation where Congress allowed the Archives to sell bonds to raise money to build a facility in Maryland. I thought that was quite fascinating. That was sort of unique in that most federal agencies don't have the right to do that.

The Senior Seminar on the whole was probably the best thing that FSI did.

Q: One of the things I found about the Senior Seminar compared to other training at the war colleges is that the war colleges did give you access to the military and to how the military think. We are moving into a generation of Foreign Service officers that didn't have the military experience. In my experience we had a good look at the military but not frankly as good a look I think as those who went through the war college.

HOOKS: That's probably true although we did meet with the military. We had a number of military that came in to talk to us. I, of course, had gone through the NATO Defense College just four years prior to that, so I had had an intense experience with the military since there were mostly military at the Defense College. We did have some exposure to the military in the Senior Seminar. I think there were two things that stuck in my mind in terms of the Senior Seminar. One was the focus on management and the importance of good management, and the fact that this is a rare quality that should be given more attention at every level, whether it is an embassy, the State Department, or the U.S. government as a whole. I felt that was really an intensive seminar in management.

The second of course was focusing on well-being, the term that was used at the time, focusing on well being both of ourselves and others. We focused not just on physical well-being but mental and emotional well-being and the importance of fostering and nurturing that in our careers. I felt that was also very good, very timely and particularly important in our careers as we were moving into our senior years.

Q: Did you find a good carry-over from these experiences that you had at the Senior Seminar in later years? In other words, lessons and habits you learned at the Senior Seminar?

HOOKS: Yes. I found that many of the lessons I learned at the Senior Seminar were extremely useful in terms of managing the embassy, managing people, dealing with people in crisis situations, dealing with Washington and dealing with local groups.

Q: You are meeting people and going places. Can you think of anyplace or group of people or person that particularly struck you?

HOOKS: One of the things we did during our travels was to seek out people who had marked their communities. I was impressed with local heroes everywhere. Of course, CNN focuses on local heroes and local networks sometimes spotlight local heroes. Local community activists show the depth and strength of American society and how American society differs from other societies where the head of government directs most activity.

In the Bronx we met a community activist who worked on Banana Street. It was incredible what she was trying to do. I think she was of Hispanic background, and she was trying to organize the community, not just organize in a political sense but organize in terms of a sense of community, a sense of improving that community both in terms of

pollution, in terms of trash, in terms of crime, you know, social awareness and education. She was a very dynamic and courageous lady.

We met many people like that as we traveled around. She proved the point that you do not have to have lots of money to make a difference. It helps to have some money. However, sometimes money spoils the situation as issues are framed in terms of money. She did have some financial support for what she was trying to do, but much of what she was doing was raising awareness in the community and trying to form a sense of community.

Q: I must say I came away particularly impressed with state and city government people. They were really handling problems right and having to deal with real problems and the fact that so many were really very articulate and talented.

HOOKS: Extremely. But I think also one of the things you learn as you travel when you are in the Senior Seminar is that the rest of the country has a very different view of Washington than we who live here have. They see it in a different light. A different light can mean lots of different things. Some people have a much broader and more balanced view of the government. Some dismiss the federal government as irresponsible. In spite of the fact that communications today make the world a much smaller place, geographical proximity still very much affects the way we look at things.

Q: After Senior Seminar this would be 1996? Whither?

HOOKS: While in Warsaw as Economic Counselor, I had been promoted to MC, so I was looking for a DCM job. We were on a trip to Tangier Island in late September, and when I came back I found a email from my career counselor which said something to the effect that “your French has caught up with you. How would you like to go as ambassador to either Brazzaville, Congo or Niger?” I was quite surprised by that job offer. I had already had interviews for DCM jobs that I was interested in, but this was an offer that I could not turn down, so I responded: “Yes, why not?”

Then my first question after saying yes was, “What do you do in Brazzaville, Congo?” I had served in fairly large posts in very interesting countries where a lot of things were going on: Tel Aviv, Warsaw, Turkey. Even Haiti received special attention while I was serving there.

Q: Relations are so intimate there.

HOOKS: The idea of going to Brazzaville made me think: “What would I do in a small embassy in the middle of Africa where the United States has only a minimal presence?” However, it occurred to me that going off as chief of mission was too good an offer to say no. So I went off to Brazzaville, Congo, having never served in Africa before. I have to say it was a unique and special experience, far more than I could have anticipated when I went.

Q: I'd like to talk about before you went there. In the first place you are not part of the African club and you are given an ambassadorial assignment. Bureau-wise, these are two strikes against you, aren't they? In the first place what was the initial sort of reaction that you were feeling about this? Then we will talk about getting into the mode for doing this.

HOOKS: This is a whole interesting phenomenon in the State Department. First of all, the procedures for choosing new ambassadors; you are never quite sure how you are chosen, at least in many circumstances you don't know. In some cases you do. Your bureau proposes you and that's it. In those days I had no idea how the system worked. I think my nomination came from personnel. As I look back on it, I think Director General Genta Hawkins Holmes nominated me, but this is simply speculation on my part. Genta had been DCM in Haiti when I was there. She never told me she played a role, but somehow just from comments that I have picked up, I think she did. I had just been promoted to MC, I was back from Warsaw, I was in the Senior Seminar, and I think there was a combination of factors which led to the nomination.

The AF Bureau is an unusual bureau in that many people are parachuted into Africa because their home bureau sometimes has too few positions to accommodate the talent they have. If you are in Southeast Asia, there are few posts there for first time ambassadors. Europe is another case where there are so many political appointees there that the Department has to find chief of mission positions elsewhere to reward the young, talented officers.

When I was nominated, the AF Bureau was extremely kind to me and I never had the impression at all that somehow I was seen as a carpetbagger, so to speak, coming in from the outside. In fact, I often felt that ambassador-designates are treated like VIPs, and while it is very nice, it is almost unreal. Suddenly you go from being an ordinary person to being an ambassador-designate. That's a unique and exalted status.

What I have thought about based on my own experience is that the Department takes a huge risk in sending people to posts as chief of mission where they know nothing whatsoever about the country. Often times their own background is not related to the culture and the experiences that they are going to face once they arrive at post. Occasionally you see situations in Africa where a country is very unstable, things go wrong, and the front office is unsure how to deal with the situation.

In my particular case, I felt that I had certain experiences that were extremely relevant to what I faced. One, I had been in different countries where coups took place. I had been in Turkey when there was a coup there in 1980. I had been in Haiti which is really the best prep school you could have for going to Africa because it really is a corner of Africa in the Caribbean. It is not totally African and yet it is the closest thing to Africa I have seen. I was there when Baby Doc left. I arrived in 1984; he left in 1986 and I was witness to the unrest and demonstrations that rocked the country and led to his departure. Hearing weapons being fired in the streets was not a brand new experience for me. For some people it was terrifying. I had faced it before so the experience stood me in good stead.

There is always a risk when you send people off to Africa who have never served there. As we know, Cote d'Ivoire, which we will get into later, is a prime example of where the unthinkable can happen. I have often cited the case of the coup in 1999 in Cote d'Ivoire as an example of that. No one thought it could happen but we will talk about it later.

Anyway, I arrived in Brazzaville. I would say a couple of things more. First of all, when you are nominated, people treat you very well, but I didn't feel the Department really prepared me in terms of the key objectives of our foreign policy in relationship to Brazzaville. I was not even able to meet Assistant Secretary George Moose because of his travel schedule at the time.

Q: He was the assistant secretary for African affairs?

HOOKS: Correct. I did not meet him before going to post because of his heavy travel schedule. I obviously met with the desk and the office director and so forth. I received many briefings but I did not get a comprehensive briefing in terms of our goals and objectives for Congo. You are expected to go out and discover that on your own and then tell Washington what you think they should be and what you plan to carry out.

If you've got lots of experience and good judgment, that works out just fine, although there are some very vulnerable months when you first arrive at post. I arrived in Brazzaville in 1996. The civil war broke out in 1997. I arrived in Cote d'Ivoire in 2004. Seventy seven days later, conflict erupted. I wouldn't call it a war. Had that occurred in Brazzaville within a month or so after I arrived, I would have been floundering. You have to get to know the geography of the country, the layout of the cities. You have to get to know the issues and the personalities. There are always underlying political and social and economic tensions. It takes time to get to know that. For instance, why is there a problem between Minister X and Minister Y? You gradually learn that X and Y used to be political buddies, and then one of them tried to kill the other. Now they are in a coalition again, but the coalition is a very fragile and could easily fall apart. You need to know those things. You are a very big fish in a small pond; nevertheless, it is a different pond than you have been in before.

Q: Just to get sort of the relationship; where did the Congo, Brazzaville fit in the Department of State's bureaucracy?

HOOKS: In terms of the State Department there are various ways of looking at it. I will try to put it this way; there are a lot of small countries in Africa where we don't have any unique and special interests. Basically we just want those countries to quietly evolve toward democracy and a decent standard of living. But we don't have any driving interests where we have a major presence or interest to defend. Obviously we have some interests in every country and as the world superpower we have an interest in trying to maintain stability around the globe. We know that many issues are trans-border issues whether it is disease or whatever. Let's face it, in many parts of Africa the country rarely if ever gets the secretary of state's attention. I am sure in many cases when a crisis does

come to the Secretary's attention, the briefing paper has to indicate where that country is on the map. You don't expect the secretary of state necessarily to know where all these countries are or what the capital is, who the president is. Let's be realistic about it. Brazzaville, Congo was one of those countries. It is one of the smaller countries, with somewhat of a checkered history as a French colony. The problem we are going to talk about here is the evolving French policy that led to confusion for the French, for the Congolese, and for us, for that matter.

We thought the primary responsibility for those countries lies with France. If they need a bridge loan for an IMF agreement, they will turn to France. They won't turn to us. We are not going to do much for them. If there is a problem there, we expect the French to take care of it.

But yes, we do have some interests in Congo; Congo exports oil and we are interested in having a supply of oil. There are American missionaries working there. Almost every country in Africa has missionaries. There are always a few Americans here and there and occasionally a businessman. In Cote d'Ivoire we had oil companies offshore, and so we had some interests there but nothing major. Washington seems primarily focused on stability. There were no real guidelines and no real direction given to me when I went out. Looking back on that experience, had I been the Assistant Secretary of State in later years, I would have made sure every ambassador going out fully understood what the issues were as seen back in Washington and what the new ambassador should focus on. That would serve as a guideline until they got their feet on the ground. Then you expect the ambassador to feed into the policy process. The Embassy is the only unit of the U.S. government that is focused exclusively on relations with that country. If you are in a small country, your own desk officer generally has two or three small countries to focus on, but you are the only unit of the U.S. government focused exclusively on relations with that country and therefore you should be feeding into the policy process.

As we all know, the decisions are made back in Washington and that's the way it should be, but you as the ambassador and the embassy should be thinking of what the relationship is, what the priorities should be, what our policy should be and feeding it back to Washington, making suggestions. Hopefully, Washington will see the wisdom of your proposals and concur, and you carry them out because others are focused on all sorts of things. The Assistant Secretary is often focused on the trouble spots in Africa, of which, as we know, there are generally several at any given time. The Secretary doesn't even have a chance to focus on your country if it is a small country like Congo until a crisis breaks out.

During my first year in Brazzaville, the country was moving toward elections to take place in July of 1997. Congo had been a French colony and the most Marxist country in Africa during the 1970s and 1980s. In 1991 there had been a change of government and Lissouba replaced Sassou as President.

The first elections in 1991 had gone reasonably well. The big question was whether the political institutions were strong enough to organize fair elections a second time.

Lissouba was a former professor, worked for a UN organization, and was really out of touch with reality. He was very much a chief in the old traditional style. I would have an appointment to see him at, let's say, 10 o'clock. I would arrive and sometimes there would be two or three or four ministers sitting there waiting to see him. I would sit there generally for an hour before I saw him. I always arrived early for my appointment but I would have to wait at least an hour. If I had requested the meeting, I generally would have two or three or four points which I would go over very quickly once we got past pleasantries, which can take several minutes, as you know. Once we got down to business, I would cover all my issues within 10 - 15 minutes, and I could have been out the door.

That is not the way President Lissouba worked. We would then talk about all kinds of issues. I was never in his office for less than an hour and sometimes an hour and a half or two hours, bearing in mind that people were stacked up outside. We would discuss broad issues of Africa, issues of development, and he became consumed with keeping Mobutu in power as Kabila marched across the DRC. Often times we talked about broad issues that he couldn't do a thing about. He did not want to talk about concrete, nitty-gritty issues of running a state.

I think Lissouba was afraid he would have difficulty winning the elections in 1994 although, frankly, my own assessment was that he could have won them very easily. Lissouba represented the majority group. I think he could have won hands down. To be fair about it, Sassou was also preparing to disrupt the elections. Lissouba moved against Sassou very clumsily and things really went awry. Lissouba tried to arrest some people that he claimed were hiding at Sassou's house. Lissouba claimed they were involved in arms smuggling. Sassou repulsed Lissouba's attack, and suddenly the political system in the country was fractured because most of the military was still loyal to Sassou. The military were mostly from the north of the country, and as soon as President Lissouba moved against Sassou, the military abandoned their posts, taking their weapons with them. They even occupied a base where much of the new equipment brought in from South Africa had been stored. The city itself was divided along ethnic lines. Most people from the north settled in one part of the city and people from the south settled in the other part of the city.

Q: Was there a north-south tribal split?

HOOKS: Yes. The country was split north-south. The north was much more thinly populated. Sassou was from the north and Lissouba was from the south.

During the conflict, the city was divided in half. President Lissouba's attack on Sassou's compound occurred on a Wednesday night, and on Thursday morning I got a phone call about 5:00 o'clock in the morning from one of Sassou's close confidants who later became Minister of Defense. He told me that Lissouba's tanks had surrounded Sassou's house. Lissouba was going to kill Sassou. He asked me to call Lissouba to ask that he move the tanks back and stop the attack before it got out of hand.

Well, this was a surprise to me that this was going on. I tried to get as many details from him as I could; how many troops, how many tanks, when did this start, why did this happen. I called the defense attaché to see if he had picked up anything and he had not. I asked the Defense Attaché to take a look into this issue, and then I called the Minister of Defense whom I knew very well. As soon as I spoke to the Minister of Defense, I could tell something was going on. Although the minister himself was from the north, he was at odds with Sassou. It was clear that President Lissouba had ordered this action. I knew we had a problem on our hands.

I called the French ambassador to talk to him because the French were very clued in on things, but he was also surprised and was scrambling to gather facts as best he could.

The situation immediately started degenerating. I worked very closely with the French ambassador in those days. Interestingly enough, we had had U.S. marines in Brazzaville just the month before when there was possibility of evacuation when Laurent Kabila arrived in Kinshasa. He arrived in Kinshasa on May 17, 1997.

Q: He represented an insurgent group that came out of the east.

HOOKS: Correct. The troops that we had were in Brazzaville. We also had French and Belgian troops there in case of a major evacuation from Kinshasa. The evacuation didn't occur and our troops left at the end of May. It was June 4 when the conflict broke out. The French troops were still there, which was very fortunate for us because they still controlled the airport.

I went to see President Lissouba. His position was that Sassou intended to launch a coup d'état. Sassou had smuggled arms in preparation for the coup. Lissouba said he just could not tolerate this, the law is the law and he as President had to apply the law.

I tried to tell him at the time, "Mr. President, this is something that is already getting out of hand. It is tearing this country apart. You are going into elections. You will probably win the elections." He called it a police action. I said to him: "Even if you are able to overcome this action which is already getting out of hand, it is going to be difficult to repair the social fabric that has been torn."

President Lissouba was really quite unrealistic in his outlook on the world. The situation on the ground was deteriorating rapidly. The city was divided and three days after the conflict started, the looting started. I recall calling President Lissouba to talk about the looting. The Embassy was located some 200-300 yards from the Ministry of Defense and we saw the troops starting to head down to the shopping centers to loot.

I called the president to tell him that his troops had started to loot. "Oh," he said. "They are not my troops. These are just criminals." I said, "Mr. President, they are your troops from the Ministry of Defense which I can look at and I can see the wheelbarrows and other things going from the stores back to the Ministry of Defense. I am an eyewitness to that."

“Oh”, he said, “I will put a stop to that.”

I said, “Mr. President, it is not something you **will** put a stop to. Either you do it now or it will get completely out of hand.”

He said, “I will make them give back what they have looted.”

I said, “Mr. President, once they have stolen this stuff, you can’t have them give back. The looting mentality sets in and discipline is being lost. If you allow your troops to loot, you lose control of them and there is a criminal element that creeps into it. You lose control of the streets.”

I went to see him and we had a fascinating meeting. The prime minister was in the meeting, and when I saw him a few months later in Gabon, he said, “Do you remember what you told the president? It was so true.” I told the president, “Mr. President, either you control the streets now or you lose control of the streets because once you allow your troops to start looting, you introduce a criminal element into the conflict and you have lost control of the streets. Your troops become the criminals.” The prime minister said, “That is exactly what happened.

What I found interesting also was the position of the French. As you can imagine, once the looting started, looting is not something that is surgical. It becomes like a plague that spreads across the city at every level. It starts, of course, with the most attractive targets. It starts with grocery stores with food and alcohol. Once looters get the alcohol, they go into a frenzy and start looting anything of value, especially electronic stores where they find cameras, telephones and other items that they can only dream about. Those are valuable items. Once the stores are looted, they head for offices, which are a treasure trove of typewriters, computers and all sorts of other things that can be sold. Private houses are next on the list. There is always a wealthy element, including the foreign community. Looting spreads like wildfire throughout the city.

As looting became more widespread, people began to panic. Initially we could send Embassy cars with flags to pick up people. The consul coordinated this operation. We brought anyone to the Embassy who felt vulnerable, whose streets were being looted.

The French were busy doing the same thing for French citizens. They had a far larger community than we did. What I found interesting was how people reacted during a crisis like this. I have noticed this in other places. If people see their street being looted, they are terrorized and in a panic; they want to be evacuated right then. Then if the looters, for whatever reason, either are driven off by the military or are attracted to another target, they change their minds. Many US citizens would say that they had lived in Congo for 10, 15, 20 years and their neighbors will protect them. The next day when the looters come back, they would change their mind. They want to be rescued again, so it is back and forth, back and forth. Not everybody, but too many people acted that way.

Next you have those who want to be evacuated quickly, and we started to work with the French. The French military would go into almost every area of the city. They would allow our consul to go with them. They formed caravans where people would get in their cars and drive out to the airport. They would leave their cars at the airport and the French military would put the people on planes bound for France. They gave us seats as we needed them to accommodate US citizens. Obviously we didn't have a large community in Brazzaville. We had a couple of hundred people, two or three hundred, max. I can't recall the exact figure, but we did not have a very large community.

I recall my consul was complaining. When she arrived at the home of those who wanted to be evacuated, they wouldn't be ready. Here we are in a crisis situation; we are evacuating people who wouldn't be ready. They hadn't even packed and they were running in and out and the kids were yelling: "I want that teddy bear, I want this and oh, I forgot this." She said, "We are standing out in the streets out here and it is very dangerous and bullets are flying."

I told her: We'll put a halt to that right now. In the future, we have radios, we are talking to people on the telephone. You tell people on their street we are not stopping the caravan. Do not stop. We drive through your street. You are welcome to join us. If you don't wish to, if you are not ready, that's your business. But you know we are coming. You join us. We don't wait for you. We don't stop in the street and wait for you to get the last teddy bear or change the blanket." I couldn't believe how people are so oblivious to the risks they are running. Obviously if you are evacuating, it is a dangerous situation.

What I found particularly interesting in Brazzaville as the situation began to spin more and more out of control is that the French were following a new policy in Africa. Traditionally, the French had played the role of gendarme where they would step in and resolve a problem when it arose.. If they had had enough of the sitting president, they would allow him to be overthrown. If they liked him, they would maintain him. Brazzaville was the first crisis where the French had decided that they were no longer going to play the role of gendarme.

Q: They had their people there and you can't just abandon your citizens.

HOOKS: They decided in Brazzaville, however, that they were not going to continue to play the role of gendarme. As the situation began to deteriorate, I was in touch with the French ambassador several times throughout the day and with EUCOM and the State Department. I have some comments also I will make about how the State Department deals with this kind of situation and how EUCOM deals with it.

The French ambassador told me on Saturday or Sunday that he was asking Paris to send more troops to Brazzaville. He wanted to create a cordon sanitaire in the middle of the city. He wanted the French military to divide the city to stop the fighting and put an end to the crisis before it got carried too far.

Ambassador Cesare was very talkative and rather sure of himself. He informed me of his plans in the morning, and in the middle of the day I received a phone call from a frantic admiral in EUCOM who said, “You’ve got to get out. The French are leaving.” I said, “That’s not right. I just spoke to the French ambassador this morning and they are bringing more troops.”

He said, “No, Paris just told us they are pulling their troops out of there.”

I said, “This is news to me.”

By the way, I did have a team that came in to help us in terms of communications because all our communications systems crashed the day the crisis broke out. That’s always one of those things that can happen.

Q: Did this just sort of happen or was it tied to?

HOOKS: No, it just happened. Our equipment just collapsed. Fortunately we had a jerry-rigged type operation that was very fragile so that we did have some communications with Washington, but it was very fragile. We were using telephones and FAX to keep in touch with Washington at that time. Being in Brazzaville, we had the good fortune of having cell phones that operated on the Kinshasa system. We also had an old satellite phone that we had to put on the balcony and line up to the satellite. We discovered that a tank firing up in front of the Embassy would cause the satellite phone to vibrate out of alignment with the satellite. Finally, we were able to stabilize the phone using duct tape. As you can imagine, it was very dangerous playing around with the satellite phone on the balcony when bullets were flying around overhead.

Q: What about Kinshasa? It’s right across the river.

HOOKS: Yes, what is your question?

Q: Couldn’t they support you or not?

HOOKS: They could not for a number of reasons. First of all, Kabila had just arrived in power some three weeks earlier and the new Kabila Government was going through a period of extreme paranoia in terms of security. The river was closed to all boat traffic. Furthermore, if you got on the river in a boat, you were so visible as a target. There were many armed soldiers on both sides of the river. They were more apt to shoot than to investigate. It was very dangerous. That is one of the things we realized during the crisis. When you’ve got difficulty in Kinshasa or Brazzaville and lots of undisciplined troops along the river, anyone trying to cross the river is very vulnerable.

Washington wanted to have a 24-hour open line. I suggested regular phone calls to update because our staff was too busy doing other things. There were times when I was trying to manage simultaneous conversations on two phones and a radio..

At my request, EUCOM sent a team of 12 people with special skills who could help us coordinate with the French. We didn't have any way to coordinate with the French military, and I wanted to be able to coordinate with the French at the airport and not have to go through the French ambassador every time. He was very busy and, although he was very kind to me and we talked several times a day, he was obviously very busy dealing with Paris and his own, rather difficult community. What I wanted to have was direct communications with the French military at the airport. The EUCOM team provided that. Once the EUCOM team arrived, EUCOM became very engaged.

When the EUCOM team arrived, a situation developed which I think is important to highlight. The team arrived by aircraft, and we were told that we could put American citizens on it but we could not put other people on it. I said, "This is wrong. How do we get to the airport? We get to the airport under French protection. They send their military around this city under dangerous conditions to pick up American citizens and caravan out to the airport, and now you are telling me that we have to tell the French, "Thank you but now we are not going to take your citizens on our aircraft"? EUCOM said, "Yes." I said, "That's really unacceptable. Naturally we give priority to our own citizens getting on the aircraft, but if there are extra seats, we must offer them to the French as they have done for us. That was a major problem.

I understand subsequently there have been memoranda signed to try to deal with that eventuality, but I could not believe that these were the instructions I had at the time. Ultimately, I had to speak to an admiral in Washington, and we got that decision overridden. I was told that if there were extra seats, we could put French citizens on the plane. It was a major issue that should never have existed in the first place.

The second thing I would like to talk about is dealing with Washington in a crisis. One of the things I was surprised about was dealing with the task force. When I would call back to the task force, which I did almost every hour, several people around the long table would start asking questions at the same time. I found that I had to instill discipline on the task force. I found that surprising that no one was in charge who laid out the ground rules for asking questions. I myself laid out the ground rules: "I will give you my briefing first. I will not take questions until I finish my briefing. I will take no consular questions whatsoever. I will take other questions and then I will put the consul on the phone who will give a status report of every U.S. citizen in country and answer any questions you may have."

Again, coming back to this question of people who have never served in Africa before; Washington doesn't always give clear guidance on what you should be doing. You have to have a sense of what you should be doing yourself. Furthermore, you have to convince Washington that you know what you are doing. While I was in Brazzaville, I observed relations between Washington and our ambassadors in Kinshasa and in Bangui. Washington insisted that Ambassador Simpson reduce the embassy staff in Kinshasa during the crisis. Ambassador Simpson did not think he needed to send people out of Kinshasa. Washington was absolutely insisting that he do so to reduce the foot print and he was resisting.

One of the lessons I learned from this experience is that you may be right, but Washington has a different set of pressures. You have to be responsive to Washington. You have to feed that wolf. Washington is always terrified of someone getting hurt, and the first step is reducing the Embassy footprint. That's a very legitimate concern. Even though you as ambassador may think that it isn't justified under the circumstances, you have to bear in mind that senior people in Washington are under pressure to show that they are handling the situation. People in Washington are fearful of Congressional criticism should something go wrong.

What you have to do is tell Washington why you have to keep certain people and why you don't just evacuate en masse. Obviously you don't evacuate your consuls first. You need them to maintain contact with and evacuate US citizens. You have to figure it out yourself and have a sense of judgment about it.

Coming back to the issue of the French leaving, once I was informed by EUCOM that the French planned to withdraw their troops, I called the French ambassador who, as I indicated earlier, was a very talkative, very gregarious guy and very sure of himself. He was stuttering and stumbling and barely coherent. I said, "Raymond, I just got a phone call from EUCOM. You told me this morning that you were bringing more French troops to Brazzaville. Now I am hearing that all your troops are being withdrawn."

He himself was in total shock, probably because he had been informed just about the same time I had been informed. He confirmed that indeed that was the case. He could not figure out what was going on in Paris, but this was where French policy was evolving. It was no longer the traditional policy where the ambassador calls, France sends the cavalry and takes care of the problem.

Q: They decided to draw the line.

HOOKS: They decided to draw the line and they were going to withdraw their troops, all of them. Basically they decided they would not play the gendarme in the Congo, and that the parties would have to work it among themselves.

I was in a predicament because EUCOM said, "We want our guys out of there right now." I told them that I was not leaving yet. We still had one Peace Corps volunteer unaccounted for, a young woman who had left her village on Wednesday to come to Brazzaville for a medical appointment. This was before the conflict broke out and she had just disappeared along the way. Our Peace Corps director was in the embassy and he was in touch with various Catholic missions and other religious groups located along her path. She had been living way up in the north of the country. He had tracked her to different missions along the road to Brazzaville. She was hitchhiking on trucks, something which at the time you could do. It sounds terrible that a young woman was hitchhiking with truck drivers, but in Congo it was relatively safe. The Peace Corp Director was able to track her from one mission to another. However, he lost all news of

her after she passed the last mission some distance outside of Brazzaville. He could not confirm that she made it into the city.

I laid out for Washington my strategy for leaving. I would give the French a few days to get organized. On the other hand, I did not want to wait until the following Saturday when the French evacuated their last troops and gave up control of the airport. I decided that we would leave on Wednesday. My conversation with EUCOM took place on Saturday or Sunday. I explained that we still had to locate the missing Peace Corps volunteer. We couldn't just walk away and leave her, although ultimately we had to get out of Brazzaville. We knew that once the French gave up control of the airport, we would no longer have an exit.

I found that the military were the most eager to pull their guys back. I told EUCOM that they could pull their team back, but I would not leave until Wednesday. EUCOM did pick up their guys on Wednesday. However, I opted to get a Dutch pilot with an old airplane in Kinshasa to pick us up. We evacuated our guys from Brazzaville to Kinshasa because I thought we could continue to function as an Embassy from the Kinshasa side for a period of time.

I had called Sassou, the former President who was trying to overthrow the Government, on Monday and told him about the Peace Corps volunteer who was located in an area which his troops controlled. I suggested that it was in his interest to find her if he wanted to have good relations with the United States. I explained to him where we thought she was. He called back the next day with the news that they had found her.

She had arrived at the roadblock outside the city the day the conflict started, and the troops there would not let her through. She was stuck there for eleven days. The soldiers told her that if she were French, they would rape and kill her. She was 23 years old. You can imagine what a stressful situation she was in; I am sure she feared that the soldiers might change their minds at some point and attack her. They would not allow her to leave.

Sassou's troops brought her into the city and the French were able to pick her up and take her to the French Embassy, where we were able to recover her. She left with us on Wednesday. It was quite an interesting experience in terms of dealing with a situation where the country had been split apart. There was a civil war in the city and no one was in control. I was negotiating with the two parties to the conflict. I went to see President Lissouba almost on a daily basis. Initially, we could go anywhere in the city with the flag flying and get past roadblocks because neither side had a problem with the United States. The United States is very popular in Congo. There was a strong anti-French sentiment in certain areas, but the troops on both sides would wave at us and let us through.

That began to change as the week evolved. The soldiers began to get drunk from looted alcohol. They were poorly trained, poorly armed, undisciplined and terrified. Obviously, no one was taking care of them. Few if any meals were delivered to them. They had to fend for themselves. I learned a great deal about fighting techniques in Africa during this

conflict. I learned to distinguish firing that indicated a confrontation was underway versus firing to mark territory. Often times the troops fired their weapons because they were scared. I began to see a degeneration of discipline and a change in attitude toward everybody driving through roadblocks.

The young troops were sleep-deprived; their eyes were red from alcohol and sleep deprivation. Traditional beliefs began to creep in and we saw guys with a woman's wig or women's clothes over part of a uniform. This was part of their belief of protecting themselves. These items of clothing served as an amulet of some type. Their uniforms were already very eclectic. They looked at me with a great deal of suspicion. Their movements became slower and slower. Initially, they just opened the roadblock to let me through. Gradually the friendly smile was replaced with a scowl and a stare. They started asking questions, such as who are you, where are you going, why, etc. Obviously, the situation was deteriorating. You could feel it. You could see the signs.

We ultimately evacuated to Kinshasa after 12 days of sleeping in the embassy.

Q: You want to talk a minute about your embassy, the staffing and how it responded?

HOOKS: It is an interesting experience to suddenly be plunged into a war. Sassou and his troops tried an all-out attack to take over the Ministry of Defense, located within sight of the American Embassy, and the Presidency, located on the other side of the Ministry of Defense. We were right in the middle of concentrated exchanges of firing. We had bullets pinging off the walls and windows shattered. We, of course, were in the safe haven, although a Marine was standing near a window when a bullet shattered the window and hit an electrical wire running along the wall. He fortunately was not hurt.

There was an incident that occurred which is important to relate here. I mentioned I could send the consul out in the car with the flag flying. People could get behind them in a caravan to the airport, although it became increasingly dangerous to do that. The few people who were still left, the few hangers on, began to call the Embassy frantically as the conflict moved into their neighborhoods. They demanded that the Embassy come pick them up. Unfortunately, we had no way of picking them up because we had no troops to accompany us and we could no longer get through roadblocks on the basis on the American flag.

I recall one family that lived not too far from the embassy called and wanted us to come. They were terrified. They finally decided to leave.

Q: What type of families were these? Why were these people there?

HOOKS: Missionaries, a few business types and people working for international organizations.

The consul said she could go get them. The troops were not in their street but they were terrified because they could hear shooting in neighboring areas. I called the Minister of

Defense, who confirmed that he still controlled the area. I asked whether he could give me a military escort. He agreed, but he said he could not provide transportation. I would have to send a car to pick them up.

I had a TDY defense attaché who agreed to pick up the two armed soldiers the Minister of Defense made available for us. The Marine gunny and the vice-consul were in a second car. When the two cars arrived at the street in question, they discovered that Sassou's guys had just moved in and already controlled the area. As soon as the rebels saw the embassy cars with the two armed soldiers, they tried to stop the cars. The defense attaché decided that the situation was too dangerous, and he thought the rebels were going to kill the soldiers in his car. I think he had a discussion with the rebels and just drove away. They fired into the car trying to stop it. He headed back to the ministry of defense to drop off the escorts who were terrified, but the car was riddled with bullets at that point and the motor died. From my window, I could see the Defense Attaché running toward the Embassy and I knew we had a problem. In his escape, he did not take time to call me on the radio.

The vice consul and the gunny...

Q: The 'gunny; being the head of the Marine corps detachment.

HOOKS: Right. Sassou's soldiers stopped the car and asked the Gunny and the Vice-Consul to get out of the car. A soldier took their radio and called me. He didn't know how to use the radio, so I had to explain to him to hold down the button while talking and to release it while receiving. Unfortunately, he wouldn't let me talk to the Consul or the Gunny, and I knew that that was not a good sign. He said, "You've got 15 minutes. You come and get them, you can have them." In our hasty conversation, I was trying to get a sense of whether they were hurt, but all I could get was the soldier's insistence that I send someone to pick them up immediately.

I figured that Sassou did not have a quarrel with us and they wanted to get the Gunny and Vice-Consul off their hands. I had a tough decision to make, and I had little time to ponder the issue. I had to try to recover them by sending more of my people down there. Was this a trap or would they release them?

This was a situation that I never anticipated being in in the Foreign Service. It was probably the most difficult decision I had to make in my life. I thought if I don't make an effort to recover them, Washington is not going to appreciate that, and if I do make an effort to recover them and two more people are taken hostage, people in Washington are going to say, "How could you be so stupid? The signs were there; the soldier would not let you talk to them. You should have known not to send more people down there."

I decided that this was a time to have the courage to make a decision, and I decided to make the decision on my own. I had a phone call from Washington. I said, "I've got a problem here. I will deal with it. I will call you back when we have resolved it. I don't have time to talk."

I made the decision, knowing that my career was on the line. No one would take note if things worked out well, but my career would be over if our efforts failed. I asked for volunteers. Another vice consul and the DCM volunteered to go. They were able to recover the Gunny and the Vice-Consul and that immediate crisis was over.

The defense attaché, the Gunny and the Vice-Consul were in the process of briefing me on their experiences when we heard a burst of concentrated gunfire coming from the area where the incident had occurred. We could tell immediately that Sassou's troops were launching another attack on the Ministry of Defense. We all moved quickly into the safe haven area. I was on the phone with the Task Force to brief them when the action started. That was a unique situation that I had never anticipated having to face. In my case, it worked out fine and it was the right decision, but you know, the line between success and failure sometimes is a very thin one.

Q: Sure, it depends on one crazy soldier.

HOOKS: That's right, and had Sassou's troops not released the Gunny and the Vice-Consul, I would have had a much more complicated situation on my hands.

Q: Who was your DCM?

HOOKS: Vince Valle.

Q: Did you find the sort of training of the instincts of your embassy officers and personnel, had they been ready for this or was this sort of a learning job or what?

HOOKS: Let me get into that. People react differently in a crisis, and we were suddenly in the middle of a crisis. There were guns and tanks in front of the Embassy firing not at us but at the Ministry of Defense. Soldiers in the Ministry of Defense were defending their position by firing at the advancing rebels in front of the Embassy. Fortunately, no heavy ammunition hit us. Our safe haven was on the side of the Embassy away from the Ministry of Defense.

Q: You keep saying 'safe haven'. What was this?

HOOKS: A secure area within the Embassy.

Q: So it is a room without windows and that's where you went as a last resort?

HOOKS: Correct, and where you have more security in terms of secure doors to protect yourself.

We had several Peace Corps volunteers and their families who sought refuge in the Embassy because they were terrified. The Peace Corps volunteers were at the end of their

mission, and their families had come to accompany them home. We put them in a small room while we dealt with the crisis.

I have to say these people were terrific. They had just gotten off the plane the previous day, and suddenly they found themselves in the middle of a war. I talked to them every couple of hours to explain what was going on and to give them some sense of connection with events. They were sitting in a separate room because we didn't allow them where the communications equipment was located. They could hear shooting, but they had little idea of what was going on.

Among the people at the embassy itself, we had a couple of people who were shaken by the rapid turn of events. The vice consul who had just been held for an hour or so was crying. There was another person whose chin was really quivering. There were two lessons that immediately came to my mind. One is you've got to give to your staff a sense of confidence that you know what you are doing, because if you panic, everyone else panics around you. You have to have a sense of confidence even if you don't know what you are doing and you are flying by the seat of your pants. I tried to reassure everyone. We are in the safe haven, we'll be fine. We are in communication with Washington. We are not the target. We just happen to be located here, but I think we will be fine.

The second thing is give people things to do. We need to start shredding so take all these files to the shred machine and start shredding. It keeps people busy. They are focused on the task at hand rather than being terrified and feeding on each other's anxieties. I started giving assignments. I had some people assist the Vice-Consul in contacting American citizens while others shredded.

The Peace Corps Director was in contact with his volunteers, especially the missing volunteer I spoke of earlier. I asked the admin people to go through the files and destroy them. We got everyone involved, they pulled together and they did really well.

I thought at the time that had I not been calm, I think a sense of panic could have taken over. Once people get involved, they adapt. It's amazing how people adapt to the most terrible conditions in life.

As you saw in Beirut, even in the most terrible conditions, life goes on. People do things. So in the embassy itself we discovered there were lulls in the fighting and we ourselves started looting in the sense that we sent people to their homes to bring back anything edible to the Embassy. As you know, the MREs . . .

Q: Meals Ready to Eat

HOOKS: That's right. It is wonderful to have them, but after several days they become so bland. One of the guys on the EUCOM team would go outside with the bullets zipping around and grill all the meat. Of course there were walls around the building, but he was nevertheless grilling outside in a war zone. He would come back inside if it got too intense and leave the chicken or whatever it was outside on the grill. It is amazing what

you can do under terrible circumstances. We couldn't do this very often, only when we felt comfortable enough, and we could never get to some homes. When conditions were good, I would send people home for about fifteen minutes to pick up their food and to pack a few clothes. I got to my house one time and was able to throw clothes in a suitcase so I could at least change from time to time.

Q: Did you have your family with you?

HOOKS: No, fortunately I did not. Within a day or so after the conflict started, we evacuated all family members. We only had staff on hand during most of the crisis.

I conclude by saying the staff did well. We were all very busy. We were in the Embassy for 12 days sleeping on the floor or wherever we could find space to sleep. Sometimes there was intensive fighting around us, sometimes less. Again, you tend to have less fighting at night. It is more in the daytime. It comes in spurts. It is not 24 hours a day; we heard intensive firing in the morning, followed by a lull in the afternoon. There was more intensive firing later in the afternoon before petering out at nightfall. There are different patterns that you learn to discern in the conflict.

I think the next thing I would like to talk about is the fate of the Embassy staff following evacuation. You quickly learn that your authority as chief of mission is always very limited. It is more limited than you think it is, than you are told it is initially.

Secondly, you learn that as soon as you close the embassy, you have no authority whatsoever. Everything then has to be decided back in Washington. Washington does not clearly explain the policy process once you close an embassy. There seems to be no coherent policy.

We went to Kinshasa across the river from Brazzaville. I think that is the only situation in the world, with the exception of the Vatican in Rome, where two capitals are almost contiguous. Embassy Kinshasa set us up in one of their admin buildings, and I had an office in the Embassy. We kept track of what was happening across the river and with our local embassy personnel. We knew that once embassy personnel started scattering, you can never recover them. Offices in Washington are scavengers, and the first thing they want are communicators and secretaries. There was a shortage of those, so you quickly lose your communications, secretaries, and consular officers. But then others as well are pulled away. We evacuated in June, the war wasn't over until October, but we were not allowed back to Brazzaville except for brief visits. In fact the embassy only opened up several years later. It was located in Kinshasa for a long period of time.

My successor as a matter of fact began to spend a few nights at Brazzaville after I left. Sorry, not my successor but my successor's successor.

We found that once you leave the post, you can't even go back to your own post without Washington's approval. We were in a strange situation. Washington only knew what was going on in Brazzaville from the information we gave them, but we had to seek

Washington's authorization every time we wanted to go to Brazzaville. We felt like our hands were tied. It was a question of going across the river in the daytime and coming back at night.

Q: Was fighting continuing?

HOOKS: Well, we had two different situations. Fighting was continuing until October, and we didn't go back during that period of time. It was simply too dangerous. Once the fighting stopped after Sassou chased President Lissouba out of the country, there continued to be violent conflict in the city. What many people don't realize is that when you have a situation like this, the conflict goes through phases. Sassou encouraged any and everybody to fight against President Lissouba. After the fighting was over and he took power, he no longer needed all those people; in fact, he didn't want them armed anymore. He wanted to control the situation.

A lot of these young guys suddenly had a different lifestyle. If you are a nobody, a 22-year-old kid on the street, and suddenly a war broke out and now you are head of 15-20 guys, people who jump when you snap your fingers and you can go out and loot on the streets, you see a girl you can rape her, that's fine. There's no law to protect that woman and you can do whatever you want to do. If there is someone on your street that you don't like, you can get rid of them.

But what happens when the war is over? Sassou basically told the young unemployed youth to give up their weapons and go back home. Well, what's he got back home to go to? Unemployed, being a nobody? He doesn't like that. There were several instances where these guys wanted to maintain their little fiefdoms, something which Sassou would not tolerate.

The youth were still in the habit of looting. You want money? You go loot. They would loot and sometimes attack Sassou's own people. The military would capture a few of these guys and put them in jail. Then their buddies would come and try to free them from jail, which led to gunfights between them and the police and the military downtown. Sassou moved against them one by one. This was right in the wake of the conflict. He simply eliminated them. I don't know the figures; obviously no one was keeping tally on this, but I suspect there were a few hundred that Sassou eliminated as they tried to set themselves up as a powerbase and to control certain neighborhoods.

There was ongoing violence in the city for a number of months. In fact it continued for a couple of years for that matter but seriously for a few months. We could only cross the river with Washington's authorization and it was only given for a week or three days or two weeks or whatever. We had to keep renewing it. It was always complicated to get over to Brazzaville.

I recall Bonnie Cohen, the deputy secretary for management. Bonnie Cohen had never worked in an embassy before and I think she had little African experience. She decided to come for a visit and you might know it, the one day she came, there was an incident. This

was after the war was over. We take her across the river to show her what the embassy looked like. We took her down to what is called the beach, which is really the river port on the Kinshasa side. There were two ferries, and as one was leaving Kinshasa, another came up and tried to position itself against the dock. Unfortunately, the pilot badly maneuvered and he ran into a corrugated tin cover over the pier and hit it, which made a big bang. This did not sit well with Bonnie. That was all she could talk about for the rest of her trip.

It had nothing whatsoever to do with the war, but in her mind it had to do with disorder and violence and all that, and I don't think she could separate the two. I think she was a little bit traumatized by it to the point that she did not want to talk about reopening the embassy.

The embassy itself was looted. The looters were able to get in although through a side door. The front door to the embassy held, although it was riddled with bullets, a great advertisement for the company that built the bulletproof glass. I think I counted 17 bullets stuck in the glass. The looters did come in, however, and looted whatever they could find. They looted my house as well, but only at the end. It was Sassou's troops that did it.

A lesson to be learned is to leave every safe open, because the safes that were opened and had nothing in them, the looters didn't bother. The ones that were closed, the looters must have spent quite a bit of time trying to tear them apart. The big heavy safes, the three-drawer safes, are not easy to get into. The looters were probably thinking that there were valuables in the closed safes, although we left nothing inside any safe.

Washington did not want to go back into this embassy for a long time in part because Assistant Secretary Susan Rice did not like Sassou. It is true that the situation remained somewhat precarious for some time, but one of the things I learned out of this is that we do not have a consistent policy. Right now for instance, take Iraq; if most embassies were under the same threat that Iraq is under, they would be closed this afternoon. However, for political reasons, we don't close the Embassy.

Given the minimal strategic importance attached to countries in Africa, you have to keep your embassy open, even if it is a dangerous situation. Once you give it up, it's almost like you've got to prove the situation is perfectly safe to get back in there. That's very hard to do. You never close an embassy unless you absolutely have to. If you have to, you do, but you don't do it lightly because once you do, you lose control of the decision-making process. It becomes a security issue.

One last point I would make here concerning Brazzaville: how do you deal with a new government that has taken over and looted the property of the United States? There was no consistent policy on how to approach this. I raised this issue immediately and insisted that Sassou had to compensate us. I told him bluntly: "If you loot, you have to pay for it and it will be a long time before we open up these embassies again." His troops looted after they got into town. This was how he was paying his troops.

I went over to Brazzaville and visited my house and it was already mostly looted. There were soldiers inside, still looting. They just stood off to the side while we were there, and continued looting once I left.

Washington did not have a policy of asking for compensation. I immediately raised this issue with Sassou. I never received any instructions from Washington on this issue. When I explained to Bonnie Cohen what I had done, she said, "Oh, that's a very good idea." I said, "I think it is the least we can do."

There was no policy where I was immediately instructed to raise the issue of compensation. I raised it on my own initiative. Interestingly enough, in the first budget that Sassou's government submitted to Parliament, he put a line-item in his budget to compensate the IMF for the house that was looted and the American embassy, but not other places. Of course the French kept troops at their house to protect it. Two of their soldiers were killed trying to protect it.

Sassou's guys were driving around with cars they looted from various embassies, including from our embassy. I insisted that Sassou give them back. His staff pleaded that they were in a very difficult situation. I said, "Difficult or not difficult, these cars are stolen. We know who they belong to. I want them back."

How could his staff tell a general or Sassou's brother that the 4x4 he just looted belonged to the American Ambassador and had to be returned. I had a 4x4 that had less than five thousand miles on it. I never saw it again.

I gave interviews to BBC and Agence France Presse and whomever I could talk to. I explained what was going on. The new minister of foreign affairs told me: "You are really embarrassing the government by these interviews." I replied: "Well, that's the purpose of it. Aren't you embarrassed that your guys are driving around with our cars and we can see it? Aren't you embarrassed?" He said, "Yes, but . . ." I said, "I don't understand. The car is there, you know where it is. Get it and deliver it to us. In the meantime, I am going to use every opportunity I can to raise the issue and I hope you are embarrassed. That's encouraging that there is the element of embarrassment there."

We did get some of the cars back. We got the boat back, a boat on the river that was there for recreation but also for evacuation.

After closing the embassy, I spent a number of weeks in Gabon where the peace talks were taking place. Bongo was president of Gabon. Sassou was Bongo's father in law. Sassou was younger than Bongo, but he was Bongo's father-in-law. And President Lissouba was Bongo's cousin. So the two parties were relatives.

Q: What were you doing?

HOOKS: Shuttling back and forth among the parties, trying to reason with them to put an end to the fighting because they were destroying their country.

Q: Why were they listening to you?

HOOKS: A lot of countries in Africa want to have good relations with the United States. There was no antagonism toward us, in fact, if they somehow could be in line with the United States, that would give a certain legitimacy to their position. There were receptive ears, and I tried to play on that to reason with them to form a government of national unity.

President Lissouba's view was that he did not deal with rebels. That's often the standard view of the leader in power in Africa. He himself had been involved in a coup d'état but never mind. That was in the past.

And Sassou's view was basically that Lissouba was trying to kill him and he was engaging in legitimate self-defense. Sassou maintained that Lissouba's term expired in August 1997, and therefore there was no legitimate government. It was really quite fascinating to mediate between the two parties.

President Omar Bongo, the President of Gabon, was quite a character. He was very interested in what was going on anywhere in Africa. Lissouba and Sassou both blamed the French in part for what was going on. It is always easy to beat up on the French. But we were not blamed by any party. I could go see all the parties, talk to them, try to encourage them, and try to reinforce the message that Bongo was giving them.

Bongo loved gossip. He was also an endless store of information. He wanted to see me quite often and I would go with Liz Raspolic, who was the ambassador there at the time. This was always a fascinating experience. Bongo was probably about five foot six, a very small guy, who had been president for thirty some years at the time. He was getting to the point where he would drop off to sleep in conversation. He would say, "With Sassou, I don't trust a thing that man says, any piece of paper he gives me. He is a Marxist and they will doctor documents. You can't trust them. I don't trust a thing Sassou sends to me." This was his father-in-law he was talking about. Bongo felt that President Lissouba had not been terribly smart in the way he handled the situation. He would go on and on about Sassou.

It is not that I solicited the comments, but he was very talkative. If you were talking, elaborating on a certain situation, at times he would just ask questions to solicit information, and at other times he would just drop off to sleep.

During one of my visits, I happened to notice he had on black shoes with a heel that I would say was three inches high and a buckle, a silver buckle, on top, a big buckle like you see on the shoes that pilgrims wore. I found that to be a little odd. I didn't realize that was still in style.

He got a phone call from the vice president of South Africa. He went out of the room to take the call. When he came back in the room, he was wearing, in addition to his buckled

high-heeled shoes, a flowing blue cape. You probably don't have too many capes in your wardrobe, particularly those that are blue with gold braiding on them. I don't have any of those. He walked in with his cape wrapped around like an animal trainer in a zoo; those are the only people I know that wear capes. He walked into the room, stopped at the door for a dramatic pause, took the edge of the cape in his hand, and flipped it over his shoulder. Then he sat down.

Liz practically went into hysterics in terms of laughter, and because she was laughing, I could hardly control myself. I decided to occupy myself with my papers and my shoes, certainly not looking at Liz. I knew if I looked at her, I would lose it. She was practically in hysterics. She was trying to hide it, but she was in hysterics.

That was just part of the theater, the drama, of dealing with Bongo. He was a very political guy, but also very theatrical, and that was just one of the personal experiences I had in dealing with him. He wanted to know what was going on between the two Congolese parties, so he wanted to see me two or three times a week at times, at least once a week during the two months or so that I spent in Libreville.

When those talks did not successfully conclude, all the parties left Libreville. I then went to Washington briefly before being asked to become part of the U.S. Mission to the United Nations in New York. Every year during the fall session, the Department sends a number of people to assist the Mission. I went for the AF Bureau because one of the key issues on the UN agenda was the conflict in Congo. I spent two or three months in New York until the civil war came to an end in Brazzaville. That was also quite an interesting experience. It allowed me to see how the UN functioned.

Q: I want to bring you back to the time you were in Kinshasa. How were you received? I mean you are sort of the man that came to dinner type. Here you were in your Brazzaville embassy in the middle of a war, when Embassy Kinshasa had its own problems. How did it work out?

HOOKS: Kinshasa's problems were the sort of crisis that never happened in the sense that Kabila arrived in power and did not loot the city. Mobutu was gone and it was a smooth transition in the sense that Kinshasa did not become a war zone. In fact, many people sent their cars and other moveable property across the river to Brazzaville where they were looted by Sassou's troops.

To back up, on the Kinshasa side you recall that South African President Mandela tried to mediate between Mobutu and Kabila. Mandela sent one of his naval ships to Pointe Noire in the Congo where I was located to try to organize a meeting there between the two of them to resolve the conflict. Bill Richardson, who was the US Perm Rep at the UN at the time, came to Congo to attend the negotiations, but Kabila never showed up for the meeting. He said the French were trying to kill him. That resulted in an aborted conference.

Later on Mandela came again. The second time both Mobutu and Kabila came. I was there when they arrived. It was interesting meeting Mobutu for the first time. He came to the airport VIP lounge. I introduced myself and he said much the same thing that Mandela did: "How's my friend, Bill Clinton?"

Many in his party I knew by name, although not personally. I had read with interest Dan Simpson's reporting on the crisis, so I knew the main characters. Mobutu arrived with part of his family.

And then Kabila arrived and the conference took place. You no doubt have seen the famous picture of them on the ship, with Mandela in between. I was right behind the cameraman at the time. It was quite an interesting experience and Washington was very interested in what was going on. I was there to keep in touch with the various parties and to follow the situation closely.

When we were evacuated from Brazzaville to Kinshasa, we set up our embassy offices there. I have to say that Embassy Kinshasa did everything to make us feel comfortable. They had an extra office in the front office which they gave to me. I guess it had been used by a staff aide at some point in the past, and when I returned as Ambassador, we used it primarily to store office supplies. It was a decent sized office and I appreciated it.

The embassy in Kinshasa had been a base for some of our support, for some of our activities in Angola in the past, and so we had large buildings on the admin compound. These buildings had just been renovated, and one of them was made available for us. What we could recover from Brazzaville we brought to Kinshasa. We were set up nicely and had plenty of space. We were not impinging on other people's space.

Some of the Kinshasa admin types were a little disgruntled, felt this was extra work, extra concern for them. My own admin types would occasionally complain to me that they were getting some resistance from their colleagues, something which I never quite understood because we are all colleagues in the Foreign Service, we are all the same people, but somehow I guess this was seen as extra work for them, things like processing vouchers. By and large the cooperation was very good and it improved as time went along.

My staff was drawn down quickly. Ultimately only the DCM and an admin person were left. I was constantly flying in and out of Kinshasa, either traveling to Washington or Gabon, or elsewhere. When the war ended with Lissouba's flight out of Brazzaville, the Department asked that I return to Kinshasa. The Angolans helped to bring Sassou to power. The Angolan involvement had a lot to do with what was happening in Kinshasa because Mobutu had been supportive of Savimbi, and Lissouba was vocally supportive of Mobutu. The French also decided that Lissouba was just crazy and unreliable and it was time for him to go. Once the French and the Angolans got involved, Lissouba's troops folded and Lissouba fled.

The situation in Brazzaville remained precarious for some time. I was asked in April of 1998 to go to Bangui because the UN was sending troops there and the Embassy in Bangui was closed. The French had troops there, but decided that they could not afford to keep them there. The United States agreed to turn the peacekeeping operation into a UN operation. Our embassy had been closed for 15 months and Washington wanted to have someone on the ground. They asked me since I was sitting in Kinshasa, going back and forth to Brazzaville once or twice a week.

Q: Bangui being the capital of?

HOOKS: The Central African Republic. I initially went there for two weeks, and then my stay was extended to six weeks and ultimately to nine months, but always by a month at the time. Actually it was one of the most interesting chapters of my career in the Foreign Service.

Q: I would like to talk to you about your UN experiences and then we will talk about Bangui.

End Session 5

Q: What year are we in?

HOOKS: We are now in 1999. We finished up last time with Brazzaville. I was there from 1996 to 1999 and I think we now start with the African Crisis Response Initiative here in Washington.

Q: Could you explain what this was?

HOOKS: The African Crisis Response Initiative or ACRI was an initiative to train African military in peacekeeping skills so that they could participate in peacekeeping operations in Africa. It really grew out of our response or lack thereof to the crisis in Rwanda and wanting to find African military who had the skills to participate, who had the communication equipment to be able to participate and who were prepared to provide boots on the ground in any UN peacekeeping operation or any other operation, for that matter, although it was particularly focused on the UN.

This initiative was started in about 1996. Marshall McCallie was the first director of ACRI. When I left Brazzaville, Susan Rice, the Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, asked me to take on that job.

Q: Where did this organization fit? In what?

HOOKS: It is an interesting question because this was an operation that clearly focused on training military in peacekeeping skills. However, it was located in the State Department and funded by the State Department, although in collaboration with the Special Forces of the U.S. military and therefore the Pentagon. That in itself led to a

major problem because of instead of having smooth inter-agency cooperation in this endeavor, the Pentagon basically went into guerilla warfare trying to get control of the African Crisis Response Initiative. Our budget was very small by Pentagon standards. It was a round off number so to speak; we had anywhere from 15 to 25 million dollars a year which is fairly small. For the Pentagon it is nothing. Nevertheless, they wanted to control this program but it had been placed in the State Department for various reasons. It was seen as a political mission.

Q: Was this a congressional placement?

HOOKS: I think so, yes. It was really under the African Bureau and I reported directly to Susan Rice, but we had interagency meetings with the Pentagon and the NSC to address where this program was going because it was put together ad hoc, but it wasn't quite clear what its mission was going to be other than broadly what I have just emphasized. What level of skills were going to be provided, how much equipment was going to be brought in because each contingent that we trained, we gave them uniforms, boots and everything else because one of the problems in Africa is that people in the military from some of the poorer countries often show up for peacekeeping operations wearing flip flops and other non-military clothing. They simply didn't have any of the equipment or the uniforms, so we provided two sets of uniforms including boots. We didn't provide weapons, but we did provide ammunition because oftentimes they didn't have the ammunition to do even practice firing. We also gave communication equipment. One of the major problems was communications between contingents from different countries. That has always been a major problem in UN peacekeeping operations in which disparate groups have their own communication systems and often times they can't communicate with each other. So this was the focus of ACRI.

This became a very interesting operation because, being under the State Department, my role as director of the program was to coordinate the interagency process which in itself is quite a challenge. The easy part of the job was going to Africa to recruit countries to come into this program. We provided a two year program of training, a training program at different intervals to bring participating units up to a minimal level we felt was necessary to participate in UN peacekeeping operations.

At the same time we had to keep recruiting other countries to keep the process rolling forward, so I did quite a bit of traveling to Africa to sell the program. One of the countries we really wanted to bring into the program was Kenya, and that was a real success when we finally managed to do that. That was one of the bigger countries. We got several of the smaller countries initially. South Africa did not want to be a part of the process initially, although later on they did become part of the program. The ACRI name was later changed after I left.

I think the major challenge for me when I was there -- it was a constant challenge -- was trying to deal with the Pentagon. Let me throw in here the fact that, except for one person, everybody on my staff were retired military. Everyone of them was quite

adamant that if the program went over to the Pentagon, it would get lost in the shuffle and would not receive the attention that it needed. I found their position to be very interesting.

We worked with the Special Forces because we wanted people in uniform on the ground in every training operation. Generally there were two Special Forces trainers present. The other trainers were done by contractors, retired military. We had different contracts to determine which skill sets were needed for the type of peacekeeping operations that the African military would participate in, and how much equipment, how much communications gear, and what was the appropriate mix to give. We had several contractors, all of whom were retired military.

One of the major questions we faced was how much military training did we give each group. What sort of response were we looking for? Were we looking for just a minimal peacekeeping level or were we looking for troops who could go in and do Chapter 7 peace enforcement. This was an issue we discussed quite often, but one of the constraints we faced was whether there were congressional restrictions or whether there were particular problems with certain countries. We really didn't want to provide too heavy a military component to it for fear the participating troops would get involved in coups. One of the things we were very sensitive about was the possibility that the troops we trained would get involved in a coup, whether the training had anything to do with it or not, somehow we would be splattered by that event, and we wanted to avoid that.

Interestingly enough, one of the countries we started training was Cote d'Ivoire. When I first joined ACRI, I attended the first training session in Cote d'Ivoire in early December, 1999. Cote d'Ivoire was having some problems at the time as the country was heading toward elections. One of the questions I asked the French Embassy, the American Embassy, and even some contacts on the Ivorian side was the possibility that the military that we trained would ever be involved in a coup d'état. The reactions were unanimous across the board: That cannot happen in Cote d'Ivoire.

Q: It was always considered the exception.

HOOKS: Absolutely. That simply could not happen here. We have no tradition of military coups. We have a very small military. They are very much under civilian command. It simply cannot happen here. That was in early December of 1999. December 24th there was a coup.

To be fair about it, it didn't start off as a coup. It simply started off as unhappy soldiers wanting to get paid. It was the holidays and they wanted to get paid. As I heard many times in later years from many sources, President Bédié was completely drunk at the time. He had not paid the troops, and his response was to kick the boys in the behind and get them out of his face.

The soldiers did not respond too well to that approach. The situation deteriorated and took on a life of its own. President Bédié was not, let's say, a person of strong character, and when they told him he was the one who had to go, he took off and hightailed it

through the tunnel from the presidential palace over to the French residence. Bédié told the French to send troops to straighten out those young guys. The French decided that wasn't what they wanted to do. And so they let the coup take place.

We had given one training session to those troops. They were involved in the mutiny that turned into a coup, and that put an end to their participation in the ACRI program. That was one of the factors we always had to deal with.

The thing that was a constant source of frustration for me when I was director was trying to deal with the Pentagon. The principal assistant secretary for the Africa area wanted the program, and he was constantly trying to create problems in order to get it handed over to the Pentagon. That was a major source of frustration for us. He didn't have funding for it; he wanted State Department funding for it. There was a lot of ambiguity about the future of the program, that is, whether the program would remain in the State Department or whether he would wrest it away.

I think the program did a lot of good. It trained a lot of African military in peacekeeping skills. It did provide them with some basic equipment and many of them went on to participate in peacekeeping operations in Africa.

Q: I have heard reports that the Nigerians were very much involved in it. They were called the African force and they ended up by looting and all that. Were you able to find troops that didn't loot and who obeyed orders and all?

HOOKS: When you are dealing with military in Africa or anywhere else, you face all sorts of challenges. It's true that there were times when Nigerian military were involved in peacekeeping activities and were accused of looting and raping. At other times they apparently behaved themselves. I think it depended in part on who the commanders were and how much discipline was maintained. But Nigerian troops had not participated in ACRI training.

As you know, oftentimes when there are military conflicts in Africa it often opens the door to looting, in part because the troops receive so little training and so little discipline is maintained. One of the things we found during ACRI training was that many of the troops coming in had not had target practice for one or two years and, if they had been trained at all, their skills had eroded. If you don't maintain the skills, the skills erode, and that was always a challenge. African military in many cases wanted us to provide everything from transport aircraft to fighter aircraft, tanks and every military toy you can imagine. We had to keep emphasizing that they had a wish list that was far out of proportion to what we could provide. That happens all the time. We provided a package to all participating units: communications gear, uniforms and ammunition, in addition to the training of course. The training was needed more than anything else. These training programs gave us a network of contacts in Africa and allowed us to have direct access to the military there that we would not have had otherwise. The U.S. military certainly appreciated it. We were giving something concrete to the participating countries that they could use and that could be helpful in terms of peacekeeping operations in Africa. After a

couple of years of ACRI training, we began to get feedback from UN commanders who were running peacekeeping operations. They reported that troops who received ACRI training had a skill set that was superior to those who had not, and they had a communications package that was compatible.

I think the ACRI program is a good example of the programs that we should be implementing in Africa. We need to have longer term horizons, not just deal with the crisis of the moment. The crises are always going to be there. The question is how to deal with them?

Q: Were you able to think of how you could use this instrument before the real mess happens?

HOOKS: ACRI is a training program. Of course, what you refer to is more a political process. When you see the seeds of a conflict, how do you respond to it? The political process is a very slow process. In Africa you have assets and liabilities in terms of dealing with crises. There are a number of regional and sub-regional organizations, such as the African Union and ECOWAS, that are involved in peacekeeping. The world basically looked at these organizations as the first line of response, and the UN became the last line of response. That's good in a sense. The problem is that many of these organizations have little or no resources. Also, the political will in many cases was limited or nonexistent. During many conflicts in Africa where was the African Union? Nowhere to be seen.

The political process in Africa is very slow. There is an unwillingness to step up and say early on that a given country is becoming a crisis and such and such needs to be done now. ACRI was very involved in trying to strengthen some of the regional organizations, especially in terms of their peacekeeping plans and capabilities. That is obviously on a long term horizon.

Q: Of the countries you were training, which one seemed to be the most, to really respond to the training to be most effective?

HOOKS: We had a couple that I think responded very well. I would cite the case of Kenya and Senegal. In some countries the skill set was practically nonexistent. Soldiers showed up in flip-flops and wearing a partial uniform who had really never even gone through basic boot camp. In some cases they had not fired a weapon in two years or so. Oftentimes we gave them the first complete uniform they had ever had. The Kenyans and the Senegalese were definitely better in terms of their training, in terms of the support they gave their troops, that is, regular salaries, uniforms, and decent food.

Q: They had quite a reputation in the French army.

HOOKS: The Senegalese did, yes. The Kenyans also tended to be quite good.

On the weaker side we had the Zambians and the Malawians. They wanted to be part of the process. These are very poor countries and the military were poorly trained and poorly equipped, poorly paid and as you know, all that is not a good recipe in terms of having sharp skills.

Q: Well, could you take a look at it and say, "I am sorry fellows, this isn't going to work" or once they sort of volunteered you were stuck with them?

HOOKS: First of all, we tried to encourage broad participation across the board. There were many political considerations. Obviously, we wanted the big countries, and we started off with Ethiopia. Unfortunately, for political reasons, that was put on hold for a period of time.

We wanted the South Africans, but for political reasons they were reluctant to come in, although they ultimately did join. When they got more involved in peacekeeping operations in Africa, they began to see that they were stretched beyond their means and they did indeed need peacekeeping skills.

The bigger countries tended to think they already had the needed skills, and the smaller countries, the poorer ones, were the ones that most wanted to be involved. Many African countries, whenever there is a UN peacekeeping operation, volunteer their troops to go on peacekeeping operations for several reasons; one is the hope of getting equipment for the troops. Secondly, the troops will get paid, which makes them happy. To be more precise, the governments get paid because the UN pays the government, not the troops. It is the countries' responsibility to disperse the money to their own troops. As we know, that has been a problem in Africa in UN peacekeeping operations. There have been cases where troops mutinied because their governments did not disperse the funds.

Q: Is there a list and a monitor, monitoring? I mean you are in, you are out depending on whether or not you are paying your troops or not?

HOOKS: It was focused more on political considerations. If they were willing to send troops, and if these troops had not been involved in egregious human rights abuses at home, they would more or less qualify. Our goal was to bring them up to a certain level so that they could participate effectively in peacekeeping operations. It was important politically to have a broad array of troops even though one contingent may be badly trained and equipped. It helps to spread the number of flags around and gives it a more international composition.

Q: I assume if there is a crisis, a general of some country is made the overall commander.

HOOKS: Well, there are a couple things to remember about UN peacekeeping operations. A commander gets assigned to each operation, and the commander may not be very good. Oftentimes he is there because of political considerations, not because of his military background. Generally the force commander of operations in Africa is an

African and doesn't necessarily come from the largest contingent of troops being provided. He may be selected for any number of reasons. But as you know, for any peacekeeping operation, the UN generally looks for an anchor country, one that can provide the infrastructure and the underpinnings and around which, like a Christmas tree, you can add on other contingents.

In Africa we tried to get the French to play the role of lead country, although in some cases other countries played that role. The lead country has to have considerable military and logistical capability and serve as the backbone of the operation, with other contingents being added on to provide support and political coverage.

Q: Did you have the equivalent of a command and general staff college potential leaders in these units?

HOOKS: Not within the framework of ACRI, no. ACRI was focused more on the training, training not just of military skill sets but also on a political level. We worked with different countries and regional organizations on their strategies for putting in place peacekeeping operations. It did not get into some of these other issues that you just raised.

Q: Did we have a stable of political advisers who basically knew about this type of operation, either retired Pentagon or active duty Pentagon or Foreign Service officers we could send out as advisers?

HOOKS: We did. First of all, we had to screen every country that participated. We had to work with them on a political process to make sure they were willing to participate in a UN framework and the troops had not been involved in human rights violations. We also tried to work with sub-regional organizations, such as ECOWAS. I mentioned we tried to get them to focus on a strategy of peacekeeping within their particular region. Obviously a peacekeeping operation is a highly political affair, but we tried to work at it in practical terms of coordinating on the military side and also to advise the political side of some of the things they needed to look at to be able to detect when crises were first starting to appear, how to manage them and prevent them from growing into full blown crises.

I think the value of ACRI lies in the fact that it was a tool that allowed us to engage in Africa in a very concrete way. It allowed us to help address one of the serious challenges in Africa, which is where do you find qualified troops to go into a peacekeeping operation in Africa? Obviously, the United States at that time was not interested in putting its own troops on the ground. We had just gone through the Somalia intervention and after that experience, no one wanted to put U.S. boots on the ground in Africa.

It was broader than just that; it was also to help train African military to participate in peacekeeping operations around the world, but particularly in Africa.

Q: You did this from when to when.

HOOKS: I did that from 1999 to 2001.

Q: And then what?

HOOKS: Then I had been nominated ambassador to Kinshasa. In early June Walter Kansteiner, who was the Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs at that time, came to me on a Thursday and said he needed my help. He had a problem in Zimbabwe. The ambassador, a political appointee, had left. The DCM was leaving. He said he needed someone on the ground who had experience. He wondered if I would go to Zimbabwe and serve as charge while I was waiting to be confirmed for Kinshasa. I accepted the challenge. I planned to leave ACRI at the end of that month anyway. He wanted me to be in the office on Wednesday the following week, which meant that I had less than four working days to get a visa, to pack out and get a flight.

Q: Did you get agrément or not?

HOOKS: Not for charge, no, although the embassy informed the government of Zimbabwe that I would become the charge. That was on a Thursday and I left on Monday and arrived on Tuesday in Zimbabwe.

Q: How long were you in Zimbabwe?

HOOKS: I was there just short of three months. It was an interesting phenomenon for several reasons. Obviously, Zimbabwe at that time was a troubled country and has become even more troubled. I think there was a strong hope, let's say, in the State Department that somehow we could help to play the role of nursemaid and bring Zimbabwe to what we call a soft landing, to move past the current regime and into something a little more acceptable.

It obviously was naive for a number of reasons. Mugabe was not interested in leaving, and he had the support of the countries around him, including South Africa, who were not going to do anything to make him leave. He was an old freedom fighter, so to speak. The fact that he was destroying his country was not the issue for them. It was that the outside world could not force an independence fighter to leave power. His country was independent from a colonial power but not free in the sense that he was very much a dictator.

I think Walter wanted to put pressure on the Mugabe regime and try to ease him out. That obviously has not taken place and I think the State Department pulled back from that approach at some point.

When I arrived in Harare, the embassy had been short of leadership for a period of time because the ambassador had ticked off the Mugabe regime shortly after he arrived, and the situation had only gotten worse over time.

Q: Let's talk a bit about this. He was a political appointee, is that right?

HOOKS: Correct.

Q: Given the time and given the country, I am surprised it was a political appointee because usually when you have a difficult country, particularly in Africa, you don't get a political appointee. What was the reason for having one there? Was it just a friend of somebody?

HOOKS: I think it was a friend of somebody, and someone who had a certain interest in Africa and who wanted to go to Zimbabwe and be the ambassador there. He had difficulties with the regime almost from the moment he arrived. He took a confrontational approach with the regime and that led to serious problems of communication the whole time he was there. I think he also had problems communicating with the State Department, the African Bureau in particular. He may have been in communication with the White House, but from what I understood, there were problems in the sense that he had gotten off on the wrong foot. I think he made a speech when he arrived that Mugabe didn't appreciate, and as I was briefed for this assignment and later on at post, I could see that this was probably where he had gotten off on the wrong foot, and it went from bad to worse from there. He also had gotten off on the wrong foot with the State Department, perhaps thinking that his White House support was sufficient for what he wanted to accomplish.

That approach had led to some issues. When I arrived, the Embassy was a little bit adrift. Kansteiner asked me to provide guidance and management to the post until the new ambassador arrived.

Zimbabwe proved to be a fascinating experience for me. First of all, I think Zimbabwe is an interesting country. It is one of the most beautiful countries I have ever seen, and the weather is as perfect as you can imagine; not too wet, not too dry. Really just great weather. I found the Zimbabweans to be warm and friendly.

I have always found it interesting that people tend to think of Africa as the same throughout. When you work in Africa, you learn that there are vast differences, even from tribe to tribe within countries. I found the Zimbabweans compared to the Congolese to be more reserved and less spontaneous, and in that sense more British-like. I met many fascinating people there, including the finance minister. He was a very bright and clever guy who knew that the country was going down the drain, but he was powerless to halt that process. He tried to do certain things but he knew that he had only the power that Mugabe would give him. Mugabe was using him to maintain credibility with the outside world. Here was a man who clearly knew what was going on, and in private meetings he was quite frank about it.

Q: You are talking about?

HOOKS: The minister of finance. He was not an ideologue, like the foreign minister, who was very much an ideologue. Here was a man who was keenly aware of the fact that

his country was being badly managed. While he himself tried to do certain things to slow the process down, he was aware that he could not hold back the flood. He didn't have enough fingers to put in the dyke.

Whether he himself was involved in corruption, I don't know. I wouldn't have been surprised, but what I found interesting was the fact that he was honest enough in my discussions with him to discuss the problem openly. He knew what the solutions should be, but he was not in a position to implement those solutions. It was a sad situation.

It was very sad to see where Zimbabwe had been and where it was going. I recall an interesting conversation I had with a young woman on the Fourth of July, a young Zimbabwean woman. She was very articulate. She was quite angry, I would say. She said, "I am not interested in comparisons with other countries around us because we were so far ahead of them to begin with. What I am interested in is where we used to be and where we are today; compare ourselves with ourselves." I thought that was right on the mark. The fact that Zimbabwe may be doing better than Mozambique is hardly a gauge to measure yourself. You want to measure yourself where you were at independence in 1980 and where you should be, in this case it was 2001. It was sad to see how that country had gone down the drain.

My stay there was very short, but I found it to be very interesting to see up close what it meant in the lives of the average citizen for Zimbabwe to be headed in the wrong direction. The issue of white farmers was still very much on the agenda, and you could see that one of the few supports of the economy was being pushed out and being replaced by less commercial farming, more subsistence farming. All farmers were very unsure of where they would be going. Would they be on their farms in six months or a year or two years? Given the uncertainty, they did not want to invest very much. Moreover, prices were controlled and the exchange rate was controlled, and people were not making money. It was through the exchange rate that the Mugabe regime was able to enrich itself. That was a major source of income for the regime.

Q: What was your evaluation at that time of Mugabe? Did you have much connection with him?

HOOKS: No. I never met the man directly. I saw him at a few ceremonies. I put in a request when I was there to see him, but I never got a response. I was only there for three months. I didn't pursue it on a weekly basis. I took the view that if he wanted to see me, I was there and I was ready to make a courtesy call on him. He chose not to, I think in part because he was still smarting from his relations with the previous ambassador who was there. Independence fighters are not necessarily democratic; they can be very anti-democratic. Mugabe wanted to free Zimbabwe from the Brits and from the previous regime, but he himself was no democrat. He ran the country as a personal fiefdom. Unfortunately, he was running it down the drain. Initially he started off with certain promises in terms of education and so forth, but then that quickly turned bad. You could also see traces of how he dealt with the opposition. One of his favorite tactics was to cut the brake wires on people's cars so they would have crashes and get killed. That

happened a number of times, and even when I was there, there were articles that appeared either in the local press or in the foreign press by former associates who accused him of liquidating his political opponents. He was prepared to destroy the country if necessary to stay in power. We oftentimes think of patriotism. What's good for the country? You resign in the interest of the country when things are not working out. Those are alien concepts for Mugabe. Mugabe was basically there for Mugabe. If the price to pay was the prosperity and the health and well-being of his people, he was ready to stay in power.

Q: You are an African hand. Was this tribal? Was his attitude that of a tribal chieftain as opposed to the president of a country?

HOOKS: That's a very good question. Mugabe definitely acts like a traditional chief, just like Houphouët-Boigny did in his time. Traditionally, a chief is chief for life and he does not leave just because things aren't going well. I think Mugabe saw himself in that tradition, that he was chief and he was going to stay chief until he dies. The idea of resigning because his administration is not equal to the challenges of the country is an alien concept in many of the traditional cultures. The chief is the chief whether things are going well or things are going badly.

In Zimbabwe there was a majority tribe from which he came from which constitutes 80 or 85% of the population, so he was from the majority tribe. The other tribes were very small so it wasn't one tribe against the other, just his own culture that he was chief and he wanted to stay chief.

Q: Did he have a coterie of police, military, a group around him who were all riding the same tiger and keep riding that tiger? Was there the feeling that if he went down a lot of people would go down with him?

HOOKS: That's always the case with dictators, and that was very much the case with Mugabe. Mugabe is a classic case of a dictator. He is now well into his 80s. People are afraid to get rid of him even though many people don't like him; they know what he is doing. If you are part of the regime, you know what is going on. You don't want to see him go because he will be replaced by somebody else. You've made it under Mugabe. Let's say you are the director of your ministry and you may think Mugabe is a fool, you may think he is destroying the country, but you personally have gotten that far. If someone else comes in, you don't know where you are going to be in that new alignment. If it is someone who doesn't like you, you may be on the outs. If it is someone you support, you may advance. So people are always very leery about changes where changes are so dramatic, because in a regime like that, if you are in you can make lots of money, you got medical care for your family, education for your kids, abroad of course, and all the perks that go with it. However, if you are out, you may lose your job or it can mean you are in jail or lose your life or whatever else. It depends on the circumstances. So obviously there are those who have benefited, who continue to benefit and want to keep him in place.

That was definitely the case there, particularly on the military side, where they wanted to keep Mugabe in power. Even if Mugabe wanted to leave, I think many military would not have wanted him to leave. We regarded that as sort of the backbone of the regime.

Q: Did we, sitting around there, OK, if Mugabe goes what would happen?

HOOKS: That was always the question we were looking at and wondering what would happen next. One of the problems with a regime where there is no heir apparent and the institutional arrangements are so weak is that it is very hard to predict what is going to happen after the dictator goes. Even though constitutionally it may be the speaker of the parliament or the prime minister or someone else who stands next in line, once the leader goes, particularly in a regime where pressure has been building up, the military may step in and say, "We have to provide security. We are taking over." So you never knew what is going to happen thereafter and what that will lead to in terms of bloodshed and violence.

Q: Did you have much contact with the other freedom-fighting states in Africa? You know, embassies or were you kind of off to yourself, by yourself?

HOOKS: I had a lot of contact with the South Africans. We were working particularly hard with the South Africans to get them on board because they were the lead country in that part of Africa. We tried to get them to have a little more spine in dealing with Mugabe. Thabo Mbeki basically took the approach of respect for the freedom fighter and quiet diplomacy. He ultimately came to recognize that it was a complete failure.

When I was in Harare, my job was to convince them that was the case. As you know, in two or three of the elections, the South Africans were involved as observers to make a judgment whether or not the elections were reasonably fair, and the South Africans said they were. Clearly they were not. Mbeki was not prepared to say that Mugabe had cheated and needed to go. The South Africans took the position that the elections were basically fair to give Mugabe a legitimacy which he didn't deserve; they were not prepared to be the least bit tough with him.

When I was there, Walter Kansteiner instructed me to talk to the South African ambassador to persuade him to work with us and to put a little more pressure on Mugabe. I pointed out that the policy of hands off and being supportive of Mugabe was not helpful to the democratic process, but the South Africans and Thabo Mbeki at that time did not want to do that. Subsequently, I think they have recognized that that policy was an absolute failure in terms of Mugabe. However, when I was there they were still pushing that policy.

Q: In a way this was a regime that was odious. Did we have any tools or any particular reason to do anything?

HOOKS: We had very limited tools for tackling this problem. We tried to bring political pressure to bear. We worked with the Brits when the farmers were being chased out,

many of whom were British citizens. I think the Brits were pushing us very hard to put pressure on Mugabe. The majority of people basically saw Mugabe for what he was. He was destroying the country. But Thabo Mbeki, the Mozambicans and others in the region are unprepared to apply a minimum of pressure on Mugabe. In fact, they even saw him as the dean of the old freedom fighters, and you can't do this to him. Without regional support, there's not much you can do because the rest of Africa and the African Union will not support you. There are only a few countries that count in terms of decision making in Africa, and a lot of the small countries would line up behind the big states. South Africa took the approach that Mugabe was an old, respected man whom they could not throw out of power. Certainly Mozambique and Botswana were going to go along with South Africa, and the rest of Africa couldn't care less and just hopped in line behind the South Africans. They might say in private that Mugabe was a scoundrel and should go, but no one in public was going to put any pressure on him. Once the South Africans adopted this policy and the neighboring countries fell in line behind the South Africans, there was simply no political pressure on Mugabe except from the Brits and the United States. If the Africans refuse to take on the issue, the United Nations has very limited ability to address it.

Q: We are seeing a bit of this, a touch of this in Latin American with the Organization of American States with Venezuela, where Chavez has been acting in a very dictatorial manner and it is getting worse and yet the OAS has not been able to rap his knuckles at all. They don't want to show they are bowing to the Yankees and that sort of thing.

HOOKS: Yes, you see it all over. You see it in Iran where the Chinese and the Russians are simply loathe to adopt serious sanctions even though the Iranians are next door to the Russians. I think these countries are sometimes appalled at the behavior of the political leadership and have some concerns, but they are very loathe to go to sanctions because of political and commercial considerations. They hope that somehow the problem will go away. I think with Chavez it's the same thing. There is a lack of political courage. No one wants to stand up and say that Chavez is a dangerous individual who is mismanaging his own country and who is really going beyond the limits of what is acceptable in a democracy, closing down television stations and so on. In fact, you get some who either endorse him, like Nicaragua, Ecuador and Bolivia, and then you get those leaders who probably think to themselves that this guy is certainly a bit of a clown and probably dangerous, but you know, boys will be boys.

Take Chile, for instance. You have not heard the president of Chile, who is respected throughout the world, stand up and say, "I for one think Chavez is dangerous to South America." She hasn't said a word about it. You get the president of Argentina who quite frequently is seen hugging and kissing Chavez. The President of Brazil has not really addressed the issue. The little countries basically let the elephant stomp around and keep their heads down. Even Mexico hasn't stood up to Chavez.

Q: Going back to Zimbabwe, was your job mainly to keep your head down and not try to push anything?

HOOKS: No. For Walter Kansteiner, there were two and a half courtiers in Africa. I say this jokingly, of course. Two and a half countries: there was South Africa and there was Zimbabwe. Where does the half come from? That was the rest of Africa. He knew those two countries well, he was very interested in those two countries, and other countries simply didn't get his attention. He was very interested in Zimbabwe and, as I mentioned, I frequently made demarches to the Foreign Ministry and the Ministry of Defense. I saw the South African ambassador frequently on this issue, as well as the representative of the European Union. It was quite an interesting period of time. Of course, it didn't lead to much in the sense there was no political support in the region for this approach.

Q: So after about three months of living in this ideal atmosphere, where did you go? Did you finally get Congo? What was it called?

HOOKS: It was called the Democratic Republic of Congo when I went there.

Well, it was interesting. I only spent three months in Harare. In July I was confirmed by the Senate for Congo, and so I left Harare in August to begin the briefing process in Washington. I planned to spend six weeks in Washington, but the DCM informed me that President Joseph Kabila would be traveling to Washington in September to meet President Bush. I had to travel quickly to Kinshasa to present my credentials so that I could be part of that event. I only had two weeks to pack and get to Kinshasa to present my credentials and prepare for President Kabila's travel to New York. He was supposed to travel on the fifteenth of September, and I met with him on the morning of 11 September 2001 to talk about his itinerary, his program and his meeting with President Bush. That program changed drastically during the course of the day.

Q: OK, let's talk about in 2001. What was the situation in the Congo, sort of politically in relations to the United States?

HOOKS: When it came time to look at places to go for a next assignment, I did not put down Kinshasa as a priority bid. This was in the year 2000. I put down Cote d'Ivoire and some other places. Nancy Powell, who was P/DAS at the time, told me: "We'd like you to go to Kinshasa. Would you consider going to Kinshasa?" I said, "You know, I didn't put Kinshasa down on my list because the old man Kabila was there at the time. It can be very frustrating to deal with him over a long period of time."

Q: Who was there at that time?

HOOKS: Laurent Desiree Kabila, the father of the current president. He was a very difficult individual to deal with; very capricious and paranoid.

Q: He had been a guerilla leader for 40 years or something.

HOOKS: Che Guevara didn't think very much of him as a guerilla fighter.

Q: Che did try. One forgets that Che went to Africa.

HOOKS: And gave up on Kabila because Che felt that Kabila was not serious, not politically very smart, and basically a womanizer hustling for money; in short not a serious revolutionary. And all of that of course was true.

I told Nancy that I would consider Kinshasa. I met with Susan Rice, the Assistant Secretary, and she said she would like to have me in Kinshasa, so I agreed to do so. During the course of that confirmation process, Kabila was assassinated on January 16, 2001, and his son Joseph succeeded him.

Q: Who assassinated him?

HOOKS: One of his own. The person who actually killed him was one of his young guards around the palace. It was never clarified what exactly transpired, but there was a lot of speculation that this young guy was put up to the job by some of the barons of Kabila's own party who felt that Kabila was getting a little out of control, and they feared for their own positions.

When I arrived in Kinshasa, Joseph Kabila was the new president. I had been in Brazzaville when Kabila came to power in Kinshasa. Mandela had tried to arrange a meeting between Mobutu and Kabila to affect a smooth transition of power. The first time Mandela tried to set up this meeting, Kabila didn't come because he said that the French were trying to kill him. The meeting was rescheduled, and Kabila finally did come to Pointe Noire, but he knew at that point that power was his and therefore he was not prepared to enter into a power-sharing arrangement. Kabila agreed not to kill Mobutu, and would allow Mobutu to remain in Congo, not as president, but as former president. And of course, Mobutu turned that offer down.

When I arrived in Kinshasa, we were trying to establish a new relationship with Joseph Kabila, and to move the country back from some of the more capricious behavior of Kabila, Senior. Kabila, Senior had been handpicked by President Paul Kagame of Rwanda and brought to Kinshasa by Rwandan forces. Once Kabila got into power, he decided he wanted to be independent of Kagame, and he turned against Kagame. Initially, the Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces was James Kabarebe, who was Rwandan, and later became Chief of Staff of Rwandan troops. Kabila saw himself as the president of a big country, and he wasn't prepared to play second fiddle to Kagame, the president of a little country. Kagame did not take kindly to Kabila's insolence, and this led to another invasion by the Rwandans. It also led to the witch hunt against Tutsis and anyone resembling Tutsi or anyone whom Kabila didn't like. There was serious ethnic cleansing in Kinshasa. A lot of people were killed.

Q: When was this?

HOOKS: This was in 1998. When I arrived in 2001, the country was divided into five parts, controlled by three large rebel groups and two client rebel groups. We were trying to establish a relationship with Joseph Kabila who was young, 29 years old at the time.

He was trying to find his way as the new head of state and we were trying to guide him through that process.

I first met Joseph Kabila on June 18, 1997 when I was evacuated from Brazzaville. At the time, he was in charge of security at the airport. We were held up on the tarmac for 45 minutes to an hour. I think I reported in the previous session that we had six Marines who were wearing flak jackets. The Congolese in Kinshasa were so paranoid under Kabila, Senior that seeing foreigners in flak jackets on the tarmac in Kinshasa led to panic, and they actually pulled up a truckload of military armed to the teeth, and parked them off to the side, even though the Embassy in Kinshasa had explained who we were, why we were coming there and what we were doing. Somehow the message hadn't gotten through the system. Communications obviously were poor, After 45 minutes or so I was invited to see Commandant Joseph. Commandant Joseph was a young man in military uniform, I took the RSO from Kinshasa with me and we met Commandant Joseph in the VIP Lounge. Some soldiers spoke to him in Swahili and then left, and there was just the three of us in the Lounge. He said to me very quietly in English, "Who are you?" I explained who I was and why we were there and he said, "Who are the military?" I explained to him who these Marines were and why they were there and why they were in uniform. Well, there's no problem. These military, could they take off their uniforms? I said, "The problem is they don't have other clothes. We have just been evacuated. They have nothing but what is on their backs and when we get to the embassy in Kinshasa, they will probably borrow some civilian clothes from the Marines there, but they have no other clothes at this point." "Could they take off their flak jackets?" he asked. I replied: "They could take off their flak jackets if that's the issue and have T-shirts on." He agreed to that. By the way, when I offered to speak French, Joseph told me that he did not speak French.

The RSO was going to have the Embassy trucks cars come around the back of the airport to pick us up at the side of the airplane. That was a problem for Commandant Joseph, so we agreed that we would walk through the VIP lounge and meet the trucks and cars out front.

When I arrived in Kinshasa in 2001, four years after this incident, President Kabila and I talked about our previous meeting when I presented my credentials to him. I think that got us off on a good footing and we had a very good relationship the three years I was there.

Q: How much of a rule did Joseph Kabila have? This country is sort of split or what?

HOOKS: The country was divided into three different camps; there was the Kabila camp who had also been rebels. There was the Jean-Pierre Bemba camp. Bemba is a guest of the International Criminal Court in The Hague, and then there was the Rwandan Tutsi contingent with Ruberwa out in the east. Each of those two rebel groups also had clients that controlled certain territory. That meant that the country was divided into five different parts. There was a UN peacekeeping operation there, and a very fragile regime in Kinshasa still reeling from the assassination of Kabila Senior. Kabila's rule was very

capricious, and I think had he not been assassinated he would have been overthrown. That's just my own speculation. When I arrived, Joseph Kabila was trying to establish his own authority. After all, he was only 29 years old. He was dealing with his father's old buddies who saw themselves as the rightful heirs. Since they couldn't agree among themselves, they put Joseph in power in the hopes that they could manipulate him. You know, young, inexperienced; he'll do what you tell him to do.

Joseph is a very interesting guy. He was smart enough not to get rid of all the old guys right away, although he got rid of some of them fairly quickly. He kept a few. He was trying to establish his own authority but doing so slowly and politically. He didn't know what the limitations of his own power were at that time. He knew he had a military; he had been chief of staff. He knew the military itself was practically nonexistent as a viable organization. It was an empty shell, by and large. He was very unsure of his own power, and he was trying to establish himself. Kabila also faced the issue of his own identity, whether he was really Congolese. Was he really Kabila Senior's son, a question often asked in the streets. Was he really Congolese? He was a kid who was like a fish out of water in some respects. He was very quiet, very reserved. As I discussed with his closest advisor, Katumba, whatever his passport may be, whatever his biological parentage may be, he was not Congolese in culture. That was not surprising. He grew up in Dar es Salam. He was Tanzanian in culture and Tanzanian in language, that is, in Swahili. His Swahili was the pure Swahili of Tanzania, not the Swahili of southern Congo. He didn't speak French very well. As I noted earlier, when I met him at the airport, he didn't speak French at all.

When he became president of the country, his French was very weak. He probably had maybe a 3/3 in French. In any public situation he never spoke French. He would always say a word of welcome, he would say one or two sentences, and then he would turn to one of his advisers to explain whatever policies he wanted to explain or answer any visitors' questions. He would talk in English in one-on-one situations, but where French was the language, he would always ask one of his advisers to explain the issue. His French improved quite a lot while I was there, and I could tell by the time I left he was becoming more comfortable in French, although clearly there were still nuances of the language he had not mastered.

Here was a young man who felt almost like a foreigner in his own country. He didn't speak French, which was the official language, and he couldn't speak Swahili in public because of his accent. It is a difference like between British English and the English let's say of Arkansas or Texas. As soon as he spoke Swahili, people knew he was not from Congo because he spoke the pure Swahili of Tanzania.

He spoke English very well. That was the language of his education, but that was not an official language in Congo. He had all these handicaps to deal with. He was also trying to manage his father's old buddies, many of whom were really thuggish. In fact, some months after I arrived, he had a crisis between his father's buddy who was Minister of Justice. The Minister had come to Philadelphia, gotten a master's degree, married an

American woman, worked as a social worker in Philadelphia, then went to Congo to hook up with Kabila Senior. He was really a thuggish guy.

At one point President Kabila said to me, “The minister is threatening me.” He told me this, the American ambassador. The day before the Minister had made public comments that to me looked unacceptable for a minister to be talking about his own president. The President acknowledged that the Minister had threatened him. I said, “Mr. President, this is very serious. It is very serious, first of all, when a minister threatens the president, but it is also very serious in terms of the way it is perceived in this country. He was really stepping on your toes and your authority. This is very dangerous. If you don’t nip this in the bud, it will get worse.”

When I arrived in Congo, the key issue was how to move Congo through a process that would lead to elections? We wanted to dialog with the various parties. We wanted to bring them together to reach some agreement so we could have elections. The peacekeeping operation there was a very expensive operation. Congo is a huge country. My mission when I first arrived was to establish contact with all the parties, foster some sort of dialogue, and get them to move to some sort of agreement where there could be elections that would help to reestablish legitimacy. After all, Kabila Senior had come to power on the back of a foreign government.

Q: Rwanda

HOOKS: The Rwandan military brought Kabila Senior to power. He had not been elected. He had been a rebel, and I occasionally had to remind President Joseph Kabila of that fact. He would characterize the opposition as rebels. I said, “Mr. President, bear in mind how your own father came into power.” He also came to power through a rebellion. Former President Mobutu initially treated Kabila Senior as an insignificant rebel. I said, “That’s part of the equation we are dealing with here, and it is one of the reasons why we are where we are today in terms of legitimacy and other questions.” He would recognize the fact in an intellectual sense, although he really didn’t want to hear it. However, to put things in perspective, I had to explain to him that part of the problem in Congo was the issue of legitimacy of the regime.

I had a very interesting situation in Kinshasa. There was a group called Le Groupe des singes (monkeys), a play on the French word Sages (wise men), composed of the UNSRSG, the Belgian ambassador, the American ambassador, the French Ambassador and the British Ambassador. We would meet once a week to discuss current issues. We occasionally would organize travel to rebel-held areas and bring in the Russians and Chinese for these trips. They were not part of the Groupe des Singes. They were part of the UN Security Council P-5, plus the Belgians. The purpose of these trips was to carry on a dialog with the various rebel groups in order to influence their behavior.

When I went off on my own to the east at one point the French ambassador was quite taken aback. He wanted to know why the American ambassador was going off on his own to visit with the rebels? The Belgian Ambassador and I explained that we all had

contacts with the rebels. It wasn't just the P-5. We needed to work together and coordinate within the Groupe des Singes, but that did not preclude everyone from having contact with the rebels by telephone and otherwise.

It was a fascinating period of time trying to work with the rebel groups. I traveled frequently to the territories held by the rebels. I was able to bring in a C-12 aircraft which used to be stationed in the Ivory Coast before being moved to Ghana. The C-12 was ideal for a country like Congo where there were no roads. The distances are enormous and I could visit each rebel group in the area they controlled..

Q: What kind of plane was it?

HOOKS: C-12.

Q: Could you describe it?

HOOKS: It's a twin engine, small aircraft that can carry about 18 people. The USG maintained 2 or 3 in Africa. The one we used in Congo was parked in Cote d'Ivoire and then Ghana. We could bring it in every few months and use it to fly around the country for about a week at the time to meet with contacts. It belonged to the U.S. Air Force. It can land on very short runways, unpaved of course. It was an invaluable asset to have. It allowed me to know all the various parties quite well because I met with them on a regular basis.

Q: I have seen newspaper accounts saying there is a war that is killing and displacing millions of people going on under sort of the canopy of the jungle practically and it is virtually unreported on. Was that fair to say or not?

HOOKS: Yes, it is fair to say. No one was really interested in it. One of the problems when you work in Africa is that you really don't have a constituency in the United States that is interested in what you are doing. The African American community has traditionally been focused on trying to improve its own situation in American society and, secondly, it is typical for the African American community to identify with all of Africa rather than just one or two countries. Because of the language barrier, the African-American community tends to have more contacts with the English-speaking countries of Africa. The community is generally not well informed on the specifics of any given country. Congo, of course is one that people didn't know very much about. There was very little coverage of events, especially in the eastern part of the country. It was very dangerous. There were no permanent correspondents out there. Occasionally people would come and go, but there was very little international reporting. You saw few news stories on CNN.

I recall that CNN covered the volcano eruption in Goma; the eruption made for spectacular photos. The cameramen would fly over it at night and photograph it. It looks great on CNN for 10 seconds, but there was very little coverage of what was happening even a few miles away. There was a UN force present, actually one of the most expensive

UN operations in history. There was no one back in Washington who was focused on it. No one in the Senate or House was really focused on it.

There was an African-American Congresswoman (McKinney) from Georgia who was interested in Congo, but I think she was not well regarded here in Washington as she was seen as too radical. Even though she was a democrat, she was extremely critical of the Clinton Administration. Unless there was some major event like a volcano or major offensive, there was no news coverage. Yes, there were still attacks on villages. People were being killed, but it wasn't a major war that got people's attention.

Q: You talk about major offenses. You know, it seems sort of like the tide going back and forth. From the point of view of an American diplomat, were you looking at who controls the government and if there is a major offensive it takes two thirds of the country and then recedes back, then an awful lot of people are killed and displaced . Does it have any lasting effect?

HOOKS: Well, it does have a lasting effect. Congo was one of the saddest cases in Africa. At independence in 1960 it had one of the best infrastructures on the continent. Yes, the Belgians, especially King Leopold, had exploited the country. However, in order to exploit he had to build infrastructure. When the Belgian Government took over from Leopold, it built infrastructure. In 1960 Congo was endowed with some of the best infrastructure in Africa.

While I was in Congo, driving outside Kinshasa was unthinkable; there were no viable roads. The climate is very unforgiving. Without proper maintenance, roads are reclaimed by the luxuriant vegetation. I recall a couple that had lived in Congo for many years; he was from Belgium, and she was from South Africa. They talked about when they got married in 1959 they drove from Cape Town to Kinshasa in a sports car. In 2001 and 2002 when I was there, it was simply unthinkable to drive from one city to another in Congo. There was a road that during the dry season led from Kinshasa to Matadi, but during the rainy season it was impassible. Driving anywhere else outside Kinshasa was impossible. The country was a wealthy country with vast resources, one of the wealthiest countries in the world in terms of resources. It has everything in abundance. It's got gold, diamonds, copper, oil offshore; it's got everything and yet Mobutu and company had ruined the country. The money had just been skimmed off; debt had piled up, domestic debt, foreign debt. Congolese somehow had accepted that. Unlike in Egypt where people take to the streets and riot if bread is raised a few pennies, somehow the Congolese had passively accepted not getting paid and watching as their standard of living declined.

Then Congo became in a sense the victim of the machinations of its neighbors because it was weak. Paul Kagame of Rwanda suddenly became the master of the situation in Congo. Many of those responsible for the genocide fled to Congo; some returned home while others remained in Congo. This created a problem for Kagame, who wanted to crush any opposition to his regime.

Kagame suddenly found that Mobutu was an old tiger who was losing his teeth, but was unwilling to step aside. He picked up Kabila, who was sort of a gadabout in eastern Africa, and put him nominally in charge of a rebellion that was little more than a front for Rwandan troops, who faced very little resistance as they moved across the country.

Zimbabwean troops complained bitterly about the fact that they would have a scrimmage with the Rwandans and the Congolese troops were drunk. Why should the Congolese fight? They were not getting paid, and if they got killed or wounded, no one took care of their families. As a result Kabila and the Rwandans were able to march across the country. Kabila was a very capricious guy, really paranoid. His management style was just as chaotic as that of Mobutu. He of course was very hungry and he wanted to skim off as much money as he possibly could.

Congo had at one time been one of the jewels of Africa that had really lost it all. I recall when I was there talking to students, many of them would comment that many of the facilities at the University of Kinshasa no longer functioned. The Olympic-sized pool with diving board was no longer functioning; it was just a breeding ground for mosquitoes. In the University library, you saw no books on the shelves, none, zero. Why? Because termites had gotten into the wooden shelves, so the librarians stored the books in an underground damp basement area of the library where there was one fluorescent light in the ceiling. To find a book you needed a flashlight to search the shelves. The musty smell of rotting books was overwhelming. Of course, the students couldn't get jobs when they graduated because diplomas were practically worthless as the standards had fallen to the wayside. Students could buy their grades and their diplomas.

The country had really gone down the drain, and people talked about the fact that the previous generation had had all sorts of benefits which the younger generation no longer had. It was sad to see the waste of human and natural resources in a country with so much potential. It takes talent to destroy that much in such a short period of time.

Culturally Congo was a very vibrant country. The music of Congo was heard throughout Africa. When I traveled around Africa with ACRI, I heard Congolese music in market places all over the continent.

Congo is a huge country; 60 million people being humiliated by smaller neighbors who then proceeded to exploit the country. Rwandans looted everything they could find: equipment, tools, furniture, etc. They dismantled equipment and took it back to Rwanda. The Rwandan army got involved in metal exploitation. Angolans creamed off what they could as well. It was a sad situation. Congo had been traumatized by the rapacious nature of Leopold's regime that had been somewhat moderated by the Belgian Government. Independence just sort of came overnight, instigated by a few politicians like Lumumba. Lumumba was not a manager, he was a politician. He was a great orator but not a manager. Within weeks of independence the government was beginning to come apart at the seams, and serious problems arose in the southern part of the country.

The country had really been traumatized for a hundred years. However, I never saw the abject poverty in Congo or elsewhere in Africa that I saw in Haiti. There were many poor people, and some cases of extreme poverty, but I never saw the generalized poverty in Africa that I saw in Haiti.

Q: What tools did you have? What sort of consulates did you have or did you have consulates?

HOOKS: We had no consulates. There had been a consulate in Lubumbashi in the south, but it had been closed well before my arrival in Kinshasa in 2001. We only had the embassy. We had very limited resources. Washington was unprepared to give very many resources, so basically we had to leverage the prestige we have as a superpower. When it came to money, the Belgians would step in and provide that. We never would. We were not going to provide troops. We were not going to provide any serious help, although we had previously had some serious aid programs back in the '60s, '70s and '80s. However, starting in 1991, all that was finished. There had been some riots in 1991 when Mobutu was first facing serious problems of security in Kinshasa itself. Mobutu basically let the troops loot as compensation for not getting paid. We were not going to put any funds in there, even for the election of the president.

Basically what I had to do was rely upon the political prestige of the United States to maintain a high profile in dealing with all the parties. It was important to all the parties to have a relationship with the United States, and that was the asset that I had.

Q: Basically, this was a write-off, isn't it? You had a government that didn't really rule most of its country.

HOOKS: That can be said for many countries in Africa where the government controls only a small part of its territory. When I was in Kinshasa, that was definitely the case. Rebel groups controlled various parts of the territory and Kabila and his government controlled less than half of the country. That was the reality of the situation.

One thing I think is important for the record; oftentimes Congo has been portrayed as the major pawn in the cold war in terms of Africa. I think that case is often overstated. That was something I thought about a lot when I was there. We had basically helped to bring Mobutu into power, and I think there is something to that, probably because Kasavubu, the first president, was so over his head. Patrice Lumumba was an eloquent loudmouth but not a serious politician in terms of being able to move the country forward. As a result, I think Washington and Brussels were looking to reestablish some degree of order. I think there was an effort to encourage Mobutu to launch a coup d'etat.

In the first few years he was in power, Mobutu was not too bad, but power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely. As his regime became more and more corrupt, he creamed off all the resources, not just a percentage but all the resources, and the country started going downhill. We didn't step in and say, 'OK, it's time to go.' We regretted the situation, but we didn't take an active role in getting him out. After all, there are many

other cases of corrupt rulers, but his is the most egregious one. He had more resources to play with, and he completely ruined the country.

He ruined it in every sense; he ruined it a financial sense, in terms of infrastructure that just crumbled, and he ruined it morally. Corruption was just a way of life. When I arrived in 2001, for instance, not one single landline was in the country, not one. Not a question of a few hundred or a few thousand, but zero. They were starting to get cell phones, but only in Kinshasa. But he completely ruined the infrastructure. The health system, of course, had collapsed. One saw only the shells of huge hospitals that the Belgians had built. The education system had collapsed.

Q: This in a way is one of the most harrowing accounts I have ever heard. Here is really a major country that is absolutely devastated and there doesn't seem to be any particular prospect of it recovering.

HOOKS: Well, I am optimistic about Congo and Congo's future, but it is one of the most dramatic cases of a country that has been slowly destroyed. One of the things I used to site as an example of that was the number of polio victims. I have never seen so many victims of polio as I have seen in Kinshasa, where you see lots of men, you don't see the women so much, mostly men crawling around on their hands and knees in the streets. They didn't have crutches or wheelchairs so grown men crawl around on the streets on their hands and knees. For less than a dollar they could have had an immunization that would have saved them from being victims of this disease. In other words, the money spent on buying one of Mobutu's palaces could have vaccinated the entire country from this disease.

There was something very demeaning, very humiliating about seeing a grown man crawling around the streets on his hands and knees like an animal. That was something I was very touched by. You would see everyday lots of people in this condition. If they had wheelchairs, the wheelchairs were provided by various humanitarian organizations, not by the government. To me that was symbolic of a country that was paralyzed by the way it was run and had been deeply humiliated.

You take a case like Congo, and then look at Japan. What resources does Japan have? They have few resources other than the people. Congo had everything, and yet somehow the people were denied the benefits of the wealth. The wealth was squandered for the personal benefit of a small coterie of people, and of course when money is free like that, it has no value. Mobutu just squandered billions, and at the end when he finally left, a sick and broken man, his country was also sick and broken.

All of a sudden Kabila came to power on the promise of getting rid of corruption and restoring democracy; he did neither. It was really one of the saddest cases of broken promises.

I remain optimistic about Congo for the fact that it does have resources. With the right management of the country, the people of Congo could live a very decent standard of

living, with decent health care, job opportunities and so forth. It's got water, sunshine, rich soil. It was a major agricultural producer under the Belgians. It could be a major producer today. It has an internal market of now about 65 million people. It could easily have industry. Whereas the South Africans are an engine of growth of the southern part of the continent, Congo should play that role in the middle part of the continent. Instead of being an agent of growth for the smaller, poorer countries in the region, it sort of drags down the rest of the continent because it is so big.

I think a few things are important to say in terms of policy. While in recent years the Bush administration has put more money into Congo, traditionally the African continent is always at the bottom of the scale in terms of strategic importance, and there are reasons for that. It also means we are not terribly engaged even politically, and this is something difficult for Africans to understand. They say, "You're the superpower. You should be doing all kinds of things." I heard that many times, "If you would just say the word," -- whatever that word is -- "then the security problem here would be solved and the country would be reunited." Whatever the problem was, many Congolese thought that the United States could resolve the issue. I tried to explain many times how we were in Afghanistan and how we had traded threatening words with the Taliban. It didn't work and we had been forced to invade and spent billions of dollars and still had not resolved that problem. It is easy to get engaged. It is hard however to work out an exit strategy.

In Congo, one of the problems was no one really wanted to engage. It was so big, so vast and with such serious problems, that most governments wanted very little engagement. Even the French, who led a peacekeeping operation because the UN forces couldn't do it up in the Ituri Region where there were really egregious human rights violations, had a very effective but limited engagement before turning the responsibility back over to the UN. A UN peacekeeping force was there, but a UN peacekeeping force is always handicapped by a mandate that is established in New York and does not always fit the circumstances on the ground. Many participating contingents either have limited capacity to perform or handicapped by their own command structure.

I will cite the example of the Uruguayans. At one point rebels were coming into the city of Bukavu. The UN was trying to block their entry. The South Africans were able to respond within 30 minutes. However, the Uruguayans took over three hours before they agreed to move. At that point it was pointless because the rebels had already taken over much of the city. The Uruguayans had first gotten in touch with their command in Montevideo, and given the time difference, where do you find someone at 2 or 3 o'clock in the morning in Uruguay who can make a decision, and what decision can they make if they are not on the ground? The Uruguayan contingent was basically ineffective.

Washington wanted Congo to move in the right direction, but was unprepared to invest very much to make that happen. I used the prestige of the United States as a superpower to have a very high profile in order to have political leverage with the various groups. They all wanted to have good relations with the United States. We were fortunate we didn't have a history of colonialism in Africa, and therefore we were not tainted as the French or Belgians or Brits. That helped us a great deal.

All the rebel groups wanted to have contact with me. I was in contact with them by telephone frequently. I traveled out to see them regularly, and that helped to build a relationship with them.

As you recall, Jean Pierre Bemba went into the Central African Republic several times in support of President Patassé, and when Bemba's troops went into a frenzy of looting and raping, Washington asked me to contact Bemba and demand that he put an end to the raping and looting. The fact that I knew Bemba and we were on a very first name basis meant that I could raise any subject with him. Naturally, he denied any misbehavior. I had to insist that it was serious misbehavior. He needed to bring a halt to it or it could have serious consequences for the future, which of course, it has: he is now before the International Criminal Court in the Hague.

Washington's policy for Congo was to bring about stability. I was urged to work toward finding a long-term solution, but Washington was not prepared to give resources to make that happen. As long as it remained relatively quiet, Washington was focusing on other issues and not on Congo. When there was some flare up, decision-makers would glance our way.

The South Africans took the lead and tried to put together a peace conference in Sun City. The goal was to bring all the parties together in an effort to reach some sort of agreement that would allow elections. Assistant Secretary of State Walter Kansteiner was very interested and worked closely with the South Africans. He asked me to go to Sun City to be supportive of the South Africans.

One of the things I found in dealing with South Africans, both in Congo and Ivory Coast, is that the South Africans don't fully understand the Francophone countries. They tend to overlook the fact that these are not South Africans; they are Congolese (or Ivorian). They have a different culture, they have a different political culture, and that led to a lot of confusion. South Africans did a lot of good, whether it was Mandela in dealing with Kabila and Mobutu or Sun City, but sometimes their arrogance and impatience with the Congolese made it difficult for them to play the role of mediator.

Q: From what I gather, I have never been to Africa, but Congo is forest jungle and South Africa doesn't have that. It is a whole different climate, culture, topography.

HOOKS: Exactly. It's a different climate, a different culture, and even the political culture is very different. When I went to South Africa to Sun City to maintain contact with the Congolese and to encourage them in the right direction, it was like trying to herd kittens in a small, shallow box.

The South Africans are very sensitive about their leadership role in Africa. When I went to Sun City, I met with the South African ambassador shortly after I got there. I knew him very well from Kinshasa. I explained the role that Walter Kansteiner envisioned for me, and offered to meet with President Mbeki's advisor handling the negotiations if she

wanted to see me. The South African ambassador called me a day or so later and said, “She would like to meet you. If you go to this hotel and to this room, she will be happy to meet with you.” He was not going to join us, however.

I went there and was ushered into a small sitting room. The receptionist said to me: “Please have a seat. She will be with you shortly.” The receptionist walked out and five minutes later another lady came in and sat down without introducing herself. We started talking and at first she was rather reserved. Then she got to the point where she was on edge and she said, “You know, you come here to Sun City and you are carrying on parallel negotiations with the Congolese without even letting us know.” I told her that I didn’t understand what she was referring to. First of all, the day I arrived I met with the South African ambassador (he had just joined us at that point) and I told him why I was there. I went on to say that Walter Kansteiner was in touch with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.” She angrily replied: “He hasn’t talked to me. I am the Minister of Foreign Affairs. He hasn’t mentioned this to me.” I said, “Well, maybe there is a communication problem, but I know Walter has been in touch with the Deputy Foreign Minister. I have known all the Congolese parties for some time, and I am here to encourage them to work with you on finding a solution.”

She accepted those explanations. When she looked at her Ambassador to Kinshasa, he just put his head down and said nothing. Thereafter, she wanted to see me quite frequently, and I knew that I had won her confidence when she called one Sunday afternoon and said, “Could you come over and brief me?” She had gone back to Pretoria and she said, “I haven’t even had time to take off my hat.” I said to myself: “Ah, she comes back from Pretoria and she calls me to find out what is going on, not her own Ambassador. That must mean I am useful to her.”

President Kabila sent two of his closest advisers to Sun City. I was frequently in touch with them, but I called President Kabila almost every day to brief him on my take of events and to give him a perspective that I doubted he was receiving from his advisers. I could also raise issues and encourage him to show more flexibility in his position. I missed a day calling him, and when I called the following day, he said, “You didn’t call me yesterday.” I said, “Well, I didn’t have anything to report to you.” He replied, “Well, I was waiting for your phone call.” I figured he found our conversations to be useful.

The Foreign Minister of South Africa called me at one point and asked me to call President Kabila and persuade him to accept a proposal the South Africans had put on the table. I said, “Madame Foreign Minister, I can do that and I will do that, but isn’t it better for you to call him? You are the hostess and you are running this conference. I suggest that you talk to him directly. I will be happy to call and tell him that the United States Government strongly endorses this view, but I think it is good for you to communicate with him directly. She said, “Well, I haven’t been able to get hold of him directly. If you could call him I think it would be very helpful.” I said, “I am happy to do so.”

It was interesting how we were able to play an important role in communications in Sun City in helping to bring about an agreement. I told various parties trying to hold out that

if they didn't come together, we would support a partial agreement and leave them aside. I tried to play the role of intermediary in close collaboration with South Africa. It was really a fascinating experience. Ultimately, there was a partial agreement that came out of that conference that led ultimately to the elections.

We were engaged; we had the prestige of being the superpower. The Congolese expected far more from us. Expectations were greatly inflated and unrealistic in what we could do. One of the challenges you face when you are ambassador in a country like Congo and you have so few resources available is managing expectations.

Q: Zaire and Mobutu had the reputation of being a CIA country where you had Mobutu who was supposed to be supportive of Savimbi. This was all open but I was wondering...

HOOKS: That occurred in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s.

Q: Oh, I understand that. My question is you had this huge country; you have only got a medium sized embassy, no consulates. How well were you served by the intelligence community? You've got missionaries, you've got other people: Military intelligence, central intelligence. Newspaper people, the media doesn't get in there very much. How well did you know what was going on in the country?

HOOKS: You have touched on a critical problem, which is communications. How do you get information? As you know, there are no serious newspapers. There were several newspapers, but they are basically rags. It is mostly editorial comment and highly politicized as the newspapers belonged to the parties or to the government. They engage in very little factual reporting. The press would sometimes bring your attention to the fact that there was a problem, but you won't necessarily understand what the nature of the problem was just by reading the press. What you have to do is rely upon personal contacts. It is a country where informal networks get things done. The economic sector is largely informal. Even in the government itself, things operate on a very informal basis. Institutions don't work very well. Personalities and political ties are what count. To get information you basically had to be in touch with people to find out what was going on.

There were no newspapers to keep me informed, there were no correspondents around the country reporting on events. Kabila's staff only knew what he was willing to share with them. He ran the government as a one man show. The situation was much the same out in the east. It was important to have personal contacts, to be on the phone, to visit them as often as you could in order to get information.

In addition to my political network, business people were very helpful. I found the missionary community to be very helpful, not as an intelligence network but as an information network. Many of them had been there two, three or four generations. They grew up in the country, and they had their own perspective, but they could at least tell you certain things that were happening in their areas and that was very helpful.

I worked closely with other embassies, although I had to be very careful with them. I was closest with the Belgian Ambassador of all the ambassadors. He was slightly flamboyant and wanted to play a big role. After all, where does Belgium get to play with the big boys? Not too many places in the world, but Congo was a case where they could. Indeed, they had more resources on the ground than anyone else. They had a large Belgian community, a lot of investments, and they were very jealous of the diamond flow into Antwerp to keep that industry alive and healthy. They had a lot of vested interests in Congo. They had lots of contacts. A lot of people had studied in Belgium, although their information wasn't always good. It was important to have several sources of information in order to get some sense of what was going on. Since all the rebel leaders wanted to have a relationship with the United States, they were very open to meeting with me and maintaining contacts.

Q: Did you ever feel under threat going around visiting and all?

HOOKS: Not at all. The rebels were too happy to see me and wanted to maintain a good relationship with the United States. I didn't see anyone as a threat. No one had a bone to pick with us, so to speak. They all wanted to be in our good graces, and therefore they all received me extremely cordially. When I talked to them on the phone, they were always very friendly. They welcomed that contact. They called me when they wanted to send a message. I served as a mediator between the various parties. For instance, if Kabila wanted to respond to Jean-Pierre Bemba, he would often ask me to pass the message to Bemba.

Q: So there wasn't this sitting there, OK, I am head of the state. You don't talk to rebels, kind of thing?

HOOKS: Joseph Kabila was a little more open and realistic. I am convinced that Kabila Senior would have been thrown out of power within a year or so had he not been assassinated because he was so capricious, so unpredictable and so provocative in his language.

Joseph succeeded his father and the provocative language stopped immediately. He was more willing to have contacts with the rebels. Of all the leaders Congo has had, I think he has been the best thing that has happened to Congo since independence.

You have to handle Joseph very carefully. In a one-on-one situation he and I had a very good relationship, and I could talk to him about any subject. In public he is very reserved and you couldn't communicate with him very well. I will give you an example. Kabila is very quiet, very reserved, and somewhat short. Bemba is a big tall guy, must be six feet three at least, a big burly guy, very loud, aggressive, very smooth in a certain way. He came from one of the wealthy families, educated in Belgium, very smooth, very charming guy, but very aggressive. He and Joseph were total opposites of each other.

Joseph didn't like talking with Bemba because Bemba would launch full force into a list of his grievances. He raised every resentment, and poor Joe would just sit there and listen to all this and then hang up the phone.

I was trying to facilitate communications between them. The president felt that Bemba should call him. Bemba felt that Kabila should initiate the call. I recall at one point trying to talk to these two guys to re-establish contact. I said to Kabila: "Mr. President, you are the president. You want to be accepted as the president. You should call him." Kabila replied: "When I call him he goes into a long litany of all his problems." I told the President that I understood. I told him that I would coach Bemba to make sure that Bemba toned down his approach.

I called Bemba and told him that Kabila was going to call him. I said: Jean-Pierre, Kabila is going to call you, and when he does you say, how are you? Things are going fine. Thank the President for calling, and that's about it. Don't raise any complaint whatsoever, because if you do, you overwhelm the guy, so no complaints." I had to coach him on what he was supposed to say. I told Bemba that Kabila feels intimidated when Bemba talks to him. Bemba said: "OK, OK, fine." I told Bemba that a successful first contact would encourage Kabila to call him more often, and they could get into the substance of issues, but that he could not unload both barrels during the first conversation.

Bemba agreed to do so. Finally Bemba called the president and they started talking back and forth. That helped to build a relationship between the two of them that started moving towards a dialogue and ultimately towards the elections, although after elections the process fell apart.

Initially, President Kabila had been adamant that he wanted no vice president. He ultimately decided to have three vice-presidents, and that was a very clever move on his part. One vice president was a threat, but three vice presidents were a committee, and committees don't work very well.

When I was there the country was undergoing an evolution, and I give credit largely to President Kabila. He toned the rhetoric down, he was open to contact, he was open to mediation, and he was willing to make a decision to share a degree of power in order to bring the rebel groups in as vice presidents along with one of his own guys. It did not water down the institution of the Presidency, but it brought the rebels into the fold and made it possible for the country to move toward elections. The time I was there was in the preparatory phase, trying to move the country toward elections, trying to improve communications and trying to repair the fences to a degree they could actually move to elections.

I remain optimistic about Congo due to the fact they did go through elections and the elections were relatively fair and free elections. That was very good. The government has not been terribly responsive afterwards, but it will take time.

This is a county that has vast resources and potential. Some countries have very little potential. Congo has huge resources, and if the resources are properly managed, the population could have a decent standard of living. The institutions of course have to be strengthened but elections were a step in the right direction.

I still remain optimistic. I think there are some very talented younger politicians there. They have to be given a chance to gain experience in governance. The aftermath of corruption is extremely difficult to deal with. When there is a climate of corruption, it is very hard to overcome it, simply because that's the way it is done. It would require, of course, more transparency and more oversight, but over time I think that will be the case.

Q: You left there when?

HOOKS: I left there in 2004.

Q: And then what?

HOOKS: I went to Cote d'Ivoire.

Q: What was the role of other embassies in the Congo?

HOOKS: We often tried to coordinate policy positions within the P-5 countries (United States, France, Russia, Britain, China), and we traveled as the P-5 to visit rebel groups and to meet the Government. I was often asked as a matter of fact to be the spokesperson for the group as the Russians and Chinese did not want to take on that role at all, and the French were reluctant to do so because some of the rebel groups often attacked the French for siding with the Government. There were times when we traveled as the P-5 plus Belgium, and this is why I mentioned Kinshasa's unique situation. This is where Belgium had a unique role because of historical reasons that they probably do not have anywhere else in the world. The Belgians played a very positive role there. In fact, they probably had one of the most active embassies in Kinshasa and were very involved in a number of issues.

There were also other African embassies that were involved. The South Africans in particular were involved in trying to mediate the conflict.

To come back to the P-5; as we traveled as the P-5, for instance, each of us was frequently asked to say something. We designated a spokesperson who would speak on behalf of the P-5, and then each would have a chance to reinforce that particular message. The Chinese never wanted to speak. They were by circumstances oftentimes required to at least say yes, we agree, the issue is important, something very innocuous. The Russians would sometimes say something. There was an interesting Russian ambassador but the Chinese were very reticent. They did not want to engage themselves at all on these issues. The Russians were not quite to the point the Chinese were, but they didn't want to take a very forward position. I found that very interesting.

I referred last time to the group des singes, not the group des sages. The group des sages would be the group of wise men. The group des singes is the group of monkeys as a play on the French words, and this group was composed of the UN representative, the Belgians, the U.S., France and Britain. We met about once a week as a group to discuss various issues. Particularly when the UN follow-up committee met, we would oftentimes meet beforehand to discuss the agenda, really to try to set the agenda and to coordinate our own efforts so that when we got into the broader follow-up committee, we could frame the discussion, let's say. One would raise the issue and others would support that particular point of view so there were no surprises to anyone. We were involved at different levels. In the follow-up committee there were various other countries involved, African countries as well, that sometimes raised issues.

In terms of human rights, I think the Belgians and the U.S. probably were the most active in raising human rights issues.

Q: It strikes me what you are talking about here is almost unique. It is a bunch of concerned nations presiding over a sick one.

HOOKS: Clearly Congo was a very sick country. The country was divided into five parts. The government in Kinshasa was composed of one of the first rebel groups to arrive in power, and then there were other rebel groups that were really spinoffs of that first one and trying to overthrow it. Independence came at such a rapid and dramatic pace that the country was really not ready in many respects for independence. It didn't have great leaders initially. Lumumba was a very eloquent orator, but an incompetent manager as prime minister. Kasavubu was President, although I can't quite figure out why he was ever chosen president in the first place. He was a nonentity in many respects and played a very low key role, but he and Lumumba began to clash very quickly as each tried to have the monopoly of power. Each began to defy the other in a very dramatic fashion, and that set the stage for chaos. In that situation, Mobutu as Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces was able to take over very easily. He was in power for thirty some years and completely destroyed the country since he knew nothing about management. He basically just sucked the resources out of the country, a country that is very wealthy.

As you recall, I made the analogy of what does Denmark have besides Danes? They don't even have sunshine for much of the year. What do the Japanese have besides Japanese? In Congo they have every possible metal that you can think of in large abundance. They have diamonds, they've got gold, almost everything, copper, even petroleum offshore and yet the resources were so badly managed that the country was deeply in debt. Infrastructure had been completely neglected for 30 some years. As a result the country was sick.

Mobutu, as a result of prostate cancer, was arriving at the end of his life and was weak and unable to govern, but unwilling to leave. There was no one at the helm, so to speak, and the ship of state was adrift.

It was very easy, given Mobutu's record, for Kagame to pick up Kabila, who was a bit of an adventurer involved in all sorts of deals, mostly having to do with bars and prostitution and this sort of thing, and someone whom Che Guevara dismissed as not a serious revolutionary. Kabila wasn't terribly serious, and Kagame thought he could control Kabila and use him as a front to take over Congo to get rid of Mobutu. And Kagame was quite successful, primarily because the Rwandans were very disciplined and the Congolese military were... to say badly trained would be too much of a positive statement; they were not trained. They were not equipped. They were not supplied and they did not have good command. All this simply led to a situation where they would run from the Rwandans as the Rwandans approached. As a result, the Rwandans simply marched across the country. It is a huge country; it took several months to do that, but Kabila was able to take over.

Kabila being Kabila, his head began to get bigger and bigger as he approached Kinshasa. He wanted to be independent of Kagame. Bear in mind the chief of staff of Congo was a Rwandan, James Kabarebe, whom Kabila fired and dismissed the Rwandans serving in Kinshasa. Kagame was absolutely outraged by this and tried to launch an attack to get rid of Kabila.

Kagame's plan didn't work largely because the Angolans stepped in. The Angolans were very happy with Kabila. Mobutu, after all, had been a supporter of Savimbi for many years. The Angolans had a bone to pick with Mobutu, but the Angolans felt that Kabila was someone that would be useful for their purposes so they thwarted the attempt of the Rwandans to take over a second time.

When I arrived in Kinshasa, Kabila, Senior had just been killed and his son, who was 29 at the time, had just been named by the party barons on an interim basis with the thought in mind that here was a young man they could control. They couldn't decide among themselves who should step into those shoes, and so they felt that perhaps Joseph would be a compromise and they would be able to control him. This is the stage we have to set when talking about Congo. It was a very sick country, a country without institutions, the judicial system totally corrupt and ineffective, the legislative branch, of course, didn't exist and the executive also was very weak. The economy was largely informal and badly managed. Obviously, when Kabila came to power, he justified his rebellion as a way to get rid of corruption and dictatorship. He simply inherited that structure and took great advantage of it. As a matter of fact, he was signing and annulling contracts before he arrived in Kinshasa. When he was in Lubumbashi, he was signed contracts to get the signing bonus, and then he annulled them. That does not help the investment climate.

Q: How would you describe the role of the non-governmental agencies and international agencies there?

HOOKS: I would say Congo was a theater for almost every international agency you can possibly think of. In many cases these agencies were doing a lot of good. They were doing inoculations, they were dealing with human rights, and they were providing schooling and food. They were involved in areas of health and education and human

rights and all sorts of things. There were many such organizations there, spread throughout the country. There were of course cases where people on the ground lost their lives; the International Red Cross lost employees.

I might add parenthetically here that Congo, particularly when it had to do with Rwandan refugees, was also a country where international organizations often have a very messianic approach toward their business. They are there on a mission. It isn't just a job; it is also a mission, and it does take a unique personality to do this. Often they go off in very dangerous areas and do a lot of good work.

You may recall that about half a million Rwandan refugees came across the border and were parked there and didn't want to go back home. A number of international organizations stepped in, and I think there are lessons perhaps to be learned from this experience. First of all, they allowed the Hutu leadership to maintain control of the refugee camps and to keep their arms. They were providing food and other things. They created a situation where the international community was providing food and clothes and medicine to armed rebels. That raises a serious question. When you've got guys who have just been accused of genocide running a refugee camp of 10,000 - 20,000 people and the international community is giving them food and shelter, you create a moral dilemma. No refugee in the camp got food unless the armed rebels allowed it.

The second thing had to do with the fact when the Rwanda community did go back, some of the international community tried to block that process. The international agencies were aghast because they felt the refugees couldn't go back unless the international agencies determined that the conditions were right. This was a situation where international organizations sometimes get in the way and have a distorted view of their mission. They felt they had to certify that conditions were right in Rwanda in order for these refugees to go back. Everything had to be under their control. However, refugees simply left the camps and walked back to Rwanda. The international organizations were stunned and almost panicked because they were not controlling, they were not overseeing, they were not monitoring. People just simply walked out of the camp and headed back to Rwanda. I think this is a very serious issue. I think the first issue I raised here of their providing food to the military command structure that had been responsible for genocide raised very serious questions. When the people decided they wanted to go back and international organizations tried to block their movement because the international organizations were not controlling the movement, that also raised serious moral questions. People should have their freedom to decide. If you are a refugee and want to go back home, who is better able to decide that than yourself? An international organization should not have the right to say, "No, I know better than you do" about whether you have the right to go back to your homeland.

I think this was an interesting phenomenon. I have not seen that so much elsewhere, although I do know that sometimes international organizations take a very aggressive stance on issues. However, let me quickly add in context that the international organizations by and large are doing much good in Congo. They saved many lives. The people that are there have taken great risks, oftentimes losing their own lives in the

process. It is just because of these unique circumstances international organizations played a negative role at a specific point in time.

Q: Was there any tie between these organizations and the various groups of country representatives in the embassies? You know, the ones you mentioned; the P-5 and the organization of the wise men and other people.

HOOKS: The response is no direct control, obviously, but all of us saw these people all the time. There were UN organizations, which obviously the P-5 and others have a direct relationship with, direct in the sense that the P-5 are permanent members of the Security Council and play a leading role in the Security Council, an international organization we funded, of which a fourth comes from the United States.

The funding for most of these organizations comes from the United States or European Union countries. So there was an indirect relationship. The P-5 or group of states did not control these groups. All of these groups want to have independence and want to have relationships with embassies on their own terms. They want to be seen as being totally independent, and I think that by and large is very good.

So the relationship was one where all of us as ambassadors knew these people and saw them frequently. After all, they had tremendous contacts. They knew a lot of what was going on, and so we had a lot of contact with them.

Q: You mentioned the Belgians. The history of Belgium in the Congo is pretty dismal, certainly up to independence of Congo. One has to read the book Leopold's Ghost and other accounts of, Heart of Darkness, all this business of what Belgium had done. They had really exploited the Congo. Was this a Belgium sort of acting as Germany did after World War II of trying to make up for the past?

HOOKS: Let's be very careful when we refer to the Belgians.

Q: Leopold was a Belgian, was he not?

HOOKS: He was. He was the king of the Belgians. But bear in mind that Congo was the personal property of Leopold, not part of Belgium, but personal property of Leopold for a number of years, from 1888 until the early 1900s. The government of Belgium had no control over it. In that period of time there was tremendous exploitation.

Q: It also sounds like a damned good excuse. I mean, there were Belgians doing this stuff.

HOOKS: Yes, you are right, but it was not under the control of the Belgian government. In fact, the Belgian government took over Congo because of these abuses and the publicity that was arising out of it. So there are two different periods here; I am not trying to apologize for the Belgians.

Q: I served in Yugoslavia and Serbia for five years and I understand these distinctions.

HOOKS: This was a situation where it was the personal property of Leopold and not under the control of the Belgian government, although he obviously as king was the head of state. But it was personal property and major abuses occurred.

I think there are two things you have to bear in mind; under Leopold's time, yes, he wanted to exploit resources, but he did invest a large fortune in the country to build up infrastructure so he could exploit it and make a much larger fortune. That is an important point to make; yes, he did build infrastructure and he did bring about organizational control, brutally exploiting the country in the process.

When the Belgians took over, the exploitation continued but on a much more humane scale and there was significant development of the country. One of the points that is important to make is that in 1960, when independence came, Congo had one of the best infrastructures in Africa. If you see the movie Lumumba, how does Lumumba leave Kinshasa? He left Kinshasa in a large American car; not a 4x4, but a large American car.

The roads were very good in those days, health care was very good and this was a sign of the stage of development. People oftentimes refer to the fact that there were only two or three university graduates, which is true. A university diploma is a great thing, but it refers more to the technical side. People are intelligent and have skills without being university graduates. I am sure many of the crowned heads of Europe were not university graduates at the time. Belgium had invested a great deal in terms of infrastructure and the sad part is that the 1950's were peak years for investment in infrastructure in Congo, and following independence in 1960, investment in infrastructure ceased. That is one of the things that turned Congo into a sick country by the year 2000.

Q: Back to my question. Did you feel that the Belgians as a government and as a people felt that they had a certain amount of guilt in the Congo? Was this sort of compensation?

HOOKS: Yes, the answer is a very definite yes. The Belgians did feel a sense of guilt and a sense of responsibility for Congo, one of the reasons why they continued to invest in the country. If the Congolese, for instance, needed a bridge loan for an IMF loan, they would turn to the Belgians and the Belgians would provide it. The Belgians did feel they had a responsibility and a sense of guilt for what had transpired.

Q: One last question. This is a more technical, sort of a Foreign Service question. At the turn of the century when you were the ambassador, how would you say that compared to what you had seen particularly in your earlier years, the change in communications with the State Department? Talk about the internet, the various things. It's a different world, isn't it?

HOOKS: I recall when I came into the Foreign Service in 1971, we had a presentation at one point and someone said that the day will come when everyone will have a computer on his desk. We thought, wow. I think the first time I had a computer on my desk was in

1990 when I was in Israel, almost 20 years after I joined the Foreign Service. I think the first computer I ever saw in my section was in 1986 when I was in Haiti. We all shared the same computer.

The Foreign Service has changed in a technical sense. In 1971 most people would write out a rough draft in longhand and give it to a secretary who would type it on a green form with the carbon copies behind. When editing, you placed a little slash mark in between because you did it double space and edits were placed there. Of course, people were hesitant to edit because too much editing required the telegram to be retyped, and since you were always meeting deadlines, that was always a problem. Communicators had to type it over again into our system and send it off.

I used to do ‘memcons’ and send them off on special forms. When I left the Ivory Coast two years ago, you did your own cable directly onto the computer. In my case I would get clearances if I wanted other people to see my draft before I sent it. You hit the “Enter” button and off it goes to Washington. That was a tremendous change.

I would say the biggest change in the Foreign Service really had to do with more a social change.

Q: I will come to that in a minute but what about what sort of consultation instructions or what have you with the State Department? Was there much made about ambassadors really aren't necessary because we can communicate directly and all that? It is a bunch of nonsense but at the same time, how about working with the State Department? Had it changed?

HOOKS: That's an interesting question, and in some ways I think the State Department hasn't changed all that much in the way it manages things except that communications have made it possible for Washington to get more involved in issues. You pick up the phone and call very easily. It wasn't all that easy back in the 1970s, but even so do you still need ambassadors in embassies in countries? Yes, you do, because in many places communications are still very difficult, and although the cell phone is helping to leap frog many generations, communications still remain an issue. When crises arise, as they always do, you need people on the ground. If there is a coup or something happens or if all of a sudden al-Qaeda is involved in a country in Africa, who is there on the ground to know how we deal with the government? You always need people on the ground.

I think Washington sometimes forgets that, in many societies, personal contact is extremely important. You just can't call up people in the government and say, Hi, my name is John Doe from the American Embassy and I would like to have the following information, even if it is innocuous. In many countries in Africa, people want to know who you are and why you want to know. They will not give out information to you as we do in the United States, even if the information is in the public domain.

What do you do in case of an emergency? For instance, if a plane crashes in northern Ivory Coast, whom do you get in contact with? When Kabila was coming into Kinshasa,

we sent U.S. Marines to Brazzaville across the river in case American citizens needed protecting. How do you get authorization for flights and for foreign troops to be located at the airport? You need an embassy there.

Globalization is not new. It has been going on since the most ancient of times, but it is coming faster and faster. Whether it is health issues, disease, AIDS, or other issues, there are pandemics without borders and there are certain issues that have to be dealt with on a global basis. The United Nations is an important institution. I think the Obama Administration recognizes it's an important institution. You have to deal with the governments that are a part of that decision making process. We need resources from around the world. There are so many reasons. I could go on and on about that.

In terms of Washington, I don't think things have changed too much. When you are in a country where Washington has a great deal of interest, the State Department wants to control everything very closely. When you are in a country where Washington has fewer interests, the policy is that you are the one who runs the show as long as the country remains quiet. That has a certain attraction to it in some respects. The Secretary of State rarely reads anything about Ivory Coast or Congo unless there is a coup or something dramatic taking place. As a result, you are left on your own to run the embassy the way you think it should be run and to feed into the policy process. Since no one very senior is involved in the process, your suggestions are oftentimes adopted as policy.

Q: You left the Congo when?

HOOKS: I left the Congo in 2004.

Q: And then you immediately went to the Ivory Coast?

HOOKS: I did.

Q: How did this appointment come about?

HOOKS: It came about in April of 2002 when Walter Kansteiner, the Assistant Secretary of State, called me and asked, "Where would you like to go next?" It is a year long process. I discussed my wish list and then he said, "I'd like you to go to the Ivory Coast. Would you be willing to go there?" I said, "Yes" because Ivory Coast in fact had been my first choice instead of going to Congo in 2001.

The personnel process itself is a very interesting one when it comes to ambassadors. I think in that particular year it was unique in the sense that the process did not work as it usually does. Normally, when the bureau selects someone, the process moves forward. It is not automatic because at every stage people have the option to say no, but this was a unique year in which my name went to the 'D Committee' which changed assignments. I recall the P/DAS called me and said, "I have good news and bad news for you. You have been named, you do have a post, but it is not Ivory Coast." The D Committee decided to switch my name and send me to another country and send the person the bureau had

chosen for another post to Ivory Coast. Clearly a mistake was made, but unfortunately it wasn't easy to turn around. Walter Kansteiner had to go to the Undersecretary to get that turned around. Then I went off to Ivory Coast.

Q: You were in Ivory Coast from when to when?

HOOKS: 2004 to 2007.

Q: 2004 you are getting ready. You have been an African hand for a long time so what had you known about the Ivory Coast and how stood the Ivory Coast when you went out there?

HOOKS: I think the reason Walter wanted me to go was because of my experience in Brazzaville during the civil war. I had been in the Central African Republic at the time we reopened the embassy. I had been with the African Crisis Response Initiative which was the program to train African military peacekeeping skills. I had been in Kinshasa dealing with the large UN contingent there, dealing with various rebel groups, trying to move them back to an agreement of some type to lead to elections. I think Walter wanted someone with experience in dealing with crises to go to Ivory Coast.

What was the situation in Ivory Coast at the time? Ivory Coast, as you recall, was traditionally the most Francophone country in Africa. Abidjan was called the 'Paris of Africa'. Houphouët-Boigny, the first president of Ivory Coast, had been a minister in the French government. He was really the anchor of French policy in Africa because he was very pro-French. He was in office from 1960 to 1993 when he died. He stayed much too long in power. Starting in the 1980s, Ivory Coast began to have serious economic problems. It did not have a lot of natural resources and oil had not yet been discovered off-shore. It was primarily an agricultural country, principally cocoa beans. Ivory Coast still provides about 40% of all cocoa exports in the world.

But starting in the 1980s, the Government had so taxed that product that production was stagnating, even slightly declining. Houphouët-Boigny was trying to build up a middle class in Ivory Coast, but it came at the expense of the rural poor. Many people talk about how the educated youth were spoiled. Houphouët-Boigny gave scholarships to young Ivorians to study in France, then brought them back and provided them with apartments and cars. How are you going to pay for all that? You have to increase taxes so the gap between the government bureaucracy and the population began to widen. It was an unsustainable budget deficit. So in the 1980s Ivory Coast started having serious difficulties.

Houphouët-Boigny maintained a one-party system for a period of time. In 1990 he made it legal for other political parties to form. The elections of 1990 were closely controlled. His first opponent was as a matter of fact Gbagbo, the current president. Houphouët-Boigny was in power for 33 years. Because he dominated politics for so long, he left a vacuum in his wake. Houphouët-Boigny was a highly respected leader in Africa. Having spent quite some time in Ivory Coast, I see you him in a different light. He was a very

talented politician in some respects, but he was too imbued with the cultural background of Africa that once you are the chief, you are the chief for life. So he stayed there until the end of his life. He could have been regarded as a great leader had he left after 10 years, 20 years max, but he stayed for 33. At the end he was not governing very well.

Secondly, he chose as his successor Henri Konan Bédié, who was not a talented politician. He is a man without much of a vision. He loved money. He seemed also to have a serious problem with alcohol. There were lots of rumors as to why Houphouët-Boigny chose him to be his successor. Bédié did not have the charisma of Houphouët-Boigny. He was not an intellectual. He was not decisive. State institutions were too weak to sustain the transition. He controlled the elections in 1995 and was reelected, in part by disqualifying Ouattara, the current president.

Ouattara came to the United States on a scholarship but with a passport from Upper Volta, now called Burkina Faso. He later worked at the IMF. In the early 1990s Houphouët-Boigny brought him to Ivory Coast and made him prime minister. When H-B died in 1993, Ouattara tried to make himself president, but under the constitution, it was the head of the National Assembly who becomes president. H-B put Bédié in that position expressly for that purpose.

So when H-B died in 1993, there was arm wrestling over the succession. Bédié came out on top. Unfortunately the 1990s was also bad economically for Ivory Coast and the world was changing in a political sense. Bédié disqualified Ouattara in the 1995 elections on the basis that Ouattara was not Ivorian. Ouattara maintains that he is Ivorian as both his parents are from Ivory Coast. But borders in Africa are somewhat artificial and people go back and forth and have relatives on both sides. It is sometimes difficult to establish where people are from.

Let me backtrack slightly. When I was in Brazzaville, Congo President Lissouba published his autobiography in 1997, and he started off by saying he is one of the few Africans of his generation who knew exactly the date of his birth because he was born on the day the explosion occurred in a factory close by. He could therefore pinpoint exactly the date of his birth. In our society, we are very precise. We were born on a specific date and a specific place. That degree of specificity does not always exist in certain cultures. It's sort of more over there, you know, near the border. It was sometime after the death of your grandmother and before the death of your uncle. That's sort of a loose timeframe and so it is not always so precise. So the question was where was Ouattara born? This became a major issue and still haunts the country to this day.

I first went to Cote d'Ivoire in early December of 1999. This was the first training program with ACRI. We were training Ivorian military in peacekeeping skills. The concern we had in training the military in Africa was the same the School of Americas had in Georgia. We did not want to train military that would get involved in a coup. I met with the American Embassy, with the French embassy and with Ivorian authorities to talk about the military in Cote d'Ivoire. Everyone was absolutely unanimous and very categorical: A coup d'état in Cote d'Ivoire is unthinkable and cannot happen. There is no

tradition, there is no precedent, and there is no military culture here. The armed forces are very small. They are controlled by civilians, which was true and therefore unlike other countries in West Africa, a coup was simply unthinkable.

Two weeks later there was a coup. It did not start that way, however. There were simply unhappy soldiers. It was December 24, Christmas Eve. There were soldiers who were unhappy that had not been paid their bonuses. In the barracks as they were thinking about the holidays, they began to get a little riled up. A few of them went over to the Presidential Palace and insisted that they be paid for the Holidays. President Bédié, according to all the reports I have, including from the French, was in a high state of inebriation and basically dismissed them as “les petits” meaning the boys. Basically, he told the soldiers to get out. That did not set too well with the military, and they basically said, “You get out of here.” Bédié, not being a very strong character, simply opened up the door of the tunnel from his residence to the French Embassy and took off running to the French Embassy. He announced to the French Ambassador: “They’ve thrown me out.”

The French were in the process of changing their policies in Africa. They had intervened in Bangui in 1996. They decided not to intervene in Brazzaville when I was there in 1997. They decided they no longer wanted to play the gendarme in Africa. However, they had a defense agreement with Ivory Coast and suddenly they were facing a coup. The French were facing a quandary.

It is a tragedy because it has disrupted the political evolution of Ivory Coast, but it is almost comical in that it could so easily have been turned around. If Bédié had been even the least bit clever, he would have said: “Ok, guys, here’s \$20,000. Go have fun. That would have resolved it, but instead he condescendingly ordered them out of his palace. Then when they said, “We’re not going. You’re going.” He just took off for the French Embassy. It was incredible.

Once that process got started, the situation turned into a coup d’état. The soldiers were all sergeants and corporals. They thought they needed a known officer as a face for the new situation, so they called General Guéi and put him in charge. You notice in the first press interview that was done, every time a question was posed to General Guéi, he looked over his shoulder at the soldiers behind him before replying. General Guéi was unsure of his position and wanted to make sure that the soldiers were in total agreement. At that time he was not in control. Later on he got rid of those soldiers and that led to a second coup in 2002.

Let’s come back to the coup that occurred in 1999. There were regularly scheduled elections in the year 2000. General Guéi tried to control them and stopped the counting process and declared himself victor. The international community and Gbagbo, who was the only serious candidate that was allowed to run because others were disqualified including Ouattara, refused to accept that turn of events. Bédié was also disqualified from running. Guéi thought he could easily beat Gbagbo.

People took to the streets. Some were Gbagbo supporters, others just citizens who wanted to register their rejection of Guéi's tactics. Guéi was not of strong character and caved in. It is interesting that the Supreme Court made a quick ruling and announced that Gbagbo won. I don't think that the votes were ever counted. Some people have suggested that there were interesting discussions between Gbagbo and the head of the Constitutional Court.

There was a new paradigm in place and Gbagbo came to power. However, the international community did not think the elections were legitimate. Even President Thabo Mbeki of South Africa called for new elections in Ivory Coast. Gbagbo said: "No. We had elections. I am not the one who controlled the elections. I am not responsible for the fraud." He was obviously involved in fraud to some degree but he said, "I didn't control the elections. I am not responsible for the fraud. I am the president of the country. No new elections for five years."

That immediately raised questions of legitimacy of the Gbagbo Administration. We still maintain sanctions on Ivory Coast based on the first coup of 1999. We did not accept the elections of 2000 as legitimate elections and therefore we did not lift the sanctions. That remained an element of contention in our relationship with the Gbagbo Administration.

Then in 2002 many of the same soldiers who had been involved in the coup in 1999 tried a coup again. It was the worst possible coup. There are generally three outcomes for coups. The first is to fail, in which case the coup is over. The results are generally not very good for the rebel leaders. The second option is to succeed, in which case the coup leaders come into power and there is a resolution, not for those in power but there is a resolution of the crisis. The worst situation is when you had a semi-successful coup. There is no resolution of the crisis, and power is divided between two warring factions. That is what happened in Cote d'Ivoire. Again, the French hesitated. The Ivory Coast was too important to let go down the drain, but President Chirac was not interested in saving Gbagbo's hide. Gbagbo never forgave Chirac for not intervening. Neither did the rebels, who claimed the French did interfere in the process, and without French intervention, they could have overthrown Gbagbo.

Q: Cote d'Ivoire is the main foothold of France in Africa.

HOOKS: Correct. And so the French hesitated. As a result, Cote d'Ivoire faced a semi-successful coup. Cote d'Ivoire is shaped roughly like this book, from the coast up to the north. The country was divided in the middle, which is also the fault line by and large between the Muslim part of the country and the southern Christian and Animist populations. Gbagbo controlled the southern part. He did not recognize the rebels and initially refused to negotiate with them. Who is the rebel leader? The rebels choose Guillaume Soro, the current prime minister. Who was Soro? He had been head of the FSCI student organization sponsored by Gbagbo at the university. Gbagbo had set up FSCI as an opposition movement to the official student organization, and one of the first heads of that organization was Soro. The former professor and his student protégée found themselves in opposite camps. Now they made up and were working closely together as

president and prime minister. Bear in mind that political alliances in Cote d'Ivoire are generally very flexible as they are based on shared interests in a given situation, and as the situation changes, the coalition evolves.

This was the situation. The country was divided. We still have sanctions. Legitimacy was a major issue when I arrived there in 2004.

Q: Before you went out to Cote d'Ivoire, did you talk to the French Embassy or did you stop in Paris to sort of see how they stood on things?

HOOKS: I stopped in Paris for consultations. That is traditional when you go to a Francophone country except Kinshasa, in which case you go through Brussels. The new American ambassador traditionally stops in Paris to brief with the French because the French are in most cases the largest embassy on the ground and certainly the most influential in many respects, although that is changing. One of the problems in Cote d'Ivoire was the frosty relationship between Gbagbo and the French. The French did not have a coherent policy in Africa. Their policy was evolving, but it had not yet solidified. Gbagbo blamed the French for not stopping the coup d'etat. In fact, the French were in an impossible situation. Gbagbo blamed the French because, during the coup in 2002, the French hesitated instead of stopping the coup right away, and then they got involved, which led the rebels to maintain that they could have taken over if the French hadn't interfered. So the French were the scapegoat for both sides.

When I arrived in Abidjan in August, 2004, that was the situation. Washington wanted me to work toward the reunification of the country and to bring the country to elections, which would reestablish legitimacy, put the country back on the rails and start the country moving forward. So that was the mandate I had.

Q: Back to the picture when you were getting there. The French had had this very large expatriate community and troops. How stood these? Had they all gone to the southern side of the line or what?

HOOKS: In most countries in Africa the capital is the largest city and the largest business center. Most of the French community was in Abidjan, although not exclusively. There were some who had been there for many generations, some were married to Ivorians, and there were a lot of small business people. They were all over the country. In fact there were over 9,000 when I arrived, much below the 20,000 plus in years immediately after independence. There was also a large Lebanese community.

I faced an interesting situation when I arrived in Abidjan in 2004. I knew that a government in trouble always wants to co-opt the American ambassador because we are the only superpower. We are also a P-5 country. There is always a desire to cozy up to the American ambassador in an effort to have a harmonious relationship with Washington. When I arrived, the cultural attaché was a unique woman. She was originally from Eritrea and spoke abysmal French, but she had gotten to know a lot of people in the government, including President and Mrs. Gbagbo.

Q: Who was the culture attaché?

HOOKS: Ergibe Boyd. She was in touch with President Gbagbo, who agreed to delay the next ceremony to receive credentials until I arrived. Every two or three months he would receive new ambassadors in batches of two to five. I arrived on a Thursday evening, and on Friday morning I had a 9 o'clock appointment to present my credentials to the Foreign Minister and at 11 o'clock to see the President. That's really unique. Sometimes you have to wait months. In fact, the Congolese ambassador had waited almost a year.

Until you present your credentials to the foreign minister you cannot be involved in activity outside the Embassy, and until you present credentials to the president you cannot be involved in too much official activity. You have to be very careful because countries are generally sensitive about protocol. If the American ambassador were to start meeting people before presenting credentials, it would be regarded as a slight to the government. You have to wait in your embassy and not do much other than deal with your own staff. I was very fortunate I was able to start working officially right away.

President Gbagbo received me very warmly. I know that he wanted co-opt me. Indeed, shortly after I got there one of his counselors came to see me. She wanted to know what my policy agenda looked like. I explained our policies, which was to foster conditions that would lead to elections and the reunification of Cote d'Ivoire. I explained that there would be no major change during my time. I would continue more or less as my predecessor had done. There will be a difference in style, probably, but the substance would not change dramatically.

She said, "We did not like your predecessor. In fact she was very much in favor of the rebels." I remarked that I did not think that was the case. I think she simply had contacts with the rebels as all American ambassadors have contact with everybody. That's often an issue in countries with weak democratic traditions. I told her that I intended to have contact with the rebels. After all, I am ambassador to all of Cote d'Ivoire. I need to have contact with all these groups. I intend to do so. I want to work with this president. I want to help you get to elections, but I have to do it my way. I cannot do it your way because the only thing I have is credibility, and if I become seen as a Gbagbo supporter, I will have no credibility and therefore I would be useless. I think she was a little taken aback by that.

The president and I seemed to strike it off very well. I saw him quite regularly, at least once a month. About three months after I arrived in Abidjan, President Gbagbo decided that this business of having the country divided in half was simply unacceptable. His policy had been that the international community needed to disarm the rebels and that would solve the rebellion and the country would move on. I told him that the situation was not that simple. The international community was not going to send a military force to disarm the rebels.

Gbagbo was quite unhappy. He decided he had had enough of it. He decided to attack the rebels. He said, "I know you would never have approved of my action here, but I have decided this is what I need to do." I said, "Mr. President, you are absolutely right. If you had consulted me I would not have counseled and advised you to launch an attack against the rebels. In fact, just the opposite; I would have advised and counseled you not to attack the rebels because I think this is a disastrous decision and could have serious consequences."

He said, "You will see. In the next 24 hours it will be over. We're going up to Bouaké and we are going to get rid of this rebellion. Then they will sit down at the table."

I said, "Mr. President, I don't understand your strategy. You are bombarding the rebels now, and after you have bombarded them, you think that they are going to sit down at a table and negotiate an agreement?"

He said, "Yes."

I said, "Mr. President, that doesn't sound quite logical to me. When you start bombing areas, there is always the danger that you are going to bomb civilians." He quickly responded: "No, I gave very strict instructions. They are all military targets and no civilians will be hurt and this rebellion will be over in 24 hours."

I said, "Mr. President, my experience is somewhat different. I am not a military strategist, but I have been in this business for a long time. Murphy's Law has not been repealed here in Cote d'Ivoire as far as I know. Things can go wrong, they will go wrong. I think you have to be very careful."

We chatted for a while and he said, "You'll see." I said, "Well, I have no options at this point but to see, but I want to say I think it is really a serious mistake. I am really concerned about how it is going to evolve."

Well, during the course of the day, flights were going out of Abidjan to Bouaké, the capital of the rebel-held area, to bomb the rebels. Early in the afternoon I got a phone call from the French Ambassador, who told me that Gbagbo's planes had just bombed a French base in Bouaké. Some soldiers had been killed and one American citizen. There was an American who had just arrived two or three days before to work for an NGO, and when the bombing started, he took refuge at the French base. The American citizen and eight French soldiers were killed instantaneously, another soldier died later of his injuries.

The bombing of the French base changed the whole equation. The French maintained it was deliberate, that President Gbagbo wanted to get the French involved, one way or the other. The President, of course, maintained it was an accident. The French actually arrested the Ukrainian pilot flying the aircraft that bombed the base, but released him. The bombing occurred early in the afternoon.

I went to see the French ambassador in his office. That was about 2:30 or so. While we are talking about the possible fall-out from the bombing, President Gbagbo called the French ambassador, who told Gbagbo that I was in his office. Gbagbo wanted to see the two of us, and we agreed to meet the president at 4 o'clock.

We met at the president's residence at 4 o'clock. I arrived first. The President and I started talking; the French ambassador arrived a few minutes later. This is where it really got interesting. Normally when I went to see the president. I would leave my phone in the car or I would shut my cell phone off. However, given the circumstances, I took it with me as did the French ambassador, and of course the president had his phone.

Then things begin to unravel completely. French President Chirac decided this was a deliberate attack by the Ivorian Air Force on the French military. Chirac ordered his troops to wipe out the Ivorian Air Force. The French military went to the airport and destroyed all the military aircraft except training aircraft and a couple of helicopters. They put explosives in the cockpits of the aircraft. Within a matter of minutes, the Ivorian Air Force existed only on paper; it had lost its small contingent of aircraft.

The Air Force is an institution of the state and this was occurring while we were in a meeting with the president. We each were receiving phone calls every few minutes, with updates of what was happening. The French ambassador was on the phone, the president was on the phone, I was on the phone, and we are talking in between telephone conversations and updating the others.

Q: Who were you talking to? Were you talking to your embassy or were you talking with Washington?

HOOKS: Mostly to my embassy but I don't recall if I had a conversation with Washington right at that particular point. I had already told Washington that I was going to see the president and to alert them to the fact that an American citizen had been killed. I don't recall getting a phone call from Washington at the time because I was so caught up with the French ambassador and the President.

While we were in the meeting, the French ambassador informed the President that the French military had just bombed the Air Force, something the President didn't want to hear at that time. The French Ambassador, -- and I thought this was very unusual -- made it very clear that Paris had not consulted him about the bombing. In fact, you should never say you have not been consulted. After all, it makes it appear you are not part of the process. He said that President Chirac had made the decisions himself.

President Gbagbo was very unhappy about this turn of events. Word was getting out on the street very quickly about what is going on. The president was very unhappy because the bombing came against the backdrop of French inaction in 2002 when the French did not fulfill their commitments within the frame of the defense agreement with Cote d'Ivoire. The President blamed the French for the mess that Cote d'Ivoire was in.

The French ambassador was trying to respond to Gbagbo by explaining what French official policy was. Now he was informing the President that France had just attacked the Air Force of Cote d'Ivoire. The situation was getting more serious by the minute. We moved a quantum leap here. The meeting went on for some time. The French Ambassador received another phone call, and he informed the President that French forces had taken over the airport. The military and civilian airports in Abidjan are side by side. The French now controlled both sides of the airport. The situation was escalating very rapidly.

President Gbagbo was also getting reports of what was going on. I was getting reports from our defense attaché and others. The situation were quickly escalating. I reminded the President that clearly things were getting out of hand. We needed to walk back from the situation and try to find a way to deescalate and to bring about some sort of ceasefire in terms of firing. The question now was whether the rebels would decide to march toward Abidjan? This was an open question because the rebels had not yet reacted to the attack of Government forces. The rebels had simply dug in their positions in Bouaké.

The government had also sent troops by land in the direction of Bouaké, but there were UN military along the way. One of the issues in the background was how the UN would react when faced with government troops. Would UN troops allow Government troops to pass or would the UN troops try to halt them? The UN troops were not in the position to do much; they didn't have enough troops along the way to deal with a serious confrontation. So this was also in the air at that time. The issue was also under discussion at UN headquarters in Abidjan. President Gbagbo still maintained that he could take Bouaké within 24 hours and the conflict would be over.

President Gbagbo was becoming more and more unhappy. The French ambassador was uncomfortable, to say the least. We agreed to bring the meeting to a close and to keep in touch throughout the evening as we tried to find a way out of the situation.

As we stood up the French ambassador said to me, "Don't leave me here. Let me go first." I said, "I understand" because we knew what would happen when we got outside, something that had happened to the French Ambassador once before.

The area in front of the entrance to the Presidential Palace is not very big, and there is very limited parking there. Normally, drivers drop off an ambassador and park beyond the guard house in another parking area. As soon as we arrived outside, my car pulled up, having been summoned by Presidential Protocol. I told Protocol that I would allow my French colleague to go first. Actually, he arrived in Abidjan two years before I did, so he did have precedence. Protocol insisted that I get in my car. They assured me that the French Ambassador's car would be arriving shortly. I declined, and told Protocol that I would not leave until the French Ambassador left.

As we walked outside the palace, the President's sister accosted the French Ambassador. She was very emotional. She proceeded to share her unhappiness with the Ambassador in very blunt French. No one said a word to me, but you can imagine the situation I faced. A

crowd of soldiers was beginning to build up outside in the courtyard. They were making noises and showing signs of anger, although no one was saying a word to me except the Protocol representative who was trying to get me in my car.

The president's sister was accompanied by several women. She was screaming at Ambassador Gildas Le Lidec. "How could you do this? You French" and all sorts of things about the ambassador personally and the French in general. I was on the sidelines listening. The French Ambassador was trying vainly to explain his side of the story, but no one wanted to hear it. They just wanted to vent their anger. The French ambassador's car was no where in sight. The situation was building up in tension.

At some point, maybe about 15 minutes later, the Protocol representative informed us: "The President wants to see you again." We went inside to see the President. As soon as we came into his office, he said to the French Ambassador, "I understand there is a problem with your car." The French ambassador said, "Yes, they won't let my car in." At that point, President Gbagbo through up his hands and said: "You see, it has already started" and walked out of the room.

The president obviously wanted to get his dig in to the French ambassador, and he called the Ambassador back in to tell him as much. I was simply a witness to all this. We went back outside. My car was still there, waiting for me. The president's sister was still there and she was getting more and more worked up.

Then the courtyard became packed with military. I would say 150 military filled the small space there. They were making comments and hand signs to express their anger. The president's sister was continuing to yell and scream at the French ambassador. He was trying to calm her down. He was very uncomfortable. I think if I had not been there, the military would have lynched the French Ambassador, which would have created a disaster between France and Cote d'Ivoire.

Finally his car pulled up and he got inside. As he did so, the soldiers in the courtyard became more agitated. Then the guards opened up the gates and brought in an anti-aircraft gun, which looks like a small cannon. I was right behind his car. I knew they were not going to fire on his car. It was pure intimidation. The military were yelling and banging on the French ambassador's car. From my perspective, it was like watching a movie, except that this was the real thing. No training at FSI ever prepared me for this sort of thing.

Q: Did you really know the soldiers would not fire on the French Ambassador?

HOOKS: I was fairly certain that they would not. This was pre-planned theater to intimidate the French Ambassador and to send a message to his Government. It was the desperate act of people who felt helpless in the face of superior force. I don't know what the French ambassador thought, although he told me later that he was sure they would have lynched him had I not been present. After a few minutes the soldiers pulled the anti-aircraft gun to the side to let the French Ambassador's car pass.

I might add at this point, just to set the stage, that we all had bodyguards. Mine were Ivorian, but his were French. The Ivorian military and forced his bodyguard to strip completely to humiliate him. When the Ivorians finally let the car into the courtyard, the poor body guard was still putting his clothes back on. He had gone through a complete body search.

We slowly pulled away from the president's palace under the eyes of soldiers spread around the street outside the palace. The French ambassador was in front with his flag, and I was behind with my flag. This had been a very harrowing experience for him, and one that left a deep imprint in my mind. I realized at the time that this could easily have led to a serious incident if they had lynched the French ambassador.

The French Ambassador was quite shaken up. We went to his residence which is very close by, literally right beside the Presidential Palace, with a tunnel under the street connecting the two. Meantime, both sides have welded the tunnel shut, as both have confirmed to me. The French ambassador's wife greeted us anxiously when we arrived. We did a quick analysis of the situation and of our meeting before I left. My Residence was only a few blocks away, and the roads were open, although there were many people milling around in the streets. I called the French Ambassador to let him know that the road in our area was open, and he decided to return to his embassy. He was almost lynched in the process because he stopped by soldiers and was barely able to talk his way out of a difficult situation.

In the meantime, people had taken to the streets, not only people who were supportive of Gbagbo, but also Ivorians who felt a sense of patriotism because the country had been attacked. The air force had been destroyed by the French and people were very angry. They felt humiliated. The crowds in the streets reached tens of thousands. By this time, it was already dark.

It is important to say that Abidjan is built on a lagoon and there are two bridges that go from the center of the city in the direction of the airport. The president's office and residence are on one side of the bridges, and the airport is on the other side. The French determined that they could not allow the crowds to move in the direction of the airport. That would lead to a confrontation with the French military, and they didn't want to end up killing a lot of Ivorians which would further inflame the situation. Given the limited number of troops the French had in Abidjan at the time, they decided that the way to control the bridges was to have helicopters flying over them while firing automatic weapons continuously. They started about 9 o'clock that evening, and the helicopters kept circling overhead and firing automatic weapons all night long. It made a heck of a noise and kept the crowds at bay at one end of the bridge.

Q: Were they firing at people?

HOOKS: Not at people, but directly on the bridge because the people were at the other end of the bridge and the bullets popping on the bridge kept the people from coming

across. Every time a bullet hit metal, it would spark and it would dig up part of the asphalt, but it held the crowds back. This went on from about 9 o'clock at night until early the next morning. I couldn't sleep that night because of all that was going on, plus there were phone calls constantly.

At that point the situation had clearly deteriorated and we started evacuating. Washington, of course, always wants to reduce the Embassy footprint very quickly. Clearly the situation in the streets was becoming very dangerous. Looters were attacking houses or businesses belonging to the French, and the French decided they needed to evacuate their citizens under military escort. A number of French were attacked; a number of women were raped, probably by Ivorian military. They didn't kill the French, but they attacked the women. This created more panic and hastened the evacuation. Within five days the French evacuated 9,000 people on special flights that they organized. They controlled the airport, after all.

The French were sending military escorts around town to pick up people and take them to the airport. Washington, of course, got very excited about the French evacuation. One of the things you learn, as I mentioned earlier, is that you have to be responsive to Washington, and you have to tell them why you are not just closing down the embassy right away. The first thing you do is send out minor dependents, followed by all dependents. We then moved to evacuating non-essential personnel within the Embassy. As I mentioned earlier, sometimes spouses are working and actually in those circumstances you need those spouses more than you need some employees of your embassy because certain activities have stopped, such as cultural activities. We were not issuing visas anymore, but we needed consuls to help evacuate people. I had one situation where two spouses were working and I really needed them, but I had to make a decision, I knew if I kept those dependents at post, the staff that I declared non-essential and evacuated would be resentful. How can you let her stay when she's a spouse and I am an employee? You get serious problems of morale. I made the decision that all dependents had to go, regardless of how badly I needed their services.

I decided not to ask Washington for an aircraft to evacuate people because Washington's aircraft is a onetime deal, and everybody goes at one time and that's it. That does not always reflect the reality on the ground. The Germans, the Italians, the Spanish and the French sent special planes to evacuate their citizens. The Germans and the Italians, particularly the Italians, gave us seats on their aircraft. They were doing training missions basically. This was training for them in addition to evacuating their few citizens. They were flying into Abidjan everyday and flying people to Accra, Ghana. Generally they had extra seats, which they allowed us to fill. Each day they told us the number of seats they could make available to us.

One of the things you learn about American communities overseas is how diverse they are. The missionaries have sometimes been there for generations; some of our business people just arrived over the weekend. Some know the country, some don't. Some people want to leave right away and some don't. Some people demand immediate evacuation when there is violence in their area. Once the violence subsides, they decide that they will

stay and weather the storm. If violence breaks out later in their area, they call the Embassy in a panic. Some people ask the Embassy to pick them up, and when the Embassy convoy gets to their house, they announce that they have changed their mind. That's very frustrating when you are trying to respond to the needs of many people with very limited resources. We didn't have a large American community, but we evacuated 444 people, if I recall. We sent Embassy cars flying the American flag. We didn't have a military escort. While maintaining solidarity with the French in an overall political sense, we didn't want to associate the French with our evacuation on the ground because of the animosity towards the French. A French military escort would have been more of a liability than an asset under those circumstances. An Embassy car with the American flag was sufficient to get through roadblocks. Each day there was a trickle of people wanting to leave.

Q: What kind of Americans did we have there?

HOOKS: We had missionaries, business people, people married to Ivorians, and people working for various international organizations.

Q: Did they feel threatened? Were they willing to go?

HOOKS: As I was just saying, some people want to leave right away. Some people felt that they had lived in the country a long time and felt comfortable in staying. Not everybody evacuated ultimately. One of the most difficult situations to deal with are children of Ivorians born in the United States and therefore American citizens, but who are living with their grandparents in Cote d'Ivoire. When we had town hall meetings for American citizens, we divided the agenda into two parts. The citizens were all combined into one meeting, but the first part of the agenda was in English aimed at Americans who grew up in America for the most part. The second half was in French and aimed at the relatives of the US citizen children who oftentimes didn't speak English and who had a misconception of what an evacuation is. An American evacuation for the most part is to move people out of harm's way. So moving people to Accra is out of harm's way.

Relatives often had the idea that we were evacuating people to the continental United States where the US Government provided housing as not all of them had relatives in the United States. We had to explain at every town hall meeting that the US Government did not provide housing. Furthermore, we could not evacuate a minor child without an adult accompanying the child, but the accompanying adult must have a US visa. And generally the 25 year old unemployed cousin would not be able to qualify for a visa during an evacuation, although clearly it makes more sense for the family to send an unemployed cousin to accompany a child than the major breadwinner in the family.

We were evacuating members of the American community -- the business community, missionaries and others -- at the rate of 30, 40, 50, a day and finding seats for them on the various aircraft. This approach worked perfectly because it gave us flexibility in dealing with citizens who changed their minds almost on a daily basis. We never had anyone at the airport that wanted to leave that we could not find a seat for. We were left with a very

small community that remained behind. Very few of the Ivorian children who held American passports were evacuated.

We were living in a very tense situation as violence took over the streets. I might say that President Gbagbo and his group had always been associated somewhat with violence. After the attempted coup of 2002, the Young Patriots, Gbagbo supporters lead by former members of the FSCI student organization, took over the streets. They took over the radio station; they began to loot systematically the homes of ministers of the opposition and French-owned businesses and homes.

We were under tremendous pressure from Washington to reduce our footprint even faster than we were. I had to provide a very convincing evacuation plan to Washington explaining why we were evacuating certain people and not other people. I had gone through this in Brazzaville. I cannot evacuate consuls until I evacuate the American community. I need the defense attaché here in the meantime and I need the DCM and the communicators and so on. We were reducing our staff, but Washington was relentless in putting pressure on me to evacuate even more. I was asked what about this and what about that. I said, "Nope, I need this person for the following reasons."

A lot depends on how much confidence Washington has in you. If Washington has a lot of confidence in you, you get to call the shots as long as you convince Washington you know what you are doing. However, if the Department loses confidence in you, the decision-making authority moves to Washington and they make decisions, not you. As long as you keep your embassy open, you control it. The minute you close your embassy, you no longer control it. I had gone through that in Brazzaville. Our Embassy in Abidjan was still under construction. We hadn't moved into it yet, and we wanted to continue construction. We only lost one work day during this time. I kept this building going during the whole conflict because I knew if we closed everything down, it would be looted even though we were not targeted politically. We were able to move around the city with the American flag because we were not targeted. This is one of the things you have to bear in mind; when you are in a conflict area in any part of the world, you have to look at it in context. You know the situation on a particular street: you may have heavy fighting and shooting in the morning at 9 o'clock. At 3 o'clock in the afternoon you can take a stroll on that street. In this case the French were being targeted, we were not. As long as people were able to identify us, we were not being targeted. We could get through street blockades on the strength of the American flag.

But as the conflict moves along, tempers rise, people get tired, hungry, angry and panicky. The security situation begins to deteriorate, so even though we were somewhat secure initially, that level of security began to erode.

We evacuated over half the personnel at the embassy, which is always a tragedy because an evacuation is open ended. You leave post until conditions are appropriate for you to return. That could be days, weeks, months or never. When you are back in Washington, particularly if you have children, do you put them in school for a week, for a month or do you go back to Ohio where you are from and leave your kids there with the grandparents,

assuming you have such an option? In Washington, do you take a lease or stay in a hotel? In Washington, the Department gives you 30 days in a hotel. Thereafter the per diem drops dramatically and you can't afford a hotel, so you have to find an apartment or something. Then 30 days later Washington says, "OK, now you are going back to post" so you have to break the lease. Every evacuee faces many difficult decisions.

Once people return to post, a new set of problems arises. Unfortunately, your staff is now divided into two groups: the indispensable who stayed throughout the crisis, and the dispensable who were sent back to Washington. People are offended, it hurts. When they come back to post, you have a serious morale problem. The problem is only resolved through time as people are reassigned and new people who have no association with the evacuation arrive at Post.

To continue with the story of this conflict, the streets were becoming very dangerous and there were roadblocks all over town. In fact, on any major thoroughfare, there was a roadblock every few blocks. Any French citizen was in great danger.

I recall the times the president wanted to see me at the height of the crisis. The first time I went to see him, it was really like a movie. By this point there were probably 10,000 Gbagbo supporters around the Palace. My house was not too far from the Presidential Palace, but I was not on the same street, fortunately. Some of the people wandered over to my area, but the main force was a few blocks away. To get to his house, I had to get through a crowd of 10,000 people, mostly young people.

In Abidjan I had four body guards, all of whom had previously worked at the Presidency. I had an armored car, with a second car following behind. I arrived in the black Cadillac with flags flying. It was just like one of those movies you've seen with Clint Eastwood. As we rolled through the crowd, it was like the Red Sea parting. I could see the movie, the Ten Commandments, in my mind. The young people were waving at me, and yelling, America, America, America. The guards had to keep pushing the people away from the car. It was like a movie set. It was incredible.

The President wanted to vent about the crisis, and it was fascinating listening to him. He was particularly unhappy with the French. I tried to persuade him that confrontation with the French would only aggravate an already bad situation. He had greatly inflated expectations of what the international community would do. He insisted that the UN forces should stop the rebellion and disarm the rebels. The UN was there but did not have a mandate to do this. For him, the solution was just that simple: disarm the rebels. He had no plans beyond that for reconciliation, power-sharing, or economic development.

I went to see him several times during this period of time. The crowds around the Palace began to diminish, but even for weeks they were still hundreds of people milling around the Palace. Each trip to the Palace was an experience, but never quite as dramatic as the first one.

The situation in the streets continued to deteriorate. It was basically people power as Gbagbo supporters took over the streets. When they saw a white foreigner, they did not know whether he was French or American, and they did not always ask to see the passport. They were sometimes hostile and began to make demands: I need water, I need money and so on. That is quite intimidating.

Periodically thereafter, whenever there was a political crisis, the president would send his Young Patriots into the streets to play the role of thugs. This became a very dangerous situation each time it occurred. It occurred regularly every few months thereafter. They frequently took over the radio station to broadcast ugly propaganda. Gbagbo tried to deny that he was behind it. He referred to it as the will of the people.

The president tends to downplay a situation when he is uncomfortable with questions, or he tries to dismiss it as not being important. Gbagbo frequently said, "They are just supporting me, I had nothing to do with all that." I would reply to him: "Mr. President, you and I have a relationship. You know that I know that you organized them and you financed them." He insisted: "No, no." I would not let him off the hook: "Mr. President, we are having a serious discussion here. You have to face the facts. I know that the presidency pays these people, and you can leave them in the streets or you can send them home. You allowed them to take over the state radio; that's really pushing your luck. That's beyond the pale, and having them loot systematically the homes of the opposition and the opposition newspapers is unacceptable." Gbagbo replied that the people were angry. I pointed out to him that systematic looting of selective targets suggests a degree of organization that leads back to the presidency, and that was not a good image for him.

I could talk quite frankly with President Gbagbo when we were alone. I had a good relationship with him. I could tell him quite directly that I knew that the Presidency was not only organizing but also financing the street activity. Later on I told him they were armed, with weapons from the Presidency, something which he denied.

Months later we got into the business of disarming these groups. His groups also wanted to be disarmed. I could not resist the temptation to poke him a bit, and I said, "Mr. President, how can you disarm people who are not armed?" He said, "Well, they have also fought for the country. They are entitled to the benefits of disarmament."

I had a good relationship with President Gbagbo the whole time I was there. I still see him when I go back to Abidjan in a private capacity, and I have been back several times since I left the Embassy in 2007.

Let's look at some of the issues on Washington's agenda. The first of these was elections. Washington was very eager to move quickly toward elections. I think there were unrealistic expectations built up in Washington as to how quickly you can move to elections. I knew when I arrived in 2004 they would not occur in 2005 when they were scheduled to occur or even in 2006. When I left I felt they would not occur in 2007 or 2008, probably not until 2009 or 2010. What I found to be unrealistic in Washington's position was the adamant insistence that the Gbagbo regime go to elections in a short

timeframe. Elections are oftentimes seen as the end all. Elections are very important. They help to re-establish legitimacy, although they can tear a country apart if elections are not credible. Policy makers in Washington frequently make the mistake of insisting that elections be organized in the wake of severe political turmoil. There frequently must be a healing process, and political leaders have to reestablish working relationships in order to have elections. I think there was a somewhat unrealistic expectation coupled with the fact of course that Washington was not prepared to invest any money, or very little money, in elections. The European Union finances in a big way -- several millions of Euro -- but we were unprepared to do so. I felt that I had to keep reminding Washington that we simply can't rush Cote d'Ivoire to elections.

The whole question of who votes now is an issue in the Ivory Coast. It comes back to the business of who is Ivorian and who isn't. It is a unique country in that sense.

The second issue I want to raise has to do with consultants and lobbyists. Many countries in Africa feel they have to have consultants in Washington in order to get Washington's attention. One of the problems in Washington is that there are different consultants who are all working for Cote d'Ivoire. I had several discussions with President Gbagbo about this problem. When Assistant Secretary Jendayi Frazer came to Abidjan, I suggested she raise this issue with President Gbagbo. She was quite blunt with him. She said, "You know, I don't know who speaks for you. I have this parade of people in my office, all claiming to speak for you and I don't know who does. So who speaks for you?" He said, "We will solve that problem."

She made it very clear to President Gbagbo that it was very difficult to know who spoke for him. Unfortunately, the problem continued the whole time I was in Abidjan. President Gbagbo sent to Washington the same advisor who came to see me originally to let me know she had been very unhappy with my predecessor. She wasted hundreds of thousands of dollars hiring first one lobbying group and then another. I tried to explain to the president many times that substance is more important than form. It is important the way you package your message, but you've got to have something to package, and until you have elections, legitimate elections, our sanctions remain in place. There is a congressional mandate and we can't change that. To improve your business climate, we've got to get to elections, and you've got to stop the riots in the streets. Take your Young Patriots out of the street.

Let me relate another incident which shows how the Presidency worked. I was away on appointments late on a Wednesday afternoon when the Presidency delivered a diplomatic note informing me that the President was arriving in Washington on Saturday. My secretary gave it to me on Thursday morning when I came into the office. I looked at the note and I thought that this was insane. The President is heading off to Washington tomorrow, arriving in Washington on Saturday.

I called Ambassador Adou, the head of protocol at the Presidency, and said, "I received a diplomatic note this morning informing me that the President is traveling to Washington, leaving tomorrow. It has your signature." He said, "Yes, yes." I said, "That's very

interesting, Mr. Ambassador. I have been in this business for thirty-five years at this point. I have never seen a situation where the American Embassy is informed only 48 hours before the arrival of the president or the head of state in Washington, DC. There are practical implications to the arrival of a head of state in Washington. Normally security is provided by the Secret Service. The Secret Service is not on standby to provide security for President Gbagbo. They knew nothing about his arrival. They may have other obligations and we can't just program it at the last minute. State Department Protocol normally meets heads of state when they arrive at Andrews Air Force Base. Protocol can't be arranged in a matter of minutes. Does President Gbagbo have a meeting with the President of the United States?" Ambassador Adou replied: "No, but that is being worked on." One of the President's advisors (Otto-Toure) who spoke English was already in Washington working with lobbyists to arrange a meeting with the White House.

I said, "I really am astonished. Normally the third element is that an American ambassador always accompanies the head of state in the country. Should a problem arise, do you think the police in Baltimore know where Cote d'Ivoire is, much less who President Gbagbo is? You have to have someone there who can say, I am with the State Department, here is my ID. This is the head of state of a foreign country. Plus you do it as a courtesy. I said, "I am not leaving Abidjan this evening." I cannot take responsibility for the President's visit if I have had no input and I have absolutely no details about it." Ambassador Adou told me: "Well, we are very sorry but the President has just made the decision to travel." I remarked: "Well, I seriously doubt it, Mr. Ambassador, that the president woke up one morning and decided he was going to fly off to the United States."

Ambassador Adou then said something that completely contradicted his last statement: "Well, Mme. Otto-Toure is in Washington, and she has made some meetings." Surprised by this piece of news, I could not help asking the question: "Oh, so she has arranged all these things? At any rate, since I don't have an itinerary, I cannot inform the State Department of details of President Gbagbo's arrival. Saturday is now only 48 hours away."

I knew Ambassador Adou very well, so I could be slightly testy with him to let him know that President Gbagbo's visit was off to a bad start, and Mme. Otto-Toure was incompetent and did not know how to organize presidential visits to the United States. I said, "I really need an itinerary. That would be a start." He said, "I'll get it to you right away." Right away meant it arrived at the Embassy late Thursday afternoon. Obviously, I had already informed Washington that this visit was in the works. I told the desk I would provide details as I received them. In the meantime, when I finally received the itinerary from the head of Protocol late Thursday afternoon, it was different from the one which their Ambassador in Washington provided to the State Department. We went from no itinerary to two different official itineraries.

I forwarded the itinerary to the State Department and ultimately we were able to get Secret Service protection and State Department protocol arranged to meet President Gbagbo at the airport. I told the State Department I did not plan to travel to Washington on such short notice. I would have had to leave on Thursday evening to get to

Washington on Friday in order to attend the meet and greet on Saturday. I could not accept responsibility for a program that I had not worked on. I had no idea what the schedule looked like. Normally the ambassador is involved in coordinating the program and setting up meetings in order to avoid conflicts. Foreigners sometimes forget the distances here in the United States. You can't have a 9 o'clock appointment with the President in Washington and an appointment two hours later in California. It doesn't work very well. People from small countries do not always keep these practical considerations in mind.

As soon as President Gbagbo arrived, the lobbyists started calling me. There were two different consulting groups working on the visit, which resulted in different programs. They were frantically calling me and blaming each other for the confusion surrounding the visit. One lobbyist was absolutely adamant that I had to go to Washington. She said that President Bush would not receive President Gbagbo unless I, the American ambassador, was there." I told her that she was absolutely right, but I was not traveling because President Bush would not be receiving President Gbagbo. The White House receives a set number of heads of state every year. You can imagine many heads of state want to travel to Washington. From Africa he receives four or five a year, and the President will not receive a head of state right before election time. The timing of this visit was just before elections scheduled for 2005, so that also worked against a White House visit for President Gbagbo. I knew that there was no point in my going to Washington.

The consultants were very upset with me. They are like lawyers; they are paid to present a case. The Embassy, however, is supposed to be neutral and present a case as the Ambassador sees it there and not as it necessarily flatters the host President. Oftentimes consultants would complain that I had not supported President Gbagbo on this and that point. I had to remind people in Washington sometimes that my role was not to support President Gbagbo. My role was to analyze the situation as I saw it. In fact, while I was advocating a policy of moving to elections, it would have been counter-productive for me to identify with the presidential camp; it would have undermined whatever credibility I had with other groups.

Another point I want to raise which I think was important concerns the gap between policy and resources. Washington was unwilling to invest politically in Cote d'Ivoire. I understand that to a large degree, given our strategic interests elsewhere, although we had significant business interests there. You know 40% of the world's cocoa beans were produced there and several large American companies like Cargill were involved in the export of cocoa beans. We had a number of missionaries in country. However, I had few resources, and most of the resources we had came from the PEPFAR program which was the presidential initiative to fight against AIDS.

I tried to have a very high profile to hide the fact that I had no resources. I went to all sorts of ceremonies and I traveled all over the country. There is a road system in Ivory Coast, unlike Congo where I had to fly from city to city, so I could drive almost everywhere in the Ivory Coast.

In a divided country like Cote d'Ivoire, government authorities thought that if a foreign ambassador had contact with the rebels, he was sympathetic to the rebels. The rebels felt that all the ambassadors were sympathetic to the government since they were all located in Abidjan. We were always walking a fine line. As the American ambassador, my role was to maintain contact with everyone. After the conflict that I referred to earlier where the French destroyed the air force and took over the airport was over and the French gave the airport back to the Government, the various political groupings reached an agreement to form a national unity government in which the rebels participated. Prior to that time, if you traveled to rebel-held areas, Government authorities took that as a sign of sympathy for the rebels. I decided once all the political groups had formed a national unity government, we needed to do something to move the process forward. I decided to make a very high profile trip through the whole country. I decided to do it high profile in part to emphasize the fact that both Government-held territory and rebel-held territory formed one country. In Cote d'Ivoire, the northern part is mostly Muslim, while the southern half is largely Christian. Government authorities often times questioned the identity and citizenship of the whole Muslim north. If a last name was Toure or Ouédraogo, names very common Burkina Faso, authorities sometimes considered the person a foreigner. Police at roadblocks intimidated people in order to get more money.

We had a very good press attaché, a young, first-tour officer. I decided the best way to get the news out was to tell people what you are going to tell them, then tell them, and then summarize what you have just told them. So we decided to call one of the better newspapers and leak the fact that I was traveling. It appeared in the press that the American ambassador was traveling up north. That hit the news wires.

Before that leak, however, I met with the President. I told him, "I am here to inform you that I am traveling to the north. The reason I am doing so is to emphasize that this is one country. I want to emphasize the unity of the country, the fact that the rebels are now part of the government. I am accredited to this country and I feel it is my role to know this country and therefore I intend to travel both in the south and in the north. I am not here to ask your permission. I am here to inform you so you are not surprised about it. I am sure you will hear about it, but here are my goals and objectives."

He said, "I understand." He told me some weeks afterwards, "I was very hesitant as to why you were going up there. I read all the newspapers that I don't normally read to find out what you were up to."

The next day I held a press conference in which we confirmed the rumor that I was going to the north. That created a buzz of excitement. We formed a caravan of three cars because, when you are traveling on the road, you need to take a backup car as there is no service station every few miles as there is here. There is no road help if your car breaks down, and the roads are pretty bad in some places. The defense attaché and the press attaché accompanied me on the trip. We went west where the roads were best and then we went into rebel-held territory. I was in touch with the rebel spokesperson regularly.

The rebels were very happy to hear I was going to visit them. They wanted to make a big deal about my coming.

The first city in rebel-held territory that I visited was Man in the west. The rebels received me like a head of state almost, including reviewing of the troops and so forth. The rebel commandant, who introduced himself as Commandant Big, stuck to me the whole time. I knew they wanted to control my program but I had told them beforehand, "You cannot control my program. Yes, I will see you, but I will also see other people and no, you don't organize the program; I organize the program." They would like to have me meet for five hours with the rebel groups and have no time to meet with local populations because there had been horrific human rights violations in the areas they controlled.

In Man we had an incredible reception. The rebels sent a representative from rebel headquarters to accompany me on the trip because I was going north almost to the border with Mali before turning east to head towards rebel headquarters.

We went to one town, Toubia, where we had to stop the cars because literally everyone in the town was in the streets. They were 10 to 15 deep on each side. About every 100 yards there was a local folk musical group, drums by and large, local dancers and singers. As I approached, the drumming and dancing became even more frenetic. It was well organized. I think everyone in town was there. It was absolutely incredible. It was more high profile than I anticipated. People in the area had not seen a high-level visitor in four or five years, so this was a big deal.

I met with local groups and local politicians without anyone from the rebels being present. These meetings gave me a sense of what living conditions were like, what sort of problems people were facing. Surprisingly, the primary concern of the people was not the rebels. Their primary concern was more prosaic in terms of water and school because the government in Abidjan refused to organize high school exams in the north. In Cote d'Ivoire, like in many countries, students have to complete the course work and pass a comprehensive exam in order to finish high school and receive a diploma (baccalaureate). The government had stopped organizing the bac in 2002, and I was there in 2006. Students could not graduate from high school. The schools were backing up because many students kept repeating their final year in hopes of taking the bac.

While I was traveling in the north, many of the international news services became aware of my visit and began to call me to find out what was going on. We got phone calls from BBC, the French press, Reuters and others. Normally when an ambassador travels, no one knows or cares. In this case in Cote d'Ivoire, because of the unique situation there, my travel was headline news in Abidjan and even got mention by the international news services. There was no one else who could have undertaken such a trip at that time. There was such animosity towards the French that the French Ambassador could not venture outside Abidjan. No other ambassador in Abidjan had the diplomatic weight to get attention. At the same time, I was taking serious political risk, because had I said the wrong thing, whichever side took offense would have jumped on my comments to discredit me. I thought often during this trip of the expression that success has many

mothers and failure is an orphan. I don't take credit for the fact that the country moved in a positive direction while I was there. It could have gone the other direction. The one thing I do take credit for was having the courage to undertake this trip to the north and to do it in a very high profile way in order to break the taboo against travel to the north.

While in the north, I pushed the rebels hard to participate fully in the Government. Guillaume Soro, the head of the rebels, was a minister in the Government of National Unity, but he refused to travel to Abidjan to attend Cabinet meetings. I told them that they had to participate in a program of disarmament. They had to participate fully in the electoral process. They said all the right things, but they were very distrustful of President Gbagbo and rightfully so. He had just bombed them a few months earlier and his word didn't mean much.

Many people on both sides of the political spectrum told me afterwards that my trip to the north was a turning point in relations between the Government and the rebels. When I arrived back in Abidjan, I went to see President Gbagbo to brief him on the trip. One of the things I emphasized was education and the high school exam. He said, "Well, this is a security issue." I said, "Mr. President, could you explain to me how an American ambassador can travel all over the north as I have just done and you can't organize high school graduation exams? It makes no sense. It is not a security issue at all. It is a political decision. You and the government have made a decision for the past few years not to organize these exams in order to try to make the population unhappy and create problems for the rebels. It hasn't worked. What it has done is make the population unhappy with you. Furthermore, if you want to emphasize the fact that you are really the legitimate government, organizing the bac is a way of emphasizing that point. If you are not careful, you are going to push the rebels into setting up state institutions." The rebels had given little thought to a political agenda. Instead of setting up a government and carrying out the functions of government, they continued to function as a rebel group with no political institutions. I told President Gbagbo: "You are going to push the rebels to organize exams, and that is going to create a political problem for you. You need to maintain the monopoly of legitimacy and power. Organize the bac. Those kids will be grateful. They will vote. When you have elections, they will vote for you. They will remember that Gbagbo organized the bac and let them finish high school."

President Gbagbo sent the Minister of Education to see me. He raised the same issue of security. I told him the issue was not security. You can travel up north just as I have traveled up north. You are from the north. The next time I went up there, that minister went with me. In fact, he and I were sitting side by side at a ceremony in the north when he got a phone call and was summoned back to Abidjan. The next day his wife was sitting beside me at a ceremony and she leaned over and whispered to me: "My husband has just been named Minister of Defense."

I think I helped to break the ice to some extent. I do take some credit for that. Washington was curious but wary about this initiative. It was one of those things that if done well, it can work. So many things could have gone wrong. Had it gone wrong, people would have said, "How could you have you been so foolish as to have done such a thing?"

I thought it was time to have someone try to make a statement, to break the taboo, particularly since a government in theory had been formed to open up the country a little bit more. I emphasized in my press conference when I came back the fact that whether you live in Abidjan or whether you live in Korhogo, you are Ivorian. And this is one country and I as the American ambassador was accredited to the whole country. I was accredited to the government but I fudged slightly. It worked in this case.

Afterwards Mme. Otto-Toure, the same lady I mentioned to you before, said to me just before I left Abidjan: “You know, I want to thank you for what you did for Cote d’Ivoire.” Those around the President appreciated my gesture because it opened up the country and led to a formation of a broader government.

My point here is that sometimes you can make a difference in a country as the American ambassador because of the high profile that you have. You have to take risky decisions to do so, but you can sometimes make a difference. That is not always the case, but at critical moments in the history of a country you can make a difference.

Q: Looking back on an interview I did maybe 20 years ago or more, Bill Crawford was our ambassador to Cyprus and there was the green line and he insisted he would travel across the green line to go into the Turkish side and the Greeks hated this openness.

I’d like you to talk a little about the French decision to take out the Ivorian air force. That was a decision made in Paris without consultation with the French ambassador which put thousands of people at risk. It is one of those things how these decisions made to be tough and for political reasons in the capital can have horrendous consequences if you’ve got people on the ground.

Also I would like you to talk a bit about, you mentioned the human rights violations in the north and maybe in the south too. And also your estimate of the Ivorian military force and were there problems with Muslim extremists there?

HOOKS: This has to do with the whole question of who was Ivorian and the impact on politics and the fabric of society which has been torn in Cote d’Ivoire. One of the lessons you learn from this is that human accidents can change the course of history for a country. The young military had no intention of planning a coup. They were simply unhappy at not having been paid. President Bédié’s drunken reaction caused the situation to unravel and led to a coup which took Ivory Coast off the path it was on and put it onto the wrong path.

It is interesting how events in small countries in Africa that the President of the United States has never heard of suddenly grab his attention, whether it is Somalia and the issue of sea piracy or a coup in Cote d’Ivoire. Once the crisis becomes a new political reality, the country recedes into the media background. President Chirac’s decision to bomb the Air Force of Cote d’Ivoire based on his personal dislike of President Gbagbo and the fact that he felt that Gbagbo had deliberately bombed his French soldiers had immediate

consequences, and the long term consequences will overshadow French-Cote d'Ivoire relations for years.

It is interesting when you are on the ground and an actor in events. I oftentimes thought, based on my experiences in Africa and elsewhere, that when you come in the Foreign Service, you never know what sort of career you are going to have. I think we feel very insular in the United States and very protected, although as we saw in Oklahoma and in New York, we are not immune to acts of terrorism, whether it is homegrown or whether it is directed from outside the United States. I think this is becoming a reality that more Americans are now beginning to realize.

But when you go into the Foreign Service and travel to different countries, you never know what situation you are going to end up in. Being an eye witness to the military coup in Turkey and the Gulf War in Israel were not events that my university and Foreign Service training had fully prepared me for.

I recall a Foreign Service colleague that I worked with in Turkey. He had been part of the CORDS program in Vietnam. For a period of time in the '60s every male member of the Foreign Service was required to go to Vietnam; not the women but the men. This guy had been up stationed in a province in the north, not near the front lines but in some region outside of Saigon. His area was attacked by rockets, one of which landed on his house. He said that he was in bed at the time of the attack, and when he came to after the event, he was under his bed, flipped upside down. He said his first reaction was, "This can't happen to me. I am a Foreign Service officer." It is funny how your mind plays tricks on you when you are in a situation like that. He was unhurt, fortunately.

I oftentimes felt when I lived in Africa and elsewhere that I was a witness or a participator in history. It was a fascinating experience. It is always more fascinating when you can talk about it afterwards, which I obviously lived to do, but these events make for a fascinating career. Sometimes you are faced with life and death issues. You find yourself making decisions you thought you would never have to make. I am sure that the stories of Foreign Service officers will be useful for historians.

Q: These stories, I feel are both history and lessons to be learned. You were in the Ivory Coast from when to when?

HOOKS: I was in the Ivory Coast from 2004 until 2007.

Q: OK, so this was a rather stressful time. We discussed the situation up to the time you were evacuating dependents.

HOOKS: We evacuated all dependents and a good part of the staff.

Q: I think of the Ivory Coast as having a line drawn through it during this time. Rebels up to the north and the government people to the south or something. Was that what happened? What was the situation?

HOOKS: When it comes to politics in Africa, the lines are rarely if ever clear. That said, when I arrived in Abidjan in August, 2004 there was a line halfway across the country, horizontally, dividing the north from the south. Yet this line was not as clear-cut as perhaps you might think, although it did follow more or less along the fault lines between the Muslim north and the Christian-animist south. Guillaume Soro was the head of the rebel movement. He did not start it per se. It was basically Commandant Wattao and his fellow sergeants who were behind the coup in 1999. They called upon Soro to be the political head of the movement and he was able more or less to establish his authority over the rebel movement.

Who was Soro? Soro had been the head of the FSCI student association of the FPI, which was President Gbagbo's political party. When President Gbagbo was a professor at the university, he had been the sponsor of this youth organization. Soro was his protégé. Who was head of the 'Young Patriots', the young people loyal to the President who were the thugs in the streets? Charles Blé Goudé. Blé Goudé had been Soro's assistant when he helped Soro run the FSCI, and he later became Soro's successor as the head of the FSCI. So in some respects the conflict in Cote d'Ivoire was an internal FPI quarrel, over power, of course, and access to resources. Today Gbagbo is President of the country and Soro is Prime Minister. And so you see, there is a bit of an incestuous relationship there. It means that the lines are not quite as firm as they may look from the outside, but when you begin to do an analysis of the situation and who the leading actors are, you see that Soro was a protégé of President Gbagbo in the past and is a protégé today, and the two of them are running the country and do not seem to be in very much of a hurry to get to elections.

Q: When you get right down to it, maybe these were internal quarrels and all, but if you are running an embassy and trying to run relations with the country and people are shooting, you've got to figure out where you want to be. I mean either one side of the line or the other side of the line or just plain out of the country.

HOOKS: I was really walking a tightrope in Ivory Coast. I had contacts with all the parties. If you had contacts with the rebels, Government authorities did not view that very favorably and felt that you were disloyal. The average citizen was in a very dangerous situation. For diplomats, it was dangerous in the sense that Government authorities would be very unhappy and express that unhappiness. I was fortunate as the American ambassador as the situation evolved because I had contact with the rebels from the very beginning, mostly by telephone.

Soro was a minister, minister of state as a matter of fact, and number three in the Government of National Reconciliation, yet he did not come to Abidjan to run his ministry. The government did not function very well. In theory at least it was a government of national reconciliation. I think I referred last time to the fact that I traveled to the north and did a highly publicized trip to the north to emphasize the unity of the country, the fact that Ivory Coast was one, the fact that all the citizens were Ivorians. I was able to do so by capitalizing on the fact that there had been some evolution in the political process.

But that said, it is always very important whenever you are in a country of conflict to establish your role as the American ambassador. You have to make it very clear from the beginning that you as the American ambassador will have contacts with all parties involved in the conflict. That's absolutely important. That's what American ambassadors do. Don't let the government define your role. As I mentioned earlier, the President's counselor (Mme. Otto-Toure) came to see me to let me know that the President was very unhappy with my predecessor. She wanted me in the president's camp, and I had to make it very clear to her that I would not be in the president's camp. I wanted to work with him to move the process forward. You cannot be in the President's camp just like you cannot be in the rebels' camp. As the American ambassador you often can't make your judgments based on virtue and justice; who is right and who is wrong, because oftentimes it is hard to figure out who the good guys are and who is right and who is wrong.

What you have to deal with is the political reality on the ground and what you really want to do is move that country toward a better situation, better being fewer violations of human rights and a more legitimate political process. Oftentimes that is defined through elections that are more or less credible in the local context. These would not be credible elections in Sweden or Iceland but credible in the local context. Governments frequently are reluctant to have contact with rebel groups for fear that the contact will somehow confer legitimacy on those groups.

Q: But there are times when there are strong rebel forces opposed to a government which we recognize and that gets very tricky in terms of contacts. We were under the strictest of instructions for example not to talk to the PLO, dealing with Palestine Israel. This came essentially from the president. This goes against everything you are saying.

HOOKS: I think we moved away from that policy, didn't we? As the PLO evolved, I think the policy was probably one that was questioned from the very beginning. That was our policy; we had to abide by the law, but I think it was based on politics and not really on a broader perspective of diplomacy. It was supportive of Israel and it must be seen in that context and not in terms of how you really should carry out diplomacy. Our experience with the PLO was unique because of our special relationship with Israel and our policy must be seen in that prism. One of the things President Obama got a lot of heat for during the campaign was his position that we need to be talking to people who are our enemies. You don't make peace with your friends; you make peace with your enemies. I think you need to have those contacts. After all, what are you really trying to do? You are trying to influence behavior, and ignoring rebel groups who occupy a huge part of the country is in my view not the way to influence their behavior.

Now having contacts with them doesn't mean you recognize them or confer any legitimacy upon them. It is that you realize it is a reality. Looking here in an African context, we recognize the government of Zimbabwe and we have an ambassador there, we have an embassy, we have contact with that government and yet that government has little legitimacy. They stole elections as we know from the experience of the past several elections. We have legislation against coups outside the government but we don't have

legislation that deals with coups by the government, in which governments seize power in a sense by stealing elections. If you work in Africa, that's a problem. I have always felt that this is a serious gap in our policies.

We also put ourselves in a difficult position sometimes by announcing that we will not recognize the legitimacy of a government, only to find that the reality on the ground is that that government controls the country. Ultimately, we have to come to terms with it. For instance, we did not recognize the legitimacy of the Gbagbo election in 2000, but we have to work with that government. We accredit ambassadors to that government. I was accredited to that government as well as my predecessor; we just have to deal with reality.

Q: During the time you were in the Ivory Coast, particularly France but some of the other countries that may have had some interests there, or embassies there, what were they doing and were we working divergently?

HOOKS: We talked about Congo earlier. I mentioned there were three important embassies that had high profiles and were very involved: the Belgians for historic reasons, the French because they also have had a strong position in Africa, and the United States. Other countries had very low profiles. The Chinese as I mentioned really did not want to engage in any public way. The Russians engaged only marginally so and generally in the context of the P-5. So only three embassies were very active.

In the case of the Ivory Coast, there were only two important embassies: the French and the United States: The French for historic reasons, the United States because of our superpower position.

On certain issues of course, other embassies were engaged. For instance, the embassy of Burkina Faso in Abidjan played a role, although not really because the political issues were dealt with primarily by the president of Burkina Faso directly. The Burkina Embassy in Abidjan was a very small embassy and the ambassador was never seen in public and never spoke on political issues. He largely provided logistical support for his president.

What was the relationship between the United States and the French embassy? I think it was a very close relationship. When I arrived in Abidjan, the French ambassador was Gildas Le Lidec, who had been the French ambassador in Kinshasa when I arrived there in 2001. He left there after one year and I subsequently followed him to Abidjan.

Q: We did talk about you being in the president's office with the French ambassador. As things developed farther along, you had both gone through a very rough patch. How did that play out while you were there? The French American relationship.

HOOKS: We worked very closely together. We had a very cordial relationship, as I did with his successor. I think I mentioned one of the problems at that particular time in Africa was the fact that French policy was evolving but had not yet solidified. The French

no longer wanted to play the role of gendarme, and they were wavering back and forth. They had played the gendarme in Bangui. They decided in Brazzaville, Congo that they no longer wanted to play that role, so they withdrew and told the parties to resolve the issue on their own.

Ivory Coast was bigger, the French had more at stake there, and they were wavering. In 1999 when Bédié fled through the tunnel to the French ambassador's house, the French ambassador didn't call French troops from the base there and tell them to throw the sergeants out of the presidential palace and put Bédié back in. They could have very easily, but they didn't do it because they did not have a clear policy. The French were wavering. Then they decided there was really too much at stake, so in 2002 when there was another coup attempt, they did intervene, but again, on a very hesitant basis. President Gbagbo accused the French of not fulfilling the terms of the defense agreement and therefore favoring the rebels, and the rebels accused the French of interfering and stopping them from seizing power. Both sides blamed the French.

The French were in a difficult position. French bashing was very popular. That was certainly the case after the events of November, 2004, when the government bombed the French base, killed nine French soldiers and one American civilian and the French retaliated. I think we covered this issue last time. This was a very low point in French-Ivorian relations and the French therefore were in a very difficult position.

This led also to a continuing evolution in the relationship of the government of the Ivory Coast and the United States. The Government had two motivations; one negative and one positive. The positive is due to a genuine fascination with the United States and admiration for American culture. American movies and music are becoming part of the local scene. At the same time, particularly on the part of the government, there was a desire to flirt with the United States to make the French jealous. That was a negative phenomenon, one that I tried to discourage, as a matter of fact. I didn't think it was healthy for us or for the French.

Q: It is not healthy because you are playing their game.

HOOKS: That's right and it was not healthy for anyone. I tried to discourage that. I recall a very uncomfortable dinner I attended, with a minister on my left side and his French wife on my right side. She engaged in what I thought was the ugliest French bashing that I have ever heard. Her comments reflected more on her than on French policy.

Q: She was bashing France?

HOOKS: Right, yes. And she herself was French. This was in the wake of the events of November 2004, and I think it was an effort to show that she may have been French by origin but her heart was fully Ivorian. I did not want to be rude to her, but at the same time I did not want to give the impression to anyone listening that I was encouraging her in this virulent, anti-French attitude she had. I really did not want to engage her in conversation. I was not about to take a side in the quarrel that was going on.

I had to walk a tightrope, one in which I did not want to appear overly pro-French or anti-French. I frequently suggested to a French basher that they needed to address the French ambassador, not me. I pointed out that France and the United States were allies. The United States was not trying to take the place of France in Africa. Cote d'Ivoire should have multiple trading partners. The French have traditional ties that we don't have and will continue to have them.

With the French ambassador, I had very close ties. We met frequently. We compared notes and certain analyses. I certainly didn't give everything I had and I am sure the French didn't give everything they had, but I found our contacts to be very useful. They still had a very heavy net spread across that country, whether it was French missionaries or French citizens or Ivorians sympathetic to the French cause. After all, many Ivorians had dual nationality, so they could be very helpful in sharing information, and I found that to be useful.

Q: Did you find, going back to the French wife, that the French and the French sympathizers in Ivory Coast must have felt almost let down or betrayed by the French government with the taking out of the air force and all that, although it had been provoked but often a provocation doesn't register when they see particularly the horrendous aftermath of the reprisal.

HOOKS: That's absolutely true. I think I mentioned that people took to the streets, not because they were necessarily pro-Gbagbo. Some of them in fact were anti-Gbagbo. It is just that they felt wounded in their pride and wanted to express their sense of patriotism, the fact their air force had been destroyed and their airport had been taken over. So yes, that certainly was manifested by ordinary people.

At the same time, many people recognized that the government had done wrong and that the government was largely responsible for this sharp breakdown in relationships. I recall an interesting dinner in which the French ambassador turned to a former Foreign Minister of Cote d'Ivoire. The French ambassador was rather direct. He said, "You know, where are our friends at this difficult time? No one is standing up and speaking up on behalf of France. The government is constantly bashing France but none of our friends are standing up." The minister began to squirm; he was very uncomfortable. He said, "The people are afraid. If you stand up now and say anything positive about France, you are treated as a traitor and as a French sympathizer. It is very dangerous."

Over time relations between the two countries evolved, and by the time I left in 2007, there were editorials in the opposition newspapers stating that while France had made its share of mistakes, the government was using France as a convenient scapegoat for its own failures. I think the pendulum was beginning to swing back in a more moderate fashion there. French foreign policy in Africa was still evolving at that time.

Q: Chirac was getting away from Mitterrand and his sons who had questionable ties in some African countries.

HOOKS: Chirac had very close relationships with some leaders in Africa; President Bongo in Gabon is a good example. With the change of government in France, where Sarkozy replaced Chirac, relations with Africa are changing. Sarkozy is of a different generation, he doesn't have the long ties that go back to what is called *Françafrique*. When I was in Abidjan between 2004 and 2007, Chirac was still President of France. The French Ambassador readily admitted that France no longer had a clear vision of what it wanted to do in Africa. It was a policy that was in evolution, one that had not yet solidified. They realized the days of playing the gendarme, of continuing the period of colonization with a façade of independence, keeping leaders in power who owed their existence in large part to their ties to France was no longer feasible.

The French Government had not yet worked out a new, clear cut policy of what it would like to do. The French wanted less interference and less involvement, but still wanted to protect French interests. They wanted to maintain the Francophone countries in France's camp because without Francophone Africa, France would be half of what it is today. France has always been able to deliver the Francophone African votes in the United Nations. If you take away the Francophone countries in Africa, who speaks French, other than France and Belgium? Using French as a language in the UN is justified in part by the fact that there are so many Francophone countries from Africa. The francophone African countries enhance the role of French as a language and France as a superpower. I think France is well aware of that. I am not sure that Sarkozy has a clear vision of the relationship he wants with Africa.

Q: Thinking back to the 1950s and '60s, the French had been in the Ivory Coast and you had people doing very well in France. These were people who would not accept basic Algerian rule but I was wondering if there was a counterpart in Ivory Coast?

HOOKS: I am not sure I understand your question. Houphouët-Boigny was the most pro-French leader in Africa. He had been a minister in France, he had been in parliament and counted upon the French rather than his own troops to keep him in power. That's why he had French troops based at the airport to protect the airport and to protect him. After all, the tunnel between his residence and the French ambassador's residence was dug when he was president. He was criticized oftentimes, certainly by his neighbors in Guinea, for being a French puppet. Abidjan was called the 'Paris of Africa'. It was the most developed and the most comfortable capital in Africa outside of South Africa. I think Cote d'Ivoire was seen as the anchor of French influence in Africa, given Houphouët-Boigny's own stature. As long as the French could keep him in their camp, he could bring along many other Francophone countries through skillful use of his money.

Q: The African ruling elite and the French colonials were melded together pretty well.

HOOKS: There was a very close relationship. There was some degree of intermarriage but also business interests. First of all, when doing business in Ivory Coast, it is always useful to have the Minister of the Interior or the Minister of Defense as your partner. That's just the way it was.

Q: By the time you left there, were you able to re-form your embassy?

HOOKS: An evacuation is one of the worst things that could happen to an embassy. After three or four months, dependents over 18 were allowed to return to post. That meant basically spouses. Children under 18 were not allowed back at post, which meant that many spouses didn't come back. When the spouse and children are back in the States, the employee begins to count the days until he can leave post. When his family isn't there, he just wants out. That is a problem. An evacuation divides the staff into the indispensable who stayed and the rest who were forced to leave.

So the embassy never gets back on its feet in terms of morale until all those at post that went through the evacuation have moved on. As new people arrive at post, the dynamics change. The whole time I was in Abidjan we continued to have that unfortunate divide between those who stayed and those who left. It really was a severe blow. We did not have minor dependents back at post, which meant that the American School was almost wiped out. I just learned when I was in Abidjan this past week that school enrollment is up to 140 students again. Most of them are Ivorians and third country nationals. The embassy never really fully recovered for the whole time I was there.

Q: How was the cathedral or whatever the hell it was treated? He replicated what, St. Peters, wasn't it?

HOOKS: Yes, it's modeled after St. Peter's. It's taller; it's not as big. It's the world's tallest basilica. The front courtyard looks much like St. Peter's Cathedral. I think there are two things we can say about this basilica; one, it is seen as a symbol of Ivory Coast, a symbol of nationalism and national identity. People are very proud of it, and the fact that there is something in Ivory Coast that is unique on a worldwide scale. The second thing you can say is that it is a little bit of a white elephant. It never should have been built in the first place. The basilica is located in Yamoussoukro, not in Abidjan, because Houphouët-Boigny wanted to move the capital from Abidjan to Yamoussoukro, his village. He started building grandiose buildings in Yamoussoukro. In fact, Yamoussoukro is the official political capital although Abidjan remains the de facto capital.

The third point I wanted to make is that it is run by Polish priests. Pope John Paul put Polish priests in charge of it. Since I speak Polish very well, I got to know the Polish priests. I visited the basilica a number of times. I took many visitors there. The problem is how to maintain a structure like that. Building it is one thing, but maintenance is another. President Gbagbo once said, "We in the Ivory Coast can build beautiful buildings, but the problem we have here is that we don't maintain them" and that is exactly the issue.

Q: This is something I have noted throughout the world. These structural monuments fall apart so rapidly. It needs a lot of money to maintain them.

HOOKS: It takes a lot of money. Even though the Pope insisted that Houphouët-Boigny also give money for a hospital, the hospital has never been built. The Polish priests

explained to me that their budget was probably about half of what they needed to maintain that structure. They point out, for instance, that it is a unique structure and therefore unique components are required to replace old ones. For instance, there are huge columns, round structures with elevators inside. The elevators were made uniquely for these columns for that particular facility, so standard elevator parts don't fit.

The dome was leaking in a couple of places, and Father Stanislaw explained to me that after every heavy rain, the staff has to mop the floor. The climate is very unforgiving in that part of the world; it is very hot and very humid, with heavy tropical rains. The basilica has stained glass windows that rise several stories. The architect built a structure around them with glass to protect the stained glass windows against the tropical sun to prevent fading. Some of the protective windows have broken at the top; not the stained glass windows but the protectors on the outside. The priests do not have the money to replace them, so they are using ordinary corrugated plastic as replacements.

The cement apparently was not designed for a hot, humid climate. There are deep gaps between blocks where the cement has crumbled and fallen away. The priests explained to me that the cleaning crew sweeps up the cement dust that falls from these structures every day. In fact, the gaps between the stones are getting bigger, and in some cases you barely see any cement left. It has practically disappeared. The rain gets in the cracks. I wonder what is going to happen in a few years.

To get to the roof, special equipment is needed even from the inside because the dome is 14 stories up from the ground. You would have to build a structure 14 stories high both inside and out in order to do repairs. The priests do not have money to do that. The priests are concerned that that over time the structural safety of the building will be compromised. Mildew grows so easily in the humidity. The leaks in the roof are going to spread. In order to save electricity, the priests only use air conditioning on high holidays when large numbers of people are inside. They can no longer afford to turn on all the lighting at night so they use minimal lighting.

Who goes to the basilica? It is in Yamoussoukro, which is not the capital, except on paper. It is not even in the center of Yamoussoukro. It is on the edge of Yamoussoukro and therefore even people in Yamoussoukro go to neighborhood churches rather than take a taxi to the basilica. There are at most 400 people in the basilica on a Sunday and often times only 200. It is a little far to walk for most people. The basilica can seat 7,000 people, with the possibility of putting additional chairs for 10,000, and at most 400 people show up on Sunday. Local donations are practically non-existent. The residents are poor people, by and large, and they have little to contribute. There are no large corporations that contribute to the upkeep of the building. As a result, the basilica, like many other things in the country, is deteriorating rapidly. I wondered when I was there what that basilica will look like in 20 years in the absence of any serious maintenance. They clean it but they can't maintain it as needed.

Q: The thought of that dome sitting up there with the pillars around it becoming structurally weaker and weaker is a bit scary.

HOOKS: It is indeed.

From the highway into the courtyard there is a kilometer covered with white marble, but there are problems maintaining that marble because it is built in a swampy area.

Q: Ok. You left in 2007. What were American interests in Ivory Coast when you left and where did you see the short run course of things there?

HOOKS: Well, I think we should put this in a broader context, what are our policies there? We had a bit of a problem in my view. During much of the remaining time I had in Ivory Coast, Sudan was the issue that caught the attention of decision-makers in Washington. The Assistant Secretary of State was seized with the issue because of political pressure.

Our interest in Ivory Coast was basically to move Ivory Coast back to where it had originally been, where it would be an anchor of stability in the region. It is one of the larger countries in the region. If Cote d'Ivoire could become a stable country, a country with a legitimate government, a democracy and hopefully with some degree of economic prosperity, it could serve as an engine of growth for other countries.

We do have economic interests in Cote d'Ivoire. Several of the companies that were processing cocoa beans were American companies, and there were other American interests, including growing oil interests. In fact, in 2005 oil became the largest and most important source of revenue in the budget, passing cocoa beans for the first time ever.

The focus back in Washington was on a stable, democratic, prosperous Cote d'Ivoire that could serve as an anchor for the rest of the region. The problem was that the Assistant Secretary had little time and attention to give to Cote d'Ivoire. I don't think any of the assistant secretaries while I was there had much depth of understanding of Francophone Africa. There was a naïve sense or hope that somehow we were going to quickly move Cote d'Ivoire to elections. That was the big thing in 2005, to get to elections. Well, I could tell we were not getting to elections. The political will was just not there. I think there was not an appreciation of the fact that the country had been torn apart. It had been traumatized by the coup of 1999 and the semi-successful coup of 2002. They still haven't gone to elections. I think the Assistant Secretary at the time was determined that Cote d'Ivoire was going to go to elections, and she did not want to hear comments to the contrary. I felt that was very naïve. First of all, we are not putting any money into elections. Initially I was told we would have \$100,000 to cover administrative costs. Later we were promised \$600,000, but that was mostly for training. It was never very solid, it was never finalized while I was there because elections kept being postponed.

So we had a situation where our whole focus was on elections while the country was simply not ready for it. The fact that we are now in 2010 and we still don't have elections is a telling point. In February there was a slight mini-crisis in Cote d'Ivoire when the President dismissed the Government, except for Prime Minister Soro. Many of the same

people were included in the new government. The President also dismissed the head of the independent electoral commission, claiming the President of the IEC planned to add 400,000 names to the voter registrations list, people who shouldn't be on the list. President Gbagbo named a new President and new vice presidents for the IEC.

Q: Was this part of the 'who is Ivorian and who isn't'?

HOOKS: That's always an issue, especially when it comes to voter registration lists. That's an issue in Cote d'Ivoire that you don't have in other countries. In many countries the question is the timing of elections, and often how much do you have to cheat to win. In Cote d'Ivoire, the fundamental question is who is a citizen and who is entitled to vote. Cote d'Ivoire has a population of about 16 million people, but about half of those are considered foreigners. If you consider that there are only eight 8 million people, of which maybe half are adults and eligible to vote, 400,000 becomes a significant number.

Q: Also you are pointing to something I think is very American. We fix on gimmicks; elections, for example. There are countries, particularly Islamic ones, where they don't have an election. In Saudi Arabia there is a good chance they might have one election and then declare it an Islamic republic with no need for further elections. This is the problem, I mean, you know elections don't always solve problems. We have elections and recently not an awful lot has been solved.

HOOKS: Elections are critical to a democracy. We know that. However, elections can aggravate problems when society is divided. It's like, if you have a certain existing medical condition, don't go running. In the United States we are very impatient people. We demand elections. They are scheduled for 2005. We want elections as we have them here in the United States. I think there is a failure to understand that in some countries the political process is just not mature enough, the institutions are not strong enough, and therefore elections don't take place as scheduled on the calendar.

Secondly, there is not always a clear understanding of the fact that countries can sometimes be traumatized, as the Ivory Coast was. Our position is basically to get over it. We don't vote in Cote d'Ivoire, and that is something we forget. We invest very little money, and we expect countries to move on our timetable. I think I told you, when I was in Brazzaville I was instructed by the deputy assistant secretary of state to tell President Sassou that we wanted elections to take place in six months. That was absolutely insane because, as I told her, if she and I were in charge of putting together elections, we couldn't organize them in six months. The country was still torn apart by civil war. It was absurd. We were not credible.

Cote d'Ivoire needs to organize new elections in order to restore credibility, but elections have to reflect political will. I was just in Abidjan last week. I can tell you, the opposition is doing very little to call for elections. There is a certain lethargy that is just palpable and not a sense of urgency to get to elections now. There are no demonstrations in the streets, there are no signs up. The government does not want elections. There is a general

sentiment that somebody ought to do something, the somebody being the international community. That is not a coherent strategy for getting to elections.

I don't quite understand why President Gbagbo does not want to go to elections. The opposition is fragmented. Former President Bédié is the symbolic leader of the opposition, and he is weak. Bédié is the best asset Gbagbo could have under the circumstances. Until he passes on or resigns, which I doubt he will do, the opposition will remain rudderless. The young generation is blocked from taking the reins.

Interestingly, during a discussion of the events of 2000, President Gbagbo told me in 2004 that had Bédié and Ouattara not been disqualified from running, he (Gbagbo) might never have been elected president. After all, he was a minority candidate from the lesser populated part of the western part of the country. He was never taken all that seriously by the population as a whole. However, due to unique circumstances, he came to power. Naturally, he does not want to jeopardize losing that power. I don't think he has the confidence to face elections. He is afraid there could be surprises, so he wants to control the voter lists so that he minimizes any risk of losing.

Q: Before we leave the subject of Cote d'Ivoire, you mentioned something about the attention of the African Bureau during this particular time. We are talking about the Bush administration. I am not stigmatizing the Bush administration, but sometimes you get a conjunction of personalities and issues. Did you feel that Francophone or parts of Africa were just not of great interest where there were problems elsewhere from the Washington point of view?

HOOKS: There are two things you can say about that. The good news is that attitudes are changing and a certain evolution in thinking is taking place. However, traditions don't die very easily. Whenever a President goes to Africa, where does he tend to go? Ghana. Ghana is English speaking, as are South Africa and Kenya. Generally one Francophone country is added to the program just for appearances. That tends to be Senegal, but POTUS never seems to go beyond that. Traditionally, we have looked upon the French-speaking countries as France's backyard, so we have been reluctant to trespass. While that policy is evolving to some degree, there is still not a depth of understanding of Francophone Africa. Few of the Assistant Secretaries have served there or have particularly close ties there that I am aware of. George Moose did have some experience there and Hank Cohen, but in recent years, that has not been the case. I think there has been a tendency not to engage there and to tell the French to take care of that area.

Q: And also for a long time the French have taken care of it.

HOOKS: The French are changing their policies. For example, Bangui, the Central African Republic. Initially the French went in to fix the problem, but then they decided they really couldn't afford that type of outlay anymore. They told the United Nations they were going to leave, and it was up to the United Nations to take over the peacekeeping process. The French decided it was too heavy a burden to maintain. Moreover, France is

changing, and so is Africa. And the United States has to change its policies toward French-speaking Africa as well.

No doubt there will be future UN peacekeeping missions in countries where there are none today. We end up paying 27% of the costs, and we are going to have to continue to do that. I think that we need to give French-speaking Africa more attention. We still need to let France take the lead in many places. I don't think we should go in and take the lead, but I think we need to be more engaged, both with France and with the host countries. We also need to be more realistic when it comes to what we can do and what we can't do; what the limits of our power are, in other words. That is something I don't think is always understood in Washington, what the limits of our power are. As a result, we sometimes put ourselves in untenable positions that make us look foolish rather than in a constructive capacity.

Q: You left in 2007.

HOOKS: August, 2007.

Q: And then what?

HOOKS: I returned to Washington to attend the retirement seminar and to retire. Since then I have been working with a group of businessmen on mining projects in Africa.

Q: Why don't we chat a bit about that? We mentioned before in the Congo, for example, the tremendous wealth in the Congo. You've got Ghana and all around there is a lot of mining. What is your impression, having been a diplomat and moving into the business community, is there a different optic toward Africa?

HOOKS: I think there is a different optic. As a diplomat you have close ties with the business community. However, you don't always understand the challenges that businessmen face that an ambassador generally does not face. Doing business in Africa is not very easy. Obtaining mining concessions is a very complicated process. I just went through this process and it took me two years. In order to break the bureaucratic logjam, I went directly to the President. Given the culture of corruption, frequently government officials who have to sign documents think that they are entitled to something when they are dealing with a huge project.

You know about corruption in theory when you are ambassador, but in business you have to deal with it, whereas in diplomacy there is not a lot of money involved. The ambassadors don't have money to hand around. The project I have been involved with in Ivory Coast is a project that includes developing mines and building infrastructure, with a combined investment of about six billion dollars.

This leads people to think there should be spinoff for them, that if they are involved in moving the paperwork forward for a six billion dollar project, there should be something that comes their way. When they don't see the spinoff, they try to block the project at

various stages of the game. The file stops at their desk and doesn't move. A project of this magnitude requires the signatures of many people in several different ministries. The last hurdle is the office of the secretary general of the government who makes sure all the documentation is properly put together. The final stop is the President's office.

It requires a lot of patience and a lot of diplomacy to track and move the documentation through the system. In some countries, a handful of ministers or the President make decisions; the bureaucracy doesn't work very well. Ivory Coast has the advantage and the curse in some respects that it does have a very bureaucratic process. Therefore, it is not easy to do business there, but it can be done if you are persistent.

As an ambassador you are always trying to encourage the government to improve the investment climate, but you do so in a bit of an abstract sense. When you are caught up in the process as a businessman, you see so many lost opportunities. When investors try to launch a project, the risks are high, and therefore they demand a very high profit margin before they will even get involved. That is a heavy cost to Africa.

Q: How do you find that you fit into the business environment? Were you tainted with being a former diplomat? Obviously it was seen as some advantage or you wouldn't have been hired. Sort of at the working level that's all cute but this isn't how we do it. In other words, were there problems?

HOOKS: No. The reason you are hired is simple: they need you to move the project forward. As I just mentioned, government officials do not always look at a project in economic terms. It isn't just whether the project is good for Ivory Coast and all the documentation is in order and therefore you move the project along; personal interests get involved. If I am director of an office and this project needs my signature, why should this project pass through my hands without any benefit to me? I've got kids in school in France and other family obligations. You know the story. I worked with businessmen to find ways of moving the project through the bureaucracy in a timely fashion and to keep it clean. There were times when I had to go to the minister and tell him that the project was stuck. He would call the director in and instruct the director to move it along, something the director would do reluctantly. My access to the Minister made all the difference. This is why I was hired. Who can call the president? Not too many people can get through. I was hired because I was able to do that, and I did. I was able to call the president and his secretary would put me through. Furthermore, when we went to Abidjan, we went to see the President. How do you get in to see the president if you are a businessman? If you have a former American ambassador who knows the President well, who knows the country well, you increase your chances of success. The process moves much more quickly, and for a large project, time is money, big money. In this particular case, when the project was blocked, I was able to call the President. The President ordered the files sent to him, and he signed them the same day.

As a businessman, you see things from a different perspective and in very practical terms. You knew about the issues in the abstract beforehand, but when you are dealing with a

project, you begin to see it in very concrete terms. It reminds you of how the things you were trying to encourage the government to do beforehand really need to be done badly.

When talking to Ivorian friends, I often cite an example of the differences in doing business in Cote d'Ivoire versus doing business in the United States. Let's say you want to buy a new car and you have the money. In the United States you go to a car dealer and negotiate your purchase. You can drive out of the parking lot within an hour. You have a temporary tag, and the permanent license tags will be mailed to you. Your taxes are taken care of because you pay your taxes directly to the dealer, who will send them to the state. One phone call to your insurance company and you are on your way; everything is taken care of. All the bureaucracy is done.

Many businessmen in Cote d'Ivoire have explained to me how the process of buying a car works. Even if you know knew the process intimately, which the average person does not, it takes about a month from the time you buy the car before you can drive it on the street legally. Why? Because you have to buy the license tag yourself, the dealer cannot do the paper work for you. How many tax offices do you have to go to? Not one but several. You don't just walk into a tax office, present your documentation and pay the tax. You have to see the director and you have to have an appointment. It is more complicated than that. Businessmen say it takes about a month to take care of all requirements even for a company that knows the process well. I use that example to show how easy it is to do business in the United States. The Government cooperates with businessmen to help people spend their money. That's not the case in Cote d'Ivoire.

Let me make a couple of points about our foreign policy. This week there is an issue at the forefront of our relations with Israel, namely the issue of settlements, as we try to move to a peace process. We see even with a special ally like Israel how difficult it is to get our own goals and objectives accepted by a very close ally at a particularly delicate time when we are trying to relaunch a negotiating process. My point is simply to say there are limits to our own power over even very close allies.

That same principle applies when it comes to Africa; there are limits to our ability to do things there, and we have to be realistic about it. We have to put it in a local context. When we become unrealistic, particularly in terms of speed, such as demanding that elections be organized in a short timeframe, we become less effective.

Washington is a city of crises. We deal with crises of the day. There is less thinking about longer horizons. In Africa, of course, you can't always know what will happen in two months, much less two years or twenty years. I think we need to give more thought to where we want Africa to be. Do we really want to have more regional integration there? If so, we need to work more with sub-regional organizations. I think we need to engage more in Africa, particularly for elections which we seem to attach so much importance to. We need to step up to the plate more and participate financially in that process. You have to pay for your place at the table.

The second thing I would say is in terms of the Foreign Service itself. I cannot think of another career that would have given me as such professional satisfaction and personal happiness as the Foreign Service did. Looking back at 36 years' experience after being retired for two and a half years, I think it was an incredible experience that allowed me to grow and develop as a person, as a professional. One of the things that the State Department gave me was confidence in myself and in my professional abilities. It is a unique opportunity that attracts some very bright people, very talented people. I think those of us who were fortunate enough to have a successful career in the Foreign Service realize as time passes how unique it was. I knew it was a terrific experience at the time, but as I look back on it now I think, wow, that really was an incredible experience that I was allowed to have, and I loved every day of it.

Q: I also think because I am doing these interviews that you realize the Foreign Service experience creates people who are able to deal with a variety of matters, often very unexpected, including all of a sudden some people firing at you. It can both be very satisfying and very dangerous and you can be really influential.

HOOKS: One of the things you realize when you are in the Foreign Service is that you can sometimes play a role in the making of history in a way that few other careers offer. You sometimes help write the history of the host country. Because you are an American diplomat, particularly the American ambassador, you play a role that almost no one else can play. Whether it is in facilitating communications or influencing the decisions of the people in power, you play a prominent role in the events of the day. I think that is something that is uniquely satisfying. It also gives you a sense of participating in something much bigger than yourself. I love history, and I try to see things in terms of historical trends. The Foreign Service experience cannot be replicated elsewhere.

Q: To me it is very apparent that the United States often reluctantly is the major player at the table.

I thank you very much, Aubrey.

End of interview.