

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

AMBASSADOR CHRISTOPHER MCMULLEN

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy

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INTERVIEW

Q: Today is the 29th of April 2019, with Christopher McMullen. It's for the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training. I am Charles Stuart Kennedy, and you go by Chris?

MCMULLEN: I go by Chris, yes.

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

MCMULLEN: I was born on December 31st, 1952, in Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania, which is a suburb of Philadelphia. I was raised in Newtown Square, about ten miles from Bryn Mawr.

Q: Well, first let's get a little about your parents. Let's do your father's side. Where did his family come from and all? Then we'll do your mother.

MCMULLEN: On my paternal side, my grandparents came from Connacht Province in Ireland. We think they were born in County Sligo or County Mayo. My grandfather, Patrick McMullen, and grandmother, Mary Maguire, first went to England to find work. They had several children before they came to the United States. We think they came to the U.S. around the turn of the 20th century because my father was born in 1908 in Conshohocken, which is outside of Philadelphia. My grandmother died in childbirth during the flu pandemic in 1918, leaving nine children, including my father who was only 10 years old.

On my maternal side, my great-grandmother, Marie Senger, was born in Alsace, France. Based on the little bit that we know about her it appears that she came to Philadelphia as a young girl sometime after the Franco-Prussian War in 1871. She spoke French and German, reflecting the fact that Alsace was a contested region. My older relatives remember that she spoke English with an accent even later in life. We don't know much about her husband, Charles Roughton, other than the fact that he worked at Baldwin Locomotives, a large company in Philadelphia.

Q: When your paternal grandfather came over, what was he doing?

MCMULLEN: My grandfather was a cabinet-maker who emigrated from Ireland and tried first to make a living in London. After arriving in the United States, he got a job in a steel mill in Conshohocken, an industrial town on the Schuylkill River near Philadelphia. We think he might have been a foreman because he got several of his sons, including my father, jobs at the steel mill. My father left school after the fifth grade and started working in the steel mill when he was 14 years old. My father told us a story of how the steelworkers at his plant were threatening to go

on strike. Instead, the company's owner locked them out, and he never went back to work again at that steel mill. I guess that was sometime in the 1920s. It was tough times for working-class people like my father. I often think the things my parents experienced early in their lives, the Great Depression and World War II, made them resilient and stoical.

Q: And your mother, she was born here?

MCMULLEN: Yes, both my mother, Albertine Kelly, and my grandmother were born in the Nicetown section of Philadelphia. My grandmother's first husband, William Kelly, died of some kind of illness and she remarried his brother, which was a common custom in those days. My mother was born to the second husband, Christopher Kelly, who died in a train accident. After he died, my grandmother got remarried again for a third time. My mother spent most of her childhood in Philadelphia and later moved to Conshohocken, where she met my father.

Q: Where did you grow up?

MCMULLEN: I grew up in Newtown Square, in Delaware County, about 15 miles outside of Philadelphia. I was fortunate because Newtown Square was fairly affluent, although we lived in a mostly working-class neighborhood. My father worked in industrial jobs for much of his life. When I was three years old, he became disabled in a work-related accident. At that time he was in his mid-forties. He later tried starting several small businesses that never took off. He eventually got a job as a clerk in a state liquor store. My mother was a "Rosie the Riveter" during World War II; she worked at the Budd Company, which made military vehicles for the war effort. When I was growing up she worked in a dry cleaner and later in a bakery.

Even though my family lived in a blue-collar neighborhood, I went to very good schools. I went to Saint Anastasia, a Catholic grade school, for eight years. In ninth grade I transferred to public school, Marple-Newtown High School, which was very good in terms of college preparation. Both my grade school and high school focused on writing skills; looking back, this helped me in college and later when I became a Foreign Service officer.

Q: What do you recall the nuns teaching you? There are a lot of stories about nuns, both on the good side and the bad side.

MCMULLEN: It's true. There was a good side and bad side to Catholic education when I was young. To be honest, I had mixed feelings about the nuns. I thought that at times they could be pretty difficult. Of course, I'm sure they thought I was difficult too. On the other hand, the nuns gave me something that was very positive: a moral structure, which I hope serves me the rest of my life. Ironically, they also taught us the Protestant Ethic and how to compete in a largely Protestant country. They emphasized the importance of self-discipline and hard work. In that sense I thought the nuns prepared us well for later in life.

While I thought the education that I received in Catholic school was good, I had had enough of the nuns by the eighth grade so I transferred to a public high school. In retrospect, I'm grateful for the good education that the nuns had given me. It must have been difficult for them because the classes were quite large. This was the post-World War II, "baby boom," generation.

Q: Did the fact that you grew up in an area like Bryn Mawr have any effect on you as far as school was concerned?

MCMULLEN: Yes, I think it did. While I came from a working-class family, many of the kids that I grew up with came from well-off families. Many of their parents were professionals. Since we lived close to a wealthy and well-educated area like Bryn Mawr, we got some of the best teachers that money could buy. We had a very good college prep program in high school, and some of my fellow students went on to Ivy League schools and other elite universities.

Even though I was an underachiever, my exposure to this kind of academic atmosphere in high school helped me later in college. I was not a standout student; as my high school guidance counselor said, “You have a Cadillac engine, but you’re running like a Volkswagen.” I enjoyed playing sports more than studying. I was co-captain of the track team in eighth grade and played halfback and linebacker on the football team in eighth and ninth grade, but it was baseball that I excelled in, from Little League and Babe Ruth through high school. I was a pretty good pitcher and hoped to someday make it as a professional. Unfortunately, I developed chronic tendinitis in my elbow, which ended any hope of a pitching career.

I enjoyed growing up in the Philadelphia suburbs; it was an ethnically diverse area, at least by the standards of those days. As in the case of Boston and Baltimore, Philadelphia was an immigrant city with different ethnic enclaves. When people started moving out of Philly and into the suburbs in the 1960s, suburbs like Newtown Square replicated the ethnic communities of the city. I had friends who lived in ethnic neighborhoods like Little Italy and Little Israel, which were typical of the Philadelphia suburbs. I’m sure that these ethnic neighborhoods have become even more diverse in recent decades.

Q: What subjects were you particularly interested in?

MCMULLEN: I really enjoyed history. I think part of it reflected growing up in the Philadelphia area, where you have history all around you—Independence Hall, Valley Forge, and Brandywine Battlefield. So early on, I became interested in the Revolutionary War. I was interested more broadly in military history. When I was fairly young I went with my parents to Gettysburg Battlefield, which sparked my interest in the Civil War.

Q: My grandfather was actually wounded at Gettysburg.

MCMULLEN: That’s incredible. He was fighting for the Union side, I assume?

Q: He was in the Union Army. He was wounded and captured on the first day, but then [General Robert E.] Lee pulled out and left the Union wounded behind.

MCMULLEN: I think Gettysburg is a special place.

Q: Were you much of a reader, I mean, even earlier on?

MCMULLEN: Yes. I liked American literature too, particularly short stories by Edgar Allan Poe and Washington Irving. I also liked American Westerns, such as *The Ox-Bow Incident*, and *The Virginian*. I enjoyed reading historical novels about the Pacific War in World War II. Besides history and literature, I enjoyed reading about politics. Even though my parents didn't have much of a formal education, my father in particular was very interested in politics. In fact, he wanted me to get into politics and run for office, but I had no real interest in electoral politics.

Q: Where did you fall on the political spectrum?

MCMULLEN: We were New Deal Democrats. As Irish-Catholics, I guess it was a given that my family would be Franklin Roosevelt Democrats. In some ways my father was liberal and in other ways he was more conservative. Even though he had fought in World War II, he was opposed to the Vietnam War and did not want me to fight in the war. Fortunately, when I turned 18 years old, the draft lottery was in place and I drew a high number.

I found it interesting that my father was against the Vietnam War, because he had served as a gunnery sergeant in World War II and fought in the Battle of the Bulge. His artillery unit later provided fire support for General George Patton's troops in the Battle of Remagen for control of the Ludendorff Bridge over the Rhine River. Afterwards, my father served in the occupation forces in Germany, where he spent almost a year in a small village near Kassel.

Q: And your mother?

MCMULLEN: My mother also was a Democrat but didn't voice her political views as much as my father. My father was much more vocal.

Q: Where did you get your news?

MCMULLEN: We relied mostly on the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, a liberal-leaning newspaper that has pretty good coverage of domestic politics and international affairs.

Q: Would you say up through high school you were getting much on the international side?

MCMULLEN: My high school social science teachers made sure that we had access to international news. We mostly read *Time* and *Newsweek*, which at that time were probably the most accessible sources of international news for high school students.

Q: What was grade school like for you?

MCMULLEN: Grade school was very pleasant. As I mentioned, I liked sports and was fairly athletic. I played football, ran track, and played baseball. For me, sports overshadowed the academic side of grade school. I also enjoyed fishing, camping and spending time in the outdoors. I had the advantage of growing up in a suburban area where there were still lots of woods and open spaces; it wasn't as developed as it is today.

Q: Did you get into scouts?

MCMULLEN: Yes, I enjoyed both Cub Scouts and Boy Scouts. When I was a Boy Scout I made it to Life Scout but didn't make it to Eagle Scout. I was not much of a swimmer, so I never earned the swimming and lifesaving merit badges that were required for Eagle Scout. I stayed in Boy Scouts until I was about 12 years old. I think Boy Scouts was eventually overtaken by sports and school social life.

Q: In high school what was the social life like?

MCMULLEN: Social life was good in high school. I had friends from different backgrounds. In that sense the Philadelphia suburbs were a melting pot. It was interesting, too, because I had quite a few Jewish friends. I still remember one of my Jewish friends whose father had a number tattooed on his forearm. I was only about 14 or 15 years old, so this would've been the late-1960s. My friend's name was Morris Schwartz. I said, "Morris, what was that number on your dad's forearm?" He said it was from when he was in the concentration camp as a kid. This was a real revelation for me; at that point, I had never heard about the Holocaust.

Coincidentally, about this same time, my father had shown me photos from his time in Germany during World War II. He had served with the 259th Field Artillery Battalion. After fighting in the Battle of the Bulge and the Battle of Remagen, my father's unit was sent to Buchenwald, the infamous concentration camp outside of Weimar. His unit arrived at Buchenwald shortly after an American armored column had liberated the camp in early May 1945. My father had photos of the camp, both former prisoners and stacks of corpses. The photos were horrendous. At that time, in the 1960s, very few Americans knew much about the Holocaust. After my parents' death, my sister donated my father's photos of Buchenwald to the Holocaust Museum.

Anyway, the coincidental timing of seeing the concentration camp identification number on the forearm of my friend's father and seeing my father's photos of Buchenwald was an eye-opening experience. I don't think my friend's father was at Buchenwald. I think his family was originally from Lithuania. Interestingly, in May 1975, some 30 years after my father was at Buchenwald, I visited there while traveling through East Germany with a group of students. It was quite moving to visit Buchenwald in light of my father's connection to the camp.

Q: In high school, was your family pointing you towards college?

MCMULLEN: My father had only attended school through the fifth grade and was a very practical guy. So he wanted me to get a skill in some kind of trade. He would have preferred for me to have gone to vocational technical school rather than the high school that I attended, which was focused on college preparation. My mother only went to the 10th grade but she saw the value of education and wanted me to go to college. While I was far from an academic standout in high school, I at least did well enough to get into Jacksonville University in Florida.

When I was accepted at Jacksonville, I was hoping to play baseball and maybe get a walk-on scholarship as a pitcher. That didn't happen. I attended Jacksonville for a year but I didn't play baseball. I realized that my pitching arm was shot. Nevertheless, Jacksonville was a turning point in my life. When I arrived there, I was not a serious student. But I was fortunate because one of

my history professors, Dr. George Buker, really inspired me to study and learn. He was a retired Navy Captain and a tough taskmaster. Most students didn't like him but I enjoyed his class. As a result of his influence, I decided to change my major from business marketing to history when I transferred after my freshman year to West Chester University, a state university in Pennsylvania. While I wasn't sure what I was going to do with it, I enjoyed studying history. As it turned out, history provided a terrific background for the Foreign Service.

Q: Could you describe both of these universities?

MCMULLEN: When I was there in 1970-71, Jacksonville was a redneck area. This was prior to Jacksonville's explosive growth in recent years. The university was a typical southern liberal arts school with a beautiful campus on the St. Johns River. It was a small private school of about 3,000 students. I was in the business program, but the school was noted for its liberal arts. It was a pleasant atmosphere because it was close to the beach and there was a golf course on the campus, where I played whenever I had a chance. I had a good time. The academic program was fine, but it was a fairly expensive school and my family didn't have the money to support me. I realized that I could not afford to stay there so I transferred to West Chester University.

In contrast to Jacksonville, West Chester University was a fairly large school located about 25 miles west of Philadelphia. Most of us were first-generation college students from working-class families. I would say that the student body was generally conservative compared to many private liberal arts colleges. A lot of students worked part-time, as I did, while taking classes. I had a number of different jobs at various times—working in construction, house painting, pumping gas, delivering furniture and, during the summers, cutting grass at a private golf course. I enjoyed my time at West Chester and thought that I received a solid liberal arts education.

Q: Were you concentrated on any particular area of history?

MCMULLEN: I focused mostly on modern European history. One of my professors was a scholar in German history. He spurred my interest in modern German history. I also took quite a few courses on the developing world—Latin America, Africa and Asia. This was fortuitous because I spent most of my Foreign Service in those regions.

Q: We were just really discovering Africa during that time.

MCMULLEN: Exactly. Patrice Lumumba in the Congo and other liberation leaders had put Africa on the map. It was an exciting time to study about the developing world. There were revolutionary movements in Latin America supported by Fidel Castro and Che Guevara. In 1973, when I was a junior in college, Chile's military launched a coup that overthrew President Salvador Allende. These events piqued my interest in international affairs.

During this period one of my history professors invited a friend of his from college to speak to us about careers in the State Department. They had both attended Trinity College in Dublin, and his friend had joined the Foreign Service after graduation. He spoke to us about his experience serving as a political officer in Prague in 1968 when the Soviets invaded Czechoslovakia. I think his name was Jim Madden. Interestingly, I later met him at a party in the early 1990s, when he

was Office Director for West European Affairs at State Department. This was a few years after I had joined the Foreign Service. I told him that his story about serving in Czechoslovakia had sparked my interest in the Foreign Service. Having come from a working-class family—and even though Philadelphia is a fairly sophisticated area—I didn't know much about the Foreign Service. So he planted the seed that eventually led me to pursue a career in the Foreign Service.

Also during my college years, Henry Kissinger was on television almost every day. I was fascinated by this former Harvard professor who was applying his knowledge of history in dealing with complicated foreign affairs problems as Richard Nixon's National Security Adviser and later as Secretary of State. This combination of hearing Jim Madden talk about his experiences in the Foreign Service, and seeing Kissinger applying history to try to solve difficult diplomatic problems, really had an impact on my decision to pursue a career in foreign affairs.

Q: So how did the Soviet Union play in your thoughts in this period?

MCMULLEN: I came of age at the height of the Cold War competition between the United States and the Soviet Union. In 1975, I traveled to East Germany with a small group of students led by Dr. Claude Foster, the German history professor whom I mentioned earlier. He had been a Fulbright scholar in Germany and had been traveling to East Germany for many years. Foster had done a lot of work on Thomas Müntzer and the German Peasants' War focusing on how the East Germans and the Soviets used the Peasants' War in the 1520s as the legitimizing force for a distinct East Germany as opposed to a unified Germany. Every summer Foster would take students to spend about six weeks traveling throughout East Germany. I traveled there with him and a group of five students, visiting Erfurt, Eisenach, Leipzig, Dresden, and East Berlin.

When I went to East Germany, I was somewhat liberal, like many college students. However, crossing from West Germany to East Germany was an eye-opening experience, seeing the Berlin Wall and East German soldiers armed with machine guns. We were told to open our suitcases and show them the contents because they didn't want any Western "propaganda" entering the country. Throughout the trip, we had to register at the local police station in every town that we visited; the police annotated our passports with the dates that we would be staying in each town. In conversations with East German officials we would ask, "Why did you build the Berlin Wall?" And they would say, "It's to keep Western imperialists out of our country." The logic was a bit contrived. Anyway, seeing first-hand how it was to live under communism in the Soviet bloc was a real shock. Even though we were there in the summer, I remember that everything looked gray: the sky was always gray, the buildings looked gray, and even the people looked gray. It seemed like a metaphor for life under Soviet rule. So I took a very harsh view of the Soviet Union based on my experience in East Germany.

Q: Something I should've asked earlier: How important was the Catholic Church in your life?

MCMULLEN: My parents were not religious at all. They went to church only for weddings and funerals. My brother and sister were practicing Catholics. My brother was 14 years older than I was and my sister was 17 years older, so sometimes I would go to church with them. I was never an altar boy. But I would say Catholicism was important in giving me a moral compass. The Catholic Church is important for Irish-Americans because it's hard to separate your Catholicism

from your ethnicity, even if you're not religious. It's kind of like the Poles. I always thought that Polish identity, like Irish identity, has been tied to Catholicism, whether you are religious or not. So, in this sense, Catholicism has played an important part in my life.

Having served in Latin America as a Foreign Service officer, I could see why the Catholic liberation movement was popular among the poor in some countries. I think the church often serves as a buffer against some of the worst abuses of the state and the ruling elites. I saw this in East Germany, where the Lutheran Church worked within the constraints of communist control to mitigate some of the worst aspects of Soviet rule. The Lutheran Church in East Germany provided an outlet for people, as did the Catholic Church in Poland during the Cold War. I think the role of the church is important in that sense and can be a moderating force.

Q: How about the civil rights movement? Did the role of blacks have an impact on you at all?

MCMULLEN: It's interesting because I grew up in an ethnically diverse neighborhood, but at that time there were not many African-Americans or Hispanics living in the Philadelphia suburbs. The counties outside of Philadelphia were made up of mostly white ethnics, which reflected the nature of immigration in that region. As a result, I had very little contact with blacks until my college years. As I recall, we had only one black student in my high school, and he had transferred there during his senior year. That's incredible because my high school was pretty large. There were more than 560 students in my graduating class. Anyway, it wasn't until I went to college and later graduate school at Georgetown University that I had any real contact with African-Americans, Hispanics and other minorities. I know that the area where I grew up is a lot more racially and culturally diverse today than it was when I was young.

Q: You were going to college between what years?

MCMULLEN: I started at Jacksonville University in the fall of 1970. I went there for a year and then transferred to West Chester University. During the summer of 1971, between my freshman and sophomore years, I took a cross-country trip with a couple of friends; we drove a Volkswagen from Pennsylvania to California and then down into northern Mexico. It was a kind of Jack Kerouac, *On the Road*, experience that really expanded my worldview.

When we left on our adventure, I wasn't sure whether I wanted to return to college. I had enjoyed my freshman year in college, but I was cynical about the value of a college degree. So when we went cross-country, I thought that I might stay in California or somewhere in the West. For a number of reasons, however, I decided to return home. Since I had not yet applied to transfer to West Chester University, I went back to work on the golf course where I had worked for the past few summers. I soon found out that it's much different working on a golf course in the off-season when there are no other college kids; it's mostly older guys who are down on their luck and can't hold down normal jobs. This was another useful learning experience. I saw the writing on the wall: if I didn't go back to college, I would likely be doing manual labor for the rest of my life. So I transferred to West Chester University in the spring of 1972, and I received my bachelor's degree in history in December 1974.

Q: Where did you get your master's and doctorate degrees?

MCMULLEN: Shortly after graduating, West Chester offered me a research assistant position that allowed me to get my master's degree in history. I focused again on modern European history but took quite a few courses on Latin America and Africa. During this time I started thinking that if I got a doctorate in history, it might help me get a job in foreign affairs, perhaps at the State Department, Pentagon, or CIA. So I applied to Georgetown University, University of Florida, and University of Pittsburgh. I received scholarship offers at Pittsburgh and Georgetown, but Florida said, "You pay for the first year and prove yourself, and then we'll give you a scholarship." Both Pittsburgh and Florida had excellent doctoral programs in Latin American history, but I didn't want to become an academic; I wanted to go into public service and hopefully get a job in policy making. I had only a vague notion of how Washington worked, so I thought that Georgetown would be my best choice.

I was fortunate because I had several outstanding mentors at Georgetown. Luis Aguilar was my main mentor and dissertation adviser. He had worked as minister of culture in Cuba under Fidel Castro. Like many Cubans, Aguilar became disaffected with the Cuban Revolution after a year or so and left the country; he eventually wound up teaching at Georgetown. I also had Tom Dodd as an adviser. He was a specialist on Mexico and Central America. His father had been a senator, and his brother, Chris Dodd, also became a senator. Tom knew how Washington worked in practical terms, and he taught at State Department's Foreign Service Institute. So he was very helpful in giving me guidance. The other professor who was influential in my development was Jules Davids, who taught diplomatic history. He was best known for writing several chapters in John F. Kennedy's *Profiles in Courage*. Davids was a terrific teacher who brought history alive through his vivid descriptions of key personalities.

Towards the end of my time at Georgetown, I had the opportunity to work for Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker. He was a founding member of the Institute for the Study of Diplomacy (ISD), which was affiliated with Georgetown's School of Foreign Service. I had just started working on my doctoral dissertation in the fall of 1978, and Bunker had recently retired after negotiating the Panama Canal treaties. ISD was looking for someone to serve as a special assistant for Bunker and to draft case studies analyzing his mediation efforts. I drafted two monographs that ISD published: one dealt with the dispute between the Dutch and the Indonesians over West New Guinea in 1962; the other involved a contentious dispute in Yemen between Egypt and Saudi Arabia in 1963. These mediation efforts were similar in the sense that Bunker had to find face-saving formulas for the weaker party in both instances. In the West New Guinea dispute, Indonesian strongman Sukarno held all the high cards and wanted to humiliate the Dutch, who were trying to hang on to one of their last colonies. In the case of Yemen, Egyptian leader Gamal Nasser had the stronger hand and wanted to embarrass the Saudis, who bridled at Nasser's posturing as the leader of a pan-Arab state. In both cases, Bunker formulated proposals that traded symbolism for substance and saved face for the side that was making concessions.

Q: Bunker was the arbitrator in both disputes?

MCMULLEN: Yes. Perhaps because of Bunker's business background before becoming a diplomat, he turned out to be a skillful mediator. He was able to figure out fairly quickly which

side had the winning hand and then craft a solution that masked—often through symbolic gestures—the key concessions made by the weaker party.

Q: I served under him in Saigon.

MCMULLEN: Oh, did you really?

Q: I was Consul General at the embassy.

MCMULLEN: That must have been a big job and an interesting one.

Q: What was your opinion of Bunker?

MCMULLEN: I really admired him and learned a lot during the time I worked for him. Even though he grew up in Yonkers, New York, his manner seemed more like a New England patrician. As in the case of Averell Harriman and other wealthy businessmen-turned-statesmen of his generation, Bunker embodied the concept of *noblesse oblige*. I remember visiting his farm in Putney, Vermont: as I drove up the driveway, I felt like I might run into Robert Frost taking a walk. The plain white farm house seemed to reflect Bunker's simple, straightforward style.

I thought Bunker's personal integrity was the real key to his success in mediating the disputes in Yemen and West New Guinea, as well as the 1965 crisis in the Dominican Republic. Bunker inspired trust, which is critical for a mediator. This trait was also crucial to his success in negotiating the Panama Canal treaties, and in winning support from a skeptical U.S. Senate. He took a lot of abuse from conservatives over his role in negotiating those treaties but he firmly believed that turning over the canal to Panama was the right thing to do in terms of U.S. interests

On the other hand, I don't think his skills and temperament were well suited for his job as ambassador in Vietnam, especially at a critical period in the war, 1967-73. He placed far too much trust in the judgment of his military advisers, particularly General William Westmoreland, commander of U.S. forces in Vietnam. I think in retrospect that trust seems to have been misplaced. Nevertheless, Bunker went to his grave believing the U.S. had won the war in Vietnam but that the military victory was squandered by the failure of our Congress to provide support for South Vietnam in the run-up to North Vietnam's final offensive in 1975.

Q: There wasn't much mediation for Bunker to do in Vietnam...

MCMULLEN: Right. As you know, Washington calls the shots in setting the policy, particularly in a case like Vietnam. While Bunker commanded widespread respect in Washington, I don't think that he believed there was much room for him to maneuver in Vietnam. He saw his role as the implementer of the policy instructions that came out of Washington; there is little evidence that he pushed for a different approach. He probably would have been better suited to leading the Paris peace talks with the North Vietnamese, a job that went to his friend Averell Harriman.

While I had the greatest respect for Bunker's diplomatic skills, I never thought of him as a foreign policy visionary like Henry Kissinger, Dean Acheson, or George Kennan. Bunker was

more of a tactician and a mediator. To his credit, I think he knew his own limitations. President Kennedy reportedly offered Bunker an assistant secretary position at State Department; I think it might have been to head the Bureau of East Asia and Pacific Affairs, but he turned it down.

One of the amazing things about Ellsworth Bunker was his sheer longevity. He had a long and successful career as an executive in the sugar industry before getting into diplomacy in his late 50s. I remember when I interviewed for the job as his special assistant at the Institute for the Study of Diplomacy, this was in the fall of 1978, and he was 84 years old. He asked me the topic of my doctoral dissertation and I said, "U.S.-Mexican relations during the 1920s." He said, "Oh, that's when Dwight Morrow was ambassador to Mexico. I knew Dwight Morrow." He then told me a story about getting caught up in a local uprising in southern Mexico, where his family had extensive sugar plantations. Bunker's father had made a lot of money in the sugar industry; he owned plantations throughout the Caribbean Basin, including some in southern Mexico.

In the uprising that Bunker mentioned, his father had sent him there to deal with a labor dispute. This was during the 1920s, when Mexico was still recovering from the Revolution that had begun in 1910. Bunker got caught up in one of the minor rebellions that popped up periodically in different parts of Mexico. He apparently was taken hostage by an opportunistic local warlord. This was the era of "Dollar Diplomacy," when the U.S. flexed its muscle in support of American business interests in the Caribbean Basin. Bunker's father knew the Secretary of Navy and asked if he could send a U.S. Navy frigate to the coast of Mexico to try to find his son. The U.S. Navy sent a ship to the area but weren't able to find Bunker. His father eventually managed to send a ransom in silver from New Orleans to the rebels in Mexico and thus secured Bunker's release.

Q: How long did you work on your Ph.D.?

MCMULLEN: I began my Ph.D. studies at Georgetown in 1976, and graduated in 1980. I spent a year and a half doing classwork and then a semester studying for my comprehensive exams. I spent the last two years researching and writing my dissertation. I also worked part-time for Bunker at the Institute for the Study of Diplomacy during this time.

After doing my initial research at the National Archives in Washington, I went to Mexico and used the diplomatic records at the Mexican Foreign Ministry and National Archives. Also, Dwight Morrow, one of the U.S. ambassadors to Mexico during the period covered by my dissertation, had donated his papers to Amherst College, so I went there to do research. The other ambassador during that period, James Sheffield, had donated his papers to Yale University, so I used the Sterling Library in New Haven, Connecticut. Fortunately, I was also able to draw on the personal papers of Arthur Bliss Lane, who had worked for Sheffield in Mexico. Lane, who later served as ambassador to Poland and Colombia, had also given his papers to Yale.

Q: After absorbing the personal papers of these diplomats, what lessons did you learn?

MCMULLEN: I guess the main lesson that I learned in reading the papers of these diplomats was the importance of patience. I remember George Ball, a former senior State Department official, remarking on Bunker's formula for success. He said, "Bunker starts with the principle that he is dealing with reasonable people and just keeps at it until he gets an agreement."

I think that is the key to effective diplomacy—to have patience and ferret out where there are shared interests among opposing parties. In his successful mediation efforts, Bunker was able to see where there was a convergence of interests. The West New Guinea crisis was a good example. Even though Sukarno held a much stronger hand than the Dutch, domestically he faced two powerful opposing blocs: on one side, the Indonesian military was unhappy with the provocative way he was handling things, while on the other side, the communist party was also unhappy, preferring an even tougher line. Bunker was well aware of these internal constraints on Sukarno. For their part, Dutch business leaders were upset with the Dutch government because they thought West New Guinea wasn't worth fighting for; and they believed the dispute was moving towards a war that Indonesia was better positioned to win. Bunker saw that both sides had a shared interest in cutting a deal; plus, he sensed the points of pressure and vulnerabilities on each side, which he used to extract key concessions at critical junctures in the negotiations. This stuck with me when I later served as a deputy assistant secretary in the State Department—that is, try to get the other side to see where their interests converge with U.S. interests.

Q: What did you think of the Mexican government during the period that you were working on?

MCMULLEN: My dissertation dealt with a period of consolidation in the Mexican Revolution. The decade of the 1920s marked the triumph of the so-called “Northern Dynasty” over other competing factions. The leaders of this winning faction, the “*rancheros*”—big landowners from northern Mexico—had absorbed many of our traits because of their proximity to the United States. The Northern Dynasty leaders were more pragmatic than leaders of other factions in the Revolution, a key factor that allowed us to eventually defuse tensions between our two countries.

During the 1920s, Mexico was looking for a way to improve relations with the U.S., but without making concessions that undermined the basic principles of the Revolution. This was a tricky proposition that required nuanced diplomacy. Mexican officials knew they had to throttle back on the anti-Americanism, a central feature of the Revolution. On the other hand, they knew they had to implement key commitments of the Revolution, such as land reform and nationalization of the oil industry, both sensitive issues that involved U.S. interests in Mexico.

My dissertation focused on the diplomacy of Plutarco Elías Calles, who served as president from 1924 to 1928. Calles was a general during the Revolution and had worked his way up the ranks of the Northern Dynasty. He had been one of the generals from the northern state of Sonora but he wasn't a popular politician. For this reason, he was beholden to Álvaro Obregón, a popular general who preceded him as president. This was a delicate period for U.S.-Mexican relations, mostly because American oil companies feared that Mexico was going to nationalize the oil industry using a controversial article of the 1917 Constitution. American oil companies wanted to take a hard line with Mexico. However, American bankers were concerned about their loans to Mexico and wanted to take a more moderate line that would preserve their own economic interests. This is where it became interesting: Ambassador James Sheffield supported the oil companies and urged a hard line. But with the two countries drifting towards war, President Coolidge decided to replace Sheffield with Dwight Morrow, a prominent lawyer who worked for some of the top Wall Street banks. Not surprisingly, he sided with the bankers and wanted to find a solution that met the needs of both Mexico and the United States.

In the end, Morrow was able to work out a deal with Calles whereby the Mexican Supreme Court declared the Petroleum Law unconstitutional. This allowed U.S. oil companies to continue their operations, while allowing Calles to save face by distancing himself from the decision. Interestingly, Morrow's formula was very similar to the diplomatic style that Ellsworth Bunker later used so effectively in his mediation efforts. In any event, President Lázaro Cárdenas eventually nationalized the country's oil reserves a decade later, taking advantage of the run-up to World War II when the United States did not want to alienate Mexico.

The Calles presidency is often overlooked because it was not as violent or as colorful as the core period of the Revolution from 1910 through 1917. Plus, Plutarco Calles has been as unpopular among historians as he was among his contemporaries. As the kidnapping of Bunker by a local warlord illustrated, the 1920s were characterized by small uprisings throughout the country. The most prominent uprising, the so-called "Cristero Revolt," was led by Catholics opposed to the anti-clerical elements of the Revolution. The revolt was brutally crushed by Calles, who believed the Catholic Church was in large part responsible for backwardness of the country. He thought the government had to reduce the power of the church for the country to modernize.

The Cristero Revolt complicated efforts to improve U.S.-Mexican relations because Calles charged that the Knights of Columbus and other Catholic organizations in the United States were providing arms to the Cristero rebels. While there might have been some truth to these charges, I doubt it was on the scale that Calles alleged. The Yaqui Indians in northern Mexico also rebelled during this period, which weakened Calles's hand in dealing with the United States. With these uprisings as a backdrop, Dwight Morrow knew that Calles didn't really want to pick a fight with the United States. At the same time, Morrow knew that President Coolidge had his hands tied by Congress because he had deployed the Marines to Nicaragua, where we supported a political faction that was fighting the faction supported by Mexico. In finding a compromise solution to the impasse in Mexico over the oil issue, Morrow took into account the weaknesses of the Calles government, as well as the constraints on the Coolidge administration.

As a side note, Coolidge had sent the Marines to Nicaragua to battle rebel leader Augusto Sandino, namesake of the Sandinista rebels who overthrew the dictator, Anastasio Somoza, in 1979. The Marines spent a number of years in the late 1920s and early 1930s trying to hunt down Sandino in the mountains in Nicaragua. Fast forward to when I served in Nicaragua as a political officer in the late 1980s, the Sandinista military was trying to hunt down the Contras (U.S.-backed rebels) in those very same mountains. I traveled regularly throughout that region of Nicaragua, reporting on local attitudes towards the Contras. During those trips I often thought how ironic it was that history had repeated itself but with a different twist.

Q: Did you get your Ph.D.?

MCMULLEN: Yes, I got my doctorate in May 1980.

Q: Then what?

MCMULLEN: Well, I have to admit that I was a bit complacent about getting a job. I somehow thought that I was going to get a job without difficulty. That wasn't the case. After I graduated, I soon realized that finding a job was going to be a lot more challenging than I expected, since we were in the midst of a recession. I wasn't interested in becoming an academic; I didn't have the temperament to be a scholar focused on a single issue or region for an entire career. I felt that having studied history was good preparation for working in foreign affairs. I looked at a career in academia as similar to what scientists call basic research, whereas a career in foreign affairs is similar to what scientists consider applied research. In other words, how can you apply the lessons of the past to solve contemporary foreign policy problems? I was looking for a job in foreign affairs, perhaps State Department, the Pentagon, CIA, maybe a think tank in Washington. But when I graduated, I didn't have any full-time job offers in hand.

Fortunately, Georgetown offered me a one-year position as an adjunct professor in the history department. Both Tom Dodd and Luis Aguilar—two Latin American historians—took their sabbaticals during the same academic year, 1980-81. So I taught two undergraduate courses on Latin American history, as well as two upper class graduate courses: one examined the role of peasants in politics in Latin America, and the other one dealt with the Southern Cone—Chile, Argentina, Uruguay, and Paraguay.

In the spring of 1981, while I was teaching and working at the Institute for the Study of Diplomacy, the chairman of Georgetown's history department passed along my name to the staff of former President Jimmy Carter, who was looking for someone to help him research and write his memoirs, what was later published as *Keeping Faith*. I assume that Georgetown recommended me based on my work with Ellsworth Bunker. Anyway, I made the "shortlist" of applicants and interviewed with Carter at his mother's house in Plains, Georgia. The interview was a bit surreal; halfway through it, Carter's secretary passed him a note. He read it and looked up at me and said, "The Pope has been shot." I thought "this is unbelievable: I'm interviewing with Jimmy Carter and he tells me that Pope John Paul II has been shot." This was May 13, 1981, several days before my wedding. Following our wedding a few days later, my wife and I went on a month-long backpacking trip through Europe. When we returned, I found out that I didn't get the job with Carter. He had chosen Steve Hochman, a former student of Dumas Malone, a Thomas Jefferson scholar at the University of Virginia.

Later in 1981, I took the Foreign Service exam. I also interviewed at a Defense Department think tank and at the international division of a large U.S. bank. I pursued possible jobs at CIA and at the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA). In the spring of 1982, DIA offered me a job as a current intelligence analyst at the Pentagon. By that time, I had passed the Foreign Service exam and was on the register at State Department but had not been offered a job. I was also waiting to hear from CIA. I remember saying to Ellsworth Bunker, "I'm not sure what to do because I would rather join the Foreign Service, but I have a solid offer from DIA." Bunker being the practical guy that he was, said, "A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush." So I accepted DIA's offer and was assigned to the Pentagon as desk officer for El Salvador.

When I joined DIA in June 1982, El Salvador was mired in a brutal civil war. I remember reading what we called the "grim grams," diplomatic cables from our embassy in San Salvador: these telegrams provided details of how many teachers and labor union leaders had been killed

overnight by right-wing death squads. It was a dark period in Salvadoran history. During most of my time at DIA, from 1982 to 1987, I covered the wars in Central America. My principal duties included drafting daily intelligence analyses, and briefing the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Secretary of Defense on significant developments. I eventually moved up to become the section chief and senior analyst for Central America. In the fall of 1984, I also taught a graduate course at George Mason University on revolutionary movements in Latin America, which focused on the root causes of the insurgencies in Central America and the Cuban Revolution. This stint was a nice opportunity to share some of my real-world experiences as an analyst at the Pentagon.

In June 1985, I served as principal drafter for a special national intelligence estimate on prospects for the Contras in Nicaragua. That assignment was probably the most interesting aspect of my time with DIA, because it was a critical juncture when Congress was bitterly divided on the issue of funding the Contras. This was part of the Reagan Doctrine, which entailed funding for the so-called “freedom fighters”—the *mujahideen* (Muslim guerrillas) fighting the Soviets in Afghanistan, Jonas Savimbi’s UNITA rebels fighting the Soviet-backed government in Angola, and the Contras fighting the Sandinista government in Nicaragua.

Q: In the case of Nicaragua, you’re talking about threats on our border, right?

MCMULLEN: Well, that was how the Reagan administration portrayed the situation. President Reagan asserted the Sandinista government in Nicaragua threatened our southern border. This was history repeating itself. During the 1920s, President Coolidge had warned of similar dangers posed by Augusto Sandino, the rebel leader whom the U.S. Marines battled in Nicaragua.

For me, it was interesting to see how the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Pentagon leadership viewed the situation in Central America in the early 1980s. Despite the hardline language coming out of the White House and conservative circles, U.S. military leaders were wary of getting involved militarily in Central America. Having recently come out of graduate school, I was still fairly liberal when I began working at the Pentagon and had a preconceived notion of the U.S. military as hawkish on Central America. This notion turned out to be far from the truth.

I found that many of the military leaders at the Pentagon were generally gun-shy about intervening in Central America. This was not that long after our withdrawal from Vietnam, where most of the Pentagon’s top military officers had served at some point in the war. They didn’t want to get involved in another land war, particularly the leaders of the Marines and the Army. I remember briefing the Joint Chiefs of Staff at a couple of key junctures in the early years of the war in El Salvador, around 1983 or 1984. The Commandant of the Marines, General P.X. Kelley, was skeptical about how things were going there. At one point in the briefing he said, “I heard that some of the Salvadoran soldiers had cut and run during a battle with the guerrillas. Is that true?” The truth was that the capabilities of Salvadoran military units varied at that time; some units would stand and fight, while others did cut and run. As U.S. training gained traction, the performance of the Salvadoran military improved steadily. I suspect some of General Kelley’s skepticism was based on his experience in Vietnam, where the South Vietnamese military had a checkered record on the battlefield.

Q: P.X. Kelley was a legendary figure in the Marine Corps.

MCMULLEN: That's true. I think he was the youngest Marine to have been promoted to general before becoming Commandant of the Marines. The military leadership at the Pentagon was quite impressive when I worked at DIA. General John Vessey was Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff; he was succeeded in 1985, by Admiral William Crowe. General Vessey had fought with the Army at Anzio in World War II and later commanded U.S. forces in Korea. Like General Kelley, he was wary of getting involved directly in Central America, but he did support U.S. training for the Salvadoran military. I think they were worried about fighting in another jungle setting that reminded them of Vietnam and rightfully so, since we know how that ended.

While most Pentagon leaders supported the training of Salvadoran troops, some worried about the U.S. military being tainted by the atrocities of the Salvadoran death squads. They wanted to avoid questions such as, "Is the U.S.-backed Salvadoran military involved in these activities? Or are off-duty soldiers involved?" In truth, some off-duty Salvadoran soldiers did participate in the death squads in the late 1970s and early 1980s, but most of this participation occurred before the U.S. began training the Salvadoran military. Also, many of the death squad murders seemed to be carried out by off-duty members of the National Police and Treasury Police.

I think our training of the Salvadoran military improved its performance in fighting the FMLN (Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front), which in turn reduced the Salvadoran elites' reliance on the death squads. Our training also improved the Salvadoran military's human rights record, although periodic atrocities still occurred such as the murder of the Jesuit priests during the FMLN's "Final Offensive" in November 1989.

Q: Was Ollie North a figure at all when you were dealing with Central America?

MCMULLEN: He was, yes. We would hear rumors at the Pentagon that Ollie North was working closely with Bill Casey, the head of CIA, on outfitting and training the Contras in Nicaragua. The special national intelligence estimate that I drafted, in June 1985, was reportedly requested by the Joint Chiefs of Staff. I think there was concern that the U.S. military could get sucked into the conflict in Nicaragua. Pentagon military leaders were skeptical about the Contras—the number of troops they claimed to field, their capabilities, and their legitimacy

I had a couple of direct dealings with Ollie North. During the run-up to elections in El Salvador in the spring of 1984, I was asked to brief him in his office at the NSC (National Security Council). According to North, U.S. officials were trying to decide whether we should provide security for Napoleon Duarte, the Christian Democratic candidate, and Roberto D'Aubuisson, the candidate for ARENA (National Republican Alliance), who was widely believed to have been one of the main backers of the death squads. North was trying to get an idea of the possible threats against both candidates. I don't know whatever happened; it was a policy decision and above my pay grade. I later met with North again in the spring of 1985, when I was drafting the special national intelligence estimate on Nicaragua. He had just returned from visiting some of the Contras' camps in Honduras. I wanted to get his perspective on their capabilities, although I knew that I would have to factor his personal bias into the assessment.

Ollie North was an interesting guy. The first time I went to his office he was on the phone and said several times, “Yeah, Bill.” The Navy officer who escorted me there—he was the liaison officer between DIA and the NSC—said, “Do you know who he’s talking to?” I said, “I have no idea.” He said, “He’s talking to Bill Casey.” I think North was only a major in the Marines at that time, yet he seemed to have a close working relationship with the CIA Director. I remember hearing rumors around the same time that North would call members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and try to solicit their support on policy issues. Given the general wariness of the Pentagon’s top military leaders about deeper U.S. involvement in Central America, I doubt that North garnered much support from the Joint Chiefs for a more aggressive policy in Nicaragua. In retrospect, North’s relationship with CIA Director Casey and his soliciting support of the Joint Chiefs reflected a flawed chain of command at the NSC; to have a relatively junior staffer bypassing his supervisors suggests there was a breakdown of traditional lines of authority. North was able to exploit a power vacuum at the NSC, which ultimately led to the Iran-Contra scandal.

Q: How did you feel? It sounded like you were somewhat involved in what you had wanted to get into—policy formulation or policy making.

MCMULLEN: I think my time at DIA was a good experience, as was my experience working for Ellsworth Bunker. Both jobs provided valuable preparation for my career in the Foreign Service. At DIA, I learned how the intelligence community interacts with policy makers, and I had personal contact with policy makers at the Pentagon, NSC and State Department.

When I was desk officer for El Salvador at the Pentagon, I was briefing the Joint Chiefs virtually every day and the Secretary of Defense at least once a week. It seemed like I was always briefing alongside the desk officer for Lebanon. This was a terrible time for Lebanon, which was also in the midst of a brutal civil war. I remember him saying to me, “I don’t know how you keep track of all the guerrilla factions in El Salvador.” I laughed and said, “I don’t know how you keep track of all the sectarian factions, the Druze and other groups, in Lebanon.”

Working for DIA was good training because I learned how to brief and write for policy makers, which helped when I joined the Foreign Service. I regularly read the reporting cables from our embassies in Central America. I dealt with the various players in the intelligence community. By 1986, however, I felt like it was time to do something different. I applied for and received a congressional foreign affairs fellowship with APSA (American Political Science Association). As APSA fellows, we had to find our own jobs on the Hill. I wanted to work for someone who reflected my own values and views, so I took a job working for Senator John Glenn, a moderate Democrat from Ohio. His views reflected my own in the sense that he was more conservative on foreign policy and defense issues but more liberal on social issues.

As an APSA fellow, I was technically detailed to Senator Glenn’s office and was supposed to return to DIA after one year and work in its congressional liaison office. However, I never went back to the Pentagon; instead, I went into the Foreign Service. I had taken and passed the Foreign Service exam during my time working for Senator Glenn. I was offered a job as a political officer and entered the Foreign Service in September 1987, with the 39th A-100 class.

My year working for Senator Glenn was also very helpful for my career in the State Department. I learned how the Hill works and saw first-hand how Congress influences foreign policy. I worked on a wide range of national security issues related to Glenn's role on the Senate Armed Services Committee. He was also interested in certain foreign policy issues, such as the civil war in Lebanon, the democracy movements in Taiwan and South Korea, as well as the knotty problem posed by Panamanian dictator Manuel Noriega and our planned turnover of the canal.

Q: How did you see things developing in Central America at that time?

MCMULLEN: When I started working for Senator Glenn in the fall of 1986, the Iran-Contra scandal had just broken. It was clear that the NSC and Ollie North had made a major mistake in trying to find foreign funding for the Contras, which was an attempt to bypass Congress. Due in part to the fallout from this scandal, the Reagan administration seemed to be seeking an endgame to our involvement in the Central American wars. The problem was that the Reagan Doctrine committed the U.S. to fighting Soviet proxies in places like Afghanistan, Angola, and Nicaragua. In addition to the Soviets, we wanted to counter Cuban support for the FMLN guerrillas in El Salvador and the Sandinistas in Nicaragua. The Soviets were finding it increasingly difficult to finance their own foreign adventures in Afghanistan, Central America, and elsewhere.

Despite the ham-handed way that we supported and funded the Contras, I thought that this military pressure was necessary to force the Sandinistas to seek a negotiated solution in Nicaragua. By the mid-1980s, both the U.S. and the Sandinistas were under increasing pressure to find a way out. And since Sandinista support—backed by the Cubans—was critical to the fortunes of the FMLN guerrillas, achieving a negotiated solution to the war in Nicaragua could help pave the way for an end to the war in El Salvador.

In the case of El Salvador, our training had improved the capabilities of the Salvadoran armed forces. They were more professional and committed fewer human rights abuses in the countryside. This helped turn the tables in the war because Salvadoran peasants were generally conservative—they wanted land reform but did not buy into the FMLN's Marxist doctrine. The problem was that the armed forces had alienated the peasantry early in the war by committing human rights abuses. When the Salvadoran military first went into the countryside to fight the FMLN guerrillas in the late 1970s and early 1980s, they committed atrocities that turned the peasantry against them. After receiving U.S. training, the Salvadoran military became more confident in its capabilities and started respecting human rights, which started to tip the balance in their favor. By the late 1980s, there was a strategic stalemate in both El Salvador and Nicaragua, which pointed to the likelihood of a negotiated solution to these armed conflicts.

Meanwhile, the Berlin Wall came down in November 1989, and the Soviet Union began to unravel. This meant that the Soviets could no longer bankroll the Cubans, who in turn were not able to provide critical assistance to the Sandinistas in Nicaragua and to the FMLN guerrillas in El Salvador. In the end, we resolved the Central America policy problem about as well as we could have hoped from a U.S. perspective. I always felt that the negotiated peace agreements in Central America represented a bipartisan success because this outcome required a military component in Nicaragua and El Salvador, which the Republicans advocated, and it required a

human rights component, which the Democrats demanded. Nevertheless, the question of U.S. policy in Central America during the 1980s remains politically controversial to this day.

Q: You mentioned earlier that you had taken the Foreign Service Exam. Do you recall any of the questions given to you in the oral exam?

MCMULLEN: I remember one question very vividly. I should note that even though I had fairly frequent contact with the State Department during my time at DIA, I didn't know how things worked inside an embassy. So for me the most difficult part of the oral exam involved the scenarios that the interviewers spun out concerning American citizen cases overseas.

At the outset of the oral assessment, the two Foreign Service officers asked me about my academic background. I told them that I had specialized in Latin America, particularly Mexico. They said, "Okay, imagine you are a consular officer in Guadalajara. You're a junior officer. The owner of a local hotel calls you and says two little old ladies, American citizens, are refusing to pay their hotel bill. What would you do?" I had no idea what the standard policy was in dealing with cases like this one. So I said, "Well, I don't think it's the role of the U.S. government to follow American citizens around the world to make sure they pay their bills." It got worse; the interviewers then asked: "So now they're in jail, what would you do?" And I said, "Well, I guess I might try to help them get a lawyer." Again, I was grasping at straws because I didn't know what embassies did in these kinds of cases. They said, "Well, the ambassador just called the consul general, and he's mad as hell because he got a call from Congressman Claude Pepper." (He was a famous advocate for senior citizens.) "The ambassador wants to know why you didn't help those two little old ladies in jail in Guadalajara. What would you tell the ambassador?" I said, "I guess the same thing I told you: I don't think it's the role of the U.S. government to go around the world making sure that Americans pay their bills."

Believe it or not, even with that rather awkward answer, I somehow passed the exam. In those days you could request your oral exam results, so I requested and received the interviewers' written summary of my performance in the exam. The first line of their assessment still sticks with me. It was along the lines of, "Mr. McMullen is a bright, well-informed young man with little feel for people problems." I was shocked, although I'm sure that their harsh assessment of my people skills stemmed from what they saw as my hard-hearted handling of the two little old ladies who refused to pay their hotel bill. The interviewers had spun out several other scenarios but I don't recall the details. Anyway, these notional American citizen cases were difficult since I didn't have any familiarity with embassy procedures. On the other hand, I knew there was no clear-cut answer to these scenarios; they were probing my critical thinking and judgment.

On the policy side, the two Foreign Service officers asked several big picture questions and asked me to pick one of three different geopolitical problems. I think one dealt with the Israeli-Palestinian dispute and its impact on U.S. interests in the Middle East. I don't remember the other two choices; I think one might have dealt with international economics. Fortunately, I was fairly well prepared for the policy-related questions. They also asked a question about American culture—something along the lines of, "If someone were to ask you for the name of a movie that depicts an important aspect of American society, what movie would you choose and why?" I had recently seen *Norma Rae*, a movie about union organizing in the South. So I said, "I think *Norma*

Rae is a good depiction of how American labor unions struggle to organize workers in a hostile environment such as the South.”

Q: Did they indicate in the oral assessment report that you had passed?

MCMULLEN: Yes, the report noted that I passed and was placed on the State Department register. If I recall correctly, my scores were in the mid-range. In those days you could stay on the register for one year; if you were not offered a job during that year, then you had to take both the written and the oral exams again. I wasn’t called that year, so I had to take both exams again. When I took the exams a year or so later I passed at the high-end of the scores.

Q: Were they coning you at the time?

MCMULLEN: Yes. The designation of your cone—or area of specialization in the Foreign Service—depended on your exam scores as well as your preference. At that time, prior to the merger of USIA (U.S. Information Agency) into State Department, there were four cones: political, economic, management, and consular. I think USIA and FCS (Foreign Commercial Service) were also options but I don’t remember whether there was a separate assessment in the written exam for those agencies. I scored highest in political, and second highest in economics. When I entered the Foreign Service in September 1987, the Board of Examiners told me that, based on my scores, I could choose whichever cone I wanted; I chose the political cone.

Q: What was your A-100 course like? That’s the Foreign Service introductory course.

MCMULLEN: We had about 50 entry-level officers in my A-100 class. It was a fairly diverse group by the standards of those days. I was 34 years old when I entered the Service, which was a couple of years older than the average age of our A-100 class.

I was impressed with my colleagues; some had come from successful careers in law and education and other professions; two officers had worked on Capitol Hill, and several others were accomplished China scholars. In fact, two of them were fluent in Chinese; one was a China specialist who had done extensive historical research in Taiwan and mainland China; the other officer had worked at the American Institute in Taiwan.

I thought our A-100 instructors did a good job in preparing us for the Service. The course lasted about nine weeks and covered every aspect of the Service—from the nuts and bolts of management rules and regulations to diplomatic protocol and drafting cables. I remember a former INR (Intelligence and Research Bureau) analyst taught us how to draft cables for the Foreign Service. He gave us several cable-writing exercises using newspaper articles; he then critiqued our drafts and made suggestions on how to front-load the bottom line in the opening summary of the cable. I thought the exercises were useful in training us how to write for busy policy makers who had limited time to read cables. Having worked for DIA, I was familiar with the Foreign Service style of writing, which helped me early in my career as a political officer.

As part of our A-100 program, we had guest speakers from different functional and geographic bureaus in the Department. For example, Mark Grossman, who later became Under Secretary of

State for Political Affairs, gave us practical advice and tips on note-taking. We also had speakers from other U.S. government agencies who talked about their organization's role in foreign policy. Following A-100, virtually all of us took ConGen (consular training), since we would be doing visa work on our first tours. Some of us also did language and tradecraft training.

Q: Had you acquired a significant other during this period we're talking about?

MCMULLEN: Yes. Actually, I met my wife a couple of days after I defended my doctoral dissertation at Georgetown in April 1980. I went with a couple of friends for happy hour at a popular watering hole in Rosslyn, Virginia. We met a group of young women there, some of whom I knew from Georgetown. Fortuitously, I sat next to my future wife Laurel, whom I did not know. I asked about her background; she said she was from Canton, Ohio, and had studied in Brazil as a Rotary exchange student in high school. That fascinated me; I told her that when I was a junior in high school, I don't think I could have found Brazil on a map much less found my way there. After graduating from Georgetown with a degree in Portuguese and Spanish, she got a job at a Brazilian bank in Washington, D.C., where she was working when I met her.

While we had some overlap at Georgetown, I didn't know her when I was there. She graduated in 1977, a year after I started my doctoral studies. She had spent some time studying abroad, again in Brazil, and also in Ecuador. We started dating in late spring 1980, and got married a year or so later. She was still working as assistant manager at the Brazilian bank when I joined the Foreign Service. Given the nature of life in the Service, she had to give up her career. There was no opportunity for her to do that kind of work overseas. Since she was fluent in Portuguese and Spanish, and I spent a good portion of my career in Latin America, she was able to get jobs from time to time in the embassy. Some of the embassy jobs were interesting, such as her work with Vietnamese refugees when we were serving in Malaysia. As I moved up in the Service, she mostly did volunteer work overseas to avoid nepotism issues.

Q: Where did you want to go after A-100?

MCMULLEN: Well, it seemed predestined that I would wind up in Central America. When the open assignments list was given to our class, I had a feeling—and my colleagues in A-100 thought the same thing—that I would get the consular/political job that was open in Nicaragua. It seemed like a good fit for my background. The only other Latin American job on the open assignments list was a two-year consular position in Buenos Aires. In the end, I got the Nicaragua job, which turned out to be a tremendous personal and professional experience.

Q: When you arrived in Nicaragua, what was the situation? How was the Sandinista government viewed in Washington? What was going on in the country?

MCMULLEN: It was a politically charged time when I arrived in Nicaragua in April 1988. Our ambassador, Richard Melton, had arrived a few weeks earlier. Elliott Abrams was the assistant secretary for Latin America, and the Reagan administration was pushing a confrontational approach towards the Sandinistas. I was supposed to work for the first year in the consular section and then rotate to the political section for the second year. As it turned out, however, I moved to the political section from consular after only 10 weeks of doing visa work. This

unexpected move was prompted by the Sandinista government's decision to expel our ambassador, along with seven officers from the political and economic sections, in July 1988. Our embassy had hosted a large Codel (congressional delegation) over the weekend prior to these expulsions. The Codel wanted to observe an opposition demonstration that was scheduled to take place in Nandaime, a city south of Managua. I was the deputy control officer, so I accompanied the delegation to Nandaime. We spent most of the day there, observing the anti-Sandinista protests. We were leaving Nandaime when violence broke out. Several people were killed in the melee. Thankfully, the Codel didn't get caught up in the riot. Nevertheless, the Sandinistas used the riot as a pretext to expel Ambassador Melton and the other officers.

These expulsions wiped out our political and economic sections, leaving only the political counselor. Our chargé d'affaires closed the consular section, except for American citizen services and emergency visas, and moved me and another officer to work in a now-combined political/economic section. We worked as a three-person pol/econ section for about a year before the Sandinistas finally granted visas for one political officer and one economic officer. The latter was expelled shortly after he arrived in Nicaragua, having gotten caught up in another outbreak of anti-Sandinista protests. When I moved to the political/economic section, I was assigned to cover the labor unions, the Catholic Church, economic issues, and political-military affairs. I also traveled frequently to the countryside to report on the Contras and the war. For a first-tour political officer, it didn't get any better than this portfolio in a high-profile country.

In terms of the broader context, U.S.-Nicaraguan relations were at a crossroads when I arrived in Managua in the spring of 1988. Both countries were under pressure to negotiate an end to the war: the Reagan administration was still dealing with fallout from the Iran-Contra scandal, while the Sandinistas were grappling with an imploding economy and military pressure from the Contras. There also was international pressure on both countries. In the early 1980s, Colombia, Venezuela, Mexico and Panama—had launched the Contadora peace process, which had evolved into the Esquipulas process. In the face of economic, military and economic pressure, the Sandinistas finally agreed to negotiations with the Contras as part of this peace process.

By 1988, the war in Nicaragua was at a stalemate. The Contras had evolved from a small, illegitimate, rag-tag force to a more formidable insurgent threat that the Sandinistas were unable to counter. When the Contras began their guerrilla operations in the early 1980s, they were mostly ex-National Guardsmen from the ousted Somoza regime. With U.S. funding, the Contras initially received training from former members of the Argentine military. During these early years, the Contras were not a very effective force, and they had little popular support inside Nicaragua, partly because of human rights abuses they committed in the countryside. Over time, however, the Contras improved their capabilities. When they procured Redeye surface-to-air missiles, this changed the equation on the battlefield because the Sandinistas became reluctant to use their most effective weapon—their Soviet Hind attack helicopters. The Contras also gradually gained more support among the peasantry and began attracting disaffected Sandinista supporters to their ranks, which caused serious concern among Sandinista leaders.

Meanwhile, the Catholic Church—another key actor in Nicaragua, an overwhelmingly Catholic country—had become increasingly critical of the Sandinista regime. While Catholic leaders were not providing direct support to the Contras, some of the priests in the conflictive zones were

giving a wink and a nod to peasants who joined the Contra cause. The Catholic Church had supported the Sandinistas in their overthrow of Somoza, which lent greater credibility to the Church's later opposition to Sandinista rule.

At the same time, the economy was in free fall. During my tour in Nicaragua, inflation hit over 30,000 percent. It was like the hyper-inflation in Weimar Germany. If you went to a restaurant there were no prices on the menu because the prices were increasing as you were eating your meal. Hyperinflation and the scarcity of basic necessities caused discontent in the cities where people relied on a market economy. There also was growing disaffection in the countryside because peasants resented the forced conscription of their sons, and they felt the Sandinistas were repressive. When I arrived in Nicaragua, the country was really a simmering cauldron.

Q: How dangerous was it?

MCMULLEN: We knew that it was unlikely the Sandinistas would harm us deliberately; they certainly didn't want the 82nd Airborne or the 101st Airborne landing in Managua. Nevertheless, traveling in conflictive areas was dangerous. I traveled frequently to the countryside, including conflictive zones, where I met with Nicaraguans from every sector—labor leaders, businessmen, priests, peasants, and local government officials. My job was to meet with these contacts, many of whom took enormous risks in meeting with me, and report to Washington on their views of the economy, the political situation, and the war.

The danger in traveling in the countryside was that one side or the other—the Sandinista military or the Contras—might make a mistake and ambush your vehicle. There were periodic ambushes by both sides, cases of mistakenly shooting at unidentified vehicles traveling in the countryside. Towards the end of my tour, in the fall of 1989, I traveled with another political officer to an isolated part of Nicaragua where the Contras reportedly had ambushed and killed a number of peasants. Our job was to investigate the ambush. So we traveled to the remote mountains northeast of Matagalpa. We took two vehicles because the terrain was so rugged; we needed a back-up vehicle in case we had problems with our main vehicle. We were probably at least five hours from any village when we were stopped by a Sandinista military patrol on horseback. The commanding officer addressed us both by name, so they obviously knew who we were and where we were going; they had either tapped our embassy phone or found out from informants in Matagalpa, where we had stopped to meet with contacts earlier in the day.

The commanding officer said, "You know you're in a military zone." Of course, we knew that we were in Contra country but that did not necessarily mean that it was a formally declared military zone; with the fluidity of the fighting, the Sandinistas frequently changed their declared military zones. Anyway, the officer said, "You're not allowed here; you better go back to Matagalpa," which was the closest city. My colleague and I debated what to do; we knew that we were in a tough spot. We didn't know whether the Contras or the Sandinistas had carried out the recent ambush that we had been sent to investigate; however, we knew that we could be the next ones ambushed—and there would be no help nor any witnesses. So we decided to go back.

Our biggest challenge in doing contact and reporting in Nicaragua was harassment by Sandinista security officers and their hired thugs. Because of the danger in traveling outside of the capital of

Managua, the embassy had a policy that you could not travel alone. Since we were short of officers at that time, and my wife was fluent in Spanish, she would often travel with me as a note-taker. Our vehicles were big armored Chevy Suburbans, which were easily identifiable as embassy vehicles. Whenever we would pull into a small village, people would surround our vehicles because they knew we were from the embassy—as did the local Sandinista informants. Even before we arrived, the Sandinistas would know our plans and who we were meeting with, because our embassy phones were tapped. Often when we met with local contacts, they would tell us that the Sandinista secret police had visited them that morning and told them they were to report back everything we had asked and what they had told us during our visit.

Sometimes the Sandinistas would resort to tougher tactics in trying to dissuade Nicaraguans from meeting with embassy officers. I remember one time meeting with an opposition leader, Jaime Cuadra, who had just been beaten up by Sandinista thugs. He was concerned about meeting me in public, so we met in a movie theater. When I met with Cuadra, he had a black eye and his broken arm was in a sling. Besides having hired thugs to beat him up, the Sandinistas also had confiscated Cuadra's coffee farm. Despite these intimidation tactics, many Nicaraguans demonstrated tremendous courage in meeting with us and in challenging the Sandinista regime at a critical time in their country's history.

While the Sandinista security forces were not all that capable, the Cubans and East Germans were very good at collecting intelligence on us. Nicaragua during those days was like the bar scene in the movie *Star Wars*; there was a cast of characters that included Bulgarians, Cubans, East Germans and other fellow-travelers who were helping the Sandinistas. The Cubans were constantly probing our embassy operations and trying to provoke a response. We would have frequent walk-ins, people claiming to have sensitive information to share with us; we also had mischievous probes by phone. The East Germans were good at technical collection, such as tapping our phones. The Sandinista media worked hand-in-glove with the security forces. In some of my meetings with contacts, Sandinista TV reporters would walk in with cameras rolling and start interviewing me and my contacts. They wanted to embarrass us and dissuade our contacts from meeting with us. They would often claim on the state-run TV news and in the Sandinista newspapers that I was a CIA officer, which was not the case but that didn't matter because it served the purpose of Sandinista propaganda.

Besides these types of provocations and harassment, Sandinista security forces would sometimes throw nails under our vehicles so that we would get a flat tire out in the middle of nowhere. They would take videos or photos of us and show them on the TV news or post them on the front page of the two main Sandinista newspapers. When I was later expelled from Nicaragua, on New Year's Day 1990, the Sandinista press claimed that I had been in charge of organizing a rural opposition front and conspiring with the independent labor unions to overthrow the Sandinistas. This wasn't true of course, but it fit the Sandinista narrative because I met regularly with labor leaders and I traveled frequently to the countryside.

Despite the Contra war, Sandinista repression and an imploding economy, this period offered some hope for the Nicaraguan people; there was growing pressure on all sides—the U.S., Contras, and Sandinistas—to negotiate a peaceful settlement. Around the time that I arrived in Nicaragua, in April 1988, the Sandinistas had agreed to give political rights to the Contras if they

demobilized and agreed to participate in elections. The opposition, including the Contras' political leaders, eventually coalesced around Violeta Chamorro, whose husband, Pedro Joaquin Chamorro, had been assassinated by Somoza's thugs a decade earlier.

The summer of 1988 marked a turning point for Nicaragua's badly divided opposition. Violeta Chamorro was the logical choice to bring the opposition factions together because she had credibility with all sides. She had initially supported the Sandinistas but, like many other Nicaraguans, she had become disillusioned with them. She was both capable and charismatic—the ideal candidate to head the opposition alliance. This alliance was called UNO (National Opposition Union), and included a wide range of political parties—Liberals, Conservatives, Christian Democrats, Christian Socialists and others. Reflecting the fractious nature of the country's politics, the opposition included two communist parties, one pro-Beijing, one pro-Moscow; it also included three factions of the Liberal Party, as well as five independent labor unions that ranged from hardline communist to traditional bread-and-butter unions.

Q: Where did the Catholic Church stand in all of this?

MCMULLEN: While the Catholic Church leaders had soured on the Sandinistas, they never tipped their hand publicly. Instead, they would telegraph their displeasure in an oblique way in their sermons and public comments. There was never any doubt that the Church supported Violeta Chamorro; she was a devout Catholic and represented all the values that the Church stood for, and she was a trusted ally. But the Church could not openly show its support for her.

The Catholic Church did lend its support to civic organizations, including one that led a public campaign to convince Nicaraguans that their vote would be secret. This was an issue among poor and illiterate peasants and urban workers who feared the Sandinistas would find out how they had voted and would take away their ration cards for food and gas if they voted for Mrs. Chamorro. So there was a major public campaign by civic organizations to convince Nicaraguans that their vote would be secret.

My main job was to meet with the leaders of key sectors—labor and civic groups, as well as politicians, businessmen and Catholic Church officials—and to report to Washington on their views of the upcoming elections. Most of the leaders of these sectors supported Chamorro but some were more discreet in their support than others. I met frequently with Catholic Church leaders, including Cardinal Obando y Bravo's principal adviser, Bishop Bosco Vivas, who was politically savvy and discreet. He provided us a direct channel to Obando y Bravo, who was a shrewd operator. Obando y Bravo and other Church leaders had originally supported the Sandinistas when they overthrew Somoza but they became disaffected with the Sandinistas' repressive policies and the tanking economy.

Q: What was the mood among average Nicaraguans? Did they support Mrs. Chamorro?

MCMULLEN: During the election campaign I spent a lot of time traveling in the countryside, where many labor leaders and peasants were telling me, "I'm going to vote for Doña Violeta (Chamorro)." To be honest, I was a bit skeptical of these declarations because the Sandinistas had a lot of leverage over the average Nicaraguan. The Sandinistas controlled their ration cards

for food, gasoline and other essentials. The Sandinistas also controlled a repressive security apparatus that it could bring to bear against these people, many of whom lived in isolated areas and were vulnerable to government intimidation.

Interestingly, while public polls during this period showed the Sandinistas leading, private polls—which we had access to and we knew the Sandinistas were reading—showed that Mrs. Chamorro was leading. Nevertheless, we were still not sure that working-class Nicaraguans would vote for Chamorro, because the Sandinistas held all the high cards in terms of access to state resources and control of the instruments of repression. In that sense I learned a lot, not just professionally but personally, about the strength of character and courage of the common man. As it turned out, these people whom I met with in my travels were telling me the truth; they later did vote for Mrs. Chamorro in large numbers, despite Sandinista coercion and intimidation.

The election campaign started in earnest in August 1989, and this kicked off a wave of weekly visits by congressional delegations, including ones led by Dante Fascell, chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, Senator Bob Graham from Florida, Dennis DeConcini from Arizona, and others. They all wanted to attend Mrs. Chamorro's rallies, which grew increasingly larger as the campaign progressed, another indication that the Sandinista could be in real trouble.

Q: Did you have any contact with Violeta Chamorro?

MCMULLEN: Yes, we met fairly frequently with Mrs. Chamorro, and even more so with her staff. Her son-in-law, Antonio Lacayo, was our principal contact. He was married to Cristina Chamorro, Doña Violeta's daughter. Cristina was quite talented and ran *La Prensa*, the main opposition newspaper. Since every congressional delegation that visited Nicaragua wanted to meet with Violeta Chamorro, we had many dinners and meetings with her and members of her family throughout the election campaign. To her credit, Mrs. Chamorro was thrown into a difficult situation with little preparation and yet rose to the occasion. I doubt that she ever imagined she would be running for president. But because her husband had been assassinated by Somoza, she became a powerful symbol and, over time, the voice of Nicaragua's opposition.

The other contender for the opposition's presidential nomination was Enrique Bolaños, head of COSEP (Superior Council for Private Enterprise), a conservative business organization. While he was a powerful voice for the opposition, and eventually became president in 2002, Bolaños did not seem like the right person to take on the Sandinistas at that time. He was a courageous guy and very outspoken in his criticism of the Sandinistas. But he also was a polarizing figure. Most State Department officials believed that Chamorro was the best bet to take on Daniel Ortega, the incumbent Sandinista president who was running for re-election. Chamorro had the popularity and personality to bring together a fractious and fragile coalition. In contrast to Bolaños, she was a unifying force for the opposition.

While I don't think Bolaños would have been the best choice as the opposition candidate for president, I have to give him a lot of credit for fighting for the opposition cause. He was a tough guy who could not be intimidated by the Sandinistas. A few days after Ambassador Melton and the other embassy officers were expelled in July 1988, I met with Bolaños at COSEP headquarters. It was the first meeting that any embassy officer had with an opposition leader

since the expulsions. Tensions were still running high, and we didn't know whether the expulsions had intimidated our opposition contacts. Bolaños made it clear that he was not going to be intimidated. As soon as I sat down in his office, he looked at me across his desk and said, "I don't want the United States to take one step backwards. I want you to keep the pressure on the Sandinistas." This was a reassuring message for Washington policy makers.

On a later occasion when he and Doña Violeta were still competing to run as the opposition candidate, I had to inform Bolaños about a death threat against him. He had already received a number of credible threats, and we believed this one was particularly credible. When I arrived at his house he was in the living room with his wife, so I asked if we could chat for a minute out in the garden. I told him about the threat information that we had received and said we believed it was credible. His reply was classic Enrique Bolaños, "I'm not backing down." Despite continued threats against his life, Bolaños never stopped fighting for the opposition cause.

Q: So you mentioned that you were expelled from Nicaragua. Was that before the elections?

MCMULLEN: Yes, I was expelled before the elections. There was a confluence of events that ultimately led to my expulsion: the crisis that had been building over Panamanian dictator Manuel Noriega's increasingly erratic behavior came to a head in the late fall of 1989; at the same time the Sandinistas were becoming increasingly concerned that Mrs. Chamorro might win the upcoming elections. So when we invaded Panama in late December 1989 to oust Noriega, the Sandinistas seized on this opportunity to eviscerate our embassy by expelling virtually every American employee. Their goal was to diminish our ability to monitor the elections.

In the days following Noriega's ouster from power, U.S. military forces were looking for him in the capital, Panama City, where he was believed to be hiding out. U.S. officials thought he might be hiding out in the Cuban, Libyan, or Nicaraguan diplomatic mission. In trying to find him, a U.S. military patrol received a report that he might be hiding in a building that turned out to be a Nicaraguan diplomatic residence. The building's caretaker told the head of the U.S. military patrol that it was the residence of a Nicaraguan diplomat. The patrol leader checked with the U.S. Embassy in Panama City, which told him, "We don't have any record of that building being a Nicaraguan diplomatic residence." Based on this assurance, the U.S. military patrol entered the building, which was in fact a Nicaraguan diplomatic residence. The residence also was being used as a safe house by the FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia), who often used Panama for logistical purposes. The patrol found AK-47s, all kinds of ammunition, RPG rockets and other war materiel belonging to the FARC guerrillas. Noriega was eventually found hiding out in the papal nuncio's residence.

Meanwhile, in Nicaragua, the Sandinistas decided to use this incident in Panama as a pretext to expel nearly every officer in our embassy in Managua. They knew that we knew we were keeping a close eye on their actions during the election campaign. There were other election observers besides us, including the UN, Carter Center, and OAS (Organization of American States), but the Sandinistas were concerned about our capability to monitor the developments through our network of contacts in key sectors of the electorate. They also knew that we were much more likely to blow the whistle if they tried to steal the elections.

In a televised national address, Ortega denounced Mrs. Chamorro and the opposition as “traitors” and “lackeys” of U.S. imperialism. He denounced the U.S. military patrol’s entry into the Nicaraguan diplomatic residence in Panama, characterizing it as a violation of Nicaraguan sovereignty. As a consequence of this “Yankee arrogance and lack of respect,” Ortega declared that he was expelling 20 embassy officers and their families. He gave us 72 hours to leave the country. I spent most of that time drafting cables while my wife packed our suitcases and prepared for our departure. We left Nicaragua on January 1, 1990.

I was disappointed that I couldn’t stay for the February 25 elections, which turned out to be a crushing defeat for the Sandinistas. Doña Violeta won a resounding victory with about 55 percent of the vote. Unfortunately, Chamorro’s decisive victory over Daniel Ortega did not translate into a fundamental change in the power structure in Nicaragua. It is one thing to win an election, but it is another thing to gain full control of the powers to govern. This was a key lesson that the Sandinistas had learned from Salvador Allende’s ouster by the Chilean military in 1973. When Allende won the Chilean elections in 1970, he acquired the symbols of power but not the instruments of power. He didn’t exercise control over the Chilean military. The same thing happened in Nicaragua; the Sandinistas gave up the symbols of power—Violeta Chamorro served nominally as commander-in-chief—but they retained the instruments of power—Humberto Ortega remained as minister of defense and exercised real control over the military.

Meanwhile, U.S. policy makers were grappling with problems elsewhere in the world. It was the end of the Cold War and new nations were emerging from the former Soviet Union. We needed to build and staff embassies in these countries, and we needed to provide development assistance to these struggling new nations. For U.S. policy makers, Central America was placed in the “win” column; the wars were over in Nicaragua and El Salvador; the Sandinistas had been defeated in the elections and the Salvadoran guerrillas had demobilized and joined the political process. With U.S. attention focused elsewhere, there was backsliding in Nicaragua, which eventually led to the return of the Sandinistas in power.

Q: Going back to that time, can you see the seeds of the chaos that’s now in Nicaragua?

MCMULLEN: Yes, very much so. The current political unrest in Nicaragua is reminiscent of the situation when I served there in the late 1980s. Sadly, its root causes have never been fully addressed by any of the political parties. Despite Violeta Chamorro’s victory over the Sandinistas, the country remained polarized and the former opposition parties fell back into their usual fractious state after she left the presidency. This ultimately opened the door to the Sandinistas’ return. Mrs. Chamorro’s government was clean but only moderately effective. Her successor, Arnoldo Alemán, governed over a corrupt and ineffective government. When Enrique Bolaños took over the presidency in 2002, he tried to turn things around but failed.

Throughout this period, the Sandinistas kept chipping away at the electoral law to shape it in their favor. They always held a hard-core support base of about 30 percent of the electorate, which was more than any other party. Working with corrupt opposition politicians in the National Assembly, the Sandinistas changed the election law so that they were finally able to win back power with a simple plurality. Since Daniel Ortega’s return as president, the country has

fallen again into turmoil. Nicaragua has been rocked by demonstrations in recent months; about 135 young protesters have been killed by Sandinista paramilitary forces.

Interestingly, Nicaragua doesn't have a problem with violent gangs like El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala, largely because its police and military forces have kept drug trafficking and criminal gangs in check. On the other hand, Nicaragua remains prone to bouts of political violence. Like many other Latin American countries, Nicaragua suffers from a tradition of zero-sum politics: my side wins, your side loses. There are no minority rights or checks and balances like the ones our founding fathers believed were necessary for a healthy democracy. There is no give and take in Nicaraguan politics; and the country's institutions—the legislature, judiciary, media, and civil society—are too weak to serve as a check against authoritarianism.

Q: After Chamorro won the elections, were you still in Nicaragua?

MCMULLEN: No, I was expelled about two months before the elections.

Q: Could you talk a little more about your expulsion from Nicaragua?

MCMULLEN: As I mentioned, the Sandinistas used our invasion of Panama as a pretext to expel those of us in the embassy that were monitoring and reporting on the electoral process. In my case, they claimed that I was trying to organize a "rural front" as part of an alleged embassy plot to overthrow the Sandinista regime. I assume this accusation was based on my frequent reporting trips in the countryside. The Sandinistas accused another embassy officer of trying to create an "urban front" as part of this putative plot. Of course these charges were nonsense but they served the Sandinistas' purpose.

I think the Sandinistas mistakenly believed they could use the same strategy with the new Bush administration that they had used with the Reagan administration. Shortly after President George H.W. Bush took office, he appointed Bernie Aronson as Assistant Secretary for Latin American Affairs. Aronson was a pragmatist and political moderate; he was not at all ideological and confrontational like his predecessor Elliott Abrams. Aronson's mantra reflected his pragmatism; he always cautioned: "let's not make the perfect be the enemy of the good." I think this pragmatism caught the Sandinistas by surprise; it did not fit their playbook of portraying the U.S. as a rogue imperialist power seeking to impose its will on small countries like Nicaragua.

The Bush administration took a more nuanced approach towards El Salvador and Nicaragua, seeking negotiated solutions to the conflicts in both countries. In the case of Nicaragua, I think the Sandinistas initially thought they could win the elections handily because of their control of the ration cards and other state resources. However, when their own private polls showed Mrs. Chamorro leading in the run-up to the elections, they might have believed that by expelling our embassy officers it would be easier to manipulate the election results if things were not going their way. The Sandinistas wanted us out because they assumed that we would be able to assess the election results more rigorously than the international observers who had been in the country for only a short time. Plus, the Sandinistas knew we would be more willing to blow the whistle if they tried to cheat. In this sense, they underestimated the vigilance of the international election

observers; they also didn't factor in the personal integrity of former President Carter, who as head of the Carter Center observation team, was willing to call the Sandinistas out.

After being expelled, I was assigned to work on the Nicaragua desk in the Department, while one of the other desk officers took my place in Nicaragua. The Sandinistas granted only a few visas for officers to replace the 20 embassy officers whom they had expelled. For the newly-arrived officers, it was challenging to reestablish regular contact with the shell-shocked opposition. Nevertheless, our embassy did a terrific job in monitoring and reporting on the elections.

At the State Department we set up a working group in the Operations Center to monitor the elections. I was working on the graveyard shift when we got a phone call in the early morning hours from Jack Leonard, our chargé d'affaires in Managua. Jack said he had just spoken to Jimmy Carter about the latter's meeting with Daniel Ortega concerning the suspension of the vote count. We had noticed earlier in the evening that the vote totals in some of the Sandinista strongholds in Managua were running heavily in favor of Mrs. Chamorro. We were shocked. Then, the vote count slowed and eventually stopped. We knew that something was wrong. The slowdown or suspension of vote counting is usually a sign that someone is manipulating the results. Carter recognized what was happening and confronted Ortega. Carter reportedly told Ortega, "We know what you're doing. You're not going to get away with it, so I would suggest that you make your concession statement." Ortega finally acknowledged that Mrs. Chamorro had won the election. I give Carter a lot of credit because he was the one who called Ortega out.

Q: I thought it was strange that Chamorro won yet, as you noted, the Sandinistas still controlled the armed forces. What was the feeling in Washington about this?

MCMULLEN: That's right, the Sandinistas retained operational control of the armed forces. Humberto Ortega, Daniel's brother, stayed on as minister of defense, and Sandinista officers remained in charge of key military commands. I wasn't privy to the thinking of U.S. policy makers at that time because I had moved on to my next assignment in Malaysia. My guess is that Washington was reluctant to push Mrs. Chamorro on this matter since she had more pressing problems, including the urgent need to revive the economy. I also suspect that U.S. officials thought Mrs. Chamorro would eventually gain effective control over the armed forces. Based on my pre-election contacts with Chamorro's staff, I think some of her advisers, such as Antonio Lacayo, probably feared they might provoke a backlash by the Sandinistas if Chamorro moved too quickly to assume operational control of the armed forces.

Q: Did you stay on the Nicaraguan desk for a while?

MCMULLEN: I stayed on the Nicaragua desk for about four months after the elections. Pete Romero, the Office Director for Central American Affairs, asked me to stay on for a little while and help out with the \$300 million assistance package for the new government. I worked with Mrs. Chamorro's economic advisers—her son, Pedro Chamorro, as well as her Finance Minister, Francisco Mayorga—in putting together a development assistance package for consideration by Congress. Fortunately, there was bipartisan consensus in Washington that we needed to provide a robust economic package that would help the Chamorro government revive the country's moribund economy, which was her biggest immediate challenge.

Around this same time frame, I was informed that I had been assigned to Malaysia as a political officer. So I stayed on the Nicaragua desk until May 1990, then I took the political tradecraft course at FSI before departing for Kuala Lumpur.

Q: There's a tendency in State Department to pigeonhole people, particularly officers in Latin American affairs.

MCMULLEN: Exactly, and I wanted to avoid getting trapped in a career focused solely on Latin America. For this reason, I bid on a political officer position in Malaysia for my second assignment. When I was finishing up my tour in Nicaragua, our chargé d'affaires, Jack Leonard, said, "I think you're making a mistake" (because I wanted to work in EAP, the Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs). He said, "I think you should ride the wave. I think you should stay in the bureau and make a career in ARA" (the Latin America bureau prior to the creation of WHA, the Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs). I said, "Well, I plan to come back to Latin America at some point, but I want to serve in another bureau for my second tour."

As you know, there are pros and cons to specializing in one geographic region. If you're an expert on China or Japan, the languages are so challenging and the cultures are so complex that I can see why you would want to spend your career in EAP. Similarly, I understand why Arabists spend their entire career in the Middle East. But for officers who serve in Europe, Africa or Latin America, I think it can be beneficial to work in another geographic bureau. As it turned out, I served in three different geographic regions—Latin America, Africa, and Asia. I don't know if it helped or hurt my career, but it certainly enriched my life and my wife's life. I also thought it made me a better officer by getting experience beyond my area of expertise.

Q: So, it was time to move on and you were headed to Malaysia?

MCMULLEN: That's right. I went to Malaysia as a political officer.

Q: That must have been quite a change from Nicaragua.

MCMULLEN: Malaysia was a real change in terms of political culture. When I arrived in Kuala Lumpur in June 1990, Malaysia's economy was booming. It had been growing at about six or seven percent for the past decade. Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir bin Mohamad was one of the leaders of the NAM (Non-Aligned Movement). While Mahathir was anti-West and anti-U.S. in his rhetoric, he wasn't ideological in his actions. He was a pragmatist at heart.

Despite Mahathir's strident rhetoric, we had excellent military-to-military relations with Malaysia. Our Special Forces regularly conducted jungle warfare training exercises with the Malaysian military. To avoid political fallout, these exercises took place under the radar. Our economic and commercial relations were also strong. Malaysia wanted to increase U.S. trade and investment, and our Foreign Commercial Service office was very active promoting American business interests. There were a number of large U.S. companies, such as Motorola and Mattel, which operated factories in Penang. Since Malaysia had a fast-growing middle class, there was

strong demand for American consumer products, particularly among the Chinese-Malaysians. So we had important economic and military interests in Malaysia.

More broadly, we looked at Malaysia as a model for other Muslim nations. Even though Mahathir often railed against the U.S. and other Western nations, he governed as a moderate Muslim and stressed the importance of economic development. Like his contemporary Lee Kuan Yew in Singapore, Mahathir was authoritarian in his governing style but there was enough democracy in Malaysia to appeal to U.S. policy makers. After all, Malaysia was a multiethnic, multicultural and multiparty democracy. This stood in contrast to Indonesia, which at that time was under the rule of military dictator Suharto.

Q: Malaysia had fought a war, a guerrilla war, which was a significant experience.

MCMULLEN: Absolutely. Malaysia's painful experiences in World War II and during its post-war insurgency were still sensitive subjects when I served there. Early in World War II, the Japanese invaded the Malay Peninsula and drove out the British. While the Malays collaborated with the Japanese, the ethnic Chinese didn't; this left a bitter legacy. I remember several of my contacts recounting stories about how the Japanese carried out beheadings and other atrocities against the ethnic Chinese, and how the Malays collaborated with the Japanese. Following World War II, it was mostly ethnic Chinese who led the communist insurgency in Malaya that was eventually crushed by the British. As a result of these experiences, there was still bad blood between the Malay and Chinese communities. The Malay-run government did not trust the Chinese, who were essentially barred from serving as senior officers in the Malaysian military.

Q: Did you have the same situation as in other Southeast Asian countries where the ethnic Chinese were better educated, and more prosperous than the Malays?

MCMULLEN: I think that was generally the case. The ethnic Chinese were mostly engaged in business and lived in urban areas; they were much better educated than the Malays, who tended to live in rural villages and were engaged mostly in subsistence agriculture and fishing. However, this situation was changing rapidly when I was in Malaysia, largely due to the government's affirmative action program for ethnic Malays. They were favored for government assistance, including state-sponsored scholarships to study in the U.S. and UK.

Malaysia's affirmative action program dated back to 1969, when race riots between Malays and ethnic Chinese resulted in over 100 deaths. Although small-scale compared to the ethnic bloodbaths of some other countries, the riots were a defining event in Malaysian history. As a consequence of this event, the government implemented an affirmative action program on behalf of the Malays, who had been largely left out of the country's economic development.

As part of this program to help Malays, the so-called *bumiputra* ("sons of the soil"), the government made Bahasa Malaysia the official language and required public schools to use the Malay language in classrooms. Unfortunately, this decision had the unforeseen consequences of hurting the job prospects of Malays in the longer run. Since most ethnic Chinese spoke English, they were better positioned to take advantage of Malaysia's growing economy. The Malays would have been better off if the government had subsidized English language training for them;

in 1969, however, government officials saw the use of Malay language in public schools as the best way to give an advantage to the Malays over the Chinese. This move prompted the Chinese to pull their children out of public schools and put them in private schools where English was taught. As part of the affirmative action program, Malays were given preferences for government jobs and the military, which didn't require English. So Malays generally went into the civil service and armed forces, while the Chinese continued to dominate in business.

As in many developing countries, corruption was a problem in Malaysia. But the corruption among ethnic Chinese was a bit different from what I saw in Latin America and Africa. Chinese-Malaysian businessmen would often buy a BMW or Mercedes with some of their ill-gotten gains, but they also used some of the money for what I would call productive ends. They would put some of it back into their business as a capital investment, and they would use some of it to send their kids to schools abroad. The Chinese valued education and spent a lot of money on educating their children in Western universities. Most Chinese-Malaysians spoke fairly good English, whereas Malays who lived in rural areas generally spoke rudimentary English.

Q: You worked in what section?

MCMULLEN: I worked in the political section. My portfolio included foreign policy issues, civil society, and the Indian community. Ethnic Indians fell into two distinct socio-economic classes: the poorer and more populous Tamils, who worked mostly as rubber tappers during British colonial rule, and the professional Indians who were doctors, lawyers and college professors. Malaysian-Indians were interesting politically because they served as a sort of the bridge between the Chinese-Malaysians and Malays.

Q: Could the Chinese and Indians have any real role in the Malaysian government?

MCMULLEN: Both ethnic groups—Chinese and Indians—understood the limits of their role in government. Even though Malaysia was ostensibly a multiparty democracy, in reality it was a one-party state dominated by the Malay-led Barisan Nasional, an alliance of three political parties representing the main ethnic groups. This alliance had all the cats in one bag: the ruling UMNO (United Malays National Organization) party; MCA (Malaysian Chinese Association); and MIC (Malaysian Indian Congress). Most of the political horse-trading and patronage was worked out behind closed doors within this alliance. In terms of the opposition, the DAP (Democratic Action Party), represented the only credible check against total Malay domination. During my time in Kuala Lumpur, the Muslim fundamentalist party PAS (Malaysian Islamic Party) began to make inroads in the conservative states of the east coast. PAS was mostly a fringe group that advocated for Sharia law; the party has gained strength in recent years.

Even though it was a vehicle for Malay dominance, Barisan Nasional did a fairly good job in tamping down ethnic tensions within the political system. In doling out patronage jobs, Barisan normally gave certain ministries to the Chinese in MCA and a fewer number to the Indians in MIC. The apportionment of these ministries reflected the demographics in Malaysia. At that time, ethnic Chinese made up about 38 percent of the population, followed by Malays at 32 percent, and Indians at about 12 percent. These numbers have changed over the years and Malays now have a decisive demographic advantage. MCA usually controlled the economic-

related portfolios, such as finance and development. MIC normally held the labor portfolio and sometimes another minor cabinet position. Malays always retained the security-related portfolios. The Chinese were not able to rise very far in the military or security forces, but the Indians were able to ascend to senior positions in these forces because the Malays trusted them. The Indians were able to operate in both worlds, Malay and Chinese. In general, the Chinese preferred to work in the private sector, many owned family-run businesses. After the affirmative action program for Malays was implemented, some Chinese took on Malays as business partners.

Q: I've heard that communal violence is common in both Malaysia and Indonesia, pitting one ethnic group against another. Indonesia experienced horrendous violence against the Chinese and communists in the mid-1960s. Also, isn't the term running "amok" from Malaysia?

MCMULLEN: That's right, "running amok" is a Malay term. It generally refers to an emotionally-driven wave of killings or acts of violence. There are different theories about what causes Malays to run amok. In some respects, it's similar to people in our own country who commit mass murders. Why does some guy walk into McDonald's and shoot people? In the case of Malaysia, some psychologists believe the phenomenon of running amok reflects certain cultural traits. These psychologists suggest that Malays tend to keep their feelings bottled up, which can then lead to occasional outbreaks of violent rage. In rural areas, when Malays "run amok," they often attack people with machetes. Malay women also sometimes express their repressed feelings in a highly emotional way, almost as if they are possessed. I remember the head of an American company in Malaysia telling me that he had to shut down his factory for a week because a group of Malay women were suffering from a form of mass hysteria.

There is no doubt that politicians can exploit a country's ethnic divisions, but I think Malaysia has done a decent job in terms of giving some autonomy to ethnic groups. In general, Malaysia has treated ethnic Chinese better than Indonesia, where they were forced to give up their Chinese identity. The Indonesian government forced the Chinese to adopt Indonesian names and placed restrictions on ethnic Chinese schools. Malaysia has largely left the Chinese alone in that sense. They could keep their own names. There were Chinese schools that passed along their traditions and customs. At the same time, Malays drew the line on ethnic Chinese involvement in the security forces; they didn't want them in senior positions in the security or intelligence services.

Overall, Malaysia has been more successful than Indonesia in preventing communal violence. Notwithstanding the 1969 race riots, Malaysia has never experienced anything like the violence Indonesia experienced in 1965-66. Many ethnic Chinese as well as suspected communists died in that bloodbath. Despite its flaws, Malaysia's affirmative action program has helped Malays improve their standard of life, which has helped tamp down ethnic tensions. The Malaysian government has worked hard to improve educational and job opportunities for Malays.

When I served in Malaysia in the early 1990s, the government was sending some 30,000 Malays a year to universities in the U.S., UK and Australia. Many Malays who attended large state universities in the United States often struggled to adapt to campus life. Interestingly, some of them formed cliques built around radical Islam and then returned to Malaysia as militants. This radicalization of some students caused concern in government circles because Malays were generally moderate Muslims. As a result, the Malaysian government began to monitor students

studying abroad, and it cut back on the number of students being sent to universities in the U.S. and other Western countries. I don't know if Malaysia still sends large numbers of students to schools in the West but I would imagine that the government screens them better now—to ensure they have the English skills and social skills—so they can integrate into campus life.

Q: What sort of influence has China exerted in Malaysia? And what role have the overseas Chinese played in Malaysia? Were there any concerns about them?

MCMULLEN: Malaysia has maintained diplomatic relations with mainland China since 1974. This relationship reflects Malaysia's non-aligned policy as well as its pragmatism; economic ties have grown steadily stronger over the years. At the same time, Malaysia has always been wary of China, probably due in part to the economic power of the overseas Chinese in Malaysia. Malaysian officials privately express concern about the overseas Chinese serving as a potential fifth column. In recent years there have been diplomatic disputes between Malaysia and China, including friction over competing territorial claims in the South China Sea. As with other Southeast Asian countries, Malaysia is wary of China's increasingly aggressive actions.

Fortunately there are multilateral forums in which Malaysia and China actively participate and can use to defuse some of these tensions. They are both members of APEC (Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum), and China participates in the annual summit of ASEAN, (Association of Southeast Asian Nations), which has tried to balance the regional influence of China and the United States. None of the ASEAN countries, including Malaysia, wants to tip the balance too much in favor of the U.S. or China. Malaysia is also a member of the TPP (Trans Pacific Partnership), which advances its economic goals and helps to blunt some of China's influence. Malaysia has tried to have the best of both worlds, seeking the advantages of trading with Western countries while not alienating the regional hegemon, China.

Q: Let's look at Malaysia's relations with other countries in the region such as Singapore, an extremely wealthy country. I think of Singapore as sort of the Kuwait or Dubai of Southeast Asia. What is Malaysia's attitude toward Singapore? And how are relations with Indonesia?

MCMULLEN: That's a good point. Malaysia's relationship with Singapore is complicated by a shared colonial history and a different demographic balance. Having declared independence from Malaysia in 1965, Singaporeans are still somewhat wary of their northern neighbor. In this sense, Singaporeans look at Malaysia in the same way that Malaysians look at Indonesia—a potential threat from a country with a much larger military. Singapore is a small island-nation made up of mostly ethnic Chinese, with small Malay and Indian minorities. It's the mirror image of Malaysia's ethnic mix and has a distinct political culture. In the face of Malaysia's larger ground forces, Singapore relies on its formidable airpower as a deterrent. Like Israel, Singapore has well-trained pilots flying some of the most advanced warplanes in the world.

Singapore also relies on its talented diplomats, who have a deep understanding of Malaysian politics and society. They are probably the best informed diplomats in Malaysia. Given Singapore's threat perception, they need to stay attuned to Malaysian capabilities and intentions. If you want to know the Malaysian government's thinking on any given issue, talk to a Singaporean diplomat. They have well-placed contacts at all levels of the Malaysian government.

I remember one of my Malaysian contacts recounting a scandal that broke in the public domain a little bit before I arrived in Kuala Lumpur. The Singaporeans apparently had obtained a copy of Malaysia's contingency plans in the event of a war with Singapore. The story illustrates Singapore's access to sensitive information in the Malaysian government. I'm sure this incident heightened Malaysia's concern about the overseas Chinese, since Singapore is governed by ethnic Chinese. And there has been concern in some circles in Malaysia that mainland China could use the overseas Chinese to advance Beijing's interests in the region.

Despite their demographic differences, Malaysia and Singapore are both economic success stories and have close commercial relations. An interesting aspect of their somewhat symbiotic relationship is the fact that Singapore is vulnerable to having a critical source of fresh water being cut off by Malaysia. This happened during World War II when the British retreated down the Malay Peninsula to the perceived island safety of Singapore. The Japanese cut off the water to Singapore, which runs by pipeline from the southern Malaysian state to Johor Bahru to Singapore. Although such a scenario is unlikely to play out today, Singaporeans are very much aware of this vulnerability. With that said, mutually beneficial economic links compel the two countries to find a way to get along.

Another key aim of Malaysian foreign policy historically has been to keep Indonesia at bay. This is much less of a problem today than it was when Indonesian dictator Sukarno pursued his policy of *Konfrontasi* (confrontation) towards Malaysia. As a consequence of its size and geopolitical importance, Indonesia has always viewed Malaysia as its "little Malay brother." This condescending view has dissipated since the end of military rule in Indonesia under Sukarno and Suharto. Despite the fact that Indonesia is a fellow Malay and Muslim country, and basically speak the same language, they have experienced periodic ups and downs in their relations. Frictions reached their peak in the 1960s, when Sukarno opposed the newly-reconstituted Federation of Malaysia, which included Singapore as well as states of Sabah and Sarawak in northern Borneo, a large island which is shared by Indonesia and Malaysia. In response, Indonesia infiltrated guerrilla forces into Sabah and Sarawak. The conflict was largely limited to sporadic jungle warfare in Borneo, and British Special Forces assisted Malaysia in rebuffing the Indonesians. Despite the limited fighting, Sukarno's threats against Malaysia had a strong psychological impact. I remember two of my Malaysian golfing friends telling me about their time serving as "coastal watchers," looking out for a possible Indonesian invasion of Peninsular Malaysia during the *Konfrontasi*. It seems funny today but at that time Malaysians took Sukarno's threats seriously.

Q: How about relations with other neighboring countries like Thailand?

MCMULLEN: Malaysia's longstanding foreign policy priority has been to maintain good relations with its neighbors. This goal has been challenging at times because of Malaysia's historically complicated relations with all of its neighbors—Thailand, Singapore, and Indonesia. For example, there have been periodic outbreaks of violence by Muslim separatists in southern Thailand, which have created tensions along the border with Malaysia. During my time in Malaysia, there was an incident along the border involving Thai Muslims who were reportedly receiving armed support from Malay Muslims in northern Malaysia. Despite these periodic tensions on the border, this issue has not been a major irritant in bilateral relations.

Malaysian foreign policy has been built around its active role within ASEAN, the 10 member regional forum. These ASEAN nations are neighbors with both shared and competing interests. In this sense, ASEAN has been helpful in reducing tensions among its member states. Many observers refer to “the ASEAN way,” which entails quiet diplomacy and consensus-building. When I was in Malaysia, we were pressing government officials to take a tougher line with Vietnam, Cambodia and Burma. We were trying to thwart their efforts to join ASEAN until they improved their performance on human rights and democracy issues. Malaysia and other ASEAN countries resisted our efforts to isolate these countries. Instead, ASEAN members argued that the best way to change their behavior was to offer inducements, and bring them inside the tent. ASEAN eventually allowed Vietnam, Cambodia and Burma to join the forum.

Q: Within the embassy, among yourselves, was there a debate about which of the two policies—the exclusion or the inclusion of these countries—was best for U.S. interests?

MCMULLEN: Sure, and I think some of us sympathized with the position of Malaysia and other ASEAN countries. We thought Malaysia had a valid argument in advocating for a more inclusive approach, although Cambodia and Burma were much tougher cases to make than Vietnam. Vietnam’s human rights record was not as dismal as Cambodia and Burma. In the case of Vietnam, Hanoi was also actively seeking rapprochement with us as well as our allies. I think some of us in the embassy favored the idea of allowing Vietnam to join ASEAN. But we are diplomats, so we carry out the instructions of our government.

Q: The Gulf War took place while you were in Malaysia. I remember watching the precision bombing, which made for great TV. What was Malaysia’s attitude toward the Iraq-Kuwait confrontation?

MCMULLEN: At the time of the Iraq crisis, Malaysia was one of the rotating members of the UN Security Council. I think this was a tough issue for Prime Minister Mahathir because it involved two Muslim countries. In the end, Malaysia voted in support of the UNSC resolution that authorized the use of force to expel Iraq from Kuwait. I suspect this decision reflected Mahathir’s personal principles and his innate pragmatism. In terms of principles, I’m sure that he viewed Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait as unacceptable; on the pragmatic side, he likely looked at the precedent that might be established if Saddam Hussein was able to reclaim Iraq’s “lost province” of Kuwait. I think Mahathir realized that such a precedent could have an adverse impact on Malaysia’s various territorial disputes.

When the Gulf War began in January 1991, I was assigned to monitor reactions to the war among Malaysia’s ethnic communities. I worked closely with our public affairs office, where the local staff reviewed the daily newspapers of the various ethnic groups—Chinese, Malay and Indian. The Chinese-Malaysians tended to support the U.S. and its allies. So I was surprised several days after the war began when I asked our local staff about the Chinese attitudes, he said, “They’re very upset with the U.S.” I asked, “Why are they upset?” He said, “Well, they all bet that the U.S. was going to win the war in 24 hours, and now they lost a lot of money.” [laughter]

In contrast, the Malay community mostly favored Iraq. This was an interesting development because Prime Minister Mahathir was a savvy politician but he clearly had miscalculated how Malays would react to the war. For Malays, this was a personal, not a geopolitical issue. Shortly after the outbreak of war, I met with a Malay foreign ministry official to get his views on why Mahathir had gotten so much pushback from the Malay community on his decision to support the use of force to liberate Kuwait. I also wanted to see if he had any suggestions on how we might mitigate the situation. He explained that much of this anti-Kuwait, pro-Iraq sentiment was based on the personal experiences of Malays who had traveled to Mecca for the Hajj. He said Malay pilgrims had to pay a high transit visa fee for traveling through Kuwait, which they resented. On top of that, they were treated shabbily by rich Kuwaitis who looked down on Malays as rural rubes. Speaking about his own experience, he added: "When I served in Kuwait as a diplomat I was treated like a Filipino guest worker. Malays look at the Kuwaitis as rich and haughty; they look at Saddam Hussein as being a man of the people." It was as simple as that.

When the U.S. started dropping bombs on Iraq, Mahathir faced major blow-back from the Malay community. The media didn't help matters with its pro-Saddam Hussein tilt. There was an inflection point a few days into the war when Mahathir seemed to wobble a bit; to his credit, however, he never renounced Malaysia's UNSC vote for the use of force. Instead, he created a firewall to insulate himself a bit from U.S. military operations in Iraq. He began carping about the way the war was being conducted; he also tried to distract public attention from the war. We were worried that Mahathir might denounce U.S. actions but he stopped short of abandoning his support for the UNSC resolution. It was vintage Mahathir in the way he handled this issue.

Q: How did you feel about Mahathir? Did he viscerally dislike the United States?

MCMULLEN: I think Mahathir was of two minds about the United States; on the one hand, he admired what we had achieved; on the other hand, he viewed us as bullies. I think the latter sentiment informed his more strident verbal attacks on the United States. He could put aside his visceral dislike of U.S. policies, if it served his interests, or if it were a matter of principle that he felt deeply about. The Iraq crisis fell into this category on both scores.

On a more personal level, Mahathir could be vindictive. This was evident in the case of his deputy prime minister, Anwar Ibrahim, who opposed Mahathir's economic policies during the 1997 financial crisis. When I was in Malaysia, Anwar was a rising star. He was only in his early forties and was extremely popular among young Malays. Everyone thought he would succeed Mahathir. But Mahathir didn't brook dissent. When the financial crisis hit Malaysia in 1997, Anwar thought that market forces should be allowed to work. This was the position of the IMF and World Bank. However, Mahathir said, "No, we are going to impose currency controls."

In the end, Mahathir's policy approach turned out to be right on this issue. And Anwar had alienated Mahathir by taking a public stance in opposition to the thin-skinned prime minister. Mahathir never forgave him. Sadly, he pressed forward with trumped-up charges against Anwar, who spent quite a bit of time in prison on bogus charges. Anwar was a talented politician; in the recent elections, he mounted a surprise comeback by cutting a deal with Mahathir.

What I thought was so beneficial to our relationship with Malaysia when I served there in the early 1990s, was the fact that Mahathir was nimble enough to compartmentalize different aspects of the relationship. On the political side, he frequently blasted Western countries in his public statements. But we knew it was just rhetoric. In our cables to Washington, we invariably referred to Mahathir as “the prickly prime minister” when reporting on his latest anti-U.S. screeds. At the same time, Mahathir pursued pragmatic policies in other areas of our relationship, such as military-to-military ties and commercial relations. We simply agreed to disagree on some political and international issues. Fortunately, in the case of Iraq invading Kuwait, Mahathir realized that it was in Malaysia’s interest to take a principled stand on the UN Security Council resolution to use force in expelling Iraq from Kuwait.

Q: Was there a parliament in Malaysia?

MCMULLEN: Yes, but the parliament was dominated by Barisan Nasional, the Malay-dominated alliance. Shortly after I arrived in Malaysia, Mahathir called snap elections in October 1990. He wanted to catch the opposition off balance and ensure that Barisan was able to retain its two-thirds control of parliament, which allowed it to make constitutional changes without needing opposition votes. Mahathir’s gambit succeeded, although Barisan lost a number of seats and barely retained its two-thirds majority.

Despite the political dominance of Barisan, Malaysia is a functioning democracy with an increasingly activist civil society. With the growth of Malaysia’s middle class, all sectors of society have been clamoring for a more transparent and less corrupt government. The corruption scandal involving former Prime Minister Najib Razak, who was a well-respected politician and minister of defense when I was in Malaysia, led to Mahathir’s return as prime minister, but this time as the opposition candidate in recent elections. Malaysians got fed up with corruption and voted against Barisan. And Najib is now in jail. This reflects the impressive progress that Malaysia’s civil society has made in holding its politicians accountable for their actions.

I remember drafting a think piece on public pressure groups when I was in Malaysia. I talked to a wide range of civic leaders, all of whom were committed to making Malaysia a more transparent and democratic country. Even back then in the early 1990s, there was increasing concern about corruption, human rights, the environment, and other social issues. I remember being impressed with the activists whom I met, but there was little indication then that civil society would become the force that it has become today. I give Malaysians a lot of credit for what they have achieved; some of this democratic spirit reflects the British legacy, and some of it is due to the growing influence of the country’s middle class.

Q: When you were in Malaysia, what was the status of American and European investment?

MCMULLEN: Not surprisingly, the British were the biggest investors, reflecting the legacy of colonial rule in Malaysia. At that time, in the early 1990s, Australia and Japan also had sizable investments in Malaysia. China had some investment in Malaysia but not as much as it does now; the Chinese economic boom occurred after I had left Malaysia. We had fairly sizable investments in certain sectors such as electronics and the toy industry. Much of this U.S.

investment was based in the northern state of Penang, which was largely ethnic Chinese. With its expanding middle class, Malaysia was a growing market for American products and services.

Q: On foreign policy, was there any concern at that time about Malaysia's claims to the islands of the South China Sea and China's counter-claims?

MCMULLEN: Well, it was not as much an issue when I was in Malaysia in the early 1990s, probably because China was not pursuing an aggressive policy at that time. I think that Malaysia and other ASEAN countries are in a difficult position on the issue of the South China Sea. There are so many overlapping claims among ASEAN members: the Philippines, Malaysia, Indonesia and Vietnam all have claims in the region that conflict with those of China. As a consequence, China is able to leverage these competing claims within ASEAN by proposing, "Let's work this out among ourselves in a bilateral way." This is what the Chinese have been doing with the Philippines; they've been trying to cut a deal by using trade and development assistance as incentives. ASEAN has cautioned against bilateral deals because such an approach would balkanize the organization; however, there are limits to ASEAN's ability to dictate policy to member countries.

Q: How did we view the Malaysian military? My impression is that we worked very closely with their military. For a small country, Malaysia apparently has a very effective military force. How did we feel at the time?

MCMULLEN: It's true. Malaysia has a very capable and professional military. Its Special Forces are particularly effective; they train regularly with their U.S. counterparts and the British SAS (Special Air Service). So, they're very good. Malaysia's armed forces have generally acquitted themselves well in UN peacekeeping operations in Lebanon, Somalia and elsewhere. In fact, it was Malaysian peacekeeping troops that tried to assist the U.S. soldiers who were involved in the tragic "Black Hawk down" incident in Somalia.

The Malaysian military needs to prepare for a variety of potential threats. For many years, Malaysian officials worried about a war with Indonesia, when Sukarno was rattling his saber over territorial claims in Malaysia's part of Borneo. While this threat has receded in recent years, Malaysia's territorial claims in the South China Sea have become more problematic with China's increasingly aggressive counter-claims. Malaysia is also a strategically located country; it shares control of the Malacca Strait—a vital shipping lane—with Indonesia and Singapore.

Q: Was there an extremist Muslim threat in Malaysia when you were there?

MCMULLEN: No, there was no real indigenous terrorist threat at that time in Malaysia. The most militant Muslim party, PAS, was popular in rural areas and in the east coast states of Kelantan, Terengganu, and Pahang. While it was a political force in these lightly populated regions, nationally it was a marginal force. PAS advocated for strict Islamic rules, including Sharia law, but it did not advocate violence. Malaysian politicians have played the ethnic or religious card at times, although thankfully the country has not had the problem with Islamic-inspired terrorism that Indonesia has experienced in recent years. This might be due in part to the government's pro-Malay affirmative action program, which has improved the lives of many

Muslims. As long as Malaysia's economy is doing well, the country's ethnic and religious differences remain muted; tensions seem to rise when there is an economic downturn, and then minority groups like the ethnic Chinese often become scapegoats.

Q: Were there any incidents or situations during your time in Malaysia that revealed religious or ethnic tensions? I mean that affected you doing your job.

MCMULLEN: During the Gulf War in 1991 there was an uptick in ethnic tensions. On the eve of the war, our deputy political counselor who covered the Malay community went on R&R (rest and recuperation travel) for six weeks, which coincided with the duration of the war. Our political counselor asked me to monitor the reactions of the Malays as well as other ethnic groups so that we could inform Washington. Shortly after the war started, the Islamic PAS party began orchestrating large-scale protests outside our embassy every Friday after prayers at the mosque. The protests lasted only about three weeks or so, but it was a tense time.

At the first demonstration there were hundreds of angry protesters, and the PAS leaders demanded to meet with an embassy officer. I was tapped to meet with them because I was covering the Malay community. When I went to the embassy's main gate to meet the PAS delegation, the protesters were agitated and chanting denunciations of the United States. The atmosphere was quite charged. I invited the PAS leaders to come into the embassy compound. We sat down over a cup of tea and talked about the war and their concerns. It was an amicable discussion and at the end of it they presented me with a petition against the war.

PAS held two more large protests in the following weeks and then suddenly stopped, which was a relief to all of us in the embassy. The Malaysian government had invoked the ISA (Internal Security Act), which barred any further protests. While I wasn't worried about my personal safety during these protests, we all were concerned that if the demonstrations gathered more force, we might face a serious situation, such as protesters trying to climb over the embassy walls or some other incident that could spark violence. Malays are generally not aggressive, but PAS politicians and the media had whipped them up by portraying Saddam Hussein as a "good Muslim" who was being unfairly attacked by the U.S. and its allies.

Q: Well, the Gulf War was quite short, did that help with this situation?

MCMULLEN: Absolutely, it helped us a lot. More importantly, it helped Prime Minister Mahathir, who was under heavy criticism in the Malay community. I think Mahathir had been blindsided by the depth of the hostility among Malays, who vociferously opposed his perceived support for Kuwait. The short duration of the war avoided a political crisis, which might have prompted Mahathir to renounce Malaysia's support for the use of force against Iraq.

Q: Was the embassy able to do anything to mollify Malay anger over U.S. actions in Iraq?

MCMULLEN: When the war broke out, we launched an outreach campaign aimed especially at the Muslim community. I spoke to students at several universities to explain why the U.S. and its allies were using force to expel Iraq from Kuwait. I still remember a young Malay woman who was lambasting our policy. She said, "You wouldn't be doing this if the conflict was about

bananas rather than oil.” I replied, “You’re absolutely right. We wouldn’t be doing this if it was about bananas, because the world doesn’t run on bananas. It does run on oil.”

As part of our outreach, we had visits by senior U.S. government officials, such as Ambassador Alec Watson, who was one of the U.S. deputy permanent representatives at the UN, and John Wolfe, Assistant Secretary for International Organizations. Besides meeting with Malaysian government officials to address their concerns, they also did public outreach during their visits.

Q: When you get right down to it, it’s pretty hard to come up with a rationale for not supporting this international effort to stop Iraq’s takeover of a foreign country.

MCMULLEN: I agree, but many Malays were reacting more on emotion than logic. I think the average Malay’s view of the Gulf War was shaped largely by an intense dislike of the Kuwaitis. As a Malaysian diplomat put it to me, Malay thinking was along the lines of—the Iraqis must be the good guys because we know the Kuwaitis are the bad guys. For us this logic seemed incomprehensible. If there was one principle in international affairs that most people could agree on, it had to be that one country can’t invade another country and get away with it.

Anyway, we walked a fine line in doing our public outreach: we didn’t want to hunker down in the embassy trying to hide from our policy, but at the same time we didn’t want to get too far out on the barricades and alienate Malays even more. So it was a balancing act in terms of being visible but not being too shrill in advocating a policy that was clearly unpopular among Malays.

Q: Did you find yourselves pretty close to the British embassy and working with them?

MCMULLEN: Yes, the British and Australians were very helpful; as in other parts of the world, we all shared information. Since they were part of the Commonwealth, they had easy access to key Malaysian officials. The British placed an emphasis on parliamentary politics, so they had particularly useful contacts among Malay Members of Parliament. As allies in the Gulf War, the Brits and Aussies worked with us in trying to allay Malay concerns. We all wanted to find a way to shore up Mahathir so that he didn’t renounce his support for the Gulf War.

Q: This brings us back to Mahathir’s view of the U.S. as being a bully. He might have thought that if we feel this way, other countries also may feel that way but none of us can do much about it, so he relied on diatribes against the U.S.

MCMULLEN: Mahathir’s anti-U.S. rhetoric reflected the views of many Malaysians who felt that the U.S. threw around its weight to get what it wanted in international affairs. I don’t know how many times I heard the foreign minister, Abdullah Badawi, and other Malaysian officials say, “When the elephant and the mouse are in the garden together, the mouse never sleeps. He’s always afraid that the elephant is going to roll over on him.” In their view, we were the careless elephant and they were the attentive mouse. So you’re right, Mahathir’s rhetoric probably reflected his frustration at not being able to influence U.S. policy.

I remember when I made my courtesy call on our ambassador, Paul Cleveland. At the end of our meeting he said, “Did you notice the map on my wall?” I said, “No, I didn’t.” He said, “Well,

look at it; see if you see anything unusual.” I said, “Yes, Malaysia is the center of the world.” He said, “Keep that in mind. In this country, Malaysia is the center of the world.” It was a truism that we sometimes forget—other countries view themselves as the center of the universe, and they have their own political dynamics.

Unfortunately, American politicians sometimes forget that other countries have their own politics, which often constrains their ability to support U.S. policies. I’ve heard Americans say, “Why don’t we just tell this country or that country what to do?” They forget that the leaders of those countries have their own political agenda. We saw this when Prime Minister Mahathir had to fend off a backlash among his core supporters—the Malay community—during the Gulf War.

Q: Was Paul Cleveland your ambassador while you were in Malaysia?

MCMULLEN: Yes, and he had a challenging job because he was the tip of the spear in dealing with the mercurial Mahathir. Even though we had excellent relations with Malaysia in areas of mutual interests, such as security and economic issues, our political relationship was challenging, and unfortunately this was the most visible component. Mahathir would go to the UN General Assembly or a NAM (Non-Aligned Movement) meeting and routinely blast U.S. policies.

The political reality was that Mahathir could only support some of our policies, such as the Gulf War, if he maintained a distance from other unpopular U.S. policies. In some respects, his strident rhetoric was political theater for his domestic constituents, but it annoyed politicians and policy makers in Washington. Malays tended to see themselves as victims—of ethnic Chinese whom they viewed as overly aggressive, and of Westerners whom they viewed in the same way—and Mahathir embodied this sense of victimhood vis-à-vis the West.

Q: I’ve never been in Malaysia, but in the Foreign Service it is considered to be a pleasant place to serve. How was it?

MCMULLEN: Malaysia was a fascinating place because of its ethnic, religious and cultural diversity. The Malays were by law Muslim; the Chinese were mostly Buddhist or Christian; and the Indian community was a mix of Hindu and Muslim, with a small minority of Christians. Also, there were about 40 other indigenous groups. So the country was a cultural mosaic. And these religious and ethnic differences played a critical role in Malaysian politics.

Malaysia was a very pleasant place to live. My wife and I traveled extensively throughout the country. There were a lot of beautiful beaches and “hill stations” that offered relief from the stifling heat and humidity of Kuala Lumpur. I’ve heard that the capital has become very congested and polluted in recent years. The tremendous growth of car ownership has undoubtedly contributed to this pollution. Mahathir wanted Malays to be able to own cars, and he wanted to produce them in the country. So Malaysia entered into a joint venture with Japan’s Mitsubishi to develop the Proton. Mahathir insisted that the Proton should be cheap enough so that the average Malay family could own a car. This initiative helped the country industrialize, and it helped the Malay middle class, but it has also made Kuala Lumpur less livable.

Q: You left Malaysia when, and where did you go?

MCMULLEN: I left Malaysia in the summer of 1992 and returned to Central America, this time to El Salvador. There was a certain sense of symmetry in going to El Salvador. I had begun my career with DIA in 1982 as an intelligence analyst covering El Salvador. Those were terrible times for the country, which was in the midst of a brutal civil war. Now I was going to El Salvador, which was just beginning to implement the UN peace agreement. My portfolio included the ruling right-wing ARENA party, as well as political-military affairs. The latter duty entailed working closely with the UN peacekeepers. For me personally and professionally, it was very rewarding; El Salvador had come full circle, and I had borne witness to that evolution and maybe even helped in a small way in the reconciliation process.

Q: When you went to El Salvador, you were there from when to when?

MCMULLEN: I arrived in El Salvador in July 1992 and left in July 1994. When I arrived there, the country was in the initial phase of the peace process. The Salvadoran government had signed the UN-brokered peace agreement with the FMLN guerrillas in January 1992, and they were just starting to implement the required reforms when I got there.

Q: Where was the peace process when you arrived?

MCMULLEN: ONUSAL, which was the UN mission for El Salvador, had recently set up shop. The UN mission had established four main components: a political division, a human rights division, a military division, and a police division. Since I was the embassy's political-military officer, I dealt mostly with ONUSAL's military division. As part of this job, I also traveled extensively through the countryside to monitor the demobilization and disarmament of the FMLN guerrillas, who had moved into cantonment camps.

In the broader regional context, neighboring Nicaragua was now ruled by President Chamorro following her victory over the Sandinistas. This development had a major impact on the war in El Salvador. With the Sandinistas out of power, and the Soviets and Cubans sidelined, the Salvadoran FMLN guerrillas could no longer rely on an external pipeline for weapons. This new reality had helped push them towards a negotiated peace agreement. The UN was now implementing it; as embassy officers, our two biggest challenges were: 1) convincing the Salvadoran military to carry through with the required reforms, including purging its ranks of human rights abusers; and 2) convincing ARENA to accept the concessions that the government had made in the peace process. It was an exciting time; I was fortunate to be involved in these efforts because I dealt with two of the main actors—the military and the ruling ARENA party.

Q: Excuse me, this was an embassy position; you were not on detail to the UN, right?

MCMULLEN: That's right. I worked in the embassy's political section, which was fairly large. I think that we had seven officers, plus five or six local staff and OMSs (office management specialists). That was a large political section for such a small country, but it reflected the importance that State Department placed on making sure that the peace process succeeded. This was post-Berlin Wall; the Cold War was over. Washington was less concerned about the role of

the Soviets and Cubans in Central America, especially since both countries were grappling with their own problems. Still, El Salvador remained a high-profile issue for U.S. policy makers.

Q: What was the war about?

MCMULLEN: Well, the real roots of El Salvador's war dated back to colonial rule under Spain. When the Central American countries gained independence, they inherited dysfunctional political and economic institutions. In the case of El Salvador, these legacy problems were compounded by the repressive rule of a landed oligarchy backed by the military. During an uprising in 1932, the military killed an estimated 30,000 peasants, an event called "La Matanza" (The Massacre), which left a lasting scar on Salvadoran society and set the stage for civil war.

By the 1970s, there was growing discontent among university students in the cities and landless peasants in the countryside. Liberation theology espoused by leftist priests was gaining traction among the peasantry, while radicalized university students began organizing armed groups that eventually coalesced under the FMLN banner.

Q: The FMLN?

MCMULLEN: The FMLN (Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front) was a coalition of five guerrilla groups that was formed with the help of Fidel Castro. The Cuban leader saw that these factions spent as much time fighting each other as they did fighting the Salvadoran security forces. So he helped broker a deal among these ideologically disparate groups. He had played a similar role in the creation of the FSLN (Sandinista National Liberation Front) in Nicaragua.

In response to growing political violence in the 1970s, elements of the Salvadoran oligarchy started hiring off-duty policemen and soldiers to carry out extrajudicial murders of suspected leftists, including teachers, university students and labor leaders. The rise of these death squads reflected the Salvadoran elite's lack of confidence in the government's security forces.

Q: What was the impact of these death squads?

MCMULLEN: In our conversations with FMLN leaders during the peace process, they told us the death squads were so lethal that by the early 1980s, they had driven most FMLN militants out of the cities and into the countryside. The death squads were targeting not only FMLN guerrillas but also anyone even suspected of sympathizing with the FMLN cause. The indiscriminate killings by these death squads radicalized even some moderate sectors of Salvadoran society.

Once the death squads had driven FMLN supporters out of the cities and into the countryside, the Salvadoran military went after them with a vengeance. The human rights abuses committed by the military drove many disaffected peasants into the ranks of the FMLN. The guerrillas also committed abuses in the countryside but they were generally more discriminating in their acts of violence. The FMLN usually had better intelligence than the military about who supported their cause and who backed the government. The FMLN would go into a village, pick out several community leaders and say, "Either you cooperate or else..." In this sense, the guerrillas were equally brutal but more selective in their assassinations of village leaders who refused to

cooperate with them, whereas the military was indiscriminate in its violence. The military would often go into a village and kill anyone they thought might be an FMLN sympathizer.

Q: Was Washington able to do anything to curb these abuses by the military?

MCMULLEN: Over time, U.S. military training helped curb these human rights abuses. Many of the Salvadoran military's worst abuses were committed prior to U.S. training, which began in earnest in the early 1980s. With our training, these abuses diminished significantly, probably in part because we had advisers in virtually every military unit and their presence served as a deterrent. Besides basic infantry training, our advisers provided human rights training, which was one of Congress' conditions for assistance. I think Congress was wise in setting a limit of 54 as the cap on U.S. military advisers. Why did Congress choose the number 54 as a cap? Who knows why that number. Anyway, this limit had the salutary effect of forcing the Salvadorans to fight the war themselves. I think the Pentagon was fine with the cap, especially since U.S. military leaders were wary of getting sucked into the war as they had been in Vietnam.

We had U.S. military advisers at every military base in El Salvador. While these advisers were there to train the Salvadoran military, they were also useful in keeping an eye on things. As the embassy's political-military officer, I would often travel to these barracks and talk to our advisers. They were able to offer a sense of what the average Salvadoran soldier was thinking, along with the views of senior officers. This perspective was extremely valuable in the fall of 1992, when there were constant coup rumors.

Q: I suppose the U.S. advisers also had a sense of what was happening with respect to the death squads and any abuses by the military.

MCMULLEN: Interestingly, it was one of our advisers who blew the whistle on the Salvadoran military's murder of six Jesuit priests during the FMLN's "final offensive" in November 1989. This adviser heard about who had carried out the murders and told an embassy officer. So it was very helpful for us to have those eyes and ears in the barracks at that critical juncture.

Our training had improved the Salvadoran military's performance but when FMLN guerrillas launched their nationwide offensive in November 1989, they caught military leaders completely flat-footed. The guerrillas had secretly infiltrated upscale neighborhoods of the capital, which caused panic among the elites. The military initially seemed to buckle under pressure from the guerrillas, prompting several senior commanders to order the murder of six Jesuit priests who were falsely accused of supporting the guerrillas. In truth, these priests had tried to facilitate peace talks between the government and guerrillas. Although the military eventually regained the initiative and pushed the FMLN out of the capital, the intensity of the offensive and the barbarity of the Jesuit murders marked a turning point in the war. Salvadorans were surprised by the FMLN's ability to infiltrate the most affluent parts of the capital, and they were shocked by the military's murder of six Catholic priests. Like the Tet offensive in Vietnam, the FMLN's failed offensive had a much greater psychological impact than a military one, and it likely contributed to the government's decision to enter into peace talks with the guerrillas.

Q: Did the FMLN miscalculate when it launched this offensive?

MCMULLEN: The 1989 final offensive was a replay of the FMLN's first "final offensive" in January 1981. In both instances, it was a close call for the military, which buckled but didn't break. One of the mistaken assumptions made by the FMLN leaders—and by Fidel Castro in his support of them—was their belief that the Salvadoran military was a paper tiger. The FMLN thought the Salvadoran military would simply fold like Anastasio ("Tachito") Somoza's National Guard in Nicaragua and Fulgencio Batista's army in Cuba. In both of those cases, the armed forces had been badly weakened by corruption and poor leadership; they lacked the will and the ability to fight, even in the face of much smaller insurgent forces.

In contrast, the Salvadoran military was capable enough to fend off these two major FMLN offensives. The Salvadoran armed forces were by no means a well-oiled machine, but they generally could and did fight. They weren't a feeble Praetorian Guard like Somoza's forces in Nicaragua, nor were they as corrupt and incompetent as Batista's army in Cuba. The other FMLN miscalculation in both the 1981 and 1989 offensives was the assumption that there would be a popular uprising in support of them. That didn't happen either time. Nevertheless, the FMLN had pushed the military to the brink in both nationwide offensives. Many of the Salvadoran army's worst human rights abuses were committed when it felt seriously threatened by the guerrillas. I think there were critical points in both the 1981 and 1989 offensives when Salvadoran military leaders feared the army might fold. This fear led to panic, which led to atrocities that were horrific and inexcusable.

Q: I would think that by this time it was becoming more difficult for the guerrilla forces to get weapons. The Cuban supply line of weapons was probably beginning to dry up after the collapse of the former Soviet Union. Was that a factor or not in bringing an end to the war?

MCMULLEN: That's true. The Soviet-Cuban arms pipeline, which ran primarily through Sandinista-controlled Nicaragua, was crucial for the FMLN guerrillas. Once the Soviet Union collapsed, Cuba lost its subsidies and was forced to retrench; it no longer had the means to support the Salvadoran guerrillas or the Sandinistas in Nicaragua. And when the Sandinistas lost the elections in February 1990, the FMLN lost its principal pipeline for arms and ammunition.

Meanwhile, our training and support for the Salvadoran military was beginning to tip the scales against the FMLN. Also, with Cuba's diminished role in El Salvador, Fidel Castro was less able to mediate the ideological and personality disputes among the leaders of the five FMLN factions. The ERP (People's Revolutionary Party) was the strongest faction in terms of military capabilities, and its leader, Joaquin Villalobos, was the most astute strategist among the FMLN leaders. For these reasons, his views carried the most weight within the FMLN. By 1990, following the last major FMLN offensive, Villalobos had concluded that the guerrillas could not defeat the Salvadoran military and would have to enter into peace talks with the government.

Q: How serious were these divisions among the guerrilla leaders?

MCMULLEN: Toward the end of my time in El Salvador, sometime in the spring of 1994, I got an interesting insight into Villalobos' thinking on this question. I was control officer for a visiting congressional staff delegation that met with Villalobos to discuss the upcoming

elections. By this time the FMLN had demobilized its forces and reconstituted itself as a political party; it was now preparing to participate for the first time in elections. During the course of a long discussion about the FMLN's internal dynamics, Villalobos made a comment that has always stuck with me. He said, "If we had won the war, we would have become a military dictatorship." I think he was right, because it probably was the only way that the fractious FMLN coalition could have held together.

These ideological and personality differences among the FMLN leaders were deep and difficult to bridge. The divisions had always complicated the FMLN's strategic planning. While Castro had managed to paper over the differences for much of the war, the fissures remained under the surface. Shafik Hándel, head of the PCES (Communist Party of El Salvador), was the most problematic FMLN leader. He was a hardline Stalinist with an abrasive and inflexible personality that antagonized his colleagues. In contrast, Villalobos was pragmatic and generally more accommodating; ideologically, he was closer to that of European social democrats.

Q: Who were the FMLN's foot soldiers? Were they drawn mostly from the peasantry?

MCMULLEN: Yes. For the most part it was the young sons, and sometimes daughters, of peasants who formed the core of the FMLN's forces. Some of the guerrilla field commanders came from urban areas and were better educated than the rank and file. Many of the country's best educated dissidents—university students and professors who supported the FMLN—were killed by the death squads in the early years of the conflict.

FMLN leaders were certainly justified in denouncing El Salvador's landed oligarchy, colloquially called "*las catorce*," or "the fourteen" (ruling families). In reality, these extended families probably numbered in the hundreds. They had long controlled the land tenure system, and in a country with very limited arable land. They also paid pitiful wages to the peasants who worked on their large estates. These factors, along with their poor treatment of peasant day laborers, had produced simmering discontent in the countryside. By the 1970s, landless peasants were ready to take up arms, just as their grandparents had done during the 1932 uprising.

The dismal economic condition of the peasantry was a source of discontent throughout Central America. This historical problem was aggravated by other issues: for example, the high population density in El Salvador, and the abusive treatment of the indigenous population in Guatemala. Another factor that exacerbated discontent in El Salvador and Guatemala was the brutal repression carried out by the military and the death squads. Even worse, these abuses were carried out with impunity, reflecting the weakness of government institutions.

By the early 1980s, El Salvador's fate was in the balance as the military struggled to keep the FMLN guerrillas at bay. Against this backdrop, Washington decided that it needed to have a political track that complemented our military support for El Salvador. This political track focused on improving the human rights situation and instituting a land reform program that would appeal to disaffected peasants. I think U.S. policy makers realized that if we were going to defeat the FMLN guerrillas, we had to push the oligarchy hard on land reform. In the end we did push the elites; they didn't like it, but it worked.

I remember an interesting conversation that I had with one of my Salvadoran neighbors about the land reform program. He was an ARENA hardliner who came from a wealthy family that owned several large coffee *fincas* (estates). He said, “You Americans were wrong for imposing land reform on us. It was never successful.” I replied, “Well, if you’re talking about economically, you might be right. But that wasn’t the point of it. The point of the land reform program was to take this issue away from the FMLN. In that sense, politically, it succeeded.”

The land reform program that we pressed with the Salvadoran government achieved the primary objective of breaking up some of the biggest estates. This was important symbolically because the vast majority of peasants did not own the land that they worked on. By giving land titles to thousands of peasants, the government had undercut the FMLN’s ability to use this sensitive issue in its recruitment efforts in the countryside.

Q: So what happened after the FMLN’s last major offensive?

MCMULLEN: The FMLN’s 1989 offensive demonstrated that the war had reached a strategic stalemate; neither the military nor the guerrillas could achieve a clear-cut victory. Peace talks between the two sides began in 1990, mediated by UN envoy Alvaro de Soto. In early 1992, the FMLN and Salvadoran government signed the Chapultepec Peace Accords.

As part of the agreement, the government was required to reduce the size of the military and abolish its rapid deployment forces as well as the National Guard and Treasury Police. The National Police was replaced by a new National Civil Police. For its part, the FMLN agreed to disarm and demobilize its forces. Some of these former guerrillas became part of a new Salvadoran armed forces composed of troops from both sides. These soldiers had to be vetted to ensure they had not committed any human rights abuses. The FMLN also agreed to integrate into the political process and run for the first time as a political party in the 1994 elections. Another key component of the peace agreement was the creation of a Truth Commission that would draft a report detailing the human rights abuses carried out by both sides during the war.

Q: How did this Truth Commission work?

MCMULLEN: The Truth Commission was tasked to investigate acts of political violence and human rights abuses that had been committed by the security forces and the guerrillas. The goal was to determine who was responsible for these crimes. The Commission collected information from anyone who had witnessed abuses or acts of violence. The investigators worked with NGOs and talked to thousands of people in trying to establish who had committed some of the most egregious atrocities, such as the massacre of innocent peasants in the village of El Mozote, and the murder of Archbishop Oscar Romero. These were two of the most notorious acts of violence committed by government-linked forces. The findings were made public in a report that identified the perpetrators of violence; it also made recommendations on a path forward. These recommendations included a call for the purge of government officials and military officers implicated in human rights abuses and acts of violence; an overhaul of the judicial system; and reparations for the victims of violence.

When the report was published—I think sometime in the spring of 1993—President Cristiani faced a firestorm of criticism from conservative elements of Salvadoran society. Not surprisingly, the harshest reaction came from the military, which was implicated in most of the major acts of violence. To quell some of the backlash, Cristiani proposed an amnesty that was passed by the National Assembly. The amnesty applied to everyone implicated in the report: Salvadoran security forces, as well as FMLN guerrillas. Rightly or wrongly, Cristiani believed that he had to take this action in order to relieve pressure from the military and the right wing of his ARENA party. In his view, the amnesty law was necessary to save the peace process.

Despite the fact that many of its recommendations, including reparations for victims, were never fully implemented, the Truth Commission report was helpful in healing some of the psychological scars caused by the country's brutal civil war. As a result of the report's findings, along with the findings of the Ad Hoc Commission report, a couple of hundred officers were purged from the armed forces. These two reports also allowed Salvadorans to get a fuller picture of what had really happened during the war, and thus helped to foster reconciliation

Sometime in the last few years the Salvadoran Supreme Court ruled that the amnesty law was unconstitutional. However, I don't think anyone has been prosecuted yet for any acts of violence during the war. I'm not sure what will happen in the future. Quite a few of the principal players, particularly senior military officers, have passed away in recent years.

Q: The Truth Commission was also useful in South Africa. I think it gets you at least to a point where you have to say, no more acts of revenge. Let's start with a clean slate.

MCMULLEN: That's true. I think the Truth Commission did give Salvadorans a fresh start. I believe the Commission's report, which provided details of abuses and atrocities, and determined who was responsible for them, helped at least some Salvadorans get past the trauma of war.

Q: Were there any other notable elements of the peace accords?

MCMULLEN: Another important part of the peace process was rebuilding the country's police force, which had been a key instrument of repression. As in the case of the military, many off-duty policemen had been involved in the death squads. The Salvadoran government abolished the former Treasury Police and the National Police, both notorious for their human rights abuses. The former was not replaced; the latter was replaced by a new National Civil Police (PNC).

Our embassy worked closely with the Spanish and Chileans to improve the capabilities and professionalism of the new PNC. Both the FBI and the Department of Justice's ICITAP (International Criminal Investigative Training Assistance Program) were involved in training the PNC. As in the case of the newly reconstituted military, we assisted the Salvadoran government in vetting candidates for the PNC in order to ensure they had not been involved in any human rights violations. This helped create a police force that people no longer feared but respected. If people don't have faith in their institutions, particularly law enforcement and the judiciary, then they're going to take the law into their own hands. Of course, building a functioning judiciary is one of the toughest tasks, probably even more so than building a new police force.

I had an interesting conversation with the prominent political scientist, Francis Fukuyama, about this issue some years ago. He was visiting São Paulo when I was consul general there and we talked about nation building. Fukuyama noted, “The U. S. has been fairly successful in building central banks and finance ministries in developing countries, but we haven’t been very successful in building judicial systems.” It’s true. I think one of the main reasons is cultural. Unlike central banks and finance ministries, judicial systems involve cultural norms. We come from an Anglo-Saxon culture that places a high priority on the rule of law. But that’s not always the case in other cultures. Some cultures have other ways to resolve their differences other than in a court of law, which makes it difficult to build a functioning judicial system in those countries.

Q: Did you say earlier that senior military officers had been purged because of human rights violations?

MCMULLEN: That’s right. In addition to the Truth Commission, the peace accords called for the creation of an Ad Hoc Commission that would identify members of the military who had committed human rights abuses. The Ad Hoc Commission was supposed to identify the bad actors in the military, including members of the High Command. Many observers at that time thought the Ad Hoc Commission would identify some lower ranking military personnel but leave the upper ranks of the officer corps untouched. To its credit, the Ad Hoc Commission identified more than 100 members of the military as human rights abusers, including all but one member of the High Command, El Salvador’s equivalent of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff.

The Ad Hoc Commission report represented an unprecedented blow against the impunity that El Salvador’s military had enjoyed since its inception. Military leaders were shocked and angry. For a period of time it seemed like the fate of the peace process was in the balance. Fortunately, we had good visibility on the military’s reactions to the Ad Hoc Commission’s report. This was a critical juncture when having U.S. military advisers in the barracks really paid dividends. While the upper levels of the military were outraged and unhappy with the report, junior officers and the rank and file were much less upset. For junior officers, they understood that the removal of more senior officers would provide head room for their own advancement.

Q: Did you think the military might mount a coup?

MCMULLEN: We didn’t think so, but we couldn’t be absolutely certain. Tensions in senior ranks of the military reached a boiling point in the fall of 1992, when there were constant coup rumors. We consulted closely with President Cristiani and his aides in monitoring the mood in the barracks and in the upper ranks of the officer corps. Our main goal was to make sure there was no backsliding, and that the military fully implemented its part of the peace process.

In the face of these coup rumors, our chargé d’affaires, Pete Romero, requested that General Colin Powell, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, come to El Salvador and meet with the High Command. There were only a few people on our side in the meeting: Colin Powell, our chargé, defense attaché, military group commander and myself as note-taker. It was a dramatic meeting and it proved to be a decisive turning point.

Powell allowed each member of the High Command to speak, beginning with General René Ponce, the minister of defense. They talked for about an hour; it was more of a venting session than a conversation. The Salvadoran generals complained that they were being mistreated, asserting they had fought the communist FMLN guerrillas on our behalf and now we were throwing them under the bus. They claimed that it wasn't fair; the charges against them were false. Finally, Colin Powell said, "Gentlemen, I want to tell you that sometimes as a military officer you have to do things that you don't agree with but it's best for your country. And now is one of those times." Without offering an opinion on the validity of the Ad Hoc Commission's charges against the generals, Powell essentially told them they had to step down. It was an appeal to their patriotism and professionalism. In closing the meeting, General Ponce said, "I understand." He had tears in his eyes; he knew the gig was up.

Following a face-saving interval, General Ponce and the other generals stepped down, as did other officers who had been identified as human rights abusers in the Ad Hoc report. This marked a milestone in the peace process. The military also fulfilled its commitment to downsize its forces and to demobilize the counterinsurgency battalions that had been cited for human rights abuses, such as the Atlacatl Battalion. These were not easy actions, and all of us feared the military might balk at some point. Fortunately, there was enough momentum and external pressure to keep the peace process on track.

Q: How about the political side? Wasn't it a conservative government in charge?

MCMULLEN: We did have some political concerns as well. While coup rumors were the most worrisome issue in late 1992 and early 1993, we were also concerned about hardline elements in the ruling ARENA party. President Cristiani represented the moderate wing of the party, which had gained ascendance after the death of Roberto D'Aubuisson, founder of ARENA and a leader of the death squads early in the war. In an apparent deathbed conversion, D'Aubuisson had thrown his support for the peace agreement, which was signed shortly before his death. Yet, even with D'Aubuisson out of the picture, there were still hardliners in ARENA who opposed the peace process.

We were concerned that these hardliners might goad disgruntled elements of the military into staging a coup. Another concern was that some ARENA hardliners might resort to the use of death squads to torpedo the peace process. So again we worked with President Cristiani and his allies in the party to make sure that things didn't go off the rails. Cristiani was a pragmatist and a savvy politician; and he assured us that he had things under control with the military and hardliners in his party.

Q: What about the guerrillas? Were they carrying through with their commitments?

MCMULLEN: For their part, FMLN forces remained in their cantonment camps as the disarmament and demobilization process moved forward. As part of our monitoring process, I visited the UN-run cantonment camps throughout the country. While we shared the FMLN's concerns about the possibility of a coup or a resurgence of death squad activity, we nevertheless pressed the guerrilla leaders to follow through with their own commitments. For instance, we pressed them about reports that FMLN units might be trying to hide some of their armaments—

RPG rockets, rifles, and other materiel, presumably as an insurance policy in case the government did not comply with its commitments.

Q: Where was the UN in all of this? Did you coordinate with UN officials on the ground?

MCMULLEN: My main contact in ONUSAL's military department was a Brazilian commander, Colonel Romeo, who was very astute. In fact, most of the ONUSAL observers that I met had a solid understanding of the broader political context in which they were working. They also had good visibility on the FMLN's internal dynamics, much like we had with respect to the government and military. Though they sometimes needed a nudge, ONUSAL officials generally tried to hold the FMLN leadership's feet to the fire. This was important because the UN had more leverage with FMLN leaders, just as we had more leverage with Salvadoran government officials and military leaders.

Once we got past demobilization and disarmament, which was the most difficult stage for the FMLN, the two sides began preparations for national elections in the spring of 1994. Our job now shifted towards the political sphere; we wanted to ensure free and fair elections. We worked with the UN to insist on a level playing field that would allow the FMLN to compete fairly in the elections. This was more complicated than it sounds because there was still a lot of hostility among Salvadorans toward the FMLN. Many Salvadorans, fairly or unfairly, blamed the FMLN for the violence that they had suffered over the past 15 years.

In terms of the elections, we were hoping that a moderate would win the ARENA presidential nomination. This would ensure that if ARENA won the election, a moderate would continue the pragmatic policies that Cristiani had pursued. In the end, ARENA nominated a Cristiani ally and moderate, Armando Calderón Sol, who went on to win the election. This provided the continuity needed to maintain support for the peace process, which was our main goal.

Q: Towards the end of your tour, were you doing mainly political reporting?

MCMULLEN: Yes. For the most part my reporting focused on ARENA's prospects and strategy in the 1994 elections. I also did quite a bit of reporting on how the military was adjusting to the post-war reforms.

Under the terms of the peace agreement the military had to downsize and restructure its forces; 40 percent of the newly-reconstituted military was to be made up of former FMLN guerrillas; the Army's controversial counterinsurgency battalions had to be disbanded; and anyone charged with human rights abuses were to be purged from the armed forces. Also, former members of the military and FMLN who were demobilized were to receive vocational and technical training so that they could integrate into the economy. USAID was the main provider of this training.

Despite periodic concerns in Washington about the possibility of the military balking at these reforms, the peace process stayed on track. After the Ad Hoc Commission identified the senior officers to be purged from the military, there was less likelihood of a coup because mid-level and junior officers were promoted into the positions that the more senior officers were forced to

vacate. For the remaining officers, there was no incentive in mounting a coup. Again, we had good sources of information that allowed us to monitor the military's reaction to the reforms.

The other major issue that I reported on was the mood of hardliners in ARENA. We knew that many hardliners were unhappy with the peace agreement, particularly the integration of the FMLN into the political process. As elections approached, there was concern in Washington that right-wing elements might revive the death squads in order to torpedo the peace process. So I was tapped to meet with several ARENA members who were suspected of having financed the death squads in the early years of the war. The most surprising thing was that these guys did not fit the image of mafia-type thugs that I had imagined; they were well-dressed, well-spoken and well-educated, some at schools in the United States.

Based on my conversations with them, it was clear that these former suspected death squad financiers had been sidelined by the course of events. They had lost the power struggle inside ARENA; Cristiani's allies, pragmatists and moderates, were now in charge of the party. The hardliners were isolated and had lost their main ally when Roberto D'Aubuisson died; they were not in any position to mount another death squad campaign.

While it was a bit disturbing to meet with guys who had a lot of blood on their hands, it was important for us to know where they were in the bigger picture. The stakes were high for the fate of the peace process. It was a fascinating time to be a political officer. And it was interesting from a personal point of view because I was bearing witness to the peaceful resolution of a brutal war that I had followed almost from the outset. I was watching a country trying to find its way forward, trying to end the zero-sum politics that had contributed to the war.

Q: I meant to ask you earlier, who was the ambassador when you were in El Salvador?

MCMULLEN: Ambassador William Walker had left post a few months before I arrived in July 1994. Our chargé d'affaires, Pete Romero, arrived in August and left about a year later to serve as ambassador in Ecuador. Alan Flanigan was our ambassador during my second year there.

By the time Flanigan arrived in the fall of 1993, we had gotten past some of the most difficult points in the peace process—the Truth Commission, Ad Hoc Commission, and the coup rumors—but there was still simmering discontent among Salvadoran elites. The next major challenge in the peace process was to ensure free and fair elections, which were scheduled for the spring of 1994. More broadly, Flanigan's other key task was to normalize our presence in El Salvador by reducing the outsized U.S. footprint. Normalizing internal embassy operations was also a challenge because it had been run as a wartime embassy for a long time.

Q: How was life for you in El Salvador?

MCMULLEN: For the most part, life was pleasant. There were good restaurants in San Salvador, the capital, and the nearby beaches were a popular place to go on weekends. I played golf and tennis at local clubs. We traveled periodically to neighboring countries such as Guatemala, Honduras and Belize. I also traveled frequently throughout the country to monitor the peace process and the 1994 elections. While the war was technically over, there were still concerns

about violence, particularly with so many weapons still floating around. So you had to be careful about where you were traveling, especially in the countryside; we generally had good intelligence on possible threats in different areas but it wasn't perfect.

I remember when I visited E Salvador for the first time; it was in 1983, a bad time in the war. I was working at the Pentagon and was sent to El Salvador on temporary duty. A week before I arrived, one of our military advisers had been killed by the FMLN at a university in San Salvador. He was dating a Salvadoran woman who turned out to have ties to the FMLN. An urban cell of the FPL (Popular Liberation Forces) had been monitoring the movements of a U.S. Navy Seal, Commander Albert Schaufelberger, and shot him while he was waiting for his girlfriend at the university. When I arrived a week later, our defense attaché, Colonel John Cash, handed me a nine-millimeter pistol and said, "You might need this."

Later in the week, I decided to visit Santa Ana, near the Guatemalan border, with another DIA analyst. About an hour or so into the trip, we came to a roadblock and several armed men. In those days, the FMLN guerrillas would set up roadblocks to collect "war taxes"; if they stopped somebody important, they would take them hostage and demand a ransom. Sometimes the guerrillas would wear Salvadoran military uniforms, so you could never really know whether it was an Army or an FMLN roadblock until you stopped. We were traveling in the western part of the country, which generally wasn't as conflictive as eastern El Salvador. At the same time, we knew there was an FMLN unit that operated in the western region. The unit was part of the FMLN's logistics network, so we didn't think it posed a serious threat. Anyway, as we approached the roadblock the question became, "Do we stop and run the risk that it's the FMLN and not the Army, or do we try to run the roadblock and run the risk of getting shot?" I was driving at the time and decided it would be best to stop. Fortunately, it turned out to be an Army roadblock, but this was the kind of thing you had to take into account in wartime El Salvador.

By the time I went back to El Salvador as a Foreign Service officer a decade later, the peace process was in train. However, even though life was returning to normal, there still were armed groups roaming the countryside and robbing people. Some of these armed groups were made up of demobilized FMLN guerrillas, along with demobilized soldiers from the armed forces. A number of our embassy colleagues were robbed at gunpoint by these groups. So life in El Salvador even after the war could still be dangerous.

Q: You've described the places you had been so far, and they had important political implications for our interests. So when did you leave El Salvador?

MCMULLEN: I left El Salvador in July 1994.

Q: Did you go back to Washington?

MCMULLEN: Yes, I had decided to wait until my fourth tour before returning to Washington. Having worked at the Pentagon prior to joining the Foreign Service, I felt that I had a fairly good understanding of the interagency process. While at DIA I had worked with a number of U.S. government agencies, so I felt that I could wait a little longer before doing a job in State Department. After my time in El Salvador, I wanted to get experience in another region, so I took

a job in AF/E (Office of East African Affairs). I served as desk officer for Kenya and Uganda from August 1994 to August 1996.

Q: What was the situation in each country? Maybe you could describe Kenya first.

MCMULLEN: In the case of Kenya, the U.S. has major security, economic and geopolitical interests there. Kenya has been our strategic anchor in East Africa, just like South Africa and Nigeria in their respective regions of Africa. Our embassy in Nairobi, the capital, was our largest diplomatic mission in sub-Saharan Africa at that time. Our regional offices for refugee affairs and labor affairs were based in Nairobi. After the collapse of Somalia in 1991, our ambassador to Somalia was based in Nairobi until just a few years ago when we re-opened our mission in Mogadishu. I don't know whether Embassy Nairobi is still our largest mission in Africa but I'm sure that it is still a regional platform for many U.S. government agencies.

We have always had a special relationship with Kenya, probably because of its legacy as a British colony. Kenya also has maintained stronger institutions than most other African countries. And its British-trained military forces are among the most professional and capable in Africa. We still coordinate closely with the British on many political and security issues in Kenya. We have significant investments in Kenya, reflecting its position as the strongest economy in the region. Kenya's middle class is fairly large and plays an important role in the country's politics. Kenyans place great emphasis on education, which is one of the reasons for the country's political and economic progress.

While Kenya's democracy has suffered setbacks since independence, its vibrant civil society and press freedoms serve as a guardrail against the kind of dictatorships that many other African countries have experienced over the years. Kenya's first president, Jomo Kenyatta, did a fairly good job in setting the tone for post-independence politics. The principal political problem since independence has been the dominance of the Kikuyu, the country's largest ethnic group. The British favored the Kikuyu during colonial rule; this dominance continued after independence when Kenyatta became president. Working out a functioning power sharing system with other ethnic groups has been a major stumbling point for the country.

Q: So what were our main interests in Kenya when you were desk officer?

MCMULLEN: Well, our strategic interests in Kenya date back to the Carter administration, when the Soviets invaded Afghanistan and we became concerned about potential threats to the oil fields in the Middle East. As part of the Carter Doctrine, the U.S. military created the Rapid Deployment Force, which later evolved into U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM). As part of our strategy to deter the Soviets, the U.S. negotiated agreements with a number of countries—Djibouti, Somalia, Oman, and Kenya—that gave our military forces access to key airports and seaports in the region. In the case of Kenya, we had to renegotiate the terms of our Facilities Access Agreement (FAA) every five years.

When I started on the Kenya/Uganda desk in August 1994, we were preparing for the first round of FAA negotiations with Kenya. Renewal of this agreement was a top priority for the Pentagon. However, we had a serious problem because Kenya's president, Daniel arap Moi, was not in

good favor with the White House, largely because of his anti-democratic behavior and human rights abuses. Moi had won the country's first multiparty elections in 1992; after that, he went on a campaign of intimidation against the opposition.

So here we were trying to negotiate an important military access agreement, while at the same time we were publicly criticizing Moi because of human rights issues. Our criticism was fully justified, but it was still hard to square the circle. I spent much of my time trying to assuage the NSC, particularly senior Africa adviser Susan Rice, who was unhappy with Moi's behavior. At one point in our FAA negotiations, the NSC proposed that we impose economic sanctions on Kenya. Needless to say, the Pentagon strongly objected to that idea, as did the Commerce Department, which was concerned about the impact on our economic interests in Kenya. With the interagency process divided over Kenya, AF (Africa Bureau) proposed a State Department-led policy review that would offer recommendations on a path forward. The idea was to work out a strategy that would address NSC concerns about human rights, while not jeopardizing the FAA negotiations.

Q: Sounds a lot like trying to square the circle...

MCMULLEN: That was pretty much the case. Anyway, I was tapped to draft the strategy paper and policy recommendations. In trying to navigate the interagency landscape, I knew that the Pentagon, Commerce Department and most of the key players in the State Department were in favor of pushing forward with the FAA negotiations. If we had to take any action against Kenya, they preferred limited actions aimed at Moi; they didn't support economic sanctions. On the other side, the NSC and DRL (the Democracy, Human Rights and Labor Bureau) took a tougher line and wanted to impose economic sanctions on Kenya.

In drafting the strategy paper and policy recommendations, I tried to balance our competing interests in Kenya. The main thrust of our strategy proposal was to focus on development assistance to improve human rights and democracy over the longer term, while giving short-term priority to securing renewal of our military access agreement. The AF Assistant Secretary at the time, George Moose, convened an interagency working group that offered an opportunity for key stakeholders to voice their views. In the end, we garnered support for our approach from the principal interagency players. I don't think the NSC was happy with our proposed strategy, but I believed it was the most prudent approach in light of our limited options at that time.

We eventually secured renewal of the access agreement but negotiations stretched out for nearly a year beyond my time on the Kenya desk. In addition to our concerns about the human rights situation in Kenya, negotiations were further complicated by Moi's demand that we pay a sizable sum of money to renew the FAA. Of course, this was a non-starter for us. While there might be an exception or two, the U.S. does not normally pay money for access to another country's military facilities. Instead, we normally provide a mix of assistance such as International Military Education & Training (IMET), low-cost loans for military hardware and other incentives in lieu of cash. Moi had heard that Oman received a cash payment for our facilities agreement there, so he wanted cash and was driving a hard bargain. It took us more than three years to negotiate new terms for the Kenya facilities agreement. Meanwhile, the human rights situation in Kenya

improved marginally as a result of our pressure. Moi's anti-democratic behavior continued to be an irritant in our relations with Kenya.

Q: Ok, now what about our relations with Uganda?

MCMULLEN: In the case of Uganda, also part of my portfolio, President Yoweri Museveni, presented us with another set of challenges. Museveni had risen to power in the mid-1980s after the bloody and brutal dictatorships of Idi Amin and Milton Obote. He came to power by mobilizing a guerrilla force that defeated Obote's military. Amin and Obote had killed hundreds of thousands of people from rival ethnic groups. So Museveni was initially embraced by Ugandans who believed he was going to move the country beyond its bloody ethnic politics. Over time, however, his authoritarian governing style alienated many Ugandans as well as the U.S. and other foreign donors.

Our ambassador, Michael Southwick, was vocal—and justified—in his criticism of Museveni's authoritarian style. However, in contrast to their negative view of Kenyan President Moi, NSC staffers saw Museveni in more positive terms. The NSC viewed Museveni as emblematic of a new generation of African leaders that included Paul Kagame in Rwanda, Isaias Afwerki in Eritrea, and Meles Zenawi in Ethiopia. These younger leaders were viewed as part of an "African Renaissance." The NSC saw them as more enlightened than the Old Guard—Moi in Kenya, Dos Santos in Angola, and Mobutu in the DRC (Democratic Republic of the Congo). Museveni and his cohorts were seen as more respectful of democratic norms. Unfortunately, this new generation turned out to be just as anti-democratic as the Old Guard.

During my time on the Kenya/Uganda desk in the mid-1990s, there were differing views in Washington regarding Museveni. Some saw him as a wolf in sheep's clothing; that he would ultimately become another dictator for life, just like Mobutu and other African "Big Men." However, others saw Museveni as part of a new "post-tribal" generation that looked beyond ethnic politics. While Ambassador Southwick was advocating for more pressure on Museveni, he ran into resistance in some quarters, including the NSC. I think those U.S. officials who resisted putting pressure on Museveni felt that Uganda had been through a lot with the genocidal violence of Idi Amin and Milton Obote. The bar was set pretty low; Museveni wasn't killing tens of thousands of people as his predecessors had done, so this was relative progress. According to this view, Museveni might be autocratic; he might be authoritarian; but he's not genocidal. In that sense, some U.S. officials thought he was relatively better than an alternative.

Fast forward to today and we see that Museveni is still in power; perhaps the debate inside our government is the same one that I heard 25 years ago. Museveni's argument in favor of basically a one-party system was tendentious but plausible; he contended that the root of ethnic violence in Africa was parochial politicians playing the tribal card in a multiparty political system. And he makes a valid point when pointing out that the way multiparty politics works in Africa is that every ethnic group has its own political party. As a result, it's a zero-sum game; whoever wins the elections gets to call the shots, and with little consideration for the views of minority parties. As I noted, it's been the Kikuyu who have mostly called the shots in Kenya, and to the detriment of other tribes. Museveni's point is that multiparty politics encourages politicians to stir up

communal enmities, which often leads to violence. He is right about that. However, his solution to the problem—essentially one-party rule—is self-serving.

The question of Museveni's authoritarian governing style was a major issue when I was desk officer for Uganda. As in Kenya, we had competing interests in Uganda: on one hand, we were promoting democracy and human rights; on the other hand, we were trying to advance our security interests in the region. On this score, Museveni was helpful in providing peacekeeping troops in Liberia, a U.S. policy priority at that time. One of the thorny issues that I dealt with during this period was the fact that the U.S. was not providing promised funding for Ugandan peacekeeping troops, which was an irritant in the relationship. Museveni was also helpful on the issue of Rwanda, which was still trying to recover from the Hutu-inspired genocide against the Tutsis. Museveni and Rwandan President Paul Kagame were close allies at that time; since then there has been a falling out between the two leaders. Initially, Museveni was also helpful in trying to stabilize the situation in the DRC after the overthrow of Mobutu, although Uganda's subsequent grab for that country's valuable natural resources created new problems.

These were some of the factors that had to be taken into account by policy makers when considering whether to press Museveni on democracy and human rights. As you know, it's rarely a clear-cut call in policy debates within the U.S. government. We wouldn't spend countless hours in interagency discussions if a policy solution was self-evident. For me, it was interesting to participate in these policy debates, even though I was only a mid-level officer at that time and therefore didn't have much influence on policy decisions.

The issue of ethnic politics in Africa was also interesting for me because my area of expertise was Latin America, where populism and ideology have been the driving forces, not ethnic politics. Populism has long been the bugaboo for Latin America. At times, this populism fuses with ideology, such as in Venezuela today, where it has produced a hybrid type of socialism. Latin America also has had strains of fascism in its populism, such as in Argentina under Juan Perón. Of course, Africa has gone through periods where ideology and nationalism were key factors in the region's politics, particularly during the period of independence, which coincided with the Cold War. Thus far, Africa has not experienced the problem of populism, which has had such a detrimental impact on a number of Latin American countries.

Q: Were there problems with certain tribes being discriminated against in Kenya or Uganda?

MCMULLEN: During the period that I was desk officer, the problem of ethnic discrimination was more of an issue in Kenya than in Uganda. President Moi was from a small tribe, the Kalenjin, and they were allied with the dominant Kikuyu tribe. Kenya's first president, Jomo Kenyatta, was Kikuyu, and Moi had served as his vice president.

This kind of alliance between a large tribe like the Kikuyu and a smaller one like the Kalenjin was typical of the ethnic politics in Kenya. The Luhya and Luo were also fairly large ethnic groups that had forged alliances with smaller tribes. In some cases, these ethnic alliances represented different economic interests. For example, the Kalenjin are nomadic cattle herders from the Rift Valley in western Kenya, while the Kikuyu are agriculturalists and businessmen. It's usually the larger tribe that will field the presidential candidate for a political party and the

second largest group will run on the vice presidential ticket. The Luo, based mostly in western Kenya, have long felt aggrieved due to Kikuyu political and economic dominance.

Kenya's political competition often revolves around land issues. When the British ended colonial rule in Kenya, they left the Kikuyu as the main beneficiaries of the land tenure system. They also gained control of the government. Interestingly, when the British left Malaysia, they chose the Malays as the ethnic group that would inherit control of the government. In both Kenya and Malaysia, this decision by the British to favor one ethnic group over the other has left a lasting legacy, and not always a positive one, on the post-colonial politics in those countries.

In the case of Uganda, ethnic politics have been more muted since the genocidal regimes of Idi Amin and Milton Obote. To his credit, Museveni has tried to tamp down the tribal rivalries that have produced so much violence in post-colonial Africa. Museveni's political movement—he doesn't like to characterize it as a political party—is based on a vague ideology rather than ethnicity. And he has tried to prevent politicians from playing the ethnic card, which is a challenge in such an ethnically diverse country as Uganda.

Q: Was there any foreign interest in developing manufacturing in Kenya and Uganda to take advantage of cheaper labor costs, or was this controlled by South Asian Indians?

MCMULLEN: In Kenya and Uganda, as well as in Tanzania where I later served, there is a large South Asian community that historically has dominated manufacturing and business. South Asians are also prominent in professions such as medicine, law, and education. In some respects, they have played a similar role in East Africa that Lebanese businessmen have played in West Africa. As an ethnic minority, Indians in East Africa have frequently suffered political discrimination because of their dominant role in business. Much like the ethnic Chinese in Southeast Asia, Indians are viewed as foreigners and are often the scapegoats when there are economic crises in these countries.

Q: Well in Uganda many Indians were expelled under Idi Amin.

MCMULLEN: That's right. Amin expelled most of the South Asians from Uganda in the early 1970s, even though many of them had lived there for several generations. As outsiders, the Indians never had a voice in Ugandan politics and were vulnerable when a xenophobic despot like Idi Amin seized power. Some South Asian families returned to Uganda when President Museveni took power in the mid-1980s. He saw them as important players in rebuilding the country's devastated economic and human infrastructure.

South Asians also lacked a political voice in Kenya and Tanzania, although they never suffered the same abuses as in Uganda. Kenyan politics mostly revolves around tribal differences; South Asians are not really part of this tribal competition. Tanzania has been mostly free from ethnic rivalries, with the exception of Zanzibar, where political competition has been artificially defined as Africans versus Arabs. For the most part, South Asians have stayed out of politics in Tanzania. In general, the Indian communities in East Africa have been forced to find a back channel in trying to influence political leaders. In Uganda, a few prominent Indian families, such

as the Madhvanis, have allied themselves with Museveni and have done very well economically since their return from exile.

Q: I suspect that some would go back to Uganda, but for many Indian families it would be enough is enough after their experience with Idi Amin.

MCMULLEN: You're right. Many Indians were traumatized by Idi Amin and didn't want to take the chance of losing their lives or their businesses again. They left Uganda with whatever they could carry in their hands. So it's not surprising that a lot of them didn't want to return.

During my stint as desk officer I dealt with a member of the powerful Madhvani family; she was the commercial attaché at the Ugandan Embassy. Her job was to encourage American investment in Uganda. Her family had returned to Uganda and rebuilt their businesses, which included manufacturing as well as food processing and distribution. The Madhvani group was involved in a lot of other businesses and had close ties to Museveni, which was mutually beneficial. I would assume that the Madhvanis are still big players in Uganda.

Q: I was wondering whether Kenya and Uganda were magnets for American or European investors who want to set up shop in manufacturing or other industries.

MCMULLEN: I think Kenya has been more successful in attracting U.S. and European investment than Uganda, which has experienced cycles of political violence since independence. The UK and U.S. have fairly sizable business investments in Kenya, which has been the economic engine of East Africa. But it's South Asians who have dominated most of the manufacturing in Uganda. We didn't have much in terms of investments in Uganda when I was desk officer in the mid-1990s, but that might have changed since there has been a long stretch of political stability and economic growth under Museveni. I would get inquiries periodically from U.S. companies asking about doing business in Uganda but not much materialized at that time.

Museveni visited Washington when I was desk officer and met with key U.S. business groups. He made a strong pitch for more U.S. investment in the country but I think that a lot of American businessmen still viewed Uganda as a risky place to invest. Another problem for Uganda is that neighboring Kenya has a much better trained and educated workforce. Even many poor Kenyans will pay to send their kids to good schools. As I mentioned, Kenyans place a premium on education, which might be part of the British colonial legacy. Also, Kenyan businessmen are savvy and generally good partners for foreign investors. Although it's an imperfect democracy, Kenya's institutions are stronger than those in Uganda, which probably contributes to Kenya's competitive advantage in attracting American and European investment.

Q: How were your countries treated in State Department and elsewhere in the bureaucracy? Did they get much attention from policy makers?

MCMULLEN: Kenya received a lot of attention because of its geopolitical importance; it was seen as a stabilizing force in a volatile region. Following Somalia's collapse in 1991, and then the genocide in Rwanda in 1994, U.S. officials looked at Kenya as a critical bulwark against instability in East Africa. The Pentagon also placed a high priority on retaining our military

access agreement with Kenya, which was important for U.S. interests in the Middle East as well as in the Horn of Africa. CENTCOM wanted access to the port of Mombasa and to Kenya's main airports. Besides their military importance, these access points were also critical to our humanitarian operations in the region. When I took over the Kenya/Uganda desk in August 1994, we were still funneling humanitarian assistance through the port of Mombasa, then through Uganda and down into Rwanda. U.S. military personnel and USAID's Disaster Assistance Relief Teams staged some of their key operations through Mombasa.

Our military forces also carried out periodic exercises with Kenya's armed forces, which were British trained and very competent. We worked closely with the UK on political and security issues in Kenya. During that time, the British military maintained an infantry battalion based in Nairobi, much like the French have retained some military forces in West Africa. I don't know if the British still have any military units based in Kenya but the presence of this battalion was helpful in the past in dealing with possible coups. This British military presence proved critical when the Kenyan Air Force attempted a coup against President Moi in the 1980s.

Unfortunately, Kenya also received attention from policy makers for less positive reasons, particularly President Moi's anti-democratic behavior. At a critical point in the negotiations to renew our military access agreement, Moi threatened to expel two journalists from major U.S. media outlets. This was on top of other repressive actions. Needless to say, this didn't help us in trying to keep the NSC from pushing for economic sanctions against Kenya.

Uganda received much less attention among U.S. policy makers because it was less important for U.S. strategic interests. As a landlocked country, it didn't have the same geopolitical value as Kenya. Museveni was helpful on some regional issues, such as peacekeeping in Liberia. On the other hand, some of his actions merely complicated problems in the region, such as his support for rebel forces in southern Sudan. The Sudanese government retaliated by providing sanctuary and support to Joseph Kony's brutal LRA (Lord's Resistance Army), which carried out widespread atrocities in northern Uganda.

Q: Was the LRA operating in Uganda at that time?

MCMULLEN: Yes. It was a major domestic issue for Museveni's government. During my orientation trip to Uganda in October 1994, I traveled to Gulu in northern Uganda, where Kony's LRA was active at that time. The Ugandan official who was in charge of this issue, Betty Bigombe, took me to several villages outside of Gulu where I heard horrific stories from young boys and girls who had been kidnapped by the LRA. The boys related stories of being forced to kill classmates and family members as part of their initiation into the LRA. The young girls, who also were only 12 or 13 years old, had been taken as sex slaves by Kony's group. Some of them had escaped from the LRA and others had been freed by Ugandan troops. Kony and his followers were religious fanatics. They were more like a cult; they had strange beliefs about purifying the Acholi tribe that lived in the region. LRA fighters believed they were part of God's army; they put oil on themselves believing it would prevent bullets from killing them.

Mrs. Bigombe, a smart and charismatic government official, came to Washington in 1995 to talk about efforts to eradicate the LRA. She claimed the Ugandan government was on the verge of

defeating Kony's forces. Unfortunately, that prediction was way too optimistic. While the LRA is much smaller today, Kony's army is still in the field, operating mostly in South Sudan and the Central African Republic. The LRA has been more resilient than anyone thought possible; Kony's group even evaded U.S. Special Forces that were deployed to hunt them down during the Obama administration. Thankfully, the LRA is not as much of a threat today as it was during the 1990s, when it terrorized communities in northern Uganda.

On the whole, Uganda didn't command the same level of interest that Kenya did among U.S. officials. I would say that in terms of U.S. interests in Africa, Kenya probably ranks with South Africa and Nigeria. Kenya is important for U.S. interests, not only in East Africa but also in the Middle East because of its strategic location and its military facilities.

Q: Were you working on the Kenya/Uganda desk before or after the bombings of our embassies in Kenya and Tanzania?

MCMULLEN: I was working on the desk before the bombings of our embassies in Kenya and Tanzania. Prudence Bushnell went out to Kenya as ambassador about the same time that I left the desk in the summer of 1996. I know from helping Pru prepare for her Senate Foreign Relations Committee confirmation hearing that she was well aware of the cables that her predecessor, Aurelia Brazeal, had sent to the Department complaining about the security situation at our embassy in Nairobi.

I had visited our embassy in Nairobi a couple of times and it was clearly vulnerable to a terrorist attack like the vehicle bombings we had experienced in Beirut, Lebanon in the 1980s. Everyone knew there was inadequate setback from the busy boulevard where the embassy was located. It was like having an embassy located on K Street in the center of Washington. The problem was that Congress had not appropriated money for a new embassy in Nairobi; therefore, DS (Diplomatic Security Bureau) did not have the funds to build a safer facility. So Pru Bushnell found herself drafting the same kinds of cables that her predecessor had sent to the Department warning about the potential of a terrorist attack. Sadly, these cables proved prescient.

Q: Well then, you left the Kenya/Uganda desk when?

MCMULLEN: I left the desk in August 1996 and began Swahili training at FSI (Foreign Service Institute). I did nine months of Swahili training before going out to Tanzania.

Q: How did you find Swahili?

MCMULLEN: It's an interesting language because the formation of words in Swahili is different from the Romance languages that I had studied. So, learning how to form words in Swahili was difficult at first. Grammatically, Swahili is somewhat like Malay and German, which I had studied a little bit, in the sense that it is an agglutinative language; you've got to find the root and then work out from that. Swahili is easier to speak than it is to read; like Malay, it developed as a trading language. Swahili is a mixture of Bantu, Arabic, and Portuguese.

Q: Trading languages are designed to be simple.

MCMULLEN: Exactly. It wasn't until relatively recently that Swahili developed the past and future tenses. For a long time, Swahili only used the present tense; you figured out past and future by context. This makes sense for a trading language, which is basically transactional and functional. I was fortunate to have a very good instructor, John Thiuri, who was a Kenyan from the Kikuyu tribe. He taught at FSI for quite a few years.

Q: When did you go out to Tanzania and what was your job in the embassy?

MCMULLEN: I went out to Tanzania as chief of the political/economic section in August 1997. At that time Tanzania was just emerging on Washington's radar screen. The country was changing rapidly; the Cold War was over and Tanzania was initiating political and economic reforms. Its first president, Julius Nyerere, had created a socialist government after independence in the 1960s. Nyerere was also a prominent leader of the NAM (Non-Aligned Movement). During the Cold War, he had tilted towards the Chinese model of agrarian socialism. His successor, Ali Hassan Mwinyi, took the first steps to dismantle Nyerere's socialist model in the early 1990s. Tanzania held its first multiparty election in 1995, a couple of years before my arrival.

During my tenure there, our primary interest was to strengthen multiparty democracy by encouraging the opening up of space for the opposition and civil society. We also supported the free market reforms that Tanzania had begun with the support of the IMF (International Monetary Fund) and the World Bank. One of my principal jobs was to report on the economic and political reforms that were being implemented by President Benjamin Mkapa. The biggest political issue at that time was the question of Zanzibar, which was seeking greater autonomy from the mainland. As a former sultanate under Oman for a couple centuries, and as a British protectorate for some time, Zanzibar had a distinct culture from mainland Tanzania.

Q: One of our earliest treaties was with Zanzibar. What was it like when you were there?

MCMULLEN: As you can imagine, it's an exotic and culturally interesting place. When I served in Tanzania, Zanzibar was a political flashpoint, so I spent a lot of time there doing contact work and reporting on the island's political tensions. After the 1964 uprising on the island, Zanzibar was integrated into mainland Tanzania, though it retained some limited autonomy. While Tanzanians characterized the uprising as an African overthrow of Arab "foreigners," it wasn't that simple. The island was a mixture of African and Arab cultures; most Zanzibaris were mixed blood, Arab and African; and virtually all of them were Muslim.

The unification of Tanganyika and Zanzibar had left a bad taste in the mouths of many Zanzibaris who felt they didn't have an equal say in the new nation of Tanzania. In recent decades, the opposition CUF (Civic United Front) party has sought greater autonomy for Zanzibar. The simmering tensions between the CUF and the ruling CCM party (Party of the Revolution) have provoked periodic bouts of political violence in Zanzibar. So, in addition to monitoring the situation in Zanzibar, I tried to see if we could help bridge some of the differences between the two sides.

Zanzibar attracted interest in Washington because it was a tinderbox, and U.S. officials feared a serious outbreak of violence. During my trips to the island, I met with different sectors of society to see if we could find common ground between CUF and CCM. Our embassy funded a number of international visitor programs for Zanzibari political and civic leaders to travel together to the U.S. The goal was to bring these leaders together so they could discuss their differences in an informal and neutral setting. USAID also funded a study by a top American scholar on Zanzibar to see what we could do to reduce tensions on the island.

In the fall of 1998, we arranged for our newly arrived ambassador, Charles Stith, to meet with the president of Zanzibar, who was also a leader in the national CCM party. Under the terms of union between the mainland and the island, Zanzibar had its own president but his powers were limited and he was not co-equal with the president of Tanzania. Our previous ambassador, Brady Anderson, had adopted a policy of non-engagement with the CCM party in Zanzibar because of its repressive rule and incidents of violence against the opposition.

By the time Stith arrived in September 1998, we thought that it was time to re-engage with the CCM in Zanzibar and try to encourage talks between the ruling party and CUF that would reduce tensions on the island. It was the first time that a U.S. ambassador had met with the president of Zanzibar for several years. Unfortunately, this re-engagement did not achieve our goal of reconciling CUF and CCM. About five years or so after I left Tanzania there was another outbreak of political violence in Zanzibar. I suspect the island will remain a flashpoint until the two parties can find a way to get past their bloody history. I think part of the problem is the economic situation in Zanzibar. While mainland Tanzania has experienced economic growth as a result of the country's economic reforms, Zanzibar has been left behind; poverty remains a serious problem, particularly among CUF supporters and in rural regions of the island.

Q: Wasn't Zanzibar basically Arab?

MCMULLEN: Well, it's a complicated question because of Zanzibar's history. For many centuries Zanzibar had been part of the Swahili Coast, which was a mixture of African, Arab and Persian cultures. By the 1960s, the island's population was mostly Africans, Afro-Shirazi who claimed Persian ancestry, with smaller minorities of Omani Arabs, and South Asians.

The Sultan of Oman had ruled Zanzibar as an overseas territory until the mid-19th century, when the island became independent under its own sultan; beginning in the 1890s, the British administered it as a protectorate. The Revolution in 1964 that ousted the Sultan of Zanzibar and many of his supporters was initiated by militia forces acting on behalf of Tanganyika. I understand that Thomas Pickering and Frank Carlucci were serving as Foreign Service officers on the island at the time. We had a consulate there and they apparently got caught up in things...

Q: Frank Carlucci was declared persona non grata (PNG) because he said something on the phone that upset the government. He said something along the lines of, "I've run out of bullets." It was misinterpreted by the government; he was actually telling Washington, I don't have any more talking points. But his comments were used to PNG him.

MCMULLEN: I didn't realize that. I knew Carlucci had been there, along with Pickering.

Q: So is the conflict in Zanzibar between the Arabs and the Africans?

MCMULLEN: Well, that is how the ruling CCM party chooses to characterize the conflict—as Africans versus Arabs. This is mostly an artificial construct that serves the CCM’s goal of portraying the opposition CUF as a party of “foreigners.” Zanzibar, as part of the Swahili Coast, has a *sui generis* culture; it’s much more mixed blood than CCM politicians want to admit. The Swahili language and culture, along with the Muslim religion, should be forces of cohesion, but many Zanzibari politicians have chosen to accentuate artificial differences.

This construct of Arabs versus Africans is used by CCM to mobilize its supporters. The CUF is portrayed as the Arab party, even though ethnically it is mostly African or mixed blood. It’s also difficult to make a distinction between the CCM and CUF based on religion because many of CCM’s national leaders and some recent presidents of Tanzania have been Muslims. In order to tamp down religious conflicts within CCM at the national level, Nyerere initiated a system to rotate the presidency between Christians and Muslims. He was Catholic but was succeeded by Ali Hassan Mwinyi, a Muslim, who was followed by Benjamin Mkapa, a Christian, who was succeeded by Jakaya Kikwete, a Muslim. The current president, John Magufuli, is Catholic. To Nyerere’s credit, this system of rotating Christians and Muslims in the presidency has minimized the issue of religion within the ruling CCM party.

Q: It’s interesting that they were able to maintain that succession because normally this kind of system would break down over time. Was Julius Nyerere alive when you were there?

MCMULLEN: Yes, and he was still very active. I had quite a bit of contact with Nyerere in his role as the mediator of the dispute between the Hutus and Tutsis in Burundi. In the aftermath of the genocide in Rwanda, there was concern that there could be another outbreak of ethnic violence in Burundi, which had experienced several bouts of violence between Hutus and Tutsis. As a widely respected elder statesman, Nyerere was tapped to work out a political solution to the ethnic divisions in Burundi. Most of these negotiations were held in Tanzania. Nyerere had two very capable Tanzanian diplomats working for him, Charles Sanga and Berta Some, whom I met with regularly to get their views of the negotiations.

I initially met Nyerere, who was affectionately known as *Mwalimu* (“teacher” in Swahili), while I was serving as control officer for Howard Wolpe, our special envoy for Great Lakes issues. Wolpe was an African specialist who had taught at several universities in Michigan. He later served as a member of Congress, where he chaired the Africa sub-committee of the House Foreign Affairs Committee. As our special envoy to the region, Wolpe visited Tanzania at least every other month. I normally served as note-taker in his meetings with Nyerere and the Burundian factions that participated in the negotiations in Tanzania.

During the negotiations I had only seen Nyerere’s formal persona. Towards the end of my tour, our ambassador invited Nyerere for an informal dinner: he also invited my wife and me. In this relaxed setting, Nyerere talked expansively about the challenges he faced as president in the early years after independence. Remarking on Tanzania’s economic struggles in those years,

Nyerere jokingly said, “I realize now that I wasn’t much of an economist.” That was an understatement. His flawed economic policies had bankrupted the country.

Q: Nyerere was the darling of Scandinavia. I’ve talked to people who served in Tanzania and they thought his system of putting people in self-sufficient hamlets had destroyed the country.

MCMULLEN: It’s true. That was what Nyerere was conceding at the ambassador’s dinner. He didn’t understand the basic principles of economics, and Tanzania suffered as a result. Nyerere once remarked in reference to Wall Street investors that he didn’t understand how anyone could make money by simply making a phone call. The remark revealed his lack of understanding of how capital markets work.

Nyerere’s biggest mistake was his implementation of a misguided system called *ujamaa*, which in Swahili means a sense of brotherhood or community. In practice, *ujamaa* was a system of agricultural communes or cooperatives. It was a total failure. As a result, Tanzania had to rely on foreign donors for its survival. And you’re right; Nyerere became the darling of the Scandinavian countries. They admired his honesty, humility and respect for human rights— traits that distinguished him from the corrupt and repressive Big Men of Africa.

To his credit Nyerere created a cohesive country that largely escaped the ethnic violence of other African countries. He used Swahili as a unifying language that overcame the linguistic and ethnic differences among Tanzania’s more than 100 different tribes. Unlike many other African leaders, Nyerere did not foment tribalism to advance his own political fortunes; there was little violence during his years in power. The exception to this largely peaceful history was Zanzibar.

Today the situation is more worrisome. Tanzania is currently experiencing a rise in political violence and human rights abuses on the mainland. President John Magufuli, who came to power touting his anti-corruption credentials and his desire to improve the economy, has turned out to be a nightmare. I recently read an article in *The Economist* about the headless bodies of his political opponents washing up on a beach that we used to go to near Dar es Salaam. This violence is uncharacteristic of Tanzania’s record of peaceful politics, at least on the mainland.

Unfortunately, Tanzania has taken a step backwards under Magufuli. I was there during a hopeful period. The country had embraced multiparty democracy and free-market reforms. While the Scandinavian countries, along with the UK and Germany, were still major donors, Tanzania was slowly weaning itself from foreign assistance. In fact, its economic reforms under Presidents Mkapa and Kikwete had made Tanzania the darling of the IMF and World Bank.

Q: We were sort of peripheral, right?

MCMULLEN: That’s right. We weren’t among the big donor countries. We were probably number six or seven in terms of assistance. Most of USAID’s budget was focused on healthcare, small business development, governance, democracy and human rights. We also had a Treasury Department representative who was helping to improve operations at the central bank.

While we weren't a major player, our views still carried weight. We had good access to senior officials but we weren't the money people. Some of the projects that the Scandinavians funded turned out to be white elephants that did little to help Tanzania's economic development. I think our policy of supporting economic and political reforms was the right one at the time. Our record on funding big infrastructure projects in Africa has been a mixed one at best.

Q: Was there any concern at that time about the radicalization of certain parts of East Africa?

MCMULLEN: While there was concern in Washington about Sudan's sheltering of Osama bin Laden and Al-Qaeda, radical Islam was not yet seen as a serious problem in East Africa. In the case of Kenya, we were aware of some radicalization of the Muslim community on the coast, around the port of Mombasa and northward towards the Somalia border. But the radicalization of Muslims living in the region had not manifested itself in any kind of violence. Northern Kenya was suffering from the spillover effects of violence in Somalia but it wasn't driven by religion as much as by banditry and crime. Even the violence in Somalia was mostly clan-based; of course, this pre-dated the emergence of the jihadist group Al Shabaab.

Most of the Muslim population in East Africa was located on the coast, reflecting the pattern of Islamic penetration of that region. The interior parts Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania remained overwhelmingly Christian. As a land-locked and mostly Christian country, Uganda did not have a large Muslim community. And while there were small-scale bombings in Uganda during the 1990s, these acts of violence were mostly politically motivated. There was some spillover from the insurgency in southern Sudan, which affected limited areas of northern Uganda.

In Tanzania, there were some signs of Islamic radicalization on the island of Pemba, part of the Zanzibar Archipelago. However, this was not a cause for serious concern because of Pemba's small size and relative isolation. Plus, there had not been any violence associated with Pemba's Islamic militancy. In March 1998, there were some deaths associated with Muslim-led riots in Tanzania's capital, Dar es Salaam. The riots subsided after a few days. But this was the first indication of discontent in the Muslim community on the mainland.

As I recall from my reporting at that time, the riots were sparked by discontent over practical issues, not religious ones. Muslims in Tanzania were generally moderate and eschewed violence. It appeared that the disaffection among Muslims in the capital was prompted by specific local grievances. This was not the first stirrings of a jihadist movement in Tanzania. And there was no indication that anyone who participated in the March riots in the capital was involved in the bombing of our embassy in August 1998.

I think the two Tanzanians who assisted Al-Qaeda in the embassy bombing were from the island of Pemba. As I recall, the Pembans helped the Al-Qaeda operatives with logistics—purchasing the explosives and truck, finding a safe-house, doing surveillance of our embassy—things like that. Perhaps the Al-Qaeda operatives made contact with the Pembans because they thought that Muslims on the island might be sympathetic to Al-Qaeda's cause. The driver of the truck-bomb was Egyptian and the bomb-maker was also an Al-Qaeda operative from the Middle East.

Q: Could you talk a little bit about the bombing of your embassy in Dar es Salaam?

MCMULLEN: Sure. On the day of the bombing, August 7, 1998, my wife and I arrived at the embassy early that morning. We chatted with a female Tanzanian security guard who told us that she had just been offered a job in the embassy as a telephone operator. We were really happy for this young woman, since it meant a better salary and more job security. Sadly, we found out later that she was one of the 11 people killed in the bombing. She was one of many Muslims who worked at our embassy; she left behind two small children.

I was head of the political/economic section and we had a meeting that morning with our chargé d'affaires, John Lange. I think there were about eight of us, Americans and Tanzanians, who were in the meeting. Our office manager had just returned from a stint working in our embassy in Kampala, Uganda. She was telling us how happy she was to be back in peaceful Tanzania, because there had been a number of bombings in Kampala while she was there. In the middle of her comments, the Marine at Post One initiated the weekly embassy "duck and cover" alarms for bombings and other incidents. Shortly after the practice alarms, I heard a sound outside the embassy that sounded like a loud backfire of a car. Then there was a loud explosion and suddenly the air pressure in the room seemed to change and glass started raining down on us. It looked like dirty water rushing into the room and then everything went pitch black.

It was 10:39 in the morning and we were in total darkness; there was complete silence for a few minutes, and then we heard screams throughout the embassy. Our political assistant, a Tanzanian woman whose father had been a diplomat, was nine months pregnant at the time. When the windows blew out, one of the window panes landed intact on top of her. Fortunately the mylar film had held the glass together, so it did not shatter on her. It landed on her like a vest. We heard her whimpering, so a colleague and I crawled over and peeled it off her. Most of us, including myself, had been cut by flying glass but fortunately none of us was seriously hurt.

We crawled out to the reception area in the executive suite, where we tried to figure out what had happened and what we should do. At first we thought an air conditioner unit might have exploded or maybe a gas tank in the embassy compound; the last thing we thought of was a bomb. This was Tanzania, a peaceful country, not Beirut, Lebanon. Then we heard popping noises that sounded like small-arms fire. We thought that our embassy might be under attack. And then we thought, "Maybe it was a bomb." Then the question was, "Well, do we leave or stay in the building?" We didn't know if it was safer to stay or leave, but structurally the walls looked like they were about to collapse; you could see cracks in the walls.

We decided that it was best to leave the building. All of us somehow found our way through the debris that was everywhere, some of it blocking the hallways. The building had once been the Israeli Embassy but after Tanzania had broken diplomatic relations with Israel, we took over the building. Fortunately, it was built to withstand a terrorist attack, and it was designed so that a handful of people could defend the building. This meant that there were all kinds of unusual features to the building, including hideaways and narrow hallways.

After I left the ambassador's suite, I went down to the next floor to look for my wife, who was working in the consular section. I walked down the steps to the consular section with great trepidation about what I might find. I had this terrible feeling in my stomach walking down the

steps because there was broken glass and concrete everywhere. When I entered the consular section, there was a jagged shard of glass about eight inches long stuck head-high in the door. I looked inside the room and there was broken glass and paper strewn all over the room. It was an eerie scene. No one was there, so I left to see if my wife had made it out of the embassy.

John Lange and I had gone in different directions after leaving the ambassador's office; we met up at the Regional Security Office (RSO), which was near the consular section. I remember looking at the RSO clock and it had stopped at 10:39, when the bomb went off. The funny thing was that the phone under the clock was still on the hook; and the phone was still working, which was unusual because our embassy phones didn't work even under the best circumstances.

Prior to leaving the embassy, John Lange called the Operations Center in the State Department to inform them of what had happened, although we still weren't sure whether it had been a bomb or whether we were under small-arms attack. John and I then left through a rear exit that I didn't even know existed. The door had been blown open by the bomb.

Q: Excuse me, what happened with your wife?

MCMULLEN: Fortunately, my wife had gotten out of the building. When I finally found her, she was completely covered with blood. She had a lot of cuts on her head from the flying glass. Thankfully it looked worse than it was. I was just happy she was alive. She had managed to get out through an exit that was blocked by concrete and other debris.

We helped my wife and others with injuries climb over the embassy compound wall, where local minibuses had stopped to assist in taking the wounded to a nearby hospital. My wife was taken to the chargé's residence where a French Embassy doctor put stitches in her head. After my wife left the compound, I went over to the other side of the embassy where the truck-bomb had exploded; the whole area was engulfed in flames that were dangerously close to our underground fuel tanks. Fortunately the tanks didn't explode, which would have been devastating.

In the end we lost 11 people, all of them were local employees, except a Kenyan man who was married to an American Fulbright scholar. She had gone into the embassy to cash a check while he stayed just outside the gate. It was the gate where the truck-bomb detonated. I think there were more than 80 embassy employees, Americans and Tanzanians, who were injured, mostly by flying glass. The casualties could have been much higher but two factors saved a lot of lives. First, the bombing took place on a Friday, when we did not do visa interviews. If it had been a normal day, the line of visa applicants outside the embassy walls would have been decimated. Secondly, the embassy water truck was leaving the compound when the truck-bomber was trying to get through the gate. The embassy water truck was full to capacity, so it absorbed and deflected much of the 2,000-pound bomb blast. That water truck saved my wife's life and the lives of many other embassy employees.

Q: Do you know much about the planning for this attack? What did the investigators find out?

MCMULLEN: The FBI investigators believed that the Al-Qaeda operatives, probably using Tanzanians who would not arouse suspicions, had been doing surveillance on our embassy for

weeks prior to the attack. Therefore, the operatives knew that every Friday at a certain time in the morning, the embassy water truck left the compound so that it could make the rounds in filling the cisterns at our residences.

The truck-bomber evidently tried to force his way into the compound when the guards opened the embassy gate to let the water truck leave. The FBI investigators think that when the truck-bomber tried to drive through the embassy gate, the water truck assistant got out and told him to back up. At that point, the truck-bomber detonated the explosives. The bomb blast was so powerful that the investigators never found enough DNA to identify the water truck assistant. They found one of his shoes a block away, where it had been blown by the blast.

Our gunnery sergeant, the head of our Marine Security Detachment, happened to be driving on a street that ran parallel to our embassy when he heard the blast. He looked over at our embassy and saw the water truck blown into the air above our four-story embassy roof. A day or two after the bombing, I escorted the FBI agent who was investigating the forensics of the bomb blast. While we were standing next to the five-foot deep hole in the ground where the bomb had exploded, the FBI agent explained how the blast dynamics had worked: after the detonation of the bomb, the blast first hit the water truck and blew it into the air, absorbing some of the blast; then the blast wave hit the house of an embassy employee who lived across the street, destroying the front of that building; finally the blast wave bounced back across the street and hit our embassy again, destroying much of the façade as well as the interior walls of the embassy. It was an incredibly powerful bomb that would have killed many more embassy employees if it had not been for the water truck blocking the path of the truck-bomber.

Q: Many more Kenyans were killed in the Nairobi embassy bombing, right?

MCMULLEN: That's right. We were lucky because the bombing happened on a Friday when the consular section was closed, so there were no visa applicants waiting in line. Otherwise, many more Tanzanians would have been killed. We were also fortunate that the building had been built by the Israelis and was designed to withstand a terrorist attack. The building was solidly built with thick concrete walls, although it didn't have much setback from the street. The building's interior design was a bit strange; the Israelis had carved out cubby holes throughout the structure so that just a few people could defend the embassy in the event of an attack. As I mentioned, another factor that helped reduce our casualties compared to Embassy Nairobi was the fact that our embassy water truck absorbed and deflected some of the bomb blast.

Q: How did you hear about the bombing of our embassy in Kenya?

MCMULLEN: After our injured embassy colleagues had been taken to a local hospital, John Lange and I walked across the street to the French Embassy. We wanted to see whether our French counterparts had any information that might shed light on what had happened.

Interestingly, when we entered the French Embassy compound, a gendarme took us behind the chancery and showed us the hood of what appeared to be the truck that had been used in the bombing; the holes looked like they had been caused by the pistons being blasted through the hood. Our embassies were separated by a four-lane highway with a median strip in the middle.

That means the bomb was so powerful that it blew the truck-bomb's hood over our embassy, then across a four-lane highway and finally over the French Embassy, which was the same height as ours. This gives you an idea of how powerful the blast was.

When we went into the French Embassy, we were told that our embassy in Kenya had been bombed almost simultaneous to our own. We were also told that our embassies in Uganda and Sudan had been bombed. The report that our embassy in Khartoum had been bombed didn't sound right because we had closed our diplomatic mission in Sudan. We had only a small group of Sudanese employees serving as caretakers of the embassy in Khartoum. I knew it was unlikely that Al-Qaeda would have targeted an embassy that had been closed for the past few years. The report that our embassy in Uganda had been bombed also turned out to be inaccurate.

Anyway, that is how we found out that our embassy in Kenya had been bombed. When we heard that our embassies had been bombed almost simultaneously, we assumed that the attacks had been carried out by a sophisticated terrorist group such as Al-Qaeda.

Q: Had you heard about Al-Qaeda before the embassy bombings?

MCMULLEN: I had heard of the group while serving as desk officer for Kenya and Uganda. I remembered that Sudan had been accused of sheltering Osama bin Laden and other Al-Qaeda leaders. I also recalled that Al-Qaeda had been involved in the bombing of a garage in the World Trade Towers in 1995.

Q: Were there any militant groups based on Zanzibar?

MCMULLEN: I don't recall that there were any organized militant groups in Zanzibar. The Tanzanian government sometimes portrayed the opposition CUF party as a militant "Arab" party, but it was neither militant nor Arab. Plus, whatever their differences were with the Tanzanian government, CUF leaders had no axe to grind with us. So it was unlikely that CUF would have been involved in the bombing of our embassy.

As I mentioned, the Al-Qaeda operatives who bombed our embassy did recruit two Tanzanians from the island of Pemba, which probably had more militant Muslims than Zanzibar. I think this reflected the fact that Pemba was poorer and more isolated than Zanzibar, which was more open and relatively more prosperous because of the foreign tourism. In any event, I don't remember any organized militant Muslim group on the islands of Pemba or Zanzibar at the time of our embassy bombing. As far as I know, the two Pembans who were involved in the bombing were acting on their own in assisting the Al-Qaeda operatives.

Q: You really wonder why a small segment of the Muslim community encourages its members to go out and kill people for no particular reason, and many of the victims are fellow Muslims.

MCMULLEN: That's the ironic part; in many cases, Muslims are the main victims of these attacks. That was the case in the bombing of our embassy; a number of the victims were Muslims.

The attacks on our embassies in Kenya and Tanzania were the first real taste that we had gotten of Al-Qaeda. This organization had tried to take down the World Trade Center in 1995, when it detonated a bomb in the garage of one of the buildings, but it didn't succeed. In retrospect, that botched bombing was a wake-up call that went unheeded. The reality was that most of our embassies around the world were vulnerable to attacks by Al-Qaeda and other terrorist groups. Congressional funding was insufficient to meet the security needs of the time. And even if Congress had appropriated adequate funding, OBO (Overseas Building Operation) needed a long lead time to design and build secure embassies.

Q: Prudence Bushnell made the point during my interview with her that Congress never held any hearings on the East Africa embassy bombings. It was like life just went on...

MCMULLEN: That's true. Congress should have held hearings but, for whatever reason, did not do so. I think the Accountability Review Board for Kenya and Tanzania developed lessons learned and made recommendations that hopefully will save lives in the future.

Q: I am interviewing John Lange.

MCMULLEN: I'm sure that John will give you more details on the bombing as well as his views on how Washington handled this issue. John did a terrific job managing the challenge of rebuilding our mission and at the same time managing relations with the Tanzanian government. Perhaps the most positive thing that came out of the bombing was our improved relationship with Tanzania. We were initially concerned because we saw that the bombing in Kenya had created serious strains between Embassy Nairobi and the Kenyan government.

Q: Did relations change with the Tanzanian government because of the bombing?

MCMULLEN: Yes, our relations actually got closer, which was a real surprise; you would think that the Tanzanian government would have blamed us for the bombing, since we were the target of the terrorists. But thankfully that didn't happen. In fact, Tanzanian government officials felt they should have done more to protect us.

We were monitoring the fallout in Nairobi, because we were concerned that we might have to deal with a similar situation. Fortunately, we didn't have a public relations problem like the one that Embassy Nairobi experienced, probably because there were fewer casualties in Tanzania.

In the immediate aftermath of the bombing, we were worried that the Tanzanian government might try to distance itself from us. I give President Mkapa a lot of credit for embracing us rather than taking the easy route and distancing his government from us. Mkapa was a pragmatist and probably realized that it was in Tanzania's best interests to have a close relationship with the United States. Julius Nyerere had been wary of the U.S. during the Cold War, but Mkapa understood that the world had changed with the demise of the Soviet Union. Tanzania didn't need to maintain a non-aligned foreign policy as it had done in the past. I also think Mkapa understood that in this new age of terrorism, Tanzania could be the next target, especially given the country's religious fault lines. It would be easy for a terrorist group to exploit frictions between Muslims against Christians.

For whatever reason, Mkapa decided to cooperate more closely with us on security and law enforcement issues. His foreign minister, Jakaya Kikwete, a Muslim himself and later president, was very helpful. After the dust settled, our relationship with Tanzania improved in areas that had been off limits: intelligence sharing, closer military-to-military ties, and law enforcement cooperation. The bombing could have produced a much different outcome...

Q: Well, it certainly didn't work out that way in Kenya.

MCMULLEN: No, it didn't. So much is driven by optics during crises. The optic of the bombing in Nairobi was the massive loss of life among Kenyans, many times more than Americans. Then we had to evacuate the American casualties to Germany, where they could get adequate medical care. Even though Embassy Nairobi did its best to facilitate the evacuation of seriously injured Kenyans, media coverage focused on the initial evacuation of Americans. The media also focused on Embassy Nairobi's Marine Detachment doing its job in trying to safeguard classified documents that had been blown all over the city's streets.

Thankfully our experience with the Tanzanian government and public opinion was very different. To be honest, I would have predicted the opposite outcome because Kenya had long been one of our allies, whereas Tanzania had been a non-aligned country and sometimes highly critical of the US. Also, Kenyans had closer people-to-people connections with Americans. Tanzanians seemed more likely to say, "We don't want anything to do with Americans."

Q: How long did you stay in Tanzania after the embassy bombing?

MCMULLEN: I left in May 1999, about nine months after the bombing.

Q: Well, I assume you were basically doing clean-up work after the bombing?

MCMULLEN: That's right. Our top priority was to rebuild a functioning embassy, since our operations had been gutted by the bombing. After working out of the chargé's residence for a few days, we moved into the public affairs officer's (PAO) residence, which had an adequate setback from the street. The Pentagon sent out the 50-member U.S. Marines' Fleet Anti-terrorism Security Team (FAST) unit to provide security for our operations. They put concertina wire around the PAO residence, and set up sandbags and .50 caliber machine guns. At that point, we didn't know whether the terrorists were still in the country and whether they might mount another attack. I think the Marine FAST unit stayed until we moved into an interim embassy compound. We worked out of the PAO residence for about six months and then moved into an interim embassy in March 1999.

In the aftermath of the bombing we spent a lot of time dealing with the Tanzanian government on practical matters such as the FBI's investigations. I initially devoted much of my time to accompanying FBI agents on their interviews, since I spoke Swahili. We also spent a lot of time trying to find a place that could serve as an interim embassy. We eventually found a complex of villas that OBO connected with walkways and DS outfitted with the required security features.

Our new ambassador, Charles Stith, arrived at post about a month after the bombing; this absorbed our attention for the next few months. We also had a stream of high-profile visitors, including Secretary Albright, Commerce Secretary Daley, and Under Secretary for Political Affairs Pickering. These visits advanced our goal of deepening relations with Tanzania.

Q: How did you find the support of the State Department?

MCMULLEN: I think Department officials did everything they could to help us but they were operating in new terrain. While our embassy in Beirut had been bombed twice during the 1980s, this near-simultaneous destruction of two embassies represented an unprecedented challenge.

As soon as we set up shop in the chargé's residence, we established an open telephone line with the task force working in the Operations Center. American embassy employees and spouses, including my wife, rotated duty in shifts so that this crucial lifeline was staffed 24/7 for about a month or so. The Ops Center task force was there for us 24 hours a day; we just had to ask them for something and they would follow up.

Within 48 hours after the bombing, Foreign Emergency Support Team (FEST) personnel arrived and they were very helpful; additional support arrived in the following days. At one point, we had about 350 TDYers (temporary duty personnel) from the U.S. military and multiple government agencies assisting us in getting the embassy back up and running. Most of these TDYers left after a few weeks but a residual group stayed until we moved into an interim embassy complex in March 1999.

We were tripping over each other when we were working out of the PAO residence. It was just a small three-bedroom house and there were literally hundreds of people working out of it. Our political/economic section worked out of a small room that had three or four desks and computers. If you got up to go to the bathroom, you lost your computer and seat.

The U.S. Marine Corp response to our situation was truly outstanding. In addition to providing us security with the FAST contingent, the Marines also sent out a psychologist within days of the bombing. He was very good. Initially, no one wanted to meet with him because everyone wanted to pretend that nothing was wrong; plus, we had a ton of work to do. After a couple of days we finally met with him in small groups. It was really interesting and helpful to hear from other people where they were at the time of the bombing and what happened to them afterwards. At about the same time, State Department also sent out a psychiatrist. I think these sessions provided a catharsis and allowed us to catch our breath a bit before moving on.

So the State Department and other agencies did what they could to help, but at the end of the day it's the embassy people who have to pick up the pieces and figure things out. I don't think we had any curtailments, but if you wanted to, you could have curtailed. I think our embassy personnel and their families showed real resilience during the difficult months after the bombing.

While the bombing was traumatic for everyone in the embassy community, it was a particularly frightening experience for our local staff. A few members of our local staff later left the embassy

because of their fear of future terrorist attacks. However, the number of Tanzanians who left was very small and they left after we had largely rebuilt our mission.

As you know, there is always another crisis that absorbs Washington's attention. We might be the crisis today, but tomorrow it's Lebanon or Afghanistan or some other place. It's difficult because those who remain at post have to press forward when it seems like Washington has moved on from the crisis. Our situation was challenging, but it was worse for our colleagues in Nairobi. They had to deal with the massive loss of life and fallout from the Kenyan government.

Q: Well, you left Tanzania about nine months after the embassy bombing, and where did you go?

MCMULLEN: I went to the Operations Center to serve as a SWO (senior watch officer). One of the reasons I wanted to work there was because of my experience in the bombing. The Ops Center had given us great support and was our lifeline in the crucial hours and days after the bombing. I served in the Ops Center from June 1999 until July 2000.

Q: Could you explain what the Ops Center does? And what were some of your more memorable experiences as a SWO?

MCMULLEN: Sure. The Ops Center, in my view, is a unique element of State Department because of its role in managing fast-breaking crises, such as terrorist attacks, military coups, airplane hijackings, and other incidents that affect U.S. interests overseas. The Ops Center is often dealing with multiple, simultaneous crises. During off hours, weekends and holidays, the SWO serves as duty officer for the State Department.

The "Watch," as we referred to the Ops Center, is a 24/7 emergency center. It is normally the first point of contact for our diplomatic missions when there is a serious problem or they need urgent assistance. When our embassy in Tanzania was bombed, the last thing our chargé d'affaires did before leaving the building was to call the Ops Center and let the watch officer know what had happened. Interestingly, when I started at the Ops Center one of the first people that I met was the watch officer who had taken our chargé's call almost a year earlier.

The Ops Center also supports the secretary of state and deputy secretary when they are traveling and when they are placing phone calls to foreign leaders. The Ops Center often serves as the link between the seventh floor and regional bureaus in times of crisis. The Ops Center is part of a secure telephone network of U.S. government agencies, including the intelligence community, Pentagon, and the White House. When the Ops Center receives breaking news that might affect other agencies, it immediately alerts those agencies through this secure telephone network.

It's a fast-paced atmosphere and things can get hectic in a hurry. Sometimes you're dealing with two, three, four crises at a time. Shortly after I came on board, the director of the Ops Center gave all of us new SWOs guidance on how to manage the Watch. He stressed that when you're handling multiple crises, you can't get too involved in any one crisis; otherwise, you will lose control of the situation. He cautioned, "Keep your head above the waterline."

Well, that guidance lasted about five minutes after I started my first time on duty as SWO. It was June 1999, and the Kosovo War was coming to a climactic end. In an unexpected move, a Russian military unit had seized the Pristina airport in Kosovo before NATO forces could get there; this set off alarm bells in Washington. A tense standoff ensued: while NATO controlled the airspace, the Russian field commander refused to cede control of the airport to NATO forces.

This was my first crisis as a newly-minted SWO. Both Secretary Albright and Deputy Secretary Talbott were traveling, which left Under Secretary for Political Affairs Pickering as the acting secretary. I had just begun my shift as SWO when Pickering called to get an update on the situation. After I briefed him on the state of play, he wanted to know the flight times from Russia to Pristina, Kosovo via neighboring countries. He also wanted to know how long it would take to secure flight clearances for U.S. military aircraft to transit the countries surrounding Kosovo. And he wanted to know the transit times for those flights.

When I got off the phone, I asked my team to call our embassies in the region to find out how long it would take to get flight clearances for U.S. aircraft. Meanwhile, I had maps spread out all over my desk trying to figure out the various flight times. Contrary to the advice given by the Ops Center director, I found myself totally immersed in the details of this crisis. Fortunately, there was no other crisis going on at that time; otherwise, I could have been in real trouble. In the end, U.S. officials leaned on Kosovo's neighbors to deny flight clearances for Russian aircraft trying to get to Kosovo. This left the Russian military unit isolated at the Pristina airport, which led to a negotiated resolution to this high-stakes standoff.

As this story suggests, it's difficult to avoid getting involved in a crisis when Department principals are trying to defuse it. In this case the stakes were clearly high for U.S. interests in Kosovo. I did what the acting secretary had asked me to do, but I knew that I could have lost control of the situation if there had been another crisis at that time. This was a learning experience. I was much more careful not to get too involved directly in other crises.

Q: I would imagine that your teams in the Ops Center can be stretched pretty thin sometimes.

MCMULLEN: That's a good point. Our teams in the Ops Center are relatively small, about five officers or so, depending on the situation. Normally there are a couple of more officers on duty during the weekends and holidays, when Department principals use the Ops Center to place calls to their counterparts. So it can get pretty hectic when you're handling more than one crisis.

One of my more memorable experiences working with a small team took place in the fall of 1999, when I was the SWO on duty for the graveyard shift and Secretary Albright was traveling in the Middle East. For several days she had been meeting with PLO (Palestinian Liberation Organization) chief Yasser Arafat and leaders of various countries in the region, including Israel.

In the course of this shuttle diplomacy, Albright had gotten deeply immersed in complicated negotiations, some of them conducted via phone calls placed through the Ops Center. I should have mentioned that the Ops Center is responsible for drafting memoranda of conversations of the Secretary's telephone calls with foreign leaders. In this case, the phone conversations between Secretary Albright and Mideast leaders involved technical aspects of old treaties, such

the Sykes-Picot Agreement in which the British and the French had defined their respective sphere of influence over parts of the collapsing Ottoman Empire.

None of us on the Watch that night had much background in Mideast affairs. And because we were doing the graveyard shift we couldn't consult with NEA (Near Eastern Affairs Bureau) concerning the context of these complicated negotiations that were being conducted by phone through the Ops Center. So our small team had to piece together the details of territorial boundary lines and other technical aspects of these World War I-era treaties. The drafting officer, Rena Bitter, did a superb job in knitting together the eight memoranda of conversation that came out of Secretary Albright's high-stakes telephone diplomacy.

At the same time that we were scrambling to piece together the details of Albright's negotiations, we had to secure time-sensitive flight clearances from six or seven countries so that she could travel to her follow-on stops in Southeast Asia. While we had previously obtained flight clearances from those countries, Albright's extended talks in the Middle East meant that the time windows had expired for the clearances. One of the four officers on our team that night had been a pilot in the U.S. Air Force prior to joining the Foreign Service, so I tapped him to work with the defense attachés in our embassies to secure new flight clearances. This might sound like a simple task but it's not; our defense attachés in those countries have to find an official in the host country's defense ministry, many times during off hours, and get them to issue new flight clearances as quickly as possible. This can sometimes be a time-consuming process because we are often dealing with cumbersome bureaucracies in developing countries. Also, some governments don't necessarily like to respond in a timely way when the U.S. asks for a favor. Fortunately, we were able to secure new flight clearances and Secretary Albright was able to travel to Southeast Asia without any delays. I think that night was one of the most challenging shifts that I worked in the Ops Center, in large part because we were a small team struggling to understand the historical context of these telephone conversations so that we could pull together the eight complicated and detailed memoranda of Secretary Albright's negotiations.

Q: When you have multiple crises going on, and you're working with a small team, can you hand off anything to the regional or functional bureaus?

MCMULLEN: We would often do that but it depends on the situation. I remember on Christmas Eve in 1999, I was the SWO on duty when there was a hijacking of an Air India plane with American citizens on board. While we were working with CA (Consular Affairs Bureau) and our diplomatic missions in India on the hijacking, we got word that there had been a military coup in Côte d'Ivoire. AF (Africa Bureau) was understandably concerned about the safety of our embassy staff, as well as American citizens in the country. So in this situation where we had simultaneous crises, we handed off the hijacking to CA, and we handed off the coup in Côte d'Ivoire to AF, which formed a task force in the Ops Center to monitor the situation.

These are typical tales of life on the Watch. It's a high-adrenaline job. It's exciting and stressful. I really enjoyed my time in the Ops Center but it's not the job for everyone. When I decided to bid on a SWO job, it was the first time in my career that I wasn't bidding on a job that played to my strength, which was political reporting. The Ops Center is one of the few places in the Department that has cutting-edge technology; the telephone system is very sophisticated and

computer-driven. And the learning curve is very steep during the first few months on the Watch. The younger watch officers were much more adept than I was in using this technology.

Q: As a SWO, how do you decide when to consult with senior Department officials?

MCMULLEN: That's an interesting question. It's never easy to call a senior Department official in the middle of the night, especially if there is a possibility that it's a false alarm or something that could have waited until the next day. One of the toughest things for a SWO is trying to make judgments based on incomplete or conflicting information. This is particularly true in dealing with urgent terrorist threats that we receive fairly frequently from our embassies and from various U.S. government agencies. Based on my experience at DIA and State Department, very few of these terrorist alerts turn out to be credible. The danger is that you might make a serious mistake by being too complacent and not alerting the appropriate officials.

Our standard operating procedure during off-hours was to consult first with the director or deputy director of the Ops Center before contacting a senior Department official. In many cases, they would make that contact, or they might ask the SWO to do so. Anyway, it's always a challenge trying to sort out fragmentary information, which often turns out to be inaccurate. That is why sound judgment is probably the most important trait that you can have as a SWO in the Ops Center.

Q: I will point out, although it's not in its job description, the Operations Center is often a place where young and middle career officers are sent who are considered to have real potential because you learn the wiring of the State Department, which is very important.

MCMULLEN: That's true. You learn how the State Department operates, particularly in a crisis. And you learn how it interacts with other U.S. government agencies in a crisis. So, you're right; working in the Ops Center gives you valuable experience as you advance to more senior positions. Rena Bitter, the watch officer who drafted the complicated memoranda of Secretary Albright's conversations with leaders in the Middle East, later went on to become our ambassador in Laos. I'm sure that she still draws on her experience in the Ops Center.

Q: Did you come away from the Ops Center with an idea of a job or an idea of where you wanted to serve?

MCMULLEN: After doing a series of highly operational jobs, I wanted to recharge my batteries and broaden my background a bit, so I decided to go to the National War College.

Q: What were you doing at the National War College?

MCMULLEN: I was a student there from August 2000 until June 2001. The National War College is a 10-month program that allows you to earn a Master of Science degree in national security strategy. Normally, about 12 or so Foreign Service officers attend the War College each year. The goal is to broaden your background so that you are prepared to take on senior positions in the State Department. The U.S. military officers who attend the War College are usually on the fast track to general or admiral. They are an impressive group. We also had a large

contingent of foreign military officers from allied countries; they brought a valuable perspective to our class discussions.

Q: Could you describe what the program is like and what you study at the War College?

MCMULLEN: The overriding goal of the National War College is to give you a broad view of U.S. national security interests around the world. So you take core courses on statecraft; the use of military force as an instrument of power; and the use of non-military instruments of power—diplomacy, economic sanctions, covert action and other policy tools. The objective is to teach you how to assess the most appropriate instrument of power to use in different situations.

The War College stresses the importance of developing a comprehensive strategy, not one that relies solely on a single instrument of power. An emphasis is placed on viewing military force as a policy tool that should be used in extremis, when other options have been exhausted. The military instructors always cautioned against the knee-jerk use of military force, saying: “If every (national security) problem looks like a nail, then every tool is a hammer (military force).”

The program uses case studies and exercises; sometimes these are team efforts that include representatives from across the interagency community as well as foreign military officers. I was on a three-man team that included a U.S. Air Force officer and a Jordanian Army officer. We drafted a case study analyzing how Egyptian President Anwar Sadat used limited war to achieve key political goals in the 1973 Arab-Israeli War. He decided against an all-out war aimed at defeating Israel because he knew that a clear-cut military victory was an unattainable.

In waging a limited war Sadat had several specific political goals: first, he wanted to shore up his own legitimacy; second, he wanted to take back the Sinai Peninsula, which Egypt had lost to the Israelis in the 1967 Six-Day War; and third he sought to normalize relations with Israel. For a variety of reasons, Sadat had concluded that Egypt needed to normalize relations with Israel; however, to do that he had to demonstrate to fellow Egyptians and the Arab world that he was doing so from a position of strength and not simply bowing to Israeli pressure. The case study was an example of how a leader can use limited war to achieve specific and limited policy goals. On the current world scene, Russian President Putin has become quite adept at using the strategy of limited war; his interventions in Georgia, Ukraine and Syria are good examples of using limited military force to achieve limited, specific political goals.

Towards the end of the War College program, students go on field trips to different parts of the world. The idea is to visit a region where you have never served and don't intend to serve; again the goal is to broaden your horizon. I had never visited the Middle East and I had no plans to serve in NEA. So I decided to go on the trip to Oman, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates. I hadn't studied much about the region, except for the research that I had done in drafting the monograph about Ellsworth Bunker's mediation of the Yemen dispute between Egypt and Saudi Arabia. I found that our two-week orientation trip to the Middle East was quite helpful in giving me a better understanding of the dynamics in that region.

I very much enjoyed my time at the War College. In addition to learning a lot from the classroom discussions and our overseas trip, I also learned quite a bit from my colleagues. Our classes

included representatives from virtually every U.S. government agency that is involved in foreign policy and national security. Even though I had experience in dealing with the U.S. military from my time at the Pentagon, the War College gave me a deeper understanding of the culture of each of the military services. We periodically had brown bag lunches where U.S. military officers discussed their service's culture.

Q: I also think that you gain a greater appreciation for the quality of our military officers. The caliber of these officers is impressive, particularly those who reach the higher ranks. The military has quite a winnowing out process in its promotions.

MCMULLEN: That's true. I was very impressed with the quality of military officers at the War College, both the American and foreign officers. When I was at DIA, I worked with quite a few Army FAOs (foreign area officers). They were Latin American specialists who had served multiple times in the region; in some instances they had attended war colleges in Latin America.

These FAOs were fluent in Spanish or Portuguese, and they understood the cultural context of their work. Many of the Army FAOs were also Special Forces, usually Green Berets, who were involved in training foreign military forces. Some of them had worked in a DAO (Defense Attaché Office) or an ODC (Office of Defense Cooperation) in one of our embassies in Latin America. Most of these FAOs had a sophisticated understanding of Latin American politics. They also knew the inner workings and culture of various Latin American military forces. Many of them still had contact with senior officers in various Latin American countries; these contacts were very useful when there were rumors of a possible military coup in one of those countries.

Q: Did you get the feeling there was a sort of think tank at the top of the military looking at problems strategically and from all points of view? Do you think the consensus at the top of the U.S. military is usually pretty well thought out?

MCMULLEN: Yes. I think our senior military leaders normally give a lot of thought to problems before taking a position. They also try to anticipate problems and prepare contingency plans for different scenarios. And after a crisis or military operation, they almost always conduct a post-mortem to extract any lessons learned.

I think the biggest surprise for me in dealing with our military colleagues, especially the Army FAOs, was how well they understood the political culture in different countries. That really surprised me because I didn't realize how much our military focused on other cultures. Many of these officers get advanced degrees in foreign areas studies, in some cases from top-flight schools. They spend a lot of time deployed in different countries studying the language and culture. In this sense, the FAOs are a lot like Foreign Service officers. I was surprised at how similar my duties as a political-military officer were to those of our Army FAOs working in the same embassy. In fact, we often compared notes on issues.

Q: When you were a student at the National War College, could you and your colleagues go to the State Department and talk to desk officers or other officials about the situation in the countries that you were studying at the time?

MCMULLEN: Sure. Before we went on our orientation trip to the Middle East, I arranged for our group to meet with NEA officers who gave us briefings on the region. Interestingly, my military colleagues thought that we got a better perspective from the desk officers than from the more senior officers. In most instances desk officers have a better grasp of what is happening on the ground in each country. Our military colleagues who had worked in the Pentagon also understood the value of getting to know the mid-level officers at different U.S. agencies because they are often the ones who frame policy proposals.

I remember when I took over the Kenya/Uganda desk I spent the first few weeks paying courtesy calls on my counterparts at the CIA, Pentagon, Commerce Department and other U.S. agencies. I wanted to get their perspective on Kenya and Uganda, and I wanted to get to know them personally. This investment of time paid dividends when I had to write the strategy paper for Kenya. I knew who would be our allies in the interagency community. I knew who to enlist for support in OSD (Office of Secretary of Defense), in the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and at the Commerce Department. As a desk officer, you have to build personal relationships and allies. The Pentagon is a powerful player, not just on military issues but also on broader policy matters. The Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy serves as a mini-State Department within the Pentagon. This office has a mix of civil service officers and military officers on two-year rotations. They have a perspective that might not be the same as State Department, but it's a perspective that has to be taken into account in developing policy proposals.

Another thing that many people don't realize is that the Pentagon is not a monolith. There are sometimes serious policy differences within the Pentagon between the OSD and the Joint Chiefs of Staff. This reflects the fact that JCS represents the uniformed services and the various military commands around the world, whereas OSD represents politically-appointed civilian officials in the Pentagon. Many times OSD is more hawkish on an issue than the Joint Chiefs of Staff. I saw these divisions when I worked at the Pentagon in the 1980s. While OSD tended to be more hawkish, JCS was more cautious on Central America. JCS didn't want to get dragged into a war in Nicaragua or El Salvador. They wanted to protect the military institution from another losing cause like Vietnam. As a Foreign Service officer working on interagency issues, it's important to understand that the Pentagon has many players internally and not all are on the same page. This can sometimes work to your advantage in advocating a policy approach.

Q: When dealing with the military, did you find the experience of Vietnam weighed heavily on their thinking?

MCMULLEN: As part of our studies at the War College, we analyzed what went wrong in Vietnam. One of the books that we read was *Dereliction of Duty*, by H.R. McMaster, who later served as Trump's national security adviser. McMaster's thesis was that senior military officers failed in their duty because they didn't challenge civilian political leaders regarding our flawed strategy in Vietnam. I think most U.S. military officers took to heart these lessons.

Actually, I first noticed the impact of Vietnam when I worked at DIA, which was not that long after the Vietnam War. It was evident that Vietnam had left a lot of scar tissue for many military officers who had served there. The legacy of that war had an impact on how we briefed the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Secretary of Defense on the wars in Central America. Senior officers who

had served in Vietnam remembered the dubious KIA (killed in action) statistics during that war and they didn't want us to measure progress in the wars in El Salvador or in Nicaragua by using body counts. I was working at the Pentagon when General William Westmoreland was interviewed on CBS's "60 Minutes" about his time as commander of U.S. forces in Vietnam. The interview became an embarrassment for the Pentagon because it revealed the extent to which the military had doctored the KIA statistics. By that time, Pentagon officials also had come to realize that using those kinds of metrics to measure progress in Vietnam was a huge mistake.

The experience of Vietnam had another impact on how the Joint Chiefs of Staff and other senior military officers viewed the wars in Central America. They sometimes questioned whether our allies—the government forces in El Salvador and the Contras in Nicaragua—had the will to fight, which was a key issue in Vietnam. We see the same issue today in Afghanistan and Iraq—we can train foreign military forces how to fight, but we can't give them the will to fight. That was a hard lesson that our military learned in Vietnam.

Q: Where did you go after the War College?

MCMULLEN: I left the War College in the summer of 2001. I went to Colombia as the Political-Economic Counselor. The Pol/Econ section there was one of the largest in the world at that time. We had about 25 people in the section, including Foreign Service officers, local employees and support staff. It was a fast-paced operation.

Q: What was the situation when you arrived there? Wasn't that a tough time for Colombia?

MCMULLEN: It was a tough time for Colombia when I arrived in Bogotá in July 2001, but in retrospect it probably marked a turning point for the country. We were just beginning to implement Plan Colombia, a strategy aimed at strengthening Colombian institutions, particularly the military. At that time the armed forces faced a serious threat from the FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) and ELN (National Liberation Army).

The FARC and ELN had emerged in the 1960s as Marxist-Leninist guerrilla groups. By the 1980s, however, the FARC had become essentially a drug cartel, and its military capabilities had grown considerably due to the profits from drug trafficking. By the late 1990s, the Colombian military was suffering serious setbacks at the hands of the FARC. Although the ELN was less involved in cocaine trafficking, and less of a threat militarily, its kidnapping of Colombian citizens had created a serious problem for the government.

When the Colombian and U.S. governments developed Plan Colombia in the late 1990s, there was serious concern in Washington about the threats posed by leftist guerrillas, right-wing paramilitaries, and drug traffickers. These illegal armed groups exercised control over large swaths of Colombian territory. Many think tank pundits and journalists were warning that Colombia could become a "failed state." While I think this rhetoric was overblown, it served a useful purpose in pushing our Congress to provide the funding for Plan Colombia, which was a broad-based strategy aimed at strengthening state institutions.

Q: What did Plan Colombia look like when Washington was finished with it?

MCMULLEN: The initial funding for Plan Colombia was skewed towards security assistance because of widespread concern in Washington about the poor performance of the Colombian military. Pentagon officials believed it was important to improve the mobility of Colombian forces, so the assistance package included Huey and Black Hawk helicopters that would allow the Colombian armed forces to take the offensive against the FARC and ELN guerrillas. This front-loading of security assistance was due in part to the high cost of helicopters and the long lead time required for deploying them to Colombia.

When Congress eventually appropriated \$2 billion for Plan Colombia in 2000, the first tranche was heavy on funding for military hardware. This caused heartburn in some circles, especially among human rights groups. They felt that more money should have been channeled to improve the rule of law and human rights in Colombia. While it was true that most of the money was directed towards the Colombian military, there was also substantial funding for USAID programs designed to strengthen the rule of law and protect human rights in Colombia.

In addition to the funding for USAID programs, Congress allocated about \$4 million in aid for State Department to help improve the human rights situation in Colombia. Our political-economic section was responsible for implementing this funding, which was a lot of money for an embassy office that normally doesn't disburse foreign assistance. So we had to figure out how best to spend the money. In the end, we used this aid to complement what USAID was doing on the so-called "soft side" of Plan Colombia. Most of our funds were directed to local NGOs, some that were USAID partners.

Q: Was the money flowing by the time you arrived in Colombia?

MCMULLEN: When I arrived in July 2001, U.S. assistance was just starting to flow. For the Colombian military, it was like trying to drink water from a fire hydrant. Initially it was difficult for the armed forces to absorb this amount of assistance but they adapted well over time.

Of course with this amount of assistance, Colombia rightfully received much greater scrutiny from Washington. Shortly after I arrived at post, the new Under Secretary for Political Affairs, Marc Grossman, led an interagency delegation visit to Colombia that included representatives from the Pentagon, Justice Department, USAID, and other agencies. The goal was to see first-hand how the initial tranche of Plan Colombia money was being spent. A month or so later, in August 2001, Senator Lieberman, chairman of the Homeland Security Committee, visited Bogotá to assess how the National Police were using U.S. funding to combat drug trafficking.

The key question for U.S. officials was the obvious, will Plan Colombia work? There was concern in some sectors of Washington that the Colombians might not be up to task, not just the military but also civilian branches of the government. Fortunately this concern turned out to be unfounded; the Colombians proved to be among the best partners that we have ever had.

Q: Didn't we have a historically close relationship with the Colombians? If I recall, Colombia's military had helped us in the Korean War.

MCMULLEN: That's a good point. Colombians have been friends and allies of ours for a long time. And they did send an infantry battalion to fight with us during the Korean War. I think that our historically close relationship with Colombia was one of the reasons why there was so much concern about the country's deteriorating situation. Many U.S. officials were concerned that a traditional ally was in real trouble. Even though it was an exaggeration to suggest that Colombia was becoming a failed state, this assertion helped to galvanize support in Congress. It also helped that Colombian President Pastrana was viewed in a favorable light in Washington.

Q: Why was there so much skepticism about Colombia?

MCMULLEN: Some of the initial concern stemmed from the fact that Colombia had long suffered from weak state institutions. Since independence in the 1820s, the central government and the armed forces had been weak. As a result of its challenging topography, Colombia had evolved as a loose collection of city-states, separated by mountains and vast open spaces. The cities of Bogotá, Medellín, and Cali evolved as very distinct entities. The residents of those cities felt more loyalty to their local communities than to the nation state.

During my consultations before heading to Colombia, Miguel Vivanco, the head of Human Rights Watch for Latin America, made a comment that captured the roots of Colombia's problems. He observed that Colombia's elites were the only elites in Latin America that had not internalized their country's borders. If something happened in *los llanos* (Colombia's remote savanna), it didn't matter to urban elites because it didn't affect their lives. For Colombia's upper class, *los llanos* might as well be on the far side of the moon. Not surprisingly, it has been in these remote regions that illegal armed groups like the FARC guerrillas have thrived.

This cavalier attitude among elites began to change in the 1980s, when the FARC started growing and improving its military capabilities because of profits from the drug trade. Unlike in the past, the FARC began to pose a threat to the cities, which alarmed Colombia's upper class. U.S. officials also became concerned about the phenomenal growth of the FARC, which grew from a force of about 5,000 guerrillas in the 1960s to an estimated 35,000 fighters in the late 1990s. The FARC had become the largest drug cartel as well as a formidable military force.

I'll relate an interesting anecdote from a U.S. military officer who worked in our Office of Defense Cooperation when I was in Colombia. The anecdote underscores how the armed conflict in Colombia changed radically as the FARC ramped up its military capabilities in the 1980s and 1990s. This U.S. military officer had grown up in Colombia, where his father worked as a businessman. After graduating from college, my colleague joined the U.S. military and returned to Colombia to participate in its elite *Lancers* program, which is similar to our Green Beret program. He told me that when he was training with the *Lancers* in the late 1960s, his unit would often set up camp in Colombia's remote savannas. Only a few miles away, FARC guerrillas would set up camp with their flag flying high. The two forces would spend three or four days camped close to each other but neither side made any effort to attack the other; there was a live and let live atmosphere during those early years of Colombia's conflict. That changed dramatically with the FARC's booming drug revenues, which fueled its growth as a military force in the decade or so before Plan Colombia.

Q: Where was the government in all of this? Didn't it push the military to go after the FARC?

MCMULLEN: As I mentioned, Colombia's elites really didn't care about the FARC in the early years because it was mostly a threat to peasants living in remote regions of the country. That complacency among Colombia's elites changed when the FARC started to pose a threat to their interests. Many wealthy landowners began to fund right-wing paramilitary forces because they lacked confidence in the military's ability to combat this growing guerrilla threat.

The rise of paramilitary forces was a dangerous sign that government forces were losing ground to the FARC guerrillas. Many members of the paramilitary groups had served in the armed forces and later became hired guns for the large landowners. The emergence of these paramilitary forces was problematic because their activities further weakened the authority and the legitimacy of the Colombian government. By the late 1990s, there was deepening concern in Washington that things might be spinning out of control in Colombia. Whether this concern was overblown is something historians will likely debate in future years. In any event, Plan Colombia was designed to shore up the authority of the state by improving the military's ability to combat the guerrillas without the support of right-wing paramilitary forces.

The Colombian military did gradually improve its performance during my time there. The U.S.-supplied Huey and Black Hawk helicopters gave the Army greater mobility, allowing it to go after the FARC. Despite this progress, the human rights situation remained a challenge. As a condition for continued U.S. funding of Plan Colombia, we had to certify to Congress each year that the Colombian military was fulfilling its human rights requirements. Under the Leahy Law, we also had to conduct in-depth vetting of Colombian soldiers and units before they received U.S. training. This law, which dated back to 1997, stipulated that foreign forces receiving U.S. training had to undergo vetting to ensure they had not been involved in human rights abuses. This vetting was labor intensive; we had two members of our Pol/Econ staff devoted solely to vetting the thousands of Colombian soldiers who received U.S. training each year.

Q: If the countryside was the main battleground, was there any funding for development assistance in Plan Colombia that could be directed towards the rural regions?

MCMULLEN: So the initial goal of Plan Colombia was to bolster the military's capabilities and to strengthen the central government. In subsequent tranches of assistance we provided funding for broader institution building, particularly in the countryside where the government historically did not have much of a presence. The aim was to fill that vacuum, which in some areas was being filled by the guerrillas. The truth of the matter was that if you lived in the countryside, there were no government services such as schools and health clinics; you were on your own. That was one of the reasons why the FARC was able to recruit so many young peasants in the rural regions. These kids saw there was no future for them.

As part of Plan Colombia, USAID served as the main implementing agency for our development assistance programs. Once the Colombian military had cleared formerly conflictive areas in the countryside, USAID worked with its partners to establish a functioning government and to build schools and medical clinics. We had a vested interest in Colombia's ability to establish state control over these ungoverned spaces because we saw what had happened in Afghanistan, where

Al-Qaeda was able to hide out in these vast open areas. We didn't want a vacuum to exist in Colombia that could be exploited by terrorist groups that could adversely affect U.S. interests.

Q: Were there any efforts by the government to try to negotiate with the guerrillas?

MCMULLEN: President Pastrana pursued a two-track approach in trying to end the armed conflict. On the one hand, he took the first serious steps to improve the capabilities of the Colombian military. At the same time, he agreed to engage the FARC in negotiations. Some observers have suggested that his decision to talk to the guerrilla leaders might have been an attempt to buy time while the military improved its performance in the field. He also might have wanted to exhaust the option of a negotiated solution, which had a low probability of success.

As a show of good faith, Pastrana gave the FARC what he called a *despeje*, a “demilitarized” zone. This term was a misnomer because FARC forces were allowed to operate within this protected area without having to give up their weapons, but government forces were not allowed to enter the zone. Not surprisingly, the *despeje*, which was the size of Switzerland, became a safe haven for the FARC. The guerrillas used the zone to manufacture cocaine and to receive airdrops of arms and ammunition. The FARC amassed large arms caches, which increasingly worried the Colombian military. While the guerrillas gained strength in this protected zone, the innocent civilians who lived there were forced to grow coca for the FARC's drug trade.

Q: How about the negotiations? Were the guerrillas interested in peace talks?

MCMULLEN: Perhaps predictably, peace talks with the FARC went nowhere. On a number of occasions President Pastrana flew down to the *despeje* for talks but the FARC leader, Manuel Marulanda, didn't even show up. The TV cameras would show a dispirited Pastrana sitting by himself next to an empty chair that was intended for Marulanda. This was humiliating for Pastrana and it was eroding the legitimacy of his government.

Finally, in February 2002, there was an incident in which the FARC hijacked a civilian plane and kidnapped a senator who was on board. The FARC had launched this brazen action from the security of the *despeje* and then took the kidnapped senator to that protected zone. This was the last straw for Pastrana; in a national address that evening he announced that he was abolishing the *despeje* and would send in government forces to retake control of the zone. This was a turning point for Colombia, and particularly for presidential candidate Álvaro Uribe, whose numbers now surged in the election polls. In many ways, Uribe locked up the election on that pivotal day in mid-February; his resounding victory in the May elections was a mere formality.

Q: It sounds like these elections came at an important point. With Plan Colombia in full swing, and now the failed peace talks, what were the candidates proposing to do?

MCMULLEN: When the election campaign began in earnest in the fall of 2001, Álvaro Uribe was not well known nationally and was barely breaking double digits in the polls. As a senator, Uribe had been outspoken about taking the war to the FARC. He argued that peace talks were a waste of time; he insisted that the guerrillas had to be defeated militarily.

I attended several of Uribe's political rallies and thought this guy is the real deal. I remember saying to Ambassador Anne Patterson, "This guy could win the election." She said, "Chris, he is only at 10 or 12 percent in the polls." I said, "I know, but he has a vision." As Pastrana's peace talks foundered, Uribe's poll numbers rose steadily in late 2001 and early 2002. I think that by the time he abolished the *despeje*, Pastrana himself had reached the same conclusion as Uribe: without sustained military pressure on the FARC, peace talks would never go anywhere.

As it turned out Uribe won in the first round of the May 2002 elections with about 54 percent of the vote. This was a resounding mandate for him to implement his hardline military strategy against the FARC. The Colombian people were angry and frustrated with the guerrillas. Colombians were psychologically exhausted by the kidnappings carried out by the FARC and the ELN. Even more than the violence and abuses committed by the guerrillas, the kidnappings had a particularly corrosive effect on public morale.

I don't think that I met a Colombian who didn't have a family member or a friend who had been kidnapped by the ELN or FARC. Sometimes the family paid outrageous ransoms and the guerrillas still killed the hostage. Many hostages were held for years, leaving family and friends in an emotional limbo. Over the course of two decades, hundreds of thousands of Colombians had been touched by these kidnappings, and many were never able to achieve a sense of closure. This collective trauma had a tremendous impact on the Colombian people.

Q: What about the other candidates? Did they have a different proposal to offer?

MCMULLEN: I think that by the spring of 2002, most Colombians were looking for a fresh face and someone who would take aggressive action against the guerrillas. Uribe was a tough, straight-talking politician who had a clear strategy on how to pursue the war. His main challenger, Horacio Serpa, was an old-style politician with few fresh ideas. Serpa also had been tainted by his participation in the government of former President Ernesto Samper, who had ties to drug traffickers. I don't think Serpa himself was involved with drug traffickers, but the baggage of having served in Samper's discredited administration hurt him in the 2002 elections. More than anything, it was the violence and kidnappings carried out by the guerrillas that motivated most Colombians to vote for Uribe in the May 2002 elections.

Q: So the FARC was getting all this money from drug trafficking and kidnapping. What was it doing with it? If they were Marxist-Leninists, what were they doing to help the rest of society? Or were they running around with gold chains; if you're out in the jungle, you can't do a hell of a lot with the money except buy more arms.

MCMULLEN: Well, it's interesting that you ask that question because the FARC leaders used the *despeje*, the demilitarized zone, as a place where they could do whatever they wanted without any government presence. There were no security forces or functioning government institutions. FARC commanders basically acted in the place of government authorities. They also lived like the elites that they purported to be fighting against. We had photos of FARC commanders riding around in Land Rovers and Land Cruisers. These commanders had a lot of money and power in the *despeje* and they flaunted it. Their behavior met the classic definition of conspicuous consumption. Also, as you suggested, they used this enormous territory as a place to receive

airdrops of arms and ammunition. They didn't have to worry about the government security forces confiscating this war materiel.

In contrast to the FARC, leaders of the smaller ELN guerrilla group still retained at least a patina of ideology. The ELN espoused a kind of Catholic liberation theology mixed with Marxist and liberal social justice principles. The FARC had long ago given up any pretense of being a socialist organization seeking to improve the conditions of life for the average Colombian. FARC commanders acted with the same impunity inside the *despeje* that they criticized the elites for doing outside the zone. A number of the FARC leaders had money squirreled away in other countries, such as Switzerland and Venezuela.

Q: Were there any similarities between the paramilitaries and the guerrillas?

MCMULLEN: Unfortunately, there were similarities in the sense that both the guerrillas and the paramilitaries committed horrendous atrocities against civilians, particularly in the countryside. It was difficult for isolated peasant communities to deal with the FARC guerrillas and the AUC (United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia) paramilitaries. As in similar conflicts, both armed groups were trying to gain support from the local population, whether through persuasion or coercion. Most of the foot soldiers in the FARC and the AUC were poor peasants. The FARC had been out in the field for a lot longer than the paramilitaries, so they were better known in some of the rural communities. Both sides used coercive tactics when necessary in recruiting young peasants. Not surprisingly, the abuses that the two armed groups committed in the countryside were counterproductive; they turned people against their cause.

When the Colombian military was struggling to keep the leftist guerrillas at bay, large landowners turned to paramilitary forces to battle the FARC and ELN. The paramilitaries essentially filled the role of government forces in large parts of the countryside. The paramilitaries were an undisciplined force that caused more problems for the government than they resolved. The human rights abuses carried out by AUC forces worsened the situation in the countryside. By the time Uribe took office, many Colombians believed that it was necessary to get rid of the paramilitaries as well as the guerrillas. He also came to realize that he would have to dismantle the paramilitaries if he were to achieve success in going after the guerrillas.

I think Uribe understood that the government had to establish supremacy over all the armed actors, not just the guerrillas. He recognized that the legitimacy of his government depended on the state establishing a monopoly over the use of force. Fortunately, the Colombian military was improving quickly and was able to reestablish government control over large swaths of the country. As a result, Colombians were increasingly confident that government forces could take on the guerrillas without the help of the paramilitaries. So, with Washington's encouragement, Uribe eventually pushed for demobilization of the AUC, which was a major step forward. This allowed the military to focus its resources on going after the FARC. The challenge for Uribe was to develop a viable strategy to achieve that goal.

Q: So what was the strategy that Uribe pursued?

MCMULLEN: During the two months between the May 2002 elections and when I departed post in July, we held meetings with Uribe and his security advisers to discuss strategy. These informal discussions included members of our country team who dealt with security issues. The conversations centered on how best to fight the FARC. The key question was whether the Colombian military should go after the top FARC leaders, which would leave the organization leaderless. Alternatively, would it be better to go after the FARC mid-level commanders, who led the troops in the field and worked the crucial logistics of the drug trade that brought in the money. There was also discussion of waging a campaign aimed at encouraging the FARC's foot soldiers to defect. Many of these combatants were peasant kids who had been force-recruited by the FARC. The assumption was that they might be more inclined to defect than the field commanders, leaving the FARC with fewer foot soldiers to continue the conflict.

In the end, Uribe and his security team decided to pursue a strategy aimed at taking out the FARC's top leadership. Because of the guerrilla group's top-down structure, Uribe and his advisers believed the FARC couldn't function without its most senior commanders. So the military started targeting senior leaders of the FARC, which turned out to be a very effective strategy. The military also pursued a parallel campaign to encourage defections, which prompted widespread desertions among lower-ranking FARC combatants. This two-pronged strategy eventually forced the FARC to the negotiating table, and several years ago the two sides signed an agreement that removed the FARC guerrillas from the battlefield.

Q: How, does one go after a guerrilla leader? I mean, don't you have to go through all the guerrilla troops in order to get to their leader?

MCMULLEN: A key factor in the success of this strategy was the Colombian military's ability to locate the FARC leaders in the country's vast jungles and mountains. This was not an easy task but the military steadily improved its intelligence collection capabilities, particularly its ability to intercept FARC communications. This allowed the military to locate the FARC leaders with a fairly high degree of accuracy.

The Colombian military also improved its capabilities to act on intelligence in a timely way, sometimes with airstrikes and other times with surgical operations by elite Army units. They used the Black Hawk helicopters that we had provided as part of Plan Colombia, inserting small units into remote areas where FARC leaders were located; depending on the situation the military would sometimes capture or kill the entire guerrilla unit.

Colombian Special Forces also became much more effective in operating at night, which gave them an advantage over the FARC. At the same time, the Colombians military learned lessons from what U.S. forces had done during the Iraq War. For example, Colombian forces replicated the fusion cells that we had used so effectively against insurgents and terrorists in Iraq; this involved analyzing various sources of intelligence to support Special Forces that were able to act on the information in a timely way.

I think FARC leaders were caught off guard by the government's tactics and strategy; they didn't realize how much the military had improved since the 1990s, when the guerrillas had dictated the

terms of engagement. Colombian Special Forces in particular had become extremely effective at combining real-time intelligence, airpower, and airborne troops to target top FARC leaders.

Q: How much did our assistance influence the Colombian military's performance?

MCMULLEN: Our military assistance was definitely an important factor in the Colombian military's improved capabilities, especially our provision of helicopters that gave the Army mobility to go after the FARC in their remote strongholds. The Colombian military also learned tactical lessons from U.S. Special Forces that had served in Iraq, such as the use of fusion cells to combine actionable intelligence with quick-strike operations.

Perhaps the most striking thing about the Colombian military's improved performance was its willingness to stand and fight. This trait was lacking prior to our engagement under Plan Colombia. I give the Colombians a lot of credit because they stepped up to the plate. We have trained troops around the world—Afghanistan, Iraq, South Vietnam—and most of these militaries learned how to fight but lacked the will to do so. Colombia's armed forces were different; they were willing to hunt down and initiate engagements with the FARC.

Q: Was Venezuela a player at all in the Colombian conflict? Was Hugo Chávez an actor?

MCMULLEN: Definitely so, and he was not a helpful player for the Colombian government. Chávez became president of Venezuela in 1999, when Colombia was at its low point in the war against the FARC and ELN. He quickly became a problem for Colombia because of his active support for the leftist guerrillas. He also was closely aligned with the Cubans, who had been long-time supporters of the FARC, and even more so the ELN. With Venezuela's vast oil reserves, and the high price for oil at that time, Chávez had a lot of money to throw around.

From the outset of his presidency, Chávez provided sanctuary for the FARC and ELN guerrillas, who moved freely across the Colombia-Venezuela border. Some of the top FARC leaders moved around openly in Caracas, the Venezuelan capital, at times even giving press conferences. While the Colombian government was well aware of this problem and regularly lodged protests with Chávez, it couldn't go after the guerrillas across the Venezuelan border.

A related problem was the proliferation of drug trafficking and corruption in Venezuela. The Venezuelan National Guard became heavily involved in illegal activities along the Colombian border. They not only turned a blind eye to the Colombian guerrillas crossing the border, but they also allowed Venezuela to be used as a major transit point for drug trafficking by the FARC and other illegal armed groups.

The close cooperation between Chávez and the Colombian guerrillas came to light in March 2008, when Colombian forces killed the FARC's number two leader, Raul Reyes. His captured computer files and other documents revealed a close relationship between Chávez and the FARC leadership. Chávez continued to be a thorn in the side of the Colombian government until his death in 2013. His hand-picked successor, Nicolás Maduro, has remained antagonistic towards the Colombian government, viewing it as too closely aligned to the United States.

The spillover effect of Colombia's armed conflict also had an adverse impact on neighboring Ecuador, which served as a sanctuary for the FARC guerrillas. Colombia's southern border was very porous; and the rugged terrain in that region complicated Ecuador's ability to exercise control along the border. For whatever reason, Ecuador's military also would sometimes turn a blind eye to the Colombian guerrillas; it wasn't clear whether this was done for money or because the country's president, Rafael Correa, was sympathetic to the FARC cause.

Q: How was the legal system in Colombia during the time you were there?

MCMULLEN: Like most Latin American countries, Colombia's judiciary was based on the Napoleonic Code, which is different from our Anglo-Saxon legal system. With the implementation of Plan Colombia, however, Colombia began to change its system to one that is closer to our own. With USAID assistance, the government gradually began moving towards a system based on precedent, oral arguments, and trial by jury.

As part of Plan Colombia, USAID helped create *casas de justicia* (houses of justice) that were aimed at resolving civil cases in a faster and fairer manner. These civil courts became very popular because they were more efficient than the cumbersome traditional courts. Colombia's courts were backlogged with civil cases that could be resolved easily in these new *casas de justicia*. This in turn reduced the number of overall cases clogging the traditional courts, which could then focus on more serious criminal cases.

While Colombia's judiciary still has its flaws, it is fairly effective by Latin American standards, and it is getting better. The level of corruption in the legal system is not as bad as most countries in the region. I found that many Colombian judges and prosecutors demonstrated incredible courage in prosecuting drug traffickers and other dangerous criminals. Also, Colombia is much better than most Latin American countries in conducting and using forensic analysis to prosecute cases. Even with the substantial assistance that we provided to El Salvador through FBI and other DOJ training, the Salvadorans still struggle with the use of forensics to prosecute criminal cases. In contrast, Colombians are pretty good at using forensics. In part, this difference in capabilities reflects the higher level of education among Colombians.

Q: How much did Plan Colombia help in stemming the flow of drugs to the U.S.?

MCMULLEN: That's a fair question, since one of the key reasons we supported Plan Colombia was to combat drug trafficking. In my view, this aspect of the initiative fell far short of our goal. In the early years of Plan Colombia, there was a notable reduction in coca production, and some progress in combating the trafficking of cocaine. In recent years, however, this progress has been reversed. We have seen a major uptick in coca production in Colombia, which is likely due to the government's decision to curtail aerial spraying to eradicate coca production. We also have seen the flow of Colombian cocaine shift to routes through Central America and Mexico. This shift in the pattern of drug trafficking is attributable to the "balloon effect" that critics had warned about; as a result of squeezing the drug balloon in Colombia, traffickers have shifted to using other countries in the region to ship cocaine to the U.S.

On the positive side of the ledger, I believe that Plan Colombia succeeded in achieving its primary goal: that is, the strengthening of government institutions, including the police and military. The central government in Colombia is much more capable today than it was prior to Plan Colombia. With the improved performance of the security forces, violence has diminished dramatically, and the government has established a presence in previously ungoverned regions of the country. This in turn has allowed the government to build schools and health clinics that were previously unavailable to the vast majority of the country's poor rural population.

Q: So where does this leave us with Plan Colombia? Did it help bring peace?

MCMULLEN: Yes. I think the assistance that we provided through Plan Colombia was a crucial factor in the military's successful strategy of eroding the FARC's fighting capabilities as well as the morale of its forces. And the military pressure that the Colombian government brought to bear on the FARC was decisive in forcing the guerrillas to the negotiating table. From the outset, the military pressure was designed to achieve a specific political goal. The idea was to compel the FARC leaders to engage in serious negotiations that would lead to peace and the integration of the guerrillas into the political process. Once the Colombian armed forces shifted the strategic balance, it became clear that neither side would be able to achieve a clear-cut military victory, so there had to be a negotiated solution.

After protracted negotiations, the government and the FARC finally signed a peace agreement a few years ago. Almost immediately there was controversy over the terms of this agreement. Some Colombians, including former President Uribe, believed the peace agreement was too lenient with FARC guerrilla leaders, whose forces had committed many atrocities over the years. Of course the AUC paramilitaries and the Colombian security forces also had committed their share of atrocities. The problem was that the Colombian government faced a dilemma that is inherent in all negotiations aimed at ending a vicious civil conflict: in order to achieve peace, there would have to be a broad amnesty for FARC combatants and others who had committed atrocities during the war. In other words, there had to be a trade-off between achieving lasting peace and carrying out true justice. It's impossible to achieve both goals. I think that most Colombians were tired of war and believed this trade-off was worth it. In the end, President Juan Manuel Santos argued that the agreement, flawed though it might be, was the best means of bringing an end to the bloody conflict that had plagued the country for some 50 years.

Q: When did you leave Colombia and where did you go next?

MCMULLEN: I left Colombia in July 2002. Our ambassador-designate for Panama, Linda Watt, asked me if I would leave Colombia a year early to go to Panama as her DCM (deputy chief of mission). Even though I very much enjoyed my job in Colombia, it was an opportunity that I couldn't turn down. It's a curious thing. As Foreign Service officers, we aspire to become DCM, consul general, or ambassador. Yet the job that I enjoyed the most was serving as a political officer, especially in places like Colombia, El Salvador and Nicaragua, where the stakes were high for U.S. interests. As political officers, we were on the front line, offering our assessment of the situation on the ground, which allowed Washington to adjust its policy approach accordingly.

Q: Could you explain what the situation was like in Panama? It sounds like you arrived there after we turned over the Panama Canal and our military bases that were in the former Canal Zone. Also, was there a legacy of Panama's history of once being part of Colombia?

MCMULLEN: In terms of Panama's legacy of once being part of Colombia, I didn't see much there, except for the fact that there were quite a few Colombian businessmen operating in Panama. However, that probably reflected proximity as much as anything else. Curiously, I never sensed any special bond between Panamanians and Colombians, perhaps because their cultures are not as close as you might think. Colombia's culture is more Andean than Caribbean, except on its north coast, where the culture is closer to that of Panama's.

I thought it was interesting that Colombia never harbored any revanchist sentiments over its loss of Panama. It could easily have felt aggrieved because it lost Panama as a result of our intervention there. As Teddy Roosevelt famously said, "We stole it fair and square." Instead, Colombia accepted the reality of the situation and moved on. And as you noted earlier, it became a close ally of the United States. I think this reflects the pragmatism of Colombians.

Anyway, when I arrived in Panama in August 2002, there were a number of issues that we had on our plate. Foremost was our effort to establish a new relationship with Panama after the turnover of the canal and our military bases in the Canal Zone. As you know, our history with Panama goes back to its independence in 1903. During the period between independence and Panama's recovery of the Canal Zone, our relationship was quasi-colonial in the sense that our ambassador to Panama and the Commander of Southcom (U.S. Southern Command), which was headquartered in the Canal Zone, acted as sort of dual proconsuls. In fact, the Southcom commander arguably exercised greater authority than our ambassador for much of that period.

Panama was finally made whole on December 31, 1999, with the turnover of the canal and closure of our military bases there. This marked the full implementation of the Panama Canal treaties that Ellsworth Bunker had negotiated some 20 years earlier. Under the terms of these treaties, Panama was responsible for defending against internal threats to the canal, while we were responsible for defending against external threats to the canal's neutrality. This division of labor facilitated U.S. Senate passage of the treaties, which faced vocal opposition among some senators. It was a clever formulation that preserved the symbolism of Panama's sovereignty over the canal, while preserving our ability to keep the canal open to U.S. ships in times of war.

Q: So, I assume that our relationship with Panama had improved now that the contentious issue of the canal and our military bases was behind us?

MCMULLEN: That was pretty much the case when I got there. We had cordial relations with the government of President Mireya Moscoso, who had a mostly favorable view of the U.S. and was generally helpful on key issues. The problem was that her Arnulfista Party was built around political patronage, which translated into rumors of corruption that dogged the Moscoso government. It also meant that patronage considerations often drove government decision-making. Many issues were viewed through the prism of how a decision would serve the party's interests rather than the national good. As a result, our relationship with the Moscoso government tended to be transactional. We wanted to change this dynamic and build a broader

strategic relationship based on mutual respect, mutual understanding, and shared interests. However, this goal proved challenging because the Moscoso government generally took a short-term view of things.

With the successful turnover of the canal and military bases, we wanted to establish a normal relationship with Panama. At the same time we wanted to make sure that U.S. interests were taken into account by the Panamanian government. There was still some lingering anti-U.S. sentiment in leftist circles in Panama, but it wasn't a major issue. Some of this sentiment was associated with our invasion of Panama in 1989, which ousted military dictator Manuel Noriega.

For the most part, the Moscoso government was accommodating to U.S. interests in Panama. This was certainly true with respect to bilateral cooperation in combating drug trafficking. The DEA had a robust presence in Panama and maintained close ties with its local counterparts. Some of DEA's activities in Panama involved things that its agents were not able to do in Colombia. The Moscoso government also was cooperative in monitoring and seizing drug shipments coming from Colombia and transiting through Panamanian waters.

One of our priorities now that Southcom had moved its headquarters to Miami was to make sure that U.S. military forces were still able to use Panama for jungle training exercises. Given the sensitivities surrounding U.S. military activities in Panama, we tried to do things in a way that did not seem like our military forces were retaking the Canal Zone, where some of these exercises were conducted. We were well aware of the optics of any highly visible U.S. military activities and wanted to avoid embarrassing the Panamanian government. For most part, we were able to keep these periodic military exercises under the public radar.

There were other issues involving the U.S. military that required delicate handling with the Panamanian government. For example, there was always a robust U.S. security presence whenever sensitive Navy assets transited the Panama Canal. This was shortly after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, so Pentagon officials were concerned about the vulnerability of U.S. naval vessels throughout the world. In the case of the Panama Canal, once a vessel enters the waterway the captain must turn over control to a Panamanian captain who navigates it through the canal. Giving up command of a vessel is a difficult thing for U.S. Navy captains to do; and they only do it when there are adequate U.S. safeguards in place. So we tried to maintain our normal level of security for these vessels without having a highly visible U.S. military presence that would embarrass the Panamanian government

We also wanted to normalize some U.S. military activities that had become sensitive issues because of Panamanian sovereignty concerns. For instance, we wanted to resume the civic action projects that the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers carries out in many other countries. These civic action projects provide a real benefit for poor communities in rural areas. The U.S. military engineers generally travel to remote areas of the country to build health clinics and schools for local communities. At the same time the U.S. Army engineers gain valuable experience working as a unit overseas. The Pentagon normally wants our soldiers to be able to carry weapons and wear their uniforms when they are deployed abroad. But the Moscoso government didn't want that kind of visibility. So we worked to lower the public profile of our troops, while we also sought to ensure positive press play for the humanitarian projects. It was a balancing act.

Q: Having handed over the canal and our military bases, were there any other contentious issues with Panama?

MCMULLEN: One of the principal irritants in our relationship was the legacy issue of cleaning up the UXO (unexploded ordnance) in the U.S. military's former firing ranges in the Canal Zone. The Moscoso government didn't think that we had done enough in cleaning up the former artillery and mortar ranges. Not surprisingly, the Pentagon had a different view, maintaining that the U.S. had done more than enough. The central issue was whether the U.S. military had cleaned up the UXO to a sufficient depth in the soil. The Panamanians wanted us to double the depth of what we had already cleaned up, a demand that caused heartburn in the Pentagon.

This demand by the Moscoso government raised our suspicions and concerns because there were credible reports circulating that prominent Panamanian developers wanted to buy the land around our former firing ranges so that they could build luxury hotels, condos and resorts inside the Canal Zone. Given the problem of corruption in Panama, we couldn't rule out the possibility that this demand was tied to sweetheart deals between government officials and developers seeking to exploit the newly-cleared areas. This was worrisome because the Canal Zone belongs to a large and fragile ecosystem; its rainforests form part of a huge catchment area for the many rivers that feed the canal. Any degradation of this ecosystem could threaten the viability of the canal, which depends on massive amounts of fresh water. So for us it was not just the cost of a deeper clean-up of the UXO, it was also an environmental issue that involved the operation of the Panama Canal. At that time, one of USAID's few remaining development projects in Panama was an environmental program aimed at preserving the ecosystem of the Canal Zone.

We were also involved in difficult negotiations to clean up UXO on San José Island, which was used by the U.S. for bombing practice during World War II. The Pentagon made several reasonable offers for further cleanup of San Jose Island as well as the firing ranges in the Canal Zone. The Moscoso government turned down these offers, leaving us at an impasse.

Throughout the two years of negotiations, the Panamanian press focused almost exclusively on the UXO question. Whenever our ambassador, Linda Watt, gave an interview with local journalists, they inevitably asked, "What is the U.S. doing about cleaning up the firing ranges?" After the Panamanian government rejected several reasonable offers, Ambassador Watt wisely decided she was no longer going to answer questions about the UXO issue. She told the press, "We made several good faith offers that your government turned down. We're not going to make any more offers; we're moving on, case closed." It was a gutsy decision and the right one; the Panamanian press eventually stopped asking us about the issue.

Q: Did the problems in Colombia have much of an impact on Panama?

MCMULLEN: There were several ways in which the spillover from Colombia's conflict affected Panama. Foremost was the FARC guerrillas' use of the Darien region for logistical and other purposes. The Darien is a remote and ungoverned region along the porous Panama-Colombia border. FARC guerrillas took advantage of the region's tough terrain to get medical treatment for

its forces as well as for R&R (rest and relaxation). The AUC paramilitaries also used the Darien region as a sanctuary when they were under pressure inside Colombia.

In response to our urging, the Panamanian government tried to improve its security posture in the Darien, particularly along the Colombian border. But this was a challenge for Panama because it had abolished its armed forces after the ouster of military dictator Manuel Noriega in 1989. As a result, it was the Panamanian police that had to confront the well-armed and combat-hardened FARC forces that operated in the Darien. Plus, Panama's police forces lacked the mobility, particularly helicopters, to respond in a timely way to FARC incursions. So the Darien became a de facto sanctuary for FARC forces, and at times for AUC paramilitaries as well.

Another effect of the spillover from Colombia was the use of Panama to launder money from the drug trade. I remember one of our DEA agents saying, "Panama is a perfect place to launder drug money. If you're trying to launder money, the best way to do it is through casinos, construction, or tourism. Panama has all those things." We saw an explosion of construction in Panama when I served there. Some of this construction was legitimate business, driven by the country's economic growth. However, some of the construction boom was likely tied to Colombian drug traffickers laundering their money in Panama.

I remember there was a shopping mall near our residence that had luxury stores that sold Gucci, Prada, and other high-end products. Whenever we went into the mall, there were never any customers in these stores. They seemed to exist largely to launder Colombian drug money. The store owners used fake sales receipts to launder the cash. Right down the street from this mall was a popular casino that was widely suspected of laundering Colombian drug money.

Q: Was there anything we could do to combat corruption in Panama?

MCMULLEN: Well, besides the problem of money laundering, Panama was plagued by widespread graft. And we routinely advocated publicly for anti-corruption reforms, which resonated with the Panamanian press and civil society. We also had some policy tools, albeit limited, to use in cases of graft that adversely affected U.S. interests. For instance, we took advantage of a State Department program run by INL (International Narcotics and Law Enforcement) and Consular Affairs aimed at combating corruption in foreign governments. Under the terms of this program, an embassy could request the revocation of a foreign official's visa based on corruption. To do so, the embassy had to demonstrate that the corrupt act had adversely affected U.S. interests. For instance, an embassy might argue that a U.S. company had lost a bid because of corruption by the foreign official.

Q: I guess that a government official might want to take his family to Disney World. And his wife says, "You can't go because you got yourself on their list." I'm sure that must really hurt.

MCMULLEN: Exactly. It might seem funny to the average American but revoking the visa of a foreign government official really does hurt. As you know, Latin Americans love to shop in Miami and take their kids to Disney World. It's also extremely embarrassing for government officials to have their U.S. visa revoked. Even though our privacy policies prohibit an embassy

from making these visa revocations public, it doesn't take long for word to get out on the street that the U.S. has revoked the visa of a host government official.

During my three years in Panama, I think we probably revoked the visas of about seven or eight government officials, or in some cases former government officials. The most notable case was the visa revocation of a Supreme Court justice. We also revoked the visa of an official who had been in charge of the bidding for a contract to build a second bridge over the Panama Canal. The bidding had taken place before I arrived in Panama but there was compelling evidence that the European company that beat out its U.S. competitor had paid a bribe to this Panamanian official.

I don't know if we are still using this program but I had some qualms about it. While I think it can be a useful tool to deter corruption, it also has the potential to be abused. The problem is that you are sometimes relying on incomplete or conflicting information in trying to make your case. So you can't always be certain that the allegations of corruption are true. In the handful of visas that we revoked in Panama, I think there was sufficient evidence to justify the revocations.

Q: Was the Moscoso government in power the whole time that you were in Panama?

MCMULLEN: No, there were elections in May 2004, which brought the PRD (Democratic Revolutionary Party) back into power. About a year or so prior to those elections, we made an effort to improve the embassy's relations with the PRD, which had been strained for some years. I initially met with a group of PRD leaders in late 2002; the main goal was to reestablish rapport with the party and to enlist its support for the first U.S. military civic action program since the turnover of the canal and our military bases. In the end, the PRD agreed not to criticize the Moscoso government's approval of these U.S. military projects, which was a major step forward.

The PRD's presidential candidate, Martin Torrijos, was the son of former strongman Omar Torrijos, who had clashed with Washington prior to the turnover of the canal and U.S. military bases in Panama. While some of Omar Torrijos' strident rhetoric was bravado, there was a small but vocal anti-U.S. faction in the party. Fortunately, the PRD's new leadership under Martin Torrijos was much more moderate and wanted to improve relations with the United States.

Shortly before Torrijos declared his candidacy, I met with Samuel Lewis Navarro, a senior PRD official who became the foreign minister and vice president. He was a smart, sophisticated guy. His father had been foreign minister during the Panama Canal negotiations and had been close to U.S. negotiator Ellsworth Bunker. When I met with Samuel, he proposed that we work together to repair frayed relations between the U.S. and the PRD. We focused on how to advance our mutual security interests, but in a way that would not provoke a backlash by Panamanians concerned about the country's sovereignty.

We also wanted to preempt new demands regarding further clean-up of UXO on San José Island and in the former U.S. firing ranges. We told PRD leaders, "Look, the previous government turned down the best proposals we were able to offer on the UXO issue. So you can either accept what the Pentagon is willing to do on this issue, or we can move on." Thankfully, the PRD decided to move on, removing a major irritant in our bilateral relationship.

Q: I know that Panama had gone through a very difficult period with Manuel Noriega before our troops ousted him. I also know that there were lingering concerns after our military intervention. How was the political situation as far as the fairness of Panama's elections?

MCMULLEN: Well, the May 2004 elections were free and fair; neither domestic nor foreign observers found any serious irregularities. Our embassy followed the campaign closely and sent out observers to monitor the voting, which went off without major problems.

As I recall, the PRD candidate, Martín Torrijos, won a plurality of about 47 percent of the vote. His father, Omar Torrijos, had been popular among Panamanians, and some of that popularity carried over to Martín, who was young, telegenic, and quite capable. Despite past differences with the PRD, we were able to work well with the Torrijos government on a range of issues

Foreign Minister Samuel Lewis Navarro was particularly helpful to us in the OAS (Organization of American States). When Washington was touting our preferred candidate in a contentious dispute over who would serve as the next secretary general of the OAS, Panama supported us and tried to enlist other countries. This was a notable change because the PRD had not been helpful on such issues in the past. As a left-leaning party, the PRD government had credibility with other leftist governments in the region when it went to bat for us. We also worked closely with the Torrijos government on important issues related to the security situation in Colombia.

Q: So, you have a new government headed by the son of strongman Omar Torrijos. What was that relationship like? After all, we had some rough patches with the elder Torrijos before handing over the Panama Canal.

MCMULLEN: That's true. Omar Torrijos had caused problems for us, as had his PRD party during the rule of Manuel Noriega and Ernesto Perez Balladares. For this reason, we wanted to normalize our relations with the PRD. Fortunately when Martin Torrijos won the May 2004 elections, he and his faction of the PRD had the same goal with respect to the United States.

One of the first things we did with the incoming Torrijos government during the transition period in the summer of 2004 was to help his team develop a national security strategy. With the dismantling of the Panamanian Defense Forces in 1989, the country's new civilian police force had acquired some quasi-military functions. The new Torrijos government wanted to find ways to use the police more effectively in combating drug trafficking and in controlling the border with Colombia. A key question was: How does a civilian police force carry out military duties?

As part of our support for the Torrijos government, we arranged for the visit of a team from WHINSEC (Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation), which is based at Fort McNair in Washington, DC. The team was made up of Spanish-speakers with extensive experience in security affairs. They put together a week-long workshop for Torrijos nominees who would be filling important security positions in the government. The workshop was quite helpful; the WHINSEC team focused on how to put together a defense budget, how to develop a national security strategy, and how to craft a public relations campaign to support the strategy. This initiative got us off to a good start with the incoming Torrijos government.

Q: Where was Panama on State Department's radar during this period?

MCMULLEN: Well, even after the turnover of the canal and our military bases, Panama is still important to U.S. interests in a number of ways—geopolitically, economically and militarily. With that said, Panama is not a country that receives a lot of attention from U.S. policy makers. This is partly because it doesn't create major problems for Washington. While there have been strains in our bilateral relations in the past, especially during the governments of Omar Torrijos and Manuel Noriega, it's not a country that demands a lot of attention like Colombia, Venezuela or Mexico. That in itself is a net plus in Washington.

Although it's a small country, Panama will always be important for U.S. interests because of its strategic location as a land bridge between Central and South America. The Panama Canal is also a crucial sea link between the Caribbean Sea and the Pacific Ocean. With the rise of China, the canal has become a critical conduit for the massive trade flow from Asia to the East Coast of the United States. And despite periodic disputes, Panama remains a reliable ally and friend.

In many ways Panama flies below Washington's radar, but that's alright because it's a pleasant place to live and work. As a testament to the country's quality of life, many of the so-called "Zonians," Americans who lived in the Canal Zone prior to its turnover in 1999, have come back to live in Panama.

Q: I was going to ask, were there many "Zonians" living in Panama when you were there?

MCMULLEN: I was surprised by the number of former Zonians I met during my time in Panama. Many of them had returned to the U.S. after the signing of the Canal treaties. They were young when they left the Canal Zone, and now they're older and have decided to retire in Panama. They had spent their childhood in the "socialist paradise" of the Canal Zone. And many of them had fond memories of attending Balboa Academy, which was the American school in the Canal Zone.

Most of the Zonians had left Panama during the transition between U.S. and Panamanian control of the Canal Zone. They were angry with the U.S. government because they felt they had been "sold out" by Washington. Over time, however, they came to recognize the new realities and decided to return to Panama. They were returning because of nostalgia and the economic incentives that Panama was offering to Americans who wanted to live there.

The Panamanian government welcomed the former Zonians and other Americans. It offered them tax incentives. For instance, you could buy a house and not pay the tax rates that you would have to pay elsewhere; you were allowed to bring in a car tax free. And the medical care in Panama was very good. Most of the Panamanian doctors were U.S. trained and fluent in English. In fact, Johns Hopkins University opened a hospital there with a local partner. So the quality of healthcare was quite high.

Q: What about the Panama Canal? There was concern in some circles in the U.S. about what would happen to the canal after it was turned over to Panama. Have they maintained it?

MCMULLEN: That's true; there was a lot of opposition to turning over the canal. I remember the U.S. Senate debate over the Panama Canal treaties, when a number of senators expressed concern about Panama's ability to administer the canal. As things turned out, Panama has proved up to the task. Our embassy followed this issue closely and we were really impressed with Panama's stewardship of the canal. In contrast to when we ran the canal, it is now a money-making operation. This serves as an incentive to effective operation of the canal. The rate of accidents in the canal has actually declined significantly since the transfer of administration to Panama.

Interestingly, Panama Canal Authority officials give credit to the U.S. for helping to facilitate a smooth transition in administration. From the opening of the canal in 1914, until its transfer to Panama in 1999, the former Panama Canal Commission had been run by Americans. Not surprisingly, there was concern that the loss of American expertise might endanger the operations of the canal. To prevent this problem, the Canal treaties included a 20-year transition during which Americans and Panamanians would work side by side in the daily operations of the canal. So 10 years after the signing of the treaties, a Panamanian took over as head of the Canal Commission and an American served as his deputy in order to provide continuity. This was duplicated throughout the Canal Commission so that an American would mentor every Panamanian employee, even down to the tugboat captains who guided the ships through the canal.

When I was in Panama the head of the Canal Authority, Alberto Alemán, was a Texas A&M graduate in engineering and a very capable guy. His staff was also a talented group. It was under Alemán's leadership that Panama decided to expand the canal. Since my time there, Panama has widened the canal to accommodate post-Panamax ships, which are the huge cargo vessels that carry goods from China to U.S. East Coast ports. Panama also has added another set of locks on the Caribbean side. The locks are more efficient today because they now use a hydraulic system to open and close the lock's gates. The canal still uses the original gates that were built in Pittsburgh in the early 20th century. It's an amazing system; about 54,000 gallons of fresh water are used for every ship transit. While many environmentalists were concerned about plans to expand the canal, Panama was able to overcome the environmental and engineering challenges of widening and modernizing the canal. The Panama Canal is in good hands, and it's still a magnificent feat of engineering.

Q: You left Panama when?

MCMULLEN: I left Panama in May 2005. After taking a transition course from Spanish to Portuguese at the Foreign Service Institute, I arrived in São Paulo, Brazil in September 2005.

Q: Consul General in São Paulo was always considered to be a posting for someone on the way to becoming an ambassador. I mean it's such an important post.

MCMULLEN: I really enjoyed serving as Consul General in São Paulo. It was a terrific job. I think it was our third largest consulate in the world at that time, I don't know how it ranks now but I suspect it is still one of our largest and most important consulates. I think we had 10 U.S. agencies and about 320 employees, including Americans and Brazilians.

Q: São Paulo is considered the business capital of South America. What was the nature of your relations with American companies based there?

MCMULLEN: As you noted, São Paulo is the economic engine of South America; virtually every U.S. Fortune 500 company has its regional headquarters there. Consequently, one of my most important responsibilities as consul general was to advocate on behalf of U.S. companies operating in Brazil. I worked with the local American Chamber of Commerce as well as Brazilian business organizations in pressing the Brazilian government to improve the investment climate and to make it easier for U.S. companies to do business in the country. I also worked with Brazilian companies that shared our goal of improving the business climate. Trying to get the government to take action was a challenge, so we found it was more productive to collaborate with both Brazilian and American companies.

Among the most interesting business groups that I worked with was an informal forum called the “Paulista dinner group.” This forum was a legacy of Brazilian military rule from 1964 to 1985. During those dark days it was difficult for anyone to get reliable information about what was going on within the Brazilian government. It was a period of political repression when thousands of people were arrested and imprisoned on mere suspicion of subversion. Brazil’s military rule was not as bloody as the “dirty war” in Argentina, nor were there the massive disappearances that occurred in Chile. Nevertheless, many Brazilians were tortured and beaten during that time.

Not surprisingly, the U.S. had an uneasy relationship with Brazil’s military government. It was in this context that the U.S. Consul General in São Paulo began meeting informally with representatives of U.S. companies to compare notes on what was happening. In the secretive environment of that era, American diplomats and businessmen had only a small piece of the bigger picture. So the Paulista dinner group met monthly to share information. This tradition continued through my time in São Paulo, and I suspect it continues today because it is still a valuable venue for our consul general and American businessmen to compare notes.

The tradition of the Paulista dinner group was that representatives of U.S. companies rotated their participation by sector. So you might have JP Morgan representing the banking sector for six months and then Citibank might take his place at the dinner. With all the sectors represented at these dinners, usually there were about a dozen American businessmen as well as the consul general. I found it was a useful way to hear the concerns and perspectives of U.S. businessmen. It also allowed us to discuss informally how the consulate might be able to help. I always chuckled to myself because at the beginning of every dinner, representatives of the various U.S. companies would talk about how difficult it was to do business in Brazil. They would complain about the crumbling infrastructure, the cumbersome labor laws, and the exorbitant and complicated taxes. After venting they would then report, “Our profits were up this month by 25 or 30 percent.” Somehow they found a way to make money. I guess it is a testament to the ability of U.S. companies to thrive even in a challenging environment like Brazil.

My value added was keeping these businessmen informed about planned visits by U.S. government officials who might be able to advance our commercial interests. I was also able to give them an idea of where we were going in terms of policies or initiatives that might affect

their business interests. I very much enjoyed the Paulista dinner group, and it complemented my work with the American Chamber of Commerce in São Paulo.

Q: Besides this engagement with the U.S. business community, what were some of the other issues that you dealt with in São Paulo?

MCMULLEN: When I arrived there our most pressing issue was the explosion of demand for B-1 and B-2 visas to travel to the U.S. for business and tourism. The whole U.S. diplomatic mission in Brazil was under siege because of the exponential growth in visa demand, but the situation in São Paulo was particularly challenging because of the sheer size of the consular district. Visa demand in our consular district grew by 90% over my two-year tenure as consul general, making São Paulo one of the top ten visa-issuing posts in the world.

One of the junior officers in our consular section did an interesting analysis of the tremendous growth in visa demand. His graph showed that the appreciation of the *real* (Brazil's currency) tracked almost exactly with the huge spike in demand for U.S. visas. Because of the significant appreciation of the *real*, it was cheaper for Brazilians to go to the U.S. for vacation than it was for them to go to a resort in Brazil. And it seemed like every Brazilian wanted to go to Disney World, or skiing in Colorado, or shopping in Miami. This crush of demand for visas started a little before I got there and took off in the months that followed. It was a major challenge for our consular chief and the junior officers doing hundreds of interviews for non-immigrant visas all day, and day after day.

Q: Was Brazil eligible for a visa waiver program? This would allow many visa applicants to bypass the interview process.

MCMULLEN: That's a good point. In this case, I think that Washington was reluctant to agree to a visa waiver program because of the high number of Brazilians who had traveled to the U.S. and overstayed their visas. There were some states like Minas Gerais, which was not in my consular district, that had a particularly poor record of visa overstays. There were high-level bilateral discussions regarding the visa issue but I think State Department was wary of taking a chance on the visa waiver program with Brazil. Some of this concern also might have been related to the problem of Argentina, where we had implemented a visa waiver program and then had to reverse course when the country's massive debt default caused an economic implosion and an exodus of middle-class Argentines seeking to escape the fallout.

In any event, we had to find a way to manage the steepening curve of visa demand in our consular district. The city of São Paulo alone was enormous, with some 22 million people living in the metropolitan area. There were about 70 million people living in the five states that made up the São Paulo consular district, which was the wealthiest region in the country. Our visa officers were laboring just to keep their heads above the water line; some of them were doing 250 interviews a day, which is an exhausting pace.

This crushing visa demand also created an infrastructure problem for us; we didn't have enough windows in the consular section to do more interviews, even if State Department were able to send us additional officers to help out. Not surprisingly, the visa issue became a major public

relations problem. The local press seemed to carry a new story every day about Brazilians complaining they were not getting their visas in a timely way. This was a serious problem not just for us, but also our embassy in Brasília as well as our consulates in Rio and Recife.

We eventually were able to get Portuguese-speaking consular officers on temporary duty from other assignments, but the lack of sufficient interview windows was a problem that required more time to resolve. Our bureaucracy moves slowly, especially when it comes to appropriating money and approving bids for construction projects. Fortunately, we were able to fast-track this initiative and find some short-term fixes to the consulate building that allowed us to move more people through the visa interviewing process.

We also worked out a deal with American Chamber of Commerce in São Paulo that allowed us to fast-track the applications of Brazilians who wanted to travel to the U.S. for business purposes. We offered businessmen the option of channeling their applications through the Chamber of Commerce, which vetted them and then sent them to our consular section for review and visa issuance. These businessmen still had to meet the criteria to get a visa, but at least the Chamber of Commerce was able to triage and prioritize the applications, which allowed us to expedite the issuance. This process helped us enormously by taking the business visas off the table. We also gave priority to F-1 student visas and the work-study J visas, which were popular among young Brazilians seeking to study and work in the United States.

One of the complicating factors in dealing with Brazilians on visa matters was their use of *despachantes*, who were paid local expeditors but had no real standing in our visa system. Brazilians would hire these *despachantes* to facilitate their visa applications and were often disappointed to find out that the expeditors could not arrange the visa interviews in a timely way. Also, whenever you get an outside player involved, there is always a concern about corruption. We were wary about whether these *despachantes* were on the up and up.

Our consular chief and I did a lot of public outreach to explain what steps we were taking to solve the visa problem. And over time we found ways to cope with the burgeoning visa demand, although it continued to be a public relations problem for much of my time in São Paulo. I think part of this reflected the fact that Brazilians, like Americans, are not shy when they have a concern or complaint. They are also very sensitive to their country being treated like a “banana republic.” This wasn’t the case, of course, but that was the perception among some Brazilians.

An interesting aspect of the visa issue is that Brazilians spend more money per capita than any other foreign visitors to the United States. They are big spenders when they travel to the U.S., whether it’s at Disney World or in New York City. And there is a large reservoir of demand for visas among Brazil’s sizable middle-class. For many Brazilians it’s often a question of, “Where is the *real* in reference to the dollar?” If the *real* is doing well, there will be a commensurate growth in visa demand. And it’s obviously in our interests to have more Brazilians traveling to the U.S. and spending money.

Q: Were many students going to study in the U.S.?

MCMULLEN: Yes, there were quite a few Brazilian students going to U.S. schools and universities. I don't remember the exact number per year but Brazilians were among the largest contingents of Latin American students attending U.S. schools. We also had a lot of Brazilians going to the U.S. on J work-study visas. Since their summer school break is during our winter months, a lot of Brazilian students work at ski resorts in Colorado, Utah and California. I thought these work-study visas were a great way for young Brazilians to have an opportunity to live and work like young Americans who have part-time jobs when they are attending college. The J visas are really a win-win because young Brazilians earn some money and learn first-hand about life in the U.S., plus American companies benefit from the seasonal labor.

Another program for young Brazilians that I really liked was our *Jovens Embaixadores*, or Youth Ambassadors. This was a scholarship program run out of the public affairs office. As I recall, each year our embassy and consulates selected about 30 students between 18 and 22 years old and sent them in small groups to live and study in the U.S. for two or three weeks. There were certain criteria in the selection process: the students had to have a good grade point average and speak English, plus they had to do community service. We placed an emphasis on selecting students from disadvantaged backgrounds, since wealthier Brazilian families were able to send their children to the U.S. for high school or college.

As part of their program, the Youth Ambassadors normally visited Washington and New York City, after which they were individually placed with American families in different states. The idea was to give the students an idea of how average Americans lived in various regions of the United States. The experience of staying with a family in Kansas or Montana or elsewhere, was probably the most enriching part of the program.

The students chosen for this program were really impressive. They generally came from very poor backgrounds, and often lived in isolated rural communities. I remember talking to one young man from a poor community in northeastern Brazil; he was about 18 years old, and I asked him, "How did you learn English?" He said that he had learned English by listening to VOA (Voice of America) on the radio. I thought that was incredible; how do you learn a language just by listening to the radio? Anyway, the Youth Ambassadors program was a terrific initiative. I hope that we are still doing it.

Q: How did you find living in São Paulo? I understand the traffic is difficult to navigate there.

MCMULLEN: Well, with 22 million people in the São Paulo metropolitan area, it was a bit challenging to drive there. Fortunately as consul general, I had a car and driver for my official duties. I limited my own driving to the weekends, mostly to play tennis. São Paulo's unpredictable traffic was something that we always had to take into account when planning official events. If we were hosting a representational lunch or dinner—or if we were going to attend an event somewhere—we had to factor in the traffic. It was challenging for my wife whenever we were hosting a representational event at our house because she had to figure out a very elastic timeline for serving the food.

Despite its traffic woes, São Paulo is a tremendous city. It's one of the most dynamic places I've ever been. It has a vibrant civil society, which is refreshing because Brazil's bureaucracy can be

extremely frustrating. There was a definite divide between the plodding government in Brasilia, which placed a premium on colonial-era bureaucratic practices, and the dynamic business community and civil society in São Paulo, which placed a premium on effecting change. When I was there, civil society activists were pushing to streamline the stifling government bureaucracy. This was something that we supported because the bloated bureaucracy was a major impediment to doing business in Brazil. There were also a number of large protests because of government scandals. Civil society leaders were demanding that government officials be held accountable.

Q: Was this political discontent basically because of corruption?

MCMULLEN: That's right. President Lula (Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva) and his Workers Party had won the 2002 elections based on the party's pledge to clean up corruption. There was a lot of optimism when Lula assumed the presidency. He had been a popular leftist labor leader, an outspoken critic of the military dictatorship, and a hero for many Brazilians. Even a lot of normally more conservative middle-class Brazilians had voted for Lula because of his anti-corruption stance. Sadly, the presidential terms of Lula and his successor, Dilma Rouseff, turned out to be among the worst periods of corruption in modern Brazilian history.

I think part of the corruption problem in Brazil stems from the country's byzantine bureaucracy, which dates back to Portuguese colonial rule. A related problem is the so-called "Brazil Cost," which refers to the high costs of running a business. There are many overlapping and onerous taxes; the labor laws date back to the 1930s, and are equally onerous. This confusing array of taxes and labor laws requires companies to hire teams of accountants and lawyers, which is problematic for small- and mid-size companies. The country's infrastructure is in total decay and adds to the cost of doing business.

The only way that many Brazilian businessmen can survive in this atmosphere is to find a way around the bureaucracy. The Portuguese term for this is *jeitinho*, a back-door way of circumventing the rules and regulations to get things done. Inevitably this leads to bribes and other forms of corruption. Corruption thrives where there are too many rules and regulations, which is the case with Brazil. American companies have to be above board in everything they do because of the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act, the U.S. law that prohibits American businesses from paying bribes. When I was in São Paulo, both Brazilian and American companies were clamoring for the government to streamline and modernize the bureaucracy. Much of the problem involved Brazilian culture, and culture takes time to change. Brazil inherited its business culture, like its political culture, from Portugal. This colonial legacy has proved a lot more impervious to change than many Brazilians would like.

Since I left São Paulo there has been some progress in attacking the problem of corruption. Brazil's judiciary has brought forward a number of prosecutions against prominent Brazilian businessmen and politicians. The case of Odebrecht, one of the largest construction companies in the world, has been at the forefront of these corruption trials. I knew several senior executives at Odebrecht and they were savvy businessmen. I think what happened in the case of Odebrecht was that it became too powerful and started throwing its weight around. Odebrecht's practice of using bribes to win contracts and circumvent laws spread from its operations in Brazil to other

countries in Latin America and elsewhere. The court documents revealed that Odebrecht had engaged in corruption in Angola where I later served.

Q: Angola is another former Portuguese colony...

MCMULLEN: Exactly, and both Brazil and Angola suffer from the same problems related to their histories as Portuguese colonies. The most serious shared problems are the top-heavy bureaucracies and statist economic practices, which inevitably lead to corruption.

There is an old cliché, which I've never liked, that "Brazil is the country of the future and always will be." During my tenure in Brazil it seemed that the country was on the cusp of finally fulfilling its enormous potential. Brazil had implemented a number of political and economic reforms in the 1990s that had set the stage for transformational change. By the mid-2000s, it looked like Brazil was approaching economic take-off.

Seeking to build on these positive developments, our ambassador created a CEO forum, bringing together American and Brazilian CEOs to push for a better climate for doing business in Brazil. The CEOs concurred on the need for Brazil to lower tariffs and to address non-tariff barriers to trade. Unfortunately, since that time Brazil has taken steps backwards in terms of changing its statist economic policies. I still think positive change is going to come in the case of Brazil, where there is a strong business community and a vibrant civil society. I'm less optimistic about Angola, where the government seeks to restrict free market activities.

Q: Much like the U.S., Brazil is an ethnically diverse country because of its history of immigration. Isn't there a sizable Japanese community in Brazil?

MCMULLEN: That's true. We share a number of things in common with Brazil, including our diversity and history of immigration. Most Americans don't realize that Brazil is a melting pot like our own country. Because of the immigration policies of the Brazilian government in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, there are large ethnic groups from all parts of the world. In the São Paulo consular district there is a huge Japanese population; it's the largest ethnic Japanese community outside of Japan. Many young Japanese-Brazilians go back to Japan and work there for a few years. It's funny because Brazilians are sophisticated and stylish in their dress, so when they go to work in Japan's conservative culture it is a bit shocking for both sides. There are also differences in the Japanese spoken by these young Brazilians; it's an archaic form of Japanese that hasn't been spoken in Japan for a long time. It's only the Japanese diaspora in Brazil that still speaks this dialect. Many of the young Japanese-Brazilians who work in Japan don't enjoy the experience because they're not accepted as being truly Japanese.

Italians make up another large ethnic community in the São Paulo consular district. When I served there the mayor of São Paulo, José Serra, was of Italian descent. I remember him saying the language most commonly spoken on the streets of São Paulo in the early 20th century was Italian. He said most of the newspapers were in Italian during that time. There is also a large and economically powerful Lebanese community in the São Paulo area; it's the largest Lebanese community outside of Lebanon. Likewise, there are large Lithuanian and German communities in southern Brazil. In contrast, northern Brazil is mostly Afro-Brazilian because of the slave

trade that continued in Brazil well into the 1800s. There was a lot of miscegenation in northeastern Brazil, where millions of African slaves worked on large sugar cane plantations.

Q: How were race relations in Brazil? I talked to a woman who was dating a man from Jamaica who was black. She told me that she was shocked by the racism that her boyfriend faced in Brazil. He once was forced to take the freight elevator in a building because he was black.

MCMULLEN: We had a similar incident involving a young American woman who worked in our consulate in São Paulo. She was Puerto Rican and married to a DEA agent who also worked in the consulate. One Sunday afternoon, she took their two little kids to a birthday party at a nearby tennis club. When she arrived at the club, they told her she had to go in through the back door because they thought she was a nanny or maid for a wealthy Brazilian family. We lodged a complaint with the club about its treatment of our colleague. It's a myth that Brazilians have cultivated that they're not racist; it's simply not true. In fact, there is racism towards Brazil's indigenous community as well as towards Afro-Brazilians.

Q: Does Brazil have much of a problem with smuggling or the movement of illegal goods through its territory?

MCMULLEN: Brazil has a problem with illegal goods coming from Paraguay. The tri-border area—a region shared by Brazil, Argentina and Paraguay—was a problem area when I was in Brazil. The Paraguayan side of the tri-border is notorious for its illegal commercial activities. The main town of Ciudad del Este is like a Wild West town where anything goes. The illegal cross-border trade exists mostly because of Brazil's high tariffs, particularly its duties on expensive electronics such as computers and iPhones. Paraguay was a smuggler's paradise during the colonial era, for much the same reasons as it is today. Brazil's mercantilist trade policies are an invitation for smugglers trying to take advantage of the country's tariffs and other trade barriers. If Brazil lowered its high tariffs on electronics and similar products, smuggling in the tri-border would largely disappear because there would be no economic incentive.

A more worrisome issue for U.S. interests in the tri-border area is its large Muslim Shia community, which has ties to groups like Hezbollah in Lebanon. The remote tri-border region first appeared on our radar with the two terrorist bombings in Argentina in the 1990s, when the Israeli Embassy and a Jewish community center in Buenos Aires were blown up. According to the findings of investigators, a couple of the terrorists involved in those bombings had passed through the tri-border area en route to Buenos Aires. Ever since those bombings, we have tried to monitor the tri-border to ensure that no one from that area is involved in terrorist activities. Some analysts believe that several prominent Lebanese Muslim families based in the tri-border are involved in financing Hezbollah, although these families claim they fund only the group's charitable causes in Lebanon. In any event, since 9/11 we have focused on ungoverned spaces like the tri-border area where Al-Qaeda, Hezbollah or other terrorist groups might flourish.

Q: Were the high tariffs imposed because Brazil has its own industries?

MCMULLEN: That's right. The Brazilian government keeps its tariffs high to protect most of its economic sectors. This is the mercantilist mentality that I mentioned earlier. While the Brazilian

government publicly touts the value of open markets and globalization, its trade policies don't support free trade. We have had trade disputes with Brazil over the years involving orange juice, cotton and other products. Some of these disputes were resolved through bilateral negotiations or through the WTO (World Trade Organization). Like the U.S., Brazil is an agricultural superpower. The downside of its booming agricultural sector is that Brazilian farmers have encroached increasingly on the fragile Amazon ecosystem, which has caused major environmental concerns.

Q: How were relations with Embassy Brasilia, since it is far from the consulate in São Paul?

MCMULLEN: When you are consul general, it's always good to be far from the embassy. It's also good to be far from the host government. In all seriousness, we had good relations with Embassy Brasilia. For one thing, our consulate focused mostly on the U.S. business community, whereas Embassy Brasilia focused mainly on the government. There was a small contingent of foreign ministry officials in São Paulo, but they were easier to deal with than their colleagues in Brasilia. Some of the diplomats in São Paulo were out of favor with the foreign minister, Celso Amorim, who was a leftist ideologue and not particularly helpful to U.S. interests.

Amorim had placed a number of fellow leftists in key positions in the foreign ministry, which complicated our bilateral relations. Brazil's foreign ministry is often referred to as Itamaraty, which dates back to the time when it was located in a palace by that name in the former capital of Rio de Janeiro. It's kind of like the Foggy Bottom moniker given to State Department because of its location. Anyway, the Itamaraty contingent based in São Paulo consisted of a handful of diplomats, most of them friendly towards the U.S. Since they were far away from the foreign ministry, they were much more helpful on issues involving our consulate.

Our primary focus in São Paulo was directed towards assisting the American companies based there. We had the second largest FCS (Foreign Commercial Service) office in the world, following that of Embassy Beijing. FCS in São Paulo had a large American staff, but it was our Brazilian employees who were the experts in the various economic sectors of the country. Our Brazilian colleagues in the consulate were probably the best local staff that I ever worked with, although the Colombians working at our embassy in Bogotá were a close second. To be honest, our staff in general was so good that the consulate could have run itself. I was fortunate in that sense because it allowed me to focus on assisting U.S. companies and doing public outreach.

We didn't have an ambassador during my first year there, so I was pretty much able to do my own thing in São Paulo. At the beginning of my second year, in August 2006, our new ambassador, Cliff Sobel, arrived at post. He was a political appointee who had previously served in The Hague. Sobel loved São Paulo and visited us almost weekly. He would fly down to São Paulo on Friday morning, do meetings all day, and then fly to New York for the weekend. He would return to São Paulo early Monday morning and do meetings in the morning, and then fly back to Brasília in the afternoon. He had a ton of energy.

As you know from your own experience, the two biggest issues between a consulate and the embassy are: how much independence can the consulate have, and how much of post's resources can it have? Resources were a major issue when I arrived in São Paulo because our consulate had

recently moved to a new location that required a lot more resources than the previous one. The new consulate compound in São Paulo was beautiful and spacious; it looked like a college campus. But it required a lot more money to run it. So, money was an issue in the first year or so. Fortunately, we were able to work out the resources issue with Embassy Brasília.

As far as the independence question, we didn't have much friction with the embassy because there was a natural division of labor between Brasília and us. São Paulo was viewed within the diplomatic mission as the business consulate. In terms of political reporting, we tried to complement what Embassy Brasília was doing during the 2006 elections. We reported mostly on the views of the Brazilian business community and civil society. We also reported on developments within the PSDB (Brazilian Social Democratic Party), the main opposition party that was based in São Paulo. We always made sure the embassy cleared our reporting cables before we sent them to Washington. Thankfully, we never had any serious disagreements with the embassy over our reporting and analysis.

Our consular district included the southern states of Brazil. Many pundits referred to this region as the G-7, because the states were prosperous and resembled Western Europe. In contrast, these pundits referred to northeastern Brazil as the G-20, because it was less prosperous and more like developing countries. This profound difference between northern and southern Brazil was another legacy of the colonial era, when the Portuguese colony of Brazil was centered in the northeast and relied on slaves to work the vast sugar plantations. This region has suffered from under-development since independence, and the political structure of northeastern Brazil has long been dominated by the landed elites. President Lula, who came from a poor family that migrated to São Paulo from the northeast, focused considerable resources on trying to spur development in this impoverished region. He developed a program called *Bolsa Família*, (Family Allowance), which provided monthly cash stipends for poor families. The government generally tried to direct these payments to the mothers of these families. Many of the women started small businesses and did quite well. I don't know how the program is functioning today, but it was pretty effective in channeling cash to the poorest sectors when I served in Brazil.

Q: What about our consulate in Rio? Did it retain any of the prestige from its past role when the embassy was located there?

MCMULLEN: I didn't have many direct dealings with our consulate in Rio but, as I recall, the main issue with Rio was that the ambassador and DCM thought that it was too large and absorbed too much of post's resources. This was a legacy of Rio's former role as the capital. Even though our embassy moved to the new capital of Brasília in 1971, our consulate in Rio remained large for its diminished role. Another problem was that the consulate building was in bad shape and didn't meet the new security standards. Compounding these things was the fact that the local staff felt Rio no longer had the prestige that it once had, so morale was an issue.

As our DCM put it, "The problem we have is that Rio once was the capital, and our consulate staff still thinks it's the embassy. We have Consulate São Paulo, which was never the embassy, but probably should be, based on its size and importance. Then we have the embassy in Brasília, a city of little importance other than being the capital." Anyway, I think it's inevitable that there are rivalries between the consulates and the embassy in every country where we have a large

diplomatic mission and multiple posts. I'm sure there are rivalries among our diplomatic posts in China, where Hong Kong probably plays somewhat the same role as São Paulo does in Brazil.

While Rio's importance was diminished, our consulate in Recife was growing rapidly because of booming visa demand and increasing U.S. commercial interest in northeastern Brazil. During my time in São Paulo, there also was serious consideration of re-opening consulates that we had closed years earlier. This reflected not only the growing demand for U.S. visas but also the increasing importance of Brazil across the board. Several years after I left São Paulo, we opened up consular offices in several cities—Belo Horizonte, Porto Alegre and Belém—to help deal with the visa demand. I think that State Department hired Portuguese-speaking Americans who were on five-year contracts to do visa work in these offices. They were not Foreign Service officers but they received CONGEN (consular) training at FSI.

This measure helped alleviate some of the pressing problems related to the tremendous visa demand. I don't know the current status of these consular offices; I suspect that Brazil's economic slowdown has reduced the demand for U.S. visas. Interestingly, we didn't have many Portuguese speakers in the WHA Bureau during that period. After ramping up our American staff in Brazil, we now have many more Foreign Service officers who speak Portuguese. I'm sure this has improved the recruiting pool for other Portuguese-speaking posts such as Angola and Mozambique, which are growing missions that are traditionally hard to staff.

Q: So, where did you go after Brazil?

MCMULLEN: I returned to Washington in August 2007 to serve as DAS (Deputy Assistant Secretary) for South America in the WHA Bureau. Our new assistant secretary, Tom Shannon, wanted to have a DAS in the front office who had served in Brazil so he asked me if I would leave São Paulo a year early to take the job.

As it turned out, I spent much of my time working on Brazil. Tom saw the growing importance of Brazil for U.S. interests and felt the time was right to launch a strategic partnership with the country's leftist government. This was the period of the so-called "pink tide," when a number of Latin American countries had elected left-leaning leaders, including Brazil's President Lula. As a broader context, I think Secretary Rice at the time wanted to improve U.S. relations with Latin America. Amid the negative fallout from the Iraq War, I suspect the Bush administration was seeking to make inroads in Latin America and other regions outside of the Middle East. So when Secretary Rice tapped Tom Shannon to serve as assistant secretary, he had a mandate to pursue a more constructive approach in dealing with Brazil and other leftist governments in the region.

Q: What was your portfolio, and did it include many "pink tide" countries?

MCMULLEN: As DAS for South America, my portfolio included 10 countries, eight of which were part of the pink tide. This wave of leftist leaders began in 1998 with the election of Hugo Chávez as president of Venezuela. He was soon joined by other leftist presidents that included Lula in Brazil, Evo Morales in Bolivia, Rafael Correa in Ecuador, Cristina Kirchner in Argentina, Fernando Lugo in Paraguay, Tabaré Vázquez in Uruguay, and Michelle Bachelet in Chile.

These leaders espoused different forms of socialism, sometimes mixed with populism and nationalism. In the case of Venezuela, Chávez championed a militant anti-Americanism, which found an echo with Bolivia's President Morales. This was in sharp contrast to the moderate democratic socialism of Chilean President Bachelet and Uruguayan President Tabaré Vázquez, both of whom sought close relations with the United States. Some of the pink tide leaders had close personal ties with one another; two of them—Evo Morales and Cristina Kirchner—were spokes on the Chávez-centric wheel, while the others were more independent minded.

Q: And Chávez had the oil money, too.

MCMULLEN: That was the key thing. Chávez had the money to bankroll these fellow travelers. When I assumed the DAS job, the prevailing view in State Department was that we should try to engage with the leaders of this pink tide to see if we could find any common ground. As you know, our history of dealing with leftist governments in Latin America has been one of mostly confrontation or isolation rather than engagement. This history has haunted us in many ways.

So we wanted to see if we could find any points of converging interests with these pink tide governments. We would try to ignore the anti-U.S., rhetoric as much as possible and focus instead on the actions of these governments. We tried to avoid getting into a public pissing contest with Chávez who seemed to bait us daily with his outrageous statements. This was more difficult than it sounds because he was very provocative, and there were many politicians and U.S. officials in Washington who wanted us to respond to Chávez's taunts.

Chávez was one of those guys who threw so much out there that you could easily lose sight of your broader strategic goals. It was often tempting to respond but we would have been playing his game, not ours. Even if we had wanted to respond to his taunts, by the time we were able to get the countless clearances in the bureaucracy to issue a public statement, Chávez would be off on a new anti-U.S. rant. He didn't need any clearances for his public statements. This was a problem for us because his strident anti-U.S. rhetoric played right into the hands of hardliners in Washington who preferred a policy of isolation and confrontation, just as we had done for decades with Fidel Castro in Cuba, and with meager positive results.

Anyway, we decided to ignore, to the extent possible, the anti-U.S. screeds of Chávez and the other more militant leftist leaders. We knew that in many cases these leaders had a visceral dislike of the United States. They didn't like our policies. They didn't like our history in Latin America. In some countries, such as Argentina, anti-American rhetoric has always been good politics, so Cristina Kirchner was able to tap into a reservoir of distrust of the United States.

Despite their shared socialist tilt, some of the leaders of this pink tide had their own political agendas; in other cases, there were personal rivalries among them. Ecuador's President Rafael Correa didn't toe the Chávez line; in fact, Correa saw himself as an alternative leader of this inchoate leftist movement. Given this diversity of agendas and personalities, we tried to deal with each country on its own merits. In the case of both Bolivia and Ecuador, we initiated bilateral dialogues to see if there were areas where we could work together.

Chávez was the most difficult leader to deal with because his popularity, particularly among poor Venezuelans, was wrapped up in his anti-Americanism. He portrayed the U.S. as the bogeyman that had been in cahoots with the Venezuelan elites to exploit the country's oil reserves. More importantly, Chávez had the money from oil revenues to fund his fellow leftist leaders in the region. Most of the other pink tide leaders didn't have the resources to take the hard line that Chávez took with the U.S., so he tried to put steel in their spines by subsidizing some of them.

More worrisome for us was the stability of some of the countries caught up in the pink tide. In some cases, Chávez's mischief-making was causing problems that threatened the cohesion of these countries. This was particularly true in the case of Bolivia, which was the first country that I visited as DAS. We were concerned that a civil war might break out because Evo Morales, with Chávez's encouragement and financial support, was going after the traditional elites there.

Q: Evo Morales was president of Bolivia...

MCMULLEN: That's right. Evo Morales was a former *cocalero* (a coca leaf grower) who became president in 2006. His socialist agenda ran into resistance from the Bolivian upper class, whose power depended on the support of the armed forces. Bolivia's military was very wary of Chávez's influence in the country. When Morales started provoking class tensions, Bolivia seemed to be heading for the kind of showdown that occurred in Chile in the early 1970s, when President Allende's socialist agenda sparked a military coup supported by the middle class and the traditional political parties.

During my visit to Bolivia in September 2007, I had a memorable meeting with the deputy foreign minister. He was frank about what he saw as our nefarious role in Bolivia's history. I was equally candid about our concerns regarding the country's current trajectory. One of his comments was quite revealing because it showed how Evo Morales and his allies viewed the United States. The deputy foreign minister said, "Given the history of our relations, we need to tear down the relationship completely and then rebuild it." I told him that we understood where they were coming from, but we also had our own interests and concerns. With that said, we were willing to try to work with them in areas of mutual interest.

As that meeting suggested, Bolivia proved to be a tough challenge. We knew that our counter-narcotics programs and DEA's presence in Bolivia were irritants in the relationship. We had heard a story that Evo Morales himself had had a run-in with DEA agents when he was a *cocalero*. I don't know whether the story was true but Morales clearly had a visceral dislike of DEA. He also had problems with some of USAID's operations in Bolivia, particularly its programs that provided assistance to farmers so that they could grow crops in place of coca.

We launched a bilateral dialogue to explore how we might be able to work with the Morales government to advance our mutual interests. During these discussions it became clear that Morales wanted to control how we spent our assistance money in Bolivia. This was a non-starter for USAID, especially since it would establish a precedent that could be exploited by other countries. It also would have been a non-starter for our Congress. So we explained to Bolivian officials that we could not relinquish control over how we spend our money, but we were willing to explore ways in which we might be able to address their concerns. In other words, we can't

simply give you a check for you to spend the money however you want, but we're willing to see how we might shape our aid programs in a way that is more palatable.

In the case of DEA's operations in Bolivia, it was simply a bridge too far for us to find any common ground. In fact, Morales decided to expel DEA from Bolivia. He also expelled our ambassador, Phil Goldberg, in September 2008, which compounded our problems. For reasons that were never clear, Morales seemed to believe that Goldberg was working behind the scenes to undermine the president. This was patently false but it didn't matter.

Q: What happened after the expulsions of DEA and our ambassador?

MCMULLEN: We tried to preserve what we could of the relationship but it was difficult. While we were able to maintain a functioning embassy run by a chargé d'affaires, our relationship with Morales remained cool and correct. We also tried to maintain a counter-narcotics presence through our NAS (Narcotics Affairs Section) programs, which were not viewed as negatively by Morales. As I recall, USAID maintained a presence in Bolivia but cut some of the aid programs that Morales didn't like. Bolivia continued to be a challenge throughout my time as DAS. It was a problem that we couldn't solve, so we tried to manage it as best we could.

Q: In Bolivia, were there changes in how the Morales government favored one sector of populace over another sector?

MCMULLEN: Well, it seemed that one of his key objectives was to address the inequalities in Bolivian society. He wanted to improve the lot of the impoverished indigenous community, which was a laudable goal. His guiding ideology was a blend of socialism and *indigenismo*, a tilt towards the country's indigenous population. He came from an indigenous background himself and saw first-hand the discrimination this group faced at the hands of Bolivia's traditional elites.

I think what irked Morales the most was the sense of impunity among Bolivia's ruling elites. As I mentioned earlier, this sense of impunity among the elites has always been a problem in Latin America. It is a legacy of colonial rule; the landowning elites lived privileged lives in both the Spanish and Portuguese colonies, which carried over after independence. Morales and other members of the indigenous community suffered under a system that favored the wealthy. The challenge for Morales was, how do you change cultural norms in a short period of time? That's a challenge in any culture.

My sense was that Morales thought he could use Bolivia's natural gas resources, which he nationalized, to improve conditions for the indigenous community. And to some extent he was able to improve their economic conditions. On the other hand, some of his policies were counterproductive. For instance, he demanded that USAID curtail some programs aimed at improving the lives of the indigenous community. Also, his failure to cooperate with us in combating drug trafficking, as required by our Congress, resulted in Bolivia losing its tariff preferences for the export of textiles to the United States. This was a blow to the indigenous community because the textile sector was labor intensive and provided some of the most lucrative jobs for poor Bolivians. At the end of the day, Morales was responsible for this outcome because of his failure to effectively combat coca production and trafficking.

Despite his anti-U.S. rhetoric, we were prepared to work with Morales on issues of mutual interest. It wasn't his leftist ideology that was the problem; it was his hostile actions that made it impossible for us to have a constructive and functional relationship. Once he expelled our ambassador and DEA, it became virtually impossible to engage constructively with the Morales government. He simply carried too much baggage for State Department to convince key members of Congress and some senior officials in other U.S. agencies that engaging with Morales would advance our interests. He seemed committed to tearing down the relationship, just as his deputy foreign minister had signaled in my meeting with him in September 2007.

Q: What about the other pink tide countries? You mentioned that Ecuador wasn't necessarily toeing the Chávez line.

MCMULLEN: That's true. In the case of Ecuador, President Correa used some of the same rhetoric as the other pink tide leaders but he had his own agenda. As in the case of Bolivia, we proposed a bilateral dialogue to see if we could find any common ground with Ecuador. In contrast to Bolivia, the atmosphere surrounding this bilateral dialogue was better because Correa didn't provoke the same negative reaction in Washington as did Evo Morales or Hugo Chávez. We held several productive rounds of talks within the bilateral dialogue. In the end, we were able to shape some of our USAID programs in ways that Correa wanted, and we worked together to improve commercial relations between our countries.

The main irritant in our relations with Ecuador centered on our FOL (forward operating location) in Manta, which the U.S. Coast Guard used to monitor maritime drug trafficking off the coast of Ecuador and Colombia. Correa viewed our FOL as an affront to Ecuador's sovereignty. We tried to find a way to assuage his concerns, but Correa finally told us that we had to shut down the FOL. This decision forced the Coast Guard to find other bases, primarily in Colombia, where it could carry out its surveillance operations. Despite his action on Manta, Correa was generally more manageable than Evo Morales, who seemed to be emboldened by Chávez. For one thing, Correa was never as close to Chávez as Evo Morales was, partly because Correa saw himself Chávez's equal, and didn't want to be beholden to him. We were able to use this as a bit of leverage in our relations with Ecuador. But there were limits to this leverage, as we saw with the FOL in Manta, which struck a nationalistic nerve with Correa.

Q: Did you sense that our policy overall towards Latin America changed much over the time you were involved?

MCMULLEN: I think there was a significant change in the way we dealt with the leftist governments in Latin America. All of us in the WHA front office during that period tended to view the pink tide in a historical context. And we were conscious of U.S. history in dealing with leftist movements in Latin America. The pink tide countries did not pose much of a geopolitical risk to core U.S. interests. So we were able to adopt an approach similar to the "Good Neighbor" policy of the 1930s, when President Franklin Roosevelt tried to work with problematic governments in Latin America. Instead of trying to undermine these leftist governments—as U.S. policy makers had tried to do in Cuba, Chile and Nicaragua during the Cold War—we tried to engage with them. Of course it's important to note that our policy approach towards Latin

America reflected a more benign geopolitical environment; the Soviet Union had collapsed and China had not yet emerged as a rival power. This gave us more latitude to try a different tack.

We also didn't look at the pink tide as a monolithic movement, as some pundits tended to portray it. And our relationship historically with each of these countries was quite distinct. So we tried to deal with each bilateral relationship on its own terms. In the case of Brazil, President Lula embraced the idea of forging a strategic partnership. And our relationship with him was very different from our relationship with Argentina's populist presidents, Néstor and his wife, Cristina Kirchner. Their policies were reminiscent of the populist and statist ideology developed by Juan Perón during the 1940s and 1950s. The Kirchners reflected a long-standing strain of anti-American sentiment in Argentina's Peronist Party. Given our history with Argentina, we had to deal with the Kirchners in a different way than we dealt with other leftist leaders. Another factor that affected our relations with Argentina was the close personal relationship between the Kirchners and Hugo Chávez, who helped bankroll their party.

In any event, I think our policy towards Latin America did change in both form and substance during the tenure of Tom Shannon as assistant secretary, and his pragmatic approach was supported by Secretary Rice and Under Secretary for Political Affairs Bill Burns. This pragmatism marked a notable change from Shannon's two immediate predecessors, Roger Noriega and Otto Reich, who took a more ideological line. Their policies reflected the views of a conservative faction of the Republican Party that had long supported a tough policy towards Cuba and other leftist governments in Latin America. We wanted to preserve U.S. interests in the region but were willing to take a more flexible route to get there.

On balance, I think the results of our efforts were mixed; in some cases, like Brazil and Chile, we were able to advance our mutual interests; but with Venezuela and Bolivia, the hostile actions of Chavez and Morales made it impossible for us to sustain constructive engagement. I'll leave it to historians to judge whether the traditional U.S. policy of confrontation with leftist governments would have been more effective than our policy of constructive engagement in advancing our interests in Latin America. I suspect that the traditional hardline approach with these pink tide governments would have stoked anti-U.S. sentiment more broadly in the hemisphere and would have provoked a negative response even among our allies.

Q: So did you see any greater or lesser interest in Latin America during your tenure?

MCMULLEN: I think the level of interest depended on the issue. There was a lot of White House and congressional interest in Venezuela because of Hugo Chávez and his close ties to Fidel Castro. The politically influential Cuban-American lobby in Miami advocated a hardline approach towards Venezuela because of these ties. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, Chávez had become the main source of support for Castro's embattled regime. Cuba received heavily subsidized Venezuelan oil that kept the country afloat.

One of Chávez's more provocative actions that raised eyebrows in Washington was his decision to invite the Russian military to increase its presence in Venezuela. I think it was sometime in 2008 that two Russian Bear bombers landed in Venezuela, around the same time that several Russian ships were conducting maneuvers in the Caribbean. These were symbolic shows of

force. Chávez was using a page out of Fidel Castro's playbook, raising the specter of renewed Cold War competition in our hemisphere. Again, this was political theater for Chávez.

Given our heavy investment in Plan Colombia, there was considerable congressional interest in how things were going with the Colombian government's campaign against the FARC guerrillas. Related to this issue was the question of human rights in Colombia; many NGOs and some members of Congress were concerned about reports of alleged abuses by the military.

The Bush administration also invested heavily in our growing relationship with Brazil. We launched a strategic partnership with Brazil, which attracted interest from various U.S. agencies, some members of Congress, and a number of American companies. President Bush tried to leverage his personal relationship with President Lula to enlist his help in dealing with the more problematic leftist governments in the region, particularly Venezuela. However, Lula remained wary of getting drawn into the clash between Chávez and Washington.

In truth, U.S. interest in Latin America always seems to wax and wane depending on how an issue might affect our interests. When the situation in Latin America seems to threaten our core interests—such as the Soviets in Cuba, or the threat of communism in Central America—there is invariably an uptick in public and U.S. government interest in the region. These ups and downs in our level of interest in Latin America follow a predictable pattern that I suspect will continue.

Q: When you were in the WHA front office and taking a non-confrontational approach with these leftist leaders, it seems that at no time before had Latin America had so many mild leftists.

MCMULLEN: That's true. The pink tide ushered into power an unprecedented number of leftist leaders in Latin America. Fortunately the Cold War was over and we had more room to maneuver in dealing with these governments. I remember when Chile elected President Salvador Allende, a Marxist ideologue, in 1970. Henry Kissinger was concerned that a freely elected Marxist government in Chile might set a dangerous precedent that could be replicated in other Western countries. Of course that was at the height of the Cold War. In contrast, we were dealing mostly with moderate leftist governments that didn't have the backing of a rival superpower like the Soviet Union. It's true that Bolivia and Argentina had the financial backing of Chávez, who was a thorn in our side, but that did not have the same geopolitical implications as did Soviet support for leftist governments in Latin America during the Cold War.

Q: It seems like it has been mostly a losing cause for Latin American leftists.

MCMULLEN: I think that has been the case generally for the left in Latin America, with the exception of Cuba. Of course, Cuba has been a losing cause in terms of its disastrous economy and horrendous record on democracy and human rights. But it has managed to survive. We'll have to see what happens in Venezuela and Nicaragua. Those governments are currently headed by leaders who espouse socialist ideas but act like traditional Latin American dictators.

Part of the problem with the Latin American left in recent years has been the difficulty in defining the amorphous ideologies of many self-proclaimed leftist leaders. In the case of the pink tide, these leaders often adopted a hybrid ideology that was unique to each country. In Argentina,

the policies of Nestor and Cristina Kirchner seemed like a replay of traditional *peronismo*, a fusion of populism and nationalism. In Chile, President Bachelet pursued a European form of democratic socialism. In Brazil, President Lula adopted a statist approach much like past presidents, but with a socialist tinge. This diversity of ideologies required us to take a more nuanced, case-by-case approach in dealing with these governments.

Q: Well, I think without everything being viewed through the prism of the U.S.-Soviet conflict, these leftist governments in Latin America were not seen as the same threat they had been during the Cold War. But still, how did this policy of engagement with leftist governments play with other actors in Washington? I think this policy would not play very well in Congress because politicians like confrontation, getting tough, and blustering. How did you find the response?

MCMULLEN: That's a fair point. I think our policy of constructive engagement with leftist leaders received mixed reactions in Washington. Several influential members of Congress, such as Senator Richard Lugar, who was ranking Republican on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, supported our approach, as did Congressman Eliot Engel, who at that time chaired the Subcommittee for Latin America in the House Foreign Affairs Committee. Lugar and Engel were both strong voices on Latin America, so their support of our policy approach was particularly helpful. There were others in Congress who thought we were naïve and misguided in our efforts. The members of Congress who disagreed with our approach were mostly the same ones who have long supported a policy of isolation and confrontation with Cuba, which has failed to deliver positive results. What do they say is the definition of insanity, doing the same thing over and over again and expecting a different result?

In any event, we pursued a policy that seemed best suited to advance U.S. interests under the prevailing circumstances. And we were keenly aware of past U.S. policy failures in Latin America. So we tried to craft a policy approach that took into account both American interests and values. I don't think we could have succeeded with the traditional U.S. approach to Latin America: "It's our way or the highway." We understood that the path to democracy was not going to be the same one for every country in the region. Sometimes the route to democracy is long and circuitous. Look at the case of Mexico since the Revolution in 1910; it has made some notable progress but it has not been a linear process. Democracy in Latin America is going to look different from ours. It might have a leftist tinge to it; it may have a rightist tinge to it, but that's for the people of those countries to decide based on their distinct culture and history.

I think all of us in the WHA front office viewed the pink tide as another political cycle in the history of the region. Latin America has gone through various cycles of populism and nationalism; it has experimented with Marxist rule in Chile and New Left communism in Cuba. During the 1930s and into the 1950s, Latin America experienced a wave of military-run governments, a pattern that was repeated again from the mid-1960s through the much of the 1980s. So we were very conscious of the cyclical nature of Latin American politics. We also realized there was little that the U.S. could do to change the trajectory or the duration of these cycles; they had to run their course. We couldn't simply impose our will on these countries.

Of course we also understood the political realities of Washington, which sometimes complicated our efforts to pursue a policy of constructive engagement. Even for members of

Congress who supported our policy approach, it was often hard for them to listen to Chávez's anti-U.S. screeds and not want to respond. It takes a lot of discipline for politicians and policy makers to resist the desire to respond to provocations. The problem was that Chávez relished these verbal slugfests; this was political theater for his supporters. Even though he would threaten to cut off oil shipments to the U.S., the truth was that we were the main market for Venezuelan oil. And we were virtually the only country that was paying U.S. dollars for the oil.

Q: We had the only refineries for the heavy oil.

MCMULLEN: That's right. Venezuelan oil has a high sulfur content, which makes it more difficult to sell on the international market. At that time we were virtually the only country that was able to refine this heavy oil. Even today this is a problem for Venezuela because it limits where it can export the oil. I think China has built some refineries in recent years that can process heavy crude oil, but not many. Plus, the cost of shipping this oil to China is a lot higher than the cost of shipping it across the Gulf of Mexico to Texas or Louisiana.

Q: So was your biggest challenge dealing with the pink tide of leftist leaders, or was it trying to generate interest in Latin America? Historically there has been a tendency to take the region for granted unless there is a crisis.

MCMULLEN: I spent quite a bit of my time dealing with the fallout related to these leftist leaders. Within the State Department there was a fair degree of consensus that we should try to find points of convergence with those governments that were willing to engage with us. However, some senior officials at other U.S. agencies viewed a number of the pink tide leaders with deep skepticism. So this created a challenge. As you know, our government is not monolithic, so there were wide-ranging views on how to manage relations with these countries. This diversity of views produced spirited interagency policy discussions.

Another challenge was the highly partisan politics of Washington. Our policies in Latin America have often been driven by U.S. domestic politics; more so, I think, than in any other region of the world. I don't think there is another geographic bureau in State Department that has experienced the same degree of partisan political interference that the Latin American bureau has experienced over the years. While Cuba clearly is the most obvious example of domestic politics driving foreign policy, we also have seen partisan politics at play with respect to Venezuela. Some of this reflects Cuba's involvement in Venezuela, which has produced an alliance between the Cuban-American lobby in Miami and the burgeoning Venezuelan diaspora in the United States.

I also spent quite a bit of time working with our embassy in Bogotá on a follow-on assistance package that would consolidate the gains made under Plan Colombia. The new aid package was focused on strengthening state institutions, especially local governments in the countryside. By this time, we had gotten past a lot of the things we had been doing to strengthen the security forces. The Colombian military had cleared large areas of the countryside, so we were able to get USAID into these areas to help local officials who were trying to deliver basic services to the long-neglected rural population.

As I mentioned earlier, we launched a Strategic Partnership Dialogue with Brazil that involved a number of U.S. agencies and the private sector. Even though Brazilian President Lula espoused a socialist agenda, he shared our interest in improving commercial ties between our countries. One of the main goals of our economic dialogue was to reduce non-tariff barriers to trade. This dialogue was complemented by a CEO Forum that brought the private sector into our discussion of commercial relations. We also held separate dialogues on a wide range of regional and geopolitical issues of common concern.

Chile was another instance in which we were able to find converging interests with a leftist government. We worked closely with President Bachelet's government on a number of issues. Bachelet was a moderate leftist who sought closer ties with the U.S., particularly in areas such as education and economic relations. Unlike Venezuela and Bolivia, we didn't have any concerns about Chile's foreign policy. In contrast to Chávez and Morales, Bachelet was not courting the Iranians or the Russians as a counterweight to U.S. influence in Latin America. In some respects Chile is one of the most conservative societies in South America, which served as an internal check on Bachelet's left-leaning government. Plus, there were painful memories among Chileans of the country's failed Marxist experiment under Salvador Allende in the 1970s.

We were able to develop a constructive relationship with Chile's leftist government that advanced our mutual interests. One of Bachelet's priorities was to improve the social and economic conditions of Chile's indigenous community. However, in contrast to Evo Morales in Bolivia, Bachelet didn't pursue this goal by waging class warfare against the Chilean elites. Instead, Bachelet used Chile's sovereign wealth fund, built from the country's copper exports, to support educational opportunities for the indigenous community. Morales could have done something comparable by using the revenues from Bolivia's natural gas exports, but he chose a policy of confrontation with the country's ruling elites and with the United States as well.

In any event, Chile developed a creative program to send disadvantaged youth to the U.S. to study at community colleges and vocational schools. The students first attended technical schools in Chile and learned English; they then went to the U.S. schools, mostly in California, for a couple of years. The idea was to give indigenous and other poor kids the skills they needed to join Chile's economic mainstream. We signed a memorandum of understanding with Chile that set out the terms for increasing the number of Chilean students attending schools in the U.S.

Our educational links with Chile go back to the 1960s and 1970s, when many Chilean students attended colleges and universities in California. During that era, hundreds of Chileans attended the University of California-Davis campus, where they studied viticulture. These graduates of UC-Davis were responsible for the remaking of Chile's wine industry. Prior to this period, Chile produced mostly basic table wines; today, it produces quality wines and at reasonable prices.

The relationship between Chile and California is a strong and longstanding one; in part, it's built on similarities in geography, topography and climate. When I first visited Chile I was struck by how much Chile resembles California. They are both Pacific countries with economies built on sophisticated agricultural techniques. Also, unlike our competition with Brazil and Argentina in commodities such as soybeans, Chile and California complement each other in terms of

agricultural exports because of the products and their different growing seasons. This means that we don't have the same kind of trade irritants with Chile that we have with Brazil and Argentina.

Q: It's easy to forget that South America's growing seasons for crops are different from ours, particularly grapes, blueberries and other products of this nature. We are able to enjoy fresh fruits and produce because we have our growing season, and they have their season. It's a very sophisticated system. Look at Colombia, which has an extremely lucrative fresh flower industry. Most of our flowers in the supermarkets are from Colombia.

MCMULLEN: That's right. I remember when I visited Medellín in December of 2001; it was a dangerous period and I had an armed escort of plainclothes Colombian policemen for the whole time that I was there. Despite the tenuous security situation, Medellín's flower growers were still exporting to the U.S. and Europe. I visited several large flower farms outside of Medellín and was really impressed with the efficiency of their production system, as well as their ability to get the flowers onto the planes so quickly. And this was being done during a very tough time in terms of security around Medellín because of the FARC and ELN guerrillas.

Q: The export of fresh flowers is time imperative.

MCMULLEN: That's true. And it was amazing that the Colombian growers could meet these tight time constraints in the middle of an armed conflict. This goes back to my earlier point that Colombians are very talented and entrepreneurial. I think the same applies to Chileans as well. On this score, I always thought it was interesting that both countries had a sizable community of Basques, an ethnic group that is hard-working and entrepreneurial. I suspect the Basques have had a positive impact on agriculture and industry in both countries. Another similarity between Colombia and Chile was the relative isolation of their core population centers, which forced them to be more creative and self-reliant. Chile's geographic isolation is more obvious but Colombia's core culture developed in the relatively remote Andean mountain ranges.

Q: So, where did you go after your stint as DAS for South America?

MCMULLEN: While I was serving as DAS, the WHA bureau put my name forward as its candidate to be ambassador to Colombia. At the same time, AF forwarded my name as that bureau's candidate to be ambassador to Angola. My preference was to go to Colombia, since I had served there and knew the country pretty well; however, I knew there was a good chance that I would be tapped for Angola. The Africa bureau wanted an MC (Minister Counselor) to fill the position because our relationship with Angola was important and complicated. Plus, I already spoke Portuguese and had served twice before in the AF bureau.

In the end, the D Committee selected me for Angola. I finished up in WHA in the spring of 2010, and then started Portuguese refresher training at FSI. During that time frame I got my first dose of Angola's slow-moving bureaucracy when it took almost five months for me to receive *agrément* (formal host government approval). My predecessor, who was still in Angola, told me that the same thing had happened to him; he said the *agrément* request simply sits in the president's inbox until he is ready to sign it. This was a harbinger of things to come...

Q: Was this the way the Portuguese had run things in their colonies? I mean, was it the bureaucracy sort of perpetuating itself?

MCMULLEN: That was certainly part of the problem but not all of it, as I found out when I finally arrived in Angola. The Portuguese influence on its former colonies was evident in my dealings with both Brazil and Angola. They centralized power in the bureaucracy, which meant top-down control of virtually everything. Angola and Brazil also put a premium on protocol, form over substance, and caution over efficiency.

Another common trait shared by Angola and Brazil, which I suspect goes back to Portuguese colonial rule, was the tendency to channel every bilateral issue through the foreign ministry. When I was DAS for South America and we wanted to pursue something with Brazil's defense ministry, there would be push-back from the foreign ministry, which insisted that it would take up our issue with the defense ministry and get back to us with a response. The same was true when I was ambassador in Angola; if we wanted to deal with the ministry of justice on an issue, the foreign ministry would step in and take up our issue within the bureaucracy.

In the case of Angola this system was complicated by the office of the presidency, where there was a small group of senior advisers who operated as a parallel cabinet. In many instances these presidential advisers had more power than the cabinet ministers themselves. They were the ones making the calls, not the foreign minister or the defense minister. This produced a dysfunctional bureaucracy that operated at glacial speed. I soon found out that it was even worse when there was a crisis that required immediate action by the Angolan government.

Angola was further hampered by a dearth of human capital. This was one of the many unfortunate consequences of the country's 41 years of war, which began in 1961 with its struggle for independence and lasted until the end of its brutal civil war in 2002. The bureaucracy also suffered from Angola's system of political patronage; many key jobs were filled by people whose only qualification was their personal ties to a powerful player in the ruling party. I found that Angolan officials often used excessive protocol to mask widespread incompetence in the bureaucracy. On top of this, Angolan President Jose Eduardo dos Santos exercised control over the smallest details of government, which often produced paralysis in decision making.

Q: So when did you go to Angola? And could you give a little background on our history with Angola? It is interesting.

MCMULLEN: I arrived in Angola in mid-November 2010, and left there in mid-June 2013. As you suggested, we have an interesting and complicated history with Angola, and it continues to influence our bilateral relations to this day.

In terms of context, Angola fought a war of independence for 14 years and gained its independence from Portugal in 1975. After a coup that ousted long-time strongman Salazar, the Portuguese wanted to get out of Angola as well as their other African colonies. And they didn't want to get bogged down with the knotty question of who was going to run these newly independent countries. As a consequence, Angola plunged into a devastating civil war that lasted 27 years. Initially there were three competing factions: the MPLA (People's Movement for the

Liberation of Angola), led largely by members of the Mbundu tribe from the coastal area near Luanda, the capital; the FNLA (National Liberation Front of Angola), led mostly by the Bakongo, an ethnic group based in northern Angola; and UNITA (National Union for the Total Independence of Angola), dominated by the Ovimbundu tribe based in central Angola.

Angola soon got caught up in the Cold War rivalry between the U.S. and the Soviet Union. The Soviets and Cubans backed the MPLA, led by Agostinho Neto, while we initially backed the FNLA, led by Holden Roberto. However, when the FNLA's prospects flagged, we switched our support to the more militarily capable UNITA, led by Jonas Savimbi. He became one of the so-called freedom fighters that formed the core of the Reagan administration's surrogate forces fighting against Soviet surrogates in Angola, Afghanistan and Nicaragua. Our support for UNITA ended around 1988, when we helped broker an agreement that led to the withdrawal of Cuban forces backing Angola's MPLA-led government. As part of the agreement, South African troops that were assisting UNITA forces also withdrew from Angola. The civil war finally ended in 2002, when Angolan troops hunted down and killed Savimbi, marking the decisive defeat of UNITA as an insurgent military force.

Even though we severed our ties to Savimbi's rebel forces well before Angola's first multiparty elections in 1992, our earlier support for UNITA left a lasting legacy that we still have not overcome completely, at least with the current generation of Angolan leaders. Since establishing diplomatic relations with Angola in 1993, we have had our ups and downs, with some of the down periods complicated by continued Angolan distrust of the U.S. I suspect that we are unlikely to shed our historical baggage until a new generation comes to power in Angola.

Q: Did this legacy affect your work in Angola?

MCMULLEN: Absolutely. It seemed like the specter of our history in Angola hung over us whenever we were grappling with frictions in our relations. Unfortunately, several things happened shortly after I arrived in Angola that revived the suspicions of government officials about our motives and set the tone for much of my tenure there.

The first issue was related to the Dodd-Frank Act that Congress had passed a few months before my arrival in Angola. The new law reflected congressional concerns about foreign entities using U.S. banks to launder money. As a result, the Comptroller of the Currency required U.S. banks to monitor foreign accounts more closely, including those of embassies. The Angolan Embassy was one of 37 diplomatic missions in the U.S. that had its bank accounts closed because of the high costs of monitoring them. The banks didn't make much money from embassy accounts, so it was more cost effective to close them. This made it virtually impossible for these embassies to do business. Angolan officials refused to believe that this was a business decision by private banks; instead, they saw it as a hostile act by the U.S. government. The Angolans were so angry that it wasn't clear whether they would even let me enter the country.

As it turned out, the Angolan government allowed me to enter the country but made me wait nearly five months before I was able to present my credentials. Typically you are credentialed within a month or so after arrival. Meanwhile, I wasn't allowed to conduct any business with government officials, which of course complicated our efforts to help them with the banking

issue. Despite repeated explanations by senior officials in Washington that this was a business decision made by the banks, Angolan officials were convinced that the U.S. government was responsible for their predicament. For whatever reason, they also were convinced that I could solve their problem if I wanted to do so. Of course, we know the U.S. government doesn't work like that; it was an issue out of our hands. In fact, State Department tried and failed to get help from the Treasury Department on this vexing issue, not just for the Angolan embassy, but also for the other foreign diplomatic missions that were affected by these bank account closures.

Angolan officials took this issue as an affront, not only because it seemed to fit a pattern in our past relations but also because we had just signed a strategic partnership agreement in July 2010. To distrustful Angolan officials, the closure of their embassy's bank accounts looked like another case of bad faith on our part. They also saw it as an embarrassment and a slap in the face. Despite our assurances that we were doing all that we could do within U.S. laws, Angolan officials thought that our strategic partnership would make them immune to this kind of thing. In the end, we had to muddle through the best we could until the Angolan Embassy finally found a bank that would keep their accounts. The whole process left a bad taste that lingered throughout my tenure there. According to Angolan press reports, President José Eduardo dos Santos was so angry that he decided to delay receiving my credentials as a way to express his displeasure.

Q: Did you say there were other things that happened early on that affected your relations with the government?

MCMULLEN: Yes, there were two other issues that soured relations early in my tenure. In the fall of 2010, Côte d'Ivoire held elections that were marred by dubious charges of fraud and violence. International observers declared that opposition leader, Alassane Ouattara, was the winner of free and fair elections. The losing candidate, incumbent President Laurent Gbagbo, charged fraud and launched attacks on Ouattara's supporters. Angola was the only country that backed Gbagbo. According to credible reports, President dos Santos sent a small group of Special Forces to support Gbagbo. This was dos Santos repaying a debt to Gbagbo, who had helped dos Santos and his MPLA party when it was battling UNITA during Angola's civil war. Gbagbo had given MPLA forces safe haven and allowed them to train in Côte d'Ivoire.

Needless to say, Washington was not happy with Angola's actions, which worsened tensions in our relations. And as a consequence of President dos Santos' decision to delay receiving my credentials, I was not able to work with Angolan officials to defuse these tensions. Dos Santos finally withdrew the Angolan forces from Côte d'Ivoire after a few weeks but further damage had been done to our relations, including the recently-launched strategic partnership.

Shortly after we had gotten past this issue, Angolan authorities seized a U.S.-flagged ship in the port of Lobito, about a three-hour drive south of the capital of Luanda. The ship was carrying humanitarian assistance as part of the McGovern-Dole Food for Education Program. The ship was delivering this food aid to Angola, Mozambique and Malawi; it was then going on to Kenya, where it was delivering ammunition that the Kenyan military had bought from a U.S. company. The ammunition reportedly included a mix of inert and live rounds for Kenyan military training.

We were not aware that the ship would be stopping in Angola and were completely caught by surprise. The timing of this port call could not have been worse. The opposition party UNITA, which we had supported during Angola's civil war, was leading large anti-government demonstrations in Lobito around the time that the ship pulled into port. This played right into the hands of the Angolan government, which claimed that the U.S. was delivering military supplies to its old ally, UNITA. This assertion was nonsense but it served the government's propaganda goal, which was to deflect attention from legitimate peaceful protests. Local authorities detained the ship claiming the American captain had not declared that his ship was carrying hazardous cargo. The captain rejected this charge, pointing out that he had come into port flying a hazardous cargo flag, and had listed the ammunition and other cargo in the ship's manifest.

I still had not been able to present my credentials and therefore couldn't talk to Angolan officials. So I worked behind the scenes using back channels to communicate with the government. I passed messages through the Angolan director of the U.S.-Angola Chamber of Commerce, who had access to senior government officials. I also used other unofficial channels to communicate with Angolan officials. My main message was that Angola was badly blotting its copybook with Washington and for minimal gain. In the end, it took us several weeks to get the government to release the ship, causing further strains in our relations.

Q: What was Washington's attitude towards the Angolan government? I mean, after the long history of bad blood in our relations over the years ...

MCMULLEN: I would say there were mixed feelings in Washington about Angola. When I did my initial consultations with other government agencies, I was struck by the wide divergence of views among U.S. officials. Some had a generally positive view of Angola, while others were quite negative. It seemed like this divergence of views was based on the personal experiences of these U.S. officials in dealing with the Angolan government.

President dos Santos had been in power since 1979, so there was understandable concern about his autocratic rule among some members of Congress. Senator Russell Feingold, chair of the Senate Subcommittee on African Affairs was one of the more prominent critics of Angola, although he wasn't strident in his criticism. Plus, he recognized the importance of Angola for U.S. interests in Africa. There were other members of Congress who also understood Angola's strategic importance, even if they didn't particularly like the government.

Prior to my Senate confirmation hearing, I met with Senator Johnny Isakson, a Republican from Georgia, and Senator James Inhofe, a Republican from Oklahoma, both of whom expressed support for improved relations with Angola. I think there were ambivalent feelings about Angola among many other members of Congress. They were aware of the country's questionable record on democracy and human rights issues, but they didn't treat Angola as a pariah as they tended to do with Zimbabwe. My sense was that many members of Congress recognized that Angola had suffered a devastating civil war and were willing to give the government some space to hopefully move in a more democratic direction.

Q: When did you finally get credentialed? And how were your dealings with the government after these various disputes?

MCMULLEN: I presented my credentials to President dos Santos on March 31st, 2011, a few weeks after the U.S. ship was released by port authorities in Lobito. Angolan officials were cordial during my initial courtesy calls, but it was clear that the banking issue still rankled. By that time several more U.S. banks had dropped the Angolan Embassy's accounts, leaving their diplomatic mission in a state of limbo. This situation persisted well into my tour; I think they finally found a bank that would keep their embassy accounts sometime in 2012.

These frictions created a negative atmosphere that affected my work from the start. Angolan expectations had been raised pretty high by the signing of a strategic partnership only six months earlier. For Angolan officials, the strategic partnership represented Washington's long-awaited public acknowledgement of Angola's importance to U.S. interests. They also seemed to believe that the strategic partnership would somehow insulate Angola from any kind of scrutiny by U.S. officials, which of course was unrealistic.

Q: Given our checkered past with Angola, and then these new tensions, were you able to get any traction with the strategic partnership?

MCMULLEN: We were able to get something going with the strategic partnership a few months after I presented my credentials. We proposed an energy dialogue that would explore ways in which we could work together to advance our common interests. Angola's economy was heavily dependent on oil exports, which accounted for about 80 percent of the government's revenues. At that time, we bought about 40 percent of Angola's oil exports, providing much of the country's hard currency. So we thought this topic would likely appeal to Angolan officials, despite the residual strains in our relations. After securing the approval of President dos Santos, the government agreed to host a two-day energy dialogue under the umbrella of our strategic partnership. Our delegation was led by Carlos Pascual, State Department's Special Envoy for International Energy Affairs, and David Sandalow, Energy Department's Assistant Secretary for International Affairs. The discussions were constructive and mostly centered on how our two countries could cooperate to ramp up oil exploration and production in Angola. The dialogue was a positive step forward and it gave new life to the strategic partnership.

About six months later the Angolan government agreed to host a geopolitical dialogue as part of the strategic partnership. Our delegation was led by State Department's Under Secretary for Political Affairs Wendy Sherman. During the day-long dialogue, Sherman and Angolan Foreign Minister Georges Chikoti engaged in wide-ranging discussions of regional and international issues of mutual interest. In the case of regional issues, we were able to find common ground on the Great Lakes region—Rwanda, Burundi, and the DRC (Democratic Republic of the Congo)—which was an area of great concern for Angola. Our two countries share an interest in maintaining stability in the Great Lakes countries. That region is a top security concern for Angola, which has suffered from refugee flows during periods of instability.

The energy and geopolitical dialogues focused on issues of interest to the Angolan government and thus allowed us to make some progress in advancing the strategic partnership. Subsequent visits by senior U.S. officials were helpful in generating dialogues on other issues of mutual interest. General Carter Ham, Commander of AFRICOM (U.S. Africa Command), followed up

on Sherman's visit by leading a delegation that engaged with senior Angolan military officials on security issues. Likewise, Deputy Treasury Secretary Neal Wolin's visit advanced our interest in assisting Angola with a number of reforms aimed at strengthening the country's financial system.

Q: So did these high-level visits help you turn the corner with the Angolan government?

MCMULLEN: The visits helped us get beyond some of the frictions of my early months in Angola, although strains reemerged in the run-up to Angola's elections in August 2012. I was traveling quite a bit throughout the country as the elections approached, meeting with civic and political organizations, including opposition parties and the ruling MPLA party. My meetings with civil society leaders and opposition parties did not go down well with the government. On the eve of elections, the deputy foreign minister summoned me to complain about these meetings. He said the office of the presidency was upset over my activities. I told him, "I'm doing what every American ambassador does in other countries around the world. We travel throughout the country, we talk to the opposition, we talk to the ruling party, we talk to NGOs, we talk to the press, and we report back to Washington our views of the situation."

I pointed out to the deputy foreign minister that Angola's ambassador in Washington was free to meet with whomever he wanted—Democrats, Republicans, civil society leaders. I said, "That's the way we operate." Of course, as I knew, that's not the way Angola operates. The Angolan government prefers the way the Chinese, Russians and other autocratic governments operate. Their ambassadors stay in the capital of Luanda and meet exclusively with government officials or members of the ruling MPLA party. They don't travel much outside of Luanda and they certainly don't meet with opposition leaders or social activists.

Q: What about other countries, how did they get along with the Angolan government? Were the Angolans still close to their former Cold War allies?

MCMULLEN: In general, I found that Angola's foreign policy was based on clear-eyed pragmatism. And even though the ruling MPLA party had originally been founded on Marxist principles, I met very few Angolan officials who were ideological. On the other hand, many Angolan officials still demonstrated surprising loyalty towards their former Cold War allies who had helped them during the civil war.

The diplomatic pecking order in Angola when I was there was basically driven by money and history; the Chinese were at the front of the queue because they had made large loans to the Angolan government to rebuild the country's infrastructure that had been destroyed by the war. These loans were usually repaid with Angolan oil over a number of years. As part of the deal, China sent about 250,000 workers to Angola to rebuild bridges, roads, hospitals, hotels and other buildings. This became a sore point for many Angolans who understandably thought they should be the ones being hired to rebuild their country's infrastructure.

Angolan officials liked these oil-for-infrastructure deals because they were able to rebuild relatively quickly by leveraging their large oil reserves. More importantly, the Chinese government didn't impose the same kinds of conditions as the IMF (International Monetary Fund) and World Bank, nor did they demand reforms like the U.S. and other Western countries

did in many cases. For these reasons, the Chinese were viewed as Angola's most valuable relationship at that point in time.

Angolan foreign policy is both pragmatic and transactional, so China's place at the top could change if Angola's priorities were to change. Since the collapse of oil prices in 2014, and the election of a new president, João Lourenço, in 2017, Angola has tried to rebalance its relations by working more closely with the U.S. and other Western countries. This reflects the realization among Angolan government and business leaders that the country needs to diversify its economy beyond its reliance on oil and diamonds; to do this requires Western expertise and assistance.

When I was in Angola, the Russians, Cubans, Portuguese, and Brazilians enjoyed close relations with officials in the Angolan government and in the ruling MPLA party. Angola's close relationship with Russia and Cuba was a legacy of the country's civil war; both countries were crucial to the MPLA's victory in that war. Interestingly, the Cubans still played an important role in Angola, mostly in the areas of health and education; I would often run into Cuban doctors while traveling in the countryside. And there were still warm personal relations between Angolan and Cuban officials. In the case of Portugal and Brazil, their close relations with Angola reflected cultural affinities and economic ties. Despite our past history, Angolan officials nevertheless saw value in our bilateral relationship; they viewed the strategic partnership as an especially important symbol of Angola's place in the world.

Q: China has become an increasingly important actor in Africa and in other developing regions. As you noted, China has helped Angola in rebuilding the country's infrastructure. What was the real nature of the Angola-China relationship? Was it based on geopolitical considerations or was it simply transactional, oil for infrastructure?

MCMULLEN: Actually, that's a question that I explored a bit in my conversations with Angolan officials. I asked a number of them why Angola had decided to forge a partnership with China, given their very different cultures and histories. Their responses were revealing. They claimed that when Angola's civil war ended in 2002, the U.S. and other Western governments had placed onerous conditions on loans for Angola to rebuild the country's infrastructure. According to these officials, the U.S. and European countries had leaned on the IMF and World Bank to impose transparency and accountability requirements that the Angolan government felt were infringements on the country's sovereignty. I should note that the U.S. and other Western countries had insisted on these conditions because of valid concerns about corruption in the Angolan government. So Angola decided that instead of accepting Western loans with conditions, it would go with the Chinese who didn't place any conditions on their loans.

One senior Angolan official said that when they initially got the loans from China, the Angolan government had planned to use its own citizens to rebuild the war-torn infrastructure. But Angolan officials soon realized they faced a dilemma: they were working against the clock because Angolans were demanding quick action. This meant that skilled workers would be needed to do much of the work, but Angola's long civil war had taken a heavy toll on the country's human capital. Angolan workers didn't have the same skills as Chinese workers. This Angolan official described the government's tough choice, saying "If we allow our own people to rebuild the infrastructure it's going to take twice the time to do it, or we could have the

Chinese do it.” Angolan officials chose the faster option. As a result, an estimated 250,000 Chinese workers were doing jobs that Angolans could have been doing. Angolan officials knew this was a sensitive issue among Angolans; they also knew there was a lot of resentment against the Chinese workers, who were often the targets of Angolan anger and abuse.

For their part, the Chinese were frustrated with Angolan officials, whom they viewed as mostly ineffective and corrupt. During my initial courtesy call, the Chinese ambassador was surprisingly candid in expressing his negative opinion of Angolan officials. Shortly after my meeting with him, he gave a press interview in which he criticized the work ethic of Angolans. Not surprisingly, this was his last interview before he left Angola to return home. His successor was more cautious in his public remarks and much more solicitous towards Angolan officials.

The overall relationship between Angola and China was not an easy one; in many ways, it was a marriage of convenience. For one thing, there were significant cultural differences between the two countries, which contrasted sharply with Angola’s cultural and historical ties to fellow Lusophone countries, such as Portugal and Brazil. Also, Angola and China didn’t have much of a history of collaboration and cooperation, as was the case with Russia and Cuba. Like the U.S., China had initially supported the FNLA rebels in Angola’s civil war and later switched its support to UNITA. In contrast to our relationship, Angolan officials conveniently disregarded China’s past intervention and support for these rebel forces during the civil war.

Q: Were the Chinese burrowing in? I mean, with all of these workers in Angola, did you see Chinese restaurants? Was there a Chinese community emerging in Angola?

MCMULLEN: I think it is human nature for this to happen. It certainly seemed that there were a lot of Chinese workers who had decided to stay and make a life in Angola. I remember being on a couple of flights from South Africa to Angola that had large numbers of Chinese workers coming in together as a group. Both the Chinese and Angolan governments tried to keep these workers together in military-style compounds. Despite these efforts, many Chinese workers found their way into local communities where they built simple houses and established small businesses. I was often surprised when I visited *musseques* (shanty towns) and would see Chinese living with Angolan common-law wives or girlfriends. They evidently were planning to make a life there. I suspect they made the calculation that there was more personal freedom for them in Angola than there was in China.

Q: What was our real interest in Angola?

MCMULLEN: We had two core interests: foremost was the fact that Angola was the second-largest oil producer in sub-Saharan Africa, after Nigeria; secondly, we had shared strategic and security interests in Africa, particularly in the Great Lakes region.

The importance of Angolan oil reflected our desire to diversify the sources of imported oil; this predated the explosion of fracking and shale oil in the U.S., which has reduced the importance of oil imports from Angola and other countries. When we signed the strategic partnership with Angola in 2010, its importance as a source of oil was a key factor. At that time, we were buying

about 40 percent of Angola's high-quality oil. Unlike Venezuela's heavy oil, Angola's light oil is easy to refine because of its low sulfuric content.

Also, as a consequence of the country's long civil war, Angola's armed forces are among the most capable and professional in Africa. Angola's armed forces are able to deploy relatively quickly due to their airlift capacity. In light of these capabilities, we would like Angola to play an active role in UN or AU (African Union) peacekeeping missions in Africa. While Angola has a lot of potential in this area, I think it's going to take time for the country to take on this role.

Given Angola's strategic importance in Africa, we wanted to enhance our military-to-military relations. This was one of the topics that General Ham raised when he and his AFRICOM delegation met with Angolan Minister of Defense Van Dunem and other top officials. While we were able to increase some professional exchanges between our forces, the pace of progress was slow. Senior Angolan military officers remembered our support for UNITA guerrillas during the civil war and were wary of getting too close to us. On the other hand, Angolan officers below the rank of colonel were much more open to working with our military. For many mid-level and junior officers, the U.S. military was a model to emulate and they wanted to have closer ties.

I suspect that we will have to wait until this new generation of officers assumes senior positions for us to have closer relations with the Angolan armed forces, although this process could be accelerated with the election of João Lourenço as president. He was a general during the civil war and has cast himself as a reformer and a modernizer. So it's possible that Lourenço might decide to seek closer ties with the U.S. military as a way to further improve the professionalism and capabilities of Angola's forces.

We also have converging interests with Angola when it comes to stability in central Africa. Diplomatically, Angola is a key player in efforts to bring peace and stability to the Great Lakes region, particularly in the DRC. The DRC is a strategically important country but its government is fragile and virtually non-existent outside of Kinshasa, the capital. Political instability in the DRC, accompanied by violence and large refugee outflows, is a nightmare scenario for Angola. These common concerns are a compelling reason for our two governments to hold regular consultations on regional issues within the context of our strategic partnership.

Q: And the DRC is a huge country....

MCMULLEN: That's true. The DRC is huge and has little in terms of infrastructure; there are few roads outside of Kinshasa. The Congo River serves as the main highway for the movement of people and goods across the country's huge expanse. A major concern for us and Angola is the fact that the DRC has virtually no government presence in vast parts of the country. These ungoverned spaces allow illegal armed groups to flourish, including Rwandan Hutu militias.

Our concerns about the DRC plunging into chaos are shared by Angola. As a neighbor worried about its own interests, Angola intervened in the DRC's ethnic war in the late 1990s, along with Rwanda, Uganda, Zimbabwe, and several other countries. We want to make sure that whatever influence Angola exercises in this region is a positive one and not just a grab for natural resources. Given its diplomatic and military weight in the region, we also believe Angola could

be helpful in Burundi and Rwanda. This was another important factor in forging a strategic partnership with Angola. At the same time, these shared interests often conflict with our desire to improve democratic practices and human rights in Angola, which has caused frictions.

Q: Was Angola's president like Mobutu other African "Big Men" in terms of repression and corruption?

MCMULLEN: I would characterize President dos Santos as one of the softer African strongmen, compared to Mobutu, Idi Amin, Robert Mugabe and some others. When I was there, the Angolan government had enough money to buy off dissidents rather than kill them or imprison them for long periods. Angola's revenues from the export of oil and diamonds went directly into government coffers. These lucrative revenues served as the grease to make the political system work. Much of the corruption involved the diversion of these revenues to support the ruling MPLA party's vast patronage system. And the Angolan government's method of suppressing dissent was to co-opt dissidents by giving them well-remunerated sinecures.

I remember hosting a lunch at my residence for young Angolan leaders from various sectors. The IMF had just released a report noting that \$32 billion in oil revenues "had gone missing;" it was unaccounted for in Angolan government records. At the lunch, I asked this group of young professionals what they thought of this report. A young lawyer said, "I don't mind corruption in the government but they should share some of it with us." I was shocked by the comment. But another young lawyer gave a different perspective, saying "I hope that we get to the point where there are so many Angolans who are unhappy with this kind of corruption that the government can't afford to buy us all off." This was the problem: oil prices were at record highs at that time, so the Angolan government did have the money to buy off a lot of would-be dissidents.

Q: What about young Angolans? Did they share their parents' distrust or dislike of the U.S.?

MCMULLEN: First of all, I should note that young Angolans are an increasingly important demographic; more than 40 percent of Angola's population is under 14 years of age, so it's a very young country. In contrast, Angola's independence leaders are in their 70s and 80s. This gives us an opportunity to build a better relationship with Angola than we have had in the past. I felt that our long-term interest in Angola was with the new generation of leaders who didn't have deeply ingrained suspicions of the United States. So I decided to focus much of my time trying to cultivate trust and closer relations with this next generation. I met regularly with young Angolans to hear their views on issues of common interest. I also spoke to university students and hosted lunches for young professionals from different sectors—doctors, lawyers, educators. Unlike many of their parents, these younger Angolans generally had a positive view of the U.S.

I remember visiting the University of Houston where the Angolan government sent a lot of students on scholarships to study chemical engineering so they could later work in the oil industry. I met with a group of these students to talk about Angola's future. I was amazed at how well informed they were about Angola's place in the world, and how candid they were in their criticism of the country's record on human rights and democracy. Despite the fact that they were on government scholarships, they weren't afraid to voice their unhappiness with Angola's

repressive policies. They also expressed admiration for our way of life even though they had spent years hearing the Angolan government criticize the U.S.

As part of our outreach we took advantage of State Department's International Visitor's program to send young Angolans to the U.S. Our outreach meshed with the Obama administration's YALI (Young African Leaders Initiative), which also focused on the next generation of leaders. I left Angola hopeful about the next generation, in part because a growing number of young Angolans share our views on human rights and democracy.

Q: By the way, I would think that you had a larger staff when you were consul general in São Paulo, since it is a huge consulate, than you had when you were ambassador in Angola.

MCMULLEN: That's true. We had around 220 embassy employees in Angola, compared to more than 320 employees at our consulate in São Paulo. We had 10 U.S. government agencies in São Paulo, plus a very large consular section. In Angola we had only five U.S. agencies when I was there, and a small consular section.

Q: On the issue of staffing, one of the problems we've had in dealing with consular affairs in Africa is that our embassies are likely to have a single, very junior officer serving as the consul. Normally, most of the other Americans on your staff don't have much consular experience themselves. And so for the embassy, you don't have the same level of experience and expertise that you would have in Berlin or another post like that.

MCMULLEN: That's probably true in most of our embassies in Africa, except for our larger missions in Kenya, Nigeria and South Africa. I was fortunate to have a talented, though inexperienced, country team. I used to joke that all of us were doing our jobs for the first time: I was a first-time ambassador; my DCM was a first-time DCM; the political/economic chief was managing a section for the first time, as was the public affairs officer and her husband, the consul. They were all outstanding officers but, as you noted, they didn't have the experience of their counterparts in embassies outside of Africa. Thankfully our consul had excellent judgment, because we had several challenging ACS (American citizen services) cases. One case in particular received a lot of attention in Washington and in the U.S. media. In fact, Senator Robert Menendez became personally engaged in the case, which involved two of his constituents, a music promoter and his son who got hooked up with a shady Angolan promoter.

Q: Senator Menendez is from New Jersey.

MCMULLEN: That's right. As with many ACS cases, it was a convoluted story of how this music promoter and his son came to our attention. It was also a cautionary tale for Americans doing business in a country where the rule of law does not always prevail.

In a nutshell, the American promoter had committed—and was paid in advance—to bring an American rapper and another musician to perform at a concert in Angola on New Year's Eve in 2011. I was on personal leave in Namibia when the American father and his son entered Angola, apparently without a visa or proper documentation. They found out after arriving in Angola that the American musicians they were representing were not coming to Angola for the concert.

The American music promoter had struck a deal with an Angolan promoter who was well connected in the ruling MPLA party. When the Angolan promoter found out that the American musicians were not coming, he asked Angolan government officials to detain the American promoter and his son. In response, Angolan officials detained and questioned the Americans for several hours; they then released them but refused to allow them to leave the country until they repaid the Angolan promoter. The father and son were told that they had to repay the Angolan promoter the \$300,000 that he allegedly had lost because of the no-show by the American musicians and the cancellation of the concert.

At some point after their release from detention by Angolan authorities, the American father and son decided to stay at a five-star hotel in Luanda, the capital. They were there for a couple of weeks but were running out of money. Our consul was in contact with them throughout this time and provided as much assistance as possible. Meanwhile, I was trying to press government officials to either bring formal charges against the American father and son or allow them to leave the country. Instead, the government prosecutor simply sat on the case.

Shortly after this case started to unfold we formed a small working group in the embassy to explore what we could do to press the government to move forward. I asked our consul to find out who the prosecutor was in this case. I knew that I was walking a fine line between helping our fellow citizens and interfering—or at least appearing to interfere—in Angola’s judicial system. We were regularly urging the Angolan government to respect the rule of law, so I didn’t want to be accused of interfering in the judicial process.

One of the most frustrating characteristics of the Angolan government was the tendency of officials to batten down the hatches and refuse to take phone calls from our embassy whenever we had a time-sensitive issue. When Angolan authorities seized the U.S.-flagged ship in the port of Lobito, we couldn’t get anyone in the foreign ministry or other government offices to take our urgent calls. If they didn’t have clear instructions from the office of the presidency, they went radio silent. In this top-down system, where the president serves as the ultimate arbiter of virtually every government decision, senior officials just tried to keep their heads down.

Anyway, I decided to write a letter to the prosecutor urging him to allow the two Americans to leave the country or, if he thought they had broken a law, file formal charges against them. At the same time, I called the president’s top foreign policy adviser, someone who exercised more influence than the foreign minister but was not very accessible. After finally reaching him by phone I said, “It’s not right to hold the citizens of another country in legal limbo, neither charging them with a crime nor allowing them leave. If there was a law broken, then present the case in a court of law.” I cautioned the president’s adviser that the case was getting a lot of attention from senior U.S. officials as well as influential members of Congress. Angola was also getting a lot of negative publicity in the U.S. press and social media. I pointed out that Angola’s apparent flouting of the rule of law was not a good way to attract American businessmen and investors. No one would want to do business or invest in a country where foreigners were subject to de facto detention with no formal charges being brought against them.

After more than a month of inaction, the Angolan government finally allowed the American music promoter and his son to leave the country after they apparently paid some of the money that they owed to the Angolan promoter. I think the combination of embassy pressure, as well as a forthright letter to President dos Santos from Senator Menendez, ultimately convinced Angolan officials that this case was inflicting more damage on the country's reputation than it was worth.

This case illustrates some of the risks that Americans face in trying to do business in an opaque environment like Angola where there are no clear rules of the road. It was easier for big U.S. companies like Exxon Mobil, Chevron, or General Electric, because they had critical mass and were able to exert their own leverage. But for average American businessmen, such as the music promoter, Angola could quickly turn into a house of mirrors. I always warned American businessmen thinking about doing business in Angola, "Be careful; first find out who you are dealing with here." In addition to stumbling into problems like the American music promoter experienced, another potential pitfall is the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act (FCPA); you can easily run afoul of our laws while trying to do business in a complicated place like Angola.

Q: FCPA has to do with illegal kickbacks and bribery.

MCMULLEN: Exactly. American companies can run into problems with the FCPA in Angola because of its opaque environment. It's often difficult to know who you're dealing with, and whether there is a conflict of interest. This happened to a small U.S. oil exploration company, which entered into a joint venture with an Angolan company that turned out to be owned by the head of Sonangol, the country's oil and gas parastatal. The Department of Justice opened an investigation to determine whether the American company had violated any U.S. laws but the company eventually filed for bankruptcy. So you had to be careful in navigating this minefield.

Q: Looking back on your time there, do you think we've finally overcome the burdens of our past history with Angola?

MCMULLEN: I think our history with Angola still weighs on some government officials who can't get beyond the past. There were times when I was dealing with these officials that I recalled William Faulkner's observation: "The past is never dead. It's not even past." Even issues that would have been minor irritants in relations with other countries could quickly get elevated to major disputes with Angola because of this lingering distrust of the U.S.

This underlying distrust made it challenging to get real traction on our strategic partnership. While I was committed to advancing this partnership, I had my doubts about its viability. My principal concern was that the two sides had very different views of the partnership. For Angolan officials, this partnership carried important symbolism and represented validation of their policies and leadership; for us, it was a policy initiative aimed at advancing mutually shared interests. We had launched similar partnerships with Nigeria and South Africa, reflecting the U.S. view that these countries were important to our broader interests in Africa. In all three cases, the partnerships required us to balance our interests and our values. I think it was a mistake to assume that Angolan officials would respect even the most basic principles of democracy and human rights. That simply wasn't in the cards. Angolan officials never had any intention of embracing even the semblance of democratic rule. So whenever we stood up for our

values, we revived the suspicions of Angolan officials who viewed our advocacy of democracy and human rights as an attempt to undermine their rule. Angolan officials wanted us to be a silent strategic partner and not speak out against any violations of democratic norms.

I remember a prominent Angolan activist commenting to me on this disconnect; he said, “I think the American view of the strategic partnership is very different from the view of Angolan officials. From their point of view, the United States has to be 100 percent in agreement with Angola on all issues. You can’t just support them 99 percent of the time; you have to be all in.” He was absolutely right. Angolan officials view loyalty as the currency of the realm, a sentiment that we don’t share. This difference in perspectives regarding the nature of the strategic partnership could not be overcome simply by holding periodic dialogues on issues of shared interest; without mutual understanding and trust, it’s difficult to advance mutual interests.

Unfortunately, we were not able to compartmentalize different aspects of our relationship with Angola. As a consequence, the inevitable irritants that would emerge in one part of our relationship would adversely affect the overall relationship. It would have been useful if we had been able to agree to disagree on certain issues, such as human rights and democracy, and then move forward in more productive areas, such as security and economic issues.

During my farewell call on President dos Santos before I left Angola, I said, “It’s unfortunate that the history of our relations has been one of missed opportunities. When you’ve been ready to move forward, we haven’t; when we’ve been ready to advance, you haven’t. I hope that at some point our countries will be able to seize the opportunity to move beyond our past missteps.” There have been some hopeful signs under the new president, João Lourenço, so maybe we will finally be able to move beyond our past history in Angola.

Q: So what did you do after Angola?

MCMULLEN: I returned to Washington in June 2013 to teach at the National War College. I had decided that I was only going to do one more assignment, and I thought it would be interesting to teach at the War College before I retired. The atmosphere there is intellectually stimulating, and I wanted to pay the system back for the enriching experience that I had there as a student. It was a great way to finish up my career.

Q: What were you teaching at the War College?

MCMULLEN: I taught a couple of core courses, including one on the use of non-military instruments of power. This course explored the use of various tools of national power such as diplomacy, economic sanctions, intelligence, and covert action. We looked at how a trade embargo or economic sanctions might work in some cases, whereas covert action might be more appropriate in other situations. For instance, we examined our support for the *mujahideen* (Islamic fighters), who successfully drove the Soviets out of Afghanistan. The course explored all aspects of non-military instruments of power in trying to resolve an international crisis.

I also co-taught a course on the use of military power and diplomacy. We focused on the lessons learned from World War I and other wars. We analyzed how diplomacy failed in the run-up to

World War I, and how the use of military force became an end in itself, disconnected from the original political goals of the participants in that war. We analyzed World War II as an extension of the problems that had not been resolved by World War I and its flawed peace agreement. We examined the rise of Germany and Japan as world powers and the failure of the international order to find a way to accommodate their rise in a peaceful manner. We also analyzed the Cold War and the post-Cold War period, including the rise of non-state actors in recent decades.

In addition to teaching these core courses, I co-taught an elective course on counter-narcotics strategy in Latin America. We looked at different strategies, analyzing what has worked and what hasn't worked in trying to combat drug trafficking in Latin America. Many of the students in this seminar were military officers from Latin America who brought valuable first-hand experience to our discussions.

For the most part, we used a case-study approach in these courses. Our seminars were small, usually about 15 students, representing the various U.S. military services and civilian government agencies, as well as foreign military officers. This brought a diversity of views to our discussions. We also had periodic brown bag lunch discussions on issues of the day, along with special lectures by national security experts.

Q: Did the War College give even weight to studying the use of diplomacy as well as the use of military force?

MCMULLEN: Absolutely. The faculty at the War College is a mix of civilian academics and military officers, most of whom are big-picture thinkers. Both the military officers and civilian academics emphasized the importance of diplomacy as our first line of defense in dealing with crises. They cited German strategist Clausewitz's famous dictum, "War is the continuation of politics by other means." So whether we were studying World War I or the Gulf War, we examined the role of diplomacy in trying to achieve the ultimate political goal.

In the case of World War I there was a failure of diplomacy and military strategy on both sides. In many respects it was an accidental war because no one really wanted an all-out war. The Allied Powers and Central Powers just drifted into war. So we asked, "Why did diplomacy fail?" We took note of the fact that there was not much diplomacy in the run-up to war or during the war itself. We examined the flawed military strategy on both sides, which led to a bloody four-year struggle and strategic stalemate. We also analyzed the peace process and the Treaty of Versailles, which historians believe laid the groundwork for the rise of Hitler and World War II.

Teaching at the War College was a great experience because you learn a lot from your faculty colleagues. Some of the academics are well-known scholars in their fields of study. Besides the permanent faculty of civilian academics, there are military officers and civil servants from the national security agencies that rotate in and out of the War College, normally for two-year stints. We had specialists from the intelligence community, the office of the secretary of defense, and the Treasury Department, including an expert on economic sanctions. I was part of the State Department contingent of five or so Senior Foreign Service officers on detail there.

Q: What is your take on economic sanctions? I mean it seems to be the first arrow in our quiver if things get tough. Policy makers seem to always gravitate to sanctions. I'm dubious, but what is your impression of the effectiveness?

MCMULLEN: I agree. While economic sanctions can play an effective role in backing up our diplomatic efforts, I think in recent years we have developed a case of "sanction-itis." In many instances, it is the lowest common denominator that we can get all U.S. agencies to agree on. And that can be a problem because the easiest way is not always the best way. Plus, I think the law of diminishing returns applies to most things, including the use of sanctions. Our knee-jerk tendency to rely on economic sanctions to solve virtually every problem has caused heartburn for a lot of our allies. Cuba is a good example. Many of our closest allies like the British, Canadians, and others think that our economic sanctions against Cuba have been counterproductive. Unfortunately, we have domestic politics influencing our policy in Cuba.

I think economic sanctions were part of a successful diplomatic approach that pushed South Africa to abandon apartheid. But there were a number of things that complemented the use of sanctions in pressuring the Afrikaners to cede political power. Because of U.S. and Western isolation of South Africa, the Afrikaners realized they had become international pariahs. They couldn't participate in many international events. Afrikaners found it increasingly difficult to travel abroad and to do business in other countries. So they decided to break out of their pariah status by relinquishing political power. It's true that economic sanctions were part of the reason for this decision but it was one factor among several that led to the changes in South Africa. It's also important to keep in mind that the Afrikaners ceded political power in order to maintain their economic power, which remains a problem today in South Africa.

Q: I remember the days when the CIA and covert actions were the name of the game. It took a long time to wean ourselves from covert actions as the first foreign policy tool we reach for.

MCMULLEN: Well, I don't know how much we use covert action today. However, I remember that the Reagan administration used covert action in a number of places during the 1980s. This was a key part of the Reagan Doctrine to counter the Soviets during the Cold War. It is part of the public record that we used covert action to support the *mujahideen* in Afghanistan, the Contras in Nicaragua, and UNITA rebels in Angola. In the case of Afghanistan and Nicaragua, I think the use of covert action helped us achieve our key policy goals. In contrast, I don't believe that we advanced our interests by supporting UNITA rebels in Angola. It still haunts us.

There are a couple of cases today where I think covert action might be helpful in achieving our policy goals. Our diplomatic efforts and economic sanctions have not succeeded in advancing our policy goals in Iran and North Korea. I'm sure that Pentagon officials are not enthusiastic about the use of military force in either of those countries, so what policy options does that leave you with? But you're right, we do have a tendency to overuse some foreign policy tools, whether it is economic sanctions, covert action or some other instrument of power. I suspect it is human nature: if something works, you keep using it until it doesn't work anymore.

Q: So teaching at the National War College was your last assignment? What have you done since leaving the Foreign Service?

MCMULLEN: After I retired in July 2014, we moved to Tallahassee, Florida. I was offered a position as an adjunct professor in the international affairs program at Florida State University, where I taught courses on U.S. policy in Latin America and Africa for a couple of years. It was a nice transition, and I was able to tout careers in the Foreign Service. Quite a few of my students were interested in pursuing foreign affairs careers in the U.S. government or with international NGOs.

Q: Speaking of Latin America, before we finish, could you give me your thoughts on how things are going to work out in Venezuela?

MCMULLEN: Well, I think it will eventually get to the point where President Maduro can no longer pay off the generals. It's only Venezuela's oil money that is keeping his government in power. However, the country's oil production has been declining steadily in recent years because of the lack of maintenance of the equipment needed to extract the oil. Production will likely continue to decline because the government lacks sufficient hard currency to reinvest in PDVSA, which is Venezuela's oil and gas parastatal. Venezuela's oil industry is caught in a vicious circle: the government is not investing enough in oil production, so revenue from the export of oil continues to decline. Even worse, there has been a brain drain of technicians who have fled Venezuela because of the political and economic situation.

The key question is—at what point does President Maduro run out of money to pay off senior military officers, who are crucial to his survival. This question of timing is difficult to determine because there are external actors who could help Maduro muddle through, at least for the near- to mid-term. There have been press reports that Russia is using its technical expertise to assist PDVSA. Also, China has apparently been buying more Venezuelan oil now that it has some refineries to process this heavy oil. These things have provided a lifeline for Maduro.

Cuba also continues to play a crucial role in propping up Maduro. Cuban intelligence officers are very good at ferreting out coup plots; they kept the Castro brothers in power for decades. I'm sure that Cuban intelligence officers are in every barracks in Venezuela and are monitoring closely any coup rumors. Based on press reporting that I have seen in recent years, it looks like Cuban intelligence officers have already prevented coups on several occasions. This combination of Cuban intelligence support for Maduro's government, Russian technical support for PDVSA, and Chinese purchases of oil will be hard to overcome by Venezuela's opposition.

The opposition in Venezuela remains fractured and fragile, with poor prospects for the future. That means the only viable options for change would be a military coup or a popular uprising. In either scenario, there could be a bloodbath. The best scenario would be a negotiated solution that leads Maduro to step down, but there is no indication that he would be willing to do so. And there is the question of who would take him in exile? Cuba is the most likely candidate, but that would happen only if the Cubans concluded there was no other viable option. Cuba certainly doesn't want to give up the oil that Maduro's government provides for the island's fragile economy. I also don't think the Russians or the Chinese want to give up the foothold that they have in Venezuela. So, it's going to be tough to find a peaceful solution.

Q: Okay. So I guess we'll leave it here. Thanks for your time.

MCMULLEN: Thanks for the time that you've devoted to doing these interviews for the oral history project. It's great that we have this opportunity to tell our stories. And, who knows, maybe some of our anecdotes might be useful for historians.

Q: Well, that's one of the goals of the project. Take care, and all the best.

End of interview