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

AMBASSADOR DARRYL NORMAN JOHNSON

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Pearson Fellowship
Assassination of Anwar Sadat

Washington, DC —Staff Assistant, 1982-1984
Under Secretary for Political Affairs Eagleburger's Office
Travel to Taiwan

Beijing, China—Political Counselor 1984-1987
Getting the Peace Corp to China
Meeting with the Defense Attaché
Socialism with Chinese Characteristics
Vice President Bush's Visit

Warsaw, Poland—Deputy Chief of Mission 1987-1991
The Solidarity Movement in Poland
President Bush's Visit to Poland
The Polish Election
The Role of the Pope and the Catholic Church in Poland
Bringing in the Peace Corp
Capstone; Promotion Board

Vilnius, Lithuania—Ambassador 1991-1994
Establishing a Lithuanian Embassy
The Pope's Visit
The Lithuanian Diaspora
Lithuanian Presidential Elections
Establishing Cultural Programs

Washington, DC —Deputy Director 1994-1995
Assistance to the Former Soviet Union Office
Cleaning up "Loose Nukes" in the Former Soviet Union
Program to get Soviet Soldiers Housing
Specialist at the United Nations

Sarajevo, Bosnia—Chargé d'affaires 1995-1995
Bosnian Task Force
The Bosnian Accords
1996 Croatia USAF CT-43 crash

Taipei, Taiwan—Director of the American Institute in Taiwan 1995-1999
Lee Teng-hui Visit
PRC-Taiwan Relations
Chinese Missile Tests Across the Straits
Working with the American Chamber of Commerce

Washington, DC —Political Adviser to the Chief of Naval Operations 1999-2000

Working in the Pentagon
Overseas Trips to Japan and Italy

Washington, DC —Deputy Assistant Secretary 2000-2001
Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs
The U.S. Presidential Election
Hainan Island incident

Bangkok, Thailand—Ambassador 2001-2005
Meeting the King of Thailand
Accompanying the Thai Queen on a Trip to New York

Manila, Philippines—Chargé d'affaires 2005-2005
The 60th Anniversary of Japanese Surrender

Retirement January, 2005

INTERVIEW

Personal Background

[Note: Tape 1 of this set was lost. Therefore, this first section is a written record, not the result of an interview. It therefore lacks the question and answer format.]

JOHNSON: My involvement in foreign affairs happened almost by accident. As a kid growing up in suburban Seattle, I was neither exposed to nor particularly interested in what happened beyond America's borders -- with the important exception of World War II. As kids, our games involved not only the traditional "cowboys and Indians," but also featured "the Japs" as bad guys. Interestingly, we did not feature "the Nazis" nearly as much, perhaps because on the West Coast we were much more aware of the War in the Pacific. I remember vividly when that War ended; we were at the home of my Nelson grandparents in Tacoma when the announcement was made on the radio that Japan had surrendered, and the sirens went off and people ran into the streets yelling and cheering. It was August 15, 1945; I was 7 years old at the time.

I also remember clearly the outbreak of the Korean War in June, 1950. I'm not sure why, but again it may have been because it did not seem far away, and we had recently studied in class about Korea and Japan and China. Of course, the Chinese Communists had won the civil war over the Nationalists only one year earlier, so that may have been in the background. Not long after this, Sen. Joseph McCarthy (R-Wisconsin) appeared on the political stage, and there was much talk in our house about Communists in the State Department and in the movie industry and about "who lost China." I remember my father, whose political opinions were definitely right of center, arguing with my uncle about McCarthy one time, saying, "Who is he hurting? If they weren't guilty, they

wouldn't be crying, and the State Department people are the worst -- Acheson, Alger Hiss." Later in my life I wondered whether my decision to join the State Department was a form of rebellion against his views.

To digress a bit, my main focus through junior high and high school was music. I played the trumpet, and played pretty well. I played in the All-State and All-Northwest bands in high school, and as a high school senior, was selected as one of six high school musicians from the State of Washington to participate in the All US High School Band in St. Louis. To make this even more special, I won the audition to be First Chair trumpet in the band! Let me hasten to add that I knew very well that I was not the best high school trumpet player in the USA; in fact, I was not even the best in the State. But I played my part with no mistakes in the audition -- twice -- and won the top chair.

Another digression: in the previous year, 1955, I was selected to attend the National Conference of Methodist Youth at Purdue University in Indiana. I had been active in our community church from early childhood, and participated in local and state events, too. I don't recall how many kids from our state attended the Conference, but the total number of participants was over 5,000, as I recall. Much of the discussion was over my head, but I remember three topics that interested me. First, there was a recurring theme of intellectual doubts about God and about the church, which was addressed with the repeated phrase, "Love the questions." This theme seemed very relevant to me at the time. The second was the role of the black church, or more accurately, blacks in the Methodist Church. There were some black kids there, and some black preachers, but very few. And the explanation was that there was a large and active black Methodist church in the South, which enjoyed greater influence than it would have if it became a part of the larger nation-wide church; "they have their own church," it was said. The most gripping speaker was Alan Payton, author of the book, "Cry the Beloved Country," about the plight of blacks in South Africa. The third topic was international relations, particularly the Bandung Conference of the Non-Aligned Movement in Indonesia in 1954. There was particular attention to PRC Premier Zhou Enlai's role at that conference, contrasted with the apparent disinterest or absence of the US. Little did I realize at that time that I would spend many of my working years looking at the activities of Premier Zhou, and of other developments in Asia.

Starting my college career at the University of Puget Sound, I played in the band and orchestra. But my more important musical life came with my selection to sing in the Adelphian Concert Choir, an outstanding performing ensemble. There were 40 members, and we all had to audition to get in. The Director was Bruce Rodgers, who scared several of the others, but who knew how to get the sound he wanted. We toured in the spring for about two weeks, and that was the time when our sound really came together. After my sophomore year I won the men's "inspirational" award, which was especially meaningful to me because it was the result of an election by the whole group.

On the academic side, I studied with several excellent teachers, one of whom was Harold P. Simonson, who taught English and American lit. He was very demanding but he really made the literature vibrant and challenging. Another outstanding teacher was Robert G.

Albertson, who taught religion. In those days, Puget Sound still required that all students take one semester of religion in order to graduate. So I took Albertson's course. But he taught it not as indoctrination but as comparative religion. He had served in the US Army Air Corps in the India-China Theater during WWII, and became very interested in Buddhism. In fact, I think he was really a Buddhist at heart. My point, however, was that this was another major influence with experience in Asia.

After two years at Puget Sound, I transferred to the University of Washington in Seattle. By then I had decided to be an English major, largely inspired by Professor Simonson and by my closest friend, Ralph Franklin (who later became the head librarian at Yale University). The UW had an excellent English department. So I took a wide range of courses. But because I had not been an avid reader as a kid, I felt I had a lot of catching up to do. And I also realized that if I wanted to continue in that field, I would have to go to graduate school, and I would have to have good grades to get into good schools. So I really worked, and for my senior year got "A's" in every class but one. As a result of that diligence (or fear of failure), I was chosen as a senior to take part in a special honors seminar called, "Analysis of the Modern Cultural Crisis." There were only about 12 students in this course, which was like a "last lecture" program, with leading lights from across the campus coming to present their deepest thoughts. For the first half of the course, the presenters were mostly from the "hard" sciences -- biology, physics, chemistry; for the second half, they were mostly from the humanities -- history, economics, philosophy, literature. It was a challenging course, to say the least, and the discussion went on at a very high plane -- sometimes too high for my understanding. But I enjoyed the course and did well in it. And based on my grades at the UW, including transfer credits from Puget Sound, I graduated "cum laude," just missing "magna cum laude" by a fraction of a point, and qualifying for Phi Beta Kappa. I also received separate honors for English lit, for ROTC and for music.

I also played in the marching band and the opera orchestra, and sang in the madrigal ensemble. One of my greatest regrets in college was giving up the chance to go to the Rose Bowl football game on January 1, 1960. Washington won the conference championship, and as a member of the marching band, I had played and marched at every home game. But for the Rose Bowl, I would have had take part in practices for five straight evenings when I also had opera performances and finals coming up the following week. So I decided that my grades were more important than the football game. If I had it to do over again, I would not have missed that game, which, by the way, Washington won over Wisconsin 44-8.

For graduate school, 1960-61, I chose to go to the University of Minnesota because it had an excellent English department, featuring the poet/novelist Allen Tate, the 18th Century scholar Samuel Monk and others of note. I took Tate's course, which was excellent. Tate was a close personal friend of T.S. Eliot and of Robert Penn Warren -- literary giants of their era. Monk was not there that year, but his place was taken by an equally notable scholar, Herbert Davis from Oxford, whose course on 18th Century English lit featured Swift and Pope. I did not get a degree from Minnesota, however, because I applied to go to Princeton the following year, and was accepted.

A couple of other notes about that year in Minnesota: I noticed during my first week on campus that the Minnesota Orchestra played its subscription concerts at the Northrop Auditorium on campus. So I applied to be an usher for the concerts, and as a result got to see lots of outstanding music that year, including the Metropolitan Opera in the spring and several visiting ensembles. Also on the cultural front, that was the year that Tyrone Guthrie established his world-class theater in Minneapolis, and I attended most of the plays in that first season. The third notable development that year was that the University of Minnesota football team won the Big 10 (I believe that they have never won it since then!). So they went to the Rose Bowl, where they lost to Washington 17-7. And finally, this was also the year that the Washington Senators became the Minnesota Twins, and in the spring I took a job as an usher at the ball park. This allowed me to go to the games pretty much whenever I wished, and to see some really good games. That Twins team, with few changes, went to the World Series three years later.

The following academic year, 1961-62, I studied at Princeton. There were only about 20 English majors, and it was assumed that all would complete their PhD work and go into the teaching profession at the university level. Indeed, most did. But I had a difficult time adjusting to the depth of knowledge that most of the others seemed to have, and I decided towards the end of the year that I was not cut out to be an English professor. One element in this decision was that this part of academia seemed very remote from the "real world," and I was ready for something that was more relevant -- for lack of a better word. So I applied for some jobs in New York and Washington, and got some offers. I also sent in my application for the Foreign Service, having gotten the forms from a fellow student who had been an intern the previous summer at Embassy Paris.

Then I went back home to Seattle during the summer of 1962 and got a job at Boeing, and was working there in October when the Cuban Missile Crisis gripped the country -- those of us at Boeing believed we would be among the first targets for Soviet missiles if war broke out.

That was also the summer of the Seattle World's Fair, which I visited several times. Once, purely by chance, I went to see a classical music and dance performance by the Royal Thai Ensemble. The charm and beauty of the performance made a lasting impression. Also at the World's Fair, I picked up an application form for the Peace Corps, and sent it in. One of my roommates from Minneapolis, Pete Kramer, had already joined the Peace Corps and was in the first group to go to Malaysia.

I heard back from the Peace Corps within a few weeks, and was instructed to report on November 10, 1962, to train to go to Thailand at the University of Washington -- how convenient. I had also heard back from the Foreign Service a few weeks before that about taking the written exam, and spent one whole Saturday in October at the UW taking the exam. It was the hardest test I had ever seen, and I left without taking the language option for extra credit because I thought the whole process was a waste of my time -- I would rather have been at the football game! Imagine my amazement when, about one month into my Peace Corps training program, I received word that I had passed the FS written

exam, and that there would be a team of three examiners coming to Seattle in January to administer the oral exam. The oral exam was actually not nearly as bad as the written exam, although there was a clear effort to probe for how the candidate responded when he had no clue about the answer. I evidently did well on that part of the exam! At the end, the chairman asked whether, if I passed, I would choose to enter the FS at once, or continue with Peace Corps. I said I thought I had an obligation to the PC, and that the PC experience would be quite different from the FS experience. I think in retrospect that that was the answer they were looking for, but it was also my honest feeling. In any case, the examiners told me several minutes later that I had passed and could choose to enter the FS at once, or to delay my entrance until I had completed my PC tour of duty.

Peace Corps Thailand

Peace Corps training involved about three months of Thai language training and area studies, teacher training, linguistics (because we were going as English teachers), physical fitness, American culture, and some other subjects. It was demanding, but also enjoyable. I met my first wife, Carol Lee Franz, on the first day of training, and we were married on February 9, 1963, at my family home; the ceremony was performed by Dr. Robert G. Albertson, my former professor at Puget Sound.

Lee and I and the others in our group left for Thailand on February 14, had an overnight stopover in Tokyo, then arrived in Bangkok on February 16 (one result of this timing was that Lee had no birthday that year because we crossed the international dateline around midnight on February 14 and missed February 15). Our first impression of Thailand was that it was really hot and humid, and the welcoming garlands of jasmine were full of bugs.

During our first week in Thailand, we had several orientation sessions and got to know the PC staff and several people from the Thai Ministry of Education. Lee and I stayed with a young host family, a couple who had recently returned from studying at the University of Michigan, Thermphan and Darawan Bunnag -- after whom we later named our daughter. They were from a prominent family; her father was later the head of the Royal Thai Air Force.

One event of note that week: because we were among the first PC Volunteers to come to Thailand -- Group 3 -- the Ambassador hosted a reception in our honor at his Residence. Little did I realize that one day 40 years later I would be living in that Residence and hosting a reception for the members of my Peace Corps group! The Ambassador at that time was Kenneth Todd Young, a professional academic who had worked for the State Department and was selected by President Kennedy to be his man in Bangkok. Ambassador Young's wife/widow, Patricia (Trish), was still living in Thailand when we arrived in 2001 and later moved to a retirement home in Seattle. The Young's had three children, two of whom were academics. The third, Kit, was living in Chiang Mai at that time, married to one of our officers at the Consulate-General. Small world!

At the end of that first week, we left for Buriram, a relatively poor province in Northeastern Thailand, accessible only by train twice per day. Our arrival was classic -- no one was there to meet us, and we had no idea where to go or even whom to ask for. Fortunately, some concerned people who got off the same train took it upon themselves to take care of us, and before long a group of people from the school arrived and hustled us off to a typical Thai-style house, which was to be our residence. They were profusely apologetic. And in 2002, on our first trip to Buriram after I became Ambassador, the officials of that same school gave me a copy of the message they had received 39 years earlier saying that we were due to arrive the following day!

We had arrived just before the school holiday, so we were able to take our time getting adjusted. Although school was not in session, we did start giving English language classes to teachers and officials and business people. Not long after that, Lee became ill and had to go to Bangkok to be closer to medical care. We discovered that her "illness" was actually pregnancy. Peace Corps did not have a policy at that time about volunteers having babies. But fortunately for us, three couples in Group 1 had already had kids, and two other couples in our group were already expecting. So PC decided not to send us back to the States, but rather to transfer us to a place where Lee could receive good medical care. That place was Lamphun, about 20 miles south of Chiang Mai, and the medical facility was the McCormick Hospital, a US missionary hospital where Lee was a patient of Dr. Edwin McDaniel, who later delivered our daughter, Darawan, whose Thai name means "complexion like a star."

The biggest historical event during our time in the Peace Corps was the assassination of President Kennedy on November 23, 1963. That happened at midnight, Thai time, so we did not hear about it until the following morning, a Saturday, when I had a class of local officials. One of them, the provincial chief, said at the beginning of class how sorry he was about the news about President Kennedy in Texas. I had no idea what he meant, but I thought perhaps there had been a demonstration against the President, as there had been a few weeks earlier against UN Ambassador Stevenson. But he made it very clear that that was not what he meant, although his English vocabulary and my Thai vocabulary were challenged to get the full meaning. Needless to say, we were numb for a few days as we tried to get any information that was available.

Q: This is tape two with Ambassador Johnson. We were talking about the Kennedy assassination and how you heard and you were responding.

JOHNSON: That was one of the few times that we went to Chiang Mai to the Consulate specifically in order to find out information. They had some special prints of the New York Times front page, several other pages, and a special edition that came out later. The coverage was very thorough with detailed descriptions of everything that was known up to that point. That was of course very traumatic, difficult for everyone. Interestingly, about two weeks later -- this was November '63 -- in early December, the then Thai strongman, Sarit Thanarat, died of natural causes and that was, well, I wouldn't say traumatic, but it was a difficult time in Thailand as well. The King's birthday was on December 5, and that year marked his third cycle, which meant his 36th birthday. The

conclusion of these 12 year cycles of course is a special event. So the King's Birthday that year was a very big deal. But Sarit's death only two or three days later brought a sense of uncertainty because there was no designated successor. But I have to add that at that time and in that place there was remarkably little discussion about political topics, and the general level of satisfaction was high. It was in that context that I began to doubt allegations in the Western press and academic circles about the supposedly oppressive Thai military dictatorship. The people we worked and lived with certainly did not seem to be oppressed. And I concluded that, at least in that context, things were not always what they seemed to be from the outside.

Q: The King's birthday was in December?

JOHNSON: December 5th.

Q: 5th?

JOHNSON: Yes, and Sarit died on December 8th. The other thing that happened at that time -- you asked about travel. We made two trips outside Thailand during our PC time. One of them was that week, over the King's Birthday so there was a school holiday. A group of us Peace Corps people went to Angkor Wat during that time which was a real adventure. At that time Thailand and Cambodia did not have diplomatic relations, so we had to get our visas at the Indonesian Embassy in Bangkok. Then once we got to the border crossing at Aranyaprathet, we were stamped out of Thailand. Then we had to walk and carry our bags across this old rickety wooden bridge to the Cambodian side. We found the customs and immigrations hut, and the guy was sleeping in a hammock. There was nobody else around except him. He did not know we were coming. There were 13 of us American Peace Corps people. It took him three or four hours to finally get us stamped into Cambodia. And then it was starting to get dark and we didn't have any transportation or any way to get to Siem Reap, the city closest to Angkor Wat. So he sort of hailed us one of these trucks that had a long sloping back with no windows; it was similar to the kind that the Thais use for putting as many people and chickens and everything else in the back, except it wasn't open. The Thais used these little one-ton pickups which were always open. This one was not. And it was already full. But somehow all 13 of us got into that little van/bus and made the trip to Siem Reap. The other thing that was fascinating about that journey was that the van didn't have any headlights. So when it got dark, there was a problem. About every 200 yards or so there was one of these little culverts and the only bridge across the culvert was one of these wooden bridges that had exactly the right space for the width of the tires to go across. Since he didn't have any lights, the driver gave his eight or nine year old son a flashlight and put him on top of this truck. Every time we'd come to one of those little crossing points, the kid would shine the flashlight down there so the driver could line it up and cross it. It was an adventure getting to Angkor Wat. But we were not disappointed. It's a phenomenal place, unique and stunning in its artistry and scope.

The other time we traveled outside of the Thai borders was after the hot season of 1964, after the school holiday period during which we traded places with two other Volunteers

and taught in a teacher training institute for several weeks in Phuket. In those days, Phuket was mainly known for its tin mining; this was long before it became a tourist haven. Anyway, after that we flew down to Penang and took the train down to Singapore. That was quite different. Malaysia already at that time was far more developed than Thailand and Penang was a wonderful place, mostly Chinese. We also stopped in Kuala Lumpur, the capital, which was very small and quiet. Then when we came back up we got off the train at Songkhla, where there was a small American Consulate at that time -- but no longer; that building is now the Chinese consulate. Then we took a coconut boat from Songkhla back to Bangkok for three days, to the mouth of the Chao Phraya River. En route the boat stopped at Ko Samui, and Samui was like Phuket; it had no tourism business, it was all coconuts. And that's what this boat carried, hundreds and hundreds of coconuts, as many as you could get on it. There were only like five passengers, the rest were crew and they just loaded it up with coconuts and went on back to Bangkok. Then we went on back to Lamphun by train and resumed our teaching.

Now, Thanksgiving. The first year in Lamphun, which was '63, the USIA guy, public diplomacy guy, at the Consulate there was Jerry Kyle. The Consul General was Larry Pickering; he was replaced the following year by Steve Dobrinchuk. The deputy was Richard Ogden, who spent most of his career as an econ officer in Latin America. In Thailand he made a name for himself as a really good tennis player.

Q: Yes.

JOHNSON: Jerry Kyle was the USIS guy, yes. He ran this little USIS post there in Chiang Mai that was not actually physically on the same grounds as the Consulate, it was in the middle of town. He invited all the Peace Corps Volunteers from Northern Thailand to his place for Thanksgiving dinner and there were I think about 23 of us total.

Q: Not only your third class, but the first and second.

JOHNSON: That's right. Everybody else and by then the fourth group had arrived also. There were a bunch of us, about 20, I think, and we all went to his place, and really, you have never seen human beings eat like we did there. I don't know how many turkeys we went through, but I think it must have been about one per person. It was almost an embarrassment; it was a sight of people gorging.

Q: Now, where did the turkeys come from?

JOHNSON: Oh, from the States I think, through the APO or through the commissary or whatever sort of arrangements they had. I think they were U.S. turkeys. There weren't any Thai turkeys as far as I know.

Q: We did that once when I was in Taiwan and one of the locals produced a turkey.

JOHNSON: Produced a turkey? I see. Well, anyway that was a memorable occasion. It was also a sign of things to come. When we were in the Eastern Europe and the former

Soviet Union, the Peace Corps was just getting started in those countries. And we always had a Peace Corps Thanksgiving and we'd invite as many of the Volunteers and staff people who could find their way to our residence.

Q: One of the things I also found out was our showers were very popular for the Peace Corps coming in from the far fields of Phitsanulok and Chaiyaphum.

JOHNSON: Yes. Getting cleaned up, that's right. Because otherwise you take a bath in cold water out of the cistern there with the little cups and bowls.

Q: Who else was up there with you, do you recall?

JOHNSON: In Chiang Mai?

Q: Yes, in the north.

JOHNSON: The people who had a baby in Chiang Mai in Group One were named Burton. As for others in our group, the von Fleckensteins were in Lampang. They had a baby daughter shortly before we did, about two months earlier, also born in Chiang Mai at the McCormack Hospital. I don't actually remember where most of the other people in our group were located. There was a fellow named Bill Williams who was off in Phrae, I think it was; no he was in Loei. That's right. I always thought that was a great name for a province, "the end of nowhere." Bill Williams was one of the two in the group who had died before we had our reunion in '03. The other was George Papagiannis whom you may have met.

Q: Yes.

JOHNSON: George was in our group and later was the regional PC director in Chiang Mai. He later went to Stanford, got his Ph.D. in Southeast Asian studies there, then taught for many years at Florida State University.

Q: Talking about the USIA guy who hosted the Thanksgiving party, there was a time in which USIA almost had a reading office or a post in a wide variety of Thai provinces; was that prior to you or after you?

JOHNSON: I think it must have been later; I think it was during the Vietnam period when the U.S. military buildup was going on. We had people and consulates in Khon Kaen, and you mentioned being in Udorn, and there was somebody in Ubon at that time, too. I don't think it was a consulate, but we had people in lots of places, mainly because of the American military presence.

Q: By the time I got there in '71 this vast USIA operation had shrunk considerably and the last one was in Khon Kaen and that was it for all of the Northeast, and prior to that there'd been 26 posts or something like that.

JOHNSON: There was a fellow who was assigned at one point in the Northeast named Lee Bigelow. Did you know him?

Q: Very well.

JOHNSON: His brother, Stan, was our admin officer in Taipei when we were there. I kept up with Lee Bigelow and his wife for a few years; what was his wife's name?

Q: Linda.

JOHNSON: Linda, that's right. They had also been Peace Corps I think, but not in Thailand.

Q: Burma.

JOHNSON: Burma, that's right and they later served in Burma also.

Q: Anyway, your tour, any of your students ever turn out to do interesting things?

JOHNSON: Oh, yes. Very interesting. I kept up with some of them and the first year that I was there in Lamphun was the first year that the American Field Service program was sending Thai kids to the United States for their senior year of high school. Two of my kids were nominated for that program and went that first year (1963-64) and then two others the second year (1964-65). The first year one of the kids who went was the best student I had the whole time I was there. He came from a very poor family, had been raised in a wat. In the States he lived with a family near Detroit. Just to sort of condense the story, after going to the States, he came back and was in the first graduating class at Chiang Mai University, and from there went to Chiang Mai University Medical School and graduated number one in his class in the first class from that institution. He has been a doctor ever since and in fact he was a doctor at McCormack Hospital for 20 years. He married the woman who was the number two in his class who still is at McCormack Hospital. She's a pediatrician. He has meanwhile gone back to Lamphun and set up a clinic of his own called Clinic Mo Kamtorn (Dr. Kamtorn). And his two sons are both doctors. He was smart in everything, but he was especially good in English and is still. It really makes such a difference.

In the second group, one of the guys, this fellow Annop, did his AFS year in Missouri, I think. The girl in the second group, Chawiwan, went to California. Anyway, Annop later went back to go to college in the States and lived in Florida for eight years and worked with George Papagiannis, then came back and is now the head of the English Department at Chiang Mai University. He often works for the Consulate and for the Embassy when we need an interpreter because he's virtually a native speaker of English now.

The other student, Chawiwan, is now the Assistant Dean of the nursing school at Chiang Mai University; she's the one who went to California. I had not seen or kept in touch with her, but she was involved in helping to organize the welcoming banquet for us when we

went to Lamphun the first time as Ambassador; she and her husband are still living in that area. And she is the person who handles external exchange programs for the CMU nursing school -- including the program with the University of Washington. Small world. The guy who was my closest colleague as a teaching friend was a math teacher of roughly the same age. He had a motorcycle and we PCVs were forbidden from having motorcycles, but I could ride around on his so we did that. He's long since retired. His kid also went to school in the States. One time when I was Ambassador I was playing golf and having lunch in Chiang Mai when this former teaching friend arranged for 14 of my former students to show up for lunch! And they told stories for an hour or more about the English names I had given them, and their fear of being called on in class. It was as though we had just left the class that morning.

Q: Oh, how wonderful.

JOHNSON: Yes, it was just terrific. Still in the same small world, the guy who was the host for the lunch had just missed being my student in Lamphun by one year. He was the military commander for all of Northern Thailand. And yet another one, whom I did not remember, is now the rector of Chiang Mai University. So we got a lot of strokes back. The woman who had come to work for us in our house, whose father was a teacher at my school, got so good in English that she went to work for the Thai tourism department. She spent some time in Bangkok, then came back and she's now the principal at the girls school in Lamphun where my wife taught way back in those days. She and her sister have set up a natural spa in Lamphun and they're doing great.

Q: But isn't it interesting how the seed of the contact with you and that very simple ESL program in fact became a filter for finding and encouraging Thais to fully develop their own talents.

JOHNSON: That's right. In fact the school where I taught now has a permanent AFS room. They have an AFS student every year now at that school, and not always from the States. The first year we were there they had a kid from Brazil and the following year one of their kids had gone to Spain. The AFS program works all over the world now, not just the U.S. That school, which had 300 students when I was there, has 3,000 students now. It has much nicer facilities and it's consistently ranked in the top 10 public schools in the country. From a little rickety Lamphun schoolhouse, now they have something special.

Q: That's excellent, but your tour has to end.

JOHNSON: Yes, the tour ends with the end of the school year in '65, in March of '65.

Q: March of '65, now what was the program? Were you to be replaced?

JOHNSON: Yes. Although actually I don't think we were replaced in Lamphun. We were in Buriram because we had to leave early there. There were two guys who came to replace us.

Q: Now this is northern Thailand. They have the ceremony of the strings, what am I thinking of?

JOHNSON: Yes. I've forgotten what it is called, too, but anyway, yes. I don't remember it at that time. There were lots of ceremonies, but when we went back this time, in '01, we did it, everybody did it in Bangkok especially, but also in other places as well. The tradition in the North for welcoming people was the kanthok dinner, a traditional Northern Thai style dinner where you sit on the floor and you have these sort of round low wicker stools. Then you have a variety of dishes, many of them fiery hot and you would eat them with sticky rice and dip the rice into whatever the dish was or fold it around the piece of meat or something like that. Northern Thai food is quite different from central Thai food except that it has some of the same spices. But otherwise it shows a lot of Burmese influence. So many of the things that we think of as being typically Thai, like the silver, the kind of silver that's pounded into various shapes for these bowls, some of the wood carvings, the lacquerware, the umbrellas -- those are all from the North, from what's now called Lanna. It was once upon a time called the Lanna Kingdom and it included parts of today's Burma. There's a lot of cultural overlay there that's not the same as for the lowland Thai.

Q: Well, in fact, not to get too deep into it, but northern Thailand and Burma were constantly in contact and in conflict with each other and in fact my study of it was the Thai kingdoms in the north would only appear during periods of Burmese weakness.

JOHNSON: Yes, that's right, or central Thai weakness.

Q: Or central Thai weakness because the Thai kingdoms first appeared in the north when the Yuan (Mongol) dynasty pounded the Burmese into the ground.

JOHNSON: Yes, that's right and drove these people from southern China; for the most part the Thais are originally from Yunnan and some migrated somewhat to the east, in northern Vietnam, some went into Laos and Thailand and some went further west into northern Burma, the Shan states, and even to India, in Assam. Anyway, yes, there was a lot of contact between the Thais and the Burmese in the old days. One of the little facts -- one of those things that you later think of as a blinding glimpse of the obvious: we went to see the city museum in Chiang Mai. One of the displays there was about the establishment of the railroad. There was no rail connection to Northern Thailand or any other connection until 1926. That was when they dug that tunnel through the hill near Lampang. It was German engineering that built the railroad. Think of it, it would take a month to get from Chiang Mai to the central plains going down the Ping River, hiking over the hills and jungles through the area down there and then getting on the Ping or one of the other tributaries of the Chao Phraya and going on down to Bangkok. It's amazing. I mean there was no contact to speak of. They were basically separate. Even if they were administratively linked and had some sort of tributary arrangements between the northern kingdom and the central Thai kingdoms, there was no sort of active regular day to day contact.

Q: How does one administratively leave Thailand? You go from Lamphun down to Bangkok and fly out of Bangkok?

JOHNSON: Yes, the Peace Corps paid for our way back and you could use the ticket however you wanted to, adding to it if you wanted to go on a less direct route which we did. We actually took a nice long trip on the way back starting with an overnight in Burma -- in those days you had to have confirmed reservations out within 24 hours from Burma. We arrived one evening and left the next morning, but we stayed at this grand hotel called the Strand. We were the only guests in the hotel. We also got a chance to see the great Shwedagon Pagoda, one of the great temples in all of Buddhism. Then we went on to Calcutta. We were supposed to go to Nepal, but the plane was cancelled so we went to Delhi for a couple of days.

Q: You were traveling en familia.

JOHNSON: Yes, that's right.

Q: With children.

JOHNSON: One child who was then seven months old when we left Bangkok. We were in Delhi for three days, Teheran for three days where my wife had an Iranian friend who had been an exchange student at Michigan; he and his wife were our hosts and we went to the famous bazaar. Then Teheran to Cairo for about three days, and Cairo to Athens and Athens to Rome. We then picked up a tiny Fiat 600 in Rome and my mother joined us in Rome to look after the baby. Then we drove around Europe for about four weeks I think it was. It was a good long trip. Italy, up to Florence and Venice, then up through the mountains to Austria, Germany, Switzerland, France, left the car off at Le Havre and then flew on to London for 10 days in England and flew from there to New York. And the car was there! Can you imagine? I thought that was sort of the way things were supposed to happen. I didn't realize until later that it was a virtual miracle that you leave the car off and it actually gets to New York when you expect it to. It's a good thing because we could not have afforded to stay any longer in New York.

Q: You were talking about touring Europe. This was your first tour overseas after the dust of Thailand if you will; must have been awesome particularly to end up in England with your English literature major and all that these places must have meant.

JOHNSON: We drove to Stonehenge and to Salisbury Cathedral and to Oxford and Cambridge, Stratford-on-Avon -- places that I've never been back to since then. London of course I've been back to, but yes, it was a wonderful trip and the parts on mainland Europe were wonderful as well. It was sort of the grand tour and done once, but never to be repeated. It was great. Then we got back to the States in May of '65. Our car arrived miraculously as I said in New York and we drove across country stopping in various places en route to Seattle and spent the summer here with my parents in our house in Des Moines. Then I got a call in early August saying there was a Foreign Service class starting the next Monday, can you be here? I said no, I couldn't get there, sorry. It's been

four months and I never heard anything for four months and suddenly you want me to be there in two days.

Q: Now, wait a minute, you took the Foreign Service exam when?

JOHNSON: In ’62.

Q: In ’62, so this is ’65.

JOHNSON: That’s right.

Q: What’s been happening every year since ’62?

JOHNSON: Oh, nothing in particular. As long as I was in the Peace Corps it was like being in the military, it was a hiatus. I had already passed the exams. They already told me I passed. I got word. Let’s back up now. It’s November of ’62. I took the exam in October or September, whenever it was given that year. I got notified just before Christmas that I had passed, which was astonishing. I never imagined that it was possible. In those days they did the oral exam by having roving groups, roving interviewers go around to various places and they had a group coming to Seattle in January of that year. So I took a day off from Peace Corps training and went down to the federal building in Seattle and had this interview. There were three of them with one of me for about an hour and a half. I found it kind of odd. I can still remember a lot of the questions, as I’m sure you can and others who went through this ordeal. But I also thought that some of the questioning was pretty easy. I decided afterwards that they thought it was so unusual for somebody in the Peace Corps to have actually passed the written exam that they went out of their way to be soft in the oral questioning. I remember one of the questions they asked was why did the Soviet Union recognize West Germany, but we did not recognize East Germany. I said something that I thought sounded brilliant, and this guy said, “Well, that’s their explanation, now what’s ours?” There was also a question about Indonesia; in those days Sukarno was still in power and it was a very touchy situation, and the question was, why should we have any assistance program in Indonesia when they’re kicking us around so much. I came through that one okay I guess, talking about investing in the future. Anyway, in those days they told you immediately if you’d passed. They said, well, wait outside. Oh, one of the questions at the end was if you are successful today would you choose to join the Foreign Service or continue in the Peace Corps training? I said without hesitation that I thought the Peace Corps was a unique opportunity and I had an obligation and I would do that. And I think that probably was the right answer. It was a genuine answer, but it was also the one they were looking for. Anyway, so I waited for, I don’t know, 15 or 20 minutes, and somebody came out and said that I had passed the oral exam. He added that I could then take up my commission, or defer entry until after my service in the Peace Corps.

Foreign Service Entry

Q: Oh, so in fact you had something to come back to?

JOHNSON: Yes, that's right. Unlike most of my colleagues who were still looking for something to do after that. So, yes, I had that to come back to, but it still took them a long time; I mean, as I said we got back to the States in May and it was late August by the time they called to say there was an opening in the class.

Q: You were saying you heard four months later, around April or May that they were interested?

JOHNSON: Oh no, the opening was there. It was just a question of when, because all they had to do was the security check and the medical check and they had all the stuff for that so it was just a matter of bureaucratic inertia. When they called and gave me two days notice I said no, I don't want to come back now. I can't get there that fast. Well, they said, there may not be another opening. And I said, well, I'll take the chance. The next time they called me in the middle or late September and I had about three weeks notice then and got back to Washington, drove across country with my wife and daughter and got to Washington in time to start Foreign Service training in class number 69, A100 class number 69 on the 10th of October, 1965. Double Ten Day. Little did I realize that Double 10 would come to have special significance in my professional life years later (as the Republic of China/Taiwan national day).

Q: Who was in that class?

JOHNSON: Who was in the A-100 class? Well, among those that I have sort of heard from and kept in some touch with, one was Michael Skol who was later Ambassador to Venezuela and I think now retired. One was Jack Leonard who was Ambassador to Columbia I think. One was Jim Williams whom I saw in Berlin and was later DCM in Greece and I think has the title of Ambassador, but I'm not sure; I think it was to one of the multinational organizations. Jim was a very smooth guy, very good. A guy named Ron Casagrande who was an econ officer with a Ph.D. in German studies and was married to a German. In those days we were told, oh, well, he'll never be assigned to Germany because they never send you back to where your foreign-born spouse is from. His first assignment was to Karachi, Pakistan (then the capital), and his second assignment was to Munich, which was about 60 miles from where his wife had grown up. Ron unfortunately died a few years later when he was econ counselor in Bonn and was out running and had a heart attack and died. This was quite a long time ago. Who else was in our group? Victoria Cordova who was a USIA officer and also from the state of Washington. A guy that was a long time Japan hand who had spent some of his growing up years there as a military kid, Don Westmore. I don't know whether you have run across Don. I think he's retired now. He spoke good Japanese already when he came into the Foreign Service. One of the things that struck me as unusual about that group of people was that there were 32 or 33 of us I think, seven were from California, four were from the State of Washington and the rest were all from different states, one from Illinois, one from Massachusetts, one from New York and so on; amazing.

Q: Aren't we told that Foreign Service Officers are the sons and daughters of the East Coast elite?

JOHNSON: Right.

Q: Well, it was obviously not true then. Did anybody else have Peace Corps experience?

JOHNSON: No. Nobody else in my group had Peace Corps experience. The four from here, one was Victoria Cordova, whom I mentioned; she was from Bellevue. There was a guy named Herman Rossi who later served in Africa, who was from Spokane. Don Westmore because he had a Seattle APO address was considered to be from the State of Washington, and me. Dick Holmes was in this class. You probably knew Dick Holmes.

Q: Oh, yes.

JOHNSON: We were together part of the time for Chinese language training and also part of the time in Hong Kong. Dick and I were together for the better part of four years or so in the Service. Scott Hallford was in that class; he later served in Burma and the Philippines, and was #2 in Taipei and DCM in Beijing before retiring several years ago. Perhaps you knew Scott.

Q: Yes.

JOHNSON: Scott was in that class, and although we both ended up doing China things, we were never in the same place at the same time except in Washington. But I went to visit him in Manila a couple of times when he was serving there. We've kept in touch and he's now retired and living in Florida. I have to go through the materials. Mike Considine was one of the guys in the group. I think he was a USIS officer. Quite a few of our people went to Latin America. There was a disproportionate number of the whole class that was assigned to Latin America.

Q: Can you tell us what the A100 class was all about in those days?

JOHNSON: Yes. The A100 class was basically orientation for Foreign Service work whether in Washington or abroad, but of course the main focus was on Washington institutions. We spent a whole day for example at the Pentagon. We spent a whole day at the CIA in Langley. We spent I think a better part of a day at the White House in the old Executive Office Building, the NSC. We spent time at Commerce. We spent time getting briefings from different bureaus in the State Department and at FSI, which was in Arlington, in Rosslyn, at that time. The EA bureau, the Middle East bureau, the European bureau and so forth would send people to do orientations for us. It was very thorough.

One of the more memorable events during the course: one day we were told to choose any desk, any country desk that we wanted to visit and spend the day there. I chose the PRC desk. It was then called the China mainland office and the person who looked after

me that day was Paul Kreisberg. He later became the director of the desk, but at that time was the political chief on the desk.

Q: Who himself had an incredible career.

JOHNSON: Oh, yes, a wonderful man. It turned out that his first assignment had been Bombay, so when I got my assignment to Bombay, he and his wife invited us over to their place and showed us a bunch of pictures of Bombay. The interesting thing about that day on the desk was that it was in October '65. It was the day after the UN vote that year on, what they called "Chi-Rep," that is PRC representation. It had been a tie vote that year which was a huge shock to us because even though we had forced the procedural step that said it had to be a two-thirds vote, nonetheless the fact that several of our allies including the Philippines, for example, and Peru voted for PRC admission to the UN that year; that was an enormous surprise. There was a woman whose job it was in the EA bureau to watch the multinational organization named Louise McNutt.

Q: I remember Louise McNutt!

JOHNSON: A legend in her own time. There was a wonderful meeting in the late morning that day which I think she was in charge of, maybe there was somebody else, a DAS I suppose was in charge, but Kreisberg was there and she was there and there were some others from other bureaus and I was there and it was a wonderful discussion about the vote count and what was happening. At that point, in 1965, we were sure we were going to lose it the following year. But Mao saved us for another five or six years because of the Cultural Revolution, so people were not prepared to stand with China in the following several years until '71. I thought that was a great way to learn about how a desk operates on a real issue, a really important issue, something that was a front-page story.

Q: Now at that time in '65 Vietnam is cranking up. We're putting troops.

JOHNSON: Right. Even more than cranking up. It was going pretty hot and heavy.

Q: Is this raised in your training and discussed?

JOHNSON: Oh, yes, certainly. In fact there were several of the single people in my entering class, quite a few of them ended up having tours in Vietnam if not initially, then on the second time around. There was a guy in our group named David Moore. Did you know him? He was the only Harvard graduate in our class. I later saw him in Vietnam. He was in Saigon on his second or third assignment. But he never went anywhere after that. Anyway, yes, Vietnam was certainly very much a part of our awareness at that time because it was building up both on the military side and on the diplomatic side. From the embassy side, the CORDS program I think had already started at that point and there were lots of other programs going on. I had been obviously aware of the buildup because of Thailand, where Kennedy sent a contingent of Marines to Korat in the context of the Laotian situation. Those troops were later withdrawn, but a much larger buildup began in

’64 with the air bases in Korat, in Udorn, at Takhli and so forth. These were becoming major U.S. military operations. Nakhon Phanom was also an active base I think at the same time. Ubon was at the same time. Coming back to the States and seeing the rising level of concern about the Vietnam War, it was not a surprise.

Although by the way, one thing I do want to mention is that I think in retrospect it’s very easy and it’s conventional now to talk about the discontent over the war and how unpopular it was. But actually in those days, the President’s approval rating continued high. LBJ’s approval ratings continued high at that time. Support for the war continued high until it started to go bad, and that was in ’68 and ’69, when the tide changed. In those early years the goal was to roll back the Communists, take a stand against the Chicoms and whomever else may be over there doing bad things. And also, not coincidentally, again history has a way of being selective about what one remembers. A lot of the debate at the time was about Thailand and about the so-called dominoes in Southeast Asia. The dominoes were not Cambodia and Laos. They were already basically Communist, closely allied with North Vietnam. The dominoes were Thailand, Burma, perhaps Malaysia, Singapore and so forth. It was the geographic area pointing towards Indonesia. Indonesia at the time was a problem also, so this became sort of another rationale -- to be involved in Southeast Asia was to help prevent Indonesia from collapsing and, of course the coup on September 29th and 30th, 1965, that overthrew Sukarno happened in that context, the context of the radicalization of Indonesia and Southeast Asia.

A side note: in our A-100 class we did a “country team” exercise, and one of the countries for the exercise was Thailand. I volunteered for that group, of course, as did another guy who had been in the army -- the JUSMAG (Joint US Military Advisory Group) -- in Northeastern Thailand before joining the Foreign Service. He, not surprisingly thought the so-called insurgency in Thailand was pretty serious and that we really needed to worry about Thailand’s backbone in this struggle. I did not agree on either point. But as part of our preparation we called on the Thai Desk at State, and met with the Deputy on the desk, Al Francis, perhaps you know him. And I’ll never forget that we asked him at one point, how long is our alliance relationship with Thailand going to last; he paused for a moment, then said, “It will last as long as it serves the interests of both sides.” I thought that was a pretty good comment. And the alliance is still going.

Q: Among the classmates in the A100, my impression at that time is it is a fairly young group of people, most coming right out of school, maybe a year or two of work while they’re working to get brought on, but basically mid-‘20s.

JOHNSON: Yes, mid to late ‘20s definitely. I think we had only two people over age 30 in the class. So, yes, the average age was 26 to 28, something like that.

Q: You were saying there were lectures in a class environment and these field trips.

JOHNSON: Yes. That’s right. The guy that was the head of the A100 course at the time was named Alex Davit. He was an econ officer, mostly EUR background, and his deputy

was named Ralph Jones. Jones had just come back from being political counselor in Nairobi, and I think he had two or three other tours of service -- I don't remember where exactly, but certainly Africa. He had a couple of African assignments.

Q: Let's see, so A100 is about three months?

JOHNSON: A100 is about three months, but the timing, because our class started in October, meant that we had a break over the Christmas/New Year's period before we started the Consular course. And during that period I worked in the public affairs office, and it was just after -- in early January -- it was a time when we had resumed bombing in Hanoi and other parts of Vietnam. Anyway, there were a lot of letters, and part of my job was to punch the button for the automatic replies depending on what the letter said. If the letter was in favor, of course it was 'the Secretary greatly appreciates your support.' If it was against, it was, 'the Secretary is happy to hear from you and will take your views into account.' Anytime we recognized the name, if it was somebody's name we should know, then those got individual treatment instead of a canned answer.

Q: But that must have been an interesting introduction to the whole interaction of the executive branch with the American people.

JOHNSON: Yes, because there were lots of American people who were sounding off at that point in January of '66.

Q: The Department cared enough about responding to at least have a canned response if not some real response.

JOHNSON: That's right. Then the Consular course began, I think in the second or third week of January, and that was a two week or three week course.

Q: Which everybody enjoyed thoroughly.

Bombay

JOHNSON: Oh, yes. But it was a good thing that we did it because most of us had consular assignments, if not as a full assignment at least as a partial assignment, on our first tours. My first assignment abroad then began in mid February of '66 when I was assigned to Bombay, to the Consulate-General in Bombay. And that was a very good post to begin in because it was small enough that you knew everybody, but it was big enough that it had all of the functions represented. So, for example, we had the Consul General and the Deputy Principal Officer. We had one or two econ officers. We had two political officers. We had an AG attaché. We had a Commercial attaché. We had two Consular Officers. We didn't have any military there or AID. And we had two American secretaries and some commo (communications) people. Anyway I think there were 14 or so Americans in the consulate.

Q: How was this assignment decided?

JOHNSON: Pretty much at random. Not quite. I had asked for South Asia. I had already decided at that point that I wanted to specialize in Chinese affairs. In fact, I remember a conversation with the guy that was the head of our junior officer personnel in the fall of '65 when I said I wanted to specialize in Chinese affairs because I felt the generation who had grown up in China would not be around for much longer, at least in mid level positions or junior positions. I wanted to be a part of the next batch to be trained in Chinese when it became possible to go back into China. I said I figured that would be in 10 years; in fact, it was seven years until Nixon went..

Q: Where does this idea come from?

JOHNSON: Probably from having served in Thailand in the Peace Corps. Of course you get the cross cultural phenomenon there, you get India and China as major cultural influences. And the other reason was because I thought that having such a strained relationship with the PRC was abnormal and was bound to change. It could not not change, and of course you couldn't say at the time how exactly or when, but it was certain to change. I thought there would be an opportunity there and an important one. That was in '65 and that was when I went to the China desk during my orientation day with Paul Kreisberg. In fact I've never regretted it. It's obviously a dramatically different situation now 40 some years later, but it seemed like the right decision at the time and it was. Actually I've never had a bad assignment. All of my China assignments, Hong Kong, Taipei, Beijing and Washington, came at times when there was really interesting drama and important issues to deal with. So I never regretted having chosen to specialize in Chinese affairs. But I had said I also wanted to have some South Asia experience. I actually asked for Katmandu for my first assignment.

Q: They gave you a list?

JOHNSON: No, they just said you could just sort of say where you wanted to go. They didn't have an opening in Katmandu. But Bombay was probably better anyway because the range of issues was broader.

(There is an interruption in the tape here. The narrative next resumes during Chinese language training in Washington in January, 1968. The next segment, covering my service in Bombay and the birth of our twin sons, is my reconstructed narrative, not in the Q&A format.)

Q: What were the main events during your tour in Bombay?

JOHNSON: In those days, they had a program of rotational assignments for junior officers. The Consul General was Milton Rewinkel; the Deputy was Jack Miklos. I started in the General Services office with a guy named George Robinson, who was very cynical. I remember him saying that in government work you can lie and cheat and steal, so long as you follow the right procedures. I was in that office for 2-3 months, then I moved next door to work with the Admin Officer, Ramon Gibson, a scholarly and

pleasant person. In that office I did a wage survey -- the basis for our pay and benefits package for our local employees. It turned out to be a very challenging task, because most of the enterprises we surveyed gave very generous non-monetary compensation but very small salaries. The reason was the punitive tax structure, where the supposed rate at the highest levels was over 100%! So the senior executives in these companies received company housing, a company car and driver, paid vacation, generous health care and a big pension. We could not provide such a package, so we had to find some reasonable way to assign a monetary value to those perks, which made our pay packages much larger than those of our comparators.

The second part of my rotation was in the Consular Section, which was extremely busy. Andrew Kay was the Consular Officer, later replaced by Marguerite Cooper. The biggest component of that work was the non-immigrant visa (NIV) issuance. We had a pretty high refusal rate, but even so, I know that some people got visas who should not have, based on our law and their intentions. One large subset of the NIV work was student visas. The applicants had to prove that they had been admitted to a US institution and that they had the means to pay for their first year. We required that they show an adequate bank balance. But many times it was obvious that they borrowed the money to meet our requirement, but really planned to work when they got to the US. I've often wondered whether some of those young people whose applications I adjudicated became the stars of the new tech world that blossomed in India, and with Indians in the US 20 years later.

The third part of my rotation was in the Political Section with Katherine Clarke. That was in early 1967 as India was gearing up for its first real elections following the death of the great father figure, Jawaharlal Nehru and later of his successor, Lal Bahadur Shastri. I got the chance to travel to various parts of our consular district -- Gujarat, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh and Goa. And I learned that nearly every Indian has very clear political opinions, and that doubt is not a part of their politics. In fact, the best informed sources in my experience were the political party workers. Their judgments and estimates were closer to the actual results than the views of academics, press people or even taxi drivers. I learned a profound lesson from reporting on that campaign, which was, do not try to predict other people's elections. The officer at the Embassy in Delhi who was responsible for coordinating the election reporting, Howie Schaffer, drew up a huge chart showing all of the constituencies, the incumbent and the challengers, and the party affiliations. We made up a similar chart for our area, as did the Consulates in Calcutta and Madras. The results: all of the estimates were way off, the previously ruling Congress Party lost the majority in the national parliament, the Lok Sabha, and lost in the majority of the provinces. Our estimate for our district was much closer than the estimates from the other posts, but that was not because we were better analysts, but because there were fewer changes.

After that I spent a short period in the Economic Section with Doug Marshall, but then was moved to become the full-time Consular Officer, and Ms. Cooper moved to replace Ms. Clarke as political chief. During my ten months as Consular Officer we had several minor crises involving American citizens who had lost their way in the temples or on the road to Nirvana or on the beaches of Goa and needed help. The worst of these was a

Peace Corps Volunteer who had gotten high on some easily available drugs and killed himself. Fortunately, I had a close relationship with the Indian police and with the PC office, so we were able to manage the incident without undue trauma.

On the personal side, the main event during my time in Bombay was the birth of our twin sons, Gregory and Loren, at the Breach Candy Hospital. We did not know there were two babies until the second one was born. And the fact that I had produced two male offspring gave me great status in the eyes of the Indian staff of the Consulate! The boys were 15 months old when we left Bombay. But unfortunately, the trip back to the States was disrupted by the fact that their sister had contracted the measles about one month before we were due to leave. And we knew there was a high probability that the boys would get the disease from her. But they had no symptoms by the date of our departure, so we took off for Thailand on the first leg of our trip home. And on our second day visiting friends in Chiang Mai, both boys started to get a high temperature and soon broke out with the measles. So we ended up staying in Chiang Mai for 10 days instead of three. The upside was that the boys got excellent care in the same missionary hospital where their sister had been born three years earlier. And we were lucky to get our flights rearranged, sharing the plane with lots of soldiers from Vietnam. But we were able to get back to my parents' home near Seattle just in time for Christmas.

Chinese Language Training - Taiwan

In January, 1968, I started my study of Chinese at the Foreign Service Institute (FSI) in Arlington, VA. At the beginning of my class there was one other officer, a USIA man named Bill Stubbs. In addition, there were three women whose spouses had started the course a few months earlier, Carol Fox, Pat Perito and Tina Nojek. Their spouses were Galen Fox, Bob Perito and Gene Nojek. Others who were already part way through the course were David Hughes, Dick Holmes and Frank Scotton. The head teacher was Mr. Li Tsung-mi; he was assisted by Ms. Oyang, Mrs. Bennett, and later by Mrs. Chen. They were all fine teachers, and we made rapid progress.

But the world outside did not stop -- 1968 became a year filled with tragedy and trauma. The first big event, in late January, was the Tet Offensive in Vietnam, in which the Communist forces staged a country-wide uprising which even reached the grounds of the US Embassy. The second trauma was the announcement by President Johnson on March 31 that he would not run for re-election. Less than one week later, Dr. Martin Luther King was shot in Memphis, leading to riots and near riots in several US cities. Then in early June, Robert Kennedy was killed in Los Angeles, leading to another outpouring of anger and even fear about the stability of the society. In August came the demonstrations at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago. And finally, in November, Richard Nixon narrowly defeated Hubert Humphrey in the Presidential election.

Through all of this external drama, I threw myself into the study of Chinese, and I made rapid progress in the early weeks, in part because the structure of the spoken language was similar to the structure of Thai (although there are very few actual cognates). The tones and the sentence structure were close enough to be helpful. The writing systems, on

the other hand, bore no resemblance; Thai uses a unique phonetic alphabet, while Chinese, of course, uses characters which have to be individually memorized.

(At this point, we resume the taped conversation.)

Q: There was a 5,000 character dictionary which in fact broke the characters down for you and showed you that there was a phonetic component to it.

JOHNSON: Right, but I always thought that Chinese was especially pernicious in that regard because it's the sort of thing that if you knew what it was already, this would help you to remember it -- sort of like reading street signs in New York; if you know where you're going the signs will help you get there. If you don't, you're lost.

Q: Yes, yes.

JOHNSON: Anyway, Chinese, the first half of the year, rapid progress. I could do quite a lot of talking by the time I left Washington; I had 10 months there total and left in November of 1968, stopping in Seattle again for Thanksgiving and Christmas with family, and arriving in Taipei on January 1st, 1969.

Q: Can we back up a tad to something you said earlier to all these tragic events of '68 while you're trying to plow through Chinese. When Dr. King was killed it was social disturbances in Washington, D.C.

JOHNSON: You bet, yes, we could see the demonstrations. In those days the FSI program was in that building in Rosslyn and the Chinese department was on the 7th floor. We had a view right over the river, right over Georgetown, right into downtown Washington. The day after King's assassination there was smoke rising from the 14th Street corridor and there were National Guard troops around. It was something awful. It stayed that way for three or four days. Some of the destruction was never fixed, the 14th Street corridor. Now it is. A lot of development is going on there now.

Q: Yes, that's just the point, 30 or 40 years later.

JOHNSON: And the same is true for Bobby Kennedy. There weren't fires in the streets or mayhem when Bobby Kennedy was killed, but it was equally traumatic in terms of shock to the system. Just amazing, the people in the streets. When is this going to end? It was really awful. We went down to be there when his cortege came back to Washington, down near the Arlington Cemetery.

Q: Moving on January 1st?

JOHNSON: January 1st 1969 we arrived in Taipei and were met by Bob Perito, who had then been assigned to the Embassy in Taipei. He asked why we arrived on New Year's

Day? I said, well, I'm supposed to start classes in three days; we had to have a couple of days getting Embassy Taipei procedural work done.

Q: Again, this is a TransPacific flight probably because you exited through Seattle again?

JOHNSON: Yes, right.

Q: So Northwest to Tokyo and dropped down to Taipei.

JOHNSON: That's right.

Q: So, you show up on western New Year's. This is not Chinese New Year's.

JOHNSON: That's right. Western New Year's. We were in Taipei for three days and went down to Taichung by train on January 4th and started class I guess the day after that. Initially we moved in with Dick Holmes and his wife and baby daughter because housing was not available for us and we were camping out with them for two or three weeks.

Q: What was the general housing pool at that time? Wasn't that an ex-military base or something?

JOHNSON: Not really a base. CCK Air Base was nearby, but that was too far. We had housing on "the economy," as they say. About half of it or a third of it was in the old Japanese quarter of Taichung -- Japanese style houses and some modern townhouses, which is where the Holmes were. There were three other school people in that compound. Sydney Goldsmith, Tom Moyer and Tom Kirkpatrick. Pete Smith was at the school, but he wasn't living there. Frank Scotton I mentioned, and Bill Stubbs weren't living in that compound.

Q: So, the group was kind of scattered around?

JOHNSON: Yes, scattered around. There were 25 students all together. It was the biggest group I think they ever had, that year and the year after, and most were not State Department. Then after about two weeks we moved into a Japanese house that had been vacated by Joe DeTrani and his family. Joe was there the previous year and he was then assigned to Seoul and left around the end of January of '69 so we moved into his Japanese house. It was fine. We enjoyed it. I rode a bike to the school which was down on Wu Chuan Lu in the middle of Taichung. It is now a girls' school, but then it was just a big old Western-style house with maybe 10 rooms or 12 rooms, something like that. The instruction was virtually all one-on-one or two students for one teacher, but in most cases it was one teacher for one student. The emphasis was overwhelmingly on reading at that point. The second year of the class -- I'm sure the same was true for you -- it was characters. You had to learn the characters. You might have newspaper in one class; you might have the classical stuff in another or who knows. There was one conversational class as I recall, with the head teacher, Ms. Chen. She was the head teacher and a very

good one. Mrs. Chao was teaching there also at that time. I didn't have her for class the first half year, but I did later. And when we got to Taipei in '96 she was still teaching Chinese at the AIT, although she died soon after we left in '99. You remember her, don't you?

Q: Yes, I do.

JOHNSON: She was very attractive, a good ping pong player, very athletic. Her husband was a university teacher. He later left her, but anyway, he was teaching at Donghai University. The area studies guy, Bill Speidel, would come down from Donghai once a week to give a talk at the school. We also had excellent cultural lectures by Mr. Luo. Did you know Bill?

Q: No.

JOHNSON: Oh you didn't. He was from Oberlin College. Oberlin had a connection with Donghai in Taichung and there was always at least one American scholar resident there, maybe more, and Speidel was the one there at that time. Later he was the first Peace Corps director in China in Sichuan with the Peace Corps program. He did a lot of work in and around China for lots of years. Doug Spelman started in that program.

Q: Oh really?

JOHNSON: Doug was the Oberlin guy at Donghai a few years later, and it was through that connection that he learned about the Foreign Service and took the exam.

Q: No, I hadn't heard that.

JOHNSON: Yes. The language school head when I got there was Gerald Kok who was much more of a missionary than a linguist. He was replaced the year after I left by George Beasley. George was then the head of the school for actually I think five or six years. I had first met George in Washington. He was the linguist who sat in on my language test when I left the Washington part of the program. At that time he was one of the supervisors of Vietnamese, but he also spoke good Chinese of course. He and Chick Sheehan were the two who did the Chinese language testing in Washington. George later came into the USIA part of the Service and served in Beijing while I was there.

Q: How much contact did you have with Sheehan?

JOHNSON: Not much. He wasn't working in the Chinese department at that time, he was working in the Vietnamese department, which was in a different building. It was in the old Arlington Towers.

Q: Now, you were saying the second year emphasized reading which seems natural.

JOHNSON: Yes.

Q: But in one sense looking at the tasks of the FSOs in this late '60s period, somebody always told me that the object was to read People's Daily to see if something besides the date had changed. That in fact it was an analytical process off the written material.

JOHNSON: Yes, for the most part that's correct.

Q: Since we had no contact.

JOHNSON: And that's most of what we did. I'll get to the Hong Kong assignment which came after that, but yes, that's right, most of what we did was from open material. One of the things you learn linguistically that I think is important in terms of understanding Chinese is that it is very formulaic. I mean Chinese, especially Communist Chinese, the way that they wrote their materials, they always used the same phrases all the time. If they were talking about the Soviets, they referred to the "Soviet Socialist Renegade Pigs," and always the same four characters.

Q: The same four characters over and over.

JOHNSON: The same would be true about the "American imperialists" or the "Japanese warmongers," or whatever it was. It was very formulaic and the same was true when they talked about things domestically. About the harvest for example, they had certain code words, whether it was a disaster or whether it was really a bumper crop and things like that you had to learn by breaking the linguistic puzzle, yes.

Q: What's that phrase out of the musical Chicago? It's always beautiful at the ballet?

JOHNSON: It's always beautiful at the ballet, that's right. Or all the children are above average.

Q: Yes. When you went into Chinese language training though you went in knowing you would have an assignment. You don't go into Chinese without a follow-on assignment. So you were told before you started that you were going to end up in Hong Kong?

JOHNSON: That's right, in ConGen Hong Kong. I replaced Charlie Hill, on paper. It was his position. He actually left I guess a week or so before I got there. I didn't meet him until some years later. It was his slot and that was in November of '69, so we were both off cycle at that point. I was still off cycle.

Q: You've been off cycle for how many tours?

JOHNSON: Well, from the first to that one at least. Not until I left Hong Kong did I get back on the summer rotation. Anyway, I got to Hong Kong in November, 1969, just before Thanksgiving and we were invited to the Consul General's place for Thanksgiving, which was really nice.

Q: Who was the Consul General at that time?

JOHNSON: Ed Martin at that time, Edwin Martin and his wife Emma Rose who was a wonderful lady. They both had lived in China before '49. She was a missionary kid, I think, and he had been a junior officer in training in the mainland in the '46 and '47 period. I remember asking him one time, how did you escape the purge of the China club? Everybody who was there doing any reporting during that time basically got bounced later. He said, "because my name wasn't on any of the things I wrote. I wrote things, I'd submit them to somebody else, Edmund Clubb or somebody else, and the things would go out with their name on it." Martin said he was in that sense protected. But he said it was a great experience because they did a lot of traveling around in China when they were doing their training. They were on the train all the time. Train training as it were, training on the train.

Q: Actually in Taichung at that time they were using the Japanese schools' methodology of giving you 100 yen and telling you to go off for a couple of days and come back.

JOHNSON: I don't remember that exactly, but we certainly were encouraged to get out and did.

Q: Yokohama.

JOHNSON: Taichung was enough of a town at that time, enough of a city that we could actually get around and see things and do things on our own without being encumbered by the American presence there. It wasn't that big. There was a small PX, APO, an officers' club on the military housing compound, and there was of course a large presence out at the CCK Air Base, but that was far enough away that it wasn't an impediment to us. We did play slow-pitch softball by the way with the military teams as well as the school, the local missionary school, and we won the championship one year. You could play three seasons a year because the weather was so good. One of those seasons we won. David Hughes was the short fielder; I was the first baseman; Frank Scotton was the pitcher, Billy Huff was the second baseman, Ed McGivern was third base. Anyway, a lot of people were playing there and we had a lot of fun.

Okay, in Taiwan, living out of Taipei was a big advantage because first of all we were not dragged into the Embassy net.

Q: Taichung you mean?

JOHNSON: I said living out of Taipei.

Q: Oh, living out of Taipei, yes.

JOHNSON: So, we were not dragged into Embassy activities. In fact I think we only went to the Embassy three or four times during the year that I was in Taiwan. Taichung

was also a more manageable size and there was lots to see and do in that central and southern part of Taiwan. One memorable event: my wife and I planned to travel around the island with Mrs. Chao and I think there was another couple in the car also, five of us all together on what was supposed to be a round the island trip, starting from Taichung and driving down to Kaohsiung originally. Then we were going to go to Pingtung and then over to the east side to Taitung and up that way. Well, there was a big storm the night we were in Kaohsiung. We knew this was coming, sort of. There was supposed to be a typhoon, but we thought it was going to blow by and not be any particular problem. Well, the next morning the roads were full of trees that were downed and there was some damage to buildings and so forth. But still we drove up toward Pingtung, to the bridge there. You may recall there's a wide river bed there that usually has a five foot or 10 foot wide stream running under it. Well, this particular morning the water was up to the bottom of the bridge. It was about two inches below the bottom of the bridge. As we were driving across the bridge, we heard on the radio that the eye of the storm, the center of the storm had come right over the middle of the island and Taichung was in the middle of the eye. We turned around and went back, drove all the way back to Taichung without stopping, and there were trees down in our yard but no damage to the house. We were very concerned because you know we had left our little kids there, the three little kids and the nanny taking care of them. Anyway, we got back to Taichung and never did make the trip around the island.

Q: So, it could have been made at that time, there was a round island road?

JOHNSON: Well, it didn't connect all the way, but I don't remember which leg didn't connect. It may have been the portion to the east. You could go around the northern tip of the island and down to Hualien, but I think between Hualien and Taitung there wasn't any through road. I remember one of the lessons in the course materials was about the road up there in the northern tip of the island which is spectacular because there are such steep cliffs off the side when you're coming down the northern tip down to Hualien. That road has been improved a lot since then. Now it's a regular highway, but it is still a terrible drive, so winding, much wider, but still winding. Anyway the conditions in Taiwan at the time, how to put it? They had gone through the first phase of the green revolution and so the agricultural production was actually quite good. Even though the population density of the western half of the island was very high, they nonetheless had developed miracle rice, and with a lot of hard work had actually been able to produce most of their requirements for rice and vegetables and so forth. The roads were not particularly good, but the train system was good. Of course you could go north to Taipei which was 110 kilometers, or south to Kaohsiung, the same distance. The train was good. It was comfortable and fairly cheap. We also had military flights which they called the "mei yo guanxi" (roughly translated as "what the heck") flights which used an old C46 which would fly from Taichung to Taipei I guess twice a day or something like that. I only went on it once and it was sufficiently scary so I decided not to go again. The C-46 was an older brother to the C-47, the military version of the DC-3, and it was not a great plane when it was new, let alone 30 years later. The road to Taipei was ok, but the traffic was horrible. One of the few things that Taiwan in those days had a claim to fame about was that it had the highest number of accidents per road mile of any member of the UN

(they were still in the UN at that time). The reason was that they had vehicles going the speed of cars and trucks. They had vehicles going the speed of motorcycles. They had bicycles. They had ox carts and they had people walking, all on the same half of the road. The other thing was that every intersection -- I'm sure you remember this in Taipei -- but every intersection was an adventure because the last guy across always wanted to be the last guy across and the first guy to cross the other way wanted to be the first one out. Every intersection had this little contest regardless of what's going on with the lights.

Q: If you don't make eye contact then he doesn't exist.

JOHNSON: That's right, even if you have the right of way. The other thing in Taipei I remember is that they have these lanes on the side that were ostensibly for parking, but people would come down them the wrong way. You're driving this way on the right side of the road. You have traffic here on your left, and you also have traffic here on your right. Motorcycles and everything like that are coming down the wrong side of the road. I just figured that getting through 10 months in Taiwan without a car accident was a miracle, and we did. I think I was the only one in the school who didn't have a bump or anything on the car in that 10-month period.

Q: Now, that's not the same Fiat that came across the Atlantic?

JOHNSON: No, that's long since gone in India. This was a little Mitsubishi. Taiwan was a perfectly pleasant place to live. It wasn't particularly developed at the time. It was slightly more developed than Thailand, much more developed than India of course on the broad scale, but very livable. The National Palace Museum was great with the preservation of Chinese culture. And Chiang Kai-shek was still alive of course. It was excellent. It was a repressive regime, but you didn't necessarily feel the repression very much. There were certain limits obviously on what people could do and say politically, and one of the things you could never talk about was Taiwan independence. Once in a while somebody did mention something about it and they would get in big trouble when they did. Political diversity was certainly not tolerated, but economically there was a lot of stimulus, a lot of activity. This was a time when Taiwan was also complaining a lot about the brain drain. Bob Perito told me when I first got there that of the student visas they issued they estimated that 95% of the people never came back. They would stay in the States and adjust their status. The interesting thing was by the time I went back many years later, a lot of them had come back and a lot of them had brought money back and ideas and had brought investment dollars back or had sent investment dollars back. I came to think that the question of the brain drain was really more a matter of opportunity drain if you like, or money drain; it made much more sense to have money coming in and have all this talent sort of willing to participate than it did to try restrict people's departures. It didn't make any sense.

Q: I was intrigued at the time that I was there in the mid '80s. I've forgotten who it was, but one of the guys, perhaps the dean of the university down in Kaohsiung and his interest was to encourage people to return and be professors and what not and his problem was he didn't have Western style facilities.

JOHNSON: Right. Now they do have them and of course now also one of the real benefits of democratization in Taiwan is that a lot of people have come back and whether they come back or not, they can talk about whatever they want to talk about, even mainland affairs. They can debate even in a constructive way what the relationship should be with the mainland, what the domestic political situation is in Taiwan and so on. It's completely open from that standpoint, politically open, which it wasn't back in the '69 and '70 period.

Let's see what else was interesting about that year? I mean it was mostly study. I found studying characters extremely difficult and I still do. I have trouble remembering beyond say the first 400 or something like that, beyond that it's really hard if you're not reinforcing it all the time. I figured we had to know slightly over 2,000 characters with a 3+ level reading exam, which is what I did. I also had a 3+ in speaking, but in fact my speaking and listening comprehension were significantly better than my reading. The scale went from 0 for someone with no language capability to 5 for an educated native speaker; 3 was considered the "professional" level, where one could carry on a business conversation in the target language. Before I went to Beijing in 1984 and to Taipei in 1996, I took short refresher courses in Chinese, and was tested at the 3/3 level both times, so most of it stuck, and I used my Chinese all the time, especially in Beijing.

Q: Now, was there a problem in reading material at that time because you had the simplified characters?

JOHNSON: Well, we had both. We first learned the traditional characters and that was what was used in Taiwan all the time. But certain teachers were allowed to have access to the People's Daily and other mainland materials. The papers had to be locked up after class because they didn't want this Communist material causing dissension and causing a problem among the faculty I guess. So, yes, of course we did read simplified characters. We did read People's Daily. They were usually about three months out of date, but still as far as the characters were concerned it didn't make that much difference.

1968 and of course '69 was the peak of the Cultural Revolution, so there was a lot of disruption of things coming out of the mainland including printed materials, newspapers and magazines and things of that kind. What did come out was just completely mindless propaganda, nothing that could pass as genuine news: the opening of the new hydropower station or some farmer achieving his new record harvest, so and so riding a new bicycle.

Q: You finish your language training in Taichung and Hong Kong is the ongoing assignment?

JOHNSON: Right.

Hong Kong

Q: And the job in Hong Kong is?

JOHNSON: The job in Hong Kong was in the China Mainland Section, which had two parts, one was political, one was econ. I was on the econ side and my job was China's external economic relations, PRC external economic relations. My predecessor in the job was Alan Romberg who had just moved from that side to the political external job, replacing I think Charlie Hill. In any case, I replaced Alan and my office mates were Ross Parr, who was the head of the econ section, and Dick Williams. Ross did the industrial sector, the domestic Chinese industrial side, and Dick did the domestic Chinese agricultural side, and I did the external economic side. So, my reporting portfolio was aid, trade and finance. Fortunately a lot of that stuff was publicly available through the Hong Kong media or through the partner countries. I mean if we were doing something for example about China's trade with Japan, obviously China didn't publish anything that was worth anything, but Japan did. Same with Hong Kong, same with the UK, same with France and so forth. We would get the reporting from all of those places and construct what China's trade was out of that data.

Q: Now, Hong Kong's role in the China Foreign Service world would be the primary watcher and collector. Could you describe how the mission was organized?

JOHNSON: Yes. Well, the mission as a whole was big. It performed the same functions as all other missions. We had a big visa section for example. We had an Ag section, we had Intel, we had a Defense office and so forth. But the core of the reporting that came out of the Consulate in Hong Kong was this small section that was called the China Mainland Section. When I got there the head of the section was Dick Nethercut. The head of the political side was Bob Drexler. Then, let's see who else was there, oh, Dick Holmes was there at that time as the junior internal political guy. Alan Romberg did the external political work, and, oh, Frank Wong was the guy who went out and bought newspapers and magazines for us. He worked for FBIS, for Foreign Broadcasting Information Service, and is the father of Marsha Wong and Mark Wong who are current Foreign Service Officers.

Nethercut left the first summer I was there (1970) and Bob Drexler moved up to become the section chief. Then Sherrod McCall came as the chief of the internal political unit, and Jay Taylor came in as the chief of the external political unit. In the summer of 1971, I moved from the econ side to the political side and worked for Jay. Then Bill Rope replaced me as the external econ guy, and Dick Williams became the head of the econ side. But we took a cut in that unit and combined the industrial and the agricultural side and Dick was the head of both. And oh, Galen Fox. I didn't mention him. Galen Fox replaced Dick Holmes as the junior political guy, the internal political guy.

Q: I mean in reality ConGen Hong Kong is about the size of a standard embassy.

JOHNSON: Oh, yes. We had oh, gosh, we had 300 or so people, staff at the time and very likely more than that. We had a whole FBIS operation across the street doing the translations. There were some people there whose main business was to look at

Indochina, to look at Vietnam which we did in a very peripheral way, but we didn't get into that much.

Q: In fact, Hong Kong was also the sort of listening post for the academic groups, Union Research Center was set up by the academics to in part replicate some of this material.

JOHNSON: Yes, but for a lot of it, they spent time interviewing refugees. They would invite people coming out from the mainland to come to lunch or something like that and talk about what was going on in their village. The second week we were there, Alan Romberg hosted a dinner over in Kowloon and Dick Solomon was the principal guest. Alan had known Dick for some time and Dick was there doing research on his book at the time which later became his big opus on the concept of "luan" or chaos/confusion. Dick was about to leave the University Services Center to return to the States. So anyway that was the first time I met Dick Solomon and that was in the fall, November/December of '69. Then that summer of '70, he got an internship at the White House which was supposed to be for one year and ended up being five years. So he had a good run there at an important time. And we kept in touch.

Q: But here you are.

JOHNSON: Ken Liberthal was there at that time, too. I met Ken in Hong Kong with Jan Berris whom you probably know. Jan was a junior USIA officer at that time. She worked with Bill Stubbs.

Q: Oh, really?

JOHNSON: Stubbs was there and he got sent to Cambodia after the change of governments there in early '70. David Osborn was the Consul General as of mid '71, I guess. I don't remember when he came. Anyway Ed Martin moved on and I can't remember who the deputy was. He was a USIS officer, career USIS officer. Alan Whiting had been there before, but Whiting got pulled I guess because he was predicting that China was going to intervene in Vietnam, and it turned out not to be true too many times. So, this other guy was brought in. I can't remember his name. It was Harald Jacobson; he was a USIA officer, a good friend of the Williams', Dick and Jane. And he was later replaced by David Dean, with whom I had extensive dealings later. I mentioned the guys in our section. There was also a Hong Kong-Macao section. Al Harding was the guy there for that, and Bob Perito later replaced him, but Al was there most of the time I was there.

The oddest office in the Consulate in Hong Kong, though -- one of those things you can't imagine ever existed -- was the Treasury Department office, the purpose of which was to issue certificates of origin to merchants in Hong Kong certifying that none of the products that they sold had any component from mainland China. This had been there for years; it was part of our boycott. Never mind that the water and the food and everything else was from China, Americans were not allowed to buy anything that had even a smidgen of PRC origin.

Q: Marshal Green I think in one of his books talks about being the Consul General in Hong Kong and he having to certify that the Hilton Hotel or something like that in its design material that it incorporated in the hotel, none of it was from China, that he had to look over this hotel and ask and make sure that this bamboo was not from China.

JOHNSON: Well, it was goofy of course, but fortunately for me and for the rest of us in Hong Kong at that time, the policy process was undergoing a change, a big change. This was after Nixon and Kissinger came into office, and they were paying attention to Red China at the time, whether for leverage with the Soviets or the Vietnamese, or for opportunity or who knows why, or just maybe because they thought it was too odd not to have any contact. (We did have occasional official talks with the PRC in Warsaw, but the last round was in early 1970.) But the result was that less than a month after we got there, in December '69, the prohibition on the purchase of goods for tourist purposes was lifted up to a limit of $100. An American citizen was permitted to buy Chinese origin goods for personal use up to $100 value at that point. That was a sort of breakthrough from our side. We didn't see much sign of reciprocity from the PRC side, but it certainly did make a difference for us. That was Christmas '69. Sometime in spring or summer of 1970, spring I guess it was, Nick Platt came out to Hong Kong. Nick was then I think with the Bureau of Intelligence and Research (INR) at State, as I recall, and one of the messages I remember Nick conveying in a sort of general meeting we had was that China was definitely on the front burner as far as Washington policy people were concerned, that there were all kinds of ideas floating around. Now he certainly didn't tell us anything about secret contacts at that time, if he even knew about them. But he certainly got our attention. Then at the end of 1970, December of 1970 or January 1971 I guess it was that Edgar Snow, the writer, was in China and was on Tiananmen Square with Mao and Zhou Enlai and others there reviewing the troops on New Year's Day, and Mao got into a fairly long conversation with Snow. Snow later reported through his channels what Mao had been talking about. It wasn't exactly an invitation, but it certainly was an opening of the door, an opportunity. So, three months later, March I think it was or April of '71, was the ping pong tournament in Japan and the U.S. team was invited to go in to mainland China after the world championships in Japan. Then that in turn led to the secret trip, Kissinger's secret trip that summer of '71, and of course then Nixon's trip in February of '72. That was I think the first truly momentous historic sequence of events that I was at least peripherally a part of, because we were the main reporting source of what was going on the mainland during that time.

Q: Of course you're still in your reporting collecting Cultural Revolution stuff that still dominated the reporting.

JOHNSON: It did. So, from that standpoint it was misleading. It was as though nothing had changed, but in fact a lot was changing and we became aware of how much was changing in September of '71. I had just come back from home leave and was getting caught up on developments during the time I was away. I had moved from the external economic job to the external political job, again following Alan Romberg. Then on September 12 we received a notice that all aircraft in Chinese airspace had been

grounded. This was remarkable, and there was a suggestion that this action was undertaken at Premier Zhou's order. Then the same thing happened the next day, September 13, and the next -- so for three consecutive days there had been no movement in China's airspace -- unheard of. Clearly something very big was going on, and Zhou might be a part of it. Then normal air activity gradually resumed. Shortly after that we had a visit by John Service, one of the group of top China specialists who had been driven out of the China service and vilified in the 1940s and 50s for having "lost" China. Service was then teaching at Berkeley and had received permission from the PRC to visit his parents' graves in Sichuan. He was in China for about one month, and when he came out to Hong Kong around mid-September, we asked him if he had seen or heard of any unusual activities. He had not. The third piece of this puzzle involved the sale or distribution of a new edition of Mao's Little Red Book, with a preface by and photo of Lin Biao, then the PRC Minister of Defense and Mao's heir apparent. We had reports that the book was no longer available in the PRC, although it still was in Hong Kong. The fourth item in this context was the cancellation of the preparations for the October 1 National Day parade in Tiananmen Square. This occurred on September 20. At that point, Bob Drexler wrote a long cable putting all of these items together, concluding that this demonstrated a major crisis at the top of the PRC leadership. But we needed one more event to identify who won and who lost this fight. On October 6, Ethiopian Emperor Haile Selassie visited Beijing and called that day on Chairman Mao. Drexler then did a few edits to his cable and sent it in with the title, "The Fall of Lin Biao." Even though all of our information was available to others, no one else had put it together. Drexler was commended for his brilliant and timely analysis. One unanswered question at that time was whether the opening to the US had provoked this leadership crisis. We in Hong Kong believed that it may have been a factor, but we could not see how it affected our approach. In retrospect, I think it really was a coup attempt by Lin Biao, probably thwarted by Zhou Enlai, and that relations with both the US and the USSR were parts of the power equation. Lin lost, of course, and sought to flee by plane to the USSR. But his plane crashed in Mongolia. And in any case, the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution -- one of the great disasters in human history -- still had a few years to run.

Q: Were there important differences among analysts in Washington and Hong Kong about the Cultural Revolution or what the Chinese economy was doing at this time?

JOHNSON: I'm not sure if I would call it analytic disagreements. I think that the degree of disruption that was caused in those years we underestimated pretty consistently because it was sort of not believable, the degree to which the internal society and internal economy had been so fundamentally disrupted. Even when you heard tales about it, they seemed like they were more individual tales than something that was a collective experience. I don't think we would ever have estimated the number of people who died during that time, for example, for not having enough food or being brutalized by Red Guards or being sent to the countryside with no means of livelihood. It was really awful and I think the degree of awfulness was probably something that we underestimated. Similarly, we and others greatly underestimated the degree of upside change that Deng Xiaoping brought in the 10 years after the Cultural Revolution, starting in 1978. The upside potential was also underestimated. I think that we expected at that time that things

would be more like a normal, gradual improvement rather than a dramatic improvement or the kind of change in the economy which is still going on.

Q: What's interesting is the.

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The next segment starts with the visit to Hong Kong by NSC Adviser Kissinger in February 1973

In the fall of 1971, after the Kissinger trip but before the Nixon trip, the PRC got into the UN (over our tepid objection), and several prominent Americans went to China (James Reston of the New York Times, John King Fairbank from Harvard, Shirley Maclaine and several others).

Then in 1973, Dr. Kissinger stopped in Hong Kong for two days en route between Hanoi and Beijing. On his second day there, he convened a meeting including the Consul General, David Osborn, the Deputy CG, David Dean, and the seven of us from the China Mainland Section for a kind of seminar for 1 ½ hours. Kissinger began by asking the simplest but most difficult question, "What should our policy be towards China?"

Well, how about an open ended question! So, Jay Taylor, not surprisingly, was the first to speak up and he rambled on for a while not saying anything very coherent except that we had to take advantage of this opportunity. Then Kissinger got sort of -- he decided he wanted to talk about internal political affairs, so we had Sherrod primed for that. Sherrod knew one of the journalists who had been close to Kissinger and this guy told him that Kissinger would never sit still for more than 30 seconds. He will interrupt. So, no matter how important you think your points are, just be ready to be interrupted. It was almost exactly 30 seconds when Kissinger started talking about the leadership. Then he interrupted to ask whether Ji Pengfei, who was the foreign minister at the time, was in town. Without waiting for an answer, he said that "Ji Pengfei is the most boring Chinese I have ever met." Sherrod said that Ji was in Beijing and he was likely to be there as Dr. Kissinger's official host. Then we went on in an active discussion of the Chinese political scene and of China's external relations. Bill Rope had some useful things to say on economic issues, but Kissinger made it clear that he was not much interested in economic affairs. I think we all ended up saying useful things about the relationship, and about the fact that we felt we needed to move forward in terms of a presence of some kind in China. We talked about the idea of a consulate or an unofficial office or something else. At the end of it, I think it was Bill Rope who said, "Okay, Mr. Secretary, we've been talking for most of the last two hours, can you tell us what's on your agenda to discuss with Zhou Enlai when you see him tomorrow?" Kissinger leaned forward and sort of glowered, saying in his heavy accent, "You can't leak what you don't know."

Two or three days later, the announcement came of the establishment of the liaison offices headed by the senior most diplomats on both sides. So they were embassies in all but name, very senior levels with David Bruce being the U.S. representative, having been

ambassador to France, Germany and the UK. Even though he wasn't a career officer, he had certainly done his bit. For the Chinese side it was Huang Hua, who was then PRC Ambassador to France; he was going to head the liaison office in Washington.

The opening of that office then had the indirect effect of changing some of the China assignments because people then were going to be assigned to Beijing. Bill Rope, for example, was the only person out of the China mainland section in Hong Kong who was assigned to Beijing, joining the rest of the team that went there, Herb Horowitz on the econ side and Nick Platt on the political side, John Holdridge, who had the title of ambassador although he was the third-ranking ambassador there; David Bruce was of course the senior one. Al Jenkins was the second one. I think Al Jenkins was actually senior to Holdridge. But one odd fact was that we had a staff of 10 officers, of whom three were ambassadors. That's got to be a unique phenomenon!

Russian Language Training and Moscow

I got a message then in about February or March of '73 asking whether I would like to go to Moscow to be the Embassy China watcher.

Q: Message from where?

JOHNSON: Washington, from the personnel section.

Q: From personnel.

JOHNSON: Yes, because somewhere I had put down on one of these preference sheets, what languages would you like to learn and I said I'd like to learn Russian. So, they extracted from that and maybe from who knows what other sources that I might be willing. Yes, I was very willing. I scrubbed my assignment to study East Asian affairs at Harvard the following year and went back to Washington in the summer of 1973 to begin studying Russian.

Q: Just to back up at this point, could you describe the assignment process in State because later it was much more open and you were told all what jobs were, but that's not what we're talking about here. Most people didn't….

JOHNSON: That's right. Well, we all had personnel officers and career development officers, whatever the term was at the time. The idea was as you were coming up on your assignment, say six or eight months ahead of time you should be in touch with this person about what your interests were and what your preferences were. You may not get them or maybe you would get them. I mean in the case of this particular sequence, both of the choices that I had were good. The academic choice is what I said I preferred, but then when Moscow came along, that was a better option from my standpoint. I think for most people in the Service, certainly at that time, the feeling was that the process was too closed, that it was not clear enough because you never were sure who the competition was. You never were sure whether the job was really available or not, whether it had

already been cooked and so forth. There was a lot of unhappiness I think about the way the personnel system operated in those days. Now, whether in the long run it was better or worse, I don't know. I suppose people would have to look at it over the long run. The one thing that was essential was that you had to have what they called a good corridor reputation. You had to be seen to be effective and a good reporting officer and a good manager or something in order to be considered for these plum positions. The Moscow job was a plum position. We'd had a China watcher in Moscow since the early 1960s, since the Sino-Soviet split in 1960 when it really became more serious. Among those who had had that job were Sherrod McCall whom I mentioned earlier, who had that job from 1968 to '70. Curt Kamman had the job just before I did, 1972-74. I replaced Curt in '74. Stape Roy was in that position from '70 to '72 and so forth. Bill Brown had been in that job in the mid '60s. Marshal Brement had also been in it in the mid '60s, just before Brown. The first person in that job was Jim Leonard, a longtime China person, a little older than us; he had that job in 1960 to '62. There was a long and distinguished line of China watchers in the Moscow Embassy.

Back to the end of my Hong Kong assignment: I desperately wanted to go to mainland China before heading off to a different part of the world. So I asked for and got permission for Lee and me to go to the mainland for two weeks in June, 1973. So we got our visas and planned the trip to Guangzhou, Beijing, Shanghai, Hangzhou and back to Guangzhou to exit back to Hong Kong. The PRC China Travel Service issued the visas, but on a separate sheet of paper because we already had Taiwan/ROC visas in our dip passports. Actually, we were not supposed to use our dip passports because the trip was not official, strictly speaking, and the US did not have official diplomatic relations with the PRC at that time. But we got the visas and we crossed the border on my birthday, June 7. Oh, one other minor inconvenience: the people in our liaison office were still living in the Beijing Hotel, and had not moved to permanent quarters yet, so they were discouraging non-official travel, with the admin support such visits required. So they said we could come, but they could not provide accommodations for us. So we contacted friends at the Canadian Embassy (Canada had normalized relations a few years earlier), and they agreed to put us up.

Anyway, the trip was a remarkable experience, and I am eternally grateful that we were able to go at that time because my next trip to the PRC was not until 1980, and things had already started to change dramatically by that time. For example, in 1973, we went out to the Great Wall by hired car, and there was almost no one there -- a few soldiers, but that was all. The next time I went to the Wall was in mid-1984 at the start of my Beijing assignment, and you could hardly get close because of all the tour busses and mobs of tourists and vendors. Another vignette: on the way back from the Wall we asked the driver to stop at a small village to the side of the road to take some pictures. So he stopped and we got out and walked maybe ten steps before a motorcycle cop pulled up and started yelling at our driver that it was forbidden to stop there and it was forbidden for the foreigners to take pictures. So we got back in the car and the driver was obviously quite shaken. I guess the idea that we would take photos of an ordinary small village as a sign of being disrespectful. Or something. (*break)*

Well, let's see, what else. Let's go back to Russian language training. I think I've put the names down here, the ones I could remember. Sam Fromowitz was one of them. Todd Stuart was another. Stuart's then wife, Paula Stuart was in the class for the first several months. Ann Darbyshire joined the class after a couple of months, Bill Leiser was in the class. Lee was in the other class, together with four others whom I can't remember now.

Q: So, you're saying in August '73 you started some Russian language training?

JOHNSON: August '73, that's right. Russian language training in Washington at FSI, the same building where I had studied Chinese a few years earlier.

Q: Now, Russian like Chinese is a two year program.

JOHNSON: No, it's a one year program.

Q: Oh, is it?

JOHNSON: Yes, a one year program because basically you've got to learn the alphabet of course, but it's a lot easier than learning characters. It's very demanding, but it's properly a one year program. You can make about the same amount of progress in a year in Russian as you can in two years in Chinese. I reached the level of 3 in speaking and 3+ in reading. It was fine. What else? I'm not sure there was anything dramatic that happened that year, '73 to '74. It wasn't an election year. Nothing special.

Q: Vietnam is finally winding down.

JOHNSON: Yes, that's right. There was a lot going on in the world, but not a lot going on specific to our program as I recall, at least I don't remember.

Q: Now, when you took Chinese you were mentioning very low student teacher ratio, was that still true even in the Russian program?

JOHNSON: Yes, yes. Although we did have some classes where there were five, the maximum number of people in the class was five and we started out with five. Then we would have variations; we weren't all in every class as I recall. We did have some teachers one on one for reading, but for the conversation classes mostly it was five or four which was probably a little bigger than it should have been, but that's okay.

Q: Russian doesn't have the tones and Russian doesn't have the characters and it's one year instead of two years.

JOHNSON: Right.

Q: But the materials themselves, are they as well thought through?

JOHNSON: I think the Chinese program was better. Maybe it's because it was the first one I studied there and the teachers were so good. I thought that the materials were better and that the methodology was better. You really felt like you were getting something done practically every day. Whereas in Russian I had the feeling that, I don't know, it wasn't as stimulating. It was plenty difficult, but somehow I didn't feel quite the same dedication I think is maybe the right word.

Q: Now was FSI still in the buildings in Rosslyn?

JOHNSON: Yes, it was still up the hill in Rosslyn. I forget what the name of that building was, but anyway, yes, the same one. The head teacher was a woman named Nina De la Cruz who was a great cultural chauvinist. She loved Pushkin, and we were all supposed to bow at his feet. There were…, I'm trying to think if we had two classes or three, but there were at least three teachers, maybe four. The youngest of the teachers was a man from -- a totally bilingual guy from San Francisco named Kyril Borisov, who had grown up in the Russian community in San Francisco and who couldn't wait to get out of FSI, except that, guess what? Twenty years later he was the head of the department and then he became the White House Russian language interpreter! He's been the White House interpreter the last several years in Russian. Anyway, things change. Opportunities change.

Oh, yes, there was also a lady, pathetic, what was her name? I don't think she had ever done any teaching before, but as far as we were concerned, as far as she was concerned, we were sort of like her charges. We were like 10 year olds and were supposed to be guided through little linguistic alleys. She would constantly talk down to us. Glafira Hegamann was her name. Boy the name came back! There was another one, too. I forgot the fourth one. So, anyway, yes, that was the school year of August '73 to June '74. We left in June '74, got to Moscow in early July. Went out to a softball game the first day I was there and almost froze, July 12th, boy.

Q: How does one get to Moscow in the early '70s?

JOHNSON: Pan Am to Frankfurt I think and then Frankfurt to Moscow. Pan Am had a route at that point. A daily flight. I think that's right. I think that's how most people went.

Q: Let's start out about your housing and living circumstances.

JOHNSON: In Moscow?

Q: In Moscow.

JOHNSON: Well, we lived in assigned housing of course. There was no free market shall we say. There was one apartment block that the embassy used or semi-owned which is where they put most people with families, so it was the kiddie center, with a little playground outside and an ice hockey rink and so forth. We lived on the 4th floor, moved in right after the Kammans left. Also in the building at that time was Warren

Zimmermann and his family on the top floor. Warren and his wife Teeny were the ones who met us at the train. Oh, that's how we got there. We came by train. We flew to Europe. I was supposed to connect with Curt Kamman in Zurich, do a handoff at that point, but something messed it up and they ended up not coming to Zurich. They went to Helsinki instead, but we already had our tickets. We stopped in London, I think. We stopped in Zurich. We stopped in Vienna and then we took the train from Vienna to Moscow, leaving in the middle of the night, going across the border which is now the Czech Republic, and then into Poland and then into Moscow. It's a day and a half trip. You leave at 10:00 at night on say a Tuesday and you get to Moscow about 9:00 or 10:00 in the morning on Thursday, so a long trip. They knock on the doors and wake you up every time you cross a border, twice. It was a pain. Wake you up at 2:00 in the morning and again at 6:00 in the morning, again at noon. We got to Warsaw about noon and it was another 21hours after that. That's how we got to Moscow and Warren Zimmermann and his wife were there to greet us. An indication of sort of the quality of life there: we had bought fruit for the kids to eat on the train on the way in. When we got there we still had one banana. I think it was either Teeny Zimmermann or Mel Levitsky's wife, Joan, who lived in the building also, who said something about, you know, could we have the banana? We'd cut it into thirds for our kids. Couldn't get bananas in Moscow in the summer, in the middle of summer.

Anyway, our apartment was originally two apartments and so what they did basically was just to move the door out a ways. It was a series of small rooms. It had two kid bedrooms; one large bedroom and a living room, tiny kitchen and that was about all. It was a terrible place to live. I mean Moscow was a terrible place to live. The food was awful, the weather was awful, the KGB was awful, the housing was awful, the traffic was awful, the people were unfriendly for the most part. But it was important. It was important and the work was stimulating. There was never any question about whether our reporting was being read.

Another related point: Russia was a place where one could have big thoughts. It was partly the product of the deep musical and literary culture, but it was also the sense of immense geography, immense suffering and immense ambition. In the world of culture, one of the real pleasures of serving in Moscow was going to concerts, ballets, operas and other musical performances. In that connection, one of the most interesting people we met there was Lev Vlasenko, the head of the piano faculty at the Moscow Conservatory. His claim to fame was that he came in second to Van Cliburn in the Tchaikovsky Piano Competition back in 1958. Anyway, we met him, I think in connection with one of his trips to the States. So he invited us to his home -- a rare occurrence outside the dissident community. The occasion was the upcoming trip by one of his daughters to Vienna to take part in a musical contest. I asked what she would be playing; she said it would be the Beethoven First Piano Concerto. I said that the second movement of that piece was my very most favorite piece of music. So father and daughter pulled out their music and performed that movement for us, she playing the solo part and he the orchestral part. It was truly memorable. Oh, and I forgot to mention that their home was a small apartment, in the center of which were two grand pianos, back to back. We later saw Vlasenko when

he was a judge for the Chopin competition in Warsaw several years later, and again when he was a judge for the Ciurlionis competition in Vilnius.

Back on the point about the depth of culture and the history of conflict, I remember a comment by Mikhail Kapitsa, the Foreign Ministry's top Asia policy person, who said that the Soviet Union and China would never go to war against each other because, "China is the only country that can out-suffer us." The US considered the Soviet Union to be other "super power," and we treated them as worthy opponents. The system of governance was an abomination, of course, but in Russia at that time -- later called "the period of stagnation" under Brezhnev -- the absence of pain was a blessing.

Q: Where did you buy your food?

JOHNSON: They had what they called "Gastronomes," which were hard currency stores.

Q: Special for you.

JOHNSON: That's right, special for you. Of course you couldn't use rubles for anything to speak of. You could use it for riding the bus. You could use it for dairy products or other things that were in good supply in the local markets.

Q: Now, everybody uses Peter Justesen.

JOHNSON: Yes, well, and Stockmanns, a big department store in Helsinki. Everybody in Moscow lived off of Stockmanns, a wonderful place. Service was so good. When we first got there we were told we really should get cross-country skis for the kids. They said, all you've got to do is have your kids stand on a piece of paper, draw an outline of his or her foot, send it off to Stockmanns and they'll send back the boots, skis, poles and everything you need. Sure enough, a week later, three sets of kids cross country skiing equipment arrived!

Q: Stockmanns in Helsinki?

JOHNSON: Helsinki, yes.

Q: Helsinki is the supply depot.

JOHNSON: Helsinki was the outside world. It was like Hong Kong for people who lived in China or Berlin for people who lived in Eastern Europe, West Berlin. Yes, Helsinki was a wonderful place. Most people made a point of going out to Helsinki at least every three months just to get a taste of the outside world. I didn't at first and it was a mistake. The first time we went it was about six months after we'd gotten there and we were really desperate to get out.

Q: as what, a second secretary?

JOHNSON: I was a first secretary. The Ambassador when I arrived was Walter Stoessel, the DCM was "Spike" Dubs, who was later kidnapped and killed in Afghanistan. The Political Chief when I arrived was Mark Garrison; he was replaced some months later by Marshall Brement, and he in turn was replaced by Bill Brown. Others in POL included Warren Zimmermann, who was my direct boss; later Tom Simons, and yet later Ted McNamara; Mike Joyce (who had been in my A-100 course), Jim Taylor, Jim Collins, Dick Miles, Mel Levitsky, Igor Belousovich, Joe Presel and others.

Q: First secretary in the embassy, but still you're not top stuff. You're running into the KGB or being harassed?

JOHNSON: Yes, well, the KGB didn't spend a lot of time following me, once they figured out what I was doing. They were mainly interested in the internal political guys and the ones who were looking after the dissidents. We had one officer in the internal section, Mel Levitsky when I got there, who maintained close contact with the dissident communities. Mel was later ambassador to Portugal and Brazil, and he was head of International Narcotics and Legal Affairs (INL) when it was first established. Mel was a superb officer. Anyway, he was the head of the internal political section and his job was to keep in touch with the Jewish dissidents, with the artistic dissidents, with the political dissidents and so forth. So, Solzhenitsyn, for example, had just been exiled before that. Sakharov was still around, but his movements were closely monitored. There were a lot of others. Mel, and later Joe Presel, spent lots of time with the dissidents of all stripes. I got sort of peripherally involved because one of the people that we had frequent contacts with and was of great interest to us was a guy named Vitaly Rubin who was a Sinologist. He had been at the Academy of Sciences for a long time and was then sort of booted out for no apparent reason. Both he and his wife were very prominent in the dissident community and very nice people. I'd have dinner with them from time to time. They were more or less free to move around, and they came to our place once or twice, and they came to Mel's place; Mel lived in our building, too. Anyway, really nice people. Finally toward the end of my time there the Soviets let him go to Israel, finally. One of the reasons they did was because most American Sinologists wouldn't go to Moscow, they wouldn't come because of this case and so the Asia scholars and other people just boycotted any events that were going on in Moscow. At a certain point I think the Academy of Sciences people said, well, you know, really this isn't worth it so let's let him go, so they did.

I also encouraged this result with various Soviet officials. His field, you know, it wasn't even contemporary China, it was like the Han Dynasty or something. But I think the real story was that his wife, his wife's father, I think had been a spy at some earlier point, probably during WWII. So she was the problem as far as they were concerned. Anyway, they got out, that was shortly before we left, about three or four days before we left. Unfortunately, Rubin was later killed in a car accident in Israel. Very sad but so far as we could tell, it really was an accident.
I used to deal with other Soviet Sinologists in other places. There were two people attached to the USA Institute who were Sinologists. One was a guy named Zanyegin who was well known and assumed to be a KGB guy. But he was accessible and I could always

get in to see him when I wanted to. Another was Vladimir Lukin, who later became ambassador to Washington and a prominent parliamentarian, and is now I think still the head of the foreign affairs committee of the Duma (the Russian parliament). Lukin had a lot of important positions. At the time he was kind of in hiding I guess because he had run afoul of somebody and so Georgy Arbatov, who was head of the USA Institute, had provided him a place to stay and keep his head down for a while. Then after Gorbachev came in he rose to great heights. Vladimir Lukin was the source of one of my favorite vignettes in Moscow.

We had a visit by a guy who had been in China during World War II and in the early post-war period and he wrote a book called Scratches on Our Minds. His name is Harold Isaacs and his daughter was the wife of the Baltimore Sun correspondent in Moscow at the time and he came to visit. We arranged a couple of meetings with him and one of them was a lunch with Vladimir Lukin. And Isaacs, because he was so wrapped up in this idea of cultural stereotypes, at a certain point said "Okay, now Dr. Lukin, what is the Russian attitude (he said "Russian") what is the Russian attitude about Asians?" If I say the word 'Asian,' what do you think of?" Lukin said, "We have a sense of threat," and he made the usual references to Genghis Khan and Mao. Isaacs then replied, "And Dr. Lukin, where does Asia begin?" Lukin smiled and said, "It begins at the Soviet border."

Q: Did you ever see the movie Alexander Nevsky?

JOHNSON: Oh, yes of course. Eisenstein?

Q: Yes. Remember the first scenes, the great Khan comes by, the Chinese ruler from the golden horde comes by, and Alexander Nevsky and his colleagues are down fishing with a net. The ruler of Russia at that time is the Khan.

JOHNSON: The great Khan, yes.

Q: Today is December 10, 2006.

JOHNSON: I have some pages. I think these must have been pages that you gave me when I was at your place. ...here we're talking about the Moscow experience, particularly this friend Boris Zanyegin who was attached to the USA Institute and who was a Sinologist -- a pretty well known Sinologist -- who was also assumed to have a close relationship with the KGB.

When I was leaving Moscow in June, 1977, my next door neighbor and office mate, Ted McNamara, and his wife hosted a farewell reception for Lee and me, and Boris Zanyegin was one of the people I invited there. In the course of a conversation that evening, I said, "Now, Boris Nikolayevich, I have to tell you that I have been deeply insulted. I have been here for three years and so far as I know, no one has made any effort to compromise me. Obviously, you don't think I'm sufficiently important to make the effort." He expressed shock, and then he smiled and said, "Come back and give us another chance"-- which I never did. That illustrates that that's part of the game, the idea that we're testing

the limits and they're testing, too. But it does have a certain silly quality. Spy novels are far more entertaining than the reality -- I think. The atmosphere had a certain oppressive quality because you had to assume that most of what you said was being monitored. The result was you learned to converse in a different way so that you never referred to anything classified. You never referred to anything that had internal sensitivity as far as mission operations were concerned. It means that when you do get out of the Soviet Union -- out to Helsinki or out to Berlin or out to someplace -- there's this sudden sense of relief, a great sense of a burden being lifted. Physically, Moscow was OK; it wasn't pleasant, but it was OK. But the mental pressure of living in that kind of hothouse environment certainly took its toll, it took a toll over time.

Q: One of the things that occurred while you were there is that the Americans had an election in November of '76. Carter was elected. How did the Soviets looking at these elections? Did it make any difference to them? Were they curious?

JOHNSON: Well, before the '76 election there was Watergate in '74. I arrived in Moscow in July, and Nixon stepped down in August. The Soviets totally misread Watergate. It was one of those situations where we learned something about the way their system worked through their crazy analysis of how they thought ours worked. They had defined Watergate as part of a larger anti-Nixon plot which was fueled by those hard liners in the US who opposed the Nixon-Kissinger détente policy. They had grown quite comfortable with Nixon, and later with Ford, so when Nixon fell, for reasons that had nothing to do with détente or foreign policy more broadly, they had to scramble to get back on track with President Ford. They asked themselves, in effect, "How are we going to deal with the Americans now that they have overthrown our friend Nixon?" So one of the first things they did was to invite Ford to come to a summit in Vladivostok, in the Russian Far East. That was in November, 1974, as I recall. Arms control was the main topic. That summit produced no major accomplishments, but it did get the bilateral relationship back on track, more or less.

A little vignette: on my first workday in Moscow I went to a reception at Spaso House (the Ambassador's Residence) in honor of the US Association for the UN, and the Soviet guests included several people from academic institutions and from the government who worked on UN matters. One person I met was a prominent arms control specialist, and when I said my background was in Chinese affairs, he grew very agitated; the Maoists were a threat, he asserted, and the US was foolish not to see the danger they posed. Why on this very day the Chinese were even welcoming Senator Henry Jackson, whose whole objective was to undermine détente and to build a wider anti-Soviet coalition. I replied that Senator Jackson represented my home state, and that I had voted for him several times. I thought this guy's head would split open -- he just sputtered and muttered and walked away. I saw him again several times during the course of my tour in Moscow, but we never spoke again about Senator Jackson.

We did, however, speak further about the upcoming election. In fact, Ambassador Stoessel invited some Soviet guests to watch one of the presidential debates -- the one where President Ford made his famous gaffe about alleged Soviet domination in Eastern

Europe. When the video got to that part of the debate, I said to two of my Soviet contacts, "Please come and watch this part; this is where President Ford is going to lose the election." Needless to say, the Soviets were not amused!

The election that brought Jimmy Carter to the presidency took place a few weeks later, and the Soviets were certainly curious about the election, in a couple of ways. One was whether the new team would represent any significant shift from the previous one. They weren't sure what to expect from the Democrats because there were people there whom they found sympathetic in terms of understanding the situation of the Soviet Union, but they also found hawks there, like Senator Jackson. Richard Perle was working for Jackson at that time, as was Dorothy ("Dicky") Fosdick. Fosdick was with Jackson then; she had earlier worked with Paul Nitze on the Policy Planning Staff at the State Department. That wing of the Democratic Party had a certain weight, too. Even if Carter was not personally a member of it, others were. Carter had a background as a Naval Academy graduate and a submariner. So they weren't quite sure what to expect. Similarly, on our side I think in the minds of many of the people coming in -- Secretary Vance and others -- there was a sense of opportunity that they were going to do something different with the Soviets after the Nixon-Ford years. They certainly intended to emphasize the human rights issue more, but they also intended to emphasize the need for some scaling back in terms of the military component of our confrontation.

Within the first two months after the Carter team came into office, in March, I think it was, of '77, they sent a very high level delegation to Moscow headed by Cyrus Vance -- the new Secretary of State -- including Marshall Schulman, an academic from Columbia University who was Vance's principal advisor on Soviet affairs, Les Gelb who was then head of the political-military bureau, Arthur Hartmann who was the European Bureau Assistant Secretary at the time. Mark Garrison was the Director of Soviet affairs, and several others. They brought this big and high level team. I was the so-called control officer for this delegation -- one of them. We also had an admin control officer named Joe Hulings. He had the really hard work which was to make sure that all the vehicles were in place and the housing was in place and the food was in place and all that sort of thing. I was assigned to deal basically with the heads of the delegation and to make sure that all of their immediate needs were met as far as the substance, as far as making sure people were there to take notes and that everything ran smoothly as far as the key individuals were concerned. There was a lot of advance publicity about this delegation from the American side, a lot of press coverage about new initiatives that Carter was going to try in order to break through the Gordian knot on arms control. Vance was bringing a new series of proposals.

The American Ambassador at the time was Malcolm Toon who had come to take office in January, just before the inauguration of the Carter Administration. He had been nominated under the Ford administration and came to Moscow in January but felt that he could not present his credentials at that time because he had not been re-nominated or reaffirmed by the new administration. I remember his first staff meeting with us during the week of January 20th, the week of Carter's inauguration. He began this large staff meeting by saying, "This has been the strangest week of my career. On Monday I

presented my credentials as the new American Ambassador, and on Wednesday I submitted my resignation." The whole question of Toon's assignment, because he was considered a hard-liner, became itself an issue of domestic politics in the U.S., whether he would stay on or whether Carter would replace him with someone who was considered more amenable. In that kind of a situation, no president is going to feel that he can withdraw the person who is considered the hard-liner, especially if he's a professional as Toon was. The issue came and went, and they reaffirmed Toon as the Ambassador a few days later.

In March -- a little over a month later -- Toon was not called back to Washington for the discussions about the new Carter initiatives, but he was invited to come out and meet the delegation in Copenhagen on their way in. When he got to Copenhagen -- this is his version of the story -- Vance showed him this proposal that they were going to submit to the Soviets, and the fall-back if the first proposal was rebuffed. "Deep cuts" it was called; the "Deep Cuts" proposals. Toon said he read through them and said, "There's no way in the world that the Soviets are ever going to accept this." He said, "Vance was shocked." Then Vance said, "But we've spent so much time on this in Washington. How can it be that the Soviets are not going to find this acceptable?" The idea was to cut deliverable warheads on both sides. What Toon recognized but what Vance did not recognize at the time was that the terms of reference had been so skewed that they took a disproportionate number of land-based missiles out, and they didn't touch the sea-based or the air-launched missiles. Basically, the proposal left us with the flexibility that we always wanted in terms of the triad of our nuclear deterrent, but it took away the core part of the Soviet deterrent by slashing by around 50% the number of land-based missiles. Of course they were never going to accept that. When Vance then met with Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko and later with President Brezhnev, that was the time when we were waiting anxiously for the Soviet response. And on the second day Brezhnev came out with this famous statement, "*Nyet! Nyet!"* "No" to the first proposal, and "no" to the second proposal. Our team went back to Washington much sobered by the experience.

Another interesting thing happened as a part of that exercise. About two days later, our delegation had left already and we were having a small dinner party at our place. I heard that afternoon that Gromyko was going to be on TV that night with an interviewer: just him and the interviewer. It got to be dinner time, 6:30 or 7:00, and I went and turned on the TV. Indeed, the interviewer asked him a broad question about the talks with Vance. Then Gromyko spoke for an hour and a half, almost extemporaneously. He had one sheet of paper with maybe three notes you could see on it, and he spoke for an hour and a half about why this was a bad idea, what the core points were about Soviet sovereignty and Soviet defensive measures. It was a brilliant performance. Afterwards -- we taped it, of course, and watched it afterwards -- I think it was Ambassador Toon who said afterwards, "If Gromyko had been that eloquent in our meetings, we'd have understood better where the Soviets were coming from." It was a unique event, the way Gromyko spoke in public to the Soviet people and to the leadership in the government and to anybody else who wanted to listen about the basic strategic considerations that they had to take into account and why this American effort didn't meet their basic needs.

It ended up being a major setback as far as we were concerned, and it soured the mood in the Carter administration at this stage. What we didn't know at the time, what I found out later, was that the US proposal, after it had been vetted through the Washington bureaucracy, was sent to Senator Jackson's office. Richard Perle then wrote a revised version -- 23 single-spaced pages as a revised version of this proposal -- and sent it back to the State Department. That revised version, with a few modifications, became the US proposal. Jackson's political weight plus Perle's bureaucratic skill, plus his obvious understanding of the key issues, were decisive in putting forward a proposal that would never work. Fascinating. That was March of '77.

Another key player on the US side was Zbigniew Brzezinski, who had come into the Carter Administration as the national Security Adviser. He was a brilliant man, and a true strategic thinker. And he was definitely on the hawkish side of the US political spectrum. He and Secretary of State Cyrus Vance saw the world in quite different ways. Vance was a big time international lawyer, and his approach to foreign policy was that of a lawyer and problem solver. Brzezinski saw the world in geo-strategic terms, with a strongly competitive structure for the US and the USSR.

Living and working in Moscow was always interesting because it was such a hard place to live and work. We were constantly under surveillance. My job didn't involve issues of great sensitivity from that standpoint. Most of the people that I met were officials or quasi-officials: people from the media, people from academia, from the Far East Institute, from the Oriental Studies Institute.

That's another interesting point. There were two different academic institutes to deal with China and its neighbors. The old one, the historic one, was called The Oriental Studies Institute, and that's where most of the serious scholars were. In the '60s, during the time of the Sino-Soviet split, the Soviets also established a different think-tank called the Far Eastern Institute. That institute tended to be staffed by people who had government or Party background, who were not serious scholars in the same way but who produced papers that were useful for propaganda purposes. The Far Eastern Institute was basically an arm of the Party, and if there was serious academic work, it was more accidental than by planning, whereas with the Oriental Studies Institute, there was real scholarship there. There were a lot of people who were good Sinologists who had lived in China, for example, in the '20s and '30s during the Comintern period and later in the '40s. They maintained their serious scholarship, and they were from that standpoint much more fun to talk to. One person I used to see fairly often was named Lev Delyusin. He had been in China in the '20s and '30s, and had worked closely with Zhou Enlai, particularly during the "united front" period when Zhou and the Communists worked with Chiang Kai-shek and the Nationalists. Chiang was at that time the head of the Whampoa Military Academy, near Guangzhou, and Zhou had been his deputy. Delyusin was a reporter for Pravda, the Soviet Party newspaper, and remained in China during much of the World War II period. He was not a policy maker, but his observations about China were well informed. And most importantly, he was accessible.

Another good friend from the Oriental Studies Institute was named Genrick (Henry) Gankovski. He was a South Asia specialist, especially Afghanistan and Pakistan, where he had spent a lot of time. Gankovski published a fair amount in international journals, and was trying to set up a regular exchange program with American scholars. This effort finally paid off about the time I was leaving Moscow with a program with Berkeley; the Americans most directly involved were Robert Scalapino and Leo Rose. Gankovski was also accessible. And I remember one especially telling remark he made once when there were no other Soviets around. We had been discussing an oral history project that his institute had set up, specifically aimed at gathering the experiences of those who had served in China before and during World War II. Many of those people had been purged by Stalin, and others had died or grown too old to remember details in the meantime. But some were still cogent, so time was important. He mentioned one woman in particular (I don't recall her name) who had suffered terribly during the purges of the late '30s. At one point, to keep the conversation going, I said something like, "That must have been terrible; I can imagine what it was like." Gankovski looked straight at me and said, "No, you cannot imagine what it was like; no one who was not there could imagine what it was like."

To back up a bit, my job in Moscow was to report on Soviet relations with Asia, which meant China, of course, but it also meant Vietnam during the last phase of the war, North Korea, Japan, including the Northern Territories, India, which had close relations with Moscow, and other countries. I was in Moscow when Mao died, and I wrote a number of reports over the following several months about how the Soviets were approaching China after Mao. They had made Mao into this monstrous character and they had a real problem deciding how to deal with Maoism after Mao. One of the ways we judged public opinion in the USSR on foreign policy issues was to attend public lectures at which informed officials or Party types spoke, often quite candidly. The first such program I went to was called, "Danger! Maoism!" And it featured a film, that was the most dreadful propaganda, showing Mao as Hitler, or Mao with a mushroom cloud behind his head, and Mao waving to mobs of young Red Guards, but mainly it was about the Maoist threat. There were some anti-US images as well, but it was mainly about Mao. So after Mao died the Soviets tried to show a softer image, sending a condolence message in the name of the Soviet Communist Party to the Chinese Party. But the Chinese, knowing very well the Soviet objective, refused to accept the message, saying that the two Parties had no ties. So anyway, to finish up this sequence, the Soviets essentially said that Maoism did not end with Mao's death, and after about three months they resumed their hostile propaganda.

One of the most colorful people I met there was the head of the First Far East Department of the Foreign Ministry, named Mikhail Kapitsa. He was a big guy who loved to tell stories. And our Ambassador at the time was Walter Stoessel, a truly distinguished, polished diplomat -- right out of central casting. He had been Ambassador to Poland earlier in his career, and in that capacity had chaired the so-called Warsaw Talks between the US and China -- those talks were at that time the only official link we had with the PRC, and the scope of those talks was very narrow.

A funny story: in early 1971, before the ping pong breakthrough, Kissinger sent a secret message to Stoessel in Warsaw asking him to contact the Chinese Charge d'affaires to pass a message (the Chinese Ambassador, like nearly every PRC Ambassador, had been called back to Beijing during the Cultural Revolution, probably to work in the fields). So on the next occasion when Stoessel was attending the national day reception for a country that had good relations with us and with the Chinese, he started to move toward the Chinese Charge, only to see him move further away. Stoessel waited for a few minutes, until he could move out of another conversation group, then edged toward the Chinese man again, and he moved away again. Finally, Stoessel started to move more urgently, fearing that the Chinese guy might leave, and indeed, he moved toward a back door. By this time, Stoessel was practically running after him and finally caught up with him on the back stairs, saying in Russian, "Mr. Charge, I have a message for your government." The Chinese Charge then said, "I have no instructions;" then he made a short note but did not reply.

In Moscow, Stoessel would call on Kapitsa every few months, and I went along as the notetaker. Kapitsa was entertaining but very hard line on China. In fact, the Chinese considered that Kapitsa was an obstacle to better relations. Interestingly for someone in that position, he did not speak Chinese, and his last direct experience there was in the '40s. During one of our last calls during Stoessel's time, in mid-1976, we got to talking about the Sino-Soviet skirmishes in 1968 along the Ussuri River (Heilungjiang in Chinese). Kapitsa made Moscow's usual points about the border claims, then said that the Soviets had not known that PRC Defense Minister Lin Biao had set up his headquarters only nine kilometers from the riverbank. Kapitsa laughed and said, "If we had known he was there, we would have taken care of Mao's Lin Biao problem." Stoessel then asked what had happened to Lin; Kapitsa said he had died in a plane crash in Mongolia. The Soviet's knew it was him because they had his dental records. Kapitsa then went to a shelf and brought over a shiny and twisted piece of metal piping, proudly saying that it was a piece from Lin's plane. Stoessel, with a straight face, asked how Kapitsa had gotten it; Kapitsa laughed and said, "Our Mongolian comrades knew I would be interested." At the end of that conversation, Stoessel asked whether I had any other questions I would like to ask; but before I could answer, Kapitsa looked at me and said, without smiling, "Mr. Johnson always has more questions." Interestingly, after Mao's death in September of that year, Kapitsa was totally unavailable to any outsiders for three months, despite many approaches through many channels. My friend Delyusin said this was deliberate, because "Professor Kapitsa sometimes says more than he intends to say."

Two other people I would like to mention: first, Kapitsa's deputy Igor Rogachev. Rogachev had served in Washington, spoke good English and good Chinese, and was very smooth. I used to describe him as "the new Soviet man," who could mix easily anywhere. Rogachev's father had been Kapitsa's professor many years earlier. Rogachev later became head of the Foreign Ministry's policy planning staff. I asked him once what was the biggest difference between the two jobs; he said, "The biggest difference is that in my new office the phone never rings." Rogachev later became Russian Ambassador to Beijing, and remained in that position for about ten years.

The second person is Viktor Trifonov, who was the head of the MFA's China Desk when I arrived in Moscow, but he was about to leave for Washington, where he served two long tours, the latter as Political Counselor. And in that position he became deeply engaged in arms control issues. Later when I was in Taipei (in 1997), Trifonov came to Taipei as the head of Moscow's new office there. I used to see him fairly often. But serving as the head of a small three-person office in Taipei, where he was the only Chinese speaker, was a big come-down for him. In fact, Trifonov was to me the exemplar of someone who lived much better under the old Soviet Union than he did in the new post Cold War world.

Q: Interesting. In '77 you were about to move on to your next assignment.

Yugoslav Desk

Q: How did you engineer this assignment?

JOHNSON: I wanted to come back to Washington because I'd never had a regular Washington assignment and also because my kids were getting to be junior high school age. I wanted to have them go through junior high and high school in the United States, if we could do that. I wanted to work as a desk officer, preferably a fairly small desk where I could be responsible for something specific in East Asia or Eastern Europe. Somewhere in the course of this process, I was asked whether I would like to be the Polish desk officer, and I said yes. I didn't know anything about Poland, had never served there. Later I was told that the job that would be available was the Yugoslav desk officer.

I actually was quite interested in that because Yugoslavia was a variant. Under Tito it was a variant of standard Marxist-Leninist-Communist structure. Tito had made it to fit his own needs. I was quite interested in that. The fellow who had been my boss the last two years in Moscow, Tom Simons, was back in Washington at the time. He was instrumental in getting me the job in the Office of East European Affairs as the Yugoslav desk officer. I found out later that one reason that I had been offered Poland was they were making a change in that position. The guy who had been the Yugoslav desk officer was moving to become the Polish desk officer, so I moved in behind him at the Yugoslav desk. His name was Jack Seymour. He was good at both. He had served in Poland, and he wanted to be the Polish desk officer, so it worked out very well.

The other happy accident at that time was that the new U.S. Ambassador to Yugoslavia, filling a vacancy that had been there for several months from the time of his predecessor's departure, was Lawrence Eagleburger. Eagleburger had been the Under Secretary for Management when Henry Kissinger was Secretary of State, and before that he had been with Kissinger at the White House. He was very close to Kissinger but was a career Foreign Service Officer. There was much speculation when the Democratic administration came in in 1976-77, that he wouldn't have a job in the new administration. But because of his previous experience in Yugoslavia -- he had served there as a junior officer -- and because he had good friends in high places in Washington, specifically Averill Harriman, he was chosen for this important position. Harriman, who had a special

fascination with Tito and with Yugoslavia, lobbied hard for Eagleburger to be assigned as Ambassador to Yugoslavia, and he was.

He had gotten there in June of '77, and I came through Belgrade on my way back to Washington about two weeks later. He had just arrived. I attended his first full country team staff meeting, and he was a wonder to behold; he knew who everyone was before they introduced themselves. But he had a fearsome reputation at the time. He was called "Kissinger's henchman" because as Under Secretary for Management, he was responsible for oversight on personnel and assignments -- a lot of sensitive things. Among them were some difficult personnel issues where Kissinger didn't want to take the heat, so he would pass it to his deputy for management affairs.

In fact, I was tremendously impressed with Eagleburger. He really knew his way around Yugoslavia already, but he also had a marvelously engaging manner. When he went around the table, people didn't feel the slightest bit inhibited or intimidated about speaking up. He had quite an engaging personality and was not at all what I expected. He was very open and a terrific guy to work with. I went back and became the Yugoslav desk officer, and we had very frequent, very regular conversations informally as well as formally. He was the Ambassador for the two years that I was on the Yugoslav desk, and he was there for another year after that. So he was still there when Tito died in 1980, and Dick Miles was the desk officer.

Q: Did you get some sense of what the Yugoslav desk is and how it fits in? That would be the EUR (Bureau of European and Canadian Affairs), wasn't it?

JOHNSON: Yes. It was in the European bureau, and the Assistant Secretary at the time was George Vest. The Deputy Assistant Secretary who dealt with that part of the world was Bob Berry at that time, later replaced by Bill Luers. Both were outstanding officers who had a lot of Soviet experience as well as other East European experience. The structure was the Assistant Secretary, Deputy Assistant Secretary, and then the office of East European and Yugoslav affairs. Actually, when I got there it was called EE (East European), and Yugoslavia was included. But they never wanted to be included among the other East Europeans, the Soviet satellite states, so at a certain point we changed the name to EEY (Eastern Europe and Yugoslavia). It didn't make any difference as far as the structure was concerned, but they appreciated the gesture.

We reported through the office director. Nick Andrews was the Director and the deputy was Carl Schmidt, then Carl Schmidt moved up. When Schmidt moved up, Harry Gilmore became the deputy, and Bill Farrand was the other deputy. There were two deputies, and they had different portfolios. Harry Gilmore had been the Yugoslav desk officer earlier, so he did the southern tier. Bill Farrand did the northern tier as I recall. They were both members of my carpool, which was fascinating. Anything we couldn't get done in the office we'd get done in the carpool. I was the driver, and they were two of the three riders every morning and every evening. Others who were in the office, I mentioned, Jack Seymour, who was the Polish desk officer. My next door neighbor in the office was Sam Fromowitz, who had been in Moscow when we were. He was the econ

officer for Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, and Romania. I think he had those three countries. There was another econ officer, Jim Glenn, who did the northern tier plus Bulgaria, I think. As you can imagine, there wasn't a lot going on in the economic side of the house in those days. Yugoslavia had most favored nation (MFN) status, but none of the others did, so we had quite limited econ activity in those days.

JOHNSON: In terms of incidents or events that happened during that time, there were two or three that were interesting and important. One was that shortly before I came to that job, we'd had a visit by Vice President Mondale to Yugoslavia, and he was extremely well received. This was coming at the time we had Eagleburger's predecessor who was a non-career ambassador named Lawrence Silberman. Silberman had made a public speech shortly before the US elections and shortly before he left in November or December of '76 in which he was very directly attacking the human rights situation and the political situation and Tito's leadership and all of this in a public speech. He wasn't quite PNG'd (*Persona Non Grata*), but almost, and was basically frozen out and couldn't do anything in the last month or two that he was there, so he left early.

There was then a gap of about six months when we didn't have an ambassador there. In an effort by the new administration to try and change that, Mondale was traveling in Europe anyway, and he went to Yugoslavia in May of '77. He was extremely well received. By coincidence, the Yugoslavs had some other high level visitors at the same time, so they put Mondale in what's called the "white palace," which is the state guest house. Mondale was duly impressed, and other Americans with him were duly impressed, and that in turn lead to a significant increase in the exchanges that went on over the following two years. We had a burgeoning relationship at that time. I think Eagleburger had a lot to do with that. Also was the fact that the new administration wanted to deal with the nonaligned movement and meeting the nonaligned leaders in that area in a new manner definitely helped. Mondale's personal engagement was also important.

JOHNSON: The first big event that I was involved in was the visit by the number two man from Yugoslavia, Mondale's counterpart in effect. His name was Edward Kardelj. He had been Tito's intellectual mentor for a long time. He was a Slovenian from the north of Yugoslavia. He was also the one who had formed an ideological framework for the nonaligned movement and also for the form of Yugoslav socialism, something the Chinese would call Socialism with Chinese characteristics they would call Socialism with Yugoslav characteristics. There was a self-help, self-dependence program which also looked to the West as well as to the East.

Kardelj was a very important player in the rotating presidency, rotating vice-presidency at the time under Tito. He was really the number two man. He came to Washington, and Mondale was his host. Normally when you have a high level visitor to Washington, the visitor is there for two or three days. In this case, Kardelj was there for eight days. It was quite extraordinary. One of the issues we had to deal with was where was he going to stay for eight days? Mondale wanted him to stay at Blair House which is where state visitors would stay, right across from the White House. The then chief of protocol was a man from Western Massachusetts named Evan Dobelle, who is still around. I've seen his

name a few times, a very charming guy and a good small town politician from Western Massachusetts. He had certain rules. He said, "With Blair House, you can have a visitor there for three days. You can't stay longer than that." In this one meeting where Mondale was present -- I wasn't present; I heard about it afterward -- Dobelle said, "Well, he can only stay for three days." Mondale said, "Where is that written down?" Dobelle said, "It's not written down. It's just that's the way we do it -- three days because we have other visitors coming, and that's the regulations." Mondale said, "That's the regulations, huh? Well I say f*** the regulations! I want him to stay there for eight days!" The result was that President Lee Kuan Yew of Singapore was coming that week, but not as a "state" visitor. He was coming on his own. So he stayed in the Hay-Adams Hotel. He didn't stay in Blair House because we had Blair House locked up for eight days for Kardelj, who also had some medical treatment while he was there. He died of cancer about two years later, but it was beginning at that time, so he spent a day or so at Walter Reed, which we helped to arrange. That was a big deal. Another memorable part of that visit was a boat ride on Chesapeake Bay on the Commandant of the Naval Academy's official launch. That was quite elegant.

That visit in turn paved the way for Tito's last visit to Washington which occurred in March of 1978. That involved a six month preparation time. It was amazing. Everybody and every agency had to be involved; Tito was a big enough fish. He was definitely one of the giants on the world stage at the time, so everybody wanted to have something to say about what he was going to see, what he was going to do, what the program was going to be like beginning at the top level.

Q: He'd been to the States before.

JOHNSON: Yes. he'd been to the States before and, in fact, the first time was under Kennedy. I think this was the third state visit that Tito had had during his time in office. We had inter-agency meetings for months before preparing the materials. I was in the middle of it as the desk officer. In those days the Yugoslav desk was quite small. I was the desk officer, and my next door office neighbor, Sam Fromowitz, handled the economic side of the relationship. Basically, we had one and a half officers doing Yugoslavia, so you can imagine that when you get something like this big visit going on, not only is the desk officer and everyone else there engaged, but the whole hierarchy up to and including the Secretary of State and including the White House, including the President and people around the President. It was a very, very big deal.

One of the things I remember was security. There were always very active anti-Tito, anti-communist nationalists in the United States. There were large numbers, especially from the Croatian community. There were large numbers of very militant anti-Tito Croats. There were also some Serbs, and there were some others among the other nationalities, but mainly the Serbs and the Croats. There was a group called the Croatian National Congress which had applied for a permit to demonstrate against Tito. The then Yugoslav ambassador in Washington absolutely could not understand the idea of allowing people to demonstrate when you have a state guest as a state visitor. He was threatening to cancel the trip.

Bill Luers knew this fellow pretty well. His name was Dimce Belovsky, and he was very fiery in his manner. He had good domestic political credentials, but he had no previous diplomatic credentials that I knew of. The first time we had one of these big blow ups, Belovsky said, "Visit's off. We're going to cancel it. He's not coming. We can't tolerate this sort of thing." I reported this directly to Bill Luers, who did not seem very concerned. He said, "In the next six weeks, Belovsky will call off this visit at least ten times. So next time he does it, it's OK, just let me know, and we'll go on accordingly." Sure enough, the day before the visit was to take place, when the demonstrators were already starting to gather in Lafayette Park opposite the White House, Belovsky called me directly and said, "Visit's off. Cancelled. Not coming," and so forth. I went to Luers and said, "That's number 10." It was the tenth such threat -- and the last!

We got a stroke of good luck in that regard because somewhere along the way one of the earlier schedules that we had been putting together had Tito arriving on a Sunday and the meetings to be held on Monday and Tuesday in Washington and a visit out of town on Wednesday. That version of the schedule got leaked, and so the demonstrators applied for a permit to demonstrate on Sunday, which from their standpoint was the best day to demonstrate: You'd get more people there. The permit was granted. But that was never the date when he was going to arrive! So the demonstrators gathered at Lafayette Park on Sunday morning carrying their placards and yelling their slogans, "Down with Tito, Down the Carter." There were four to five thousand people there at the peak -- it was still permissible to gather in Lafayette Park. But Tito was not there; the Yugoslavs were not there. He arrived in Williamsburg that day to have an overnight and a rest before he came up for the ceremony the following morning, Monday. By then the demonstrators were long gone, and the ceremony and the meetings went remarkably smoothly. We do state visits pretty well!

That was the first and only time I had shaken hands with Tito and with Carter, as they were in the receiving line in the White House after the ceremony on the front lawn. It was an impressive event, and it was a complete success. Everything happened the way we hoped it would, including this accidental result of the demonstrations. We made progress on the economic side; we made progress in terms of dialogue; we made progress on regional and nonaligned issues and on several economic issues. It was a very significant and very successful visit.

Q: You were saying there was about a six month roll-up to the visit itself. Part of that, certainly, would be educating the American principals who were going to be participating. There was a little more nuance and understanding of the Yugoslav situation than they probably started off with.

JOHNSON: Oh, yes. For certain, that's right. One of the things we did at that time -- actually, we did it just after the Tito visit -- was to update our contingency book for Tito's demise. He was already in his mid to late 80's at that point and was not in good health. I remember the White House person who was dealing with East European affairs was Robert Hunter, later ambassador to NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization), a very

bright guy. He came to some of our meetings, and we always made sure that he was informed about what we were doing in terms of these documents for the contingencies. The contingency book consisted of three or four sections. The first was a memo to the President, about a six to eight page memo to the President and signed by the Secretary, that told him everything he needed to know *right now* in terms of when this event happens, this is what you need to do. This is what you need to think about. One of the points we made there was that when Tito dies, the President himself has to go to the funeral. There are only about six or eight people in the world for whom that is the case, but it was the case for Tito. You need to plan on that once the word comes. Then we talked about the relations with neighbors and relations with the Soviets, and we had a very complete section called "The Soviet Order of Battle." The whole book was about 150 pages or so, and it had a lot of details of economic stuff, questions about our mission in Yugoslavia, and other details. When we finished all of this, we produced nine copies, one for each of the different agency participants. And I said, "Here's one for the President," and I gave it to Bob Hunter. He reacted with feigned alarm, saying, "Don't send it to the President. If you send it to the President, he'll read it! And there are other things he should be doing. He should not be spending the next week reading a 150 page tome about Yugoslavia." So we kept an extra copy to send to the White House when the need arose. This episode told us something about the way Carter's White House operated. Carter was a detail person and, indeed, I'm sure if we put a book like that in front of him, he would not read just the first eight pages. He'd spend a lot of time on the other things. But interestingly, when Tito did die in May 1980, Carter did not go to the funeral because he had made a public pledge not to leave the US while the Americans were still being held in Teheran. So he sent the Vice President. And that takes us up to most of my Yugoslav Desk days.

One of the benefits I got out of working in that field for those two years was working closely with Eagleburger on his occasional trips to Washington. I remember the first time he came back for consultations. He appeared at my office door one morning, and I stood up and said, "Good morning. Mister Ambassador." He replied, "Good morning, Mister Desk Officer; if you want to call me that, I'll call you that. My name is Larry," and we could deal with it on that basis which, by the way, I never did. I never did call him Larry, but that's the way he was.

Q: Was he one of those that would come back to Washington on a fairly frequent basis?

JOHNSON: Not excessively. It was about the right frequency. It was maybe every four months or something like that.

Q: He's connected by telegrams, but still, it is a good time to get some face time with the key people.

JOHNSON: He had so many friends and contacts in Washington even though he was a centrist Republican but nonetheless he had a lot of friends in high places in the Democratic administration as well. So yes, it was very much worth his while -- and mine. I remember one event that had an effect on me. Then Secretary Vance was interviewing

for a replacement as his special assistant. I made the final cut along with Arnie Raphel who was then working on South Asian affairs. I had a long interview with Vance but didn't get the job; Arnie Raphel did. He performed very capably, and later went to Pakistan as Ambassador. Sadly, he was later killed in a plane crash together with the then-President of Pakistan. Later I heard that I was called Eagleburger's candidate to be Vance's Special Assistant, and Arnie was called Scowcroft's candidate. Eagleburger and Scowcroft had a very close relationship. Scowcroft had been a defense attaché in Belgrade in the '60s when Eagleburger was a junior econ (economic) officer there.

Q: I didn't realize.

JOHNSON: ...which accounts for the breath of Scowcroft's world views, too. There were a lot of people like that who had some kind of connection with Eagleburger. I remember when we did up the guest list for the state dinner when Tito was there, we tried to contact all the former ambassadors to Yugoslavia. It was remarkable how many of them, like George Kennan, were there. It was a very impressive list. I can't remember all the names now, but people who had served in Yugoslavia were above average in terms of our business. They were diplomats of note in their area.

q: Is this usual for the desk to do the guest list for presidential visits?

JOHNSON: I should say we did *a* guest list, and the resemblance between that guest list and the list that finally came out was slightly more than coincidental, but not much more. There certainly were outsiders -- political contributors -- on the list and others who had only a peripheral relationship with Yugoslavia. Our job was to submit *a* list from which the White House would cut or add to, whatever they wanted to do.

The night of the state dinner I was not at the White House, even though I had spent six months of my life working on that visit, I was having spaghetti at home, and I was more than slightly peeved, even though I knew that the invitation list didn't often get to the desk officer level. The Assistant Secretary was there and the Deputy Assistant; I don't recall whether the East European Country Director was there or not.

Q: Often we'll see some singer or some other person, too.

JOHNSON: Sports hero or something. Car dealer from Pennsylvania; from Connecticut in this case, who was later indicted for something. But I did get one benefit. Shortly after the visit, Eagleburger invited me to visit Yugoslavia for about two weeks, in the company of one of his econ officers. We went all over that beautiful country and saw many of the tourist highlights. We also had meetings with local officials and with other American officials. I was the only Yugoslav Desk Officer who had never served in Yugoslavia (but I did have a short TDY in Bosnia in 1996).

Another highlight from that job: in February, 1979, Edward Kardelj died. And because he was so highly respected by Tito and others, Eagleburger pushed for us to send a high-level delegation to the funeral. So we invited Averill Harriman to lead a small group of

Congress people and others -- a total of 12, I think. But as it happened, there was a big snowstorm that day in DC, and some of the participants were not able to get to Andrews Air Force Base. Even Harriman was about one hour late, even with his official USG driver. So we flew to Ljubljana, the capital of Slovenia, which was still part of Yugoslavia at that time, and arrived a bit late for the start of the procession. But the organizers immediately put Harriman at the front of the procession, in a steady cold rain. He was much taller than any of the others in the parade. In fact, we were the only country to send a special Presidential envoy for the occasion, and it got us lots of points with the Yugoslavs.

JOHNSON: The ceremony was on February 13, which I remember because the following morning (Valentine's Day) when I came down for breakfast, Mrs. Eagleburger was in the control room crying. I asked he what was the trouble, and she showed me two news items that had just come in. The first said that the US Ambassador in Kabul, Adolf (Spike) Dubs, had been kidnapped and killed. Dubs had been a good friend of the Eagleburgers from their service together in Yugoslavia several years earlier. The second message was about the takeover of our Embassy in Teheran by radical young people. In that case, order had been restored. But in November of that year, nine months later, the Embassy was again taken over and the people inside held hostage for over one year.

Q: The first part of your career was all the Asia influence and while you were on the Yugoslav desk, things were moving along with China. Were you noticing?

JOHNSON: I was definitely noticing. I was looking at that closely. In fact, the then assistant secretary for Asian Affairs was Dick Holbrooke, who had a fascination with the non-aligned world, as well, and with Yugoslavia, in particular. I'm not entirely sure why, but he used to talk with me frequently. And he would see the Yugoslav ambassador from time to time, every four to six months, something like that. I didn't realize at the time that he and Eagleburger had worked in the same office many years earlier when Holbrooke had just come into the Foreign Service. They were both in the office of the then Deputy Secretary, Nicholas Katzenbach, at the end of the Johnson administration. But they got along like oil and water; they couldn't stand each other.

An example: In December of '78, I was still on the Yugoslav desk (my move to the China Desk was several months off.) Eagleburger was back in town making his rounds, and I got a call from Holbrooke saying, "I would really like to see Ambassador Eagleburger." I passed on the message, and Eagleburger said, "Yes, OK. Try to set it up, see what we can do." Then he got involved in other things, and I called Holbrooke and said, "He's not going to be able to make it this time." Holbrooke was obviously upset and said, "I'll even come down there to meet him if he prefers; I can meet him in your office if he doesn't want to call on me here." He thought that maybe there was some concern about face. I passed all of that on to Eagleburger verbatim: "He said he was willing to come down here and sit in my office and meet you here," to which Eagleburger said, "Oh, godammit, I'll go and call on him. That's what happens when you put foreign policy in the hands of children!"

(laughter]

JOHNSON: In the event, he didn't see Holbrooke; it didn't work out. One or the other of them was not available. But later that day, as I was driving Eagleburger to the Dulles Airport for his return to Belgrade, we heard on the radio that President Carter was going to have a statement to the nation that evening -- which was the 15th of December '78. There were believed to be three possible topics. One was a new arms control agreement with the Soviets which had been under negotiation for some time. Soviet Foreign Minister Gromyko was due to come to Washington the following week. The second possible topic was the normalization of diplomatic relations with Vietnam, which also had been under discussion for some time at that point. The third was some kind of issue to do with China. Eagleburger said, "What do you think it is?" I said, "Since the other two are logical, it must be the China one because we haven't heard anything about China. It must be about China because otherwise, where would they be getting that story?" He said, "Well, what do you think it is?" I said, "The only thing that would be that big would be normalization of diplomatic relations, for the President to announce it." We speculated about other things. That evening I was at a dinner at the Yugoslav political counselor's house and we all, of course, knew the President was going to make a speech at 9:00 p.m., maybe 8:00, eastern time. We turned on the TV and, indeed, that was what it was: It was President Carter's announcement of the normalization of diplomatic relations with China, to take effect the first of January of 1979, two weeks hence, followed by a visit to the US by Vice Premier Deng Xiaoping. I hadn't anticipated that, but Deng Xiaoping was going to come in late January of '79 for what amounted to a state visit. Eagleburger might have gotten briefed in advance on that had he been available to see Holbrooke earlier that day.

That's a long way of saying that I kept up my connections with the East Asia folks, and so when it came time for me to move on in the summer of '79, my next job was on the China desk. I became what was called the Officer-in-Charge of PRC (People's Republic of China) Affairs, which was a misnomer; we all used to laughingly say that the person in charge of PRC affairs was the President and the second was the Secretary of State, so my title was a great exaggeration.

Q: Let's go back to the Yugoslav desk for a moment. You said you were having dinner with the Yugoslav embassy official. What's it like for a Washington desk officer in meeting the resident embassies in Washington? Did you get invited to these?

JOHNSON: Yes, all the time. At least once a week there was a reception of some kind where there were visiting Yugoslavs or there were Americans that they were hosting and there was a dinner or reception of some kind. I was at the Yugoslav Ambassador's Residence very frequently, on California Street.

Q: These were private dinner parties?

JOHNSON: Some were private, but mostly they were stand up mix and mingle kinds of things, the usual kinds of diplomatic events. The result was that I got to know the Yugoslav embassy staff, the senior ones, anyway, quite well. I mentioned Belovsky

earlier, and he was a problem. He was difficult to deal with, but the others were wonderful. The political officer was a Serb named Vlado Matic. I think he lives in the States now. Very professional, very smooth guy.

The one that I think I was closest to was the consular officer -- the head of the consular section -- because he was also their security officer. We were getting threats all the time about demonstrations or about actual terrorist acts against the Yugoslavs. In the time that I was on the desk, we had three emergencies that required the convening of task forces in the State Department and throughout the government involving actual or potential attacks on Yugoslav diplomatic missions or other things that could have involved the U.S. In one case there was a guy who had been convicted of terrorist actions in Sweden who escaped and hijacked a plane. This was a very serious issue. They were able to confine it to Europe. We had other incidents: bombs at the Yugoslav Ambassador's Residence. We had a case where a Croatian group took over the mayor's office in Chicago (the then-mayor was of Croatian origin...).

[Transcription note: Start Tape 1, Side 2]

Q: Now you're really on duty.

JOHNSON: Yes, no question about it. That meant we had to work with local law enforcement as well as with the national police agencies, FBI (Federal Bureau of Investigation) in particular, on issues having to do with Yugoslav security. Interestingly the FBI asked me to come and talk one time at their academy down in Quantico. I didn't realize at the time that it was a setup. The main theme of the people in the audience was, "Why don't we do more to support the émigrés, the people who have fled Tito's oppressive regime, and come here. They're trying to help America. They're trying to help our international status." To talk in rational terms about maintaining a relationship with Yugoslavia that made geo-strategic sense for us was a difficult sell at that point. Part of the reason was because -- I think this was the case -- that some of their sources, some of the people that the FBI worked with were, indeed, strongly involved in the more extreme parts of the émigré movement at the time: émigré organizations.

JOHNSON: At one point they overstepped -- I mean the anti-Tito people -- in connection with the state visit. We got a report about five days ahead of time that among the demonstrators that were planning to gather in Lafayette Park were people who were going to try to assassinate Tito. That sent up red flags right away. What sent up an even brighter red flag was that one of these reports claimed that one of the people planning this operation said, "And if the President gets in the way, that's too bad." Then it became a threat against the President. Suddenly from being basically sympathetic to the émigrés, they turned the other way and realized this was a serious law enforcement/Presidential threat issue.

Q: The FBI?

JOHNSON: The FBI, yes. I must say they did respond professionally, and they acted in a way that was completely responsible. I think they never went back to the same kind of blanket sympathy for Tito's opponents that they had previously.

One other thing that I should mention in my days on the Yugoslav desk, one other big incident occurred on November 29, 1977, maybe '78. It was Yugoslav National Day, and it was also Thanksgiving weekend, and I was out of town for something; family probably. I got a call from the Operations Center and from the duty officer for our office, saying that there had been an incident involved an aircraft carrier in Yugoslavia. Putting all the pieces back together, what had happened was that we had the first visit by a US carrier in several years; it had called at the Port of Dubrovnik, a beautiful place. On the 29th of November -- they had been there three days -- they pulled out of port. They had just gotten into international waters 12 miles off shore when they decided to run an exercise. They launched about 50 or 60 airplanes off of this carrier, flying out there over the Adriatic. The Yugoslavs mostly were on leave that day because it was their national day. The guys who were monitoring their radar suddenly saw this blob of black clouds heading their way. It looked like a cloud of American airplanes coming towards them! They said, "What the heck is going on?" They called in Eagleburger and, of course, the first thing he did was tell the Navy to stop this exercise. The Navy said, "This is international waters and air space, and we can do what we want." It became a very tricky negotiation -- an internal U.S. negotiation -- about what are the rules of the road in a case like this. Do we notify the neighboring states? Not officially, no, because it's international waters. On the other hand, you just sent up war planes without any kind of advance warning; is this a peaceful situation with a friendly country? We finally did work out an arrangement using the kind of notice that goes to civil aviation. Whenever you're going to operate aircraft in a zone where civil aviation also operates, you have to notify internationally. What we did was to arrange a notification procedure through the civil aviation links. So we made sure that the Yugoslavs were info'd on such notifications. But this was a big stink for some time.

Q: As you were meeting various members of the Yugoslav embassy, did you have the opportunity from time to time to pass on to them observations about the United States, the old U.S. Government 101?

JOHNSON: Sure. In fact, we used to talk about issues to do with movement toward democracy, toward free market economics. Yugoslavia was fairly open from the economic standpoint, but it's openness politically was very limited. It was a very closed system from that standpoint.

I remember one fascinating conversation with a fellow who was a Yugoslavia defense attaché, and I was talking about democracy and the need for evolution towards democratic principles. I also said something about the disadvantages of a Communist system -- the state centralized system -- which limits the latitude of personal expression. This guy looked at me blankly and said, "But in our system it doesn't work that way. If we had democracy, if we had really full democracy in our country -- one man one vote -- everybody would vote according to their ethnicity. Period. That's just the political fact.

It's fine to talk in an American context or in Western Europe where you have a balance of interests and a balance of voices. But in our case, everybody defines themselves first and foremost in terms of their ethnicity. The Serbs are the biggest group, so they would end up with the most votes. The Croats are second, they would be the second. Macedonians are the third, they would be the third, and so forth.

JOHNSON: I thought about that at the time and frequently later when Yugoslavia devolved into civil war along ethnic lines, and it's still pretty much true that the people who live in that land area that used to be Yugoslavia identify themselves first and foremost by their ethnicity. They also define themselves in terms that distinguish them from their neighbors; that is, they are Croats and not Serbs, or are Macedonians and not Albanians, or they're Slovenians but not something else. The idea of a unified state in which individual interests supersede ethnic identity simply did not exist in Yugoslavia; it just doesn't happen, at least not in that time and place. And the consequences can be devastating.

Q: Sounds like the ethnic tensions in Iraq.

JOHNSON: Yes, Iraq . Lots of places, but fortunately we're blessed by having avoided that sort of thing in this country. You get voting blocks, of course, but nothing that is that dominant as that sort of thing.

Q: Once it gets started, you have Americans vote by immigrant groups. The Irish come in or the Poles come in. After a while people begin to have ethnic, economic interests, business interests, that supersede, but also the point is there's never -- with very few exceptions, there's no one group that tends to be so dominant that it can be overwhelmingly numerically larger than any of its neighbors. We tend to have groups in which you have to form alliances, and those alliances may be based on union connections, for example, or business connections or academic connections, or geographic connections.

JOHNSON: In Eastern Europe generally, and certainly in Yugoslavia, that problem of ethnicity and identity is a very fundamental issue and a very difficult one.

PRC Desk

Q: From Yugoslavia you moved back into the East Asia-Pacific bureau.

JOHNSON: Yes.

Q: So you get a second job in Washington instead of going overseas, and you ended up at the PRC desk. We've just normalized relations, so this is the action pit. This is the cockpit.

JOHNSON: Yes, it was a very busy time in the China world. In a way I was sorry not to have been there when normalization took place, but having come about six months later,

there was still a lot of work. Interestingly, the first big event that occurred after I came to the China desk in July of 1979 was a visit by Vice President Walter Mondale to China. That visit was in August of '79, so we were gearing up already when I got there with the briefing materials. I remembered again the point about Carter reading everything. We got a briefing book ready for Mondale that was not 180 pages, but it was maybe 30 or so, with all the economic materials. We were going to open a new consulate in Guangzhou. That was one of the purposes of his visit, and there were a number of other things. He read through the whole thing and came back with about three pages of questions the next Monday, so we ended up having to do what amounted to a second briefing book. By having been so industrious in getting the first one done early, we ended up having to do another one. That was fine. The result was that Mondale went there extremely well informed, and his visit was a big success.

The Assistant Secretary was still Richard Holbrooke at that point. The Deputy Assistant Secretary (DAS) who was dealing with the China portfolio at that time was Roger Sullivan, I believe. The other people who were most actively involved at that level in China policy discussions were Mike Armacost who was, I think, at the Pentagon at that time, and Nick Platt, who was at the White House at that time. Roger Sullivan and Armacost and Platt had a regular get-together, sometimes with Holbrooke as well, to talk about China things. The Country Director at the time was Chas Freeman; the Deputy Director was Don Anderson; Econ was Scott Hallford, I think, unless Scott came later. I think Scott was the econ person at the time, is that right? You were there and Ruth Goldberg was there.

Q: Gerry Ogden.

JOHNSON: Gerry Ogden was the head? Then Scott replaced him? I thought it was the other way around. I thought Scott was there and...

Q: I thought Scott replaced the Deputy.

JOHNSON: He did. He moved up.

Q: Scott was on the political side.

JOHNSON: No. He was on the econ side because I was on the political side. I replaced Lynn Pascoe. Lynn had been in the job, the officer-in-charge position, through normalization. Also among the people that I oversaw were Joe Borich and Tom Biddick, both of whom went off to open new posts. Biddick went to Guangzhou and Joe Borich went to Shanghai. A man named Conrad Bellamy was responsible for the exchange program, and there was another officer who also worked on exchanges.

Q: Murray Zinoman...

JOHNSON: Murray wasn't there. He was in INR (Bureau of Intelligence and Research) at the time. He wasn't on the desk.

Q: He wasn't on the desk, he was in another bureau.

JOHNSON: Murray was in Chinese language training with me. It was a medium sized desk at the time, but it grew a lot in that period because the relationship grew a lot. We were adding new people and new offices, including getting the floor plan revised so we had enough space. We relocated. My desk was sitting in a little hallway between the PRC desk and the Taiwan office. We called it crossing the Taiwan Strait, and visitors had to walk through that corridor next to my office to get to the other side.

Q: Let's back up for a moment and ask the standard question: How did you get this job?

JOHNSON: In this case, I mentioned having a frequent interchange with Dick Holbrooke while I was working on the Yugoslav desk, but also I had been in language school with Chas Freeman. In fact, we had come into the Foreign Service just one class apart. He went to India on his first assignment, to Madras, and I went to my first assignment in Bombay. We had known each other for some time and had known each other professionally in Washington as well. I'm not sure from their standpoint how my name got on the list, but to me there was never any question that was where I was going. I was going to get back into the China business.

I also had been indirectly recruited by Stape Roy in Beijing. He had gone to work as Leonard Woodcock's DCM in Beijing. I had known Stape from my work on Soviet affairs. He was the director of the external affairs office on the Soviet desk when I was getting ready to go to Moscow in the early '70s, and he had worked in Moscow before that, the job that I had in Moscow. He had been there two terms before that. So I knew Stape, and he actually tried to recruit me in the summer of '78 by saying hush-hush one day, "There are interesting things going on in our relationship with China, and we'd like you to be there." What I didn't know at the time was that that was when the normalization talks were getting serious in the summer of '78. I'm not sure who from all of these various sources put my name on the list, but it was an early decision and an easy one for me to go to the PRC desk.

Q: You came to be on the political side of the house. It's a new relationship. What does the political side do?

JOHNSON: We had a lot of visitors, and the political section in Washington, just like the political section abroad, tended to be the one to take care of especially political visitors like members of the PRC senior leadership. Coordination with other parts of Uncle Sam land was complex. Coordinating with the Pentagon, for example -- we had a lot of activities with the DOD (Department of Defense) at that time. We were regularly coordinating with the White House, coordinating with the CIA (Central Intelligence Agency), coordinating with Treasury, with Commerce, and so forth. The desk officer ends up being a focal point for the inter-agency process on issues that are his or her responsibility; similarly, liaison with our Embassy in Beijing in this case, and with the

Chinese Embassy in Washington, was also part of the political desk officer's responsibility.

There are basically four strands -- maybe five -- of activity, of action-generating impetus or information. One is our embassy in Beijing; one is the Chinese embassy in Washington; one is the rest of the bureaucracy, that is, the coordination with the rest of Uncle Sam land; the fourth is the public, the American public, because an awful lot of what goes out in terms of statements, in terms of how to respond to information, how to respond to inquiries, starts from the desk. If there is an issue involving, let's say, a Chinese defector, something where we have to have a position, articulating that position starts with the desk officer, then it filters its way through, and it ends up being a part of the words that the spokesman uses, either the State Department spokesman or the White House spokesman. Then there's also the relationship with the Congress. That's why I say either four or five. You can count the Congress as a separate link, or you can count it as a branch of the public information and public awareness link.

Between those five sources of input and five directions of output, there's a lot to do on any given day: a lot of writing, a lot of reading, especially preparation of action memos, information memos, and action material: things to prepare senior leaders in the American government for actions involving China.

Q: Can you talk about the contacts with the Congress, because the academics have argued that the very quick notification of movement toward normalization was, in fact, to thwart the Congress from stopping normalization. Congress must have been terribly interested in everything that was going on.

JOHNSON: Congress was certainly interested in anything to do with China. It's one of the foreign affairs issues, certainly in those days, and now as well, where there certainly are a range of interests on the Hill in which the China relationship is a factor. As far as how we managed it during the process of normalization, I wasn't involved in the small group that was dealing with those issues, so I don't know how that was managed. The key people and the key committees ought to have been kept informed at least toward the end of the process. But they felt that they were not adequately informed.

So because of that, the Congress then became very active in writing the Taiwan Relations Act because one of the things that was left undone by the normalization of relations was defining in legal terms -- in binding terms -- the nature of the US relationship with Taiwan after we normalized relations with the PRC. Almost immediately, in January of '79, the administration came up with actually a fairly bare bones draft law that looked to a time when we really wouldn't have to worry much about how we managed our relations with Taiwan. Then some people on the Hill wanted to reverse that and make it so that the Taiwan relationship came to define a lot of what we could not do with the PRC. In the end they actually came out with what I think is a pretty good law, but it was quite contentious at the time.

The Taiwan Relations Act was finally passed in April, 1979. There was talk at the time…, I know Chas Freeman was talking about the idea of making a Supreme Court case out of the Taiwan Relations Act, which he felt infringed on the President's constitutional right to conduct foreign policy. It never got to that. President Carter finally felt that wisdom was on the side of negotiating the terms but not fighting the Congress's right to pass such a law. It was passed, and it has served its purpose. The Taiwan Relations Act asserted unilaterally the U.S. concern with a peaceful resolution of the Taiwan issue. Of course, the PRC said we were interfering in their internal affairs, and this was not consistent with normalization. But it's still there, and we still operate by it, and it has not fundamentally disrupted the relationship with the PRC. It has certainly helped in terms of maintaining Taiwan's self confidence and its security.

Q: You're saying one of your primary responsibilities is going to be working with the Chinese embassy. How did you find the Chinese Embassy? They've been there since '72 as an interest section.

JOHNSON: As a Liaison Office, their presence started in '73. They established the Liaison Office in the summer of '73. They began their first UN (United Nations) mission in the fall of '71 when they were voted into the UN. Some of the same people who had been in their first UN mission then came to their Liaison Office in Washington because they were basically America experts. The short answer is that they had very little experience in dealing with international affairs except with their nearest and dearest, the North Koreans perhaps, the Albanians, and a few others. Certainly in Mao's time, China didn't have a foreign policy except one of suspicion and hostility toward most of its neighbors.

Q: And may have not even had a foreign affairs apparatus because the Cultural Revolution shredded...

JOHNSON: That's right. A lot of them were sent out to the countryside.

Q: Here's their major relationship, and you're going over to the embassy to see who's there. How talented are they?

JOHNSON: Not very at that time. Most of them were selected for their language ability. The Chinese in that sense had a program similar to the Russians where they would send people to foreign language training early on, sometimes when they were still college age, and those who were good at language then move into their professional service dealing with, for example, American affairs or Italian affairs, or Latin America or whatever, based in large part on their language skills but not based so much on their diplomatic experience or professional skills otherwise. You had a very mixed bag. You had some who were quite good and not only in language but in other skills, and others who were basically just out of school and had no previous experience, certainly not in the West.

The first Chinese Embassy in Washington was the Windsor Park Hotel which they bought just about that time in early '73, just after they set up their Liaison Office. I think

at the time they thought that this would be a temporary facility. To us it seemed huge right there on Connecticut Avenue. This was a great big building but they outgrew it a few years later and only now are in the process of building a big new building. The reason they wanted a hotel was because then everybody would live in the premises, and they could keep track of them. And they had a large kitchen. They never went out except in two's, at least two's, sometimes more than two's, but never individually. I think there was always a sense that they were in hostile territory or at least unknown and probably unfriendly territory. A lot changed during those years as well.

The nature of the relationship fundamentally changed from the Nixon opening until normalization and then from normalization for the three or four years after that. It was an explosion of academic contacts. I mentioned earlier that I had Conrad Bellamy working for me. His job was to look after academic exchanges. We started with a few dozen exchange students. Within the first six months we had 500. We said, "Five hundred Chinese students in this country? My Heavens! That's an amazing number." Then it became 5,000 within a few years after that, and then 15,000 and so forth. The quantity and the quality of the relationship was dramatically changing.

We also in those early months after normalization negotiated our first trade agreement. We had a *de facto* trade arrangement before that, but not having diplomatic relations meant that that had to change, that the form of it had to change. And it did in '79. Speaking of exchanges, the president's science adviser at that time was a guy named Frank Press who was a very good scientist and a very good bureaucrat, good at making the machinery of government work. He called on Deng in the spring of '79, just shortly after normalization. They were talking about exchanges, and Deng said, "We'd like to send lots of people to the States." One of Press's concerns was what happens if somebody defects? You can't be sure. This had happened before. The Chinese had sent some high school students to England, and one of them defected, and they brought all the rest of them home. This was 30 or so kids. We wanted to be sure that there was some understanding of what would happen if something like this happened. Not that we were going to try to induce defection, but what happens if somebody decides to stay? Deng waved him off and said, "Most of them will come back." That represented such a fundamental change in attitude from just a few years earlier when they were hyper about anybody being exposed to the pernicious Western influences.

Q: Hu Na?...

[crosstalk]

JOHNSON: I was working with Eagleburger at that time when he was Under Secretary for Political Affairs. That was in '82 or '83. By the way, I played tennis with her when I was in Taiwan in '96 0r '97 when I went out with some guys to play tennis. There was this lady who was hitting the ball extremely well, and somebody said, "Would you like to be a partner here in the doubles game with Miss Hu. He didn't have to say who she was; I knew who Miss Hu was at once. She was living in Taiwan comfortably.

Q: There was at that time the start of a lot of interaction with the Chinese. Was Han Xu the ambassador at that time?

JOHNSON: No. He was the DCM (Deputy Chief of Mission). The Ambassador was Chai Zemin who was an old Party guy. He was good. He was fine. Han Xu was very smooth. He later came back as Ambassador. I actually first met Han Xu at the Yugoslav Embassy in 1977. There were receptions there at least once a week. In this particular time there were people from other embassies that were there, and I was introduced to him. It was one of those times when I was completely tongue tied. I couldn't think of anything to say. The reason was that I had been writing reports and little bio sketches about Han Xu for 10 years or so before that, from the time that I was in Hong Kong in the early '70s, because he was first the Foreign Ministry spokesman. He had been involved in all sorts of activities with foreign visitors. He was later a vice minister and had been very active in international affairs. Finally actually meeting this person, I couldn't think of anything to say! He suddenly turned from paper to a real person. I was going to say, "You were assigned to Vietnam in such and such a time, traveled to Moscow in such and such a time, etc."

Q: There were very few English speakers in the embassy.

JOHNSON: It was a big help being able to speak Chinese with them except for Han Xu whose English was pretty good. Most of the others didn't speak good English, so being able to use Chinese with them was a big help.

Q: That cut back on their ability to interact.

JOHNSON: That's right, it was limited. The Chinese at that time -- and to some extent they still have this problem -- assume that the executive branch of the American government is like the executive branch of their government; that is to say that it controls the legislative branch and it controls local politics. Whenever somebody in Congress would introduce a resolution that they didn't like, they would come to us and say, "You must stop this!" We'd say, "Sorry, we can't tell the Congress." "But of course you can. You're the executive branch. The President can tell them."

Q: I was a note taker in one of those meetings one time, and Chas said -- it may have been with Han Xu -- to the embassy interlocutor, "You've got to get more English speaking officers out here, and you have to lobby other organizations. That's how our system works." He kept trying to educate them.

JOHNSON: We all did, and maybe 20 or 30 years later it's had some effect. I think they operate much more comfortably now. There's still an underlying premise that the executive branch has more weight than it really does.

Q: That came crashing down on them in '95 when they thought they had been assured that Taiwan President Lee Teng-hui would not be allowed to come to the States, where

they thought they had been promised by the executive branch, "This is American policy. You can count on it." In fact, it wasn't and they couldn't.

JOHNSON: Yes. It got overturned. But back to 1979-80, there were two very important visits. One was a visit in the summer or fall of '79 by the then acting defense minister Geng Biao who was also one of China's leading diplomats at the time. He was actually not a military man. He had been ambassador to Albania when that was one of the few embassies that they had in the world. He had been prominent in the foreign affairs apparatus and became acting defense minister under Deng in '78 or '79. He came as one of the highest level visitors ever -- it must have been the summer of '80 -- and had a great visit. He had good meetings in Washington at the Pentagon as well as the State Department and the White House.

I was part of the delegation that accompanied him. We went into South Bend, Indiana, to see a tank factory in a place where military vehicles were being produced which the Chinese wanted to buy. We then went to Fort Collins, Colorado, where we saw some foot soldiers do some demonstrations. Then we went to San Diego and on to a naval vessel out in the ocean and flew about 30 or 40 minutes on helicopters and landed on this vessel. It was a very impressive trip, and it certainly did convince the Chinese about American military prowess. That was part of the point, and that served our interests.

JOHNSON: We also had a return visit by the then Secretary of Defense Harold Brown. Brown's trip actually may have come first. His was in January of '80, I think, and Geng Biao may have been in the summer of '80. Brown was the first American SecDef ever to visit a Communist country, I think. I think we hadn't had a SecDef visit to Yugoslavia yet, but we did later. That was in January, and it was bitterly cold in Beijing. They took very good care of us. We didn't get to see much, of course. The Chinese in those days didn't show much of what was going on there in the military. They had a showcase group parade around and take some shots at moving targets. The highlight of the visit was when we went to Shanghai and we had a briefing from the head of the East Sea (East China Sea) Fleet based in Shanghai. This guy was going through his briefing and got to about the third or fourth sentence and said, "We have to be prepared against the imperialist aggressors." About three sentences further on, there was something else about "imperialist aggression." Finally, by the third time he talked about imperialist aggression, the guy with us from the foreign ministry interrupted and said, "Admiral. Admiral, sorry, that's last year's briefing!"

[laughter]

JOHNSON: We got to tour some of their ships and got a fair amount of talking time. That was a good trip.

We also went to Wuhan on that trip. That was the only time I ever got to Wuhan in the industrial heartland. After Shanghai, I think we went to Guangzhou because we didn't fly out of Shanghai.

Q: I think the only American carrier was United. Pan Am got the first routes, and they went into Beijing, then they sold their routes to United.

JOHNSON: We had our own plane. Brown had his own plane.

Q: This was a period where we were really trying to hook organizations up and put some meat on the bones of the various people to people contacts and diplomatic openings. I recall that there was much to do in the hosting and inviting business figuring who was paying for delegations: who paid for what.

JOHNSON: That's right. Actually, we agreed with the way the Chinese set it up which was that they paid for things that they hosted, and we paid for things that we hosted. When they have visitors coming to China, they pay for it. When we have visitors coming here, we should pay for it which, needless to say, was a lot more expensive for us.

Q: We hadn't quite budgeted for it before.

JOHNSON: That's right. We hadn't budgeted for it. It was an occasional problem. State Department representation funds are not noted for being anything but parsimonious. The Pentagon, actually, is pretty good at that. They do have categories of funding for exchanges of various kinds, and they do a good job at hosting. They provided the airplane, for example. We had an Air Force plane when we went to South Bend and then when we went to Colorado and out to San Diego. One of the highlights of that trip was going from Colorado to San Diego. We flew right over the Grand Canyon. We went down and basically flew in the canyon; not quite, but pretty close. It was sensational! It was a beautiful clear, sunny day. Spectacular view.

Q: It must have been awesome. Yesterday we flew over Crater Lake. It was clear.

JOHNSON: I'm trying to think of other things that happened during that two year period with China, but most of it was just more and more of everything: more trade, more exchanges, more high level visitors, lots of interest from the Hill, as you indicated, lots of interest from the American public. It was the second wave of China euphoria with some caveats, some anxiety about Taiwan, about supposedly selling out Taiwan, about going in with eyes closed. Generally speaking, following the big Nixon breakthrough in '71 and '72 this was the second wave of China euphoria.

Q: One of the things that I remember from that time was we had a national presidential election in November of 1980. If I recall, Gerry Ogden had invited a bunch of guys from the Chinese embassy over, and we had this impression that we would be there all night: Illinois comes in and Iowa comes in and whatnot. The Chinese arrived late or something like that, and the election was almost over. Here we...

[crosstalk]

JOHNSON: ...in the East room. So what was going to be a long evening of democracy became a very abbreviated and short evening. Yes, I remember the 1980 election in Washington and then ’84 when I was in Beijing. We had a big event at the Great Wall Hotel, which I discussed elsewhere. We invited lots of people including Huang Hua who was then the foreign minister. He didn’t come but his wife did. It was a great event, the first of its kind. We had a direct feed from Hawaii -- from Hawaii TV (television) -- showing on multiple screens in the ballroom maybe 40 feet long. It was a good show, but it was pretty much over by nine.

Q: One of the primary functions of the desk in Washington was to be attuned to American domestic politics. So here you have a presidential election. That means a transition team comes to the Department, you’re going to have a new assistant secretary, new political minders, if you will. How did you see that unravel?

JOHNSON: One of the things that clearly affected the transition was that candidate Reagan before he became President did focus on China issues and particularly on Taiwan. He had been to Taiwan several times when he was governor of California and also as a private citizen, and he had some real friends there. He talked about the idea of renormalizing relations with Taiwan during the campaign. The PRC went berserk about that, especially as they thought there was a good chance that he would win.

They reacted very negatively and, as a result, Reagan sent his vice presidential candidate, George Bush, to China during the campaign -- I think it was in September of ’80 -- to try to smooth things over and to get back on track. Bush had already served there in the Liaison Office and knew a lot of the key people in high places, so he was well received. He had some difficult conversations, but he also made it clear when he came back that we were not going to
re-normalize relations with Taiwan. The issue sort of went away, but I think Reagan sentimentally still... He didn’t have any particular interest in being nice to the Chinese Communists, but he had a lot of interest in being nice to the free market capitalists in “free China” on Taiwan. That was a difficult issue. The result was that after the transition came, there were people there who were paying attention to the words we used in terms of how we defined our relationship with the PRC.

The new Assistant Secretary was John Holdridge, who had been on the original team that went to establish the Liaison Office in 1973; he had lots of China experience, one of the leading US China experts at the time. But I think the assistant secretaryship was a difficult job for him. Nonetheless, he was in the right place at the right time and managed to keep things on an even keel. The Secretary of State at the time was Alexander Haig, who came in under Reagan. Haig understood very well what was at stake and to some extent oversold the case of China as an adversary of the Soviet Union. Haig’s focus was, “Let’s look at the big picture; the big adversary here was the Soviet Union and the Chinese have this hostile relationship with the USSR; maybe we ought to cultivate our relationship with China on that basis.”

That argument apparently weighed well with Reagan and with others around him; so Haig was able to keep the relationship with the PRC on track even though in my view he oversold this anti-Soviet angle as the justification for it. The Chinese played along and their rhetoric followed those lines anyway at that time. It was before they had any kind of a rapprochement with Moscow.

JOHNSON: The adjustment of the Reagan team included how to manage the inaugural events because they were...

Q: How to treat the Taiwan representatives at the inauguration.

JOHNSON: Yes. I guess it finally got resolved that they were seated among the public in the first row, with the public, not with the diplomats. There were things like that all the time. Remember the issue involving Twin Oaks, what had been the Chinese ambassador's residence of the old regime in Washington, a beautiful, big estate overlooking Rock Creek Park? In the two weeks between Carter's announcement of normalization and the actual effect of normalization, the ROC sold the property. They sold it to a group called Friends of Taiwan which was headed by Senator Barry Goldwater, for one dollar, the point being they were going to keep that property out of the hands of the Red Chinese, which they did for many years, up to this day. One of the conditions that the administration imposed upon this transfer of the property was that it be used only for official purposes. The Taiwan representative in Washington doesn't live at Twin Oaks, has never been able to live in Twin Oaks even though they do use it; they use the outside of it for entertainment occasions. This property *should* belong to the PRC as the government which the U.S. recognizes as the government representing the people of China because, in fact, that is the legally correct position; that if you were the successor government, the properties would just be transferred to you.

Q: That's right. They got around that.

JOHNSON: That's right, and that's one of the big mistakes of making the announcement one day and not having it take effect for two weeks afterwards. It was a direct result of that. The so-called "Friends of Taiwan" could not have bought the property if it had been transferred at the time the President had announced normalization. It would have automatically transferred, in other words.

Q: This is tape 2. When tape 1 ended we were talking about the impact of a new administration coming in on how the desk operates and what your responsibilities are.

JOHNSON: Part of our responsibility was to educate the new players, the key new players, on what was happening in the China relationship. That went pretty well because China is one of those big issues that people do pay attention to from the president on down. We never had difficulty getting people's attention on China issues. The new secretary, Al Haig, had not had a lot of China experience, but he was in the Nixon White House and was familiar with how the China issue played there as well as how the Soviet

issues had played. Others in other places -- John Holdridge had good China experience. We didn't really have difficulty getting people's attention on China relations issues.

I remember we had a series of high level talks led by the Deputy Secretary. We decided to transcribe everything verbatim, so we put a recorder on the table. The Chinese said it was okay with them as long as we gave them a copy. We found that in the first two hours of the conversation in the morning that day that we produced a forty page telegram. It was gibberish! It was just gibberish. It was of no use at all because...

Q: .. too much detail?

JOHNSON: Definitely too much detail. But it was our decision, and the Chinese did not object. This was in the latter days of the Carter administration when Cyrus Vance was Secretary of State, Warren Christopher was Assistant Secretary and Chas was the Country Director. We never did it again. We did it for that one, two-hour session. The only value in that message was the seven page summary, and the rest was just nonsense. It's remarkable how odd a verbatim text sounds when it really is verbatim. Sentences go unfinished, people interrupt, the context gets lost. So we never did that again.

JOHNSON: Now to the new administration, yes, there was a hesitation about getting started with the new administration because one of the issues at the time of normalization, and left unresolved, was the question of arms sales to Taiwan. The Chinese side at the time of normalization had said that this issue must be addressed. We at least tacitly agreed. So Ambassador Woodcock and the administration at the time agreed to move forward with normalization, leaving this one issue unresolved. It is important to make the point, even this long after the fact, that the Chinese never did agree to our "right" to resume arms sales to Taiwan after the mutual defense treaty ceased to have effect twelve months after normalization. In other words, we did not "agree to disagree," we just disagreed!

JOHNSON: In 1981 Ambassador Woodcock was coming back, and Ambassador Arthur Hummel had been nominated to go out to Beijing to become the new ambassador. He had extensive China experience including having been born and raised in China and having been there during World War II, so he was definitely the right person for the job. But he wasn't sure how much tenure he would have. He said when they first went he kept his bags packed because he thought they were going to get kicked our within the first few weeks or months that they were there. He ended up staying there for almost four years. There was a lot of uncertainty about the relationship at that time in the early Reagan administration. But there were visits, meetings back and forth, to try to expand areas of agreement, even as we and they were fully aware of the areas of difference. I recall there was some adjustment getting used to the new team and the new players and going forward with programs that were already in place. We at that point planted the idea of a state visit by President Reagan to the PRC. That didn't actually happen until the spring of '84. He went in March or April of '84 and had a very successful visit. When he came back he had a press conference where he talked about the "so-called Communists" in China. He obviously had been converted by seeing China with "capitalist" characteristics.

Senator Pell's Office

In the summer of '81, I applied for a sort of sabbatical program, the Pearson Fellowship, and was assigned to the office of Senator Claiborne Pell (D-RI). Senator Pell at the time was Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. At some point along the way there the Republicans got the majority, and he then became "the Ranking Member." He was very interested in foreign affairs and his constituents in Rhode Island sent him back with a large majority every time. They didn't think that foreign affairs were peripheral, and they also felt that he did the right thing so far as maintaining Rhode Island's interests in the Senate.

Q: Would you describe the Pearson Fellowship and its origins?

JOHNSON: The Pearson Fellowship was named for a Kansas senator named Pearson some years earlier. The idea was to have Foreign Service officers serve outside of the bureaucracy, outside of the Foreign Service, preferably in state or local government. There were six or eight fellows each year, of which four were set aside for the Hill, for Congress, usually two on the Senate side and two on the House side in any given year. I was selected for one of those that was based in Washington, D.C., on the Hill. Assignments were done without regard to party affiliation. It was just random that I was assigned to Senator Pell's office. There was also an officer that year who was assigned to the office of Senator Gary Hart, who was also a Democrat. On the House side, however, the two fellowships were both with Republican members. Jim Leach was one; I don't remember the other. The main point was to integrate ourselves into the staff to provide useful perspective on international relations issues and to do whatever the staff director wanted us to do. That could be constituent services -- answering the mail -- or it could be taking part in community contact work. For example, I traveled with Senator Pell twice to Rhode Island where he met with constituents and talked about whatever they wanted to talk about. Foreign affairs was a minor part of what Sen. Pell's constituents wanted to talk about. They were far more interested in issues having to do with jobs, with schools, with health care and other things of that kind that are permanent parts of the political spectrum.

Pell was good. He conveyed the impression of being distant and, of course, very aristocratic. He came from big money, and he married into even bigger money and had a beautiful house in Georgetown and was considered a bit aloof. In fact, he related very well to his constituents in Rhode Island. They really felt that he was their guy. Rhode Island by then had become a blue collar state and he wasn't anything like blue collar, but he also wasn't corrupt. He had no obligations to the local party machine, so he was okay. He was a good representative of the people of the State of Rhode Island.

One thing you find out on the Hill quickly is that they take vacations at all the right times. Summertime -- August -- they are always gone; Christmastime they are gone; they have a spring break. My assignment began in the summer of 1981, and I went up there in the second or third week of August, and nobody was home. You could barely even get into

the buildings at that time because there was nobody there except a few staffers and the security people. Once the Congress convened in early September, however, things began to move very rapidly.

I recall that my first trip to Rhode Island was in late September or early October of that year. It happened just the weekend that Anwar Sadat was assassinated in Egypt. One of the first things I did for Pell was to get the most up-to-date information as the story was breaking. As the ranking member on the Committee, he was selected to go with the President to the funeral in Egypt.

It was the same weekend that there was supposed to be a big event up in Rhode Island having to do with the dedication of a new submarine. Nuclear submarines were partly manufactured in Rhode Island, and then the final assembly was done in New London, Connecticut. We had representatives from the staffs of Pell and Senator John Chaffee, and both of the House members also, and people from Connecticut, Senator Dodd and some others from their side. We went up to Rhode Island first for a day and half and then down to Connecticut for a day and a half. That was Rhode Island in the autumn, with their autumn leaves, and it was beautiful. Senator Pell himself was not there on that occasion.

The other time I went to Rhode Island was with him was in January, and it was bitterly cold. It was the same week as -- in fact, it was almost the same day; I think it was the day before -- the airplane crash in Washington, the Florida Air crash. And there also was a crash on the Washington Metro that same day. We were in Rhode Island when all of that happened. I called back and got a read in but it sounded like Washington was practically paralyzed. We were also practically paralyzed in Rhode Island because it was snowing like crazy. The first town hall meeting that we went to was in Bristol or Cranston, and the total number of people in the audience was less than 30. That's okay: the senator was used to it. He could talk to small groups as well as larger groups.

Q: I understand that despite his personal wealth that he was quite frugal, he drove around in very old cars.

JOHNSON: That may be. I don't think I ever saw him drive, but it could well be. In addition to the money he came by through his own family connections, his wife was the heiress of the A&P grocery store fortune, so he not only had money, but he married into even more.

Over Christmas of that year while the Senate was in recess, I went down to the State Department. Lawrence Eagleburger at that time was Assistant Secretary for European Affairs. He had come back from Yugoslavia under Haig in the new Reagan administration as Assistant Secretary. I stopped in to see him, and we chatted for a minute. Then he said, "What are you doing later this year?" I said, "I don't have anything in mind at this point." He said, "I think I'm going to be moving, so if I do, I'd like you to come down and work for me." That was Christmas week. About a month later, the word came out that he was being moved upstairs to be Under Secretary for Political Affairs, the

#3 position in the Department. His staffer then called me and asked if I would be available the first of March of that year. I talked to Senator Pell and he said, "For that, you can certainly go early." So I left early from my Pearson assignment. I was actually only with Pell for a little over six months, maybe eight months.

Q: At that stage in the Congress, how did you think the Congress or the staffers that you worked with looked at the Foreign Service?

JOHNSON: I think they looked at the Foreign Service with a lot of admiration. There were people who had professional experience, for example, the director of Senator Pell's staff, and they knew who to ask for information. By the way, by that time they had already divided into majority and minority staffs, so Pell's staff was on the Democratic side. His chief staff person -- the organizer of the committee staff -- was a man named Jerry Christianson, who was a former Foreign Service Officer. One of the reasons that he went to work on the Hill was because he didn't want to go abroad again. His family was young and his wife had a job, and so they wanted to stay in Washington. He went to work for Pell on that basis. There were several others. Carl Ford, for example, who subsequently went on to more famous positions, was the principal staffer for Senator Glenn at that time. He paid a lot of attention to China and had been very directly involved in helping to write the Taiwan Relations Act in 1979. There was another guy named John Ritch who was an arms control specialist who was attached to Senators Biden and Glenn. There was a woman named Nancy Stetson who started at the same time I did but has stayed on ever since. She was originally attached to Pell but then went to Kerry when he joined the Committee. She was very actively involved in the Kerry presidential campaign in 2004, not only in the foreign affairs stuff.

I sat with Pell's personal staff, not the committee staff, which was my choice, but it was also their choice because I felt that I could get a much better understanding of how the office operated in terms of relations to constituents and relations to other issues rather than being solely on the foreign relations committee staff. There was a guy named Tom Hughes who was Pell's main guy. He was administrative assistant, and he basically ran the office. It was a quite small office.

You read about the explosion in the size of staff offices on the Hill, and it may be true, but we were certainly not overstaffed. We had one guy who was mainly involved in legislative affairs; that is, new legislative affairs. He was a lawyer. We had two whose main business was correspondence with constituents. We had a certain number of canned letters a day which you'd have to respond to, but there were ten or twelve which were substantive, where you had to have somebody draft a message on behalf of the Senator. I looked after the foreign affairs letters, and did liaison with the committee staff. There were a few others, but I think the total staff was maybe eight or so at the time. It was not bloated at all. It was a hard working group.

Q: What did you infer were the attitudes of the staffers about the Foreign Service within the legislative branch here and there? Maybe not in your office, but in other offices?

JOHNSON: I thought there was a lot of respect for the Foreign Service as an institution, maybe even more than we thought we deserved. There's always a tendency to think the grass is always greener somewhere else. When we look at the Hill, Foreign Service people tend to think the Hill people have so much initiative and the power of the purse, and they tend sometimes to not be polite in the way they ask questions. When you're on the Hill and you're looking at the institutions of government, they are the source of information; for example, in the Sadat case. But there were other cases. There was a particular issue that would come up, and my job was to find out what was going on, and I did so by calling the desk officers or by calling people in other agencies. It could be State, it could be somebody in Treasury or some other agency.

The Hill didn't have a lot of ways of finding things out except by going to the executive branch. It was an interesting insight from that standpoint. Many of them were envious of those who were in the administration. They would rather have been in the administration. Some like Carl Ford did from time to time go into the administration. My sense was that it was a relatively positive point of view, certainly among the people that I talked with.

Q: Except for Sadat's assassination and funeral, were there other foreign affairs issues that...

JOHNSON: There weren't very many foreign affairs issues during that time, but there were big defense issues. This was in the first year of the Reagan administration or the beginning of the second year by then. There were lots of issues about the defense budget. Secretary Weinberger came up to testify, and the then-chairman of the joint chiefs was up testifying. We primed Pell with a lot of questions about what were the big increases for. The usual answer from Weinberger and others was, "The Soviets are increasing their defense budget at a faster rate." Yes, they were, but from a different base. Fifty percent of two is a lot less than fifty percent of fifty. It was a nonsense kind of debate. Pell carried on the good fight. In fact, he ended up voting against the defense budget that year: one of five senators to do so, which took some courage because he had defense businesses in Rhode Island, as well.

Q: Percolating along at that time was the administration's desire to sell arms to Taiwan.

JOHNSON: Yes.

Q: If I recall, we at the State Department had set up an operation where we were selling arms to Taiwan but we chopped these arms into forty-nine million dollar boxes; therefore, didn't have to notify congress and, therefore, it didn't become public. When the Reagan administration came on, they pulled all these boxes together and notified Congress of $270 million worth of arms sales.

JOHNSON: It may be. I don't remember the first part of that. I think we must have done that in the latter days of the previous administration. I wasn't actually a part of that; at least I don't remember it. The big issue was that we were selling arms to Taiwan and we had continued to do so, and we intended to continue to do so. Later, in my next job, when

I went to work for Mr. Eagleburger when he was Under Secretary for Political Affairs, that subject was front and center on my plate for most of the time that I was there, certainly for the first year and a half until we got the August 1983 communiqué done.

The talks with the PRC had already begun before then, before March of '82, but they were exceedingly difficult. Part of the problem was because of the efforts to camouflage the numbers. In fact, what we ended up with in this communiqué, and in the history of these negotiations, was an understanding that we would not exceed in quality or quantity the weaponry we had provided to Taiwan before the normalization of relations with Beijing. And we did, indeed, go through an almost silly little game of saying, "Okay, the highest number in any given year before that was $600 million." Therefore, we were going to cut it by five million one year and maybe four and a half the next year, three and a half the next year. Basically, these sales would go on indefinitely. The arms sales would go on forever and never exceed that six hundred million dollar ceiling. Of course, that all came to naught later on with the decision to sell Taiwan 150 F-16s in 1992. This decision had nothing directly to do with China policy, but rather to do with Vice President Bush's presidential campaign and the votes of the airplane builders in Texas. Those planes were being delivered when I was in Taiwan, and by then they had little effect on the cross-Strait military balance.

JOHNSON: The Taiwan issue on the Hill was very much alive during the time that I was there, and there was still a lot of pulling and hauling about how to best manage the relationship with the PRC. I think at that time, apart from the strategic issue of a common adversary with the Soviets, we didn't really have an affirmative vision or affirmative statement of policy of what we wanted to do with the PRC. It was much more what we were *not* going to do with the Soviets and their allies, and how China could be a partner with us. We backed into where we wanted to go at the time rather than looking at it straight ahead.

Q: That's an interesting observation into how well imbedded in the domestic politics that issue may have been. It wasn't….

JOHNSON: That's right. It wasn't in the sense that there was a strong, affirmative commitment, public understanding, public support for the policy with China. It's also true that public opinion in the United States fluctuates, it tends to go through ebbs and flows. As I mentioned earlier, normalization was a positive move, but it wasn't easy. And it didn't last. China policy is one of those few issues that has the capacity to strike a chord in the body politic in this country -- usually negatively -- like "who lost China," that we talked about earlier. Certainly the whole Cultural Revolution -- Red Guards thing, to the extent people paid attention to it, was a pure negative. Nixon's opening was a pure positive, an equal and opposite positive burst. And normalization in 1979 had that effect, too. But once we got into the business of actually managing an ongoing relationship, most people didn't pay much attention and didn't much care. If they cared, it tended to be more on the negative side.

Eagleburger's Office

Q: Up to this point you've have some pretty fascinating experiences. You've been overseas, in missions looking at other societies, handling the embassies' positions. Now you come back to Washington for two desk jobs. You were then exposed to the rest of the United States' Government in the form of the Congress, and now you're about to become the staff assistant for the Under Secretary for Political Affairs, who is the third ranking officer. You are on the coveted seventh floor.

JOHNSON: That's right. I got there on the first of March 1982. Eagleburger had arrived a week or two earlier than that, and I came on as his special assistant for Eastern Europe, Soviet Union, East Asia, and the Pacific. I used to say that my empire ran from the Berlin Wall to New Zealand and everything in between.

The others who had similar jobs with Eagleburger at the time were Bill Montgomery, who had worked with him in Yugoslavia. Bill was the person who sat in the number one office outside of his office, but he was actually the junior-most among the four of us. I think not only did that suggest the respect that Eagleburger had for Bill but also suggested that the rest of us had equal access to him. We didn't have to go through Bill in order to get in to the front office to see the boss. It worked very well because everyone worked harmoniously. Bill was the guy who primarily was responsible for the paper flow and also dealt with West European issues.

I was in the second office, and next to me was Robin Raphel, who did Africa and the Middle East, and hers by far was the busiest portfolio, as it always is, I think, in Washington. The Middle East is always the busiest and most demanding. I think that Eagleburger in the time that I was there probably spent at least 70% of this time on the Middle East and the other 30% on everything else combined.

The fourth person on our staff was Bob Perry, and he dealt with international organization affairs and Latin America. And, in fact, we all have become ambassadors. Bill Montgomery was Ambassador to Bulgaria and to Serbia, I think, or Yugoslavia. Robin Raphel was Ambassador to Tunisia and also has the title of ambassador for her work on Iraq and Afghanistan. Bob Perry has been ambassador to at least two African countries, Botswana and another... And I got Lithuania and Thailand, plus the "unofficial" post in Taiwan.

Q: The point being in the lore of the Foreign Service being a seventh floor staffer is pinnacle enough. You are really in the internal engine of the Department's decision making process.

JOHNSON: That was certainly true with Eagleburger. Eagleburger was a very strong under secretary. He knew his way around Washington. He made his way in terms of the structure -- how the building operates -- and he was great at making decisions. I remember one time I was in the hallway, and he was just coming back from a meeting in the Deputy Secretary's office. Secretary Haig wasn't there. They had been meeting at the deputy's office. Eagleburger came back stomping down the hall and said, "Goddammit, I

may not make the right decision, but I'll make a decision. And the decision will not be to have another meeting!" [laughter] He was very good at that. We only had two staff meetings in the two years that I was there -- in the two years that he was there, too. In the first one, he said our job in this office should be to decide everything that doesn't have to have the Secretary's signature. The Secretary has to be involved in things that have a domestic political component in which there is a larger set of issues. Everything else -- everything that had to do with managing the relationships with other countries -- should be decided here at this level. And we did to the extent that we could do so.

Q: To make that happen, the regional and functional assistant secretaries try to get access to Eagleburger, to the Under Secretary. Are they going through you?

JOHNSON: Some, yes.

Q: How do you feed your principal...

JOHNSON: The Assistant Secretary for European Affairs (EUR) who replaced Eagleburger was Rick Burt, who had been the Assistant Secretary for Political-Military Affairs. Actually, Eagleburger wanted his successor to be Roz Ridgway whom he had known for a long time and had great respect for. She had been Ambassador to East Germany and had come back without a position. He wanted her to take over the European Bureau. But the word came from the White House that they weren't going to try to confirm anybody new. They were not going to approve anybody who wasn't already on board, who wasn't already there. That was the reason that they moved Rick Burt over from being Political-Military Affairs to take over European Affairs. In fact, Eagleburger continued to ride herd on the European Bureau, Eastern Europe in particular, and Soviet affairs.

One time he had sent back the third or fourth memo in a row from EUR that had come up for some kind of action. He sent it back again without action and asked for some other information, and he didn't like the recommendation and overturned the recommendation. As he gave me the paper to send back downstairs he said, "If I were sitting where Rick Burt is, I wouldn't stand for this."

He had a very wry sense of humor. When we'd send him memos, he had a great capacity to absorb information and remember. He knew what he was doing even if it wasn't an area that he was familiar with, like East Asia. We would send things in, and he would send them back with a note that said, "Let's talk," or "Let's discuss." You'd get three or four of those, and you'd find time to go in and talk about it with him. That would work out well.

He told the story about the guy who had -- not while I was there -- somebody who had been sent to work for him while he was Under Secretary for Management who was a psychoanalyst, somebody who was looking at the psychology of the Foreign Service and how we did things, why we did things the way we did. This guy used to send him memos, and Eagleburger would write back, "Let's discuss," or "See me." Finally this guy had

accumulated like 15 or so of these memos, and he wrote another saying, "Mr. Eagleburger, I have written these memos to you. You said, 'Let's discuss," but we never seem to be able to find time." Eagleburger wrote back "See me or, failing that, let's discuss." [laughter]

Q: You would get memos from the regional bureaus. Here's our choices: a, b. Would the staff at your level put another memo on top of that, "Here's a few other things to keep in mind"?

JOHNSON: Often I would do that, especially on Asia things. On Eastern Europe, he knew his way around there, and he didn't need much more except to make sure that the paper flowed...

Q: So you were as much a resource person as well as keeping the paper moving.

JOHNSON: Yes. And I made a point of attending the staff meetings for the East Asia bureau and the European bureau, especially the Eastern European side of the house to keep up on what they were doing at that level and usually to keep up at the Deputy Assistant Secretary level. People would either come to see me, or I would go and see them.

The Assistant Secretary for Asian Affairs when I got there was John Holdridge as we mentioned earlier. By the end of the first year there -- the end of '82 or so -- he was assigned to go to Jakarta as ambassador. Replacing him at that time was Paul Wolfowitz. Wolfowitz had been up to that point the head of Policy Planning and didn't actually play a large role in the East Asia side of the house up to that point. He had done much more Middle East stuff and some European stuff and some sort of big think east-west relations things, but not a lot on the East Asia side of the house. He had a special interest in East Asia, however, because his wife had a PhD in Indonesian affairs. So he was quite happy to get the job. I worked with him quite a lot in that role. The senior Deputy Assistant at that time was John Monjo who had just come from being Chargé/DCM in Jakarta and later went to Pakistan as Ambassador. I used to see John Monjo quite a lot. Bill Brown was the Deputy Assistant Secretary for China related things: China, Mongolia. Bill was also the senior one, so when Wolfowitz wasn't there, Bill Brown would be "acting." Bill had been my boss in Moscow, so that was a good connection. Bill was a terrific guy, later Ambassador to Thailand.

Q: Who else was there? Was Ed Peck?

JOHNSON: Not in EAP (Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs). He may have been...

Q: He was up on the seventh floor. He's from the NEA side.

JOHNSON: Not when I was there. The four people that I mentioned who were the principal staffers were there as a group the whole two years that Eagleburger was in that position. Eagleburger left in the summer of '84, and we all left in the summer of '84.

Q: At that level there's "P," the Undersecretary for Political Affairs, but there was also an "E", the Under Secretary for Economic Affairs.

JOHNSON: I think that position had been created by then although he dealt mostly with EB (Bureau of Economic & Business Affairs) people. Eleanor Constable was the Assistant Secretary for EB at that time, and Bob Hormats, whom we see on TV all the time, was head of one of the other economic bureaus. He used to spend a lot of time up there with Eagleburger, too, and we talked a lot.

Q: I presume a lot of economic things had political components.

JOHNSON: I know one of the...maybe one of *the* biggest issues that occurred during my time there on which there was a tremendous difference of opinion was the pipeline sanctions issue. This had to do with Poland. The reason I was involved was because it had to do with our response to Jaruzelski's crackdown in Poland in '81: "Let Poles be Poles," and that sort of thing. We imposed sanctions on companies that were providing equipment to build or expand the Soviet gas pipeline. It turned out most of them were not U.S. companies. They were mostly French companies or British or Dutch or others, but they almost all had some kind of a relationship with a U.S. supplier or with a U.S. partner or investor. We were basically trying to apply our policy on an extraterritorial basis by saying that a particular French company was not going to be allowed to remain a partner with General Electric or whoever the U.S. partner was, if they went ahead with these pipeline supplies to the Soviet gas pipeline.

It was a huge mess as far as the Europeans were concerned. Eagleburger hated it. He was absolutely against this kind of... He said any policy that makes your adversaries happy and your friends angry is wrong. There's something wrong with that kind of policy.

One of the people who was very helpful in terms of getting information to us and good option papers was Richard Boucher, who was then a mid-level officer in the economic bureau. He's an econ officer by background as well as a China person. He went to Shanghai the same time I went to Beijing in '84, and he was later the Department Spokesman. Richard was one of the three people that I suggested as my successor: Will Itoh was one of the three, and he did become my successor in that job. And Larry Napper was the other. Larry was a Soviet hand who's gone on to even grander things since then.

Q: A man sitting in the position of Under Secretary for Political Affairs is not going to stay in Washington the entire time. When Eagleburger travels, how is it like for you guys?

JOHNSON: If he were going out to give a speech someplace, for example, and it was to a local chamber of commerce in Louisville or something like that, if he was going to talk about Asian security issues or relations with Japan or China or something like that then yes, I would work on melding a paper, a speech for him, usually with policy planning and with the regional bureaus, usually with others. Often I would travel with him in those

cases. More often, if he traveled abroad, he would take with him the special assistant who was responsible for that area. He only did that one trip to East Asia while I was working with him for that two-year period. We went to Korea, Japan, and Hong Kong. I was actually with him as far as Bangkok on that trip. Then he continued on to India and Pakistan, and Robin Raphel came the other way and met him in Delhi and then was with him in India and Pakistan. He made one other stop after that, somewhere in the Middle East.

He didn't like to travel, though, because he had a bad leg. This was actually even before he injured it during the first Gulf War, but he was way overweight, and he used to smoke all the time. He had this breathalyzer thing, this thing that dilates, so he'd take a puff of his cigarette and then he'd spray this to keep it from getting clogged up or something. He didn't take care of himself. He put mountains of salt on everything, looking for health problems, I guess.

It was a very interesting trip. We went first to Seoul. I went a couple of days ahead of time to make sure everything was in place. We stayed at the ambassador's residence which was a fabulous house there. "Dixie" Walker was the ambassador at the time, a long-time Asia hand and academic from South Carolina. We had some very useful meetings with the Korean leadership, about half of whom were killed in the North Korean bomb in a temple in Rangoon about four months later, including the foreign minister. Very strange operation by the North Koreans. But we had good meetings in Seoul.

We went on to Tokyo. Mike Mansfield was the Ambassador at the time. We had meetings with Japanese counterparts including Miyazawa, a political heavyweight who served as PM before and after that; again, very useful meetings. Miyazawa was the father-in-law of Chris LaFleur, an FSO who was my deputy during my first year in Taipei. Then he went to Tokyo to be DCM for Ambassador Foley, and later was Ambassador to Malaysia.

After our stop in Japan, we went to Hong Kong. We got to Hong Kong on the 11th of November. The Consulate-General was closed for Veterans Day, but we met with Burt Levin, the Consul General, in his office. And in the course of the briefing -- it was about noon or so that day, maybe early in the afternoon -- the duty officer came in and said, "There's a report that Brezhnev died." Eagleburger called back to Washington; the Department said it hadn't been confirmed at that point. It later was confirmed. Eagleburger was then on the phone to ask whether he should join the funeral delegation. The Vice President was going to go to be the head of the delegation, Vice President Bush. They decided not to send Eagleburger, so he could continue on with his trip.

We had dinner that night at the Consul General's Residence up on the hill in the beautiful old house. One of the people at the dinner was Wang An who was the head guy at Wang Computers, Mr. Wang of Wang computers. At that time the Department had gone to practically all Wang computers. Dick Williams and his wife were there. He was the Deputy Principal Officer at the time, and a long-time friend. Mort Abramowitz and his

wife were there. They had been traveling in the Philippines and just happened to be in Hong Kong on that day. It was quite a marvelous gathering of folks around the table: Asian specialists. Great conversation.

The next day we went on to Bangkok; I got off the plane in Bangkok and stayed an extra day to see friends to mark the 20th anniversary of the beginning of my group's Peace Corps training to come to Thailand. I returned to DC via Tokyo two days later.

We were met at the Bangkok airport by the then-ambassador John Gunther Dean and had the strangest conversation that I've ever been a part of. Dean was there, Eagleburger, Bill Montgomery, and me. Just the four of us. The Embassy had arranged for Thai Airways to let us use a private room -- a separate room -- there at the airport.

Q: He wasn't really going to stop off there.

JOHNSON: No. Just transiting. Getting off one plane, transiting, and then going on to Delhi the same day, a couple of hours later. Ambassador Dean was there to greet us, and we got settled and we each had our bottle of water. He then began to say his little spiel. He said, "We've got a good thing going here. The relationship with Thailand is strong, perhaps the best in Southeast Asia, and they like us, and we're doing all these good things." Then a pause. Eagleburger said something. Then Dean raised the excellent work of his DCM. He said, "Stape Roy is a wonderful DCM. He does a great job, and he's looking for something bigger and better. He deserves it." Then the third thing was about cooperation in law enforcement or some other area. Then there was something about getting a new building because the building at that time was old, overgrown, sinking. This conversation, the whole thing, takes maybe 10 minutes, then there's a pause. Then Dean says, "You know, we've really got a good thing going here. We've had an alliance for such a long time, and they really like us." Then a pause. "Stape Roy is a terrific DCM, and he's looking for something bigger and better, and I really look for your help in that." Pause. Eagleburger says something noncommittal. The second time he goes through it, it's a little less than 10 minutes at that point. Pause. Pause. "We've got a good thing going here." By the third time, Eagleburger sort of, "Hmmm....." He's not dumb. He doesn't need to be told three times. I was doing all I could do to keep from choking, and finally excused myself. I was just about to break out in uncontrolled laughter at that point; it was really something.

[Transcription note: Start Tape 2, Side 2]

JOHNSON: After Wolfowitz took over as Assistant Secretary for Asian and Pacific Affairs, the Australian elections took place in early '83, which resulted in a change in government from the Conservative government that we had worked with for a number of years under Goff Whitlam to a Labour Party government led by Bob Hawke. Since we'd had no significant contact with Hawke and since the U.S. position was considered sort of lukewarm about him, it was thought important to establish contact with him to try and keep the relationship on an even keel.

Originally Eagleburger was going to go, but he wasn't able to. So he delegated Wolfowitz to go in his stead, and I went with Wolfowitz, as did his special assistant Dave Brown. There were three of us who traveled first to New Zealand, where we met with the Labour candidate for prime minister there at the airport in Auckland. He was elected a few months later largely on an anti-nuclear policy. At the time he told us that, "Oh, don't worry about it. This is just electioneering. We're going to go ahead with the same alliance relationship that we've always had." Of course, we were prepared to believe that but, in fact, once he got into office, his campaign rhetoric came back to haunt him. David Lange was his name. From then on the defense relationship really fell apart, all over the issue of the policy on nuclear weapons aboard naval vessels which we were never prepared to confirm nor deny as a matter of policy. David Lange and his government said in that case they didn't want any ship visits. That then led to scaling back the defense relationship with New Zealand.

There was a China angle to this issue as well, because the then-Party chief, Hu Yaobang, also did not understand our policy. He was about to go on a trip to Australia and New Zealand and was asked by a reporter how China had managed this issue when New Zealand could not. Hu replied that China had received assurances that there would be no nuclear weapons aboard any US vessel that called in China. Well, Washington went up in smoke about that, and it took about another year before we had our first ship visit to the PRC, to Qingdao. We got there by using a variation of our public position with Japan; each side stated its position, but neither commented on the position of the other party.

Back to our trip, in Australia, the meetings with the new Prime Minister-designate went very well. It also happened that we were there for the anniversary of the Battle of the Coral Sea, which is a big deal every year in Australia showcasing the U.S./Australia alliance and, of course, the British as well. We also had a visit at that time by two astronauts, including the first woman astronaut. There was a lot going on as far as the U.S./Australia relationship. It's the only time I've been to Australia. We transited Sydney, so we really didn't get a chance to see Sydney. We then went to Canberra for a day and a half and then came down to Melbourne for about a day and a half.

One of the highlights in Melbourne was a Sunday morning brunch that was arranged by the then-consul general bringing together some Australian journalists, one of whom was named Denis Warner. Denis Warner had written for several American publications, but the one I remembered most was The Reporter magazine which began back in the '50s, and certainly was prominent in the '60s. He wrote regularly about Southeast Asia. I remember an article by him called "Aggression by Seepage," which was about the supposed Communist infiltration in northeastern Thailand back in the early '60s. He later wrote a lot about Vietnam, and he wrote a definitive series of reports about the fall of Sukarno and the coup that occurred on the night of September 29-30, 1965, in Indonesia. He especially focused on the then military chief named Nasution and his role in that as well as the role of General Suharto who later became the head of Indonesia for 30 something years after that.

Denis Warner was a person whose name I knew extremely well but had never met. The same with Wolfowitz. Wolfowitz had read his works also, at least as long as I had. It was really quite an amazing little séance that morning. Here there were a dozen or so people in the room, but we, at least, were all paying attention to Denis Warner and trying to get his autograph like a sports star! Impressive. Denis Warner's daughter was an Aussie foreign service officer who had started in Hong Kong -- I met her while I was there -- and later was my counterpart in Beijing. She was the Australian political counselor when I was the U.S. political counselor in Beijing. Wheels within wheels.

The trip to Australia/New Zealand was extremely interesting and informative. It was good to spend time with Wolfowitz and to spend time with our counterparts in both places.

The next year before leaving the Under Secretary's office, I traveled on my own to Taiwan and the PRC. At that point I'd been assigned to Beijing as Political Counselor beginning in the summer of 1984, and I thought this would be a good chance to go to Taiwan since I wouldn't be able to go once I got to Beijing. I wanted to see what Taiwan was like since the time I had last been there more than 10 years earlier. That was a very worthwhile trip and among the people that I met there was Chang Hsiao-yen, who was then the director of American affairs in the Taiwan foreign ministry. Later when I arrived as head of the AIT (American Institute in Taiwan) in '96, he had just become the Foreign Minister. It was nice to have had that bit of contact 12 years earlier in a different context.

My trip to the PRC in 1984 was interesting partly because everyone was getting ready for President Reagan's visit that occurred about a month later. Dick Hart was the Political Counselor -- the job I would be coming into -- and he looked after me during those three days. It was quite interesting that by then not only were Reagan and his team ready to deal with the PRC on an equitable basis but the same was true in reverse. The PRC had gotten over their anxiety about Reagan. We had already signed the Taiwan arms sales agreement. So I left the Under Secretary's office in May of 1994 to take a few weeks of Chinese refresher training before heading off to Beijing. But I ended up in the hospital in June for an operation to remove gallstones. I was on my way out to dinner on a Saturday evening when I had this sharp pain in my chest. I thought it was probably a heart attack at first, but it wasn't, fortunately.

Q: Too many diplomatic dinners?

Beijing

JOHNSON: I guess; too many diplomatic dinners. That knocked me down for about a month or so, and I ended up getting to Beijing in August rather than in June of 1984. In Beijing at that time, the Ambassador was Arthur Hummel whom I mentioned earlier. His deputy was Chas Freeman; the Economic Counselor was Art Kobler; the head of the USIS (United States Information Service) office was Lynn Noah; Consular Affairs was Gene Marshall; Admin was Bob Deason. In the course of my three years in Beijing, Ambassador Hummel was replaced by Ambassador Winston Lord at the end of '85. The

DCM after Chas was Herb Horowitz, who in turn was replaced by Peter Tomsen; Econ was Kent Wiedemann; Consular was Elizabeth Raspolic; Admin was Parks Olmon.

In November of '84 President Reagan was re-elected, and we had this grand event in the ballroom of the Great Wall Hotel to invite Chinese guests to watch the election returns come in even though it wasn't very dramatic. The election itself wasn't very dramatic. This event was a grand gathering of about 600 people. It was really great.

Q: Who was in charge of the guest list?

JOHNSON: We all put in names, and the front office ultimately decided. As I recall, the political section and the econ section, probably public diplomacy, too, had a shot at making sure that our primary contacts were included. The amazing thing was a lot of them came. It wasn't just a matter if inviting people. We invited people to all kinds of things, but they would decide who came. In this case they came at high, middle, and low levels including foreign ministry people, academic people, think tank people, local government people, and artists and others that we knew. It was an impressive turnout.

Q: That signaled it alone.

JOHNSON: Exactly that. It was okay to be there, okay to be seen to be there, okay to be observing an American election even if they didn't have elections in China. It was a great opportunity.

One of the things that happened at that event had to do with Peace Corps. The U.S. had for a number of years wanted to send Peace Corps Volunteers to China, and the Chinese either didn't answer at all or answered negatively, saying that the Peace Corps was a propaganda organ and full of spies. At that election rally, that election return day in November of '84, there was a fellow from the foreign experts bureau who came up to me and said, "I'm authorized to say that the government of the PRC is prepared to talk about the assignment of Peace Corps Volunteers to China." I sent back this message which I know got read at very high levels, including Secretary Shultz and others, and we got instructions back about following up.

To make a long story longer, nothing happened in the remaining two years that I was in China. There was apparently a great difference of opinion between organs within the PRC. On the one hand the Foreign Experts Bureau consistently gave us affirmative responses saying, "Yes, we want to do this. Yes, let's talk about the numbers, talk about the training, talk about the sites, talk about the program, is this going to be an English teaching program?" which is what they wanted. "These are the ways that we can handle it." But whenever we heard indirectly from the Foreign Ministry or from the Party people, it was always, "Oh, no, we can't do this now. We're not ready for this yet. We don't want to move too quickly in this direction."

The result was that in the time I was there, nothing more happened. When I was in Washington before going to Beijing, I had a meeting with the Peace Corps Director when

it was Dick Celeste; that would have been under the Carter administration. We talked about the Peace Corps in China at that time. This was before Celeste went back and became governor of Ohio, but at this time he was an up and coming politico and had been himself a Peace Corps Volunteer someplace -- I've forgotten where, maybe India, Celeste was later Ambassador to India, if I recall correctly. And Dick Holbrooke, then-Assistant Secretary, also had an affiliation with the Peace Corps as Country Director in Morocco or Tunisia in his early years. He went with me to the meeting with Celeste.

Just to conclude this long story, many years later I got an e-mail from Peter Tomsen, who was also a returned Peace Corps Volunteer. He was Win Lord's DCM and later went on to other things in Washington. His email said that China had finally agreed to the Peace Corps program, for 25 volunteers to go only to Sichuan to teach English, and that they were to begin training in the fall of 1988. Well, they did. Then guess what? June 1989, Tiananmen, Peace Corps program cancelled. They were already practically on the plane, on their way to China at that time. We cancelled it. Finally, the first volunteers to China arrived I believe in the summer of 1994. Ten years after this conversation that I had at the election rally in 1984, we finally had the first Peace Corps Volunteers on the ground in Sichuan, and they've been there ever since, in small numbers, doing good things. I think there's now some talk about expanding the program.

Q: That's an interesting illustration of the fact that different Chinese agencies have different viewpoints on the issues and that domestic things on their side and our side impact on it.

JOHNSON: The irony was that there were all kinds of people coming as so-called "foreign experts" to teach in China. Often they were missionary people whose denomination would send them to China. They came basically with no price tag as far as the Chinese were concerned, so that was fine. Only later did the Chinese decide that maybe they didn't want people to come there to proselytize about religion as part of the English language programs. Most of these groups had no internal discipline in the way that the Peace Corps did in terms of the selection process or in terms of making sure that they had professional qualifications. They were quite happy to have something for nothing; or they thought it was something for nothing, but not to have something that had a lasting value that the Peace Corps training would. They got over it, but it took a while.

Q: When you arrived in August of '84, what are some if the big issues that you were looking at? We talked about how the embassy was organized. What did the political section look like? Was it divided internal/external?

JOHNSON: Yes, internal/external. Also, at that point we had also established a political-military sub-office under the Political Counselor. The political external section was headed by Don Johnson who later was ambassador to Mongolia and, I think, later was somewhere in Africa. His deputy was Don Camp who has since done a lot in South Asia and also was Consul General in Chengdu at one point. The other person in the external section was David Summers who has left the Foreign Service but is married to the woman who is now the Consul General in Shanghai, Beatrice Camp, the sister of Don

Camp. She was then a junior officer in the public affairs office in Beijing. So, we had Don Camp and his wife Betsy, plus Beatrice Camp and her husband, David Summers: four members of the same family at the same post at the same time!

The internal section was headed by Joe Moyle, and it included John Norris, Jeff Buczacki who had been at the China desk at some earlier point, and Judith Strotz who, when I was in Bangkok, was the Director for Southeast Asian affairs, the country director in the Department. She is now in the new intelligence and research office working for John Negroponte, in fact, in the new agency. We had a good team in Beijing. The pol/mil (political military) officer, the first one, was Andy Onate who was an academic from Arizona State who basically had been recruited by Chas at one point. That was his first overseas assignment. He knew some Chinese but he hadn't had the full Chinese course. H could read reasonably well, but his spoken Chinese wasn't up to snuff. There was another guy there later. Andy Onate was replaced about a year later by a guy named Michael Cuervorst who had been there in the consular section, who had been deputy -- either second or third in the consular section and then came over to head the pol/mil office. Don Johnson was replaced by Tom Biddick, whom I mentioned earlier had been on the China desk when I was head of the political side of the Desk. There were some other changes, too.

Q: When we talk about internal/external sections, what does that mean they're looking at?

JOHNSON: The internal section was looking at internal politics, and that means the leadership, it means the party apparatus, it means the governing apparatus, it means who is doing what to whom and any kind of changes that are likely to occur in the political structure. They didn't deal with the external relations except as a function of internal. In other words, if there was a change in the foreign ministry or if there was a change in the defense ministry, did it reflect something about external relations? usually not, but sometimes.

In China, because it's such a big country, there's also a certain constant tug of war between the center and the provinces. One big question was who the rising leaders were in the provincial level party organs and the provincial level government and how they related to their own issues at the local level but also how they related to the central administration. Central leadership was also a key factor for the internal section to report on. There's no absence of subject matter on internal politics. There's always some dynamic going on. There's one school of thought that a lot of academics have used to try to analyze internal Chinese politics. They believe that Chinese politics is marked by almost constant conflict, so that if you take a conflict model, you will have a better understanding of Chinese politics than if you take a bureaucratic model or a clique-based model or a reconciliatory model or a political interaction model. I'm not sure such patterns are accurate. The conflict model has generally been true; I think it was true in Mao's time. It probably was true in times before that. But I think as the Chinese system -- as the Chinese Party evolved and as the government evolved -- there's less conflict and more performance-based interaction now than there used to be. The differences in the

post-Mao era seem to me to be marked more by performance skills -- colored, of course, by “guanxi” relationships -- connections of family or region or interpersonal experiences.

The internal section mainly focused on these kinds of issues: Who’s doing what to whom, and why? What does it mean for us at some point? The pol-mil section was primarily focused on the defense establishment but also on the bilateral side because in those days we were doing quite a lot with the Chinese on the bilateral defense side with visitors. I mentioned Harold Brown earlier, but it had become much more common to have the visitors from either Pacific command, for example, or from the Pentagon, and for a Chinese counterpart to be going to the States. That became a big enough job that we had to keep track of it on a regular basis from a policy standpoint. That was what our pol-mil office did. They worked very closely with the defense attaché’s office and others to make sure that what we were reporting to Washington was consistent. It was. We had a good attaché’s office there, too.

I should mention that the Defense Attaché who was there when I got there was Admiral David Ramsey. He was the commander of one of the ships that... I mentioned earlier the visit in 1980 by Geng Biao. Ramsay had been the commander of the ship that we had visited off shore near San Diego. He had been transferred to the attaché corps, which I think was a big come-down being the commander of a major ship that had maybe 4,000 people on it to an office that had five or six was definitely a step in the wrong direction. He had a certain empire complex.

His principal deputy was an Air Force general -- he hadn’t gotten to be a general at that point -- named Jon Reynolds who was a Vietnam POW (Prisoner of War) and had gotten out then had gotten his commission back and moved onward and upward. One of the first things that Jon Reynolds did in Beijing in ’84 -- he got there at the same time I did -- was to fly an F-7 jet. The Chinese let him fly one of their jet airplanes which he did! He went up and drove it around for an hour or so, came back, and landed it. It was a trainer. He had somebody else in the back seat, but still it was quite something. Jon later replaced Admiral Ramsey as the attaché when he got his star -- his first star and became a brigadier general -- and became the U.S. defense attaché. There were others there in the defense establishment that were also very good officers and very much a part of the China academic crowd.

One good junior Army attaché was Karl Eikenberry who’s now a three-star and is now the commander of U.S. forces in Afghanistan. I think he’s still there. He later went back as the senior attaché in Beijing when he got his first star and is really a model of the soldier scholar because he’s kept up his academic interest in China as well as his professional interest in being a good soldier. That was the pol-mil side.

The external side as the name implies was about China’s relations with others, principally including its neighbors but also us. There was a lot going on in those days, too. My deputy Don Johnson had also served in Moscow, so we were very attuned to what was changing in that relationship. By the time he left in 1986, we wrote that the Sino-Soviet relationship was renormalized, that they were no longer guiding their diplomacy or their

actions on the assumption of competition or hostility. There was much more interaction, and in the 20 years since that time, the Soviet Union -- later Russia -- has been China's principal supplier of modern weapons. That change was something we watched closely at that time.

Relations with Japan were up and down. Relations with Southeast Asia including Vietnam were mostly down after the border war between China and Vietnam in the late '70s. It started in the late '70s but the tensions continued later. The Cambodia conflict was still going on at a lower level. Relations with India were uncomfortable. They hadn't been fully normalized yet.

Relations with Korea were an interesting evolution at that time. The Chinese were having informal contacts with the South Koreans at that time, but they hadn't yet normalized diplomatic relations. At the same time, their relations with their North Korean buddies next door were prickly, I think is the right way to put it. They were occasionally good but sometimes not so good. There was a clear effort on the Chinese side to keep it from appearing that they were having problems with their North Korean neighbors. I think it was pretty clear that at a certain point the North Koreans had said that for Beijing to have normal relations with Seoul was either unacceptable or at least would be considered an unfriendly act. The Chinese were very delicate about that. They were trying to allow the contacts to happen from the mainly economic interests. Both South Korea and China had a lot that they wanted to do together. At some point they worked out this arrangement whereby a ship would sail full of coal from a Chinese port and would get halfway to Inchon, for example, which is not very far. Then somehow the papers would change then, and this ship would be shown as having gone to Japan or having gone to someplace else, and then it would find its way to Inchon. This kind of subterfuge went on for a long time, and then they got around to normalizing relations. It was an evolutionary and occasionally difficult process but one that... Of course, we were very interested in it, and we were trying to encourage PRC contacts with South Korea.

Q: This is the start of the economic performance in China. On the internal side were we seeing any provincial elites becoming more important?

JOHNSON: Some. The real change in terms of policy was Deng's speech at what was called the Third Plenum, which was in November of 1978 -- by no coincidence exactly at the same time as the negotiations on normalization with the U.S. was taking place. The opening to the U.S. was one aspect of Deng's policy, and the opening internally -- economic opening in terms of the free market process -- was the second leg of these two. By 1984 when I got there, you could see the early fruits of this policy. There were far more goods available, especially agricultural goods because the farmers were allowed to sell things and keep the proceeds. They were not taxed at 100% of their produce, of their production. That in turn gave them buying power, and buying power in turn stimulated small scale industries and particularly things like TV's and radios and toasters and small home appliances, and eventually cars although that didn't really come until later. The general improvement of the quality of life was something that was very apparent during that three year period that I was there.

The other thing that happened was access to people, the openness, the willingness of people to talk to us greatly improved during that time. I think I was the first American to call at the Communist Party School. In the past we had tried, but we were never admitted; now we were admitted. We actually nominated a couple of the Party School leaders to come to the United States on exchange programs, which they did. The international visitor program (IVP) is a wonderful tool: very low cost, very high impact for key elites in foreign countries to come to the States and spend three weeks or four, including living with American families, seeing different parts of the country. They always come back as converts. They really love it, and they should; it's a great program, and they learn a lot.

The Party School was one example. Some of the provincial level institutions that we had not been able to get into before, we did at that time. By the time I left in the summer of 1987 in my farewell message, I said the only thing that limits our contacts now is our own time and energy, that basically all the doors were open. We could go where we wanted to and talk to whomever we wanted. A vignette: When I was in Moscow I met several times with the #2 person in the Chinese Embassy, Li Fenglin. He later returned to Beijing as head of the Soviet department in the Chinese Foreign Ministry. In that role, we nominated him for one of these IV programs in the States. Well, he loved it. I recall one of his comments after he returned; he said he had worked on Soviet affairs for over 20 years, but had never been chosen for any such program. But now the Americans, with whom he had seldom worked, gave him this valuable gift and valuable insight. And Mr. Li, who was later the Chinese Ambassador to Moscow, was always available when we wanted to see him. We were sending about 100 Chinese on these programs per year, and could have sent several times that number.

In '87, just to bring us up to that point, '87 was just the beginning of the democracy movement. In Christmas of '86, that week, there were student demonstrations in Shanghai, and it got a lot of publicity in other parts of the world because it was a relatively slow news week, and there was not much political news elsewhere.

This was a big story, and it was being fed by a Chinese scientist -- a physicist who was in Anhui Province at that time at the local Academy of Sciences there -- named Fang Lizhi. He had been basically sent down to Anhui to get him out of Beijing, to get him away from other people. They called him China's Sakharov, and I think he really was. He was a man of deep commitment to democratic principles and to the idea of the individual's' right to have a say in how he's ruled. He wrote some wonderfully eloquent articles, most of which were later published in the West, and, of course, he caused apoplexy in the minds of the PRC leadership at the time. They locked him -- or tried to lock him up -- and he ended up at a certain point taking refuge in the American Embassy where he stayed for about eight months. That's a whole other story, but it happened after I was gone.

Q: That's a Tiananmen story.

JOHNSON: That's right, that's a Tiananmen story. The point was that in the Christmas/New Year's week in1986-1987, Fang Lizhi was very vocal, very much a part

of the process of change in China. The democracy movement which he helped to spawn was showing early signs of activity at that point.

The other thing that happened shortly after that was the death of Hu Yaobang. Hu had been the party chief earlier and was considered a liberal. In fact, I saved an article, a speech that he had given in Shandong Province one time where he said, "The purpose of the Communist Party is to make people rich, and if some get rich faster than others, that's okay." Somehow, I don't remember seeing that in Karl Marx or Lenin or others.

Q: Communism with Chinese characteristics.

JOHNSON: That's right: "Socialism with Chinese characteristics." That's what it was called. Deng said, "To get rich is glorious." Deng also had another wonderful phrase. He said, "Socialism does not mean share the poverty." [laughter] This was all a part of his rationale for the new leap -- his "great leap" -- which became Deng's hallmark for change in China which we are still seeing the results of -- truly amazing results!

Q: For the Chinese at that time, it was very much a step-by-step thing. First, they let the farmers make some money, and they found that yes, that did stimulate rural businesses. I remember people at this time talking about the fact that there was actually food available.

JOHNSON: That's right, in the poor parts of the country. When Deng introduced this reform in late 1978, the first places that they tried it were in the poorest parts of the country, in Guizhou, for example, and in other parts of the mountainous southwest areas. It was only like 16% or so of the total land area, and the poorest 16%, the poorest one-sixth of the countryside. The results were so phenomenal in that area that they later expanded the area covered and expanded and expanded. Finally, about the time that I left in '87, they had another big Party meeting. They basically said that now the whole countryside can operate under this principle. It was called the "Peasant Responsibility System," and what it meant was instead of having a fixed percentage of the output which could be as high as 100%, there was a fixed amount of output that was used as a tax. It meant, for example, that if you were growing apples and your tax was two tons or something like that, anything you produced beyond that was yours. You could sell it for whatever you could make. Rather than saying 80% of what you produce has to go to the state, it was a fixed amount. That caused a tremendous stimulation in terms of productivity in the countryside, and that in turn led to the stimulation in other parts of the economy. The irony is now, 20 years later, it's the farmers who are the least well off, and it's the industrial east of China, the area from Tianjin or from Dalian all the way down to Guangzhou and Hainan Island where the prosperity is, and the farmers think they have been disadvantaged by this great boom in the eastern industrial area.

Q: It'll be interesting to see how they adjust to it because what the West took 200 years to do, the Chinese have done to their society in about 20. Surely there are stresses and strains and groans in the social effects coming out of that. If you see the studies of the French revolution, it turns out the French economy -- at least agriculturally -- was

improving, and that improvement gave people the idea that, "Things are getting better. Why do we have to put up with this other stuff?"

JOHNSON: It is one of the ironies that the Chinese system has evolved so rapidly in the almost 30 years since Deng's reforms were initiated n 1978. The disparities have greatly increased. The rich are really rich now, even by international standards. It's a small number, but even a small number in China can have a big impact. The poor, comparatively speaking, are still poor. It's a potentially difficult social issue, and that's one of the reasons that these fantastic growth rates -- nine percent per year, or ten percent per year growth rates for 30 years -- they have to keep it up in order to be able to absorb the new labor that's coming into the cities. If they slow down to five or six percent, as someday they will, it's hard to tell what the social impact would be of that kind of slowdown. It's certain to happen, and it's got to be very worrisome.

Q: Isn't there a chengyu (Chinese saying) about riding the tiger?

JOHNSON: Yes. It's hard to get off.

Q: I think one of the interesting things to note here in this period was the Embassy's greater access. Not that you could knock on the door and the door would open, but I have a suspicion that they were quite willing to say, "Why don't you come over?"

JOHNSON: I didn't often go to people's houses; sometimes, but not very often. China is a poor country, and most of the people even in urban areas and even with government or quasi-government connections didn't particularly have nice housing. They would far more often prefer to meet at lunch or dinner, most often lunch. We used lunches all the time. I must have hosted Chinese to lunch or been hosted by somebody at least three times a week during my time there. I was single at the time, so in that sense it was easy.

Another thing that I started to do that was a lot of fun was to have Sunday brunches to which I would invite, usually four groups: One was Chinese, one was other dips (diplomats), one was other Americans who could be journalists or business people or whomever, and the fourth was embassy people. I might have 20 people for brunch or something like that, and a lot of easy mixing and mingling in that type of a setting even though the housing... In Beijing I lived in the foreigners' compound, so anybody coming in had to show his or her invitation to get in. That could be a hindrance on occasion, but they usually came.

Q: China didn't have a free housing market. They had this leftover idea where they'd build a few apartments and put all the diplomats and...

JOHNSON: The dips and the journalists and others.

Q: ...in these compounds, if you will. I understand that's all quite changed now.

JOHNSON: Yes, and housing is far better now than it was in those days, the quality and the prices.

Q: In stereotype terms, who had a better idea of what was going on in China, the journalists or the Embassy?

Q: We did by far. We were frequently the sources of their things. When you read articles in the New York Times or the Washington Post or AP or UPI, they'd say, "Observers say such and such..." Sometimes they'd say foreign observers. They almost never said American diplomats. That was by our choice, too. We didn't want to be identified in that regard. We were, I would say, two-thirds of the time at least, we were the sources. While access had improved in the three years that I was there, it still was not easy for journalists to get around. First of all, they had to be good in Chinese and some were, but most were not at that point. The other is that they were followed more than we were, so there was a sense that they were more vulnerable. Maybe it was just a comfort factor, too. They figured they could come to us and get a good conversation, get a good briefing about what was going on. If we turned out to be right most of the time, then they'd come back. We were right most of the time.

Q: This was also one of those periods where China was very exciting to everybody back here. Macy's had a China month. The representatives of the political section must have been giving daily briefings to business groups coming through and certainly AmCham was growing.

JOHNSON: Dramatically. We had an outstanding commercial officer, the head of the foreign commercial service named Mel Searls who had been a businessman in East Asia for most of his life and head of the AmCham in Hong Kong at one point. He worked for Esso, I think it was still at the time. It's Exxon-Mobil now, and with various other corporate people. Then when FCS (Foreign Commercial Service) began, he was one of the first to join. It was marvelous to listen to Mel at our weekly staff meetings because he would have met with probably 15 business people the night before or two nights before: Chinese contacts and American contacts. He really was on top of what was happening in the business world. That was increasingly difficult.

When I got there in '84 we had I think something like 20 U.S. companies that were registered in China that were part of the AmCham. By the time I left there were 260, maybe even 300. There may have been some that we didn't know about. In other words, we went essentially from zero to a lot in a short amount of time. The other thing that was characteristic in the business community at the time is that many of the companies that were there in the first wave were basically serving foreigners. It was the airlines, for example, the hotels, the legal offices that were mainly serving companies that came from outside. That changed over time and increasingly not only did the Chinese pick up Western law, international law, for their own purposes, but also Chinese companies began doing more direct business that affected the Chinese market and Chinese exports themselves, not just services for foreigners.

Q: The whole business of working with China since normalization or even since '72 is that you're growing in a very short period of time, a relationship with the embassy as a platform where in Europe this has been going on for a couple of hundred years. Everything is growing fast. The embassy's growing, the Chinese are growing, they're learning new things.

JOHNSON: I had one more point here, because I remember there was an awful lot of unhappiness in the business community in those days about the difficulty of getting things done. Often it was bureaucratic; often it was legal; often it was a question of bringing the counterparts up to a common level of understanding, an idea that somehow they were trying to take advantage of us or maybe the other way around, it probably felt that way. The Chinese probably felt that way, too.

The result was there was a fair amount of grumbling. I remember when Secretary Shultz came to China in '85 or '86 and had a meeting with the American Chamber of Commerce, and they really unloaded on him. They said, "We can't do this, we can't do that, why does the American government not do this or that; why don't you help us more?" Shultz untypically lost his cool and he said, "If you don't want to be here, why don't you go home?" He added, basically, "Why is Uncle Sam responsible for your success? You've got to make a decision whether this is worth your while or not." Most companies -- most American companies at that time -- said of course they had to be there because they saw the future, and if it were difficult today or tomorrow or next week or last week, they still had to be there. Coca Cola didn't have a choice of whether or not to be in China, and Marriott Hotels didn't have a choice, and Northwest Airlines didn't have a choice. Everybody. Boeing certainly didn't have a choice. It was major business for all of these people. You swallow hard, and you try to do what you've got to do to get it done.

Q: Ultimately, though, even the business obstacles, difficult as they were, brought some benefits. I remember talking to people where they would take their Chinese accountant back to the States, show them how they really wanted to do it, and then that guy would quit on them and go to work for a Chinese company, but that Chinese company now had a western trained sophisticated accountant and they could, in fact, interact better with the next company that they came in contact with. There was a lot of education.

JOHNSON: That's right, a lot of education. It's that kind of education -- professional level education -- which has made such an enormous difference in the intervening time. It doesn't mean that doing business is easy. It's not easy. It's much harder in China than a lot of other places even now. But there is business to be done as the trade figures and the investment figures show.

Q: At this time it was all at a very infant stage of development. I remember stories from visitors saying the Chinese were absolutely scrupulous in those early days about keeping up with their contracts even to the extent that when they couldn't deliver, they paid the penalty that the contract called for rather than renegotiating or something like that. They said, "They got over that."

JOHNSON: They got over that. That's right.

Q: It was a learning process all the way around.

JOHNSON: One book that was written at that time that I actually think is a pretty serious distortion of the situation. None the less, it got a lot of readers. It's called Beijing Jeep.

Q: Jim Mann.

JOHNSON: Jim Mann had been The LA Times correspondent based in Beijing. We had a lot of good correspondents in Beijing, and Jim was one of them. Dan Sutherland for the Washington Post I think was the best correspondent in Beijing, but there were a lot of others too. Good ones. Chris Wren from the New York Times and John Burns from the New York Times have gone on to other fame since then. They did a good job, and we used to see them quite a lot because of the fact that we did a lot of close scrutiny of what was going on in the country and they didn't have the means to do that. They'd often talk to us about what we saw going on. Beijing Jeep was going on when I was there, and it was one of these classic fundamental misunderstandings which Jim Mann explains in his first chapter. My view is that this is a book that's basically one chapter expanded ten times too much. It's the same story over and over. The story is that the people who ran to Jeep Corporation in the States wanted to tap into the China market.

Q: This is Tape 3 on October 10. We were talking about Beijing Jeep.

JOHNSON: The Chinese thought that they were getting a partnership with a major U.S. corporation to export vehicles that would be brought up to international standards which were basically Chinese made and it would, therefore, make money for the Chinese partners. There was a fundamental misperception of what the goals were. It led at one point almost to a complete breakdown of the project. Since it was such a high profile project, it was raised at the highest levels Zhao Ziyang was then the prime minister; he approved Beijing Jeep's proposal to bring in kits, to bring in the kits to China and to sell those Jeeps that were manufactured from those kits in China. There were certain institutions, I think the army and some of the civil institutions who were committed to buying some of these vehicles. Meanwhile, the other half of the partnership never did materialize. They never did produce vehicles for export which was China's original intention in this project. Miscommunications. Misunderstandings.

Q: It's interesting that at that time, the Embassy seemed to know what was going on in the changes. The journals were picking it up from there and, of course, they're communicating to the American public. The American public isn't quite up to the level with the Embassy understanding what was going on.

JOHNSON: To go back to an earlier question that you raised about visitors: We had a lot of congressional visitors during this time, and everybody wanted to get their passport stamped. Every congressman wanted to get his or her passport stamped with a PRC visa. It was important. By the way, most of these visits were not boondoggles. Most of the

congressional visitors we had during those years, at least, were there to work because it wasn't a vacation spot, after all, and it wasn't even much of a shopping spot in those days. So when people came to China, they generally came to work. We had a few CODELs that were notoriously awful, but generally speaking they were good and they were serious. We always felt that they went back knowing more than they did when they arrived, which is part of the point.

Q: The internal section of the political section, did guys get a chance to travel around China?

JOHNSON: Yes. In fact, we encouraged that. I was sorry that I didn't get a chance to travel more because my duties in Beijing required me to be there a lot. We always made sure that we had people -- especially in the internal political section -- traveling around to basically all over, out in the far West, in Xinjiang and Gansu and Qinghai and other areas to the south, Hunan, Zhejiang, and so forth. We had consulates in Shanghai and Guangzhou at the time, and Shenyang was about to open. Shenyang did open while I was there, and Chengdu opened while I was there, too. But they were very small operations, so they generally welcomed visitors from Beijing to come and travel with them to meet people and to see places and to report on what was going on in their areas.

Q: What's the relationship between the Embassy and the Consulates in terms of political/economic reporting?

JOHNSON: First of all, every component of the mission operates under the Ambassador's jurisdiction, so the Consuls General, however many there are, report to the front office, usually the DCM and/or directly to the Ambassador. When other people from the embassy traveled, they had to notify and seek approval from the local post. For example, if I was going to Nanjing, I would let the consulate in Shanghai know, and if anybody from the consulate wanted to come with me for meetings or if someone in my section wanted to be there, they could do that. It was up to them. They had local jurisdiction and local authority to say who could come and who couldn't. But they never said no. They often preferred to have more advance communication. Sometimes they weren't able to join because they didn't have time or because people were on leave. There was a pretty harmonious relationship. The Consulate in Shanghai was growing already at that time, and the Consulate in Guangzhou was growing even faster because of the visa load. Later, Guangzhou became the sole place in the country to do immigrant visas and now has certain procedures to handle that very large operation in China, so they need much more staffing for a much larger operation.

Q: In terms of watching the political and economic reform in China, were the various consulates turning in different messages: it's not down here yet, we're ahead of the game, or whatever?

JOHNSON: Reporting from the consulates was generally quite good although it did vary according to the level of interest and the level of competence, if you like, of the people in those posts. Some places they were very actively interested in the business side; for

example, Shanghai and Guangzhou especially. In others there was more interest in what was going on outside their gates in terms of political reform or political change. Both Shenyang and Chengdu were very small posts, however, so they didn't do as much traveling or as much reporting because they didn't have the manpower to do it. They've both grown some in the meantime. Chengdu, after all, covers Tibet, Yunnan, Guizhou, Sichuan and the mega-city of Chongqing. That's the whole southwestern part of China, and it's under the jurisdiction of the Chengdu Consulate. To take Tibet as an example, there was always an appetite in Washington for reporting on Tibet, what was going on in terms of development, what was going on in terms of attitudes towards the Dalai Lama, towards the political leadership. Hu Jintao, the current President, was the party chief in Tibet during this time in the mid-'80s. He was already identified as a rising star at the time, so there was a lot of interest in how that came about and how was it they were able to manage this obviously difficult relationship where there's a lot of cultural and political antipathy in a way that benefited him and maybe even benefited Tibet.

Q: I would suspect that you could say that had the Embassy in Beijing been the only China reporting post, you would not have been watching much of China.

JOHNSON: That's right. It would have been like Hong Kong before we had anyone in the mainland. We wouldn't have been watching much. We would have been watching the newspapers or something. We would have been watching everything like Moscow at its worst when everybody was basically confined to Moscow. Having consulates around the country -- those four, at least -- really helped a lot in terms of our coverage, in terms of our awareness of what was going on at the local level.

Q: For the researcher who may be listening in to this, do you recall any particular really hot reporting things that you did, something that really stood out of the reported stuff that was outstanding or the subject was particularly well covered?

JOHNSON: A lot of what I did was to direct and to edit. I did some reporting myself, and I did certainly a lot of bilateral reporting about the U.S./China relationship in that time. But a lot of what we're talking about now, that is, what's happening on the ground, what's going on in Shandong Province, what's happening in Nanjing -- these were things that were done most of the time by officers in my section or officers in the consulates. My job was to edit and make sure that we were conveying a consistent message or, if it wasn't consistent, why it wasn't consistent. My job was basically direction and editing -- quality control.

We had 15 members of the political section at that time. It was a large section, and we did a lot of reporting as a result, and we did a lot of taking care of visitors, lots of visitors.

Q: Along those lines, I think our notes are saying October of '85 the Vice President came through..

JOHNSON: Right. Vice President Bush came on his third or fourth visit to China at that time. Of course, they love him. The Chinese love Bush. They like not only the fact that

by then he was the vice president, they considered that he was a friend from long before when he had been head of the Liaison Office in the mid '70s, the second head of the liaison office. He was only there for 13 months, but even nowadays people think of former President Bush with his China connection as much as they do his time at the UN or his time at the CIA (Central Intelligence Agency). He came back to Beijing, he met with all the senior leaders; he was in Beijing for three or four days. The timing was a little awkward because we didn't have an Ambassador there at the time. Winston Lord had been held up in his confirmation hearings by Senator Helms on the issue of abortion in China for which Ambassador Lord had no policy role, and it didn't have anything to do with him. It was simply intended to be a punitive act *vis a vis* the PRC. So Lord was held up.

Ambassador Hummel had left in August of '85, thinking that his successor would be there a month or so later, maybe less. In the meantime the DCM, Herb Horowitz, became the Chargé and I was the acting DCM from that point on until the new DCM came a few months later, until Winston Lord came a few months later, and his DCM, Peter Tomsen came soon after that. The result was that we had a visit by the Vice President, the highest level visitor certainly in my time there. And the ranking American official was the Chargé because we didn't have an Ambassador in place at the time. Nonetheless, the visit went off very well, and Horowitz did well. He was a long time China hand, too, who had served in the original Liaison Office, one of the original ten in 1973. He was an econ (economic) officer by background.

Bush had these meetings in Beijing, including a meeting with his former tennis coach and a few other events that were quite homey and pleasant. Then we went off to Xi'an and saw the terracotta army there, the soldiers. This dig had been open for maybe five years or so at that point, so it was still relatively new. It was not open when Bush was serving there in the mid '70s. I think this was the first time he had been to Xi'an. Then we went to Chengdu where Bush cut the ribbon to open the new Consulate there. Bill Thomas was the first CG in Chengdu; I don't recall who all the other members of the ConGen staff were.

From Chengdu we went on to Guilin and saw the beautiful scenery there: the mountains that look like Chinese paintings as we were floating down the Li River. Then we went to Guangzhou where Bush had a meeting with the local AmCham which was quite big and he made a nice speech there. Then the next day we went on to Shenzhen, the special economic zone (SEZ) which was on the border with Hong Kong. I think he was the first high-level visitor, certainly the first high-level American visitor to go to Shenzhen because a lot of Shenzhen at that time was either empty buildings or empty lots where construction gear was in play because it still wasn't a functioning city. It became one within about two years after that, but at the time of our visit it was mostly a construction site.

Then he went to Hong Kong, and I left the delegation, and the responsibility for the VP was turned over to the Consulate General in Hong Kong.

Meanwhile, I went on to Brunei, which I had never been to before, because the government there wanted to learn about China as they were preparing to join the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). Brunei is a very small country with very large oil reserves. This enormous wealth is not very visible, except for the huge mosque that dominates the landscape. Less visible is the free schooling for everyone through university level, the good roads, the virtually free medical care. But the housing is not remarkable -- mostly small houses on stilts above the river that could be in Thailand or Vietnam.

Q: Before we leave the VP, were there any particularly interesting conversations he had?

JOHNSON: I don't recall any particularly interesting or difficult topics that came up during this visit. Opening the consulate in Chengdu represented a step forward, and Bush's emphasis on business and economic ties seemed appropriate for the relationship at that time. There must have been some discussion of Taiwan topics, but I don't remember what they were. His principle foreign policy person at the time was Don Gregg who traveled with him. I had a number of good conversations with him. Jim Lilley was then the Deputy Assistant Secretary of State, I think, for Asia. He was on the trip, too. It was after his White House job, and it was after his Taipei job. This was in 1985, so it must have been when he was back at the State Department. He later went as Ambassador to Beijing -- the only person to serve as Chief of Mission both in Beijing and in Taipei. And he got to Beijing just before Tiananmen.

I remember one comment from Don Gregg when I was trying to get someone in to see Bush -- one of the local Chinese protocol people who was helping out, I think, when we were in Guilin. I said, "This guy would really love to have a picture with the Vice President." Don was reluctant, but said, "Okay, I'll arrange it. Five minutes. Maximum five minutes. But you have to understand there are a lot of people in China, and there are a lot of people in the States who would like nothing better than a picture with the Vice President. You can do them a great favor, and you'll kill your boss in doing it. He can't do everything!" Of course, that's part of the job of the staffer, to make sure you don't overtax the principal, the person whom you are devoted to serving. One more personnel item: the Consul General in Guangzhou at that time was Wever Gim, later replaced by Mark Pratt. That post was very busy because it had a large visa load; most Chinese-Americans come from that part of China.

Q: The Vice President would have done all this traveling in a U.S. aircraft?

JOHNSON: I believe that's right. I believe by then we did have the right to use our own airplanes. In the early days when Nixon visited and even for some years after that, the Chinese wouldn't allow anybody to use their own airplane in China except to arrive and depart. The visitor would come to Beijing, they would get off, and then they would be taken around by Chinese planes, and then they could leave again on their own plane.

I think in the case of Harold Brown in 1980 that we flew around on our own plane, but now that I think about it, I think the Chinese took us to Shanghai and Wuhan. Anyway, in

this case, the Vice President certainly did have Air Force Two there in Beijing, and I think he did for the other stops as well. I know that we had Marines. We had a Marine helicopter that was standing by in Guangzhou and in Guilin for, obviously, for security and safety purposes if the Vice President got sick and had to be lifted out. That was a difficult negotiation: getting the right to get those aircraft to operate in Chinese airspace.

We went by train as I recall from Guangzhou to Shenzhen.

Q: You're saying that Shenzhen was just starting out? Shenzhen was positioned close to Hong Kong.

JOHNSON: Yes, right next to the Hong Kong border.

Q: It would be the Chinese Hong Kong, right?

JOHNSON: Yes.

Q: They were trying to do lessons learned with a hands-on...

JOHNSON: Of course, they were doing it in a typical central planning way. They decided they would build this city with great big buildings, and then, "If you build it, they will come" sort of thing. They didn't have tenants for them, they didn't have any idea what the prices should be, what they were supposed to be, or even who was going to be there. It was just a big central planning design. In the end it worked out okay because the growth of the Chinese economy was such and the location was such that they were able to make use of these big buildings. Shenzhen is now a big city like a lot of other Chinese big cities, but with a special export focus.

In those days getting to Shenzhen, if you came from Hong Kong, you were crossing an international border. This was before Hong Kong reverted back to PRC rule. You were passing an international border. Also, when you went from Shenzhen to Guangzhou, even though it was a part of Guangdong Province, you also had a series of barriers that you had to pass through. Shenzhen was an air pocket, a little air lock, as you go from one side to the other. It was in between.

Q: Weren't the negotiations for the reversion of Hong Kong starting?

JOHNSON: Yes. That happened when I was in Beijing. That was one of the external subjects that we did a lot of reporting on. We were very close to the Brits (British), and the British kept us informed about their view of what was going on. Once in a while people would get persuaded that the British view was the only view. I remember a conversation with Mr. Eagleburger one time before these talks concluded, when he was out of office. He said, "Oh, the Chinese are really giving the British a hard time." I said, "What do you mean giving the British a hard time? What is at stake here? Who has the cards, and what are the issues?" He said, " Oh, you goddamn commie pinkos." (laughter)

Q: I always found it interesting that if you equate Hong Kong with Goa, the Indians took care of their imperial island by force of arms, whereas the Chinese negotiated five years. The Indians get the praise and the Chinese don't get any credit.

JOHNSON: That's right. I guess it's democratic India versus communist China.

Q: See how these patterns filter up? Certainly you must have been going over to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and trying to tease out the Chinese view of their negotiations.

JOHNSON: Yes, but it wasn't that hard to tell. We knew what they were talking about and why and what their position was. And we knew it was going to work. Deng had made it very clear when Margaret Thatcher came to visit China just before Christmas of 1984. She signed the transfer document at that time which had been under discussion for about five years. Her principle negotiator was a man named David Wilson who actually was an excellent China scholar. I had met him on one of his trips to China or Hong Kong in mid 1984. He knew what the lay of the land was and what they had to negotiate about and what they didn't have to negotiate about. He was later governor of Hong Kong, that last one before Chris Patton. We were very much aware of what was going on those talks and we had a pretty good perspective of who was doing what to whom -- or trying to. They succeeded, and Thatcher signed the document in December of '84.

Q: Did you perceive any bureaucratic differences among the Chinese on that issue?

JOHNSON: No. I don't think there were any to speak of. There may well have been a question of how far to go to give Thatcher some face. But Deng had basically authorized Zhou Nan, who was a senior foreign ministry official -- maybe a vice minister -- to handle those negotiations, and Zhou knew what his brief was. People said he was impossible to deal with, but obviously he
got the job done; maybe not all that pleasantly, but he got it done. And everybody's living with the results.

Polish Language, Warsaw

Q: You were in this assignment until '87.

JOHNSON: Yes, the summer of '87.

Q: How did you get your next job?

JOHNSON: By this time we were bidding on different positions. It was an open bid process. My first bid, which I sent in around the end of '86, or maybe early '87, was to become DCM Jakarta. By that time I knew that Wolfowitz was going to Jakarta as ambassador, and I had worked with him in Washington. I put that at the top of my list. I had some other bids, some other possibilities, also.

I wasn't chosen by Wolfowitz. I've actually not had this conversation with him, but I think what happened was there was another candidate, Mike Connors, who had already been a DCM once in Southeast Asia, in Malaysia, spoke Bahasa Indonesian, and had the right rank and the right experience. So he became Wolfowitz's DCM. I think I would have made the same decision, given the choices. Interesting side note: Mike Connors was in the same graduating class from the University of Washington in 1960, although we never knew each other in college.

About that time I heard indirectly from a friend in Washington that, "You're taken." I said, "Oh, I'm taken. What does that mean?" He said, "Warsaw. It's going to be Warsaw," because Tom Simons, who was then Deputy Assistant Secretary for European Affairs, and had earlier been my boss in Moscow, had put in for me to go to Warsaw. He expected to be going as Ambassador the following summer (1988). So I was "off the table" at that point. But that was okay. Warsaw wasn't at the top of my list, but I certainly wasn't against it, and I figured it was time to learn something new at that point. And I knew that Tom Simons would be excellent to work for. What I could not have anticipated was that this assignment in far-off Eastern Europe would turn out to be the most historically significant of my entire career.

The actual assignment came through in April or so of '87. From then on I did some reading about Poland and tried to get back some of my Slavic language ability, read James Michener -- by the way, I think that's a terrible book, Poland. Fortunately, there were a lot of other good books on Poland. That summer of '87, I came back to Washington and started Polish language training in August of '87.

Q: Who was with you?

JOHNSON: The head teacher was a guy named Vitek -- Viktor -- Litwinski, who was the best language teacher I've ever seen. He was so dynamic and so engaging. He was wonderful. His approach was, you know more than you think you do; you cannot learn like a child, but you can bring what you already know to bear. Of the other students, one was Michael Kirby, who's now in Seoul. He served another tour in Warsaw. Elizabeth Corwin was a public affairs officer -- a junior officer -- at the time, now in Delhi, I think. Michael Spilsbury was an econ officer, now in DC, I think. John Boris was a very good language officer who was in the political section in Warsaw. Mark Lijek was the admin officer; his Polish was also very good. He lives up here in Anacortes now.

I was in the class only for about five months, and I had mostly one-on-one, sometimes two people in the class, but mostly one-on-one because I was learning a somewhat different vocabulary. Another thing was because I had Russian, and most of the others didn't, my main problem was that I was Russian-izing my Polish. I would hear Polish words and they would sound like Russian, so I would respond in Russian. The teachers were trying to un-teach me Russian as well as get me up to speed in Polish, but with particular kinds of specialized vocabulary.

I was there until early January of '88, and then my assignment to Warsaw was moved up by about two months because the previous DCM, David Swartz, was leaving to come back to something else. I think he was planning to go to Albania to open that post. In the end, he didn't get that post, but he did get assigned to Washington to set up a new office to manage the "hot line" phone system between Washington and Moscow. He later went to Belarus as Ambassador.

The other reason for this change of schedule was that the Deputy Secretary at the time, John Whitehead, was coming to Poland the end of January of '88, and the Ambassador, John Davis, wanted me in place before that. So I got to Warsaw about the 20th of January which, by the way, in Eastern Europe is not a particularly nice time of year. It's dark and it's cold, cold, cold. I remember walking on ice for months. Warsaw in those days was uniquely dreary. It had to have been the grayest city on earth at that point, partly because the post-War reconstruction was dreary, and also because it was the middle of winter. Gloomy and grey, much more than Moscow even.

Q: The position of DCM in an embassy is a particularly unique one. As head of the political section, you're still a political reporter. You have a very narrow, specific area that you're working on. The DCM on the other hand is the primary administrator of the Embassy. It's a different set of skills.

JOHNSON: Right. The DCM is the CEO (Chief Executive Officer).

Q: At this time, did they have a DCM's course?

JOHNSON: That's right. It was a very good program. It was a two-week training course, and there were less than 20 of us -- maybe 16 -- in this course, the first week of which was off-site up at a retreat in West Virginia, and the second week of which was in Washington at FSI, mostly on nuts and bolts admin/management kinds of things.

The first week was more about "the vision thing," like, what is the role of a DCM, what is the role of a manager, not just in the government but in any organization, how do you bring values issues into it, how you deal with broad personnel issues, how you give and receive negative feedback. That was one of the hardest parts. How do you give somebody bad news or let them know they're not performing up to snuff? That one was really tough. There were a number of those kinds of things in the first week that I thought were really terrific. It was a good bonding experience; it was a very well run program. The person in charge of it was Prudence Bushnell, who later was Ambassador to Kenya at the time of the Embassy bombing there, and has done a number of other things. She ran a great course. It was outstanding.

The second week was more about budget and fiscal matters and admin matters and security and safety matters, and there were some inter-agency briefings during that second week. On balance, you got both. You got both the large picture of what the front office is supposed to do, what any good manager is supposed to do, and the second, you've got a lot of nitty gritty things about what being a super admin officer means

because that's essentially what it is. You are the admin officer who's over the admin officer and have responsibility for all of the management issues as far as the mission is concerned. It also depends a lot on the relationship you have with the Chief of Mission. In some posts, the Chief of Mission wants to be involved in all kinds of little things, and in other places he/she doesn't.

I had a great Chief of Mission in Warsaw, John Davis, whom I'd known in Washington when he was the Director of East European Affairs. This was his second tour in Warsaw. He'd already been there at that point for five years as Charge. He then was elevated to Ambassador in place, a month after I got there. That's very unusual, and it was all because of President Bush because Bush had been there to visit a few months earlier as VP and had been so impressed by John Davis that he agreed to promote him in place and make him ambassador. John and his wife Helen were there that time for eight years consecutively. And they had been there earlier when he was DCM. So they had a lot of years in Poland.

Q: That makes it pretty difficult to take over his job. He knows your job and his job, too. The DCM course itself has been described to me as running you through a scenario of things like how do you come to a post that already has an ambassador? How do you ingratiate yourself and find out what you're supposed to do? Then, of course, you must assume that the ambassador would leave you as chargé on occasion; then you're the top guy, but you're also the new man just coming in, how do you adjust to this role?

JOHNSON: Yes. All of those are tricky, interpersonal and professional issues. It's very difficult to find a set answer because each of these relationships is different. They all depend on the people in these positions. It's also not coincidental when you think of it in those terms that the DCM job is the most fragile of any in our business. There's something like 40% of DCM's who don't finish their tours. It's an astonishing percentage, and that's the reason. It's either because a new incoming ambassador has his own choice of the person that he wants as his number two, or it's because he has a different style of doing things, or they don't get along, the front office isn't the way he wants it, or whatever. The ambassador has the complete authority to do what he wants with the number two position.

Fortunately, I did know John Davis, and he seemed happy for me to be there. I was definitely happy to be there.

Q: You served in Beijing and on a couple of desks. What's the size of the embassy in Warsaw?

JOHNSON: In Warsaw in those days, I think we had about 35 or 40 Americans. It was a medium-small post on a global basis. Beijing was quite small when I was there, too. Beijing was just moving into a dilapidated old building where they still are, waiting for the new long-delayed building and outgrowing everything long before it was ready.

Bangkok is a huge Embassy. Bangkok has around 400 Americans and about 1,000 local employees. Warsaw relatively speaking was on the lower end of that scale, but I'd say 40 or so Americans and about 70 Polish employees.

Q: When you arrive in Warsaw, you've obviously had briefings at the desk. What are some of the issues that you were looking forward to?

JOHNSON: The big issue was domestic change and openness in Poland. We were always testing the limits on that. Solidarity had come into existence some years earlier, but Walesa at that time was sort of a non-person. He wasn't in jail, and he wasn't under house arrest, but he was certainly under surveillance. The question of how we dealt with Walesa, how we dealt with other Solidarity people, was something that was constantly on our agenda. In connection with the visit by John Whitehead, originally we planned for him to go to Gdansk to meet Walesa, who lived there. But the schedule got messed up or it just got too tight, and he wasn't able to do that. And the Polish government made it clear that if we went to see Walesa, we would not get high-level meetings with the government.

So we sent word that we'd like Walesa to come to the Ambassador's Residence and meet Whitehead there. Oh! Walesa was so insulted! He was beside himself with unhappiness about having to come to Warsaw and implicitly kowtow to the authorities. But he did. We didn't know if he was going to show up until he showed up. Then he and Whitehead had a very good conversation. Walesa is truly a charismatic figure, less so now than he was then, but he certainly was dynamic and a real persona, even heroic.

Shortly after that, John Davis came back to Washington for his confirmation hearing, and there was a big event in Gdansk, so he assigned me to go to Gdansk and try to smooth things over there and make Walesa feel that we really did pay attention to him. I had met him at the Residence when he came that time, but the trip to Gdansk about two weeks later was the first time I really had a chance to see him in his place, in his location. I really enjoyed that. One of the junior officers in the political section, Janet Weber, made the arrangements and accompanied me to Gdansk. Solidarity was her beat and she did a fine job. She was later posted as Consul in Poznan and had the painful duty of closing the post -- this was in about 1995, I think. We were a fairly small post with only three or four officers in the political section at that time: Terry Snell, John Boris, two rotating JO's (Junior Officers), Janet Weber and Cameron Munter, and one other person, I think. Dan Fried later came as PolCouns and still later served as Ambassador to Poland, as a senior NSC official under President Bush II, and later as Assistant Secretary for European Affairs at State. Econ was Howard Lange and John Cloud. Howard was replaced by Paul Wackerbarth; John went on to serve at the NSC under Bush II, and later was Ambassador to Lithuania, several years after I was there. Steve Dubrow was the Public Affairs Officer.

Gdansk was a beautiful city, even more beautiful now.

Q: Wasn't it one of the old Baltic Hanseatic League cities?

JOHNSON: Yes. It was a major port. And it was the place where World War II began. The Danzig Corridor. Tragic. So much tragedy in that part of the world, especially in Poland and the rest of Central Europe. But not in 1988/89. By that time things were generally looking up, and it got better -- a lot better in a relatively short amount of time.

JOHNSON: In 1988 when I got there, in addition to the visit by the Deputy Secretary, there was a lot of ferment and increasing openness. Tom Simons, who was then the DAS for EUR in Washington, had T-shirts made for the Whitehead trip, printed up in Polish, which said, "wszystko mozliwie," which means "everything is possible." It was the right kind of slogan because it came right at the time when things were starting to open up. When Whitehead met with Jaruzelski, he asked about such things as participation in elections or other opening up processes, and Jaruzelski said, "No, we're not ready for that yet. We're not ready for it because we're not sure where it will lead. But," he added, "in politics you should never say 'never.'"

A side note about the school. Kathleen Forance was then the art teacher at the American School of Warsaw. We met the first week that I was in Poland, but we didn't start going out until about two and a half years later. But she was there, and now she is Mrs. Me!

Q: Not being disruptive!

JOHNSON: Not being disruptive, no. It's interesting how in those small communities you can have these kinds of events...

Q: The position of DCM in an embassy is a particularly unique one. As head of the political section, you're still a political reporter. You have a very narrow, specific area that you're working on. The DCM on one hand is the primary administrator of the embassy. It's a different set of skills.

JOHNSON: Right. The CEO (Chief Executive Officer).

Of those 40 Americans in the Embassy in Warsaw and the small Consulates in Krakow and Poznan, eight were from Western Washington. Can you believe that? Eight out of 40 were from Western Washington: The DCM -- that was me; the political counselor was Terry Snell from Seattle; the econ counselor was Howard Lange, whose official home is Bainbridge Island; the admin officer was from Aberdeen; the budget and fiscal officer was from Everett; Mark Lijek, whom I mentioned was from Anacortes, and the defense attaché was from Puyallup. He and I probably went to the same football games when we were in high school; we were one year apart in age.

Q: What happened to the old saw about the elite Foreign Service thing?

JOHNSON: The Eastern Elite?

Q: Yes.

JOHNSON: Evidently that included a lot of people from this area.

Q: When you arrive in Warsaw, you've obviously had briefings at the desk. What are some of the issues that you were looking forward to?

JOHNSON: The big issue was change and openness in Poland. We were always testing the limits on that. Solidarity had come into existence some years earlier, but Walesa at that time was sort of a non-person. He wasn't in jail, and he wasn't under house arrest, but he was certainly under surveillance. The question of how we dealt with Walesa, how we dealt with other Solidarity people was something that was constantly on our agenda. One example: we had intended for Deputy Secretary Whitehead to go to Gdansk and meet Walesa there. But the schedule got messed up, probably by our Polish hosts, or the timing just got too tight, and Whitehead wasn't able to do that. So we sent word that we'd like Walesa to come to the ambassador's Residence and meet Whitehead there. Walesa was so insulted! We did not know whether he would come to the Residence until he showed up. Then he calmed down and they had a good conversation. Walesa is a charismatic figure, less so now than he was then, but at that time he certainly was dynamic -- a real persona.

Shortly after that, John Davis came back to Washington for his confirmation hearing, and there was a big event in Gdansk. So he assigned me to go to Gdansk and try to smooth things over with Walesa and make him feel that we really did pay attention to him. I had met him at the Residence when he came to meet Whitehead, but the trip to Gdansk about two weeks later was the first time I really had a chance to see him in his place, in his location. I really enjoyed that. One of the junior officers in the political section. Janet Weber, made the arrangements. Solidarity was her "beat," and she knew all of the key players. The political section was quite small but very effective. It included Terry Snell, John Boris, and two JO's (Junior Officers), Janet Weber and Cameron Munter. Janet was later consul in Poznan, and had the unpleasant duty to close that post. Snell and Boris later won the world-wide reporting award for their coverage of the Polish revolution.

Q: Wasn't Gdansk one of the old Baltic Hanseatic cities?

JOHNSON: Yes. It was called Danzig in German, and was the place where World War II began. The Danzig Corridor. Tragic. So much tragedy in that area for so long. But not in 1988-89. At that time things were generally looking up, and they got better, a lot better in a relatively short amount of time.

Tom Simons was then the Deputy Assistant Secretary responsible for that region. He came with Whitehead. And he had T-shirts printed up in Polish for Whitehead and the members of his delegation which said, "wszystko mozliviy," which means "everything is possible." It was the right kind of slogan because it was right at the time when things were starting to open up. When Whitehead met with Jaruzelski, he asked about such things as participation in elections or other opening up processes, and Jaruzelski said,

"No. We're not ready for that yet. We're not ready for it because we're not sure where it will lead." Then he added, "But in politics you should never say never."

Q: What was the thrust of the Whitehead visit? Was this part of a larger trip?

JOHNSON: Yes. He was going elsewhere in Eastern Europe and probably Western Europe, too, as far as I can recall. The main point was to follow up on Bush's visit when he came as Vice President about four months earlier during which he was given a wonderful reception. He had seen Walesa also. I remember that there was a big incident in Poland around that time where this priest was killed. Father Popieluszko was his name. He was a young and dynamic priest at a church that was in the northern part of Warsaw. One of the things that Bush did was to go to this church and to lay flowers on the tomb of Father Popieluszko. There were thousands of people. The Poles were out there in incredible numbers. The security services couldn't prevent them from coming to the church. In fact, the regime had an odd kind of relationship with the Polish Catholic Church at that time. If something was taking place on church grounds, the authorities wouldn't intervene. As long as it was a church sponsored event, even if it was George Bush, not a Catholic visitor, they nonetheless tolerated it, this kind of outpouring. The result was that we wanted to follow up and see what the opportunities were for gradual political opening. We were about a year early at that point but, of course, the wheels were beginning to turn.

Q: In this kind of environment, what does this opening up mean?

JOHNSON: It means a lot of things. It means opening up in terms of freedom of discussion, in academic circles or the press or unblocking the Voice of America or Radio Free Europe, things of that kind. Basically, it means more political tolerance. At that time they weren't ready for it, but within a year they were, and that lead to one of the great revolutionary changes of our time.

Two points here: the highlight of my tenure as DCM in Warsaw was the State Visit by President George H. W. Bush in the summer of 1989. This visit followed the first free elections in Eastern Europe on June 4 -- the same day as the Tiananmen massacre in Beijing and the death of Ayatollah Khomeini in Iran. The Davises hosted an elegant lunch for the President and his entourage, and comparable guests on the Polish side. When the luncheon was concluding, Ambassador said a few words of welcome to President Bush, President Jaruzelski, Solidarity leader Geremek and others. Then Jaruzelski said a few words, after noting that he did not know that there would be speeches. Still, he spoke briefly and generously, noting that even though his official residence was less than 100 meters from the gate to the American Ambassador's Residence, this was the first time he had ever been in that Residence. Then it was Geremek's turn. He started by thanking the Davises then greeting and President Bush and President Jaruzelski, saying that he was happy to note that this was not the first time he had been in the Ambassador's Residence. Needless to say, there was considerable chuckling at that comment.

Two vignettes, both from the same conversation: Sen. Carl Levin of Michigan came on a one-man CODEL in about mid-1988 when the situation was bubbling. We arranged a meeting for him with Fr. Jerzy Dambrowski, the #3 person in the Catholic Church hierarchy. Dambrowski was especially appropriate because he had lived and preached in Michigan for nine years, and his English was fluent. So Levin started by asking about the role of the Church in Polish life in today's world. Dambrowski paused, then said, "The Polish Catholic Church is the surrogate voice of the Polish people." He went on to compare the Church's role with that of the government and of the ruling Communist Party, neither of which could claim legitimacy. He added that the crowds on special holy days were made up of many non-believers as well as believers; many people go to such events to be seen standing with the "opposition."

Later in the conversation, Sen. Levin said he was asking a series of questions to his interlocutors in order to compare their responses. One of his questions to everyone he met, was about the quality of Poland's military hardware and training. He added that he was not asking for any classified information, and he understood that the priest might not be the best judge of military equipment. But he asked anyway. Dambrowski again paused, then said, "Senator, it's true that I am not an expert on military equipment, but I do listen when our young soldiers comment on such matters. And I can tell you, Senator, that our military equipment is "shit." Well, Senator Levin and I almost fell over, then burst into laughter. Then Fr. Dambrowski seemed all nervous, saying, "Perhaps my English is not good enough; I was trying to give you the flavor of this issue." Sen. Levin replied, "Father, your English is fine and your words were very clear."

Regarding other things that were going on in the Embassy at the time, we were talking about the role of the DCM. One of the unique roles of the DCM in Warsaw was to be chairman of the school board. When I got there the school management was a mess. The principal had been basically fired but was still there. The music teacher had been basically fired but was still there. And there was one very disruptive member of the school board who thought that she was in charge of the school. We were in the process of interviewing candidates to come as the new school principal. We narrowed the list down to the final three, so we had meetings with these three people those first few weeks. I recall that after the last of these sessions... The first six weeks that I was on the job, I think I spent probably four weeks doing school business. I went to the Ambassador at one point because he'd served earlier as DCM there and as chairman of the board, and his wife had been a teacher at the school earlier. I said, "This school stuff is just eating me up. It's going on forever, and it's very bitter with tremendous hostilities." He looked up and took a puff on his pipe and said, "When I was DCM we didn't have such problems." [laughter] Thanks, John! Thanks for your help!

Q: We don't have many opportunities to talk about the schooling structure, can you quickly point out how the State Department is involved in these overseas schools, who can be in the student body and whatnot?

JOHNSON: The answer is different in different places. For example, in Warsaw it was called the American School of Warsaw even though we had about 300 students from 32

nationalities. It was run by a self-governing board. We got a small amount of money from the State Department but not much: only a few thousand dollars a year. Most of the expenses were paid in the form of tuition by the students who attended the school. They could come from not just the U.S. Embassy or the U.S. official community, but also any other diplomatic establishment that was there. There were also some Polish kids who went to the school. If they could pay the freight and if the Polish government allowed them to go, the school was prepared to take them. We didn't have very many -- maybe a dozen, maybe less than a dozen. In Beijing the school was called the Anglo American School, and the chairmanship of the board rotated between the U.S DCM and the British DCM, and the board was elected by other members of the school community. It was a small school, but it had grown rapidly during the time that I was there. In Moscow where my kids went, it was also called the Anglo-American School.

In the Commie countries, the school staff was considered part of the diplomatic establishment. They didn't have first-, second-, third-secretary titles, but they were identified as officers of the embassies. They carried brown passports, like the technical staff of the embassy. The school people had the same kind of status as did the medical people, the preachers, people who came in under our large American government umbrella to provide essential services to our community. Same was true in Beijing; same was true in Moscow and Warsaw and other similar posts.

I'd never been on a school board before that, but it was intense; people really feel strongly about school issues. Fortunately in this case -- the Warsaw case -- the problems in a sense resolved themselves because the steps that had already been put in place under my predecessor, David Schwartz, came to fruition: the principal left, the music teacher left, and the woman who was on the school board left. By the summer of '88 basically the issues were resolved. We had a good new principal, a better board, and...

Q: Where do the principals come from?

JOHNSON: They come from a pool of international school principals who live and work overseas and often rotate around from one school to another. Usually they don't stay longer than about five years in any one place. For example, the guy who came to Warsaw after we were there had been in Brussels earlier and had been in Budapest or someplace else before that. Then he came to Warsaw, and was a real pro there, too. He also helped us to set up the school in Vilnius, Lithuania, as an adjunct to the school in Warsaw. In Taipei, the principal there had been the primary school principal, then he moved up to be the principal of the whole establishment and was there for about five years, then moved on to some other institution in another place. With the teachers as well as with the school administrators, there's a pool of international educators who most often move around in the civilian school structure. There's also the DOD (Department of Defense) school structure called DODS, Department of Defense Schools.

Q: Today is February 2, 2007. We're continuing our conversation with Ambassador Johnson. I think where we left off last October was you were in Beijing as Political Counselor. In fact, that's '84 and there's another presidential election. That November,

Reagan was reelected. When one is out at post in the field, elections aren't the tsunami that one feels domestically, are they?

JOHNSON: No, and that one less so because it was a foregone conclusion that President Reagan would be reelected. We did have one interesting new event that took place in conjunction with that election, and that was a very large public reception on the morning of the election: morning in China, evening in the States. We invited some 600--700 people to the Great Wall Hotel, rented all four of the ballrooms there, and set up TV screens all around the place. There were several people from the Foreign Ministry, from other think tanks and other institutes who came including the wife of the then-foreign minister. Huang Hua was then the Foreign Minister, a long-time America hand. His wife was a senior official and a member of the central committee, and she was the ranking person who came. Even though the outcome was foregone, the event itself turned out to be a big success in terms of our outreach programs.

Q: That's exactly the point: It's an outreach program. You create an opportunity in which you're focusing somebody's attention on these kinds of devices

JOHNSON: That is particularly true in the process of democracy building and the process of watching how an election unfolds, how the actual process of the election goes. That was, with the malice of foresight, if you like, trying to plant the idea of how democracy works on some of the people in China for whom such an experiment had never occurred.

Q: At this time I was in Washington on the desk, and Gerry Ogden had a reception for people at the Chinese Embassy. We were going to stock in beer and wait all night for the election returns. But by the time the Chinese got there, the election was almost over, so it wasn't as long a night as we thought it was going to be.

JOHNSON: That was a good example of a public diplomacy effort that certainly did have an effect on a key elite audience in China. Of course, there were others who came, too. There were foreign diplomats, and there were journalists, business people and a lot of others among the... I think we had about five to six hundred people who showed up at some point in the morning. It started at about seven in the morning and ran until about eleven by the time it was over.

Q: China at this time is undergoing these enormous economic reforms. What does the workload of the political section look like?

JOHNSON: We had a lot of visitors at that time, a lot of Members of Congress, a lot of Americans who hadn't been to China before. The political section was mainly responsible for taking care of such delegations. We did a lot of reporting about what was going on in the Chinese leadership at the time because this was still fairly early in the Deng Xiaoping period. His reforms had begun only a few years before that. They were announced in 1978, but they were beginning to take effect in the countryside and increasingly in the villages and small town areas as well. The cities hadn't really been affected yet at that point.

Political reform -- who was doing what to whom -- was a big issue in Chinese politics: how the leadership equation was being handled and how lives were being affected at the local level by these economic changes. So, we had a lot of reporting to do. We were subdivided into three sections. One was the internal political section which itself subdivided into people who looked into different provinces, people who looked at the central leadership, people who looked at the party, people who looked at social issues including dissent issues, cultural issues, literary issues, and things of that kind.

We had an external section which as the name implies dealt mostly with China's external relations divided primarily between those relationships with East Asian countries, South Asia, Middle East, and, of course, the Soviet Union at that time. Relations with us were important, too. Those were mostly handled at my level or the DCM or the ambassador's level, the reporting and the representation that was involved in those relationships. China at that point wasn't yet a major player in either Africa or Latin America except for some small projects and some contacts with some sympathetic political leaders in those places. They hadn't yet become a global actor as they have become in the intervening years since that time.

The third subsection was the political military section because at that point we were developing with China a relationship of defense department leaders, military leaders, and there was an effort to provide certain kinds of military equipment to the PRC. This, I should say, didn't go very far in part because of hesitation on both sides about what the implications were for helping China to become better armed, particularly as it affected the relationship with Taiwan across the Strait. That one didn't go very far, but the dynamics of the PLA (People's Liberation Army) and the internal role that that institution played in the defense establishment in China was extremely important. It became an extension of our internal reporting system.

Q: It seemed logical that you had two large continental powers that are going to interact in any number of areas and interaction with the Chinese military or the Chinese political-military decision making apparatus should be an important target for us.

JOHNSON: Yes. It was. The important distinction was that we weren't ready to sell weaponry. We were there to try to understand what the PLA was doing and what its priorities were. One of the things that happened during my three years there was that they began to develop much better training and a much more professional cadre of military people. We discovered something that I had never known which was the PLA is also a major economic institution, and they owned a lot of land. As Deng's reforms began to take effect, one of the things they did was to try to build hotels and to use some of this land for tourism or retreat facilities and to commercialize them. It was remarkable how much of the PLA's activities went into this self-funding or generating profits in the name of the People's Liberation Army. That was later changed, and since that time they have become much more focused on their military role and much less on making money.

Q: Isn't the 1980 period the period in which Deng really decreased the budget to the military and basically told them, "You guys got to fund yourselves."

JOHNSON: Yes, it was partly that. They also were reducing numbers. They went down from about four million to slightly over three million about the time I left. It was a very significant reduction in manpower. They were doing three things at the same time: One was reducing the numbers; the second was becoming more professional; and the third was trying to divest the non-military parts of what they did. As you said, reduced budgets also meant that they had to scrape around and find ways of supporting their own needs during that time. It also led to a lot of corruption. It was an invitation to corruption because there was the lack of accountability at these local institutional levels. That was another reason that it later got changed.

Q: For the PLA at that time, one of the candy stores that was open to them was the Iran-Iraq war during the 1980's. They had the ability to sell equipment on both sides.

JOHNSON: They probably did although they weren't a major global competitor in the arms business at that point because the quality still wasn't sufficient. That's one of the reasons they wanted military technology from us, to be able to upgrade, for example, the fire control capability, the avionics and things of that kind as well as some of the other equipment. They didn't have a Navy to speak of. They didn't have a blue water capability, and their air force was mostly made up of old Soviet airframes and some new engines and some newer avionics. Compared to Iran and to some extent Iraq at that time, China wasn't in the same league in terms of technology. For small arms yes, of course. They certainly had plenty of rifles, plenty of bullets, and plenty of uniforms to be able to supply both sides.

Q: If we could take a look at China's external relations as seen by the Embassy in the mid-1980's period, obviously the relationship with the United States was a major one. What would you catalogue as the other major relationships that they were particularly focused on?

JOHNSON: One, certainly, was the Soviet relationship. This was before the breakup of the Soviet Union, and it was after the high tensions that had dominated the Soviet relationship for so long from the late '60s through the '70s. They were getting back to a more normal relationship where they had a couple of exchanges with high level visitors -- ministerial level visitors -- and commerce was picking up between the two sides, although it was still miniscule by comparison with China's trade with most of its other Asian neighbors. But still, by the time I left in 1987, we were reporting that the Sino-Soviet relationship was back to normal. They were dealing with each other as normal countries with both the complexities and the positive factors that that implied.

Among other relationships at the time, I think the most important part was that China, as a part of its economic outreach and its domestic reform program, was seeking to have peaceful borders. You saw new initiatives with India, for example, or new initiatives in a fairly early period after that conflict with Vietnam and Southeast Asia, with South Korea.

This is one that I didn't actually believe was happening until we later learned that it was happening. There was a lot of trade going on surreptitiously, basically, because what we discovered was ships carrying coal to Korea would go halfway out and then the papers would be changed that would show them having docked in Japan or having docked someplace else. Then they would show up in port in South Korea with this load of coal or whatever the commercial goods might be, and the same in reverse. They worked out this arrangement whereas the transactions actually would happen directly between China and South Korea, but on paper they would appear to involve transit stops someplace else.

That made a big difference in the region because it meant that North Korea no longer had a guaranteed 100% support from the PRC side, that China was looking beyond its North Korean neighbor already, a trend which continued afterwards to the point where South Korea and China are now major trade partners and have lots else going on between them. That was a breakthrough. By the time I left in '87, I think they had normalized diplomatic relations. I think that occurred in late '86 or early '87.

The other big thing that happened on my watch there wasn't on the external side. It was the beginning of the democracy movement. In Christmas/New Years week 1986-87 there were some demonstrations initially in Shanghai, and they later spread to other cities, fueled by some written materials that had very oddly come out of Anhui Province, one of the most backward provinces in the eastern third of the country. A dynamic young physicist named Fang Lizhi -- he had been called the Chinese Sakharov -- had been writing political propaganda articles for some years and for that reason had been exiled, essentially, from Beijing, from the major think tanks, major universities in Beijing, and had been sent to this really creative science and technology institute in remote Anhui Province where he continued to do this and continued to get followers. Around this time the movement began to grow outside of Anhui and Fang Lizhi and his followers. He later ended up in exile in the American Embassy for several months and then was permitted to leave and come to the States. This was the beginning of the democracy movement that later took wing at Tiananmen in 1989.

Q: What do we mean the democracy movement at this point in China's development?

JOHNSON: At this point it meant probably two things: One was an effort to test the limits as far as the expression of ideas that were not ideas first composed by the Chinese Communist Party. That was what Fang was doing. He was trying to test the limits and to say that people have the right to know, they have the right to debate, they have the right to think outside of the party confines.

More importantly, the ideas or representation of democracy, of the right of the people to elect their leaders, began to take root in the minds of many activists and very committed young people. They were the ones who were demonstrating in Shanghai and later in other places and whose intensity, whose passion for the idea of democratic representation and democratic ideals took the form of the Tiananmen demonstrations that began in early 1989 and led to the disastrous crack down on June 4.

Q: Does some of this thinking work in terms of using existing institutions and making them stronger?

JOHNSON: Partly it was an effort to take the Chinese constitution and say, "Look, all these rights are guaranteed. Why can't we practice these things as it is said in there?" As a more practical matter, it was a way of challenging the party's right to rule without contest by saying the people have the right to decide who their leaders ought to be. This is not something -- with very few exceptions -- that communist systems like.

Q: In the international pantheon we talk about the Soviet Union. I have to assume that Japan...

JOHNSON: Japan has always been a very major part of Chinese consciousness in that area in both respects as an historic foe, but also as a source of economic opportunity. China and Japan at that point had already become major trade partners. Japanese companies, Japanese distributors, Japanese representatives were all over China. I remember going out to far western China, Xinjiang Province, for example, when practically every city you'd go into there, there was some Japanese business person helping to distribute car parts or whatever his product line might me: maybe pharmaceuticals. The Japanese were doing a huge amount of business at that time in the more remote parts all over the country and doing it very well. They were a major trade partner at that time, much more than the U.S. and much more than any of China's other neighbors.

Q: What was the nature of their access? If China's this bugabear, somebody let them in, somebody said it's okay to trade like that.

JOHNSON: This was a part of the Deng reforms: the domestic reform and openness to the outside world. Japan was a big part of this as was the U.S. because essentially what Deng said was that, "We have other priorities. We can't be so absorbed with the task that it becomes an obstacle to modernization." Modernization was the goal and the reform and prosperity and all the rest of it were the tools. Even though both the U.S. and Japan had been historical adversaries, Deng's vision was that they could be made a part of new China's efforts to achieve a new role on the world stage.

Q: As the leader of the political section, you're obviously meeting the Ministry of Foreign Affairs people all the time. Do you have some feeling for their maturation as representatives of China and their understanding of the outside world? I'm thinking when relations were started in 1979, Ambassador Han Xu would come over and wave some article and tell Chas, "You should tell Senator So-and-so off." The problem we found out was that the only English speaking Chinese foreign affairs officers were people who had had tours in England and were familiar with the UK's parliamentary system.

JOHNSON: Yes. The other thing was that there's always a tendency to mirror image your own system, and the Chinese for many years, even at the time that I was working in Washington in the year 2001, they would come in with the same kind of thing: complain

about what the Congress was doing or complain about what the State of California was doing or Louisiana or something. We would go through this ritual explaining the separation of powers. In their system there wasn't any separation of powers. The Party was in charge, and if you had a complaint with somebody in Zhejiang or Sichuan, you could go to the central authorities, and the central authorities were supposed to take care of it. The same was true whether it was the ag (agriculture) ministry or someplace else. Any place in the bureaucracy, you'd go to the central point to get it resolved.

In terms of the way that we in Beijing interacted with Chinese institutions, in a sense we tried to do the same kind of mirror imaging by using American models. We tried to reach beyond the Foreign Ministry, which was our regular channel of access to the Chinese system, by trying to establish contacts with academics, with Party people, and others. For example, one of the tools we used to extremely good effect during my time there was the international visitor program (IVP). China by far had the biggest international visitor program in the world at that time. We would gather together people from all sections of the embassy and from the consulates in other parts of the country, and we would put together a list of around a hundred or so people to whom we thought we should offer these visitor grants to go to the States for 30 days. It was extremely successful. At that time it was considered a real feather in the cap of the rising stars in the PRC leadership to be able to say they had been to the States or had been to anywhere outside of China.

These programs were eagerly sought after, and we used them to knock down some doors, including going to the party school. There had never been any American officials or even non-officials who had ever been in the party school before, but we nominated this guy who was then either the head or the deputy head. We let them select whom they wanted to send. We said, "We have two places for this IV (International Visitor) program, and you decide who you want to send. By the way, we want to come and deliver the invitation in person when you tell us who it is." So that's what we did.

My deputy at the time was Don Johnson who had a wonderful capacity to understand how these tools that we had available could be used to our longer term benefit in terms of developing contacts. It was really Don's initiative to say, "Let's try the Party School. Let's try the Military Academy. Let's try all these other places that we've never been able to get into." It was a terrific tool. We sent around a hundred international visitors at least in the last two of the three years I was there. We had a lot of reaching and meeting to do to try to get outside the box of the institutional structure into which we were inevitably placed.

It's interesting, too, when you ask about the Foreign Ministry because the fast track to high office in the foreign ministry was definitely through the Americas division. The people that I worked with, the director later went as ambassador to Canada and after he retired he became the head of the Chinese People's Friendship Association with Foreign Countries. His deputy went as ambassador to Norway and later Italy. The guy who replaced him, with whom I worked a lot, came as number two to Washington and later was ambassador to someplace in Europe. They were going great. The people that we

sometimes found to be difficult to deal with were themselves prospering in terms of their own careers by having to deal with us.

Q: Get ahead by dealing with the Americans...

JOHNSON: That was the way ahead.

Q: Was the way ahead. The talent and the initiative was brought into that vortex.

JOHNSON: It was the most difficult relationship that they had, and for us it was one of the most difficult relationships that we had. It was because we didn't come to our institutional connections through similar systems. The result was that we had to adjust to the way that they dealt with the rest of the world, and they were having to adjust to the way we did. It was difficult. It still is, but less so now than it was then.

Q: Probably a lot of painful learning on their part.

JOHNSON: Yes. Among other things, language ability. When they started working with us, they had maybe a half a dozen people. You mentioned Han Xu. He was one of the best. Ji Chaozhu, who had been Zhou Enlai's interpreter, later served as Ambassador to London after having served as Ambassador to Fiji. He had been in the first team that came to the UN (United Nations) in 1971, and was in the first team that came to the Liaison Office in Washington. This is a guy who grew up in New York, spoke New York English. He was about the only truly native speaker of English in the senior leadership in the PRC at the time. There were maybe a half a dozen others who were talented, but it was about a generation before they were up to speed in terms of the professional skills and language skills that were necessary to manage this highly complex relationship.

Q: Were they setting up a mission to the Asian Development Bank?

JOHNSON: Yes. The guy who was the U.S. representative in Manila in the Asian Development Bank in the early '80s was named John Bohn. Later when I was in Lithuania as ambassador, his daughter was a member of my staff. She had gone to the American School in Manila years earlier. On the substance, there was a lot of resistance in Washington to China's admission because of the perception that they would be the greatest recipient of ADB lending, and we didn't want it distorted that way. Interestingly enough, there was a similar objection to India becoming a member at the same time because the sense was that if these loans were entirely need based, all the money would go to India and China because they would have such great need. The way it finally worked out, which seemed common sensical to me, was simply to say that there were certain country limitations. Nobody wanted to have a situation where the lending was so distorted. In order for there to be money available for Indonesia or Cambodia or any other member state, there obviously had to be caps on the amount that could go to any of the borrowers, which is the way it worked out.

Q: You never see the administrative part, but this had a political component.

JOHNSON: It had a political component, and the way it worked out -- we were still living with the results of that. The formula by which Taiwan could participate in international organizations had not yet been fully thrashed out at that point. The way it was resolved in the ADB was that they became "China, Taiwan," which they still object to because they think putting the words in that order implies that Taiwan is a subordinate part of China. The formulation that Taiwan uses in the Olympics, for example, or in APEC (Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation) or other organizations is "Chinese Taipei." In English it's called Chinese Taipei; in Chinese it's called Chung Hwa Taipei which doesn't imply the country; it implies only the nationality of the people and the place, Taipei the city, rather than Taiwan as a province of "China." These are the kinds of diplomatic delicacies that sometimes take months or years to work out.

Q: Save face and make it happen.

JOHNSON: That's right.

Q:" We were talking about the caliber of Chinese diplomats as you began to interact with them. Let me direct your attention to the U.S. Embassy. There was a Chinese language program in FSI (Foreign Service Institute) all these years but not one that was going to staff an embassy and five consulates on the mainland. What was the quality of the Chinese capabilities with your colleagues?

JOHNSON: It was pretty good. We had been planning for that eventuality for some time although numerically, you're right. We didn't train enough people for the number of jobs that became available. When I studied Chinese, everybody went to Hong Kong or Singapore or Taiwan for their follow-on assignments because we basically didn't have enough jobs for people who had Chinese language training. But when the mainland opened up, there were people available in the middle levels. It had up to that point always been very difficult to get into the China field, the Chinese language program.

Those who did get into the China field were in most respects the best and brightest -- not to be immodest! There were a lot of people who knew their way around China and East Asia and U.S. foreign policy, so I think we were pretty well staffed. For example, the Ambassador when I was there was Arthur Hummel who had been born in China, raised in China in the '30s and '40s, had been a POW (Prisoner of War) in World War II and was a wonderful man whose Chinese was quite good. The DCM was Chas Freeman whom you mentioned recently who was the best Chinese language officer ever to come through the training program in Taiwan. The other people who were there -- the people that I worked with in the political section -- all had Chinese language training. Also the econ (economic) section, all had Chinese language training.

Art Kobler was the chief of the Economic Section; I was chief of the Political Section. Art had studied Chinese some years earlier. His wife was Vietnamese. His Chinese was quite good. We were not without language capability. Where we lacked and where we had a problem was that a lot of our support people didn't have a chance to study hardly

any Chinese before coming there: the communicators, for example, and the secretaries, the admin support people. For them China was just another hard assignment. It wasn't something that they really looked forward to and wasn't something which they really had any particularly strong feelings about. We thought we were part of an historic process, those who were doing the substantive work in China at that time. But the people who were the support staff felt that if it was a choice between Beijing and Tokyo or Beijing and Bangkok or Beijing and Delhi, Beijing came out second in that contest: second out of two.

Q: One of the things that you were mentioning was an important function of the political section at that time was to introduce American visitors to China and set up their itineraries and escort them around. I have in my notes that in October of '85, Vice President George Bush came to visit. How does this impact on the political section?

JOHNSON: I was the control officer at that time because I was the acting DCM, the acting Deputy Chief of Mission. Ambassador Hummel had left in August of that year expecting to be replaced within a matter of a few weeks by Winston Lord, who had already been nominated by President Reagan. Lord's confirmation took much longer than expected because he was held up by Senator Helms on issues to do with China's family planning program and a few other things. The result was that Ambassador Lord didn't get there until late November of that year, long after the visit by Vice President Bush. I was the acting number two; the Chargé at the time was Herb Horowitz who had been the DCM for Ambassador Hummel's last few months in China. So Herb was the acting number one, and I was the acting number two at that time. My job was to take care of all the details, all the meetings, all the arrangements for Vice President Bush's visit.

It was a very good visit for a lot of reasons. One was the timing. The Chinese wanted to have that kind of interaction at that level in the Reagan administration. President Reagan had come himself in April of '84. That had gone a long way toward improving the tone. The Chinese were wary of Reagan because when he had run for president in 1980, he had talked about "renormalizing" relations with Taiwan. He had been to Taiwan several times as governor of California, so they were concerned about Reagan. When he came in '84, they did a good job and he did a good job and managed to get the relationship back on track. When Vice President Bush came in '85, it was a different agenda. We were past that initial hurdle, and the idea was, "Which way do we go from here?" Bush had been head of the Liaison Office in China in 1975 for just over a year. He was the second head of the office which had been opened after the Kissinger-Nixon initiative in 1972. The Liaison Office was opened in 1973 and the first ambassador, David Bruce, was there a little over one year. Then Bush came for a little over a year, and then there was third person -- a retired general, Gates? -- for close to two years. Then Leonard Woodcock came. Woodcock was the Ambassador when normalization took place in late 1978-79.

So Bush had been there. They knew him. He had come again during the election campaign of 1980 because the Chinese were so concerned about positions that Reagan had taken. Bush went there with the hope and expectation of being able to smooth things over, and he did pretty much. I don't remember if he had come back one other time

before I got there, but I think the trip in ’85 was the third time he had come to China. In Beijing, he met with Deng Xiaoping, he met with other senior leaders, he met with the foreign minister. He also traveled to Xi’an to visit the terracotta soldiers there, and also to Guilin where we spent a few hours on the boat ride going down the Li Jiang, the Li River. It was a beautiful time. This was in October, the best time of year to visit China. We then went on to Shenzhen, to the new industrial zone in Shenzhen to visit a couple of American companies that were investing there, and then on to Hong Kong. The whole trip -- Bush’s trip -- in October of ’85 was... I think counting the Hong Kong part of it was six and a half or seven days. The mainland part of it was five days.

Q: You were the control officer. Who decided what the schedule was going to be? Were you guys making suggestions or it comes down from Washington?

JOHNSON: It comes down from Washington, and it comes up from Beijing from the Chinese side. I think we had by then so much experience in dealing with the PRC on visits that we more or less knew what to expect. Washington sometimes didn’t know what to expect and, of course, they held us accountable for any changes or any glitches or anything like that.

The usual routine was that we would go in and say, “The Vice President’s coming. He’d like to see a,b,c,d, and e. He’d like to go to this place; he’d like to go to that place.” They would say, “Thank you very much,” and that’s the last you’d hear about it. We would go in about every four hours after that with some suggestions from Washington or some ideas about how to modify it and get practically no feedback.

Then one day the Great Visitor arrived... Washington by this time is going up in smoke because they have to have their briefing books, they have to have the scenarios for every event. You’ve worked on these visits, so you know these scenarios are incredibly detailed. They say, “It takes three steps to go from here to the front door. At the front door, so-and-so will be there, and the appropriate greeting would be, ‘How are you today, Sir?’” Then you have pages of biographic data and pages of talking points. Washington wants to get all of this done so the Vice President has it preferably about a week ahead or time or ten days ahead of time, but at least by the time he gets on the plane so his staff will have gone through it. They can highlight the key points. He’ll spend time going through the drill of what all is going to happen. In the case of China, there are a lot of blanks in that schedule up until the very end. Fortunately, they always came together. We always knew what was going to happen, and they knew what was going to happen, and it usually happened the way we intended. But getting there can be quite unnerving for those who are used to a smoothly planned process.

Bush was a very good guest because he had worked in our kind of an establishment. When he was in Beijing it was a very, very small mission. They only had 10 or 12 Americans. When I was there in the mid ‘80s we had 60 or 70 Americans, and we were understaffed at that time because of the demands of visitors and the relationship more broadly. Bush was very understanding. In fact, at every stop he would go out of his way to greet the support people, to greet the people who were helping to take care of him. He

would always say, “I know how much trouble this is. I’ve been on your side of this kind of an event, and I know you do a lot more than I have a chance to see.” He appreciated it, and it really made a difference.

His senior foreign policy guy at the time was Don Gregg who was later Ambassador to Korea, a long-time Asia hand and a very good guy. The timing was driven by the fact that Bush went to Sichuan, to Chengdu, to open the first American consulate there, the ribbon cutting. The first Consul General was Bill Thomas, who had lots of China/Taiwan experience. I don’t recall who else was on the Chengdu staff initially, but Don Camp was there later, and Kees Keur several rounds later.

Jim Lilley was also on that trip. Jim was then the NSC (National Security Council) person for China, again, a long-time supporter of George Bush from the time that Jim had worked with him in Beijing back in the early ‘70s. They had a good team coming from Washington, and we had a good team on the ground in Beijing as well.

Q: To follow up on something you just mentioned, the delay of Winston Lord to take up his assignment as ambassador, and you mentioned the Honorable Jesse Helms who plays a very interesting hand with regard to the foreign service and China issues. I find it difficult to believe that the issue of family planning is so enormously important to the good senator and his constituents in North Carolina. So what was his game?

JOHNSON: He was very hostile to Communist China, and the issue of family planning, forced abortions and things of that kind were very much in the public eye at that time. How much of it was true is another matter. Certainly China had declared its one child policy at that point. Helms among others had seized on that as a reason to complain about PRC behavior. Since he didn’t like China anyway and he was highly suspicious of the rationale -- of the openings -- that had been carried out while Winston Lord was at the White House under Kissinger and later with the State Department under Kissinger, that he used this occasion to complain about China policy. The family planning thing was one part of it, but the larger issue was China policy. As you say, he used every available opportunity to berate the Foreign Service and cut funding and do other things. Winston Lord was not a career Foreign Service person, but he had spent most of his adult life doing foreign affairs in one line or another so he was a convenient target in that respect. Helms had the power to make him uncomfortable.

Q: After awhile the assignment in Beijing is over after all that language training and here you hit the top of things, you were saying you left Beijing on the Trans Siberian Railway. That’s not the usual way of doing it, is it?

JOHNSON: Not the usual way, no. People usually fly out. I was going to my next assignment in Poland at that time, so I thought it would be nice. I’d already served in Moscow, so I thought it would be interesting to take the train and stop in Moscow for a couple of days and stop in Warsaw on the way back to Washington where I was going to start studying Polish language later that fall.

There was one other high level visit that was an important one in the spring of 1987, and that was Secretary of State George Shultz. It was his first visit in that role. That was quite important because our business people we were having a lot of problems at that time. One businessman commented to the American Chamber of Commerce that, "I'm here with a non-profit venture, but it wasn't intended that way." There were a lot of companies there who felt that they were getting the short end of the business stick at that point. When Shultz was there he had a lunch with the American Chamber representatives, and there were so many complaints that even very patient George Shultz finally had had enough. He said, "If you don't want to be here, why don't you go away? Why don't you leave if it's that bad?"

Q: He was very familiar with business issues; that was his career.

JOHNSON: Yes, that and academia. He had come from being a senior executive at Bechtel. He and Weinberger were both senior officials in Bechtel. Bechtel was trying to do business in China at that time, too. I think the Chinese figured that if they did well by Shultz, they'd do well by Bechtel, but it didn't work that way. Bechtel ended up closing down about a year later.

Back to Poland

I wanted to visit before arriving on my assignment, to meet my predecessor, David Swartz, and to meet the Ambassador, John Davis, in this setting. I had visited Warsaw once from Moscow, but did not really know the place. I had known John in Washington but hadn't actually worked closely with him before, so I planned my trip home accordingly. I went with two of my three kids on the train. It took five days to get to Moscow. We spent two or three days in Moscow visiting places where we had lived there before and visiting some people. Then we went on by train to Warsaw where we spent about three or four days over a weekend and got to see the Embassy, got to see some of the people there, and spend time with David Swartz and John Davis. We then went on by train to Frankfurt and then flew home from Frankfurt.

We found that by doing it this way, we ended up saving the government money. It cost less to go by train from Beijing to Frankfurt and then to fly to Washington than it would have to fly round trip from Frankfurt to Washington or from Beijing.

Q: You immediately began Polish language training.

JOHNSON: That's right, I immediately began Polish.

Q: Chinese was two years.

JOHNSON: Yes. Polish and the other Slavic languages were one year programs at the Foreign Service Institute in Washington. Like the Chinese program and the other programs, the teachers were all native speakers of Polish, so there were five or six

teachers, and the classes were three to five each, so there were between 15 or 20 or so officers studying Polish at that time.

Q: You didn't have a full year.

JOHNSON: I didn't have a full year because David Swartz was scheduled to leave to head a new office in the State Department that was responsible for the hotline exchanges with Moscow. That was being set up about that time at the end of 1987, early '88. He left the first or second week of January, and my arrival was then pushed up to the 20th of January, so I only ended up with about four and a half or five months of Polish.

The first big event after I got there, and the reason the timing was pushed up, was because the then Deputy Secretary of State, John Whitehead, was coming for a visit to Poland in January of '88. Vice President Bush had just been there in the fall of '87 and had had a very successful visit, one that in retrospect probably turned out to be almost a turning point in the way that not only our relationship evolved but the way Poland itself evolved. There was so much pressure then for political change that by the end of 1988 -- one year later -- the whole Communist structure started coming apart. That was exciting! It was historically the most important post that I served in because of the fundamental changes that took place in the geo-political landscape of Europe in the post-World War II era. And it all started in Poland.

Q: Normally on a DCM assignment, FSI has a DCM course that they expose you to. One of the prime functions of this job in the embassy is the administration of the embassy, knowing what is going on. Did you have an opportunity to take that course?

JOHNSON: Yes. It was an extremely good course. It was very well run. I did it in the spring after I got there. I had been at post for a short while. It took it, and it was extremely good. The first week was spent off campus at a convention center in West Virginia, Berkeley Springs. That part of the course I thought was outstanding. It was about broad leadership styles, leadership values, how to provide feedback, how to provide negative feedback, how to play the role of a chief executive officer in an institution that is already in place and where you have highly trained people, highly motivated people. How do you get them to march in the direction you want them to march and to do the things you want them to do? How do you deal with personnel issues which end up being a big part of what the DCM has to deal with? How do you support the ambassador? How do you manage when an ambassador isn't there, or you are the chargée? You have to be Mr. Inside manager, but you also have to be Mr. Outside, the public face of the mission, of the U.S. government in that country. You're responsible for both the representational side of the job, reporting, and management. It's a big job, and it can be very challenging.

A lot depends on the personal relationship with the ambassador as well as the success of the mission. Fortunately, in John Davis there could not have been a better guy to work with as chief of mission. He knew Poland: this was his fourth year in a row at that point. He had come as Chargé during martial law with the expectation that he would be there

for a short while and relations would improve. But in fact he was Charge/Chief of Mission for an extended period. He had had one previous assignment in Poland, also, so all together he had been there seven years. Both he and his wife were extremely popular, well loved. Both spoke good Polish and especially among the Solidarity people, the opposition people, they were a guiding light, a kind of inspiration from the outside.

In connection with the visit I just mentioned by Mr. Whitehead, we invited Lech Walesa to come to the Residence to meet with Whitehead. Walesa was not officially under house arrest, but he generally stayed in Gdansk and was very much a non-person. He had really disappeared from public life in Poland for a couple of years before that. The Embassy kept in touch with him, and John Davis personally kept in touch with him. We invited him to come to the Residence. He had wanted Whitehead to come to visit him in Gdansk, but we said there wasn't going to be time, and we couldn't do it, and besides, the Polish government was getting very unpleasant about such visits by outsiders. They said if Whitehead goes to Gdansk, then he won't get a meeting with President Jaruzelski. We decided to try to do both. But Walesa was very irritated, claiming that we were kowtowing to the regime. So we did not know whether he would show up at the Residence until he showed up. That was the first time I met him. What a charismatic figure, I must say. It was something special to be in the same room with him.

I met him again about three weeks later. I went up to Gdansk and saw him there. By then Ambassador John Davis had been called back for his confirmation hearings in Washington. This was one of the very few times that someone has gone from being Chargé in place to becoming Ambassador in the same place. That was because of Vice President Bush --later President Bush. He took a special liking to John Davis and recognized the talent and skill that he brought to that job. Even though I had been chosen for the DCM position by Tom Simons, who was expecting to come as Ambassador, Tom's assignment was actually put off for a year, so John Davis was there for another two years as ambassador until the end of '90, until after all the historic changes took place in '89-'90. It was the summer of 1990 before the Davises left.

Q: Could you describe the Embassy as you arrived? How was it organized, who was the head of the section?

JOHNSON: When I got there, Embassy Warsaw, like the other embassies in Eastern Europe, was still smarting under the security requirements that had come as a result of two episodes in Moscow. One was the bugging of the new building which led everybody to believe that all of our buildings were bugged equally, which they weren't. That led to turning up the heat on security. The other was the bogus story about the Marines having let people into the secure part of Embassy Moscow, which also didn't happen, but it was believed at the time. There had been a big investigation of all the security posture, security procedures, in all of the Eastern European embassies. We were locked down: You couldn't get out, you couldn't get in. It was a very closed environment at the time. The usual effort to build contacts on the outside was definitely in abeyance at that time.

Q: By our own security.

JOHNSON: Yes, by the rules we established. At the Embassy in Warsaw at that time, there were about 50 or 60 Americans counting support staff. Curiously enough there was a very disproportionate number from Western Washington. The econ counselor was from here: The political counselor was from here, I was from here, the defense attaché was from Puyallup, the budget and fiscal officer was from Aberdeen. It was quite an odd coincidence.

In terms of structure, we had the front office, the ambassador, and the DCM. We had a small but very good political section. We had a small and good econ section. We had a large consular section because there was a lot of work in terms of visa load. Poles were always trying to go to the States, and the refusal rate was very high. It was a difficult consular environment. We also had a large number of immigration cases involving relatives of American citizens, Polish-Americans. We had a small defense attaché office. We had a very small commercial office which was just getting started at that time.

The camaraderie -- the morale in the community -- was extremely good. We also had a very good school there which, as I mentioned earlier, is where I met my wife.

Q: Howard Lange was the econ consular at the time. Howard is a China guy...

[crosstalk]

JOHNSON: Complete coincidence. He was already there. And he was leading the effort to select a new school principal at that time. I was chairman of the school board because the by-laws say the DCM has to be the chairman of the school board. So I came into this very complex situation which was tough going for the first few months.

Q: The DCM's responsibility is quite broad.

JOHNSON: Yes. It's the community as well as managing the mission itself. In a place like Poland in those days where it was so restricted, the contact with the outside world was restricted, so there's a tendency to focus more inwardly. Sometimes that's good, sometimes it's not. It means you have a lot of camaraderie, but it also means that there's an intensity that if people don't want to be there, for example, or if you have some social misfits, the problems and the consequences become much more intensive.

Q: You were talking about meeting Lech Walesa saying he was a quite interesting personality. Could you describe that a little bit?

JOHNSON: The first time I met him was when he came to this meeting with Deputy Secretary Whitehead at the ambassador's residence in late January if 1988. Walesa was restricted in his movements, but he remained accessible and was, in effect, protected by the Catholic Church in Gdansk, which is where he hung out. There was a sort of implicit arrangement whereby the authorities would not interfere with Walesa's activities so long as these activities took place on Church property. The Solidarity people gathered at this

particular church called St. Bridget's Church in Gdansk. The priest at that church, Father Henryk Jankowski, was very flamboyant. Helen Davis used to call him "the rhinestone priest" because he had diamonds and other jewels all over. He had this very elegant outfit, and he rode around in a Mercedes. This was not your poor little parish priest in the countryside. But theatrics aside, he provided absolutely essential support for Walesa and for Solidarity.

Walesa was a very devout man, a very devout Catholic. He went to church all the time, and it wasn't just hokey. It wasn't just political. He was that way when he was a simple electrician at the shipyard in Gdansk; it was the same then and it was the same later, too. I later saw Walesa a number of times including going up to visit him in Gdansk at St. Bridget's Church and to meet Father Jankowski.

Later in mid-1989, then-President Bush came to Poland for a State Visit. That was in July, in the summer of 1989 just after the round table, just after the first free elections in Poland. The elections led to the establishment of the first Solidarity government, which in turn led to the collapse of Communism in Eastern Europe. One of the events on Bush's schedule in Poland, was a private lunch at Walesa's house that was fixed by his wife, Danuta. There were just the four of them. It was President Bush and Mrs. Bush, Walesa, and Mrs. Walesa. Four people in there, basically the size of a kitchen, this little house that they lived in in Gdansk. It was very touching, and it was Bush's own idea, too, to have that kind of an event that would highlight the personal touch. This was, of course, long before -- a few months before -- Walesa and Solidarity came into higher office. Dramatic times to be there.

The elections took place on June 4, 1989, which by coincidence was the same day as the Tiananmen incident in China and the same day that Ayatollah Khomeini died in Iran. I remember one of my Polish friends the next day saying, "Those three events will change all three countries forever." Just those three events that happened on that same day were of such historic consequence. They certainly were in Poland, there's no doubt. I'm not sure they were in the other two places quite as much, but they were certainly important events.

Q: How did the Poles get to elections?

JOHNSON: To go back to the beginning when I got there in 1988. When Whitehead came he met with Walesa, he met with the other members of the Church, he met with the government, he met with everybody. His theme was political reform; let's do this in a way we can support. When Whitehead met with Jaruzelski, then president of Poland, Jaruzelski kept saying, "We've got to have stability. We've got to have economic reform. We've got to have progress," and so forth. Whitehead kept nagging on the point about political reform and the need to have a way forward.

The Communist government had run a referendum several months earlier, asking the people to vote for economic austerity in return for political liberalization. They turned it down! They voted it down! Imagine in a Communist country, they voted against this

resolution. The grounds were that they didn't believe him. They didn't believe that they would be allowed to have political reform in return for economic austerity. That in a sense was one of the beginnings of the cracking of the edifice. Part of what Jaruzelski was trying to do in the subsequent several months was to confront the issue of how do you get at least acquiescence on the part of the majority of the people for the kind of economic changes that he thought were necessary. In one of these meetings with Whitehead, he said, "We can't do this, we can't do that, we can't do this. But we must never say never." He said that, "In politics you can never say never." In retrospect, that was a little hint that at least he was open to the idea of some kind of process of change.

Fast forward: There were two series of strikes that spring: One was at the big steel mill near Krakow. It turned violent. There were a couple of people killed, only a couple, though. We had some early reports that there had been dozens killed, but there weren't.

Q: When was this?

JOHNSON: '88, springtime. Solidarity was slow to respond to that. It was not originally a Solidarity strike, but they then did get out in front and became quite vocal in their support of the steel workers. There was fighting and then there was some negotiating, and then they calmed down and went back to work.

There was another strike, a sympathetic strike, about two months later in Gdansk. That's Walesa's home town and the shipyard where he worked, so Solidarity was very much involved in that one almost from the beginning. Again the government was forced to negotiate, and there was a wage package or some benefits as a result of that strike.

At the same time, Gorbachev came to visit. That was in the summer of '88. Gorbachev was there for about 11 days. Jaruzelski was with him the whole time. Someone called it the Velcro relationship; they were stuck to each other the whole time! That was at the time of the demonstrations. Not for Gorbachev, though. When we looked at this moment in time afterwards, there was a suggestion that Jaruzelski somehow either voiced a threat or suggested that things were such that change was going to have to occur. Or perhaps Gorbachev himself said that they had to do something in order to bring about peaceful change. My theory is that at a certain point, Jaruzelski said something along the lines of, "What if? What if we try to crack down on the strikers?" Or on the contrary, "What if we decide to open it up? What is the Soviet response going to be?" I think Gorbachev basically said, "It's up to you. It's your business. We're not going to solve your problems either way. This is not 1956 or other times in the past, like '68 in Prague." Whether it was something that explicit or whether it was implicit doesn't matter much because soon after that Jaruzelski decided that he was going to try to tolerate some political opening.

The first indication of this came on the first of December of '88 when there was a publicly televised debate about issues having to do with labor and wages and economic policy between Lech Walesa who, as I said before, had been a non-person for the previous several years, and the head of the official Communist trade union (Alfred Miodowicz). This event was watched by every Pole. It was on at 8:00 p.m., prime time

television, and took exactly one hour. And in order that the staging not be manipulated by the authorities, the terms were negotiated on the Solidarity side by Andrzej Wajda, the great film director. One of Wajda's suggestions was that they set up the camera in such a way that there was a clock right in the middle of the picture between the two speakers so that the people running the cameras couldn't manipulate what was being shown. They showed the speakers, and they showed the clock all the time, and the camera did not move beyond that scene.

The program began with Miodowicz making a very rambling statement for about 12 or 15 minutes. He was looking down and looking aside, talking very quietly. Then the camera switched over to Lech Walesa who looked right at the camera, leaned forward and said, "My fellow Poles, I want to tell you that the time when we are subservient is over. We don't need to do this any more. We have the right to be responsible for our own future." It lit up the place. It was amazing! Later the guy that was the head of the Communist propaganda department, whom we used to see from time to time said, "After that it was over. That was the end of it. Here we thought we knew what we were doing. Walesa was going to stumble. After all, he's just a poor working man. He wouldn't have the presence or the language capability." Poles are real snooty about their language.

Q: They used to complain about his grammar.

JOHNSON: He had rehearsed extremely well for this, and he was a performer in addition to being a charismatic leader. He did a knock-out performance. That was December 1st. The corollary of that over the next couple of months -- between then and the end of the Christmas/New Year's week, there was much discussion about how to organize some kind of a national debate covering everything about national policy. By the end of December there had been an agreement under which the Catholic Church had agreed to moderate talks between representatives from the Solidarity Trade Union and the Communist Party. Those were supposed to take place by the end of December, and then something got in the way. I don't remember what it was, but the talks were rescheduled for the end of January. By the end of January, from then until the end of April, they had meetings almost every other day. They had a round table. The talks took place in a big palace in downtown Warsaw. They had equal numbers of people from the Communist side and from the Solidarity side, and the Church representative sat in the middle but didn't speak except to moderate the discussion.

Q: Was it in Lazienki?

JOHNSON: No, it wasn't in the Lazienki Palace, it was in the Radziwill Palace, in the center of town. After having this whole day of debate, the two designated leaders of the groups on either side would then speak to a reporter on camera at night. It was amazing. They would have, for example, a discussion about education policy: What should be the content of education in Poland? The next one would be about agriculture policies. The next one would be about trade unions. The next one would be about a major economic policy. Finally they got to the sensitive political issues, and for that they had to take a break.

The Church convened a much smaller meeting where there were just six on each side out at a dacha (a large rural retreat), on the south side of Warsaw, for three days. They came back from that with a political agreement to hold elections and to constitute a new legislative body: the senate. Up to that point there had only been a lower house of parliament. They were going to constitute an upper house of parliament with a hundred seats modeled after the American senate, freely elected. Anybody who wanted could run. It was not preordained that there would be a certain number of Communist senators. In return for that, in the lower house -- there were also going to be elections for the lower house, but only 35% of those seats would be open to any candidate. The other 65% would be made up of the current governing coalition; that is to say, the Communists and their allies.

That was the big breakthrough. The person on the Solidarity side who was mainly responsible for that was Bronislaw Geremek, an academic by profession who spoke elegant English and French. We used to call him the Thomas Jefferson of Poland. He was the great intellectual partner to Walesa. Walesa had the weight of the trade union people with him, but Geremek had the intellectuals with him. It was an unbeatable combination. On the Communist side, the main voice -- they had several people designated in different areas. One of the key players on the Government/Party side was a man named Kwasniewski, who later became post-communist Poland's president for several years and came to the States a couple of times on high-level visits. He served a long tour as president. And it was not coincidental that we had such a close relationship with him because the lead official dealing with Eastern Europe in the White House/National Security Council under Bush II, was Dan Fried, who had just come back from being the US Ambassador to Poland, where he worked closely with Kwasniewski.

The Roundtable was going on from January until late spring of 1989. A part of this big package deal, in addition to all these other major agreements and major areas of policy, was that there would be free elections on the fourth of June, 1989, throughout the country, with certain caveats that I mentioned before on the allocation of seats in the lower house. But everyone could vote for senators and members of the lower house of parliament.

John Davis and I had a meeting with Geremek about three weeks before the elections. He was going to the States for something, for some meeting or some award. So we talked with him for about half an hour; it was just him and the two of us. He was the campaign manager for Solidarity. We had been sending our political reporting officers out and the junior officers out throughout the country to find out what was happening in each of the constituencies. Everywhere our people went they would see the Solidarity candidates. They would have headquarters much advertised, and they would have materials to hand out. They were very active. The candidates were all over the place.

Q: Were Embassy people permitted to attend these rallies?

JOHNSON: Yes, but not on behalf of the candidates. For the Communist candidates, we would call the Party headquarters and say, "Who's your Party candidate in Rzeszow?" or, "Who can we speak to in Szczecin?" They'd say, "We don't know. Why don't you go and ask..." How can you have an election if you have secret candidates? This was something quite bizarre.

We asked Geremek in this meeting, "How are your guys going to do?" He said, "I think we're going to win about 70%." I remember John Davis -- a very wise man -- leaned back, took a puff on his pipe, and said, "Bronek, who's going to lose? As far as we can tell, your candidates are going to win everything." Geremek said, "Oh, no. That would be very bad. Then we'd have to take responsibility. The economy's a mess, we can't handle it. We don't have the expertise or the experience." There were all these reasons. He said, "We want a moral victory. We want to win the seats, but we don't necessarily want to govern."

Guess what: Of 100 seats in the Senate, the Solidarity candidates won 99, and the only one they didn't win was a non-communist farmer who wasn't a Solidarity member but a guy who was a prominent local person. In the lower house they won all 35% of the open seats that they were eligible to run for. But even more interestingly, there were 12 or 15 seats that were not contested, that were Communist Party representatives who were considered automatic. But the voters crossed them out. They crossed out those names! Even the people that were designated and supposedly agreed to by both sides were not elected! It ended up being a very fragile parliament.

There was one other party, nominally a non-communist party, the Agrarian Party, which had been a partner with the Communists since 1948. After the election, they decided that they were going to become a truly independent party. They had enough votes. They had the swing vote. They had about 20%. So Solidarity had 35%, these guys had about 20%, and the Communists had about 45%. Once the Agrarian Party decided to defect, then Solidarity, with them, had a plurality. Then two months after the election, Walesa said, "We won the elections; we're going to be the government!" The Solidarity leadership decided to try to put together a government beginning in late August of '89.

It was a fabulous time to be there. President Bush had decided to visit Poland again, right in the middle of that process. I have to say, he understood better than a lot of other people did, what was going on. Even back in April, at the time of the round table when things were looking rather glum and it looked like the Communists might try to pull the plug on this whole round table process, Bush made a couple of very balanced comments, saying, in effect, "This is a process, and we have every reason to hope and expect that the process will play through and that it'll be unencumbered. The Polish People should have the right to decide who will lead them." He wasn't buying into the conspiracy theories at all.

He and his team began to look at this State Visit, to take place in July. The voting was in June; they were going to come in July. The advance team came in May. As DCM, I was primarily responsible for that visit -- for the arrangements, that is. We didn't know for sure what was going to come out of the election or what to expect, but we went ahead and

made all the plans for this visit which was less than two years since Bush had been there earlier as VP.

The new parliament convened on July 4 -- not coincidentally. The first non-communist parliament in Eastern Europe convened on the Fourth of July. Bush came on the 10th and spoke to the parliament on the 11th at its first plenary meeting in the chamber of the parliament. It was a grand event. We really celebrated. Everybody in Poland celebrated, and President Bush deserved a lot of the credit for the way we reacted.

Q: One of the things that I see in the compare and contrast part of this, you've just come out of China, and you've gone to Poland. China's reform is to provide the economic wherewithal to make the country work, and Poland's economic situation is not fabulous, but it's better then, and so Poland's revolution got most of the changes they wanted on the political side, but still had a weak economy.

JOHNSON: The economy was part of the driving force because there was so much discontent about the economy. The Communists had tried to put through this referendum back in the end of '87 which didn't work, for people to undertake more stringent economic reforms in return for a more open political process.

QF: The economy was off market before that.

JOHNSON: The economy was not in good shape.

QF: After the election, the black market disappeared all together.

Q: There was a certain standard of living, a certain level of production that probably exceeded that of most of China.

JOHNSON: Yes, but the quality of reforms that had taken place in China even by then were more far reaching: the peasant responsibility system and the growth of the rural market sector in particular had gone much farther than in Poland -- although Poland was the only Communist state in Eastern Europe where people were permitted to own their land privately. Even so, the markets were not free and to some extent it was an echo of the Soviet economy. Because it was so state centered, the allocation of resources was extremely inefficient, and you had things like the steel mill in Krakow which was way out of date. Yes, they produced steel and there was a lot of coal in Poland and a lot of iron, but it was terrible quality. Apart from using it themselves, they didn't have a market for this stuff. They were going through some pretty dramatic economic trauma at the time, and because of that there was more and more agitation on the political side. There was a connection between the perception that the economy was going to hell and the idea that political reform was too far to reach, that they weren't able to do it. The politics came first in that case.

Q: There is an interesting paper in here somewhere because somebody told me that a lot of the economic reformist thinking that the Chinese copied came out of Hong Kong and Slovakia and the Czech Republic.

JOHNSON: Czechoslovakia was still Czechoslovakia.

Q: Yes, and that thinking helped their think tanks.

JOHNSON: In Hungary, unlike Poland, the reforms were top down and under cover after the Hungarian revolution of '56 and even more emphatically in the '70s. They got permission to experiment more with market forces as long as they kept the lid on and kept control politically. Hungary and Czechoslovakia were there, and Czechoslovakia after Dubcek in '68 -- they were examples for how to manage economic reform in a stable political environment. That's what China wanted. They wanted to keep Party control and also to allow the economy to go forward. Compared to other Commie countries, Poland has always been a little more rambunctious. They were not economically as far ahead. Both Hungary and Czechoslovakia were considerably more advanced economically than Poland was at that time. Poland was ahead of the Soviet Union, but they were not ahead of their southern neighbors. They certainly weren't ahead of East Germany which was the most advanced of the Commie East European countries. The Poles were much more driven by the political agenda, and the political agenda itself was partly driven by the sense that the economy was failing.

I want to go back to President Bush's visit in July of '89 and convey a very touching vignette. It was very warm during that week in July, and the Davises decided to have the big luncheon for President Bush outdoors because the house -- the Residence -- wasn't big enough. The process of designing the guest list was incredible. We had to have the right balance of government people, of course; we had to have the right balance of Solidarity and other opposition people, artists and theater people and Americans. Every table was a complex geometry in terms of who sat where and who sat next to whom so that we got all the right messages across.

At the head table, in addition to President and Mrs. Bush were Ambassador and Mrs. Davis, Geremek, Jaruzelski and Jaruzelski's wife. I don't recall whether Walesa was there because he didn't hold an official position at that time. I think he was not because he and his wife were hosting the Bushes at their home in Gdansk the following day. So Geremek was the main guest from the Solidarity side. When it came time to make remarks, there were two things that happened there that were interesting: One was because it was so hot and the umbrellas weren't wide enough, everybody took off their jackets. Jaruzelski never in his life before had taken off his jacket in public. He always had these sunglasses as a result of his eyes having been damaged in Siberia when he was a kid. He was always ramrod straight. Because everybody else took off their jackets, he had to take off his jacket. That was the first vignette.

The other was there were no prepared speeches, but in a setting like that you've got to make some remarks. John Davis made some welcoming remarks for President Bush and

for Jaruzelski and for the other guests. Then Bush made some short, pleasant remarks, and then it was Jaruzelski's turn. He began by apologizing, saying he didn't know there would be speeches, but he was happy to be here. He then said, "Even though my residence is only 60 meters from the front gate of the American Ambassador's Residence, this is the first time that I've been in the Residence of the American Ambassador." Jaruzelski's White House, if you like, was literally about 60 or 80 yards away, across the street. He was quite generous in his remarks and said the right things for President Bush and for the nature of the relationship.

Then it was Geremek's turn; he just got up as the fourth speaker. His first remarks were, "I'm happy to be here, too, Mr. Presidents, Mr. Ambassador, but I'm also happy to say that this is not the first time that I've been in the residence of the American Ambassador." The audience loved it!

I was once quoted in a Washington Post article quoting one of my Polish friends that the four people who made it possible for the revolution to succeed in Poland were the Pope, Walesa, Jaruzelski, and John Davis. They were the four who made it happen. The fact that it was done entirely peacefully is in no small measure a result of the wisdom of all of them in the sense of common purpose that they shared.

Q: Also I think couldn't we use those vignettes as a way in which diplomacy and simply putting people together under certain atmospheric conditions facilitates these kinds of reconciliations. You don't have to browbeat all of the time.

JOHNSON: It's important to keep in mind that Jaruzelski had declared martial law in Poland back in 1981. Remember in the first Reagan administration, that "Let Poland be Poland" slogan, and the candles at Christmastime? That was just after Jaruzelski cracked down in December of 1981. It was a terrible time in Poland during most of that decade. To some extent, Jaruzelski has lived long enough to be partially exonerated because it was really his willingness to allow the system to be flexed that brought about the elections and the changes that occurred. He had a stormy meeting with the central Party leadership in January of 1989, just before the round table talks went forward, at which he received an endorsement about four in the morning or so. The Party finally agreed to endorse his approach to the round table. Out of 500 votes or so, there were about 130 that were against him, which was unheard of in the Communist system, that the members would register a negative vote against the Party leadership on something that important? He didn't go forward easily; he didn't take this position easily.

There are lots of ironies in what happened in Poland subsequently, but among the people who were the most vehement and outspoken on the Solidarity side was a journalist named Adam Michnik who wrote some fine books and articles. One is called "Letters from Prison," written during his time in jail during the early Solidarity period. He has become almost an apologist for Jaruzelski, and has had a number of discussions and articles about Jaruzelski's role in this. It's quite interesting how attitudes and behaviors change over time.

Q: You're describing this terribly exciting reform period in Poland and yet your duty as Deputy Chief of Mission, how are you directing the reporting of the mission and directing your officers to grab onto this vibrant circumstance?

JOHNSON: The first thing is to go out and meet as many people as you can who have some sort of role to play in this process. Some of them I indicated were people the Ambassador had known for a long time, but a lot were not. A lot were people who were going up through the ranks at the local level. The more our officers -- especially the political reporting officers -- could get out and talk to people, the better from that standpoint. We tried to create as many opportunities as we could for them to get away from the office and get out and meet people and report on what was going on. They did an outstanding job. In fact, the two main political reporting officers -- Terry Snell and John Boris -- got the worldwide reporting award that year. We were reporting every day what went on around the round table, and what went on in the conversations we were having elsewhere. They sent an incredible stream of reporting into the Department which will someday form a wonderful archive of what went on in Poland in the spring of 1989. There were many observers who believed that the Communists would never give up power willingly, so there was a lot of skepticism. The guy who was then the head of the Polish desk in Washington was Dan Fried whom I introduced earlier. Dan used to come back to us about once a week or so and say, "I sure hope you guys are right because nobody back here believes you." He believed us, and it did him a lot of good to stand up for what turned out to be the right approach.

Another vignette about the same sort of mindset that the Communists would never give up willingly: The day after the elections were held -- these are two different related vignettes -- on June 4, it was clear that the Communists were not going to send tanks into the streets and say the elections had no validity. John Davis said in a staff meeting the next day, "If you listen carefully, you can hear that whirring sound of ten thousand theses going into the grinder. All of those people who said the Communists would never give up power peacefully have been proven wrong."

The other vignette was about Brzezinski. Zbigniew Brzezinski, former National Security Adviser under Carter, came to visit in May, about two weeks before the election, and he stayed with me because John Davis was away...

Brzezinski came the last week of May 1989, shortly before the elections. He came convinced that this was a big fraud, that nothing was going to come of it. He knew some of the people on the Solidarity side who were candidates. The first night he went out with them, saying "I'll let you know what happens. I'm going with so-and-so to a rally." He came back late at night, and was very enthusiastic. But he said, "I'm still very skeptical. I'm not sure the Communists will let this happen." The next night he went out again, and he came back even more enthusiastic, and the third night the same way. What had happened was he would show up at these rallies, and they would introduce him, and the crowds would go crazy! They all knew who Brzezinski was, of course. They'd invite him up to the stage, and he's say a few rah-rah words. He just loved it! Some people were

saying at the time that he ought to come back and run for President in Poland -- a thought he did not discourage!

So his friends were turning out these huge and enthusiastic crowds, and after the third or fourth day, he same back and said, "You know, maybe this is a real election after all." [interference]

Another vignette: a priest in Gdansk, probably Father Jankowski but maybe someone else, said in the church service a week before the election, "I'm not allowed to endorse any candidates, and I'm not allowed to tell you who to vote for. But if you look right over there, there's a candidate you might want to think about voting for." [laughter]

Q: It must have been quite interesting for the Church to... The Pope by now is Polish.

JOHNSON: He came to Poland as Pope first in the early '70s and had been back to visit two or three times after that.

Q: That must have given it some running room.

JOHNSON: He took a very active interest in what was going on domestically in Poland and had been there in the summer of '87, about two weeks before we came to visit on the Trans-Siberian Railroad. That had been his second or third visit since he had become Pope. Each time he would add a little more pressure on the regime, and Jaruzelski was very uncomfortable. You'd always see him standing there with the Pope, quaking.

Q: The Pope kept the people's spirits up to be strong and resist.

JOHNSON: One of the priests that I met soon after I got there had been a priest in Chicago for awhile. There were a lot more priests than there were churches in Poland, and a lot more churches than there were priests in this country. The Poles used to export priests, and this guy was fluent in English. He was the Number Three man in the hierarchy, Father Jerzy Dambrowski. I called on him with Senator Levin from Michigan, and Levin asked him the open ended question, "What's the role of the Church in this Communist state?" Fr. Dambrowski said, "The role of the Church is to be the surrogate voice of the Polish people. We are the voice of the Polish people because the Party and the government don't represent the people, and we do." It was a very strong and very accurate statement at the time. Interestingly, in the period since then, after Solidarity came to power, and since free elections, the role of the Church has diminished. Before that they were the proxy voice of all the people.

Another vignette from the same meeting: Sen. Levin had just come from a conference in Berlin discussing the shifting military relationship in Central Europe and the effect these political changes were having. So one of Sen. Levin's questions was, "What is the condition of Poland's military equipment?" He quickly added that he was not seeking classified information, and he recognized that a priest may not be familiar with such a topic. But he tried to ask the same set of questions to everyone he met. Dambrowski

replied that he was certainly not an expert on military equipment, but of course he did speak with soldiers regularly. And based on those conversations, he could say, f rankly, that Polish military equipment was "shit." Well, Sen. Levin and I nearly fell out of our chairs! Dambrowski then said, Oh, perhaps I did not speak accurately; my English is sometimes not too accurate! Levin replied, "Father, your meaning was very clear."

Q: That is probably one of the advantages the Polish situation had. We talk about contributing variables would be the Church, its ability to maintain its organization, ability to maintain its own...

JOHNSON: And its own authority, which is one of the reasons why the concern now about how many people may have collaborated passively if not actively in those days, has had such a damning effect on the Church because the Church was considered the guiding light, the institution that could do no wrong. Times change; people change; circumstances change. Sad to say, but Fr. Dambrowski was killed in an auto accident several months later. He was a fine man, always willing to meet and talk, and very witty.

[cross talk]

Q: What an exciting time to be there. Here you are living this with the Polish people and experiencing at the time that they were experiencing. The Embassy on one hand is the thermometer stuck in the side of the basting turkey, and you're saying it's done. Here's where it is.

JOHNSON: The other vignette I was going to mention was about John Davis. When we did the annual goals and objectives... In January of every year, every post has to send in this thing about goals and objectives, or goals and work plan or whatever; it's called different things from year to year. And every year the Department comes out with a high-priority message saying, "This year it's really important. It actually makes a difference this year for planning purposes." In 1989, when it came time to do this in January, we wrote up the usual thing: more exchange programs, more this, more that, more trade. It came to me for my final chop, and I said, "This isn't really our goals and objectives. Our real goals in this country are to have a functioning democracy friendly to the United States with a free market economy. Let's make that our statement. We'll make that our goal: our Number One goal. We want to see Poland become a democratic free market economy friendly to the United States. John Davis loved it. We sent it in along with all of this other stuff. After the Solidarity election of June 4th and when Solidarity came to power in August, John sent back a one-line cable that said, "My goals have been achieved. I await further instructions." [laughter]

Q: The economic section in its own right is reporting on the status of the economy and what reforms are being...

JOHNSON: In that time there was more talk than action, but there was a lot of concern about the weakness of the economy and how to transform it. After the elections Poland, unlike most of its neighbors, did undertake bold steps to try to transform the economy.

They used to say, “If you’ve got to jump over a canyon, you better make it the first time because you’re not going to get a second chance.”

The guy who was the real leader of the economic reform program there was Leszek Balcerowicz who was an American-trained economist and a brilliant man. His sidekick, who spent several months there during the fall of 1989 to the spring of 1990, was Jeffrey Sachs, then a thirty-some Harvard professor who had worked in Ecuador, I think; somewhere in Latin America. He helped Balcerowicz a lot. Balcerowicz used to say, “We’re never going to have the kind of mandate we have now because the pain of the transformation is going to be so great that a year or two or three from now, people are going to wonder whether this was the right thing to do. We’ve got to do it. We’ve got to introduce the market economy and take our medicine for all the weaknesses of the past.”

The result was that he and the first Solidarity government pushed through a major economic reform program where they stabilized the currency, they stabilized the economy, they brought in a market pricing system. It’s true that in the first year, the economy went through the floor. It had a negative growth rate of 10% or so, maybe more than 10%. The second year was a little better but still negative growth, and by the third year, they were off. They were taking off. By the fourth year -- by the fourth year to the tenth year after Solidarity came in, Poland was the fastest growing economy in Europe. They did a terrific job.

Q: What specifically were the components of this job?

JOHNSON: How they succeeded?

Q: Yes.

JOHNSON: First of all, simply by reforming and setting up a well structured macro economy. The finance system was what started it. Balcerowicz was the finance minister and concurrently the vice prime minister. He oversaw all of that. It was partly a question of getting the prices right, of getting the money right. They reformed the currency, for example, and also getting foreign trade right so they were able then to export some of their goods; even those that were not particularly well made they were able to export for lower prices to Germany. They got rid of the subsidy system. They changed and reformed a lot of the welfare programs, the housing, medical programs, things of that kind.

There was a lot of hurt. People who were on fixed pensions were badly hurt during that time. They suffered a lot because they weren’t getting the monetary benefits of the reforms. Those who had the initiative, those who were able to start new enterprises or produce new products or improve old products, or improve services, they started taking off, and that’s what led to the big improvements.

There were no good hotels in Poland any of the time that I was there until the very end. Marriott opened one, and there were several others getting started. People started to come and spend hard currency in such places.

Q: The currency rules were a significant advantage to the Poles who had relatives in the US. Remittances helped that community. And they would love to come back -- temporarily!

JOHNSON: Which leads me to another vignette. Later that year, November of '89, came the very first visit ever by the Polish-American Congress. The Solidarity government had taken over in about August or early September. The Polish-American Congress had been so adamantly against the Communist government that they refused to come anytime that government was in power. In the fall of 1989 the arrangements...

Jaruzelski was still the President at that point even though Solidarity had taken over the government. This group from the Polish-American Congress came, and they had a meeting with Walesa. The guy who was the head of it said, "Some people in Chicago and elsewhere in America are still very concerned about this divided government. You've given Jaruzelski a position . It's not clear that the reforms are going forward in a way that we'd like to see. We're curious about why you thought it was useful to compromise like this in order to move ahead." Walesa paused, then replied, "Thank you for your candor. If I lived in Chicago, I'd probably think the same way." [laughter] "But I live here, and we have to live with who we are and where we are. We have to do with what we've got, and that's what we've got. We want to see a peaceful process of change, and that's what we're doing."

Q: In this same timeframe, you have Tiananmen Square in China. Do any of those events go back or through the Polish scene enough that the Embassy's reporting on Polish thoughts on Tiananmen Square?

JOHNSON: No. There was so much dynamic change going on inside Poland. The main external reference point was Gorbachev and his perestroika policy, which certainly did have an effect on what was going on in Poland. Also important at the time was the spontaneous movement of East Germans to the East German Embassy in Prague... There were also several hundred East Germans that came to the East German Embassy in Warsaw, but the Poles took care of them in such a way that it never made the press. They basically took them out to a monastery and fed them and took care of them and put them on a train to West Germany, which is basically the same thing that the Czechs did. That was the beginning of the end as far as East Germany was concerned because once people had a guaranteed exit route, the numbers were only going to increase, which they did. At one point in Prague they were saying there were something like 8,000 people in the East German Embassy complex. They had one small building and maybe a fifth of an acre for 8,000 people. Whew! Boy! A real challenge.

The whole structure of Communism in Eastern Europe began to come apart at that time because of those things, because of people voting with their feet and because in the case of Poland, voting with their hands and their hearts.

Q: These became mutually reinforcing.

JOHNSON: In a sense they could say that China was a bad example because of the way the crackdown occurred there. But they weren't looking at China either way, positive or negative, they had such dynamics in their own processes.

Q: With the new Solidarity government, does Poland begin to play a different role in international affairs?

JOHNSON: Yes. It certainly did begin to play a different kind of role in international affairs; in fact, it was one year later when the first Gulf war began, when the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait took place in August of '90. I was chargé at the time. The Davises had just left, and Tom Simons had not yet arrived. The Poles could not have been more supportive. They were incredibly supportive of our position there. They even helped to get some of our people out. For that reason, once our Embassy in Baghdad closed down, we asked the Poles to be our "protecting power" there. They were *so* enthusiastic. They said it was the first time ever that anybody had ever asked them to play that role. The Soviets had never asked them to be their protecting power. They got their best Arabists, their best Middle East specialists, and sent them to Baghdad to be, in effect, our representatives in Iraq at that time.

Q: Isn't it diplomatic fiction that when you leave you turn your affairs over to a colleague, to another mission, and they become your face?

JOHNSON: Your representative. In some places it really is a fiction, like in Cuba where the U.S. Interests Section, it is called, of the Swiss Embassy is actually the same building as the former U.S. Embassy. In Baghdad we really did shut down. Everybody did leave. Whatever remaining interests we had there, whether they had to do with citizenship or property or other things had to be handled by the Poles on our behalf.

Q: There were a number of very interesting American-Polish interactions internationally at this point. I'm not sure you'll remember this, but there was a Polish ship in the Red Sea that got captured. Were you in Warsaw at that time?

JOHNSON: Yes.

Q: We went out and rescued the crew members..

JOHNSON: I remember that. It was a very big deal. Most of the Polish crew members were from Gdansk, Walesa's home town, and from St. Bridget's Church. I went up there the day after we got the word that the crew had been released. Father Jankowski had me sit in the front of the church at the pulpit area, and when it came to that point in the service, because there were hundreds of family members in the church, these crew members had been held for a month or something like that.

[crosstalk]

JOHNSON: They were really, really nervous. When I was able to announce that the crew had been rescued and would be released, there was boisterous applause. It was amazing! That is a good example of how something that takes place a half a world away makes such an enormous difference domestically. The fact that we, you, and others in the U.S. mission in Khartoum were able to bring that off made an enormous difference at that time in Poland.

Q: They were one very happy looking crew when we finally took control.

JOHNSON: Who was your ambassador then?

Q: Creek.

JOHNSON: Jim Creek. I remember that we were sending things back and forth. I remember his name. He personally went out there at that point.

Q: We went in the DAT's C-12.

JOHNSON: Sometimes we do the right thing.

Q: Sometimes we feel very happy about doing the right things because of the totality of the relationship. As we were talking last night, countries interact in such an incredible variety of ways that if you have a positive view toward the interaction, you have more interaction. If you say, "Oh, well, we don't deal with them because they're proliferators" or whatever, then all the other ways you interact, you're telling people, "Don't interact. Don't interact in a positive manner."

JOHNSON: It diminishes what's possible; limits the possible.

Q: By 1990 with the invasion of Kuwait and your time is going to come to an end.

JOHNSON: Actually, I left in the summer of '91, after the US-led invasion of Iraq. I still had most of a year when that happened, but I had a new boss coming, the man who had selected me for that position in the first place and had been delayed for a year. Tom Simons spent a year at Brown University writing a book about the end of the Cold War, interestingly enough. Then he came as Ambassador to Poland in September of 1990. The Davises left in July of 1990 and came back to the United States. Later they went on his last posting, as Ambassador to Romania which began in '91. Tom and Peggy Simons came in September of '90; a new era for Embassy Warsaw began at that point.

Q: Going back to the DCM course because you were saying it teaches you how to be the number one subordinate to the ambassador, but sometimes you're chargé. Here you are, you've been chargé for a very extended period of time, all kinds of things happening, and your boss comes in, and while you're known qualities to each other, you have to fold yourself back in.

JOHNSON: You have to go back to being number two. There were several ways that that was actually pretty easy. One is that I had worked for Tom Simons before in Moscow. He had been my boss in Moscow for my last two years there. He already had had a Polish assignment. His Polish was among the best of anybody in the Foreign Service. I remember at Christmastime that year when he was speaking to all the local employees, one of them leaned over to me and said, "You see? The Americans can learn to do the endings!" Polish is an incredibly complex language, very complex grammatically. Even though I spoke Russian reasonably well, Polish was very much harder for me than Russian was. It's as though they keep these archaic forms in order to make things more difficult as a matter of identity. You have to be a Pole in order to speak Polish. That's the idea.

Tom Simons was terrific because he had been working on Polish affairs in his Washington job during all this drama that was going on a couple of years earlier, and then had been in the academic world for a year, and then came out to Warsaw as chief of mission, a well deserved reward for all of his efforts, and a great time for him to be there.

Q: What do you suppose he saw as his main task at the embassy at this new time?

JOHNSON: We were still going through such a big transition. Maybe the simplest way to summarize that point is when I arrived in January of '88, our biggest concern and certainly our biggest problem was managing the security of the embassy, the physical security and the information security. By the time I left in the summer of '91, the biggest job was running an AID mission. What happened in the summer of '91, in '90 and '91, was that suddenly we couldn't do enough with Poland, and the Congress was throwing money at us, so to speak.

Another vignette: After the elections, in the fall of '89 or the spring of '90, Walesa went to the States. He didn't have a state position at that time. He was not the president, but we invited him anyway and invited him to address a joint session of the Congress, which is quite rare these days. Everybody wanted to have their picture taken with Walesa because he was a great hero. When Walesa got there, there were two aid bills -- two assistance to Poland bills -- that were working their way through the Congress. The House version was proposing five hundred million in combined assistance, and the Senate version was four-fifty. After Walesa's speech, the compromise they reached was nine hundred million.

[laughter]

JOHNSON: So his speech was actually quite valuable for Poland! The administrative result of that was we suddenly had people coming in to run assistance programs of various kinds, and that is a big chore. It's sometimes difficult to do good. Having that kind of endorsement from Washington plus a lot of enthusiastic people coming in meant that we had to find Polish partners for them to work with. They had to be people on the Polish side with whom they could help to run these programs. There weren't enough people who had the right kind of expertise and the right kind of experience to be able to work with people setting up private sector programs.

Q: This is an interesting point I think often gets lost. Traditionally, United States aid isn't just handing somebody a check and saying, "Go to it." We require that the receiving country set up an organization equivalent to ours with accountants and engineers and, in fact, someone has argued over the years that just forcing the other country to organize this human capital as it does was very beneficial to the receiving country alone, let alone if any money or resources passed. Here you are, now you have an AID program for Poland. In your and my experience in Southeast Asia when you're doing this economic development, the other country is a willing partner in this, so he creates his own economic development agency. The Poles were past that point. How do you find a partner for AID?

JOHNSON: With great difficulty because there were different parts of the newly reformed institutional structure that wanted to have that role. For example, the Ministry of Finance wanted to have that role. They wanted to be able to account for everything that was coming in. The Minister of Agriculture wanted to oversee all the programs that were in the ag sector. The Minister of Foreign Affairs, of course, had a role because they wanted to have oversight over what was happening in foreign countries and with foreign donors. It became a mish-mash. The Poles didn't have any real institutional framework. They finally set up something that operated mostly under the Finance Ministry -- at least it did when Balcerowicz was there.

There are a couple of other things to keep in mind about assistance programs: One is that roughly 80% of the U.S. foreign aid budget is spent in the United States. It's not spent by handing it out to people overseas. It's spent mainly for technical assistance, and that's what we were doing in Poland. We were mostly hiring people to come in and help them set up the reformed banking structure or free press institutions or ag reforms, land reforms, things of that kind. We had a lot of people with a lot of good ideas, and that was what they were being paid for was their ideas. I remember one time John Davis said, "We'd do a lot more good if we'd just come in, write some checks, and give them to the qualified people on the Polish side and say, 'Now you guys go out and figure out how to do this,' rather than paying ourselves to do it with them." I think there's still in some countries including Poland, there's still a certain amount of resentment that these large budgetary figures didn't really amount to a lot of assistance in a lot of cases. It involved a lot of talking and a lot of airplane rides. I remember again that John said, "The greatest beneficiary of the U.S. AID program in Poland is the Marriott Hotel," because that's where they all stayed, where the contractors all stayed.

Looked at from the inside, the biggest problem of running the AID program was all of the issues of accountability and personnel. You had to take care of the people, you had to be sure they had a place to stay, there was housing, office space. AID is a very unwieldy institution. It's very top heavy. Their overseas personnel are nearly all at the Minister-Counselor level or above. In many cases, they're the second ranking person in the mission after the Ambassador, in many cases outranking the DCM. It's not a user friendly organization.

Even though I've come to have a lot of respect for professionals in the AID bureaucracy -- the people who make things happen in the field -- it's difficult. It's truly difficult to manage it in an integrated way that makes the assistance program a complete and integral part of the way the mission operates overseas. It's not like public diplomacy which has always been a well-integrated part, at least in the missions where I've served. USIA and public diplomacy have always been a valuable and relatively small but important part of the way we manage ourselves overseas.

Q: How do you find housing for all these people and the contractors who take over the Marriott Hotel? Most of them are contractors.

JOHNSON: I'm talking about long-term contractors who were part of the AID mission. You do it in two ways: One is you enable the admin section of the embassy to do this on the same basis that they would for any other part of the organization, whether it's the defense attaches or the ag attaches or AID. It shouldn't make any difference. The admin process should be the same, except with AID it's not. They always bring their own admin people, and they have their own budgets and their own housing and their own cars and their own everything. Getting AID to participate as a co-equal part, including being a subordinate part on occasion of other parts of the embassy, is extremely difficult. It's not something I can say I succeeded in doing when we were in Warsaw. I think in subsequent years as the mission got smaller -- as Poland's economy grew -- our AID presence decreased which is fine. That's the way it should be. I think after a certain period of time it became a part of the embassy more or less functioning like the others. In the early stages it was very difficult.

Q: I'm not sure I understand what's difficult about it.

JOHNSON: They wanted to come in as a whole separate... They wanted to bring an AID mission the same as it would be in Zimbabwe or someplace else. We take care of our own housing, our own cars, our own everything. If it ends up that we have 5,000 square feet and everybody else in the embassy has 2,000, well, that's too bad. That's our standard. The idea of making AID play by the same rules as everybody else plays by was in this case extremely difficult. In Lithuania, on the other hand, I set out the guidelines in the beginning, and it worked fine, but it was a much smaller mission.

Q: I suspect one of the things you're saying is there's so much enthusiasm in your venue out of Congress that in one sense you were kind of rolled. There would be an ignition.

JOHNSON: In a sense, yes, you could say that because there was so much money and so much enthusiasm that, therefore, they came in with such a big head. My experience talking with others who have lived and worked in countries where we have large AID missions is that this is quite typical. It wasn't exceptional in that regard. The only thing that was exceptional was that it was Poland. It could just as well have been Zimbabwe or Peru or who knows where else. Disruptive. You end up spending a vast amount of money on the overhead operation, and the actual benefits for the recipients were not commensurate. By the way, one of the people in the AID mission for awhile was Dick

Cheney's daughter. She had a fairly senior position, but she was easy to get along with. The Poles knew she was there and even offered to provide dedicated guard service, but we declined, in the absence of any threat.

Q: So this was a late AID program, if you will. AID had been going on in Southeast Asia and... It's been around for years.

JOHNSON: Another program that we had at that time, a new program that came in in '90 or early '91 was Peace Corps. We had never had Peace Corps in Europe under Communist rule. But they started in Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary. The first group was mostly doing English language teaching at the university level or upper high school level; teacher training, also.

The second group was a small business group. There were about 30 of them. As a prerequisite they had to have had at least five years experience in business before coming on that program. They did a wonderful job. Their Polish partners in these enterprises were very eager for change to try to make their enterprises competitive on the global market. We had some that were small ag enterprises, chicken farms and that kind of thing where they were looking to upgrade their stock and their marketing ability. They had other things like a rug factory and lots of other small scale enterprises. They did a fine job, but the Volunteers occasionally became impatient to be able to show results sooner.

The Peace Corps program in those three countries closed after 10 years because of the feeling that the economic progress in those countries had been such that Peace Corps was no longer necessary. It wasn't appropriate to have Peace Corps in those countries once they reached a certain economic level. The Polish program closed down about the year 2000, so it was about 10 years or 11 years that they had the Peace Corps in Poland.

Capstone; Promotion Board

Q: Interesting. Did your Polish assignment come to an end in the summer of '91? Prior to that you had to start thinking about what you were going to go on to.

JOHNSON: I was replaced as number two there by the guy who had been the Consul General in Krakow earlier. We had two consulates in Poland; both had been there forever. Michael Hornblow had been the Consul General in Krakow when I got to Warsaw, and I used to see him quite often. He replaced me as DCM in the summer of 1991 under Tom Simons. Mike's a good guy.

JOHNSON: As far as my own onward assignment, in 1991,I had put in several bids. I don't actually remember what they all were now, but I remember that when I left Warsaw in June of 1991, I didn't have an onward assignment. So I didn't know what I was going to be doing in Washington. For the near term, I was assigned to chair a promotion board, something that nearly all of us do at some point. But that did not start until late July or August, so I was assigned to take the "Capstone" course. That was a program that was set up by the Pentagon -- actually, by the Congress -- to help the people in senior military

ranks to integrate once they got above the one star level. It's a mandatory program for new admirals and generals and has one State Department position in each course. The course is run four or five times a year depending on how many people are promoted in the military ranks. Normally, the State position is filled by a serving ambassador, but in my case, I had the right rank but did not yet have the right experience. But they sent me to that course anyway, in July of '91.

A digression: when I first got to Washington in June of '91, I was deployed to the Operations Center to do the midnight shift, reading cables, watching the TV news, writing a short summary first thing in the morning. It was late June/early July, as I recall, and the big foreign affairs story was the growing conflict in former Yugoslavia. At that point, before it really spread, the focus was on a Serbian enclave in the northeast part of Croatia bordering Serbia. I don't remember what that region was called, but the main town was Vukovar, and the fighting in that region was already pretty bad. On the political front, Slovenia had already declared its independence from Yugoslavia, and Croatia was about to do the same. The effect was not only to bring about the disintegration of Yugoslavia, but to stimulate conflict between peoples of different ethnicities in the areas where they overlapped. The violence was still not widespread, but the intensity of those skirmishes was very high. Later the conflict moved east and south, to the point where Bosnia became the center, and neighbors took their stand against their neighbors. The precipitating cause was Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic's pledge to make it possible for all Serbs to live in something called Serbia. Since that was obviously impossible without re-drawing the boundaries, Milosevic supported the separate Serb enclaves in Croatia and Bosnia.

An interesting sidebar: Lawrence Eagleburger knew more about former Yugoslavia than any senior US official. He had served there early in his career, and later as Ambassador. And his view was that this conflict was basically not our business. It was Europe's business. Yet he and others became frustrated that the Europeans seemed unable or unwilling to formulate an effective peace-keeping or peace-making policy. The conflict did not stop until the US decided to take a hands-on role through the Dayton negotiations, under the leadership of Richard Holbrooke, who was then the Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs (EUR). Holbrooke recruited me to work on the Dayton implementation team, particularly in the so-called "train and equip" program. The idea was to help the Bosnians and the Croats build armed forces that were adequate to deter the Serbs. This part of the Dayton process actually worked, despite some tragic events on the way to success.

I did a temporary assignment in Bosnia in 1996, shortly after the Dayton process was concluded and there was an effective ceasefire in the region. I'll get to that stage in due course.

Back to the Capstone program in 1991: It was really interesting because of the 31 or 32 people in the course, seven had just come back from the first Gulf War. Their experience in terms of what actually happened there was really interesting and important. They were able to give us a lot of perspective, ground truth, if you like. Every institution we visited,

whether it was the European Bureau at State (EUR), or the Department of the Army or another institution, they were always the ones who won the war. No matter who it was you were talking to, they won the war. Having some people with some real live experience in the course helped a lot in terms of perspective of what actually went on during that conflict.

Q: Wasn't this part of the Goldwater-Nickels program?

JOHNSON: It was.

Q: The anticipation was that senior officers from all of the services would get together and be able to work more jointly.

JOHNSON: Jointness was the word.

Q: Jointness is the word, and they even tossed in a State Department guy for more jointness and more social skills. It's a combination, if I understand, of coursework and field travel.

JOHNSON: That's right. It's about an eight week program, and it was good. I enjoyed it a lot. We had classes every day. In fact, the first hour of the first day was the then-Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, Colin Powell, who came to talk to us almost without notes for an hour. It was absolutely brilliant. One of the things that so impressed me about it was that here was four star General Powell talking to people who had just gotten their first stars. But his manner was such that it was really us talking with each other. "Someday one of you is going to be sitting in this chair, and I want you to know what it feels like. This is what I've been doing for the last several days." He talked about arms control, he talked about some of the discipline issues in the armed forces. He talked about a number of other things, and it was as though it were not at all rehearsed, and yet for the following eight weeks of the course, almost everywhere we went we would hear echoes of these themes that he had put out to us that first morning. Obviously he was completely mentally organized in terms of the messages that he had to convey both in terms of substance and in terms of style. It was a magnificent performance.

Q: Was the Capstone program run out of National Defense University?

JOHNSON: That's correct. I'm told it's like the year-long course, the regular course that people take, except that it's compressed into eight weeks. We did a fair amount of travel. We traveled to different bases in the United States, we traveled abroad. It's the only time I've been to Latin America, Central America. We went to Panama and Honduras and Nicaragua, and also to Canada.

One thing that happened toward the end of that course which made a decisive difference in my future... The timing was such that the course was going to end around mid-August, and then I was supposed to go to this promotion board. A week before the end of the course, we were in Canada, and the news of the world that day was about the coup

attempt against Gorbachev when he was visiting the Crimea. That in turn set off wheels in Washington about normalizing relations with the Baltic countries. This is something about which there had been a lot of pressure from the Baltic-American communities in the States, especially the Lithuanians, seeking to use this period of change in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union for the US to establish -- or re-establish -- full diplomatic relations with the Baltic countries.

To compress the story a bit, less than a week later President Bush -- the first President Bush -- decided to do that, to recognize the Baltic countries and to establish embassies in those three places. By that time I was on the promotion board and had gone through the first batch of cases on the board. Then the decision was made by Secretary Eagleburger that I was going to go to Lithuania, that I would open the first US Embassy in Lithuania. We were also going to open embassies in Latvia and Estonia at the same time. This was in August of '91; the Capstone course had finished just before that.

So I went to the person who was responsible for the promotion boards and said, "Look, I'm going to have to break out of this because I'm going to leave next week to open this mission." She said, "No, can't do it. Gotta stay here. Never in 30 years has anybody been broken out of a promotion panel, because in order to do that, you'd have to go back and do all of the files all over again and appoint someone else as the head of a new panel." In fact, I did leave the promotion panel. And another guy on a different panel, Bob Frazier, was sent to Estonia at the same time I was sent to Lithuania. What my promotion board did was to close those cases that had already been reviewed and reconstitute the board with the new chairman for the subsequent cases. It wasn't actually that disruptive, but it was interesting that it had never happened before, then it happened twice in the same summer.

Back to Capstone. I got this call while we were in Ottawa visiting the Canadians, and it became clear that what was going on in Eastern Europe might have some implications for my future.

Q: Who called you?

JOHNSON: It was Bill Montgomery. Bill was then Eagleburger's special assistant, his number one special assistant, and Eagleburger at that point was the acting Secretary. Bill and I had both worked for Eagleburger several years earlier when he had been Under Secretary for Political Affairs. So we knew each other well. Bill asked whether I would be willing to have my name put forward as a candidate to be Ambassador to Mongolia. Having been to Mongolia twice, I confess that that possibility did not thrill me. But I said ok, but not eagerly. Then Bill said that they could not just give Eagleburger one name. I then said that the person he really wanted to talk with was Don Johnson, who had been my deputy in Beijing and would be really eager to go to Mongolia. So I avoided Mongolia and Don Johnson did indeed go as Ambassador.

But this game was not over, and a few days later, after we got back from Canada, I stopped by to see Bill and to ask whether there was any news about the Baltics. He

paused and said, “Johnson, we have just decided your future!” Eagleburger had just decided that I would go to open the first American Embassy in the Republic of Lithuania.

Q: Friends taking care of friends?

JOHNSON: Sort of. I had served in Moscow and in Poland, so I had the right credentials.

Q: And the right connections.

[crosstalk]

Q: Could you describe the promotion panel business? A lot of people don’t understand how Foreign Service Officers get their promotions.

JOHNSON: Everybody is evaluated in the spring of every year. The evaluator is usually the section chief or the person who is responsible from the next line up. For example, the Ambassador will be the evaluator for his DCM and his secretary, usually, and perhaps other agency heads although that depends. Often times other agencies will have an evaluation process which is quite similar, so the Ambassador is the one who writes and signs those evaluations.

The largest number of evaluations is usually done by the DCM because he/she does all the State Department section chiefs. He has to write a fairly complete assessment of how that person has performed over the previous year. Then the Ambassador will do a review statement commenting on the evaluation and trying to add some additional perspective so that the person who reads the file on the promotion board will have a sense of how this particular individual performed his or her duties.

Q: It’s not just checking a couple of boxes: satisfactory, adequate, whatnot. It’s a written evaluation.

JOHNSON: It’s a written evaluation, and it can be quite torturous because you have to be careful about the use of adjectives and adverbs -- not everybody can be the most important or the most successful person I’ve ever met in my last 35 years in this business.

The group for whom I was the chairman of the evaluation board was for secretaries: senior level, mid level, and would have been junior level secretaries, although I ended up leaving before they got to the junior ones. Of the files that I read and, by the way, it’s a very demanding process, you have less than ten minutes to read the whole file, and you can read back to three years before the year that you’re currently considering. It’s usually a fairly big file. There’s quite a bit to look at and to read and to try to figure out the buzz words.

There were about 120 that we did in the two weeks that I was on the board. You have to rate each set of ten -- ten, nine, eight, seven, six, five, four, three, two, one -- in descending order of promotability, of evaluation. Not everybody can be a number 10.

This is a rigorous effort, and the other people on the panel have to do the same thing. The only ones who are considered eligible for the promotion are those in the top 20%. The tens and the nines, in other words, are considered promotable, depending on the number that can be promoted in a given year. I found it amusing that of the 120 or so files that I read, 50 at least said, "This person is the finest office manager I've met in my 35 years in the Foreign Service." They can't all be the best you've ever met in 35 years! One comes to the point of discounting rhetoric of that kind.

Q: ...pay per performance. It always struck me that the promotion panels were looking very finitely at that issue. "Look. Everybody can't be the best secretary I ever had in 30 years." It sounds to me the way the promotion panel must have worked in the Foreign Service all these years that, in fact, you are looking at performance, and it is a very fine sifting of people's tours and careers. You and I have always sat there when the promotion list came out and said, "How did that guy ever make it?" Is this the first panel you've ever sat on?

JOHNSON: Yes. I sat on one in Moscow, but it was within the Embassy.

Q: To see that all the considerations coming out of that mission that the evaluations were subject to one last rough screening. Did you have the sense that the panel was looking for performance?

JOHNSON: Yes. One of the things that you learn early on is that to some extent you can separate those that are really, really the top cut and those that are the bottom cut. The difficulty is separating, say, between the third and the seventh percentile. That was the hard part. You don't want to disadvantage people. You want to be sure that you're encouraging people who have had adequate performance. At a certain point you also -- at least we did -- tend to give some additional weight to time in grade for people who have a good steady record over time. Maybe they're not the top cut. Maybe they're not the top 10%, but they're good enough to continue being encouraged to move ahead.

Likewise, we got to the point of saying that we're not going to promote people who had only been promoted two years earlier. In theory that's not permitted. In theory you're supposed to look at each file as though it's the whole picture of that individual without regard to any other extraneous factors. You do have to take account if this is somebody who was just promoted a year or two ago. You say, "Give him/her another year at this level, and if they continue to do well, they might deserve it next year." Similarly, somebody who's been in grade five years and has consistently good marks but not quite good enough to get promoted, we tended to select those.

Q: As you said, you're looking at the annual evaluations over a period of time. You're actually able to see a progression, particularly if the individual has different bosses.

JOHNSON: It's a big advantage for somebody to have different bosses. If they have the same one, it's almost inevitable you're not going to get different styles of reporting and not a lot of differentiation in terms of what the person did. The other thing that I found

very instructive there is that by being able to look back -- I guess actually you could look back five years, I guess you could look back five, at least three -- and if you had a different evaluator during that time, you could find quite different styles of the evaluation reflecting a different performance.

In one case we had such a glowing report from this person, but it was the first year that this person had been evaluated by Party A shall we say. If you went back to year two and year three and year four before this, the reports were very mediocre. The evaluations were, "Yes, the person comes to work and leaves on time," but there wasn't anything about this high fluffery of performance. Either that means that the person has performed dramatically better in the most recent year, or it means that the evaluator feels that he's obligated to try to get this person a promotion. It tends to diminish the effect of the high flown language.

Q: On the other hand, do you catch other things like some mean SOB of a supervisor who just plain doesn't like him, and he's doing well, and he drops in a hole, gets done with that assignment or that boss and proceeds on. You can see that.

JOHNSON: You can, but it's harder with the secretaries/office managers, and I think with technical people because the definition of what they're supposed to do is so similar. If you presume that the person does it reasonably well, it is difficult to distinguish between someone who's really good at computer work or really good at making appointments and managing the front office from someone in the econ section who has a similar task.

Q: The other members of the board represent different ranks and different career cones.

JOHNSON: There's always one who is a career office manager on the board, and there's always one who's a non-State Department person who comes from the private sector in most cases or conceivably from another branch of government, but usually from the private sector. I think there were five people on my panel, and we really worked.

Q: I would presume that the backgrounds of your teammates would allow somebody to turn to them. What does this mean? If you're not familiar with office work, somebody's being credited with something. The State Department has within its own structure this fine sifting of people's performance. It knows.

JOHNSON: In some ways the officer evaluations are easier because you could differentiate more what the number two person in the econ section is doing versus the number two person in the general services section. It's harder with the office managers and the technical people.

Vilnius

Q: You were saying that you got the word that things were suddenly going to open up for the Baltic states. These are the old Hanseatic League trading towns, and that you'd been picked to go to Vilnius, and everything moved very quickly.

JOHNSON: I got that word on a Friday, and President Bush announced the re-normalization of relations with the three Baltic countries the following Monday, which was September 2 that year, and was Labor Day. And by the way, we had never recognized the Baltics as being legitimate parts of the Soviet Union. We continued to -- at least on paper -- recognize them as independent countries.

Q: From the 1930's.

JOHNSON: That's right. Including the fact that they had embassies in Washington, or legations in Washington that were headed by people who had been somehow affiliated with the previous pre-war regime. I was selected for Lithuania partly because I had been in Poland, and Poland and Lithuania had been a common kingdom for many hundreds of years in the late Renaissance era, and because I had also served in Moscow. By coincidence, Vilnius was the only Baltic capital that I had visited during my time in Moscow.

We were not encouraged to go there. Most of the reporting on the Baltic countries came out of the St. Petersburg (Leningrad) consulate. The ambassador to Moscow was not permitted to go to the Baltic countries because it might have been considered a form of acknowledging the Soviet legitimacy in those places. But consulate officers from St. Petersburg could go because they did not have a nation-wide role, and embassy officers could go. So I went with a visiting Hill staffer one time who was of Lithuanian origin, and we spent two days in Vilnius. It was an interesting irony and coincidence that 15 or so years later I was going back to head the first American mission in Vilnius. I should emphasize that it was the first ever there because in the inter war period, although we did have diplomatic relations with the Baltic countries, at that time Vilnius was under the control of the Poles: the Poles under Pilsudski.

The temporary capitol was in Kaunas; we had a "Legation" in Kaunas headed by a "Minister." It was not an "Embassy," and it was not headed by an "Ambassador." So it is technically correct to say that the Embassy that we established in the fall of 1991 was the first U.S. Embassy ever to the Republic of Lithuania, established in Vilnius. Interestingly, our office building is what used to be called the "Foreign Ministry" of the Soviet Socialist Republic of Lithuania. All the Soviet republics except Russia had their own foreign ministries which, I guess, was part of the fiction that they were all part of the Soviet Union by choice. They all had their own foreign ministries. What it really meant was that they took care of foreign visitors who came there. It was a nice little house and was perfect for our mission and still is. They are still using the same building as our Embassy.

Q: How could this have been chosen prior to your arrival?

JOHNSON: It wasn't. After President Bush announced the renewal of our diplomatic relations with the Baltic countries on September 2,nd we moved quickly and one week later, the advance team was there. I actually arrived one day after that; the other people went in through Helsinki; I came in via Warsaw. We had advance teams of five people in each of the three Baltic countries. The five included an admin officer, a reporting office, a public affairs officer, a consular officer and the head of the advance team. The other four had already arrived; I went in by way of Warsaw because they wanted us to have an official car up there because Secretary Baker was going to come to visit later in that week. So I borrowed the ambassador's car in Warsaw, Tom Simons' official car. I had only left two or three months earlier, and was coming back now as head of mission in a neighboring country. I drove up across the border and went into Vilnius the next day, on Tuesday the tenth of September 1991, in this big, black Cadillac limousine. Easy to spot!

It was dramatic. I was in Warsaw for a day and a half on that trip, then drove on up there. The closer we got to the border, the more deserted the area was, and it became very clear that the borders of the Soviet Union were not only forbidding if you were leaving to go, say, to Finland or someplace, a non-communist country. The borders were even forbidding when you were going to one of the neighboring so-called Warsaw Pact or "friendly" countries. There was very little traffic across that border at that time, but the border guards had been alerted, and we were told that we were not supposed to deal with the Russian border guards: We were only supposed to deal with the Lithuanian border guards on the other side when we crossed from Poland. I say "we", but it actually was only me in a car full of goodies and a driver.

There was only one driver at the U.S. Embassy in Warsaw who had a passport, so he was the one who drove me to Vilnius. They managed to get a visa for him to cross over and to go all the way to Vilnius. It was a quite long trip. As I recall, it was about six hours to the border in the far northeastern corner of Poland, and then it was almost an hour actually doing the technicalities of crossing, getting the documents stamped, and so forth. Then it was close to an hour from there to the hotel in Vilnius, the Friendship Hotel -- the Draugyste Hotel in Lithuanian or Druzba in Russian -- it was a typical Soviet style dump.

That was where our team was, so we met and had dinner together that night, on the 10th of September. The 11th and 12th and most of the 13th we spent getting ready for Secretary Baker's visit. He dropped out of the sky on the afternoon of Friday the 13th of September of that year, 1991. He had earlier in that day spent about two or three hours in Estonia and then had gone from there to Latvia and then from there to Lithuania, the third stop on the trip. It was a beautiful autumn afternoon, and the parliament building, which is where the government was headquartered in Vilnius, was surrounded by barbed wire because they had been under a form of siege for a couple of years from the Soviet forces that were based there as the Lithuanians marched forward to independence. They had declared independence in March of 1990 but it had not yet been recognized by most countries.

The tensions built as the Lithuanians tried to demonstrate more and more autonomy and a functioning government. On January 13th of '91 just at the time that the Gulf War was flaring up, the Soviets unleashed their tanks on a huge crowd of mostly young people at

the TV tower in Vilnius where they were trying to take control of the TV broadcasts. 12 were killed, one died later, and several others were badly injured. Then they stopped. The Soviet tanks stopped at that point, and returned to their barracks in the center of town. It may have been because President Bush called Gorbachev or it may have been for some other reason, but in any case they stopped, and that was the end of that thrust by the Soviets.

One of the things that occurred during the first year that we were there was the beginning of the withdrawal of the Soviet troops. Of course, we intervened to help make this happen, and the UN was involved as well. Within a few months, the Soviet troops started to leave and the barbed wire came down. At the time that Baker came and for the first several months when we were there, that barbed wire was all around this parliament building, and you had to be escorted to get through. They also had barriers along the street and big cement blocks. You had to drive a zigzag route to get through those things to get to the parliament building, to get inside the compound. It was a little tense there during the first several months, but we were certainly enthusiastically welcomed by the Lithuanians.

Lithuanians have a diaspora like the Poles do. Every Lithuanian has a cousin in Chicago or a brother or sister or aunt or uncle or something. There's an enormous Lithuanian community in this country, relatively speaking. The total population of the country is a little under four million -- 3.8 million -- but in the United States they have almost one million -- between eight and nine hundred thousand people of Lithuanian origin, so you can get an idea of the proportions. By no coincidence the Lithuanians in this country were directly instrumental in putting pressure on and demonstrating for the U.S. Government to support the newly independent countries in the Baltic region. During our time there, there were a lot of Americans of Lithuanian origin who came back to visit: some because they were visiting family, some because they had never been there. They wanted to see this place. There was a quite steady stream, and some of the Lithuanian-Americans moved on to important positions in the government.

One of the latter group at the time was the head of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in Chicago for the Great Lakes region. His name is Valdas Adamkus, and he served as President of Lithuania for two terms. He used to say that his budget for the EPA in Chicago was bigger than his budget for the entire country of Lithuania.

Q: You worked for the State Department, and it's in charge of overseeing your operations. How is it that you get designated and the team get there and you find an embassy in one week? This is pretty fast moving for the State Department, isn't it?

JOHNSON: It was fast moving, but we had a mandate to do this as did our colleagues in Latvia and in Estonia as well. Our main business when we first got there was to establish the embassy. Anything beyond that was considered gravy. We didn't have to do any reporting to speak of and certainly didn't have the usual kind of mandated reporting that the Department sends out now and then. Our job was to find a place to work and to live

and to get the mission up and going. We worked very hard for the first three or four weeks.

Q: As you say, the Lithuanians were very cooperative. Had you said you want those three buildings...

JOHNSON: Just about. We were the fourth to get there. The Danes and the Swedes had a contest among themselves to see which one could claim to have been the first one there. The Swedes actually had established an information office previously, but it wasn't technically an embassy. The Danes had sent in one of their senior most diplomats to establish their presence, and then he left. They sent in another full-time ambassador later. The third ones to arrive were the Germans, who had arrived a couple of days before we did, and we arrived on that Monday, as I mentioned, with our advance team. The French arrived at the end of the same week, so we were the first five.

Then others kept coming: The Italians came later, the Turks came later. They had an embassy there that was accredited to all three of the Baltic countries but resident in Vilnius. The Chinese came later. Originally I think they thought they would be able to work out of Warsaw. But our friends from Taiwan got very active around that time, and sent a mission to all three of the Baltic countries and, in fact, invited the head of the Government of Latvia to visit Taipei -- which he accepted. Needless to say, the Beijing Chinese got very exercised about that and quickly assigned officers to come there as permanent representatives and to become ambassadors/heads of mission. The guy who came to Vilnius came from their embassy in Moscow. He had been the Chinese political counselor in Moscow until he came to Vilnius.

A short vignette: I was calling on the Foreign Minister one day, Saudargas was his name. At one point, he asked me to wait in his reception room. So I waited for what turned out to be about 20 minutes. Then he came back, all hush, hush, and said he had been meeting with a delegation from China, right next door, and that they were insisting that Lithuania not have any official dealings with Taiwan. He wanted my "advice" on how to handle this issue. I quickly replied that I was not in a position to give him advice. But because I had a lot of experience working on China issues, I went over some historical high points of our relationship, including the way we handled the "one China" issue and the "three communiqués" and the Taiwan Relations Act. I emphasized that other countries used different approaches, and he might want to talk with some who handled this matter differently. He thanked me and we then discussed other issues. And the Chinese opened their embassy in Vilnius about three weeks later.

The Japanese first accredited their Ambassador to Warsaw -- a good friend who had previously served in Washington. The Australians assigned their Ambassador to Denmark, a friend from my time in Hong Kong and later in Moscow. There were about 20 resident embassies, including the Vatican, by the time we left three years later.

The Vatican reminds me, we had a three-day visit by Pope John Paul II in 1993. He stayed in Vilnius, at the Nuncio's Residence, traveling to different places in Lithuania

and in the other Baltic countries, although Latvia and Estonia were not predominantly Catholic. He also held a small session for the resident diplomats. That visit was a very big deal for the Lithuanians.

Q. This is interesting because the Foreign Service hasn't had to do this since the independence of the Africans and those countries in the 1960's.

JOHNSON: Yes, it was a new adventure! I must say, we got very good support from Washington, probably because it was something new and interesting and different. We got good admin support. We formally opened the doors of the American Embassy building on October 2, 1991, exactly one month from the date President Bush announced the resumption of diplomatic relations. I then came back to DC for consultations after that. We knew pretty much at that point what we needed to do.

To go back to your question about the facilities: There weren't any facilities there at the time we arrived, so we set up our operations in a hotel room. We had a phone system that would allow us to send faxes. Nothing classified. It all had to be unclassified, so we did the business we had to do.

Fortunately, we had a very good Lithuanian-American admin officer. One of the first things he did was to make friends with the hotel staff including the hotel management. He asked the woman who was in charge of the hotel whether there were any houses available. She said, "There's this one place that the hotel manages on behalf of the Communist Party." It was a guest house for party dignitaries who came in to Vilnius on occasion. He went and looked at it and said, "Gee, this looks like a good place for an ambassador's residence or maybe even an office." We took it as an office initially. The woman who ran the hotel said, "This is the equivalent of five hotel rooms, so we'll charge you five times the normal hotel room rate which was about five rubles. It was incredibly cheap -- it came to like $13.00 a day or something like that for this house. Needless to say, we signed it up for a long-term lease at that rate and gradually fixed it up to use as an office. The main dining room became the consular interviewing section. There was one room off to one side that we used as a public affairs office. My office was down at the other end. We got up and running and we invited the President of the country, Mr. Vytautas Landsbergis, to join in the ribbon cutting, which he did. I've got pictures of the two of us cutting the ribbon and having a little glass of champagne, a little toast of champagne, on October 2nd. It was a red letter day! As we got more settled, we then realized that this building would be adequate as a residence but would not be adequate as an office for the long term without major renovation.

So we were looking around for an office building. In this regard, we got quite lucky. One advantage of being there early was that we got to look at the building that had housed the so-called Soviet Socialist Republic of Lithuania's foreign ministry, which was about two blocks from where this residence was, from where this house was. We looked at it. They were asking a lot more than I thought was reasonable, but Washington thought otherwise. They had designated a man who had been Ambassador to Hungary and who was a real estate tycoon by background. He was tasked to go around to places where we had

established new missions, including all three of the Baltic countries, and negotiate for permanent facilities: buy the facilities, if possible, or make long-term leases. He came and negotiated.

The deal the Lithuanians proposed was $1.1 million for this building that would become the embassy office, and the residence, and the surrounding parkland. I thought that was an awful lot, given the prices that we were used to at that time. But he was much more pragmatic than I was. He said, "First of all, what's the point of bargaining? So you're going to be able to knock it down a little bit. Do we need this or don't we? Can we afford it or not?" He sold me, and he went back and sold Washington on it, and we bought the place. Then about three or four months later, we had a visit by then-Vice President Quayle and officially opened that building as our permanent embassy. It's still the permanent embassy. We've expanded some since then, but it was the right decision and the right time, and we made a lot of progress in a short amount of time.

Q: How long were the Quayles there?

JOHNSON: For a full day. He went to the other two places first, came to Vilnius last. That was on February 7, 1992. People used to say that Quayle was lucky. In this case he certainly was. This was the dead of winter in the Baltics: short days and long nights and cold. The day before he was due to arrive, it snowed like crazy. The snow was then followed by a dense fog. No planes were coming in or going out.

The advance planes were already there, the C-130's and the people bringing in equipment for the support of the VP's visit. Comes the morning of the 7th, the Quayles are going to be flying down from Helsinki that day. Brilliantly clear, sunny day, about four feet of snow all over the place, neatly cleaned. He comes in and lands and spends the day there and gives a very nice speech on the steps on the national library which is just next to the parliament building. Thousands of people out there, TV cameras. Still had barbed wire around the parliament building. Had a wonderful dinner, good meetings. He and his entourage then went back, got on the plane and left to go to the opening of the Winter Olympics in Grenoble that were starting the next day. Next day nobody could get out. Weather socked in again, the same as it had been the previous day.

Elaine Chao, who was then the Director of the Peace Corps, was there, and she was stuck at the airport for seven or eight hours. It was amazing! The visit was a big success and Quayle was terrific. We've still got a picture of him cutting the ribbon with Prime Minister Vagnorius and me at the door of the embassy building.

Q" How is the embassy organized?

JOHNSON: That was a bare bones mission. There was not a DCM designated in the small posts. There were ambassadors, then the next senior other officer in our case was the econ officer, so he was econ/acting DCM. When I was away, he was in charge. He was a Lithuanian-American. His previous post had been as number two econ officer in Canada. It was quite interesting. When we were staffing all three of the Baltic posts, the

Department ran a computer check of people who had language skills in those three languages.

They found in the case of Lithuania that there were seven officers in the Foreign Service who had Lithuanian language capability. The more interesting thing was that they also had exactly the right mix of skills. For example, we had a senior econ officer; we had a junior political officer; we had a mid-level admin officer; we had a junior public affairs officer based in Norway at that time. We asserted priority, and all these people except the admin guy came and worked at the first U.S. Embassy in Vilnius. It was great! They had the language capabilities: the econ officer, the political officer, and the public affairs officer, all three of them were excellent speakers of Lithuanian. In fact, one was a native speaker. He had grown up there his first five or six years before coming to the States as an immigrant after the War.

In the case of Latvia, the ambassador was a speaker of Latvian, Ints Silins. Do you know him?

Q: No.

JOHNSON: He's a Foreign Service Officer from my generation, and he had the right rank and the right experience. He'd served in Moscow, spoke Russian, and spoke Latvian. He became the Ambassador to Latvia. In the case of Estonia, there were two officers who had Estonian, one admin officer and someone else. It worked out that we had the right people in the right places at the right time.

Q: That's fascinating. One of the things that you haven't touched on: You were sent out directly as chief of mission, but you're supposed to be an ambassador. As ambassador, you're supposed to get congressional hearings.

JOHNSON: That's right. When we went out, even though the Lithuanians and the Americans always referred to us as an "Embassy" and to me as the "Ambassador," technically my official title according to my travel orders was "Advance Team Leader." In the course of these first few months, we were opening the building and calling it an embassy. And we had to take care of these other procedures, like confirmation hearings, as well. One of the beneficial byproducts of Vice-President Quayle's visit was that after he came, the process in Washington moved a lot more quickly. They were waiting for paperwork to be done. They were going to do all three of us at the same time. I had sent in my papers three months earlier in November, but they weren't going to act on them until everything was in order for all three of us from the Baltics.

After Quayle came we got word within one week that the paperwork was going to be sent to the Hill that week and the Senate Foreign Relations Committee would call and let us know when the hearings were going to be. We were soon told that the hearings were set for the second of March, so it was less than a month later after Quayle's visit that we were called back and had our hearings together, the three of us, on the second of March, 1992. One senator who was in the hearings was Senator Pell, for whom I had worked as a

Pearson Fellow exactly 10 years earlier to the day. The second of March was the day I had left his office back in 1982. Pell also had a special interest in the Baltic states because he had been the Baltic desk officer in the State Department in 1946 or 1947, in the early post-War period.

Q: Do I hear a grease hearing?

JOHNSON: Something like that! He asked a few questions, but it was not a difficult interview.

Q: I've interviewed other ambassadors in this series, particularly for the political appointees there is a long process prior to the Congressional hearings or that you're briefed at the Department. I get the impression that yours was on a fast track.

JOHNSON: It was pretty much a fast track.

Q: You knew what you were doing because you were a career officer. They needed to move this forward.

JOHNSON: There were a few questions about the relationship, but they had mostly to do with the kinds of programs that we expected to move forward. They were very positive, Pell's questions. There were several questions from other senators as well that were submitted in writing to us, so we dealt with those. For example, both Estonia and Latvia had major issues having to do with the Russian minority population and how they would fit in with the newly independent states, the newly independent Baltic republics. Lithuania, fortunately, didn't have that problem. They did have some ethnic differences among the people, but they had only small minorities. The Poles constituted about 9% of the population and Russians about 7%. It was not a big problem. Lithuania was quite ethnically homogeneous, so they didn't have that problem, but the others did. There were a few other things. There were some economic issues, and there were certainly some issues involving US citizen interests, consular related issues.

Q: I suspect given the kind of historical background of these countries, there's probably somebody trying to reclaim the family home that the Russians seized in 1930.

JOHNSON: There was some of that. There was more of that in Poland, but some in Lithuania as well.

Q: How did those kinds of issues get handled?

JOHNSON: With difficulty. At that time when I was there, there was no encompassing law. They were debating a law about the return of property that had been seized by the state at some point in the past. There was a big debate about how much of this should be made available to "foreigners." There was a certain sense that "foreigners," no matter how difficult the circumstances might have been when they left, didn't have to suffer through the period of Soviet occupation and, in some sense, didn't deserve to be able to

come back and reap the rewards now 40 years later, to the degree that the people who had lived there all the time did. There was a bit of that kind of tension. On the other hand, most of the people in Lithuania recognized that had it not been for the persistent agitation of the émigrés in other countries -- especially the U.S. -- they wouldn't have gotten their independence anywhere near as soon as they did nor as easily as they did. It was in some sense a by-product of the agitation by their kindred friends and relatives in Chicago and elsewhere.

Q: Those kinds of things did come up.

JOHNSON: Yes, they did come up, but there was no uniform response to them by the time we left.

Q: What were the kinds of things that the Embassy began to settle in on reporting and watching?

JOHNSON: The domestic politics in Lithuania was extremely interesting. The person who led the independence struggle was Vytautas Landsbergis, who became Lithuania's version of Walesa, although he didn't have the same kind of public appeal. He didn't have the same PR (Public Relations) presence that Walesa had. He was dour, and he was very conspiratorial. He figured that everybody who wasn't with him was undoubtedly against him, even though there were lots of differences. When it came time for the first real elections in Lithuania, in December of '92, it was assumed that Landsbergis would easily win, and that the party he led would rule in the parliament as well as in the executive branch.

Guess what! The winner of the election was the former Communist Party chief, Algirdas Brazauskas, in fair elections. It was so shocking to many people there at the time, but he was a much better campaigner than Landsbergis. He would get out and schmooze with people. He didn't talk about Party policy or anything like that. He was a "gosh, aw shucks" kind. I used to say he would have been at ease in Chicago. He would have mixed easily in Chicago because he was a great back-slapper and story teller. A lot of Lithuanians felt that he had done them well in leading the country to a comparatively independent stance even before the Soviet Union completely broke up. Lithuania and the other Baltic countries did pretty well in the last years of the Soviet Union because they were somewhat feisty and fussy and because they were economically far ahead of the rest of the Soviet Union. Brazauskas got some credit for that as well.

One of the more interesting events in my early days there: The political officer was a native speaker of Lithuanian and who still had family there. I had known him in Poland. He was the junior political officer in Krakow when I was in Warsaw, so when it came time to go to Vilnius, I wanted him for sure to come along. At one point, after we had been there for two months or so, he said, "Would you like to go call on Brazauskas? After all, he's still in the Parliament, he's still head of the Communist Party." I said, "Sure, what the heck?" Brazauskas arranged to receive us. He had a room that was maybe six feet long and three feet wide. It was not what you'd think of as the Party boss's

headquarters! But now he was out of office, and this was where he met people. We had a pleasant chat, and later, after he was elected president, we never had any problem with access to him at all.

The Europeans, on the converse, when he was out of office, wouldn't have anything to do with him. They dealt with the government in office at the time, and the opposition was just there, not something to be cultivated. I was forever grateful to this young political officer for having made that suggestion. Keep the doors open!

When we had our first Fourth of July celebration which was also in '92, in this garden right outside of the embassy wall, we invited the opposition; we invited the government; we invited scholars and artists, we invited everybody. This was before the election. Landsbergis was the guest of honor. I made some remarks and he made some remarks. Later he came over and said, "You have many interesting friends here." Of course he meant Brazauskas and other opposition leaders, most of whom could not stand Landsbergis.

Q: That's an interesting vignette actually about diplomacy and democratic policy. The Embassy has to be big enough or have the resources, personnel wise, to talk not only to the government and the ministries that are the political government and the ministries that are the administrative government, but you also want to talk to the opposition.

There are many interesting stories that I've heard where we've slipped behind. There's one great one out of Australia. Marshall Green was ambassador, and there was an election during the middle of the Vietnam War, and Labor won. Hadn't won in 20 years. He turns around to somebody and said, "Anybody know anybody in the Labor party?" Their concern was that Labor in the euphoria of victory would begin to make some anti-American statements in the midst of the Vietnam War where Australia already had troops committed.

The story goes that he jumped on the defense attaché's C-12 and sashayed all over Australia to catch the Labor leaders before they made any untoward statements that might complicate his job. It only points out that you need to walk, follow, and befriend the opposition.

JOHNSON: I'll tell you another story that I learned on my first Foreign Service tour which was exactly on this point. I was in Bombay in the consulate when the Ambassador to Delhi was Chester Bowles who was a political appointee by President Kennedy. There was an election in India in 1967, the first election where the Congress Party lost. They lost the majority at the center, and they lost in the majority of the state governments. There was this sweeping opposition victory. Bowles came to Bombay shortly after that, and the question came up about our relations with the new leaders. He said, "Don't worry about the new leaders. Call on the losers. That's what I do. Every time, the day after the election, I call on the losers. They remember. You've got plenty of time to talk to the winners. The losers will not forget that you went to see them." Of course, that was extremely good advice and advice that I've followed and others have followed in

missions that I've been attached to and for exactly that reason: They do come back. People do come back. The people who are in the opposition now are likely to be the government later, and the government now may be the opposition later.

Q: You certainly would assume that in a democratic churning of interests and issues. What did you say the population of Lithuania was?

JOHNSON: About 3.7 million.

Q: It may be a small playground, but it still is a playground.

JOHNSON: An important one for us and our interests.

Q: What are those interests as the new...

JOHNSON: In the first place, because there are so many Americans of Lithuanian extraction, one of the things is simply looking after those kinds of consular, personal, family affairs, in some cases concerning property issues but in most cases helping people contact each other. There's also political reporting. The politics there was very interesting during the whole time we were there. Economics was a lot less interesting at the time because they were still trying to dig out from under the state economic structure, and they hadn't really hit their stride yet. They later did, and the Baltic countries as a whole were significantly ahead of the rest of the Soviet Union in terms of technology. Things like electronics and sophisticated space hardware were made in the Baltic countries and were used in the Soviet space program and missile programs. A lot of what passed for sophisticated industry was in those areas, but it still shows a lot of new infusion of money and new ideas and new technology for them to become competitive in the European market, of which they are now a part. Lithuania has had a wonderful record of growth in the last five or six years, as have the other Baltic states.

The others started out ahead. Lithuania was the poorest of the three: the largest and the poorest of the three. Estonia was way ahead already because they were physically so close to Finland. Culturally and economically they were way ahead, and they're still far ahead overall.

[interruption]

Q: You were talking about American programs and how the Embassy was integrating itself into the new environment. We were talking about the cultural center.

JOHNSON: One of the ways that we reached out to the people of Lithuania and other places was through our cultural programs, and they were warmly welcomed there. We brought artists and musicians and others to come to Lithuania to demonstrate their great skills. In order to facilitate that, our public affairs officer looked around for a place where we could have a free-standing building to build a library and also to put on these programs. He came up with a beautiful facility which was an old church, or adjacent to

the church, a big old building. We got it dirt cheap and intended to use it not just as a cultural center there but also the commercial center where we'd have other unclassified programs that would go on in this facility. But it was so big and so grand that by the time it got done, it became an embarrassment to the people who led public diplomacy back in Washington. They thought it was too much of a good thing.

Actually, it was very effective, and we had terrific programs there. The Lithuanians were extremely musical. In fact, Mr. Landsbergis was himself a musicologist by profession. He taught at the conservatory as a pianist. He played the piano in our Residence after we got everything set up there. He was the first one to play our baby grand piano. He played Paderewski's Little Prelude. One of the things that the Soviets allowed the Baltics and the other nationalities to do was to keep their cultural traditions: their music and their dance. Landsbergis -- as a good musicologist and a political one at that -- decided that this was a good way to demonstrate their national identity. The revolution that he and the others in the Baltics led, but especially the Lithuanians, was called the Singing Revolution. They would sing these nationalistic songs. I'll never forget when Secretary Baker was there meeting with Landsbergis up on the third floor of this parliament building with barbed wire all around it, there must have been a couple hundred people standing down below in the parking lot singing these nationalistic songs for the whole hour we were up there. It was wonderful!

Q: Edelweiss and the Sound of Music?

JOHNSON: Yes. I think more so.

Q: So, Edelweiss in "Sound of Music."

JOHNSON: They had the same revolution which was very important as a form of national identity in Lithuania and in the other Baltic countries as well.

Q: How does the embassy get its hands on these kinds of cultural programs?

JOHNSON: Some of it comes through routinely as a part of programs that the U.S. government either sponsors or helps to sponsor, performing artists. For example, every year there's a thing called Jazz Ambassadors where there is usually a small group, a trio or quartet. They audition in Washington, and they are selected to go on a U.S. funded trip to various places. I think almost every embassy has access to them at least once a year. It's usually a fine group, not necessarily a famous one but one that is musically very talented. We had them come to Lithuania all three of the years we were there, a different group each time but all called the Jazz Ambassadors. We had a few singers and instrumentalists and other individuals. We had some people who were of Baltic origin who came in because they wanted to. They said they wanted to perform there. We had some others who were not particularly U.S. sponsored but who were great artists, for example, Vladimir Ashkenazi, who had gone to conservatory in St. Petersburg. He came a couple of times. His wife was Icelandic, but they had a Lithuanian connection. She had been to Lithuania earlier. We had a lot of that kind of music. They had wonderful operas,

and we had our own designated seat as did the other members of the dip (diplomatic) corps. But we went so often that they knew where to put us each time we came in. Colder than hell in there, I must say.

JOHNSON: The first winter we were there, there wasn't enough fuel to heat the buildings the way they should be, so the average temperature *indoors* in Vilnius was 50 degrees Fahrenheit. Believe me, it may sound like it's above freezing, but it's bitterly cold when it comes to trying to work or sleep in that environment. What the embassy did was to get people space heaters that they could put in one room of their house, so that's what we did. We'd sit in the one room that had a space heater in it and all bundled up like these kids blanket suits where you zip yourself in from head to toe. It was "interesting."

That first winter was interesting, too, for other reasons. One is that it snowed on October 12th, Columbus Day; that was the first snow, and the last snow was on May Day of the following year. And it was moderately cold all the time in between those dates. Columbus Day -- that was 1992, so it was the anniversary of Christopher Columbus' journey. You may recall that in many parts of the world, including in the Americas, there were protests about the Spanish imperialists and about taking over or destroying the indigenous culture. We had some young men in the snow outside the windows of our office there in that little park across the street with bare chests and wearing little shorts and little flip-flops, and they were demonstrating on behalf of the Pagans, the anti-crusaders, the anti-Christians demonstrating on behalf of paganism. Anti-Columbus. It was a great treat! [laughter]

Another little vignette is worth remembering here. Lithuania was the last country in Europe that was Christianized, and there are those who would say -- me included -- that it never really took, and they really are pagan. Their most interesting religious or semi-religious symbols are those involving the sun or trees or wheat growing in the fields. Even the Christian symbols they do have came from pre-Christian sources, mostly, because they became Christianized by the marriage of the Polish queen at the time to the Lithuanian Grand Duke. That was in the late 14th Century. The crosses are designed in such a way that you have the sun symbol in the middle of the cross. It's very earthy kinds of... Water is also sacred, earth.

Q: That's interesting because weren't these part of the German Hanseatic League cities in the Baltic?

JOHNSON: Remotely, but each was different and each had its own indigenous culture. They did have trading relationships, yes. Vilnius was a center, but actually, Riga was a bigger trading city.

Q: Vilnius is not a sea port?

JOHNSON: No. Vilnius is way inland.

Q: That makes a difference because the Germans stayed right at the sea.

JOHNSON: Lithuania has only one port, and it's not a good port. It's up on the short stretch of access to the Baltic Sea there; it's a shallow port, and there's only one fairly narrow mouth that brings the ships in to an inlet. There's a ferry there that takes trains across to East Germany, but other than that it's not a very practical port. When the Nazis controlled that area when they expanded into part of what is now Lithuania, the port town was called Memel. There are some historic pictures of Hitler visiting Memel back in those days, back in the World War II period.

The great era of Lithuanian expansion was during the combined kingdom of Lithuania and Poland. They ruled almost all of Central Europe for over 300 years, from 13-something to 17-something, and the empire extended all through what is now Belarus from the Baltic to the Black Sea during most of that time. Russia lay to the east and Germany, with the Teutonic Knights, much farther to the west.

Q: You were talking earlier about what U.S. national interests were. This is fine, 1930's, but what is U.S. national interest now?

JOHNSON: I think there are three or four. One is certainly on the person-to-person level. There are so many Americans of Baltic origin, especially of Lithuanian origin, that ties to the homeland are important to the U.S. because of this historic connection.

Politically we want to see democracies in that part of the world live and prosper, and they have, pretty much. It's a very open, boisterous, even sometimes antagonistic political arrangement, lots of people whose interests we think are important.

The economic side has prospered, again in part because of external investment. The U.S. is a major investor in Lithuania now. Surprise to me, but that has happened over the last decade.

And how they handle relations with their neighbors is also important to us. They've become members of NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization). When I was there they were just introducing what was called the Partnership for Peace which some of the would-be partners thought was a meager half-step to NATO membership. But that's all gone now; they are NATO members, and they have sent troops to Iraq and, I think they have sent troops to Afghanistan as part of the NATO contingent. The first time they did that was as part of a combined Baltic group that NATO sent to Kosovo. They're definite participants in our alliance system in the European theater.

All of those things are important. Some of them are relatively small because it's a relatively small country, but they have the same vote in the UN that everybody else does, and the same vote in the European Union that every other member has, and the same voice that everybody else does in NATO. They are important small allies.

Q: One of the interesting things about your connection is when you went through the confirmation hearings and you were sworn in as the Ambassador there, you were sworn in by Eagleburger.

JOHNSON: That's right. By Lawrence Eagleburger, my previous boss.

[crosstalk]

JOHNSON: ...who signed off on my appointment. He was a terrific boss and a fine man, I think a guy of real integrity and great accomplishment and a credit to the Foreign Service, one of the few career officers who has risen to the position of Secretary of State.

Q: I think the only one.

JOHNSON: I think that Foy Kohler? Thompson? Bohlen? One of the legendary ambassadors to Moscow in the '50s was Secretary of State but not for very long; only for a few days.

Q: Was this unique to Ambassador Eagleburger, or did he swear in a few other people as well?

JOHNSON: He did that, too, but I considered it very special for him to do the honors in this case.

Q: That was wonderful! You were in Vilnius for some time.

JOHNSON: Not quite three years.

Q: Your confirmation swearing in, setting it up, that's '92.

JOHNSON: That's right. Technically I wasn't ambassador until I got there in April of '92 because before that time I had been either "team chief" or I was "in waiting," or something like that. I actually arrived and presented my credentials -- my ambassadorial credentials -- to Mr. Landsbergis in the first week of April. I think it was the 6th or the 7th of April, 1992.

Q: It has been a great opportunity to build a whole diplomatic mission from the ground up. You were talking about the cultural center, and that came as you got on your feet. You're part of the European bureau back in Washington, so who's your minders in Washington?

JOHNSON: The Baltic Desk was, but at the next higher level, the Assistant Secretary for the former Soviet Union at that time before they got it all rearranged was Strobe Talbot before he became deputy secretary. At that time he was the head of the amorphous office called S/NIS (Secretary, Newly Independent States). Two things happened after that: First, he became deputy secretary under Albright, and then secondly, the Baltics didn't

want to be included with the former Soviet Union, so they were then moved to the Central European/ Northeastern European part of the bureau. They're still under the European bureau, but in a different place.

The European bureau was not at that time inclusive of the former Soviet Union. The S/NIS operation broke off from the European bureau, so EUR under Dick Holbrooke included the Baltics, but it didn't include the rest of the former Soviet Union.

Q: You found a ready home at EUR.

JOHNSON: We didn't have any problems as far as finding folks to take us in.

Q: We were talking in your other assignments about Congressional visits. Did you start to get...

JOHNSON: We had some but not a lot. During Congressional recesses, especially in the summertime, we would have one or two CODELS, but not nearly like Warsaw. In Warsaw, the year after the Solidarity government came to power, we had 24 CODELS, the equivalent of two a month: some just one or two people and some big ones. That was a big job because everyone wants to be taken care of as though they're the only guy in town. The worst thing of all is when you have a House CODEL and a Senate CODEL at the same time because they all think that you're taking care of the other one better. They both think they are coming out of it being slighted!

We didn't have that problem in Vilnius. We had a few CODELS, but not very many. The ones we did have were serious. We had quite a few staffers including one woman who worked for Helms who was Lithuanian herself by origin who was very good. I must say, she was quite serious, and she came every three months or so to find out what was going on.

Q: That tour ends. As is wont in the Foreign Service, you've got to get yourself another job.

JOHNSON: It's actually a little trickier at a senior level because maybe there's an embassy coming open, and maybe there isn't. In this case, the timing wasn't good, but I wanted to come back to Washington anyway. I had to have some medical work done. Tom Simons again was my angel. He was then the director of the newly created office dealing with assistance to the former Soviet Union, so he invited me back to be his deputy in that office. My arrival was in June, perhaps the last week of May, of '94.

In terms of my time in Vilnius, it was only a little over two years when I was officially Chief of Mission there. But I usually say three because I count from the time I got there in September of '91 until I left at the end of May of '94 to come back to that job in Washington.

I worked with Tom there for about six months or maybe less, and then he was assigned to Pakistan as ambassador. There was a new guy named Dick Morningstar who came in who'd been a political activist for Clinton and wanted very much to come help out in this office. He became the chief, and I was the deputy chief. Bill Taylor was the next in line and gradually moved up to be the head of the office a few years later. Bill really was our numbers guy. He had this big matrix which had the country names on one grid and the programs on the other. So if there was an unspecified allocation for Ukraine, for example, part of our job was to decide which program those funds would be applied to. Or, conversely, if there was a general allocation for Rule of Law programs throughout the region, part of our job was to decide which countries would receive how much funding for that program. It was complicated, requiring negotiations with the various implementing agencies, all of which had the best possible justification for using all of the available funding. And we had similar negotiations with key Hill staffers who wanted to be sure that the allocations reflected their interests, particularly how they answered constituents. Bill was excellent at making the numbers fit. The hardest part was adjusting all of the relevant numbers whenever there was a change -- for every increase there had to be a decrease. This was Bill's skill -- he had that matrix memorized!

To tell the truth, this was the least satisfying job I had in the Foreign Service. I quickly discovered that doing good can be very difficult. The decision to fund an ag project rather than an education project, for example, could be agonizing. We were scrupulous about accountability and reporting, which no doubt irritated some of the recipients, but it was essential for the viability of the program. This structure was Mr. Eagleburger's idea, to make sure that there was a policy voice overseeing these decisions. His view was that we could not simply give all the funds to USAID, even though they were the main implementers, because that would leave out some other worthy recipients.

S/NIS (Assistance to the Former Soviet Union)

Q: This was that office you talked about, S/NIS.

JOHNSON: Sort of. There were two different offices, although they both fell under the person who was the assistant secretary equivalent. As I said, that was Strobe Talbot and then it became Jim Collins just before Jim went to Moscow as ambassador. Tom Simons and Jim Collins were co-equal, so even though they both worked on former Soviet affairs, they didn't work for each other, so our office was independent. Ours office was the assistance office for the former Soviet Union.

Q: Refresh my memory: The former Soviet Union, is that Russia or was that everybody else?

JOHNSON: It's everybody including Russia except the Baltics, the only ones who were not included. If you subtract the three Baltics, the other 11 were the "former Soviet Union:" Russia, Ukraine and Belarus, then Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, then Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and one other out there, Turkmenistan. There were five in Central Asia all together. Yes, it covered all of those.

Our job was basically the policy part of it. We were not responsible for the actual implementation of any of the assistance, but this was Mr. Eagleburger's idea. It began in Eastern Europe earlier, and the purpose was to try to bring together all the agencies that were responsible for implementing any aspect of our assistance programs in those countries and to give it a policy focus. It wasn't just AID, although they were the biggest individual agency represented, but the Environmental Protection Agency, the National Academy of Sciences and dozens of other agencies had programs. Everybody in Washington had programs of some kind, so the idea was to bring people together and decide some priorities.

We had our collective staff meeting once every two weeks or so. Our job was to lay out all these proposals, to get all the budget numbers from the Hill, and to lay out this big matrix where we'd have all the programs on one grid, and all the countries on the other. For example, we'd have democracy programs on one grid, and then on this other grid you'd have Russia, Ukraine, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, and so forth. You'd have democracy programs, you'd have rule of law programs, you'd have environmental programs you'd have agricultural programs. All these things and others would be on one grid, and then you'd have the country recipients on the other grid, then we'd have the numbers that the Congress would provide, sometimes specific numbers to specific countries, in which case our job was simply to find out how best to allocate and how to implement the Congressional mandate. In some cases, there were very vague numbers, like the target number for Russia. I think the first year it was $800 million or something like that, but it was not specified as to how it ought to be spent, so it was up to us to decide what would be the most effective programs, most effective usage of the money.

Q: It was a fair analytical thing, much more than the Russian desk or whatnot. You were dealing with a larger overarching issue of how to blend these programs in these countries and move them to the kinds of political objective that we were in. Did this include the various projects in Eastern Europe to remove the Russian military, clean up the contaminated bases, and that sort of stuff? We had made some promises along those lines.

JOHNSON: Yes, in some places we were involved in those things, but not Eastern Europe. The first step in the former Soviet Union was getting rid of what was called "loose nukes;" getting rid of the nuclear weapons, making sure that all the nuclear material was under control, destroying facilities that had no further use. That was under a program called Nunn-Lugar. Senator Nunn and Senator Lugar co-sponsored this program which was originally housed in the Pentagon, but the Pentagon didn't want it, and we did, because we thought it was an important part of the overall assistance program. And not coincidentally, cleaning up these military things got us into cleaning up other environmental problems. We took both the people and the program from the Pentagon and oversaw that as a sub-set of our broader policy. But we didn't have discretion in terms of allocating those funds. We had the responsibility to implement the program, to make sure the funds were properly used, and they were.

Q: That meant getting their resident embassies involved in terms of overseeing it and monitoring. How successful were we? The Russians pulled their troops out of Eastern Europe.

JOHNSON: We were only incidentally involved in that. The Germans were much more involved in that. The Germans actually put up a lot more money to get the Russian troops out of East Germany and get them housed in Russia. We had a program which someday I'm going to write an article about because it struck me as such a perfect example of how foreign policy really gets made and implemented.

We had a program that I thought was extremely useful for that purpose, to encourage the Soviet troops to leave the Baltic countries by providing a small incentive for housing. It was a housing program, but it had other components, too. We would provide the expertise for this housing program. We would also provide assistance in terms of setting up a mortgage arrangement that resembled modern financing. The troops themselves would get a small incentive, the equivalent of $5,000, to get them started in this new track home as it were, which would be roughly a $25,000 value.

Q: Buy a new tract home back home in Russia.

JOHNSON: Right! Not in Lithuania, not in East Germany, but back in Russia, somewhere near where their bases were located.

Q: The troops would have the incentive of telling their bosses, "Hey, man, this looks..."

JOHNSON: It came undone because there was a letter writing campaign on behalf of American veterans, some of whom came from this state. Some of them addressed me personally because I had written something that was later reprinted in a veterans' newsletter. Their pitch was, "How come you're giving $25,000 to those Red Army soldiers. I didn't get any $25,000 when I retired. I'd like to be able to build a house here, too. How come you guys are doing this?"

I wrote back along the lines of, "If you have a problem with your veterans' benefits, please talk with the Veterans' Administration? That's the issue. If you feel there's a problem with your benefits. Oh, by the way, this program is serving a particular purpose, including getting the Soviet troops out of Eastern Europe and the Baltic countries sooner than they would have otherwise. And oh, by the way, we're also demonstrating how American home building works. There's a potential commercial benefit to this in the long run, and there's also financial benefit in terms of how housing markets work and financing for housing." It was a win, win, win situation. Not interested! The only thing they were interested in was that we were giving aid and assistance to the Red Army. So that program came undone. The Department decided we were not going to fight the Hill. We got no support from the Hill at all even though the effect was to get the Soviet troops out of places we wanted them out of. So the program died. The whole program would have cost $5 million. So after that it was gone -- to no one's benefit -- and the money was reallocated.

Q: With these Russians gaining access to a proper housing market, that program would have helped to educate a large number of Russians in the circumstances.

JOHNSON: And, not coincidentally, would have provided people with some adequate houses which they then could have replicated or others replicated for them. The construction company was from here, was from this area. The veterans who were complaining about it were from here, too. This issue had a real home-grown flavor.

Q: Isn't that under this rubric of defense conversion? There was something that was talked about...

[crosstalk]

JOHNSON: Actually, I don't know what the defense conversion is as applied to...

Q: There were defense conversion talks with the former Soviet Union people, and it involved these kinds of things.

JOHNSON: Didn't that involve weapons?

Q: Weapons and other larger issues. I got involved with it on the China side and, as you said, Congress killed it, and it was an incredible tool for us to really leverage these people into doing things for us, things that we thought were useful.

JOHNSON: That assistance program was in some ways the hardest job I had in Washington because I discovered that it's hard to do good. Everybody's got a good idea of how to use public money to do something that's worthwhile, and it is worthwhile. Most of it is worthwhile. But every time there's money on the table, there's a huge fight about how much of it goes where, and everyone's program is *the* most important one. It may be health care, it may be housing, it may be getting the troops out of Vilnius, it may be something else, but there's always a lot of good uses for however much public money there is on the table. Deciding upon those competing priorities is extremely difficult.

The first thing you need to do is to decide what numbers should go in which boxes. Ukraine denuclearization or Tajikistan environmental programs or rule of law, for example; things of that kind. Then you work it out among the various agencies responsible for implementation, for program design and implementation. Then at some point, and probably continuously along this process, you have to negotiate with the Hill. There are always a few people who have their own ideas of where the money ought to go and how it ought to be used. That's a third level of negotiation, fighting over crumbs at the table. It's very unpleasant, not because it's good versus evil. It's not. It's good versus good. "A" wants it done this way, "B" wants it done that way, and "C" wants it done another way.

Q: Wouldn't you say there is a bit of difference here? In the 1960's when the African and the Asian countries gained their independence, you had Kennedy and AID who was spoken of in very favorable terms. "We're going to help you guys out. We're going to help you take these first steps," That was accepted in Congress for reasons that seemed right at the time. But now you're coming to the end of the Red enemy, and instead of nice little Malaysia or Burma coming to their independence, Lithuania, or Kazakhstan or Belarus coming to its independence, basically it has a different tinge to it. Starting these programs out, you're starting in an environment which is quite different from the 1960's. You're talking about helping them take the initial steps.

JOHNSON: I think most people in this country were supportive of the idea, and the Hill was also supportive of the idea -- at least in the abstract. They did put up a fair amount of money, so it wasn't a matter of saying people don't deserve to have this assistance. It was really more a matter of saying, "What's the most effective way to provide this assistance?" and "What's going to be the outcome?" There's always the tendency to say the outcome is not sufficient for the means that have been devoted to it.

I think we were efficient in the way we allocated the resources for the purposes for which it was intended. To take another example, one of the programs that I became involved in was public health in the broad sense, and vaccines in particular. One of the things we discovered was that most of the countries in the former Soviet Union had gotten their vaccines for measles, mumps, polio, all these, from two or three different plants in Russia and one in Ukraine. First of all, the quality control had slipped already in that time and second of all, they were having difficulty getting the raw materials needed to keep their production lines going. The question then became, do we supply vaccines from other countries, for example, from Japan, or someplace else because they're better quality but also twice as expensive, or do we try to encourage the Russian and Ukrainian manufacturing and help to upgrade their production capabilities?

The answer is yes, both, probably. But there's a finite amount of money, and almost an infinite amount of need. We're talking about kids, so nobody's going to argue that kids shouldn't be vaccinated. It doesn't matter whether they're in Kazakhstan or someplace else. Of course they need to be vaccinated! Then there are also the competing agencies. We had a conference in Kyoto with participation from the UNHCR (UN High Commission for Refugees) and UNICEF, the WHO (World Health Organization) -- all are big public health organizations, big providers. Rotary International, is a big vaccine provider for polio. The question then becomes how do you meet the same quality standards, the same delivery capabilities, you want to be able to get the stuff to the kids who need it, and you want to make sure that there's continuity. The problem with the Rotary program was it was great for polio. That was their concentration at the time. But theirs was basically a one-year program, so what happens if we're going to need vaccines for the second year or the third year?

Unfunded mandates is what this comes down to. You get a program that has a beginning and has the beginning funded, but it doesn't have the middle or ending funded. My purpose was to try to get all of the participants in this vaccine program, not just polio but

all of these other diseases, in the same space and try to get the commitments that would lead to long-term solutions. I think we made some progress, but there's always a problem with funding.

Q: This is quite an interesting job of interacting with these new nation states that are the former Soviet Union and all the programs which you never had the opportunity to touch bases with them on before since they're been part of the larger continuity. You're kind of the headquarters of the main switchboard to see that all these programs are done in all these places. The Tajik desk would do its bid.

JOHNSON: Actually, we were much more directly involved. We would keep them informed about where we were going on these programs, but the assistance had so many different pieces to it, and so many different places, but certainly the Tajik desk and the others working on Central Asia affairs would be responsible for and aware of what was going on in their country of responsibility. They couldn't monitor on a regular, ongoing daily basis, so part of our job was to do that and to make sure the contractors -- the implementers -- were doing what they were supposed to do, too.

Q: This all comes from the fall of the Soviet Union. That's where this opportunity comes from, and that's where the problems come from that you're trying to get your arms around.

JOHNSON: That's right. The history of the confrontation, the Cold War; trying to get off of a confrontational mode to one where we're working cooperatively on a shared objective -- that's part of what we were trying to do.

Q: I'm flashing back to China, '72 or '79, pick your point, where you're certainly now seeking positive engagement and reinforcing positive engagement. What your work is here is now the first such opportunity for the nation states that are the former Soviet Union. Diplomacy and foreign affairs often come down to looking for the positive opportunity to keep a relationship going.

JOHNSON: Exactly that, and trying to deal with the complexities in each case and the complexities in our case. There were certain countries in the former Soviet Union that would get earmarks or would get special programs in for funding.

Q: By the Congress.

JOHNSON: Yes. By no coincidence, there are a lot of Ukrainian-Americans and lot of Armenian-Americans, so the people on the Hill who were looking after the funding priorities made sure the programs in those countries were well funded. Others like Azerbaijan, for example, because of the ongoing conflict with Armenia, didn't get any funds even for refugee assistance. We finally did get some for refugees, but not nearly enough. They had something like a million refugees who had come out of the area of Nagorno-Karabakh, where the majority are ethnic Armenians but the territory lies within Azerbaijan. The U.S. basically has not been directly involved in helping those refugees

except through the UN bodies. Fortunately for the Azeris, their country has access to oil, and they are able to get funds to help those folks anyway, but not much. Sometimes you win, sometimes you don't. Sometimes it has nothing to do with the value of the program.

Q: Often it has to do with the fact that foreign policy is domestic policy for foreigners.

JOHNSON: That's right, and it's how we behave outside our borders driven by what we do inside our borders.

The United Nations

Q: You weren't in this position very long.

JOHNSON: That's right. I expected to be there longer, but by the end of '95 -- about a year and a half after I got there -- I was moving on. In September of '95 I was asked to go to the UN for the General Assembly that year to help out with the countries of the former Soviet Union. The Department has a regular practice of sending a few area specialists to help out the U.S. mission to the UN during the General Assembly because we had so many visitors and so many meetings. So they would basically augment the U.S. mission with other people from Washington, usually fairly senior people so we could get meetings at high levels with other representatives at the UN.

1995 was the 50th anniversary of the UN, so there were a lot of heads of state and heads of government who came that fall to the General Assembly. We had a lot of meetings at either the levels of the Secretary of State, who was at that time Warren Christopher, or at the UN ambassador's level. Madeline Albright was the US Ambassador to the UN at that time. The President came during that time and lots of other senior U.S. officials, so we had a busy and interesting time at the UN for those three months. We got there in about the middle of September and left about the middle of December when the General Assembly closed down.

It was an interesting time to be in New York. I'd never lived in New York before, and the work was quite demanding because a lot had to get done in a short amount of time. Oftentimes I would find I was the only U.S. representative at a meeting of one of the minor committees. We would always have instructions, but sometimes our main utility was to be there and take notes and report back to Ambassador Albright or others in her senior leadership.

Q: This is basically a surge operation, if you will, for the purpose of the start of the General Assembly which all of the heads of state come to. You were being told to be the note taker in this meeting with the president or cover that meeting or... I think Skip Gnehm was DCM at the time.

JOHNSON: Rick Inderfurth was also there with the title of Ambassador. I reported through Gnehm. There also was a guy named Bill Woods who was the deputy political consular. The political consular was Cameron Hume at the time, and there were other

folks there, too. Albright was gone a lot. She spent a lot of time in Washington and also did a lot traveling. But when she was there, she was a whirlwind, a lot of activity around her.

The most interesting episode for me was a minor procedural vote to condemn Israel for something, I don't remember what it was. But it was one of those votes where the US and Israel are the only countries that vote against it -- probably the Cuban embargo. In any case, we were all tasked to make our pitches to the countries we were covering, so I did my duty with all of the countries of the Former Soviet Union. And surprise, surprise, the representative from Uzbekistan said he would vote with us -- not an abstention, mind you, but a real vote. I reported that, even though I didn't actually believe it, and I kept an eye on the Uzbek representative. At one point, I saw the Cuban representative bolt out of his chair and make a bee line for the Uzbek representative, whom he cornered near the door. After several animated minutes, the Cuban rep. returned to his seat, and I made my way to the Uzbek to confirm that he had not changed his position. He smiled and said, "My minister told me to do whatever the Americans wanted." I stayed in the room to be sure he carried out his promise, and he did. So I then reported this minor victory to Skip Gnehm's office, where I got a loud round of applause for having achieved a 50% improvement in the favorable votes on that issue!!

Q: In the archives there are going to be a lot of Johnson written memoranda of conversation.

[laughter]

JOHNSON: A few. There will be a few there!

Bosnia

Q: You were talking earlier that for a senior officer like yourself to line up jobs is a little different from being a mid-level officer and looking at the bid list because at this level in the foreign service, isn't it the personnel rule that if you don't get an assignment within a certain period of time, that's...

JOHNSON: I guess that's right, although I was not particularly worried about that. We all retire at some point, and I was getting to that age. I figured that I probably had one more shot at a good opening. By happy coincidence, there were two major jobs coming open in the China field that following year. One was the Hong Kong Consul General's position, and the other was the Taipei AIT (American Institute in Taiwan) Director's position. Hong Kong was coming up in 1997, the year of the transition from British rule to Chinese rule, so in terms of visibility, the Hong Kong job was certainly going to be a very interesting post over the coming few years.
But in terms of long-term engagement in China policy issues, I think Taiwan is and will remain a point of considerable interest to the U.S. We have a lot of interests there historically and currently.

[crosstalk]

JOHNSON: I was interested in either of those positions. I had already served in Hong Kong many years earlier, so I made sure my name was on that list. There were certainly a fair number of other people on the list, but I figured that my odds were at least one in three, maybe better than one in three, of getting one of those two positions. So I did! I lucked out and got the Taipei mission, and Richard Boucher got the Hong Kong Consul General position at the same time.

In the meantime, I had another temporary position. After the UN, I came back to Washington during that Christmas/New Year's week, and I ran into Dick Holbrooke, whom I had known for a number of years. This was just after the Dayton Peace Conference on former Yugoslavia. He knew I had worked on Yugoslavia at a certain point, so he caught me in the hall one day and said, "I need you to come and work on this Dayton implementation plan," the post-Bosnia, the post-war implementation of the big Dayton accords. I said, "Fine." I wasn't doing anything for six months except getting ready to go to Taipei.

Q: You already knew you were going to Taipei.

JOHNSON: I found that out before I left New York, just before I came back to Washington at Christmastime.

Q: Who made that decision?

JOHNSON: Ultimately it has to be the Secretary. The Secretary's responsible. The President is not directly involved in this appointment, although the White House can veto it. The White House can say not to send candidate A or B or C. I think what usually happens is the Department sends over two or three names, checks the one they want, and asks if there's any objection. If there is, they can go to Plan B. In this case, I did not hear of any objection. I don't know, but I assume it was the East Asia Bureau that put my name forward as someone who had good China credentials and the right rank.

Winston Lord was the Assistant Secretary for East Asian and Pacific Affairs at that time. I think that may have helped.

Q: You'd already run into him in Beijing and worked with him.

JOHNSON: Yes. Lord was the Ambassador to Beijing for most of the time I was there.

But another door is opening at this time, and as I said earlier, Dick Holbrooke had managed to tie me into the Bosnia implementation program and, more specifically, the military "Train and Equip" program. There were two aspects of the Bosnia accords; three, actually, if you count economic: One was political, one was economic, and one was military, to carry out the Bosnia peace accords. The military part was to try to build up the forces on the Bosnian and Croat side to be able to balance against the Serbian side.

The Bosnian Serbs occupied the eastern third, maybe 40% of the total territory, including part of the northern border region around Bosnia as well. The Croats occupied most of the western front. And the city of Sarajevo, and most of the central part of Bosnia, were occupied by Muslims, also called Bosniaks, who were a minority in their own country. The Serbs were about 40 percent -- or maybe a little over 40 -- of the total population of Bosnia. The Croats were about 20, and the Bosnian Muslims were about 35, between 30 and 35. It was a very difficult situation.

Looking at the history of Yugoslavia, this particular war was among the most ferocious of any in recent times, and it was the fourth Balkan War in the 20th Century. There was an enormous amount of bloodshed over a hundred-year period in that part of the world. I think perhaps we were a little ambitious in assuming that the Bosnia accords were going to solve any of that. But they did do one essential thing, and that was to bring about an effective cease-fire. The guns fell silent around the end of 1995. There was almost no fighting in Bosnia after the Dayton accords up to now except for some skirmishes. Bosnia for the most part hasn't had any active organized fighting since that time. It was a limited success but still a success. There was fighting in other parts of former Yugoslavia (e.g., Kosovo), but not in Bosnia.

I started working for Holbrooke in January of '96 and went out to Bosnia, went to Sarajevo as chief of mission -- as Chargé -- in April of '96. Before that I had been to Turkey a couple of times, to Saudi Arabia, to other Muslim countries, with a tin cup trying to generate support for the military "Train and Equip" program for the Bosnian Muslims and the combined Muslim and Croat forces in Bosnia. Jim Pardew, who later served as Ambassador to Bulgaria, was the head of the program; I was his deputy.

We had a conference in Ankara, Turkey, at which a number of countries did pledge support for that program. And there was even more support that came later, once the Bosnians themselves tried to shake the trees and get some assistance from their Muslim friends. There was also the question of Iranian assistance to the Bosniaks -- we discouraged it, of course, but the Bosniaks wanted to keep that door open at least slightly.

I got to Bosnia in early April to serve as Charge for about three weeks. The main agenda item when I arrived was to complete preparations for a major trade delegation, led by Commerce Secretary Ron Brown, that was due to arrive the same day. But that afternoon, just after we had concluded our last count-down meeting, we got a flash message from the communications office that the airplane carrying Brown and his delegation had gone missing. The delegation had been at the big US base in Tuzla that day and was supposed to arrive in Sarajevo the next day. In fact, one of the reasons I was sent out there was to have a senior officer on the ground when this delegation arrived. I had come through Zagreb on the UN airlift that morning. You still couldn't fly into Sarajevo Airport commercially; there were no commercial flights. I had come down from Zagreb to Sarajevo that day. But my wife and a lot of other people didn't know what my schedule was, so when they heard that Brown's plane had gone down, they were concerned that I may have been on it. Obviously, I wasn't.

That happened in the afternoon, and there was no word for hours on where the plane was or what had actually happened. Some wreckage had been spotted in the water near the Dubrovnik Airport, but it turned out not to be our plane. A side comment: there was no good reason for the delegation to go to Dubrovnik. There was nothing in the program about Dubrovnik. It was a shopping trip, and it was terrible weather, and the conditions... The crew had never flown into the Dubrovnik airport before; the airport was missing one of its instrument landing guidance systems, and so forth. It's never one problem when you have a major disaster like this. So they ended up in the wrong valley, tried to climb out and almost made it, but hit the top of the hill and killed everyone.

They didn't find the wreckage until eight or nine o'clock that night. The first message that we got was about four in the afternoon. It took a long time.

I was in Bosnia altogether for a little over three weeks. The first weekend I was there was Easter weekend, and I took a group of people from the embassy that day to go up to the place along this treacherous road near the ski lifts that had been used during the Sarajevo Winter Olympics several years earlier. That was the road on which three of the American officials who were involved in the Dayton process -- actually just before the Dayton process -- were killed and four were seriously injured when their armored personnel carrier (APC) tumbled over the edge of this muddy road and landed braced in a big tree. One of the fatalities was Bob Frasure who had been my colleague in Estonia when I was in Lithuania. One was from the Pentagon, Joe Kruzel, and one was an Air Force officer, Nelson Drew. They were three really good officers trying to make something good come out of Bosnia, and there was no good effect at that time.

One of the by-products of this fatal accident, however, was that President Clinton got personally engaged. He came to the funeral service at the Fort Meyers chapel. I was there, too; the place was full to overflowing. Apparently, according to Bob Woodward and other people, after the service, the President met with then Secretary of State Warren Christopher and others who were there. Albright might have been there, too; certainly some of the military people were there, and Holbrooke was there. Clinton had apparently decided at that point that we needed a different approach in Bosnia. We couldn't remain as remote as we had been up to that point. That was in August of '95. From out of that grew the Dayton Process, the agreement that was signed in November of '95 that led to the cease fire and not much else up to that point.

I was in Bosnia for another three weeks or so after the plane crash. We were in the process of getting new facilities built. The embassy building at the time was quite small. We lived in a hotel; we had round-the-clock Marine or Army protection: armed guys with guns and flak jackets and all the rest of it. One of the other trips I took out of Sarajevo during that time was over to Srebrenica which had been the site of a ghastly slaughter by the Bosnian Serbs of basically the whole male Muslim community. They wiped out all the men and boys in the thousands -- plausible estimates were 8,000. There was a UN presence, and we went to see the UN people and see some grim reminders of what had gone on there.

Around Tuzla, where the U.S. Army base was, there was a camp of the widows of the men from Srebrenica. That was extremely sad, too, because most of the women were aware that they were never going to see their men again: husbands and sons and brothers. This was basically a holding camp to try to provide them the minimum necessities of life and some encouragement to go back at some later stage. But it was clear that they were never going to go back. These women were definitely not going back to Srebrenica.

The place where we stayed in Sarajevo was the old Holiday Inn, the one that everyone has seen many pictures of with the bomb marks and bullet holes on the walls. At that point they were repairing it. They were doing a lot of repair work. In fact, you could see for the first time in three years or so, you could see flowers growing again. A lot of the debris from the fighting had been cleared off the bridges. The bridges had been free-fire zones at that time of the fighting. We also went into a number of the areas that had been Bosnian Serb settlements, and most of those people had also left. Sarajevo had almost entirely become a Muslim City, although there were Easter services at both the Croatian Catholic Church and the Serbian Orthodox Church that first Sunday that I was there. There was at least a modicum of multi-ethnic presence.

Q: In one sense, the Serbs that thought they were going to take it all over ended up losing the cities.

JOHNSON: They did. Milosevic basically wanted Serbia to be able to extend its boundaries to every place where Serbs lived. Since that's such an impossible aspiration, inevitably you're going to overlap with people who are not Serbs in some places. It was just awful.

Q: This is when you were TDY (temporary duty) as Chargé at Sarajevo. What did the mission look like at that time?

JOHNSON: It was actually quite small. I think we had two political officers, maybe one or two econ. I think the total mission including the communicators and support staff was maybe 15.

Q: And all protected by armed Marines.

JOHNSON: Yes. All protected by armed Army and Marines.

Q: What was there to do?

JOHNSON: Among other things, we were getting ready for the Brown delegation and some other visitors. Of the 30 or so people who were killed on that airplane, one of them was the head of a company named Guardian Glass, which was donating tens of thousands of dollars worth of glass to repair school buildings and hospitals and other public buildings in Sarajevo. That went ahead because the glass wasn't coming on the airplane, thank goodness. The glass was coming by truck from Germany. The glass arrived a week or so later, and I went around with a NBC (National Broadcasting Company) camera

man, and we had a couple of good shots where they were putting the glass into buildings that had been shot up during the earlier stages of the war. That was a good media opportunity after the tragedy of the plane crash.

We had very frequent contact with the UN and with the other bodies that had been created by the commission for implementing the Dayton accords that was headed by Carl Bildt, the former Swedish Prime Minister. He was there during part of the time that I was there. There was a really good German diplomat -- - Michael Steiner -- who was there all the time, and there was an American Foreign Service Officer named Bob Frowick whom you may know who was working for the UN. There were other multi-national bodies who were doing implementation work on the political side, social, economic, education. There were a lot of programs going on. Part of our job was to coordinate and keep track of who was doing what in all those various places.

Q: Were there any other diplomatic missions in town?

JOHNSON: Yes, I think the Austrians had somebody there. I think the Italians had somebody there. There were a few others, but we didn't see them often. The Germans had somebody there. The French may have. The Brits I don't think did yet. I don't remember seeing anybody from their place on the diplomatic side, but they did have some troops in the multinational force.

Q: Was there a government there for you to interact with?

JOHNSON: Yes, although they kept pulling and hauling; there were going to be elections and then there weren't going to be elections. The guy who was the head of the Bosniaks at the time, Izetbegovic was his name, had been at the Dayton meetings. He had been at Dayton to take part in the discussions that led to the accords. There was another Bosnian guy named Silajdzic who was quite good. We also met with the military people fairly frequently because there was a lot of coordination involved with them with our forces and with the other NATO forces. There were some other civilians, a foreign ministry guy. One fellow who was there some of the time that I was there was Muhamed Sacirbey, who actually is an American of Bosnian-Muslim origin who was one of Dick Holbrooke's regular partners in the negotiating process. He was the Bosnian Foreign Minister, Ambassador to the UN and to the U.S; he was about in his mid-30's or so, I suppose. He spoke native American English and mixed easily. He was one of the people that Holbrooke negotiated with in Dayton. But Sacirbey didn't have the last word in his delegation. Even as a minister of his government, he had to refer his deliberations to Izetbegovic and to others. He got into some trouble later for allegedly taking some money that wasn't his. There was also a guy named Djukic, who was one of the senior military guys. He was very direct and very effective.

We didn't see the Bosnian Serbs very often. They had partitioned themselves out of the mix at this point. Radovan Karadzic, who had been the head of the Bosnian Serbs, was now wanted as a war criminal. He was believed to be in a small town that was a little to the east of Sarajevo. I never went over there.

Q: If the American diplomatic mission is guarded by armed Marines, how did you travel around?

JOHNSON: In an armored car. We had what amounted to an SUV (sports utility vehicle) but with double windows -- hard plastic on the outside and bulletproof glass on the inside -- and an armed car in front and an armed car in back. It was a little awkward, frankly. It's not like driving out to the grocery store. It was tense. I didn't feel threatened because first of all, I thought the cease fire was sufficiently effective that conceivably there might be random attacks, but there were no organized attacks at that point. There was a lot of reconstruction work already going on. The airport was about to be reopened for regular traffic about three weeks after I left. The road from the airport to downtown had been a free-fire zone where every building on both sides of the road was completely shot up, all along that way. It was only about a seven mile stretch, but it was a mess. That was already under repair, the road itself as well as some of the buildings.

Q: Not these contractor guys, the Blackwater USA that we see today.

JOHNSON: No. They were uniformed U.S. military. They stayed with us in the hotel, too. They had a 24-hour watch. I had a hotel room in back on the fourth or fifth floor, and they had a security perimeter all around that area where my room was, 24-hour watch in the lobby as well as on the floor itself.

Q: A little bit different dynamics than being in Vilnius.

JOHNSON: Yes, quite different than being in Vilnius!

Q: Do we have an assignment for you, Ambassador Johnson!

QF: Are we going or just chatting?

JOHNSON: We're still going, talking about Sarajevo. Sad. Anyway, that was a relatively short term thing.

Q: What were you able to accomplish in that short term?

JOHNSON: Not a lot. There were occasional visitors. There were occasional programs that we needed to be there for. The main thing was coordination with the people who were implementing the Dayton peace process, and that included the multi-national people who were there for that. I also went up to visit the U.S. Army base. This is another of those wonderful illustrations about contrasting resources. I visited the general, called on him, and then went to his daily staff meeting where he had something like 300 people in this tent. He had a video conference in from three or four other remote sites in and around Bosnia. This was routine. Every afternoon they had this discussion about what was going on in the country. We at the Embassy had less than $1/20^{th}$ of that manpower and practically none of the technology that they had.

Q: How did you report back to the Department?

JOHNSON: We had some communications capability including classified commo. It was in a portable truck that was adjacent to our office building. "Our office building," that's an exaggeration. It was sort of a house similar to the one in Vilnius only a little bigger. It was built at least as an office building. Good location.

JOHNSON: The Ambassador at the time, John Menzies, had already been there for awhile. The reason I was there was because he was back on consultations and leave. He'd been there for a year or close to a year before that. He had worked closely with Holbrooke earlier, too. Then he came back. I actually overlapped with him in Washington.

Q: So you were substituting.

JOHNSON: Yes, for three weeks; an eventful three weeks, for sure.

Q: The whole operation had been set up for some time.

JOHNSON: Yes, but it was changing a lot because the fighting had stopped, and we were beginning to get some outreach programs going, and our staffing was increasing. It was becoming a more normal mission, although Bosnia was not yet a "normal" country.

Taipei

I came back to Washington at the end of April and then almost immediately went into a Chinese language refresher course to go to Taipei. I started that course in early May and studied for about six weeks in Washington at FSI. I shifted my attention to Taiwan and China as I prepared to go to Taipei that summer as the head of the American Institute in Taiwan (AIT). This is that strange creature that was created to manage our "unofficial" relationships with Taiwan.

Q: I was going to say, could you give us a little history of AIT and how it is organized. I mean, here you are a career Foreign Service Officer of great repute, been an ambassador….

JOHNSON: The American Institute in Taiwan is the instrument that was created to manage Uncle Sam's business in Taiwan after the denormalization of diplomatic relations. Up until January 1st, 1979, the U.S. recognized the government that was based in Taiwan, which was called the Republic of China, as the government of all of China. At that point in 1979, we switched our recognition and from that time have had diplomatic relations with the PRC, the People's Republic of China, in Beijing. Then we had to manage, had to do something to take care of the continuing relationships that we had with Taiwan.

After some strenuous negotiations and some strenuous work in the Congress, a law was passed called The Taiwan Relations Act that President Carter signed on April 10th, 1979. Although the diplomatic relationship changed as of January 1st, 1979, the law that codified it and created this new instrument for managing our relationship with Taiwan didn't have effect until April 10th.

Q: Actually, hadn't the Japanese already gone through this process and they too had it since 1972? Had an informal office?

JOHNSON: That is right. As did others. We were among the last to get there because most other countries already had diplomatic relations with the PRC and had created some sort of an instrument to maintain their relationships with Taiwan. Mostly they were trade promotion missions. For instance, the British had a small office called the British Trade Office, even though it was headed by a career foreign service person, an FCO (Foreign and Commonwealth Office) officer. I remember talking with him once about what his status was. He laughed and said, "I am seconded to myself." It was a completely unique arrangement as were most of the other arrangements. The Japanese, I forget what they called theirs. The French called theirs the French Institute in Taiwan, the same name as ours except for the name, "French." And so forth. Everybody had their own arrangements because Taiwan was such a major player, especially in world economic affairs, but also to some extent, world political affairs. All the major players, and certainly all the neighbors, required some functioning instrument through which they could carry on their relationship with Taiwan.

In our case, the Taiwan Relations Act specifies that the relationship is with the people of Taiwan to carry on commercial, cultural and other relationships between the people of the United States and the people of Taiwan. So commercial was specified. Cultural was specified. And "other" meant everything else. This was put into place. It was staffed by people who originally were on leave from the Foreign Service. Technically, they were separated from the service and served in this non-government organization in Taiwan for their tour of duty, then magically became Foreign Service Officers again with no loss of time in service or retirement benefits or anything else. It all sort of added up and that gap was somehow erased from their record.

By the time I got there in 1996, some of those administrative anomalies had been fixed up and smoothed out a lot, so that there wasn't any disadvantage. In the early days, there was a perception that there was a disadvantage to serve in Taiwan because your records wouldn't show a job for that period. That was fixed by the time I got there. We had several promotions. We had several people who made career-changing choices during that time and there was no disadvantage to them for having served in Taiwan.

I must say, though, that this odd arrangement led to some unnecessary problems in terms of the way we managed ourselves. For example, we reported not directly to the State Department but to an instrument based in Washington, DC, called The American Institute in Taiwan, which had an office in Arlington, Virginia. Up until shortly before I got to Taipei, it had been headed by a retired Foreign Service officer with experience in the

region, David Dean. At that point, in 1996, the position was filled by a political appointee for the first time, a political appointee who had worked on the Hill, and who was a lawyer. He read the text of the legislation and decided that this really was supposed to be a non-governmental organization, not a part of the U.S. Government, and he was going to run it that way.

Also, one of the things that was left unclear in the original legislation was the relationship between the office in Taipei and the office in Washington. His interpretation was that the office in Washington was in charge and that the instructions to the office in Taipei were to come through him and, if necessary, to be made by him.

Q: Now, this was Woods?

JOHNSON: Yes, Jim Wood. That led to a fair amount of tension, most of it before I got there fortunately. My predecessor had to put up with this problem and it was actually a very difficult situation.

Q: Could we walk through that a little bit? I have the impression that the Lee Teng-hui visit in the summer of 1995 was a very key event. You had the Taiwan presidential election the following spring. There is a gap both at AIT and the embassy in Beijing as everybody was sorting out the implications of the Lee Teng-hui visit. One of the things that happened on the AIT side was that Jim Wood came in as a Clinton appointee, as an Arkansas lawyer.

JOHNSON: It is debatable now how close the relationship was, but the sense at the time was that they had a close personal relationship.

Q: Where did he come from?

JOHNSON: That's a good question. His main connections seemed to be on the Hill, but it was unclear who pushed his candidacy or why.

Q: He had rumors supporting him.

JOHNSON: He had friends in the White House and he had friends at the State Department. The then Under Secretary for Management, Dick Moose, was apparently a personal friend. He reportedly had support at the White House too. I don't know the details; this mostly happened before my time.

As far as a gap, there wasn't a gap in the AIT office, either in Washington or in Taipei, until Wood was sacked several months later. The head of the office in Taipei was Lynn Pascoe, who was there until shortly before I got there. I think we underlapped by a couple of weeks or so. He was there until the summer of 1996.

In the Washington office, up until the appointment of Jim Wood, it was headed by David Dean, a long-time China person and very familiar with Taiwan. He had served as the AIT

Director in Taipei earlier. He resigned in protest to the Wood appointment. That, I believe, was in the spring of 1996, but it may have been earlier.

It wasn't related to the Lee Teng-hui visit to Cornell, because that happened when Lynn Pascoe was still head of the office in Taipei and David Dean was the head in Washington. Of course, regarding the Lee Teng-hui visit in the spring of 1995, the main players were Warren Christopher, then Secretary of State, and Winston Lord, who was then the Assistant Secretary for East Asian and Pacific Affairs. The AIT players, apart from the reporting function of AIT Taipei, weren't really participants in the policy process. You can talk about policy issues from the field, but the policy decisions were being made in the Department and at the White House.

Q: Where does your appointment to this position come from?

JOHNSON: Yes, another interesting point. This is not a confirmed position. Neither the Washington job nor the AIT Taipei jobs are Senate-confirmed positions. They are appointed under the terms of the Taiwan Relations Act. The head of that office is appointed by the Secretary of State. In fact, the process is very similar to being appointed to any Chief of Mission position with that important exception. Your name goes up through the chain of command and lands on the desk of the Deputy Secretary, who is the head of what is called the "D Committee," which also makes appointments or considers nominations for Chief of Mission positions, as well as DCM (Deputy Chief of Mission) positions. In my case, I know there were a number of names that went up. I think it was finally winnowed down to four of us, and then it went through the process, and my name was chosen, was drawn out of the hat. In any case, I had worked with Winston Lord in Beijing so that was an advantage. Some of the people in the Department were people I had worked with, so I think that helped.

The other thing about that appointment was that Hong Kong was also coming open at the same time. I think I was on the list for both Hong Kong and Taipei. The Hong Kong job went to Richard Boucher who had been, and later was again, the State Department spokesman, a well-respected China specialist who had served in Shanghai and Taipei earlier. He got Hong Kong and I got Taipei. It ended up fine as far as I was concerned.

Hong Kong of course was a wonderful place to be because it was the build-up to the 1997 reversion. Richard had the great advantage of being there for that time, an extremely busy year from 1996 to 1997. Things sort of tailed off after that and went back to normal.

Q: So, you were taking over from Lynn Pascoe?

JOHNSON: Right.

Q: And you went through the process of spiffing up your language a little bit. How was that? It has been a few years since you…

JOHNSON: Yes, it had been quite a few years since I had done any Chinese, although I had done Polish before going to Warsaw and had done some Chinese earlier before going to Beijing in the early 1980s. Some of the people in the language program had not changed, but some had.

The Chinese language program at the Foreign Service Institute at that time had expanded a lot. Of course, we had many more posts in China by the mid-1990s, with many more people going to China. But the most important difference was that we had teachers from the mainland. The teachers were not just exiles, if you like, people who had fled in 1949 to Taiwan and later came to the United States. These were people who were originally from the mainland who were recruited as language specialists and were then hired by the Foreign Service Institute to teach Mandarin Chinese. It made a big difference because some vocabulary, some usages, had been so changed by the mainland authorities, by the PRC, that some of the teachers from an earlier generation did not have familiarity with that kind of usage. It was good to have teachers who had recent experience on the mainland.

As far as I could tell, they got along fine with the older teachers. At any rate, they were professionals in both groups. I think there were nine or ten teachers by the time I did this refresher course.

Q: Who was the linguist in charge of the program? Do you recall?

JOHNSON: There were two of them. Tom Madden -- he had previously headed the school in Taipei. The advanced language school was up on Yangmingshan, on the mountain in Taipei, near our residence. Madden had come back to head the program in Washington. I'm trying to think who was head of the school in Taipei when I was there: Charlie, Charlie something, Charlie Miracle.

They were really good. Their Chinese was outstanding and they were really professional linguists in the best sense. That is, they did language analysis as well as language speaking and teaching. It really was a much better program than when I had taken it back in 1968.

Q: Now you are preparing to go out to post. You are probably being briefed by the desk and the bureau.

JOHNSON: Oh yes, by everybody; the various agencies.

Q: Let's arrive in Taipei. Who greets you? What does the mission look like?

JOHNSON: The arrival in Taipei was actually kind of dramatic because on the way over, we discovered that Taipei was in the middle of a typhoon, that there was a major typhoon that had centered right over Taipei. It was unusual for a storm of that magnitude to hit the northern part of the island that way. But it did hit Taipei. The result was that we already knew when we got to Tokyo that we would not be continuing on to Taipei that night.

Northwest Airlines put us up overnight in Tokyo and we got out fairly early in the morning and landed in Taipei around noon or late morning, around 10:00 o'clock I guess.

Everything was completely dead quiet. There were trees over the road. Nobody was moving. Offices and schools, everything was closed. There was even some question whether we could get up the mountain to the AIT residence, because of trees across the road.

We did. The last stretch, the last couple of blocks after you came off the main road, apparently the General Services people had been up there that morning cutting up trees. There was at least one big one across the road so that we could not have gotten through. They managed to get it cut and moved by the time we arrived at about 11:00 in the morning. So our arrival from that standpoint was uneventful. There was no power in the house. There was no power anywhere. The electricity was out completely. We had a generator so the house was running on generator power, but you had to keep it limited because of the capacity of the generator. So we didn't have any air conditioning and this was the first of August. It was rather warm, shall we say, for about the first five hours. Then, they did get the power back on and it was fine after that. So, an eventful arrival.

We were greeted by the then number two who was Christopher LaFleur who later went on to be DCM in Tokyo, and now is Ambassador to Kuala Lumpur. He met us. The Admin Chief, Stanton Bigelow, and his wife who was head of the Community Liaison Office, Margery Bigelow, met us at the airport. The usual turnout: you have the whole line up of all of the heads of the offices, we did that the next day, down at the main headquarters building.

The AIT building in downtown Taipei had been the U.S. Military Advisory Group compound before 1979 and was taken over as a temporary office by the newly-created AIT at that point. It had never had a major renovation. The grounds were much the same as they had been 20 years earlier. There was a big advantage in that it was in the middle of town and we had enough room for our offices. There was a big disadvantage in the sense that nothing had been done to upgrade the quality of the facilities. During the time that we were there, there was much talk about a new quote permanent unquote office. Finally, around the end of the time we were there, we had narrowed down the choices to two sites. Later, I think, the better of the two sites was chosen as the permanent facility. I don't know if the building has been finished by now or not, but it has been underway for a while. It should be a really nice facility.

Q: Is it not in the same part of town?

JOHNSON: No, it's past the old airport. It's on the northeastern -- from downtown Taipei, it's northeast of that area. But that whole area has built up enormously in the meantime. It is like another city center. The big disadvantage is that if you have to go to the Foreign Ministry or to the President's office, or some other main government office in the middle of town, it is much farther. Instead of being a five, or at most a ten minute drive, it is now a 40 or 50 minute drive to get into the center part of town.

Q: Part of that is because Taipei has continued to get rich and wealthy. Motorcycles have converted to cars.

JOHNSON: That is right. The traffic is very dense. Even with new road construction and new efforts at public transportation and so forth, it is still very hard to get around in the main downtown area.

It was actually difficult for us at certain times of the day and certain times of the year to get up the hill to where we lived because we were right next door to the Wen Hua Ta Hsue, the Cultural University. There were 25,000 students at Cultural University, of which twenty-four and a half thousand had motorcycles and commuted to and from school every day. So the trek up and down that two-lane road morning and evening was quite amazing, and a big problem as far as our ability to get around in the city. It meant, for example, that at our residence up on the hill -- a nice big residence, well laid out for entertaining -- but you could never do lunches because it was too far. You could not get people to come up from their offices and have a reasonable lunch and get back before close of business. So when we had official lunches, they were usually in restaurants. We also had a small guest house downtown that we used for those occasions. Maybe twice a month or so, we would have an event downtown at that facility. It was a drawback. The house was fine as a house. As a facility for events where time was not a factor, it was okay.

Q: Can you describe how AIT was organized?

JOHNSON: The actual organization was similar to an embassy. We had I think slightly more than 80 Americans, which made it about a medium-sized mission overseas. The Director had the same functions as an Ambassador, a Chief of Mission in any other post or a Consul General in a big consulate. The Director was assisted by a Deputy Director whose functions were similar to that of a Deputy Chief of Mission. The component parts, the Political Section was called the General Affairs Section, which was everybody's favorite pun of course, GAS. The Econ Section was called the Econ Section. We had an Agricultural Attaché. We had an office that handled military arms sales to Taiwan, which was a very big operation there. We had the equivalent of a Defense Attaché who did military reporting. And so forth.

The functions were much the same. Of course, we had a fairly large Admin staff and a large consular section; we also had a very effective Public Affairs function. That office had inherited the former USIA (United States Information Agency) facility. They had a nice library and sort of functions center where they could carry on lectures and exhibitions and so forth in a different part of town, near the President's office and near the Ministry of Agriculture.

It operated much as an embassy or a large consulate would operate in other parts of the world. As I said earlier, there was no disadvantage, from an admin standpoint, to people serving there.

We had a very good crew. I mentioned Chris LaFleur. He was replaced after one year by Lauren Moriarty who became my deputy the second year. She had been the chief of the Econ Section, but she was promoted to the Senior Foreign Service during that time, partly on the basis of her work in Taipei. She had the rank and obviously the interest in becoming the number two. She was there the second year and then was assigned to Beijing after that. Her husband, Jim, was the head of GAS. Then he was promoted and they both went off to Beijing. He was later the Ambassador to Katmandu and she was the Ambassador to APEC (Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation). They have moved on since then. A high-powered couple, both of whom were highly successful in Taiwan and in Beijing.

Then when they went to Beijing, she was replaced by Steve Young as the number two the third year. So I had three different deputies in the three years I was there. Steve stayed on for two more years and had another posting in the meantime, and later went back as the Director of AIT.

Q: At AIT, you had the excitement of the Lee Teng-hui visit. But as you arrived at post, what did you see as your primary issues that you would be dealing with?

JOHNSON: The consequences of the Lee Teng-hui visit to Cornell and the general deterioration in the relationship across the Strait between Taiwan and the mainland led to an intense period of confrontation that came to a peak in March, 1996, shortly before I got there.

In March 1996, the PRC conducted missile "tests" north and south of the island where they launched some unarmed missiles into the water. The message was clear that they had the capacity if they wanted to attack Taiwan should Taiwan go so far as to declare independence. That was the main worry, that Lee Teng-hui would do that, or somebody on his behalf would do it, that the people in authority in Taiwan would test the limits, and the PRC would feel that it was forced to respond.

There was still very much an echo of the missile tests by the time I got there about five months later. The U.S. response to the missile tests was to send first one and then later, a second, aircraft carrier battle group to the area near Taiwan, the area to the north and east of the island. As a result of that show of force by President Clinton, the mainland backed down and said, "Oh, this was just an exercise anyway," and so forth. But everybody understood that the mainland had given this threat and that the U.S. had responded in the way that we knew we needed to. The people in Taiwan were very grateful for this demonstration of resolve on the U.S. part. From that standpoint, we got there at a time when the importance of the relationship had recently been reaffirmed and when the chips were down, the U.S. did what we said we would do: to come to the assistance of Taiwan and to force a diplomatic solution -- or at least to force the removal of the threat in the near term.

Interestingly, although words have flown across the Strait in the meantime, there has never been another confrontation like that. The closest thing to a confrontation like that occurred right at the end of our three years there.

The last weekend that we were in Taipei, in the summer of 1999, I was out playing a farewell round of golf with some of the senior people in the Taiwan government. When I got in the car to come back after the game, I heard on the news that Lee Teng-hui had done an interview with a German TV program and had referred to the two entities on both sides of the Strait as sovereign entities, or whatever phrase he used -- clearly a phrase that implied equality of status in the legal sense between the "entities" on the two sides of the Strait. Predictably, the PRC responded by saying this was another step down the slippery slope towards independence, and they were not going to stand for it. There was another big verbal barrage; but there were not any missiles fired at that time.

It made my farewell call on President Lee actually quite interesting. Washington was caught by surprise as well, and they don't like to be surprised on issues of this kind. So I had some quite clear instructions about points to make. It turned into a rather testy conversation, even though the main point of it was a ceremonial farewell. It was about four days after Lee's interview. The news that I got was on a Sunday. The German interview by Lee had been on the previous Friday. My meeting with him was on the following Wednesday, so it was four days later.

Interesting times.

Another interesting little echo to that. After we left Taipei, my wife and I went first to Hong Kong where we hadn't been for several years, and stayed for a couple of days. We then went on to Guilin on the mainland, then to Xi'an and Beijing. She had never been to those places. Since we had already left our posting in Taiwan, it was considered okay for us to travel on the mainland; we were not there on official business. In the hotel, I think it was in Xi'an, I was surfing the channels when I came upon the German television station in English, and they carried the interview with Lee Teng-hui in English in China, verbatim. I was amazed. It was not edited. There was no commentary. It was not a PRC broadcast. It was a chance to see what the interview had actually been, the full text.

Q: That is what is interesting about the time that you were there. Because Lee and the political structure in Taiwan had converted the presidency of the Republic of China from this appointed Kuomintang (KMT) Secretary General to the winner of an actual election. In fact, there are those who argue that his trip to Cornell was part of his presidential campaign.

JOHNSON: Oh sure. It was.

Q: Then the election itself comes the next spring and these elections are new. They could have stopped them at any time they wanted, but they set them just before the American election, six months before. So now, the whole political structure in Taiwan does change. There is an elected presidency. There is an assumption that he is supposed to be more in

tune with the public, less magisterial, Secretary General of the KMT only. How did you see that over the years?

JOHNSON: I think one of the things that Lee Teng-hui will be remembered for -- appropriately -- is the degree to which he did pursue this process of democratization. From the time he became Vice President under Chiang Ching-kuo, Chiang Kai-shek's son, he clearly had this in mind. Now those who are not fans of Lee Teng-hui would say that his whole objective was to turn the place into Taiwanese-ruled Taiwan, and basically to cut away or to ignore the connections with the mainland, including the name, "Republic of China." For example, in his Cornell speech, he referred many times to "the Republic of China on Taiwan." And he regularly used phrases that implied a higher degree of sovereignty and also the legitimacy of a role derived from the will of the people, from the voters, rather than from some inherited position from the KMT or from service on the mainland.

He had made some very significant steps, even before the presidential position became an elected position, the parliament became an elected parliament, which also replaced a collection of old guys -- mostly guys, I guess there were a few women but mostly men -- most of whom had connections to the mainland at some point in their past.

Q: They were elected to the parliament in 1947?

JOHNSON: Yes. They had already changed that so that the parliament was an elected body by then. The presidential elections in 1996 were a very important event. Then again in 2000, and again in 2004. They have had now four presidential elections since that time.

Q: You are meeting Lee Teng-hui after he has been elected, he has this new status. Would you care to make some observations?

JOHNSON: He was an engaging guy; there was no doubt. He had real charisma. He had come up initially as a kind of technician. One of the reasons that the Kuomintang back in the 1960s and 1970s felt that Lee Teng-hui was a safe candidate, was because he basically was an agricultural technician. He had gotten his PhD. at Cornell in agricultural economics and had come back to work in a program that was hugely successful back in those days called The Joint Commission on Rural Reconstruction (JCRR). Taiwan was a model of success in that program. This crowded island was able to produce more rice than they needed for their own population and some other agricultural goods as well.

He came up through the ranks on the basis of his merit, his performance. He then became the Vice President to Chiang Ching-kuo, who died in 1988. Then there was a big fuss within the Kuomintang on whether he should be allowed to assume the presidency or whether they should have another election, whether someone else should be appointed, or something. Madame Chiang Kai-shek was absolutely against the idea of having a Taiwanese President, predicting (accurately) that to do so would be to lose the tie to the mainland and make it more Taiwanese. She was overruled and outvoted, and Lee Teng-hui did become the President after Chiang Ching-kuo died in 1988.

He was an impressive guy. He always had a clear idea about the message he wanted to convey. It was a combination: on the one hand, we are grateful for all the Americans have done for us. On the other hand, we need more assistance economically, politically, military. There was always a kind of leaning forward. There was always a sense of what more was in this relationship from the Taiwan standpoint.

He was always very reticent to talk about relations with the mainland, except in a self-justifying way. For example, in one of my first conversations with him, he said, "Oh yes, we are prepared to talk about some kind of new arrangement with the mainland, once the mainland becomes prosperous and democratic like we are. So we need 30 years of stability. We need 30 years of continued change and openness in the mainland. After 30 years or so, maybe we will be ready to talk with them about some accommodation." I am not even sure he used the word "accommodation", but anyway some different and more stable relationship based on democracy and prosperity basically. In other words, some dialogue could take place when mainland China had already achieved Taiwan's level of political development.

When I paid my farewell call on him, in addition to the somewhat testy nature of the discussion about the cross-Strait relationship, I said, "Well, when we met the first time, you said that you thought the process would take about 30 years. Now it's 27 years, so what has happened in the meantime? What is Taiwan doing to sort of help this process along?"

He said, "Oh no, no. I didn't mean 30 years. That's just a turn of phrase. I just meant sometime, at some point in the future when these conditions change."

I obviously was trying to pin down what the Taiwan side was prepared to do to bring about this kind of change that he had said was a desirable outcome. He later told someone that I had subjected him to a kind of interrogation; in fact, I was following my instructions on a topic that was very important to the US.

So, Lee Teng-hui was an interesting guy, a good man to talk to and I think a person of the times who did lead Taiwan to become a real thriving democracy which it still is.

Q: Do you have a sense of his availability to you as head of the American section? I was there at the time Chiang Ching-kuo was in power and the head of AIT getting access to him was very unusual. Of course, he was ill.

JOHNSON: No, it was not unusual. We could see him whenever we wanted to. I didn't abuse that opportunity, but certainly, when we wanted to see him, we could see him.

We had members of Congress coming probably every three or four months. We had other important people, business people sometimes, governors of states, and so forth, so I would usually go in and see him with them.

Q: Many of those were arriving on programs and invitations from the Government of Taiwan?

JOHNSON: Yes. This was to me kind of an anomaly that the members of the Congressional staff and even Congressmen and Congresswomen themselves had their ways paid through a kind of a foundation or some kind of informal organization in the United States. The same was true for governors. The same was true for mayors and other people who had political influence. Taiwan was very good at that. They cultivated people at an early stage.

For example, President Clinton, when he was Governor of Arkansas, went to Taiwan four times on trade promotion missions of some kind. So an obscure governor from an obscure state nonetheless was definitely on their list, as were all the others. We had a number of those kinds of visits. In most cases, I would go with the head of the delegation when they called on Lee. So I saw him fairly often. As I mentioned, I played golf with him probably once every two months or so (and he is an excellent golfer, about a 10-12 handicap).

The Vice President when I got there was Lien Chan, who later became a presidential candidate but was never president. He was a University of Chicago trained political scientist who had lived and worked in this country for some time. I remember when I called on him the first time. At that time he held both the Prime Minister and the Vice President positions. They later required that these positions by held by two different people. During my call on him, I asked what the role of the Prime Minister was, what did he do in that role. And he described running cabinet meetings, the policy process, and the way the information flow worked and so forth. And then I said, "And what is the role of the Vice President?" He said, "The role of the Vice President is to wait."

He also used a formula when we talked about cross-Strait relationships. His view and Lee's view were completely different, even though Lien had good credentials as a Taiwanese; he had actually been born on the mainland to a revered Taiwanese scholar who had fled the Japanese occupation of Taiwan. His credentials as a political leader in Taiwan were certainly unassailable, but his attitude was quite different from Lee Teng-hui's. For example, in this initial conversation, I asked Lien Chan, "What is your view on cross-Strait relations?" He said, "One China, but not now." He accepted the principle of One China, which had always been in dispute with Lee Teng-hui, but he added that, "We are not ready for it yet. Why rush into something where we don't need to rush in?" That kind of acknowledgement of the One China principle is of course what the PRC was looking for all along. When Lien Chan visited the mainland several years later as the head of the Kuomintang, he was warmly received and said essentially the same thing, "One China, not now."

Q: Actually, wasn't that phrase, "There is one China and Taiwan is part of China." Didn't that originate with the Kuomintang? That's their rationale for being in power on Taiwan, it comes from them not from Beijing and not from the Americans.

JOHNSON: That's exactly right. And only from history, not from an election. When the control over Taiwan was changed after World War II, no longer Japanese occupation, it reverted to the then Government of China, which was the Republic of China government on the mainland. By the way, the PRC is very scrupulous when they talk about this phase of Chinese history. They refer to that phase of history as the reversion of Taiwan to the then legitimate government of China. They are not claiming they were then the Government of China because they weren't. Oftentimes, you will see in press items that the PRC claims that Taiwan is a part of the PRC. That is not what they claim. They claim that Taiwan is a part of "China," not that it is a part of the PRC. It has never been a part of the PRC, before or since 1949.

Q: In fact, that claim that it is, you read that a lot in the American press. That is just the American…

JOHNSON: Yes, but they don't make a distinction between the government of the People's Republic of China based in Beijing which began in 1949, and the entity that is called "China" which of course existed for centuries before that.

Q: We were talking about Lee Teng-hui earlier. In the time that you were there, did you see any particular evolution in his approach to some of the cross Strait issues?

JOHNSON: No, I think that his objective was just to kick the ball down the road and make sure that things did not go wrong. The options that he saw and the options he felt were appropriate were for Taiwan to evolve in a way at least toward more de facto independence. That concept needed to be kept alive, in his view. And that is why his approach and Lien Chan's approach were distinctly different. Lee Teng-hui didn't even mouth the words about "One China," and definitely did not believe them. I mean he was in favor of Taiwan for the Taiwanese. He had no affinity with the mainland. He had never lived on the mainland. He had no connections, no family connections. His education was all under Japanese rule in Taiwan or in Japan or in the States. He spoke Japanese better than he spoke Chinese, Mandarin Chinese; a fact which the mainlanders never failed to let people know. His idea was that Taiwan should be a separate place and that it would be if it were not for this accident of history and geography that makes it so close to the mainland.

Q: In fact, one of the things that is not necessarily well known: did you see last week that he went to Yasukuni Shrine, to visit his brother who died as a Japanese soldier during the war?

JOHNSON: No, I didn't know that.

Q: Was this the time that the authorities on Taiwan officially recognized the March 1947 events?

JOHNSON: No, that happened before I got there. Do you mean the er er ba (2/28) commemoration? February 28? No, 2/28 had already become a national holiday

commemorating this event in which the Kuomintang (KMT) had put down a local uprising by the Taiwanese, an event that was never talked about during the time that I was there in language training, and had never been talked about under KMT rule when the rulers were mainlanders. It was only after Lee Teng-hui came to power that this event, which everybody knew about but nobody talked about, then became part of the public record. In fact, they renamed one of the parks in downtown Taipei as the Er Er Ba Park, the February 28th Park.

People whose names were largely unknown as scholars or literary people or political leaders with the Taiwanese then became much more popular, much more a part of the revised history, rather than people and places on the mainland, which had been a part of the curriculum before then. In fact now they are even getting to the point of changing the name of the airport. It is no longer Chiang Kai-shek Airport; it is now Taipei Tao Yuan International Airport. There is talk about changing the Chiang Kai-shek Park, the big square in the center of town, and so forth. These remnants from the past that have Chiang Kai-shek in the name, or any other reference that connects Taiwan to the mainland, are being gradually eliminated.

The passports now instead of saying Republic of China, now say Republic of China with the word "Taiwan" underneath. I think the current president, Chen Shui-bian, would certainly like to remove all references to China and just say the Republic of Taiwan. But that would be a little too much.

Q: It must have changed the way that AIT (American Institute in Taiwan) did its business now that you have a newly-elected legislature. The presidency is elected. How does AIT adjust to this new political environment?

JOHNSON: Well, we had very good access and this was across the political spectrum. We could see anybody pretty much whenever we wanted to. Now when I got there in the summer of 1996, the Foreign Minister who had been there forever, Fred Chien, had moved on to another high position as head of the "Control Yuan," which functioned as an oversight body, somewhat like our GAO -- the Government Accountability Office. Fred Chien had also been the head of the Taiwan office in Washington for several years, and was very well-known on the Hill. He was very articulate, very clear -- and sometimes very prickly to deal with.

He had been replaced exactly at that time by John Chang who had been a career Foreign Service Officer. Chang had worked on American affairs for a long time, partly by coincidence. He was the illegitimate son of Chiang Ching-kuo.

His parentage was later acknowledged officially and he is now the sole survivor of the Chiang family now, the others having died without children. His twin brother had died in Beijing shortly before we got there, and he (John) was given special permission by the Taiwan government and the PRC government to go retrieve the body. Interesting process.

He became the Foreign Minister shortly before we got there, and he was a pleasure to deal with. He was a very easy-going guy, very pleasant, very smart. Again, he knew his key points, what he wanted to get done. He had a very sophisticated, very polished way of trying to go about it.

His Deputy Foreign Minister at that time was Chen Chien-jen, C.J. Chen, who also spent a lot of time in Washington and later spent yet more time in Washington as the head of that office later on. He was the Vice Minister at that time. He later became the government spokesman and then he came back as Foreign Minister just about the time we left in 1999. He then later became head of the office in Washington again.

So, those were the two guys we dealt with perhaps most often. But there were others: the Minister of Finance, the Head of the Central Bank, the Minister of Agriculture, and also people who were not at the ministerial level. We had great access.

They had a terrible plane crash in Taipei while we were there and five American citizens were killed. So we had a major recovery and condolence operation there for about a two-week period. Family members came and had to identify the remains and get the documents all together, and so forth. It was a pretty bad situation. But imagine if it was a whole planeload of American citizens! In this case it was five out of about 150 people. I was thinking of that because two of the victims were the head of the Central Bank and his wife, who were coming back from a regional conference in Bali. Sad.

Q: I would presume in the political environment in Taiwan that the Political Section and the junior political officers had plenty of opportunity to practice their Chinese and get out. Kang Ning-shan is still operating at that time, I think; he was still with the DPP (Democratic Progressive Party).

JOHNSON: Yes, of course. And Chen Shui-bian was the bright star of the DPP. He was then the Mayor of Taipei. I remember the first time that I met with him; well, the second time I guess. The first time, I called on him in his office. The second time, I had lunch with him and one assistant. With me was Jim Moriarty, the Head of the Political Section, the General Affairs Section (GAS) at the time. Just the four of us. In the course of this luncheon, Chen Shi-bian said that one of the things that he and the DPP were promoting at the time was the idea of a referendum through which the people should be allowed to decide on the future status of Taiwan.

I said, “Well of course the outcome of the referendum depends on how the questions are asked. What would the questions be that you are going to ask?”

He said, “Very simple: two questions. The first is, do you think Taiwan should be a member of the United Nations? And the second is, do you think Taiwan should be a part of the People’s Republic of China?”

I said, “Well gosh, those are pretty good questions. If you end up with anything less than 99 percent on your side, it would be a big upset wouldn’t it?” I also said, “There is a

question about maintaining stability in the region and U.S. interests and so forth." He sort of waved his hand around and said, "I don't believe that the people of the United States would ever take a position against the freely expressed view of the people of Taiwan."

I said, "Well sometimes a leader has to lead and not just follow public opinion."

That was and is Chen Shui-bian's view, that the future of Taiwan should be decided by the people of Taiwan. If a referendum is the way to get there, then that is the way you get there.

Q: I also think he believes the other part of the statement that those kinds of policies would be ones that the Americans would follow unquestioningly. I think that nowadays comes from his perception of the enormous influence the Kuomintang had in the United States. You are talking about Governors and Senators and whatnot coming. You had this tremendous mechanism that created a very sophisticated soft power, as we talk about it in Taiwanese terms. I suspect the DPP when it finally came to power, just assumed it could inherit that strong association with the United States.

JOHNSON: There was a big fuss about lobbying contracts. For instance, Lee Teng-hui I think still believes that his visit to Cornell was arranged through his lobbying firm in Washington; it had good connections. Maybe it is true, I don't know. In any case, the Kuomintang, not the government, was paying that consulting firm $5 million a year. Apart from having perhaps arranged his visit to Cornell, it was not exactly clear what else they had done. This in turn gave rise to the idea of, sort of, operating outside of normal channels. They did that a lot. Several people now, including the current President, Ma Ying-jeou, have gotten in trouble because of this sort of slush fund; there were pockets of money sitting in various places to be used without accountability.

(Conversation with 3rd party).

Well members of Chen's family also got in trouble, yes, for allegedly accepting gifts. But Ma also got stuck with this. As Mayor of Taipei, he had the same kind of discretionary funds, which he did not have to account for. There was obviously a temptation to use those funds sometimes for purposes that were not entirely the public's business.

It has become a real problem in Taiwan, what to do with these undercover funds. Sometimes it is for buying diplomatic relationships. You go into a country that is very poor in the South Pacific or in East Africa, West Africa, Central America, and spread some money around. Before you know it, you get diplomatic relations established.

As far as ideology was concerned, I don't thing Chen Shui-bian's ideology has changed a bit. I think it is exactly as it was when we had this conversation when he was Mayor of Taipei. He was later defeated in his effort to run for re-election in Taipei by Ma, the current President. Then, to almost no one's surprise, Ma won by a fairly good margin; Chen had been elected first in 2000 and later in 2004. But his margin in 2004 was closer than his margin in 2000.

Q: And it involved that assassination attempt?

JOHNSON: I think that was real. I don't think there was anything to suggest otherwise. It was real blood. There was a real bullet or two. I don't believe that the capacity to stage something like that is anything as likely as the idea of someone taking a shot at him. Besides which, the Vice Presidential candidate, who was even more controversial, was in the same car at the same time. I think it was a real assassination attempt.

Q: That illustrates how democracy evolves in some circumstances. Lee sets it up.

JOHNSON: And Chen takes it over.

Q: All these other elected positions are now there because earlier, even in the 1980s, as Taiwanese politicians looked like they were about to win the mayorship of Taipei or Kaohsiung or what not, the KMT would suddenly decide, "Oh, we are going to make these appointed positions." Now this has all been reversed in the 1990s. These are elected positions.

JOHNSON: Those two mayor positions are elected. Actually, all of the positions are elected now, down to, I think there is one level -- the county level or something -- that is appointed. Nearly all of them are elected now, including the provincial chiefs, which is also a big job.

Q: Did they eliminate the Province of Taiwan when you were there? I have forgotten when that happened.

JOHNSON: I think they did. At any rate, they basically eliminated that separate level of government. James Soong was the Governor of Taiwan, who was a good friend of ours. We saw him quite a lot. He was very dynamic and very popular. I think it was during the next iteration that that position was eliminated. Of course, the provincial government of Taiwan didn't have any separate authority over anything. But Soong was very dynamic.

Q: Yes, I found him very interesting.

JOHNSON: His political standing has declined in the meantime, in part because he was tied too overtly to the idea of One China, or Taiwan as a part of Greater China. He is a mainlander who was born on the mainland and came to Taiwan in 1949. His identity as a Taiwanese is nowhere near as close as Chen Shui-bian's or Lee Teng-hui's, or even Lien Chan's. So he has pretty much fallen by the wayside politically.

Q: That's an interesting aspect of the circumstance you are looking at, because people are coming up, they are winning elections or they are businessmen of note. So you are watching this evolution in this society, you and the Economic Section, the Political Section.

We were talking earlier about your relationship to Washington, AIT Washington and Jim Wood. Now, Mr. Wood was not in that position very long.

JOHNSON: Well, he got into some trouble. He had come out to Taiwan a few times in 1995 and 1996. I guess it was mostly in 1996. He was alleged to have sought, or at least hinted, that it would be a good idea for the Taiwan folks to contribute money to the Democrats, after what Clinton had done to bring the carriers in to defend them, and so forth. He thought it was appropriate that they should provide some payback -- quite literally. Whether or how overtly he did that or whether he did it at all, I don't know; I was never in the room when those kinds of conversations took place. It was widely rumored and widely reported, and there were people in Taiwan who claimed that he had made this suggestion to them. That got back to an ethics board in Washington. There was a huge stink about it. He had his own meetings when he came out there; not meetings that were always arranged by AIT.

Anyway, the result of that was that he was in hot water. The then administration under President Clinton, even though the election had taken place and there were going to be changes within the administration, nevertheless the State Department made the decision that Wood would have to go. That was done just before the first Clinton administration left office in January 1997.

Then there was a gap of a couple of months while other candidates were considered and by the summer of 1997, Richard Bush, a well respected and established scholar who had good connections in Taiwan, was chosen for the post and did a wonderful job during the remaining time he was in that position over the following three or four years.

Q: Was it a totally different environment?

JOHNSON: Totally different. There was a much more constructive atmosphere. We got along, not only personally but also politically. In terms of what our mission was and what their mission was, how we worked with each other and how our officers worked with each other, made a huge difference.

Q: Talking about bilateral relations with Taiwan, economics used to always be high on the list. How does it fit during the timeframe that you were there?

JOHNSON: It was definitely a very big deal. As I mentioned earlier, the law that created AIT specified that we would maintain cultural, commercial and other relations. Commercial was certainly a big part. There was major U.S. investment in Taiwan. Of course, the trade numbers went up like crazy during that time because of the high tech boom. This was right at the time when everything that had to do with software and hardware, especially computer hardware, was manufactured in Taiwan, the silicone chips. It was just a boom beyond description. Every day, the non-stop flight between Taipei and San Francisco was full of business people who were involved either in Silicon Valley or in the Taiwan version of Silicon Valley. It was something amazing to watch. Many of the people who were the big investors in Taiwan had been educated in the United States. One

of them, for example, was Morris Chang, the head of Taiwan Semiconductor Corporation which was established with Taiwan government funds but was operated as a private company. He had been the head of that part of Texas Instruments for something like twenty years and was invited to come back to Taiwan.

A lot of other people also had gone abroad, gotten their education, in some cases became U.S. citizens, and then come back. They brought their money back, brought their initiative back and their tremendous brain power, and made a fantastic success out of business in Taiwan.

Another little vignette: the American School of Taipei, which was maybe the best overseas school I had ever seen -- it was really outstanding. It is the only school that I have ever heard of where the main complaint of the American parents was that the kids did not have any fun, that the class work, the schedule of work and the expectations of the students were too hard. The reason for this demanding curriculum was because the students all had to be U.S. citizens or non-Taiwan citizens. Taiwan citizens were not eligible to go to this school. So 85 percent of the student body was ethnic Chinese from Taiwan or from families from the mainland. They all had to have a U.S. or a foreign passport. They worked all the time. They never played at all. In addition to the regular school hours, they would have cram schools late at night and traffic jams in Taipei when the cram schools would let out at 10:00 p.m. It was amazing.

Q: They were building a new campus…

JOHNSON: That is the one.

Q: So that was completed by the time you were there?

JOHNSON: Yes, a beautiful campus.

Q: You were talking about this boom. Does this mean that the bilateral trade is quite out of kilter?

JOHNSON: Bilateral trade was more in their favor than in ours, although we did have major exports. We exported more to Taiwan than we did to the mainland during those years. We had around $25 billion or so in U.S. exports and about $35-40 billion in the value of imports. Of course, the rate of increase was more on the side of imports with this high tech stuff that was going from Taiwan to the States. So the disparity grew during the time that we were there. Also, they made an effort to purchase U.S. goods. There were more U.S. apples, more Washington State apples exported to Taiwan than any place in the world. They went out of their way to buy U.S. origin goods. Airplanes of course, and lots of other things. But even so, the trade balance was in their favor.

The other thing that was happening at that time was that investment in the mainland was going up. It was going up very dramatically. At that point, there was still a rule that said that Taiwan investments of over $50 million, I think it was, had to be approved at the

senior government level. There was already at that point a huge petrochemical plant going up on the mainland in Fujian Province funded by this huge chemical company in Taiwan, Formosa Plastics. Every now and then there were questions about this project obviously being worth more than $50 million. It was in the several billion category. Finally, they just basically ignored the rule. Now, there is well over $100 billion worth of Taiwan investment in the mainland; not much investment from the mainland to Taiwan -- yet. They still have some restrictions, but the amount of investment, the amount of flow of goods in both directions, has just boomed, so that the mainland is now Taiwan's number one trade partner. We used to always be, but the mainland is now. They have passed us.

Q: At an earlier time, Lee Teng-hui set up the Mainland Affairs Council, which was Taipei's unofficial institution which connected with the Straits Exchange Foundation, Beijing's unofficial entity, to talk to the mainland. One of the things the Mainland Affairs Council was supposed to do was to encourage Taiwanese businessmen to have some connection with the mainland, because you had this perception that the mainland was only of interest to the exiled mainlanders; that the Taiwanese had no interest. Well, it sounds like they were very successful in encouraging the Taiwanese to have a relationship with the mainland.

JOHNSON: I don't remember hearing them say that that was one of their objectives. In fact, the economic objective when I was there was what they called, Look South. Vincent Hsiao was the Prime Minister during part of that time; he was an economic advisor before that. He became identified with the idea of investment in Vietnam, Thailand and Indonesia, and so forth, and not to invest in the mainland, exactly for that reason, to try to get away from this concentration on the mainland. It was partly successful and partly not. Taiwan was the number two external investor in Vietnam, number three in Thailand and number two in Indonesia. They had big money in those areas. But it was not either/or; they were also investing in the mainland at the same time.

Q: Wasn't there a Taiwan tourist group that ran into a robbery? Was that during your time?

JOHNSON: Yes. There were incidents on the mainland. There was a case of a guy who got killed up in Shandong. It was probably just a plain robbery attempt that went wrong. There were incidents from time to time on the mainland. Of course, the Taiwan authorities would then get up in arms and say, "Our people are being mistreated on the mainland. It shows what the attitude is." The mainland's response was basically pretty much an abject apology saying, "This was not intentional. We do everything we can to protect the lives and property and the interests of our brethren from Taiwan who come here, as we do other external visitors and investors."

Q: In an earlier time of course, if you were in Taipei you would get no news about the mainland: political, economic or weather. I presume that has all changed.

JOHNSON: That has pretty much gone. The news is pretty inclusive. To some extent, it tends to feature things where the mainland looks bad or in the case of Hong Kong, the Hong Kong reversion. Whenever there is another indication of the PRC (People's Republic of China) meddling in Hong Kong, that gets a lot of publicity in Taiwan. That is not so much a matter of censorship; it is a matter of being selective about things they think are important to their readers. The press is pretty free, both the Chinese language press and the English press. The Chinese press is freer because there are more of them; there are a lot of newspapers in Chinese in Taiwan.

Q: You were there at the time of the Hong Kong reversion. How was that perceived and how did that affect your workload?

JOHNSON: Much less than we expected. Workload: we had some visitors of course, official visitors and others who went to Hong Kong and then came to Taiwan, or the other way around. It was a convenient time for people to travel in that part of the world. We had our fair share of those kinds of visitors.

As far as the substance of the issue was concerned, it made a lot less difference than I thought it would. I thought that once this reversion happened, and certainly within the next couple of years after that, that we would begin to hear more of what it would mean for Taiwan if such a thing were to occur. Because that is clearly what the mainland intended: the whole question of One Country, Two Systems, as articulated by Deng Xiaoping back in 1984 was not originally aimed at Hong Kong. It was originally aimed at Taiwan. The phrase was still used by Beijing a lot of the time during my time in Taipei.

Deng Xiaoping was still alive during some of that time. So I thought that there might be at least some small number of people in Taiwan who would look to that Hong Kong example as something that might apply to them. In fact, it did not. They felt rather the opposite, that the people in Hong Kong did not have a choice, that their rights were negotiated away by the British, that the quality of life would certainly be worse under the PRC flag than it was under the British flag -- or needless to say under their own flag. It came across really as more negative than positive in terms of attitudes towards the mainland.

Interestingly, in the ten years since then, I think that has continued to be the case. Even though Hong Kong is a thriving, bustling place, and the currency is still stable and people have become more outspoken than they were earlier, the people of Taiwan do not see it as a model. They just think it is a different situation; theirs is not the same.

Q: Going back to economics for a second -- sorry for jumping around -- were you beginning to see Taiwan investors moving some of their factories into the mainland and therefore things that they were normally putting into U.S. trade was now coming into the U.S. trade statistics as mainland exports?

JOHNSON: Not as much while we were there. A lot of that has happened since then as the volume of Taiwan investment in the mainland has gone up. The catch phrase at the

time was the manpower or the labor could be done on the mainland but the design and the headquarters and the financing would all be done in Taiwan. And that was still pretty much the case when we were there. So even companies like Formosa Plastics and some others had big investments in the mainland but still at least pretended that the bulk of their operations, including their finances and their design work, were all still being done on Taiwan.

Q: Actually, I think if some economic researcher wants to look at it, that was similar to the relationship between Japan and Taiwan through the 1950s and 1960s. That is, the Japanese would be the designer and the buyer. They would go to the shoe manufacturer in Taiwan and say, "Make me 12 sets of these and 10 sets of these."

JOHNSON. Yes. Another thing about the business culture in Taiwan that I remember at the time struck me as quite remarkable was the idea that failure was not a permanent blemish on the record. There were so many people we met whose life history was along these lines. They started out maybe working in their dad's bicycle shop doing some repair work of some kind. There were too many bicycle shops and they finally went bust. They didn't get anywhere. So they then moved into sewing machines; they worked on sewing machines and that business was okay for a while. They that got flooded and there were no more expansion possibilities. Then they bought into a small company that was making computer chips. Five years later, they were millionaires. So often, you had this pattern of people who started out and it didn't work. They started another thing and it didn't work. They started a third thing and it didn't work. And finally, something did work. The part that did work was usually in the high tech side of things. Not always, but usually.

To take an example, Tatong was a good example. Tatong was a big company even back in the old days. They were a big company making very standard ordinary kitchen appliances like fans or rice cookers or things of that kind. Tatong now is producing computers and probably high-end cell phones by this time, and so forth. In that case, the trajectory is a more standard one, but they had some bumps along the road too.

Something like 95 percent of the enterprises on Taiwan are classified as small and medium sized enterprises based on the number of employees and the valuation. Most of them are actually quite small operations. They become part of a bigger complex but they get there over a rather bumpy road sometimes.

Q: The American Chamber of Commerce has always been a feature on Taiwan. You would have had frequent contact.

JOHNSON: Frequent, yes. They had maybe slightly over 400 members of the AmCham, the American Chamber of Commerce. They were very active and very effective in Taiwan. They covered a fair range of industries, some in the high tech areas, but other things in the basic services like the airlines and the banks and things of that kind. In fact, two different presidents of the AmCham while I was there were both bankers, different banks, Bank of America and Citibank. Many of the people in the business community

also lived there and worked there for some time. They did not have fast turnover, most of them did not have fast turnover. They became quite closely identified with the place.

Q: If bankers were head of the AmCham, it sounds like Taiwan over time had changed its banking regulations to allow them to come in.

JOHNSON: Yes, they did, but there were still a lot of restrictions and that was the problem. They were very limited on what they could do in retail banking for example. They could do corporate banking, trade banking, that sort of thing, letters of credit and so forth. I think Citibank was the only one that had branches around the island. Citibank was a very big operation there. They had a lot of branches around the island. Bank of America and the others banks mostly did not.

Q: Was Taiwan still having intellectual property rights issues that you would raise sometimes?

JOHNSON: Yes, big problems, but not as big as I remembered during the first time I was there. In those days, you could go and buy tapes and books for practically nothing. A lot of that had changed. There was still a lot of piracy; a lot of CDs for example were available cheaply on the streets. But the Taiwan authorities, unlike Thailand, really did take it seriously because by that time they had something to lose. Their idea about protecting intellectual property was directly related to the fact that they benefited by having enforcement actions. It was definitely improving during the time I was there.

Q: So, once they came to the realization that it was to their advantage, they began to build up their own internal mechanisms for laws and law enforcement?

JOHNSON: Yes, the laws and law enforcement had definitely changed. It had already changed before we got there but it was gradually getting better all during that time.

Q: So there wasn't any particular protest you might have put on the table during that time?

JOHNSON: There were a few, but they were not at the top of our lists. They weren't big problems; they were relatively minor problems. Problems, but not deal breakers.

Q: Taking time out for a David Letterman approach, what were your Top Ten Problems, as you saw them?

JOHNSON: The first one was certainly the management of the cross-straight relationship, making sure that we were informed what was going on in the minds of the people in Taiwan on that issue. That one made such a fundamental difference to our interests in the region.

On the economic side, of course the interests of U.S. business, the fair level playing field kind of thing. Promoting the sale of U.S. goods and services in Taiwan -- we did a lot of that.

What else? Getting to know the place, getting around the island, meeting people at the local provincial level, as well as the city level.

Certainly among the top five would be public diplomacy and the outreach programs: universities reaching out to students, reaching out to faculty and making sure that the information about the United States and programs that we could help with on academic exchanges were widely disseminated so that people knew what was available. We had a lot of people going to the States, not only as privately paid students but also on sponsored programs of various kinds. We had occasional performing arts groups or cultural groups or educational groups coming to Taiwan. So, a lot on the public diplomacy side.

Consular affairs is always a big deal of course, especially with so many people there with U.S. citizenship or in some cases, green cards, but usually U.S. citizenship. Very large visa numbers: we were the second or third largest visa-issuing post in the world during the first year I was there. We had 370,000 or so visas, and an extremely low refusal rate. In fact, I made the point several times that Taiwan qualified for the visa waiver program according to the law which said that there had to be less than a three percent refusal rate for three years in a row, and it was. We never got any kind of response from Washington. I think the feeling was that some institutions did not like the visa waiver program at all anywhere, and they certainly did not want to add new countries to that practice. The other was that they felt they could not be confident enough about document fraud, that it might open up an avenue from the mainland to try to come in as Taiwanese. Anyway, whatever the reasons were, it never went anywhere. If you were to ask people in Taiwan about getting a visa to the United States, they would always say, “Oh, it’s very difficult. Probably fifty percent of the people don’t get their visas.” Not true. Three percent refusal. I think it went up to five later on.

Q: And the Consular Section would still have the fraud unit and whatnot to make sure everything is channeled properly?

JOHNSON: Oh yes. We had a case when I was there which was a very unpleasant case of a former employee claiming that he had either been paid for visas, or he had sought sexual favors, or something like that. We and the Foreign Ministry went public with it immediately and said that if anybody had any personal experience to support this claim, please come anonymously if you want to, but let us know what it was about: where and when it happened and how it happened. Not a single reply. The Foreign Ministry set up its own hotline with the same open-ended commitment to respond. They said they got one call from a woman who complained that she had been refused a visa but without any implication of impropriety. She didn’t say that she would have gotten it if she had paid somebody, given a favor or something. It all sort of went away. I think the perception is probably still there that if you dig far enough, something may turn up, but not as far as I know.

We had another indirect case involving a junior officer who at a later post was accused and found guilty of tampering with visas. I know the investigative security office at the State Department spent a lot of time back in Taipei looking at his records. There was nothing that would support a suggestion that any of that was happening in Taipei, nor was it possible. The procedural steps were such that one individual officer operating in visas would not have been able to do this. There was enough oversight, enough checks and balances, so we were never hurt by that. In fact, the Director General of the Foreign Service, Tony Quainton, told me later that ours was a model case about how to manage such issues.

Q: Just from your understanding of visa issues and whatnot, would you like to comment on the post-9/11 almost collapse of the visa program, if you will. We are now so suspicious.

JOHNSON: I am not sure it makes much difference in Taiwan. It didn't make any difference in Thailand. Our approval rate was the same as it had been before. The process took a little longer and there were more people who had to be interviewed. As it used to be, for example, if you were under 18 and over 65, you didn't have to be interviewed, all other things being equal. That rule changed so now we had to interview nearly everybody.

I think that in both Thailand and Taiwan and other parts of East Asia, if you didn't have a Muslim name, then the rules were pretty much the same as before. The places that were most directly affected were Malaysia and Indonesia, and I guess to some extent, Singapore. It didn't make much difference in the other places, even though it took longer. So instead of getting all the cases handled in about a ten-day period, we often had a two or three-week delay from the time the appointment was made until the time of the interview, in Thailand that is. From that standpoint, it didn't make much difference. Of course, the rise of concern about terrorism affected our workload in lots of other ways, not necessarily consular.

Q: What other ways?

JOHNSON: For example, Thailand sent troops to Afghanistan and they sent troops to Iraq. So coordinating those deployments, coordinating the policy process, coordinating the role that we would play in helping to facilitate those kinds of actions, and the policy part from their standpoint -- those were all extremely important. The Thais did well. They did what they were supposed to do. In fact, a couple of their soldiers were killed preventing a truck bomb from getting into a big base.

Q: Getting back to Taiwan in the late 1990s, I think we have touched on a lot of the economic issues, the organization of the mission. Do you see now any trends that continued to come forward from that timeframe?

JOHNSON: Yes, I think that the process of democratization in particular, the big divide between the DPP, the Democratic People's Party, and the KMT, the Nationalist Party, is as sharp as ever, particularly on the question of the long-term status of Taiwan. The tension, with a few minor exceptions, over this issue I think has diminished some in the intervening years. I think the PRC is less nervous about the future of Taiwan than they were before. They feel they can wait out Chen Shui-bian and perhaps even wait out his successor if necessary. In the long run, as long as the mainland continues to evolve in a peaceful and progressive manner, becoming relatively more open and more prosperous, that time is on their side. It used to be that the people in Taiwan, I think, felt that time was on their side, and the longer they could maintain their separate role, the longer that status quo would serve their long-term interests. I think a lot of them still feel that they can maintain the status quo in which the PRC does not feel threatened, in which you don't have verbal or other kinds of provocations across the Strait, that serves the interests of the people of Taiwan as well. I think that's a much more widely held view now.

Q: It raises the question though, how does the KMT hang on to its influence on the island?

JOHNSON: The only way they can hold on now is by trying to provide better services to the electors, to the people who vote. Ma Ying-jeou's approach has been to try to basically out-perform his predecessor and to say that… [end of tape]

…about 25 percent will vote for the Kuomintang (KMT) candidate pretty much regardless. And 35 percent will vote for the DPP candidate regardless. That means you have an additional 40 percent that are pretty much swing voters who will respond to the personality, will respond to the platform, will respond to the performance, and so forth. It is an open system, yes, and one in which there are sometimes strong feelings. The Taiwanese legislature is famous for fistfights. Every now and then somebody gets worked up and rather than just settling it by voting or by calling each other names, they actually get into fisticuffs. It does not reflect well on them in terms of the eyes of the world, but it does suggest the intensity of feelings within this fairly new democratic system.

Q: One of the issues we have not discussed is military arms sales, that relationship with Taiwan and how it is handled both domestically by the Taiwanese and in their interaction with us.

JOHNSON: It is a very big part of our relationship. In fact, the arms sales to Taiwan were the second or third largest in the world during the time that I was there. We were delivering 150 F-16 fighter planes, the decision on which had been made by the first President Bush during his election campaign in 1992. Those planes were being delivered. There was a lot of other U.S. military hardware and software that was coming to Taiwan during that time. We had an office in the AIT headquarters, the purpose of which was to monitor and to oversee these arms sales and the deliveries, and other issues that had to do with them. As far as I know, that system ran quite well. There was very large money involved. As far as I know, it was handled effectively. Most of it was done through

foreign military sales which helped, because then individual go-betweens, individual agencies and so forth, are not a part of the process. It is done directly with the U.S. Government and that helps to maintain the integrity of the program.

Every time we would announce a new arms sale or every time a new item was delivered, the PRC would protest. Under the terms of the Taiwan Relations Act, we are committed to providing Taiwan with sufficient self-defense capability that they can take care of themselves. This is not the same as a military alliance. We don't have an alliance and we don't have a treaty obligation. But it is also very clear that under circumstances where Taiwan were to come under direct threat as it did in 1996, for example, the U.S. would respond. We feel there should be no ambiguity about that.

The law itself does not say that we will take military action to defend Taiwan. It says we will consult, and that is what we did in 1996.

Q: One of the interesting issues that comes out of this interactive process is the way in which the parliament or the legislature handled military issues.

JOHNSON: Up to that point, they didn't have much of a hand in it. There were members of the parliament who had been military officers and they would often steer these program through, including the defense budget. Later, in the period about 2000 to 2004, the question of whether they would go forward with purchases that we had approved was unresolved for a long time. In fact, it may still be unresolved. That is a budgetary matter because the parliament was not able to come to broad enough agreement to pass the budget. The result is that a lot of programs that we had already approved remain unsold because the Taiwan legislature has not voted the money for these transactions yet.

Q: But that period was outside the period you were there, wasn't it?

JOHNSON: Yes, it was after I was there.

Q: At the time you were there then…

JOHNSON: It was moving smoothly. They were getting the money. They were buying the products. The products were being sold and delivered and upgraded. Part of the problem was that we discovered in 1996 that a lot of systems, including information systems, were not compatible; we were not able to obtain information on a timely basis about what was going on there. So some of what happened during my time there was upgrading these procedures whereby we would be better informed about what was going on in Taiwan and what their own thinking was about their defense priorities. It was an interesting and important time.

Q: Is that a function of liaison with the Ministry of Defense?

JOHNSON: Yes, and the armed forces themselves. We used to see the people in the armed forces quite a lot. I like to say that culture has changed in Taiwan: they don't drink

the white lightning so much any more, but it is usually red wine when you go to a banquet with ministers or with business people. The two exceptions were the police and the military. They still drink the kaoliang or maotai, this really potent stuff that knocks you out. So when we had banquets with the military, which was fairly often, we would always have a designated drinker among us whose job it was, first of all, to survive; and second of all, to take the heat off the rest of us.

Q: I am not quite sure I am clear on what you were talking about with the information…

JOHNSON: We found at the time of the PRC missile tests in 1995 and 1996 that there was a lot we didn't know about what Taiwan's capabilities were or what their intentions were, what their strategy was. We felt as a result in the after-action discussions that these were areas where we needed to be more closely integrated in terms of knowing what they were doing but also to provide advice and assistance in areas where we felt there were important gaps. That was in the beginning of my time there; it continued subsequent to that. I think it certainly helps to maintain a constructive engagement and one where we feel… This is a situation where you don't want to be surprised. If there is going to be an issue of tension, you need to know what the capabilities, as well as the intentions, are on both sides.

Q: Is this something that CINCPAC (Commander in Chief Pacific) was involved in?

JOHNSON: Yes, they were very much involved. Of course, they couldn't send people. Once in a while they would send people in civilian dress to observe exercises. Most of the discussion was carried on by either consultants or by us at the AIT office. We would have people come from Washington, but they always had to come as AIT consultants; they could not come as direct representatives of their U.S. government institutions. This was another of those institutional arrangements that we made to maintain the distinction between official relations and unofficial relations, but it didn't have any practical limitation. It didn't mean we couldn't do it. It just meant that we had to do it by a proper procedure.

Q: And the missile events of 1996 and 1997 pointed out that you needed a little bit better communications?

JOHNSON: Yes, it did.

Q: And it filled that gap?

JOHNSON: So that was a big part of what we did, the commercial part and the political side. It was a well-rounded relationship and I think a quite healthy one during that time.

Q: Now, you would have also had an opportunity to talk with other foreign representatives on the island -- the Japanese, the French, the Brits, etc. How would you summarize their views on cross-straits and Taiwan itself?

JOHNSON: The Japanese had a mission that was maybe half or a little less than half the size of our. They were very involved in the business side of things. Of course, they had a long historic connection, so there were personal ties as well. The other missions, for the most part, were either observer missions or trade missions or both. They were usually very small. I mentioned the British before. The British had two people there. The French had maybe five or six, something like that, maybe less. Almost everybody had somebody there. The Europeans, the Swedes had an office. The Poles had an office. The Russians had an office that was opened by a guy I first met in Moscow many years earlier. They only had three people too; the Russians had three. Theirs was almost entirely commercial: air services, tours, and movement of goods and services, that was about all. So nobody had the kind of full scope engagement or operations that we did. The Japanese were the closest, but theirs was much smaller than ours.

As far as monitoring the cross-Strait relationship, yes I am sure that all of these offices had some reporting responsibilities, but they didn't have the capacity to affect it. Their main engagement in the part of the world was with Beijing or with Tokyo or with somebody in Southeast Asia. So the Taipei operations tended to be mainly commercial with minor attention to the political landscape.

Q: Part of this commercial interest is, of course, because Taiwan's getting richer, with more foreign exchange. Isn't this the period where there is a lot of work done on infrastructure, when the subway started? Or was that later?

JOHNSON: The subway was a little bit later. There wasn't any subway when we were there. The high-speed train contract was getting underway. I understand that is operating now. This is the bullet train that goes from Taipei to Kaohsiung. It stops three or four places en route.

There was a major upgrade of the airport. They doubled the size of the airport, the passenger terminal and the cargo handling and so forth. Those decisions, those developments, were very important to both UPS (United Parcel Service) and FedEx (Federal Express), who had major operations out of Taipei.

What else? Well, those are the main things, I guess. Infrastructure, highways, always building new highways.

They had a high tech park in Hsinchu, a little south of the airport, about an hour or so south of Taipei which is where Taiwan Semiconductors had its big operation. There were several others that were there as well. There must have been 150 or so companies that had offices in that space. There were so many that they had outgrown it. When we were there, they were developing a second special economic zone near Tainan, which was going to be like six times larger than the one in Hsinchu. That one was not yet open by the time we left. It is open now and there are several big factories there, again in the high tech, semiconductors, and so forth, in that industry.

Q: On the economic issues, you were saying that the mission was very supportive of American business. We often don't get our interviewees to discuss that very much. What might the mission have done to be of interest to businessmen?

JOHNSON: For example, the banking sector which we talked about earlier, was very important to the stable operation of our business interests. We wanted always to be able to expand their access. Sometimes it worked and sometimes it didn't. I mentioned earlier that one big U.S. bank, Citibank, had a major retail operation, but the others did not. They were regularly looking for opportunities to get into the retail banking market. Air services: both Northwest and United flew to Taiwan, so we were regularly looking for ways either to increase the frequency of the service or the way in which the service was handled. It was a good, comfortable operation. There were two Taiwan carriers that came to the U.S., China Airlines which had been there forever and had been a state-owned enterprise, I think it is now mostly private; and EVA, which was entirely private. It was the air wing of the Evergreen shipping company. We used to see them from time to time. They were very innovative and very successful. So, things like shipping, things like air services, things like banking, the whole range of high tech business, we were always looking for new success stories.

There were many success stories of services or equipment that were unique and what they called, OEM, which means "original equipment manufacture." Is that what OEM stands for? Original something…. It means things that are built to specification of an original producer of a brand name, like Dell computers, but they are manufactured in Taiwan to Dell's specifications. So even though the item that comes out of the Taiwan factory doesn't say Dell on it, it is exclusively for Dell. It is a unique product that is used only by Dell. That is true for some of the cell phones, for example. Some of the flat screen televisions, a lot of the component plastic parts, many of those are made in Taiwan by various plastics companies. So those were areas where we were always looking for opportunities for U.S. business and trying to promote more sales of US goods and services.

I mentioned agriculture. We had a couple of agriculture fairs each year. American beef, American fruit and vegetables were very popular in Taiwan. Our job was to make sure we had enough to meet the market demand, to expand the market and also to meet the demand.

I mentioned students earlier in a different context, but we had these student fairs where we were recruiting the best and the brightest, we hoped, from Taiwan to come to do their advanced studies in the United States. We always had huge turnouts for those. We had a visit by the President of the University of Washington, Richard McCormack, and several other university presidents. This was the first time ever that a University of Washington President had come to Taiwan. We had an alumni event that night for something like 400 people that were University of Washington alums. We had a similar group for the President of the University of Minnesota. We had another one for Rutgers, I believe, and one from the State University of New York in Buffalo. There were hundreds of graduates

from all of these institutions, not to mention UCLA, Cal and Stanford, the ones that are perhaps better known as destinations for Taiwan students. It was impressive.

Another thing I should mention in terms of trade promotion: there were a number of states that had their own trade promotion offices there. They were usually one or two-person offices, but they did a great job of taking care of visiting officials, as well as visiting executives. California, for example, had a four-person office there. Their whole job was to take care of California business. There were 13 or 14; I guess 14 states that had state offices, including the State of Washington, and Indiana, of all unlikely places. And Louisiana because there was big plastics investment in Louisiana petroleum. California I mentioned. Oregon, Hawaii and New York, and so forth. Those state offices did a lot of trade promotion as well, and we supported them.

Q: You were supporting them by getting them access and having them at your dinners?

JOHNSON: That's right. And information. We would have meetings -- we mentioned AmCham -- we, the people from AIT, had participation in all of the subcommittees of the AmCham. I was the Honorary Head of the AmCham. We had a very close working relationship with the whole U.S. business community in that regard.

We would brief people on things that we thought they needed to know. We would try to make sure we were informed about what was on their minds.

CNO's Office

Q: You wrap up in Taiwan?

JOHNSON: Yes, June 1999.

Q: And where are you going?

JOHNSON: Well, immediately after we left Taipei, we went to visit Hong Kong and then mainland China because as I mentioned earlier, Kathleen had not been to those parts of China before. We went to Guilin, Xi'an and Beijing. We didn't get to Shanghai; she had already been to Shanghai, as had I. In Beijing we stayed for four or five days with the Moriartys whom I mentioned earlier, and I had one semi-official meeting with the people who ran the Taiwan Affairs Office in the Chinese Academy of Sciences. I went to call on Mr. Zhu, I think that was his name, the head of that office. I was waiting for a minute or two and he came in and I introduced myself, shook hands and said my name in Chinese, Zhang Daiyou. He sort of smiled and said, "Yes, we know who you are. We have read what you have said about such and such" in a public speech in Taiwan." We had a good conversation. It was just after Lee Teng-hui had made his statement about sovereign entities on the two sides of the Taiwan Strait.

After our trip to the mainland, we had ten days or two weeks of home leave, and then I started in Washington in August 1999 as the Political Adviser (POLAD) to the Chief of

Naval Operations (CNO) at the Pentagon. This is a State Department position which had been created about three or four years earlier. All the service chiefs then had senior Foreign Service people as their POLADs, also known as Foreign Policy Advisers. The CNO at that time was Admiral Jay Johnson, a submariner by trade.

It was a very interesting year. I had never worked in the Pentagon before, although I had been there a number of times. It is quite a different context from State. There are so many people and so many resources. Compared to the State Department, it is just shocking when you see the abundance of things, especially money and manpower. The reason is, of course, that in a time of conflict, you have got to have the people and you have got to have the resources right now. But this was not a time of conflict in 1999. I was just astonished by the abundance of everything.

Q: What does a political adviser do?

JOHNSON: There is a daily meeting with all of the personal staff of the Chief of Naval Operations. It goes over his schedule. It goes over what is happening, what we need to know about. The Foreign Policy Adviser is one of the participants in that small meeting of 15 or so people. That's to get the guy ready for his day, everything that's going to be going on. Maybe preparation for travel.

The service chiefs do a lot of traveling. For example, we had trips twice to Japan during the year that I was there; once to France, once to Italy, once to Columbia, once to Singapore, once to the Middle East. These are to meet with counterparts, with Ministers of Defense and with other senior officials in those places. In some cases, they are just to socialize to pay calls on people who are leaving their positions or who are entering their positions, and to make sure the alliance relationships are kept in good order. In the case of Columbia, it was a regional, Western Hemisphere meeting of naval chiefs, which happens every year. Alternate years, it is in the United States; other years it is in one of the Latin American countries or Canada.

There are a lot of these kinds of institutional links. In addition, the Chief of Naval Operations every other year hosts what is called the International Sea Power Symposium at the Naval War College in Newport, Rhode Island. That event involves invitations basically to every navy in the world with whom we have normal relations. There were 70 or so naval chiefs who showed up in Newport for three days. There were a lot of those kinds of activities.

When you were asking about the morning meeting, that's part of what the morning meeting does is to work on events of this kind in order that the CNO has what he needs for those meetings and presentations. If he is giving a speech, as he did at the Strategic Studies Institute in Singapore, for example, he has to have the text a few days ahead of time, and so forth. So that all happens in the first morning meeting which takes about 20 minutes, maybe a little more.

That was followed immediately by a meeting with the people who deal only with the external part of the CNO's job. The big issue during the whole year I was there was Vieques, an island off of Puerto Rico which the Navy had used as a bombing range for decades. There had been an accident there several years earlier where someone had wandered onto the range during one of these exercises and was killed, a Puerto Rican. Then there was a big public outcry about getting rid of this facility. The whole year that I was there, almost every one of these second meetings that I am describing began with what's happening with Vieques. The Navy desperately wanted to keep it. They said there was no other facility like it in the world. But at a certain point, it was clear that the politics were not going to allow this to happen. It was going to have to be given back or at least limited substantially.

Then the question became where will the Navy do this kind of training? You have got to have some kind of live ammunition training. It was not resolved by the time I left that job. It was resolved, I think, about a year later. I think now that live training facility is becoming a tourist destination in Puerto Rico.

Another thing that always went on in the second meeting was where are all the ships now, especially the big ones. So there would be a rundown of the carrier battle groups and others. For example, so-and-so might be in Yokohama, or so-and-so might be on a port call in Singapore, someone might be in the Persian Gulf, or someone might be in the Atlantic doing an exercise with the Brits or something. Or they might be in repair dock in Bremerton or something like that. They would go around the world every day and say where all the ships were and what they were doing or getting ready to do. What are the demands on their resources and time?

When we went to Italy… I went with the CNO on all of his overseas trips and also when he had counterparts calling on him. The new head of the PRC Navy, for example, called on Admiral Johnson at the Pentagon while I was there. There were several others who also came to call. We had two big trips overseas. One was to the Persian Gulf, to Bahrain and to Saudi Arabia; we didn't get as far as Iraq, but we did go to Jordan where we had a good conversation with the King himself! Then Admiral Johnson and some of his other staff people went to Diego Garcia, an outpost in the middle of the Indian Ocean, southwest of India. I didn't go on that trip because that was Thanksgiving week and he didn't require that everyone go to that event. It was a small place and he just wanted to go and be there for Thanksgiving with the Navy troops.

During the trip to Italy, we went first to the USS Theodore Roosevelt. We landed on the Theodore Roosevelt. Both landing and taking off from an aircraft carrier is something special, I'll tell you. If you do it by helicopter, you don't have the same feeling. If you do it on an airplane, you really get the thrust of the takeoff and landing. Then we saw the operations. They were doing flight operations right there in the middle of the Mediterranean while we were on board. That is a dramatic thing to see -- the noise, the action, and so forth. And the other thing that is so amazing is that many of these operations are very sensitive, like the landing operations, giving the signals to the pilots coming in, whether they are too high or too low and they have red, green, blue and

yellow lights that the pilot sees. The adjustments are made by a 21-year old flight officer who is sitting there on the edge of the deck giving these signals as the plane is coming in. Similarly with the guys that are arranging the takeoffs, giving the flag signal or giving the thumbs up signal to takeoff. These are mostly guys, there may have been a few women on that crew, but they were mostly men. They are very responsible people doing terrific work. Impressive.

Q: You were talking about the visitors who would come to see the CNO; the Chinese came in. What was our attitude or opinion of the Chinese navy at this point?

JOHNSON: It was in the process of building, it's still building, of course. This was seven or eight years ago. So part of it, was just a matter of information. What were their goals? What were they trying to do? How did they assess their own priorities? What were they doing about budgets? I mean, we have always had a lot of suspicions about the PRC'S defense budget, of course. There are a lot of things that don't show up in the official numbers. So we would often ask about those things. And some of it was just social, just getting to know people. It was also business. It was also a matter of talking about their priorities and ours; how we saw their role in the Pacific region and how we saw our role and how they could be compatible. For example, up to that point, I don't think the PRC had had a naval visit to the mainland United States. During that year I think was the first, maybe the next year, when they first had a ship visit San Diego. They had one to San Diego; they had one to Hawaii. Of course, we have ship visits to China fairly often now. The first one occurred while I was in Beijing. We had a vessel come into Qingdao. Now we have naval visits to PRC ports, I think probably once a year of so, maybe more often than that. It is not a big deal anymore. They often go to Qingdao; they often go to Shanghai, and the southern areas.

Q: Actually, for them to come this way is a big step forward because don't you have to refuel along the way?

JOHNSON: Oh yes, it's a big operation. Until very recently, the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) didn't have a blue water capability. Their navy was basically for coastal defense. And in fact, among those 70 heads of navies from around the world that I mentioned coming to Newport, virtually all of them command a force that does what we would call Coast Guard work. That is essentially what they do; guard their coastal regions. And they don't have an extension capability, a blue water capability. The only exceptions are the Chinese, the Russians, us, the British and the French, who still have some of those capabilities. India has some, although they don't go far afield that often. And Japan has that capability, although they also don't go far afield that often.

Q: Some of the latest statistics I have seen indicate the Japanese navy is actually the largest navy in the Pacific.

JOHNSON: That's right. It's larger than the PRC navy.

Q: Larger than ourselves. We keep moving our guys around.

JOHNSON: I see. At any given moment, I guess that is right, but our whole force is much larger than theirs, even if you count only the Pacific Command.

Q: There is a political adviser to all the major commands?

JOHNSON: That's right and they have been around for a long time.

Q: So what does a political adviser add?

JOHNSON: Two things. One is to provide the perspective of the foreign relations piece of what the Navy is doing. For example, with the Chinese or with the Singaporeans or with whomever, when we are going overseas or when someone like that is coming to call, we help with the preparations and the execution of the event. The other is Washington access; it helps to have someone who can plug in directly with the State Department, for example, or the NSC (National Security Council) or others. Interestingly enough, the services don't automatically have that. The chain of command or the chain of information tends to run from the services to the Joint Chiefs and the joint staff. Depending on what the issue is, it may then go to the civilian side, either to the Secretary of the Navy or the Secretary of Defense. It does not go from the Navy to the State Department, or for that matter, from the Navy to the CIA or other places like that. That is one of the things they felt…

I'll give you a concrete example. One of the issues that the Navy was very concerned about during the year I was there was contacts with Indonesia. They felt that the break off after the East Timor war, the cutting of the contacts with the Indonesian military, was doing us harm over the long run. We didn't know who was coming up, what their attitudes were or their experience, so we had less capacity to influence them. We didn't have any joint training programs or exercises, and so forth. So the Navy was very eager, as were the other services, to try to get back to some kind of working relationship with the Indonesian military. Part of my job was to try to see what the lay of the land was on the Hill or at the State Department or at the NSC on this particular issue. It changed during the time that I was there.

At the beginning of my time there in 1999, the attitude certainly on the Hill and other places was accountability, that the Indonesian armed forces had to be accountable for what happened in East Timor, and until there was some evidence of people being brought to trial or being held accountable, we did not want to have anything to do with them. Whereas the attitude certainly of the Navy was that the longer we didn't have contacts, the more likely we were to have these kinds of problems over the longer run, because we wouldn't have the established trust that we need. Nothing changed during the year I was there except that the attitude was more positive towards the end of that time, recognizing that we did need to find a way to get back to a working relationship with the Indonesian military. So, that was one example.

I pursued that every ten days or so. There would be some kind of an exchange, e-mail or phone message.

What else did I uniquely contribute there? Mainly, it was just the foreign affairs perspective. I was the professional foreign affairs person on the CNO staff, so whenever things came up that were not about Vieques for example, or not about the Congress, or not about the other services, something that involved another navy or some other event that was outside of U.S. territorial waters, then it was partly my business.

One of the things I learned that year -- not a big revelation I guess, but nonetheless -- you don't have to convince the Navy that foreign affairs is important because they are always operating on the other side of the water. Most of their business is not in San Diego or Honolulu or Bremerton. Most of their business is in Yokohama or Qingdao or Singapore or some place else.

One of the things that was happening in Singapore, and the reason the CNO made this long, long trip within the last month of his tenure in that job was because Singapore was building this big facility specifically so that we could bring carriers into Singapore. While we don't have a formal alliance with Singapore, we have a very close and comfortable relationship. The CNO and the rest of us -- about 8 people total -- flew in this little Gulfstream airplane for 30-some hours to spend about eight hours in Singapore for the dedication of this facility. We had a couple of banquets and we had a couple of meeting with the senior defense people on the Singapore side, and then we flew back, another 30 hours. It was a long and a not entirely pleasant trip, but nonetheless, it was important to be there for that.

Q: I would assume you would have also seen representatives of other navies that were in the Pentagon. I think the Australians for example, had a fair contingent.

JOHNSON: I didn't see them very often. They were mostly working on, in some cases arms sales issues, in some cases training programs that are ongoing training programs that we have with the Aussies and we have with some others. I didn't actually see them very often. My focus was much more on the CNO himself and what he was doing.

Q: Did the problems with New Zealand come up?

JOHNSON: No, not during that time. The New Zealand nuclear issue had of course gone sour some years earlier and nothing changed during the time I was there. I think there was some effort; I think we did talk to the Aussies one time about it. The Aussie naval chief came during the time I was there. That's right, the new one. So of course, there was some talk about New Zealand, but there wasn't any change. Nothing happened.

EAP Deputy Assistant Secretary

Q: After the CNO's office?

JOHNSON: After the CNO's office -- that was for one year. Admiral Johnson and I had agreed at the beginning, since his tenure in his job would run out in the summer of 2000, that rather than staying on for two years, which was the usual routine, I would keep open the option of leaving at the same time he was leaving, and the new CNO could pick his own foreign policy adviser.

It turned out to be a very fortuitous decision, because in the spring of 2000 when I was over at the State Department one day visiting with then Assistant Secretary Stanley Roth, he asked if I would like to come and take over the China portfolio as Deputy Assistant Secretary to cover China and Mongolia in the front office at the State Department. So I said, sure. That was, I think, in March or April, 2000.

I then left the Pentagon I think in June or July and started at the State Department in August of that year. I replaced Susan Shirk, an academic whom I had known for a long time, who went back to teach at the University of California San Diego at that point.

Q: Backing up just a second. The political adviser job, to begin with, how were you chosen for that?

JOHNSON: I bid for it. It was one of the senior jobs that was on the bid list as I was coming out of Taipei. I don't actually remember the selection process. It was similar to other assignments though. I did a phone interview with Admiral Johnson; he had already been in that position for two years when I arrived, and had worked with my predecessor, John Finney, whom you probably know. Actually, John invented the job. He had been there for two years, or maybe three. Then he had run up on his time limit in Washington and had to go abroad. He went abroad as the political adviser to the troops in Bosnia. He was in Bosnia for a year after that.

Q: He has almost been doing that ever since.

JOHNSON: Yes.

Q: The current incumbent is Don Camp.

JOHNSON: Yes, I know. And I notice that the current CNO is about to become the new Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, Admiral Mullen. It will be interesting to see. I don't know whether that will affect Don's job, whether he will stay on with the new CNO or whether he will move to the Joint Staff. Yes, I know Don is in that job now.

That takes us up to the summer of 2000 and coming back to the State Department. It was kind of interesting to come into State at that stage. Of course, it was an election campaign and it was certain there was to be a transition, whether Vice President Gore had been elected or whether Governor George Bush had been elected. There were certainly going to be changes. Stanley Roth was not going to be staying on, for example. And others in the Department expected to be moving on, regardless of the outcome.

So it was kind of a period of uncertainty. The papers still flowed, meetings still occurred, events still happened, and so forth, but there was a sense that it was temporary. Whatever we were doing from August 2000 to January 2001 was temporary. So I don't actually remember much about big events during that time. I am sure there must have been some, some visitors.

Oh, I know what one of the big things was. I went with Stan Roth to New York for the General Assembly for a meeting between Secretary Albright and her Chinese counterpart. Herself a former UN Ambassador, Albright liked the UN a lot and she knew a lot about what got done there. She used the period of the General Assembly to do a lot of meetings with foreign ministers, including the Chinese Foreign Minister and others from the East Asia and Pacific region as well. I went with Stanley to the meeting with the Chinese Foreign Minister, including all the preparations and the social events and so forth. That was during September or October, 2000.

There were a couple of other meetings, but that was the only one that I was a part of. She also met with her Japanese counterpart, but we had a different Deputy Assistant Secretary, Tom Hubbard, who covered Japan, so he was up there for that.

Q: So, this position that you took was just as China DAS?

JOHNSON: Pretty much. China and Mongolia is the portfolio. To some extent, it overlaps with the desk officer who was responsible for managing PRC affairs.

Q: … quite a bit of reorganization because normally one DAS in previous times has been the Northeast Asia DAS, so he covered Japan, Korea, and China.

JOHNSON: That's right. It depends on the person's own background, as well as what the Assistant Secretary wants to do. In this case, Tom Hubbard was the senior among us and he had previous Japan and Korea experience, so that was his portfolio. I did China. Ralph Boyce, Skip Boyce, did Southeast Asia. They were already there; both Hubbard and Boyce were already there when I came. I don't remember who did the South Pacific islands, but it may have been Hubbard as the senior DAS. The economic issues were handled by Larry Greenwood.

Q: And who was the Assistant Secretary?

JOHNSON: Stan Roth.

Q: Stan Roth, that's right.

JOHNSON: Stan was there until after the election. He left actually before the Inauguration. He left, I think, at the end of 2000, either November or December 2000. Then Tom Hubbard was the Acting Assistant Secretary from then until several months later when Jim Kelly, the new Assistant Secretary, took over. I think Kelly was confirmed in, it must have been mid-April, I guess.

Let's cut it off at that point. We'll come back and we'll start with the EP-3 incident -- that was April 1st.

[END OF SIDE A, TAPE 2; SIDE B is blank]

[This portion and the remainder of this document were not recorded. Therefore, they are a written narrative, with key points depending on my memory.]

In July 2000 I concluded my assignment to the CNO's office. The CNO himself and some other members of his team were also transferring at that time. Admiral Robert Natter, who had been the head of N-3-5 and therefore my direct boss, became the Commander of the Atlantic Fleet. He had been the Navy's point man on the long-standing dispute about Vieques, the firing range on an island near Puerto Rico.

When I moved back to State, the EAP Assistant Secretary was Stanley Roth, who had held that position for nearly four years. His senior deputy was Tom Hubbard , who stood in when Roth was away from the office. The others in the office included Ralph "Skip" Boyce, who handled the Southeast Asia portfolio, and Larry Greenwood who handled economic issues for the region as a whole. Roth's Office Manager was Mary Ann Silva, who had been in Warsaw when I was. She was an excellent professional. I replaced Susan Shirk, an academic China specialist from the University of California at San Diego who had held the Deputy Assistant Secretary position for nearly three years and was returning to her academic career in San Diego. The Director of the Office of Chinese and Mongolian Affairs was Jim Keith who was really on top of his portfolio. He had previously served at the NSC, so he could give us some White House perspective. Jim later moved up to be the DAS, and yet later went as Ambassador to Malaysia.

The first major event during my time in the EAP Front Office was the UN General Assembly in New York starting in mid-September and continuing until mid-December. Unlike my temporary duty assignment to the US Mission to the UN in the fall of 1995, this time I had a specific focus on China. So I participated in US Ambassador Albright's meeting with the PRC Foreign Minister, including the preparations and the reporting of the meeting. That meeting took place on or about September 20, as I recall.

The other big event that fall was the US election campaign, and the growing likelihood (according to the polls) that Texas Governor George W. Bush would defeat Vice President Al Gore for the Presidency. But the race was very close, which had the effect of pushing foreign affairs off the front pages. And the eventual results were so close that the outcome of the election was uncertain for several weeks.

A vignette about the outcome: Justice Sandra Day O'Connor was active for many years in rule of law programs funded under the US assistance programs for the new democracies of Eastern Europe, and for a few other countries. In that capacity, she had come to Lithuania with several other important judges and lawyers for the annual meeting of the sponsoring organization, the American Bar Association's Central and East

European Law Initiative (CEELI). We had a chance to meet her informally as well as formally. And she had also gone to Mongolia in that capacity. One day in early December of 2000, when we were back in DC, she received Alfonse La Porta and his wife; Al had been the US Ambassador to Mongolia when Justice O'Connor visited. And O'Connor invited me to come along, in view of my responsibilities covering Mongolia as DAS. We had a pleasant chat, including some discussion about the ongoing dispute about the outcome of our election. At some point I was interrupted by an urgent phone call from my wife, Kathleen. I was reluctant to leave O'Connor's office, but felt I had to. And the message from Kathleen was that the Florida State Supreme Court had decided not to decide on the procedures to resolve the results of the disputed ballots, and therefore not to decide the decisive outcome in Florida. So the case would be returned to the US Supreme Court. When I passed this information along to O'Connor, she expressed some agitation and said, "I was afraid this would happen; it was their issue, but now it's ours again." So my claim to fame in this episode was that it was I who informed her about this important development, in which her vote turned out to be decisive. She commented that she and Justice Breyer were supposed to be going to an international legal conference in New Delhi, but had cancelled their trip because of this possibility. She said they felt that the American public would not look kindly on two Supreme Court justices going off to India when one of the most important cases in history was before the Court. A further note: when that delayed trip was finally rescheduled, Justices O'Connor and Breyer landed in New Delhi on September 11, 2001.

The Court did, in effect, decide the outcome of the election through the case known as "Bush v. Gore." And by that time, the American public, which had grown increasingly troubled by the lack of a definite result, was relieved to have a result -- even if they had not supported Bush. So the President-elect went about naming his team, including his foreign affairs team. To no one's surprise, he named retired General Colin Powell to be Secretary of State -- a nomination that was universally welcomed by Republicans and Democrats. And Powell selected his long-time friend Richard Armitage to be Deputy Secretary. I had known Armitage from the time when he was at the Pentagon and I was working on China at State a dozen years earlier. He and Powell formed a strong team. And before long,, the names of those selected for other positions at State began to leak out. For Assistant Secretary for East Asian and Pacific Affairs (EAP) the only name in play was Jim Kelly, who had a long and distinguished career at State, Defense and the White House under President Reagan. I thought he was an excellent choice. But the confirmation process takes several weeks, so Jim would not actually take over his position for quite awhile. The good thing about this process is that it gives the nominee plenty of time to read up on the key issues in his area of responsibility. The bad thing is that the world does not stop to wait for our confirmation process.

On the evening of Saturday, March 31, 2001, I was at home watching the semi-finals of the NCAA basketball tournament. The University of Maryland was one of the teams, and they eventually won the tournament. But that quickly became unimportant after I received a call from the State Department Operations Center passing on a message from the Under Secretary for Political Affairs, Marc Grossman, saying that I should come to the Department at once. The call came at about 9 pm, and by the time I got dressed and

drove to the Department, it was about 10 pm. The Senior Watch Officer gave me several urgent messages reporting that a US Navy reconnaissance plane had apparently collided with a PRC fighter plane and had been forced to make an emergency landing at a PRC military base on Hainan Island. We did not know the condition of the crew or of the aircraft. We had been in contact with the US Embassy in Beijing, but had no report back from them yet. By the time I had read through the early messages, Secretary Powell was on the phone asking for my views on the event and on how best to approach the Chinese Government. At that point our primary concern was to find out the condition of the crew and to seek their early release. But to do that, we had to have some direct interaction.

By Saturday March 31 midnight our time (noon Sunday April 1 in Beijing), the news media had picked up the story and it was running as the lead story on CNN every half hour. We had also learned that the plane had landed at the Hainan Naval Base on the southern part of the island, and that there were no casualties. (I do not recall how we knew these important facts, but we did.) The Embassy in Beijing had requested a meeting at the Foreign Ministry at the earliest possible time, but had not received a response. Meanwhile, more details began to emerge, including the type of aircraft -- EP-3, a Lockheed P-3 platform configured for electronic surveillance. The media regularly referred to it as a "spy plane," although its mission was not clandestine.

Even though we had received no response from the PRC Government, we decided to put out a short statement acknowledging that our plane had been forced to make an emergency landing at the PLA Naval base and that we sought the early release of the crew and the plane. The first question we had to decide was how and who would issue the statement. My view, which was supported by Secretary Powell and the Navy, was that it be issued in the name of the head of the Pacific Command, Admiral Dennis Blair, and be handled as a military to military matter. Blair had been involved in several military-to-military contacts and felt that he could handle this situation at that level. We believed that handling it in this manner would minimize the impact. We later learned that the Chinese resented our handling it this way, saying that it should have been handled at much higher levels, perhaps even at the Presidential level. Of course, they were looking for an "apology," which we were not about to issue, at least until we knew more details of what had actually happened. Another key point at this stage was a comment by Secretary Powell that this was an "accident" not an "incident;" the Chinese, he stressed, had not tried to down an American plane.

Several hours later, at 7 pm Beijing time, the Foreign Ministry finally received Ambassador Prueher and Political Counselor Jim Moriarty. On the Chinese side, the meeting was led, as I recall, by Vice Minister Zhou Wenzhong, well and favorably known to us and later Ambassador to Washington. Zhou began by asserting that the American plane had violated China's sovereignty by landing without permission at the PLA Naval base. He went on to say that the US plane had run into the Chinese F-8 (aka J-8) fighter plane, apparently causing it to crash in the sea. The fate of the pilot was not yet known. After Zhou made this explanation, Ambassador Prueher asked for more details about the location, speed and direction of flight of the Chinese F-8. In turn, Prueher reported the location, speed and direction of flight of the P-3. In the most telling

part of the exchange, Prueher, who had himself been a naval aviator, responded to Zhou's assertion that the US plane had overtaken the Chinese plane by saying that "physics does not work that way; it is impossible for a slower aircraft to overtake a faster aircraft. Therefore the P-3 could not have overtaken the F-8 and caused it to crash."

Zhou did not accept this logic and continued to assert that the US plane had caused the accident. He also repeated that the US plane had landed at the Chinese naval base without permission. Prueher did not agree or disagree with this assertion, saying that we would have to talk with the crew and examine their records to determine whether and how the plane had notified the Chinese that they were coming in for an emergency landing. He did note that an aircraft in distress has the authority under international law to land wherever it could. He said he was confident that the crew had sent the international distress signal if its transmitter was working. On the question of meeting with the crew, Zhou said that US officials would be able to meet with the crew the following day (Monday, April 2). With that news, the Ambassador sent General Neal Sealock, the US Defense Attaché, and the chief of the Consular Section at our Consulate General in Guangzhou, to Hainan. The crew was actually being held in a guest house in the town of Sanya, on the southern tip of Hainan Island and a growing tourist destination.

Jim Kelly had been named to be EAP Assistant Secretary a few weeks earlier, but was not yet confirmed and could not be a participant in our deliberations. Still, I thought it was important that he be aware of what was going on. So even though it was Sunday, I discovered that he was in the building preparing for his confirmation hearings. So I went to see him and bring him up to where we were. Because he was in the building, he had not watched the morning news programs and had not previously been briefed. As it turned out, bringing him into our information loop was important for him -- and for me within the next month.

General Sealock and the Consul from Guangzhou reached Sanya late on Monday and notified the Chinese naval personnel that they were there to meet with the crew and to expedite their release. Not so fast, said the Chinese officer in charge. And in fact, there was no meeting that evening, nor the next day. Finally in the late evening on Tuesday, April 3, our officials were permitted to see the crew and speak for a few minutes with the aircraft captain. We gained the insight that commitments made by the Foreign Ministry did not necessarily apply to the Defense Ministry. But we were able to establish that the crew was safe and that there were no casualties or serious injuries.

The EP-3 had been flying at 24,000 feet and the crew had spotted two PLA planes coming up apparently to intercept it. So our pilot had put the EP-3 on auto-pilot so that the plane would not make any unexpected moves that could be misinterpreted. This caution was partly because the Chinese had harassed the same EP-3 a few days earlier when it was on a similar mission. The Chinese F-8 pilot on that occasion had come dangerously close to the EP-3; in fact, the Chinese pilot made a gesture of showing the Americans his email address through the glass of the cockpit. The US officially protested that incident as a danger to safe flight.

It was a genuine miracle that the US plane and crew survived the collision. What happened, apparently, was that the Chinese pilot got so close, and slowed down so much that he actually stalled under the left wing, knocking out two of the four engines and the radar nose cone. As a result of the impact and the flying debris, the EP-3 fell about 8,000 feet in an uncontrolled spin. The F-8, on the other hand, disintegrated upon impact with the EP-3 and fell into the sea. The pilot was never found.

Somehow the EP-3 pilot was able to regain control of the plane and head for Hainan Island. Without radar he had to navigate by line of sight. The EP-3 was about 110 nautical miles south of Hainan when the accident occurred. Once the plane was adequately stabilized, the people who ran the monitoring equipment shut down all of their equipment and physically damaged most of it to reduce the possibility that the equipment and its contents could be compromised. There were, however, some paper manuals, some of which were torn up and thrown into the sea. But apparently some of those papers were thrown out over land and may have been recovered. The pilot, in order not to stimulate a military response, made one pass over the airport before coming in for a difficult but smooth landing.

Back on the diplomatic front, we were never able to establish with certainty that the emergency notification had been sent and received. We later accepted the possibility that the Chinese had not received the emergency message, or had not understood it. It was possible that the Chinese base was not monitoring the international emergency frequency and therefore never received our message. But they never admitted that, and we could not prove it.

A few other smaller points: some of the media commentary said that the Chinese claimed that the US plane had violated Chinese air space. This is not correct; the Chinese never made such a claim, officially. They asserted that the plane was operating about 100 nautical miles from Hainan, which corresponded to our information. They made it clear, however, that their interpretation of the Law of the Sea Treaty (which the US has signed but never ratified, by the way) differed significantly from our interpretation. Both sides agreed that every country enjoys sovereignty out to 12 nautical miles from the nearest point of land. Beyond that, out to 200 nautical miles, every country has an Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), which mainly confers the right to explore and exploit the resources of the sea and the seabed. We and the Chinese also agreed that ships of all kinds, including naval ships, have the right to "peaceful transit" and to scientific research through or over another country's EEZ, so long as such transit does not represent a threat to the bordering country. But at that point, the Chinese view differs significantly from ours. China and a number of other countries assert that the coastal state has the right to approve or disapprove any activity, including scientific research or peaceful transit, through or over its EEZ. In fact, there had been a case only a few weeks earlier where a US non-military scientific vessel had been harassed by the PLA near Shandong Province, near Korea. Such events still occur from time to time, and neither side has budged from its legal position.

Once our officials had their first contact with the crew, we were pretty sure that they would be released. The key questions were when and under what terms. We established an interagency working group, which met by classified video conference each morning at 11 am. I chaired these meetings, which included representatives from the National Security Council (NSC), the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS), the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD), CIA and Treasury (I don't recall why Treasury was there, but they contributed, too). Our task was to be sure everyone who needed to know what was going on did know. We would review the overnight reporting from Embassy Beijing, then draft instructions and observations for Ambassador Prueher and his team. The fact that we were 12 hours behind Beijing helped in this process, because the Embassy would complete its work on its clock, and we would have most of a day to prepare and send our responses. In addition, the Embassy team would call us almost every night around 3 am our time (3 pm Beijing time) to report any new or urgent developments.

The Embassy team performed magnificently during this period, keeping Washington in the loop, but checking to be sure we were on the same wave length when new ideas came up. One such idea, which we discussed on the night of April 4, was the use of an official letter to explain our position on what had happened and to seek the release of the crew. We thought of having the letter be sent in the name of Secretary Powell to his Chinese counterpart or others. We settled on having the letter sent over the signature of Ambassador Prueher to the Foreign Minister. In terms of protocol, the Ambassador was the President's personal representative, so we thought that arrangement should satisfy the Chinese -- if they were looking for a solution. We were discussing the wording, and Powell made it clear that we were not going to apologize. Our plane had not violated Chinese air space, and did not cause the accident. The Chinese clearly wanted something that sounded like an apology, so we had a ways to go before we would have a solution. When we were about to sign off that night at around 3 am, Secretary Powell said, "This is a hell of a way to start celebrating my birthday! (April 5)."

From that point on, the process slowed down, partly because Chinese President Jiang Zemin was on an official visit to Argentina and other countries in that region. At one point, we tried to arrange a phone connection between Secretary Powell and former PRC Foreign Minister Qian Qichen, who was traveling with Jiang. But Qian would not take the call, in effect saying that we should work with others in Beijing. It was also clear by this point that the Chinese Embassy in Washington was not in the loop. Ambassador Yang Jiechi made some unhelpful comments on the TV news, and it took us awhile to establish that he was winging it. Partly for that reason, I called in the Chinese Deputy Chief of Mission, He Yafei, whom I knew well and respected. Unlike many Chinese diplomats I had known, his approach to the many small problems that came up in the US-China relationship was to try to find a solution, rather than to point a finger and try to score debating points. I asked that he not bring a note taker and assured him that I would also not have a note taker. When he came in, I said that this case was dragging on too long and we needed to get it resolved before it affected other elements of our larger relationship. I said that we were not going to apologize because we had nothing to apologize for. He became a bit flustered at that point, saying the US was to blame and needed to apologize. Furthermore, the US had bombed the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade

two years earlier in what was also said to be an "accident." In fact, he continued, China had suffered since the time of the Opium Wars from American and other Western insults and injuries. China was the victim, he asserted. At that I got very testy, saying I had spent a number of years working in Eastern Europe, and in that region, everyone is a victim. They can all point to insults and injuries, and the only consequence is that such feelings create the conditions for the next war. And to what purpose? As for the Belgrade bombing, we had apologized and paid for the reconstruction of the Chinese Embassy. We were at fault in that case, and we said so. But we were not at fault in this one, and we were not going to say we were. I then changed tone, saying that if we got this incident resolved in the next few days, it could actually turn out to be a positive development early in the tenure of the new US Administration. We could demonstrate that even such a potentially disastrous event could be overcome in a reasonable way in a reasonable length of time. He asked what I thought the time line was; I said my view was that if we got it resolved within one week, it could be portrayed as a positive result. But every day beyond that would hurt. I could not estimate how much it would hurt, but there were already media items claiming that the crew was being held "hostage." This was obviously not true, but the best way to answer the charge would be to let the crew go home.

One other memorable event during that week (I think it was on Friday, April 6): I received a call from the Office of Congressional Relations saying that a large group of Senators wanted to be briefed on the current state of play. So I checked with the Deputy Secretary's office, and Mr. Armitage said that I should do it. So I appeared at the appointed hour in a special room in the Capitol building that was designed to handle classified discussions. The meeting was chaired by Senator John Warner (R-VA), the Chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, and included about 35 senators. I was joined by briefers from the JCS, the OSD and some others.

Senator Warner started the session by stressing that the entire briefing and discussion were "top secret," and that he did not want to hear any media reporting about it. No one was to take notes. Then the military and OSD people spoke, mainly about the plane and its mission, and about how much information was supposedly lost or compromised. (For what it's worth, I was never convinced that much important information, hardware or software, had been lost to the Chinese, mainly because they had a limited capability at that time to decode or reverse engineer whatever they had been able to retrieve. I should point out that others who are more expert than I disagreed with this assessment.)

Then it was my turn to tell them where we were in our diplomatic efforts. But before I started, Warner again intervened to stress the high sensitivity of this information, and that there should be no discussion of it outside these doors. So I spoke a bit about the contacts with the crew, and about the Embassy's activities in Beijing, including the shape of the letter we were working on. At the end of my presentation, Sen. Warner and several others thanked all of us for our briefing, and Warner again warned about the sensitivity of this information and about leaks.

About ten minutes after I got back to my office, I got a call from the Secretary's office asking me to come up to his office. This was not a common occurrence -- in fact, it had

never happened to me before, so I was more than slightly anxious. When I got there, Secretary Powell and Deputy Secretary Armitage were there, and Powell asked whether I had been on the Hill briefing people about our negotiations with the Chinese. My anxiety grew, and I said that, Yes, I had just come back from doing such a briefing. Powell said he had just gotten a call from NSC Adviser Rice saying that she had just heard Sen. Warner on the radio reporting on the negotiations with the Chinese about the EP-3, and asked who was briefing Warner. Powell added that he had been at a reception on the Hill the previous evening and had made a point of saying nothing about the talks with the Chinese. Well, at that point I felt like crawling out the door on all fours, cursing Sen. Warner all the way. When I got back to my office, I was still shaking and wondering what the consequences would be. Then about 20 minutes later, Mr. Armitage called and said, "OK, it's all over and you have nothing to worry about. I (Armitage) told the Secretary that I had asked you to brief Warner and the other senators, and that you had done what I had asked. Furthermore, you did not try to dodge or shift the blame. Powell knows that and respects you for it." Well, talk about a mood swing! What had been one of the lowest points I could remember became at least a qualified high. But I told Armitage that if I never saw Sen. Warner again it would be too soon.

Back to solving the problem at hand, we finally made some progress on Monday, April 9, which I think was when Jiang Zemin and his delegation returned to Beijing. The rest was essentially logistics -- getting the letter finalized and delivered, getting a charter plane in to Sanya and setting in motion the process of removing the EP-3 -- which took another few months. The letter was signed by Prueher, having been negotiated line by line with the Chinese; it came to be known (by Powell and others) as "the letter of two 'sorries.'" We said we were sorry about the loss of Capt. Li, and we were sorry that the naval base had not received the distress call from our plane. Some commentators later said that we had gone too far, and that the letter sounded like an apology, even if we claimed it wasn't. I, on the other hand, thought it hit the right points in the right way, and the tone was really not apologetic. More importantly for all of us who worked on this issue, it was seen by President Bush and his new foreign policy team as a success.

To back up a bit, the new team was just taking shape, with Powell at State, Rumsfeld at Defense and Rice at the NSC. Rich Armitage was believed to be a candidate for the number two position at either State or Defense, and Paul Wolfowitz' name was in play for the same two posts. The story goes that Rumsfeld called Armitage to sound him out about his availability to become Deputy SecDef, prefacing his question by saying that Armitage's chances were only 50-50, because there was another strong candidate. Armitage reportedly replied, "Rummy, the chances are zero because I'm not coming." And the rest is history -- Wolfowitz became Deputy SecDef and played a decisive role in the decision to go to war in Iraq. Armitage was already close to Powell, and they worked very closely during their time together in these roles -- to the point that they were considered reluctant warriors on Iraq. Armitage later told me that they really were not against the Iraq War, but that others (unnamed) in the Bush Administration thought they were not really "on the team."

Our bureau, like every other office in the State Department and elsewhere in the government, prepared numerous briefing papers for our new bosses. By that time, Stan Roth had left his post as Assistant Secretary, and had not yet been replaced. So Tom Hubbard, the senior DAS, served as Acting Assistant Secretary for a few months. Jim Kelly was nominated to be the new Assistant Secretary quite early in the process, but of course he could not act in that capacity until he was confirmed by the Senate. In fact, he could not sit in his future office, so other space was found for him, I think on the Korea Desk, and he was not a part of our policy deliberations or the decision-making process on this issue.

The Ambassador to Beijing at that time was Joseph Prueher, a retired four-star admiral who had previously served as Commander-in-Chief of the Pacific Command, based in Hawaii. He had served as President Clinton's Ambassador to China and was expected to tender his resignation. In fact, all ambassadors and other Presidential appointees offer their resignations after a presidential election, even if the president is re-elected. In the case of a change of political parties, the usual practice is that the career diplomats serving as ambassadors are asked to stay on, and the non-career ambassadors are asked to move on within a few months. I accompanied Prueher to a meeting with Powell in February. As senior military officers, they knew each other, but not well. In the course of their warm conversation, Prueher said he liked the job in Beijing and would be willing to stay on, if the new Secretary and the new President agreed. Powell was non-committal, but later told Prueher that he should plan to leave Beijing by the end of April. As it happened, the timing of Prueher's departure became very significant. The other interesting comment from that meeting was when Powell was talking about the political atmosphere in Washington. "You know," he said, "there are quite a few people in this town who wish I were not a Republican." He laughed, then added, "In fact, I have to keep an eye out over my right shoulder."

Jim Kelly, whom I had known for many years, had been nominated to become Assistant Secretary for EAP. But he was not yet confirmed, so he could not be involved in any of our deliberations. Nevertheless, I thought he should know what was going on. So on that Sunday afternoon, still April 1 in DC, I went to talk with him in his temporary office on the Korean Desk. Fortunately for me, he had not yet heard about the incident, even though it had been leading the CCN news since the night before. I had a good talk with Jim and told him where we were. He was very grateful. And I think that this effort on my part put me in a good place with him, which in turn made a significant difference later in April when the question of my onward assignment came up.

Within the first few days after this event occurred, we learned quite a lot about the way the Chinese system worked -- or didn't work -- especially between Beijing and Hainan. Ambassador Prueher had sought a meeting at the MFA from the moment he learned of the incident. The time was about 8 am on a Sunday morning in Beijing, and there was no one home at the MFA. In fact, there was apparently no one available anywhere in the senior leadership of the government. Evidently there was no equivalent of our 24-hour Operations Center. We heard later that most of the senior leaders, including President

Jiang Zemin, had been out of town that morning planting trees; it was Arbor Day in China.

The MFA, in the person of Assistant Minister Zhou Wenzhong, finally received Ambassador Prueher and Political Counselor Jim Moriarty at 7 pm -- almost 12 hours after the event. And even then, there was no effort to discuss what had actually happened. The Chinese officials stuck to their initial version of the story. And this is where having a naval aviator as the US Ambassador made a significant difference. After the Chinese official said that our plane had overtaken theirs, Prueher said, "Physics doesn't work that way; a slower plane cannot overtake a faster plane." He explained the flight characteristics of the old and slow EP-3 -- the military version of the old Lockheed Electra -- versus the much faster Chinese F-8 fighter plane. He also said that the same Chinese pilot had buzzed a US plane a few days earlier, and had flown so close that the American flight crew could read his e-mail address from a piece of paper shown through the cockpit window. It was a genuine miracle that the EP-3 did not crash and that the crew did not perish. The fact that these dire possibilities did not occur was the result of brilliant work by the flight crew, a sturdy air frame, and extraordinary luck. The F-8 had approached the EP-3 two or three times, to the point that the EP-3pilot had put the plane on auto-pilot so that it would maintain a straight and level flight pattern, avoiding any unintentional moves that could be read as evasive. On the last pass, the Chinese pilot came in under the left wing and got too close. As he slowed down to stay even with the EP-3, he lost lift and stalled, his nose rising abruptly, causing him to run into the left JOHNSON: inboard engine, after which debris knocked the radar dome from the front of our aircraft, then clipped the right outboard engine. The F-8 broke up on impact and went into the ocean in pieces. The EP-3 had no radar dome, two broken engines and two functioning engines on opposite sides of the plane. But the wings and other flight surfaces were not damaged. Because of the impact, however, the plane went into a stall and a partial spin, dropping from its cruising altitude of 24,000 feet to about 16,000 feet, at which point the pilot was able to re-establish limited control. The crew then shut down all of its equipment and destroyed most of the manuals and other operational materials on the plane. The pilot knew that there was a Chinese air base on Hainan Island, about 100 nautical miles to the north, and he headed for that base. He sent out an emergency signal, but he was not sure whether the Chinese had received the distress call, so as the plane approached the base, he made one long circle over the area before landing and stopping in the middle of the runway. The Chinese at the base apparently did not know what was going on, and had evidently not received the distress signal -- it's not clear why, but perhaps they did not have their receivers set on that international distress frequency. But they ordered the crew out of the plane and took them to a nearby facility that was apparently an officers' club, with adequate accommodations.

During the following several days, Ambassador Prueher and Jim Moriarty met several times with Deputy Minister Zhou and others in Beijing, and called Washington after their meetings. Through the marvels of modern technology, those phone calls came into the Ops Center and were linked via a phone tree, to those who needed to be in the loop. Those calls usually came at about 3 am, Washington time. One of those was on March 5, and after we had gone over our business, Secretary Powell said, "This is a hell of a way

to start my birthday." We in Washington met at 11 am every morning via classified teleconference to go over the reporting from Beijing, and to lay out next steps from our side. I chaired those conference calls and meetings; other participants included people from the NSC, the SecDef's office, the Joint Staff, the CIA and one or two others.

One key point in the discussion of this episode was a fundamental disagreement between the US and China about some provisions of the International Law of the Sea Treaty -- which the US signed but never ratified. The treaty permits every country to claim territorial waters out to 12 nautical miles, and to claim 100 nautical miles as a Special Economic Zone (SEZ). Some countries, including China, assert that the coastal state has the right to refuse activities in or over the SEZ; other countries, including the US, assert that any country has the right of free passage through the SEZ, including unarmed military vessels and aircraft. Several media reports at the time said that the Chinese went after our plane because they claimed we had violated their sovereign air space. That is not correct; the Chinese never claimed that we had violated their territorial waters or the air over those waters; they accepted our statement that the event had occurred about 110 nautical miles from the nearest point of Chinese land. But they still claimed that our plane should not have been there without their permission, even if it was unarmed. Interestingly, we had sent an unarmed research ship into China's northern EEZ, in the Yellow Sea, only a short time earlier, and that vessel had also been harassed until it left the EEZ.

Three important things occurred during the next few days; first, Embassy Beijing proposed that a letter be sent in Ambassador Prueher's name to the Foreign Minister, saying that we were sorry that this incident had occurred. We were not prepared to apologize, but we could "regret" the incident. This message was later expanded to become what Powell called "the letter of the two sorries." The letter said we were sorry that the Chinese pilot had lost his life, and we were sorry that the Chinese air base had evidently not received our distress message. But that was a far as we were prepared to go. By the way, Powell insisted from the beginning that this event was not an "incident," it was an "accident;" the Chinese did not intend to knock down our plane; if they had intended it, they would not have been so surprised.

The second important fact we learned was that the Chinese Embassy in Washington was not in the loop with Beijing. We were getting such fast and accurate information from our Embassy that we were well ahead of Ambassador Yang Jiechi and his Embassy.

The third fact was that the Chinese leadership did not delegate the handling of this issue, so that when Jiang Zemin left on a trip to Latin America (Chile and Argentina, as I recall), the whole process virtually stopped. Even normal contacts at senior levels were cut back, so, for example, former Foreign Minister Qian Qichen, with whom we often dealt, was with Jiang and "not available" to take a call from Secretary Powell.

Regarding access to the crew, the MFA said that we could meet with them the second day at the guest house where they were being held. The MFA also asserted that the crew was not under arrest, but was being "detained" until their actions could be investigated. We

sent our Defense Attaché, Army General Neal Sealock, to Hainan to be ready when we received permission to meet with the crew. We also sent the chief of the Consular Section from the Consulate-General in Guangzhou as the person responsible for the welfare and protection of American citizens in that part of China. But despite the assurances from the MFA, our people were not given access to the crew until late in the evening on Tuesday, April 3, and even then it seemed that the PLA did not agree. As it happened, the conversations were short and uninformative, but we were able to establish that the crew members were not being mistreated, and that their health was ok. Later in the week, we were able to meet with the crew members individually, but not for very long.

By the following Tuesday, April 10, we got encouraging news from Beijing. After Jiang and his entourage returned from their travels, they got to work to resolve this matter. Within the next 24 hours, we had agreed on the text of the letter, the format (Ambassador Prueher to the Foreign Minister), the timing and the public announcement. The arrangements for the departure of the crew had also been worked out by then; we brought in a Continental Airlines plane to the airport on Hainan Island, loaded up the crew and brought them back first to Okinawa, then to Hawaii, then on to DC, and finally to Oak Harbor, Washington (State) where the unit was based. The announcement of the results was scheduled for the afternoon of Wednesday, April 11, Beijing time, late at night in Washington, but early enough to catch the morning news cycle. The media coverage was uniformly positive -- the new administration had passed its first major foreign policy test. The EP-3 itself was not permitted to fly out, even though our technical survey team said they could have patched it up enough to make it flyable. Arrangements for its removal were not completed for another two months, and when the plane was removed, it was in pieces, placed in the cargo compartment of a Ukrainian Antonov 24, a huge cargo plane from the former Soviet Union.

The other major policy issue on our plate at this time was the annual decision about which weapons systems to sell to Taiwan. The usual pattern was that Taipei would submit its wish list, and we would decide which items we would allow them to buy. There was always a certain amount of tension in this process because Taipei would always ask for systems they knew we would not approve, then they (and their influential supporters in Washington) would complain that we were undermining their security. Meanwhile, Beijing would complain even more vociferously that we were not living up to our commitment to reduce arms sales to Taiwan, and were creating tension between the two sides. In this case, in 2001, Taipei requested six systems, plus support packages. The most sensitive by far was the Aegis-class destroyer, which was a state-of-the-art naval vessel that had lots of electronic devices to allow it to "see" well beyond the horizon. Beijing had made it clear that a decision to sell the Aegis to Taiwan would seriously damage the US-China relationship. We had several interagency meetings to go over Taipei's list, including one at the White House with NSC Adviser Rice in the Chair and other cabinet or sub-cabinet people present. I accompanied Powell. The decision -- which was really Rich Armitage's decision -- was that we would agree to sell all of the items on Taipei's list. Powell argued successfully that we leave open the decision on the Aegis, with the understanding that we could approve it later. For what it's worth, I did not agree with that decision, especially on the submarines, because I knew that the US

Navy did not want us to provide subs to anyone, and I thought we could mitigate the fallout from Beijing by approving a smaller package. But I have to say that Armitage and Powell were right. By approving five of the six items outright, we put the onus for completing the deal on Taipei, and eliminated the annual public fight on this issue. In the event, Taiwan had neither the funding nor the will to actually make these purchases. Now, several years later, Taiwan has still not purchased any of the systems on that list (except for some upgrades of existing systems). And the Aegis has not reappeared on Taipei's list. Or I should say non-list, because this decision and the manner in which it was done meant that we never again had to face this annual exercise. This decision was confirmed around April 20, if I remember correctly.

At about the same time a series of happenstance events occurred that made a big difference in the rest of my career. Jim Kelly had been confirmed without difficulty and he took over the EAP Bureau as Assistant Secretary in mid-April. About the same time there was a problem in Indonesia, and Jim asked Ralph ("Skip") Boyce, the Deputy Assistant Secretary with responsibility for that region, to take on the role of Ambassador to Indonesia. Skip was, at the time, expecting to go to Thailand as Ambassador, and his papers had already gone to the White House. Skip had served in Thailand twice, and his Thai language skill was the best ever in the US Foreign Service. Kelly was also trying to find an ambassadorship for Ray Burghardt, who had been my successor both in Beijing and in Taipei. Ray was due to complete his assignment as Director of AIT-Taipei in 2002. Again for reasons of serendipity, Hanoi opened up. At one point, Jim asked me whether I spoke Vietnamese; I said, no, but Ray did. On April 24, I was in my office on the phone when Jim Kelly came to my door and made the Thai gesture of greeting, the "wai." So I knew that through this convoluted sequence of events, I had won the lottery and would be going to Bangkok as the US Ambassador -- truly a dream come true from the time I came into the Foreign Service 36 years earlier.

I continued in the EAP front office until mid or late June, 2001, then handed over my responsibilities to Don Keyser, a good long-time friend who was one of the top China experts in the Foreign Service, having served in Beijing three times, and Tokyo twice. Don later got into trouble over his handling of some classified documents. But I was never clear about the details of the case, which on the face of it seemed fairly innocuous. And I knew Don to be an excellent officer. In any case, I then took some leave followed by about ten weeks of Thai language refresher.

I was in language class at the Foreign Service Institute on the morning of September 11 when some of the teachers and students in the Vietnamese program across the hall knocked on our door and said that three airplanes had crashed intentionally, two in New York and one at the Pentagon. The Vietnamese classroom faced east, and we could easily see the smoke from the Pentagon crash rising into the sky just four miles away. They also had the TV on, showing the scenes from New York. It was truly a gut-wrenching feeling. Soon we were told that the roads into Washington were being closed off and that we should go home quickly to avoid the rush of traffic exiting the city. It is no overstatement to say that 9/11 and its consequences came to dominate US diplomacy from that time on, even when there seemed to be no direct connection, as with Thailand.

Bangkok

My confirmation hearings took place in November, 2001, and my swearing in was in early December. It was quite grand. Rich Armitage was the main speaker, and Powell sent a nice note. Then shortly after that, the new Thai Prime Minister, Thaksin Shinawatra, led a large Thai delegation to Washington to meet with the President and other senior US officials. My predecessor, Dick Hecklinger, was still the Ambassador to Thailand, so he accompanied Thaksin on his Washington meetings. But I was also included in the social events. I then accompanied the delegation to New York, where they met with business people and other big shots.

One event was a large breakfast meeting at the Asia Society. After Thaksin gave his opening remarks, one of the other participants said, "Thank you, Mr. Prime Minister, but I wondered whether you could tell us a bit more about why we or our clients should invest in Thailand as opposed to somewhere else in Southeast Asia like, say, Singapore." Thaksin replied that Thailand had a large domestic market, it had well-trained and loyal workers, it was a gateway to China, it was friendly to business … "and it's not boring." The room erupted with laughter, then Thaksin said, "Oh, I don't mean that Singapore is boring," which brought forth more laughter. I got to see and speak with Thaksin several times during that trip, and with several other members of his cabinet, including Foreign Minister Surakiat, Finance Minister Somkid, Ambassador to Washington Sakthip and others. It was a great way to start my assignment to Thailand.

We shipped out our household goods, and put some things in storage, then left for Bangkok, with a short stop to see family in Seattle. We arrived in Bangkok on December 28, at the beginning of the long New Years weekend, and were met by DCM Ravic Huso and his wife Barbara, and by Kathy Hodai, the Admin Chief and her husband. And we met most of the rest of the Country Team, including my Office Manager, Ginny Phillips, over the following few days. The Political Counselor was XXX, Econ was Joe Yun, Public Diplomacy was Pat Corcoran, Consular was Dan Morris. We intentionally came during the holiday week to avoid any official business during the first few days. But I did have a meeting at the MFA the second day to present an official copy of my credentials (the originals were held for presentation to the King about two months later). We were warmly welcomed by the American staff and especially by the Thai staff of the Embassy. Bangkok was the second largest Embassy in the world at that time, with a permanent staff of about 400 Americans and about 900 Thai employees. The reason for having that many people there was mainly to tend the large and important relationship we had with Thailand, including a large military alliance program. In addition, several members of our staff handled some of our dealings with neighboring countries where Bangkok served as a hub; our embassies in Laos, Burma and Cambodia were very small.

The first visitors to our Residence were Ambassador Leonard Unger, his wife, and son Daniel. Unger had been Ambassador to Thailand for nearly six years, 1967-73, and had also been our last Ambassador to the Republic of China (Taiwan). He and his family were on a visit to the region before his son went to Vietnam to study for a few months.

Accompanying them that day was Patricia {Trish) Young, the widow of Ambassador Kenneth Todd Young, who had been Ambassador when my Peace Corps group arrived in Thailand in 1963. Small world. Trish later settled in Seattle where one of her sons lives, so we have been able to keep up with her from time to time after we retired.

Our first official visitor was the head of the US Environmental Protection Agency, Christine Whitman. She had several useful meetings in Bangkok, then we went to call on the King at his palace in Hua Hin, a resort town south of Bangkok on the Gulf of Thailand. That meeting lasted more than one hour, during which the King demonstrated both a keen interest and knowledge of environmental issues, especially those affecting water quality. As a result of this conversation, Governor Whitman invited Thailand to send a group of experts to Hawaii to look at our research on "border grasses," which grow in salt water but help to prevent erosion.

A few days later we had a visit by the Speaker of the House, Congressman Dennis Hastert. The pattern for his visit was similar; he met with members of the Thai parliament and government, then went to Hua Hin to call on the King. In this case, the conversation was mostly about international affairs in Asia, including Burma, which Hastert had visited about five years earlier. In the course of this conversation, the King raised the topic of a proposed constitutional amendment that would specify that Thailand was "a Buddhist country." Speaking directly to the Foreign Minister, the King said that he was adamantly against this idea because it would tell anyone who was not a Buddhist that they were not co-equal Thai citizens. This was unacceptable, and if such a proposal came to him, he would refuse to sign it. He told the Foreign Minister to convey this message to the Prime Minister and the cabinet, quoting his words exactly. These were the first of several occasions when I attended meetings with the King.

Among other American official visitors during our time in Thailand were Secretary of State Colin Powell and US Special Trade Representative Robert Zoellick. To my surprise, Powell said he had never previously been to Thailand -- surprise because he had served two full tours of duty in Vietnam as an Army officer. He said, "Real soldiers didn't go to Thailand; that was for the Air Force wussies."

Zoellick's mission a few weeks later was to meet with the trade ministers from the ASEAN countries (not including Burma). It turned out that he had also not been to Thailand previously, but his wife had lived in Bangkok as a child when her father was the first Director of the Peace Corps (and therefore my institutional supervisor many years earlier).

Our first trip out of Bangkok was to Chiang Mai, partly to visit the Consulate General there, led by Consul General Eric Rubin, and partly to visit the small provincial town of Lamphun, where I had spent most of my Peace Corps time in 1963-65. It was a memorable trip, including visits to the McCormick Hospital, where my daughter, Dara, was born, to the school in Lamphun where I had taught, to an elegant Northern-style welcoming dinner prepared by people who had been my students 40+ years earlier. One of the guests, Mr. Pramuan Chilanond, quoted from the farewell toast he had given when

my family and I departed from Lamphun in 1965, saying that he hoped my career in the US diplomatic service would be successful, and that I would return someday as the American Ambassador to Thailand! That was a moving moment.

Our second trip out of Bangkok was to the Northeast, where we stopped in Buriram, the province where my Peace Corps assignment began. Coming back 38 years later, I was amazed to find that not only did some of the elders remember, but they had even made me a copy of the message announcing our arrival -- one day later than the day we actually arrived! They were at some pains to prove that the error was not theirs!

Our third trip out of town was not as pleasant. It was to Phuket, which is a beautiful island on the Andaman Sea. But the occasion of our visit was to present awards to a number of Thai military and police divers who had recovered the body of an American diver who had drowned about one week earlier. We also met with members of the resident American community on Phuket -- about 30 of them.

Another memorable event was to accompany the Queen and her extensive entourage on a visit to the US in October, 2002. The Queen had been there several times, and other members of the Royal Family visited fairly frequently. In this case, the program included a banquet hosted by the Queen at the Library of Congress. The ranking guest was Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Conner. Another event during the Queen's visit was the showing of a Thai epic film called Suriyothai, about a warrior princess, at the Kennedy Center. The Queen's hostess on this occasion was Alma Powell, who was not only the wife of the Secretary of State but also the head of the Kennedy Center board.

The Queen's trip also included stops in New York, where the Queen visited the site of the 9/11 attacks, and Houston, where she visited the MD Anderson Medical Center. She also attended a rodeo show arranged especially for her by Unocal, the big petroleum company based in Houston. After she left, Kathleen and I stayed on in Houston for a few days to greet Prime Minister Thaksin on his separate visit to his alma mater, Sam Houston State University, where he earned his doctorate in criminology. Several of his classmates came to Houston especially for the occasion -- he was warmly remembered.

Thaksin was definitely the most popular Thai political leader in recent times, maybe ever. He was not popular among the Bangkok elite, many of whom had played political musical chairs over the years. But he was enormously popular in the North -- his home territory -- and the Northeast -- the most heavily populated and the poorest part of the country. Thaksin was criticized for being "populist," with his policies of micro lending for villagers, virtually free health care, and a village handcraft promotion program. Populist or not, he was certainly popular. He was also extremely wealthy. His family-owned company enjoyed a virtual monopoly on the hugely popular satellite phone and TV business. He was widely believed to be corrupt, but I did not believe such charges, partly because he did not need to be corrupt -- he was already wealthy beyond anyone's dreams. More to the point, in my view, is that he did not always distinguish clearly between the government's business and his personal business. In any case, he was overwhelmingly re-elected in 2005, only to be overthrown by a military coup in 2006.

In the King's Birthday speech in December, 2002, the King called for new efforts to wipe out the drug trade. Drugs were a social and physical cancer on the society, he stressed. The following month, Thaksin announced a new War on Drugs, which included a strong mandate for provincial governors and police personnel to intensify their efforts to eliminate the drug business. Soon we began to hear stories of quotas being established for provincial governors, and reports about the success -- of the lack of success -- in this crackdown. By the end of January, there were stories about arrests, abuses and even killings of drug dealers, alleged to number as many as 2,500. We reported this to Washington, with some caveats, but Washington didn't seem very interested (this was just after the active phase of the second Iraq War started). But later in the Spring, when Thaksin indicated that he would like to go to the States again, the issue came up at high levels in Washington, to the point of questioning whether the President should receive Thaksin. Finally, in May, Thaksin sent his most experienced diplomat, Ambassador Nitya Pibulsonggram, to Washington to meet with Rich Armitage and others to push for Thaksin to be received by the President. After some discussion, the visit was approved, and Thaksin met the President in the Oval Office in mid-July. I sat in on the meeting -- the first time I had ever been in such a meeting. The conversation was mainly about the alliance relationship, including Thailand's contribution of 400 troops to the coalition effort in Iraq. Then two days later, I was present for another Oval Office meeting, this one between President Bush and the Crown Prince. That conversation was also mainly about the long and strong relationship between our two countries.

For what it's worth, I think Thaksin's alleged War on Drugs was mainly a PR exercise. No doubt some low-level dealers and some of their customers were killed, and others were arrested. But the story at the time, about "cutting the link" between dealers and users, was not plausible; why would dealers kill their customers? And the numbers were not believable. In an effort to get some clarity on the numbers, we asked the national police chief about them. He said that 2,500 was the total number of people who had died of unnatural causes during the two-month period of the drug war. When we asked how many would normally die in a two month period, he said that number was about 1,200. So the increase was about 1,300. We later asked how many of the fatalities during this period were officially classified as "extra judicial" killings; the government people replied that about 50 police people had died in self-defense. We then stressed that we were not talking about law enforcement people killed in self-defense; in fact, we meant the opposite, namely, non-police people who were the victims of killings by the police. Interestingly, that question was never answered. But I once asked Thaksin directly about these extra-judicial killings: he replied, scornfully, "What's more important, the health of our children or the rights of some scumbag drug dealer?" I replied that I did not know that was the choice. The other reason I thought it was mostly a made up number was that there were virtually no weeping families or allegations of the misuse of force by actual victims or those who could cite specific cases. In fact, there were only two cases where the victims were even identified. Another related point: I never heard any Thai person complain about this alleged abuse of the use of force. In my view, the story was kept alive mainly by the non-Thai media and other foreign observers who mainly talked with each other.

The other big issue during our time there was the rising insurgency in the three majority Muslim/Malay provinces that bordered Malaysia. In that case, the reports of the killings were entirely believable because they came with chilling details and real names and places. So far as we could tell, this was a local situation, not an extension of al-Qaeda or its local Southeast Asian branch. There was one major incident in 2004 where local Thai police and/or military confronted a large crowd and killed several dozen people, mainly young men. A few months later there was another awful incident where a large number of young men were being relocated, and a dozen or so suffocated in the back of a truck where they were piled like logs. The situation in the South has continued to be volatile, with local people killing teachers, local officials, even monks and other people who were seen as unwelcome symbols of the Thai state. The people of those three provinces evidently want autonomy or separate status. They are not Thai in culture, language, religion or any other identifiable characteristic. They live in Thailand because of historic accident, when the former British colonial rulers of Malaya negotiated the boundary with the former Royal Siamese Government in 1902.

A good news story in the War on Terror: the most wanted terrorist in Southeast Asia, was successfully captured in Thailand, through the combined efforts of US and Thai law enforcement and intelligence personnel. Hambali, as he was called, was believed to have been responsible for the bombing of two bars on the Indonesian resort island of Bali that killed 200 people in 2002.

JOHNSON: The major ceremonial event during our time in Thailand was the Summit of the leaders of the countries of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC). The Thais not only hosted the senior leaders of the 22 member economies, but they also laid on State Visits for President Bush, Russian President Putin and Chinese President Hu Jintao -- all within the same week! It was an amazing performance.

One other notable event during our time in Thailand was the Queen's annual silk festival, held in the far Northeast, near the Mekong River, in Sakon Nakorn. This was a very classy show, bringing designers from around the world and featuring the incredible hand woven work of hundreds of Thai master weavers. This was a major event on Kathleen's calendar because of her artistic eyes and her own weaving skills. We always came back with several yards of exquisite Thai silk.

Another highlight: in 2004, not long before we left, I joined the North Texas State University Jazz Ensemble and the King in a three-hour jam session at the King's palace in Hua Hin. The young musicians from Texas were phenomenal, and the King was also pretty good on clarinet, sax and trumpet. We finished the evening with a rousing rendition of Duke Ellington's masterpiece, Sing, Sing, Sing.

By late 2004, we were preparing to depart after a memorable three years. There had been some staff changes in the Embassy by that time: the new DCM was Alex Arvizu, the Political Counselor was Bob Clark, Admin was Kees Keur, Consul General Chiang Mai was Beatrice Camp.

We packed our household goods and sent them off just before Christmas 2004. And on our last weekend in country, we went to visit the Elephant Training Center in Lampang Province, near Chiang Mai. We had been there before, and really enjoyed spending time with friends and with the elephants.

Then on the morning of December 26, one of the people in our group received a phone call saying that there had been a terrible "flood" of some kind in Phuket. But we did not have any frame of reference so we could not tell what exactly had happened. Then at the airport, as we were returning to Bangkok, we saw some still scenes of water damage in a hotel lobby in Phuket. It was not until we got back to Bangkok and turned on the TV that we saw evidence of the terrible tsunami that had struck Phuket and other areas along the west coast of the Kra Peninsula at 8 am that morning. The Embassy had already received several hundred phone calls from the States, and had set up an open line to the State Department. We also sent two consular officers to Phuket to help in identifying bodies and to help American citizens get flights out of Phuket. We also sent a couple of people who worked in our POW/MIA section because they had experience in identifying remains. In the event, the number of American fatalities was "only" about 30, while the numbers of West Europeans was much higher -- about 800 Swedes, and several hundred British, Germans, and others. One major fatality was the King's grandson, who was at a resort north of Phuket with his mother, Princess Ubolrat. The boy was about 21 years old, and was apparently playing on the beach when the water rapidly receded, then came rushing back in. He made it back to the building where he and his mother and their entourage were staying. But the huge waves caught up with him before he could get inside the building. His mother was on the third floor; the water reached the second floor.

We departed as planned on the early morning of December 28, exactly three years from the date of our arrival. But I was working up to the last minute to get Thai government clearance to bring in some large cargo planes from Okinawa to the Thai naval air base at Utapao, southeast of Bangkok. This base served as the operational center for the huge relief and recovery effort mounted by the US. The brunt of the blow from the earthquake and the tsunami hit Aceh, on the northern tip of the island of Sumatra in Indonesia. Over 220,000 people perished in this event, most of them in Indonesia. The number in Thailand, as I recall, was about 30,000. It was a colossal disaster.

We returned to the US via Honolulu, where I had a few meetings about the relief effort. Then we went directly to Washington, DC, where I met with my successor, Ambassador Ralph Boyce, for about two hours, including the time it took me to drive him to Dulles Airport. He had moved up his departure to get to Bangkok as soon as possible to oversee the relief effort and to be there when Secretary Powell came to the region a few days later. It was painful for us to depart in the wake of such a disaster, but it was time to move on to the next phase of our lives. I officially retired from the Foreign Service on Friday, January 5, 2005.

Manila

But wait! There's an encore to this performance! In June, 2005, I received a call from the State Department asking whether I would be willing to go to Manila as Chargé d'Affaires for three months starting in July. At this point we had finished unpacking, but were still in the midst of a major renovation of our house near Seattle. In other words, we were not by any means resettled. But the opportunity to go someplace that was really new to both of us, and to get out of the messy renovation, was very appealing. So I went back to DC for a few days of briefings, then we headed off to Manila in mid-July. Kathleen had other business in Thailand, so we booked her ticket as a round trip from Seattle to Bangkok, with the return via Manila. Her travel was not official; we paid for her ticket ourselves, as we did for our modest shipment of the minimum necessary possessions we would need to perform our official business during that period.

The Philippines turned out to be a fascinating adventure. For preparation, I read the book, In Our Image, by Stanley Karnow (whom I had known as the Washington Post correspondent in Hong Kong during my time there). The book was the best area studies briefing I've ever read. It prepared us for many of the historic events and places we saw there, including many reminders of how closely the US and the Philippines had been tied together, during the colonial period, during WWII, and during the post-War period. There was a saying that the Filipinos had lived in a convent for 300 years (under the Spanish) and had lived in Las Vegas for 50 years (under the US). It was sad, in a way, to see how important the US was to so many Filipinos, and to realize that the feeling was not mutual.

The reason there was a vacancy in Manila was that the previous Ambassador, Frank Ricciardone, had gone to Cairo as Ambassador, and his deputy, Joe Mussomeli, was about to go as Ambassador to Cambodia. So they needed someone with gray hair to sit in the big chair. The acting DCM was Scott Bellard, whom we had met in Chiang Mai in 1998, and who had also served in China. I really depended on him for guidance throughout our time there, and he did an excellent job.

Because our time would be short, we wanted to do and much and see as much as we could. One memorable event occurred the first week I was there (Kathleen was still in Thailand). There was an opening of a feature film called, "The Great Escape." It was a true story about how an inexperienced American battalion, with the active help of Filipino resistance fighters, had liberated an allied POW camp, freeing about 600 Americans and about 50 Australians without a single fatality on the allied side. This action took place in early 1945. These POWs were mostly survivors of the Bataan Death March two years earlier. The camp was in a district called Cabanatuan, northeast of Manila; I had never heard of the place. But I learned a lot before seeing the movie, and more from the movie. And I shared the stage at this gala opening with the Filipino star who played the guerilla leader.

Another event commemorating an event of the same period was the 60th anniversary of the Japanese surrender, which took place in the American Ambassador's residence in Baguio, a hill resort to the north of Manila. The Japanese commander had used that residence as his official headquarters during the War, so it was fitting that he should be brought back there to surrender. There was a large painting showing the scene in the

dining room where General Wainwright took the surrender from General Yamashita. In a calculated insult, MacArthur refused to accept the surrender document and was not present for the ceremony.

I went to Mindanao, the largest island in the Philippine archipelago, three times. Mindanao and a few much smaller islands were home to an active Muslim insurgency that had been going on for many years, maybe even decades. At one point, it looked like a political agreement was virtually in hand. But then the issue of ancestral lands, which had always been a problem in these negotiations, came back to sink the negotiations. There were also issues of political and family/clan rivalries in that region which made reaching a durable agreement difficult to impossible. The point of having us go there that often was to demonstrate various assistance projects being built by the American military and civilians, from a small bridge between a village and its market, to a new elementary school building in one of the small islands, to a new ferry landing on a different small island (which was blown up by the guerillas about two weeks later). We also visited an immense banana plantation near Davao, the capital of Mindanao, owned and operated by an American who was the third generation of his family to own and operate this plantation (he was also a part owner of the San Francisco Giants baseball team).

The President at the time was Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, who had been elected and re-elected, but was not very popular. I called on her soon after arriving, and saw her a few other times. Kathleen and I also called on Corazon Aquino, who had become President after the assassination of her husband by then-President Ferdinand Marcos. She showed us around the museum that had been built to honor her husband, but also had many photos of her. And we met Fidel Ramos, who remained the most popular and influential political person in the country at that time.

The new DCM/Chargé, Paul Jones, arrived in early October and overlapped with me for about ten days. Then he took over as Chargé until the "real" ambassador, Kristie Kenney, completed the procedures to come to Manila. My last day on duty in Manila was October 10 -- exactly 40 years to the day of my first day on duty in the Foreign Service -- October 10, 1965. Mr. Jones served as Chargé for about three months until the arrival of Ambassador Kenney, who was the first female US Ambassador to the Philippines, and later became the first female US Ambassador to Thailand in 2010.

End of interview