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

AMBASSADOR WILLIAM MONROE

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy
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INTERVIEW

Q: Today is the 12th of September 2018, with William Monroe, and this is being done on behalf of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training. And I'm Charles Stuart Kennedy. Let's start with when and where you were born.

MONROE: I was born in San Mateo, California, on December 21st, 1950.

Q: We will come back to San Mateo, but first can we get an idea about your father. Then we will come to your mother, but what's the background of the Monroes?

MONROE: My father grew up in New Jersey. He went to Princeton, where he received a degree in engineering, and then began a lifelong career selling printing presses.

Q: Where did the Monroes come from?

MONROE: The Monroes came from Scotland originally. But on both sides of the family we go way back, coming to America many, many generations ago.

Q: Your father graduated from Princeton when?

MONROE: He was class of 1945.

Q: Did he get caught up in the military?

MONROE: It's a bit of a story. He would have his, as his whole class did, but he had a medical issue, and was unable to serve, so ended up going back to Princeton. But he always regretted that he hadn't served his country as his classmates did, so later—after the war—he volunteered and joined the Army. That took him to California, and that's

why I was born in Santa Mateo. Because he was in the Army in California when I was born in 1950.

Q: What was he doing in the army?

MONROE: I don't know. He never deployed outside the U.S.

Q: What about your mother? Where did she come from and her family?

MONROE: She grew up in New York City. Her father was a lawyer. Her maiden name is McCoun. Again Scottish, so I'm full of Scottish blood. She went to Smith for two years, met my father and often told the story that at the end of sophomore year, when she was taking an exam, she wrote on her test, "I'm going off to get married to the love of my life, so I'm quitting school." And she indeed dropped out, married my father, and became a housewife.

Q: How did your parents meet?

MONROE: They met on a blind date with her best childhood friend and his best childhood friend. As it happens, my parents retired in Sarasota, which is one reason I retired in Florida. And this couple who introduced them also retired in Florida, in nearby Venice. The two couples remained best friends throughout their lives. Although my parents have passed away, their friends are still living and I see them regularly. They love to reminisce about my parents.

Q: Alright, let's go back to your early childhood. What was San Mateo like?

MONROE: I have no idea. I left when I was one. We moved briefly to Arizona and then on to Illinois, where we lived for almost 10 years, first in Wilmette and then Winnetka. And then we moved to Connecticut just before I began sixth grade

Q: Oh, Wilmette. My parents lived in Wilmette when I was born. But this was 1928, so a little bit before your time!

MONROE: Indeed.

Q: Well, what was Wilmette like as a kid?

MONROE: I do not remember Wilmette too well as I was about five or six when we moved to Winnetka. Winnetka was a paradise for a kid. It was one of those suburban towns where all of my friends were within walking distance and I had to walk just three blocks to get to school. After school, we came home and played outdoors till dinner—baseball, football, basketball. We didn't have video games back then. At dinner time, my mother would ring a bell, and home I went. In my memory, it was a terrific, almost idyllic childhood.

Q: It's interesting the change from today where your childhood games are terribly organized and your parents are spending all the time taking you from place to place.

MONROE: Indeed. My next door neighbor had what seemed huge, but was actually a small backyard, which was our baseball field. We used to go out there and play baseball, simulating games with Major League players which we made up ourselves. No parental guidance. We were just out there having fun.

Q: What was the neighborhood like? Like the composition? Any ethnic divisions?

MONROE: It was pure white.

Q: I would imagine so.

MONROE: When I moved to Connecticut, which at that point was also still pretty pure white, there happened to be a Jewish girl in our class who gave a report about her religion in my 7th grade social studies class. For me, it was so eye-opening. I was simply not aware of different cultures or religions. I grew up with a very narrow perspective back then.

Q: *In Illinois, you went to school for how long? You went up to what grade?*

MONROE: Through fifth grade.

Q: And then where did you go?

MONROE: My father took a job with a different company near New York City, and so we moved to New Canaan, Connecticut.

Q: Now at this point were you much of a reader?

MONROE: I was a big reader. In Winnetka, I used to go to the public library, especially in the summer, and take out as many books as I could read. I was an avid reader.

Q: Do you recall any books in particular that made a big impression on you at that age?

MONROE: Not really. It was mostly children's fiction, although I recall that at some point I became interested in Civil War fiction.

Q: In school which subjects did you like and which subjects didn't you like?

MONROE: It's hard to say. I was always good at math but I can't say I particularly liked it. I really didn't have a particular interest or passion at that point.

Q: Oh no, that's quite normal. What was life sort of like for young boy in New Canaan?

MONROE: What was it like? New Canaan is an affluent town. I lived there for several years but only went to school there through 8th grade, then I went off to prep school in ninth grade. So I kind of lived a normal life there for about three years. You know it was the early 60s—go to school, hang out, play sports. A normal kid's life, nothing special.

Q: Where'd you go to prep school?

MONROE: A school called Choate in Wallingford, Connecticut.

Q: Oh yes, well I went to Kent.

MONROE: My uncles went to South Kent.

Q: What was Choate like in those days?

MONROE: Choate had a very significant impact on me. I didn't realize it at the time, but it set me on the path to become a diplomat. But at that time it was also an unhappy place. This was the mid-60s. I was there from 1964 to 1968, and while America was starting to change in significant ways, Choate remained a very rigid and structured school. We had chapel seven days a week. We wore coats and ties. If you were late for meals, late for chapel, late for class, you got punished. There were no girls. Basically, you had a bunch of teenage boys, hormones starting to rage, living in a repressive environment at a time when the United States was beginning to go through big changes. So our class was an unhappy class for the most part. But changes started right after we left. The school changed almost overnight. The girls' school Rosemary Hall moved up and merged with Choate, and the school became co-ed. The strict rules were eased. I just went to my 50th high school reunion, and we were unanimous about how difficult a time it was for us. But looking back, we were all appreciative of, and had come to respect, what a great education we received.

Q: What sort of subjects did you particularly like?

MONROE: Well, this leads to Choate's role in directing me towards the Foreign Service. When I was in junior high school, we had the choice of taking French or shop. I chose shop, which shows that I wasn't really thinking internationally at all—nothing along those lines. When I went to Choate, in my freshman year I took Latin, because I had to take a language and my parents urged me to take Latin because it would be good for my vocabulary. So I started Latin, but after one year I realized that I didn't like it. It was boring; nobody spoke it.

I wanted to take a language that people spoke. Choate had a program in Russian and I made the calculation, "Well okay, three years of French or Spanish, or three years of Russian?" Three years of Russian would look a lot better down the road when trying to get into college, so why not try Russian? And we had a wonderful Russian teacher, a Dutch-American. His class was really interesting, and his Russian class just opened my eyes to the world.

Not only that, Choate had a summer program that included four weeks of intensive Russian language study at Choate, followed by a month-long trip to the Soviet Union. This was in 1967, the 50th anniversary of the Russian revolution. We went all over the Soviet Union, from Leningrad to Kiev to Yalta to Sochi to Tbilisi to Soviet Central Asia to Moscow. It was just a fabulous trip. We also went to Poland, including a visit to Auschwitz. Needless to say, this trip opened my eyes to the world and showed me how interesting other countries and cultures were. That's why I say that Choate had such an impact on my life. The Russian trip and that Russian experience launched me in a direction I had not anticipated.

Q: Any impressions about the Soviet system?

MONROE: The Soviet system? The Soviet system obviously was oppressive, but we weren't particularly oppressed during our trip. Although we were on a state-organized tour, we were given a fair amount of freedom at times, especially in the evenings, to walk around and talk to people. In retrospect, it's obvious we were shielded the harsher aspects of the Soviet system, and our Soviet organizers knew what they were doing in planning our program. But for us, teenagers traveling around the Soviet Union, it was a fascinating adventure.

Q: Did you get any exposure to the Foreign Service on this trip?

MONROE: No.

Q: You didn't go to the embassy?

MONROE: No, we did not go to the embassy. The first time I went to an embassy was a few years later when a college group I was with got a briefing at the U.S. Embassy in Prague.

Q: So you graduated from Choate when?

MONROE: 1968.

Q: Then where did you go?

MONROE: I went to Stanford University.

Q: What directed you towards Stanford?

MONROE: Two things, I guess. One, I just didn't like the East Coast preppy life. I wanted to get as far away from East Coast preppy as I could. And two, after four years at an all-male high school I wanted a good university that was coed, frankly. And you know, most of the Ivy League and the top-notch universities on the East Coast were not

coed at that time. The fact that I was born in California may have also played a small role. There was a little bit of "Oh, that'd be cool" to go back to where I was born.

Q: I went to Kent and then I went to Williams. I got a little bit tired of all males. And then I ended up in the Air Force for four years. In those days the Korean war was basically all male, too. First girl I sat down next to later at Boston University to get my masters, I married her for 60 years. I was ready.

MONROE: Well, all's well that ends well!

Q: What was Stanford like in those days?

MONROE: Stanford was great in many ways. It was an interesting time to be in California, because I arrived in the late 60s, and sentiment against the Vietnam War was strong. I wasn't an activist by any means, but I observed and participated in anti-war activities a bit. My son went to Stanford 35 years later, and actually lived in the same freshman dorm, but I think we had a somewhat different experience. In my day, we really didn't take studying very seriously, something in retrospect I have a bit of regret about. We all assumed we would get jobs, and weren't focused on building a résumé and taking full advantage of all that Stanford had to offer. For my son and his classmates, I felt that academics played a more central role.

Q: What did you major in at Stanford?

MONROE: I majored in history. I might have majored in Russian studies if such a major has existed, but it didn't. Stanford's political science department was not that strong then, and too quantitative for my taste. I studied a lot of modern history with a global focus—20th century Russia, 20th century Europe, 20th century China—so I kind of fell into a history major. But it was really modern history. I studied Russian for three years, but the Russian program at that time veered quickly into literature, and away from speaking and more interesting and practical courses. So I dropped the Russian after three years.

I took up German when I went to the Stanford campus in Vienna for six months in 1970. I chose Vienna for my overseas program because it was close to Eastern Europe and it fit with my interest in the Soviet Union and its allies. The program included study trips to Yugoslavia, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia. We had a professor, Jan Triska, who was an expert on Eastern Europe and joined the teaching staff in Vienna while I was there. So it was a good fit for me.

Q: This was what, your Junior/Senior year at Stanford?

MONROE: It was a six month program, starting in the spring quarter of my sophomore year in 1970, and running through the summer quarter.

Q: Well it must have been quite an experience, wasn't it?

MONROE: Yes and no. I mean yes, it was a great experience. The problem—well there were two problems. First, again I didn't benefit from it as much as I should have. I should have worked harder on my German, participating for example in a program that lined students up with a host Austrian family. That would have certainly helped my German and enhanced my experience. But I, to my later regret, chose not to focus on strengthening my German.

And second, Vienna at that time, and still to certain degree, was a very, very conservative city. Old ladies scolded you if you walked on the grass in the park or acted disrespectfully on the sidewalks. We were a group of 80 long-haired, sandal-wearing, barefoot in the park kids from California, plopped in the center of a very conservative city, and there was a bit of a culture clash.

Q: How were your courses?

MONROE: They were good. We studied German and we had courses on Eastern Europe, and on Austrian art and culture. It was good mix. The program was excellent. The biggest fault was mine—I didn't benefit from it as much as I should have.

Q: How about, you said this is where you made contact with the Foreign Service, the embassy?

MONROE: Yes. We took a trip to Prague and we had a briefing by someone at the embassy in Prague. It was the first time I'd been in an embassy; the first time I'd been briefed by embassy officers. I had one other brush with the embassy while in Vienna. It came in May 1970, after the U.S. incursion into Cambodia, when we organized an all-night vigil sit-in outside the embassy in Vienna. That was ironic in a way, because since I retired I have been living part time in Cambodia for seven years now.

Q: The idea was to light candles in front of the embassy?

MONROE: I don't remember if we lit candles. We probably did, and we had signs and stayed there most of the night, just across the street from the embassy.

Q: I was in Saigon as Consul General at that particular time and there was a couple of American kids who got candles and came. They were in Vietnam even though the war was on, and they lit candles. And of course the newspaper people got out with cameras and all that. Then we sort of just sat there and kept our heads down while they did that. How do you feel about Vietnam?

MONROE: I thought it was wrong. I had a friend in high school from New Canaan who died in the war. And I was terrified that I might get drafted and sent there to fight in the war, which I had no interest in doing. And the war itself just didn't make sense. I was very anti-war on many levels.

Q: You graduated in what year from Stanford?

MONROE: ‘72.

Q: What were you pointed towards or did you have any feel for it?

MONROE: I originally thought that I'd be a lawyer—that I'd be a do-good lawyer and support social justice and that kind of thing. But I took a criminal law course, which is the most interesting part of law as far as I’m concerned, and I just hated it, it was so deadly boring for me. So law was out. And then in my senior year, I read in the Stanford Daily newspaper that a recruiter from a school called the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy was coming to Stanford to interview prospective students. I had never heard of it, or thought of a career in international relations, but I went over to the career center and read the handbook about the school and the course curriculum. And the more I learned, the more I thought it was perfect for me. Without even realizing it, I had been heading in this direction. So I went to the interview, applied, and got in. So off I went to Fletcher.

Q: And you were there for two years?

MONROE: I was at Fletcher for two years.

Q: Where you concentrated in a particular field?

MONROE: Well, I took a lot of Russian studies-related courses even though they didn’t have a Russian studies field, and they didn’t offer language courses. I also focused on security studies and international relations more generally. I still didn't know what I wanted to do at that time. I was going through a transition. Fletcher was significant for me. I left Stanford kind of anti-business, anti-government, anti-military, sort of anti-everything. And I went to Fletcher and some of my classmates had served in the military. Some were conservative, some were liberal. I was suddenly exposed to a broader range of people and ideas. By the time I graduated, I had changed and was interested in working for the government or in business. I wasn't sure yet where exactly I was headed, but something in the international area.

Q: So then what did you do? After you graduated?

MONROE: I looked for a job, which took a while. I finally landed a position at the Commerce Department in the Bureau of East and West Trade, which was a special bureau set up to focus on the boom, or the expected boom, in the trade with Soviet Union and Eastern Europe—which had just emerged as a big potential market. So I was hired in the Eastern Europe Division, and was the desk officer for Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, and Albania.

Q: What the hell do we have to do with Albania?

MONROE: Back then? Nothing, but somebody had to cover the country for the occasional question that came up. I was really the desk officer for Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia, and we didn't have much trade with Bulgaria. We had more with Czechoslovakia. It was an entry-level position. We had six people in the Eastern European division, with desk officers for each of the countries. It was a small operation.

Q: What were you doing?

MONROE: We were promoting trade. We provided advice for any company that wanted to do business in those countries, which were newly opening up for Americans. In Bulgaria, for example, there was the annual Plovdiv International Fair, and we would work with companies interested in participating in the Fair. And we would write reports on the market in these countries which we would provide to interested companies. I wouldn't say it was the hardest I've ever worked. Commerce, shall we say, was a little sleepy. It didn't take long for me to realize that I wasn't going to spend my career in the Commerce Department. But my work there did give me useful experience; experience which was actually pretty valuable years later. When I moved to the State Department, my Commerce background gave me credibility. At that time, State officers were often accused of not paying sufficient attention to commercial work. My Commerce Department experience showed that I had a genuine interest in commercial work. So it was time well spent, but it was definitely not going to be permanent.

Q: Did you get any feel for the relationship between the Department of Commerce and the State Department?

MONROE: I learned enough to realize the State Department was much more dynamic than the Commerce Department. We interacted some. Of course I took an orientation trip to Sofia and Prague and was hosted by State Department officers, so I got to meet them there. We had some interaction with State, but I was not involved in difficult policy issues, where there might have been some bureaucratic battles with State. But I could tell there was more dynamism at State.

Q: Were you under instructions to watch prohibited items from getting to Czechoslovakia, for example?

MONROE: No, we were focused on trade promotion.

Q: What could you promote?

MONROE: Working with the embassies, we would identify opportunities, sectors that were hot, regulations, potential pitfalls. These markets were just opening up, and companies would come to us for information on how to do business there.

Q: How long were you at Commerce?

MONROE: I was at Commerce for three years, but I was only in the Eastern European Division for about half that time. Things got a little complicated. I got married shortly after starting at Commerce. My wife (she was my first wife) was also a Fletcher graduate, one year behind me, and she followed me down to Washington and started looking for a job. We had been kind of thinking about the State Department, and she applied and got in about a year before I eventually did. She stayed in Washington for her first assignment, and started working on the Middle East. On the assumption that this might lead to an assignment in the Middle East, we thought that maybe I should get some Middle East experience—whether or not I got into State or followed her as a trailing spouse. So I changed jobs at Commerce. This was the mid-70s after the oil boom, and Commerce had set up a new bureau to help U.S. companies take advantage of all the petrodollars—the Commerce Action Group for the Near East, or CAGNE. One of the offices in CAGNE organized trade missions to the Middle East as well as trade exhibitions of U.S. companies at our Trade Center in Tehran. That office had an opening, I applied for it, and was chosen.

So in 1977, I was busily recruiting companies to take advantage of the great market in Iran. It was a miserable job, making cold calls all day long, telling companies about the promising opportunities in Iran and encouraging then to participate in exhibitions featuring American companies in different sectors—water and sanitation, automotive spare parts, whatever. And I filled several exhibitions with American companies at the Teheran Trade Center in 1977, and then left Commerce for State in 1978. Of course, the Iran revolution took place a couple of years later, and I always wondered how many sales reps were cursing that guy at Commerce who convinced them to exhibit in Tehran just before the market closed off after the revolution.

Q: Did you go to Iran?

MONROE: No I didn't. I would have loved to. I wish I had. I was only at CAGNE for a year, and then I was gone, and Iran closed up.

Q: So you didn't deal with Iran after the revolution….

MONROE: No, I left the Commerce Department at the end of 1977, and I joined State in 1978. In the summer of '79 I went to Egypt. Before I went to Egypt, I was studying Arabic at FSI with several people who were studying Farsi in the room next door who became hostages.

Q: Okay let's go back a bit. Did you take the foreign service exam?

MONROE: I took it twice. First time I did not pass. Second time I did pass.

Q: And then when did you take the oral exam?

MONROE: It would have been probably in '77 sometime.

Q: Were you married at the time?

MONROE: I was.

Q: What was the situation as a married couple, since your wife was already in by that time?

MONROE: There was no problem—two officers could be married by then. The issue didn't really come up, I don't think, in the oral. By the time my class was called up in January '78, she'd been at State for a year. I took a one-year job as a staff assistant in the Political-Military Bureau so that we could line up my end-of-tour date with hers. So obviously the Department at that time was willing to give the flexibility to allow a tandem couple to work out their assignments so that they could go out together—which we did in the summer of '79.

Q: How did you find the A-100 course?

MONROE: I found it fine. I think it was less relevant to me in the sense that I had been in Washington for three years and I knew the bureaucracy pretty well compared to most of the others in my A-100 class. They were coming from all over the country, and many had little to no Washington or government experience. I was already exposed to a lot of what was presented because I had been working in Washington. I felt fairly comfortable already. Plus my wife was in the Department at that time.

Q: What was she doing?

MONROE: She was working in NEA, in the office of Syria, Jordan, and Lebanon.

Q: Well then, you got out of A-100 course in...

MONROE: End of February 1978. Then I got a job as a staff assistant in the Political-Military (PM) Bureau, which frankly was a great first tour. I think everybody should do something like that, because that one year, working in a functional bureau as a staff assistant, I really learned how the Department worked. How the bureaus interrelated, how the 7th Floor worked, how briefing papers moved, how to get things done. It was an invaluable experience.

Q: What section of the political-military were you in?

MONROE: I was in the front office. I was the Bureau's staff assistant to the assistant secretary, who was Les Gelb at that time. Most bureaus had two staff assistants at that time, but PM had just one, so I worked hard and it was not easy—first one there in the morning, last one out at night.

Q: What was Les Gelb like?

MONROE: I have the highest respect for him. He's brilliant, an unbelievable writer, smarter than can be. I was in awe of him and remain so. He was just very thoughtful, very skillful, excellent. He was a great person for whom to work. It was learning from a star. I have great respect for him.

Q: Were there any particular issues that were affecting the Political-Military Bureau?

MONROE: Oh yeah, there was a lot going on. This was Jimmy Carter era, so there were all sorts of arms control negotiations going on, including some innovative ones, such as on conventional arms transfers. And the other thing I remember were the battles over arms sales to Iran.

Q: Oh yes. Was there the feeling that Iran was going "down the drain" while you were there?

MONROE: Well, I don't know about "down the drain," but human rights issues were an increasing concern, and I imagine there was some question of how stable the Shah's regime was. So there was an issue of whether we wanted to keep pouring arms into Iran.

Q: You were there for a year?

MONROE: I was there until January 1979, and at that time we were looking for a posting overseas.

Q: How did events in Iran affect your job in your bureau?

MONROE: You mean the Political-Military Bureau? Well the events in Iran happened after I left. Because I left in January '79 and the embassy didn't fall until one year later, so I don't know how it impacted PM.

Q: So where did you go after the Political-Military Bureau?

MONROE: That's where it got a little interesting. In the fall of 1978, my wife and I started to look for jobs and because she was working on the Middle East—in NEA— she was competitive there. We were both economic officers, and there was a job in the economic section in Cairo for her, and one in the consular section that I could take and satisfy my obligations to do a consular job. And so we bid on those jobs and were assigned—provisionally. I say provisionally because—an indication of the new era we were entering—the Ambassador in Cairo at the time, Hermann Eilts, wanted to check us out before approving this newfangled tandem assignment. Do you remember Ambassador Eilts?

Q: Yes.

MONROE: He was rather old school. Anyway, so he was back for consultations sometime in that period. He was a little suspicious of this idea of a married couple

assigned to his Embassy. He was worried that it might cause trouble, and wanted to interview us. So we came in to talk to him and had an interview. We must have done OK because he did approve the assignment, and off we went in the summer of 1979. Now the ironic thing was that, thankfully, he left Cairo before we got there because he would have no doubt felt he was on to something and should have withheld his approval. That's because within a few months of our arrival there our marriage fell apart and we got divorced. It could have been a difficult situation but we handled it very professionally. We both stayed. There were no scenes. In fact, I think we demonstrated that unfortunate things can happen in people's personal lives, and that should not affect the way the Department deals with their professional lives. Of course, it helped that Cairo was a huge Embassy, which made it easier to navigate through the process. Anyway, we moved into separate housing, and we stayed there and finished our tours successfully. But that's the kind of issue Ambassador Eilts was worried about, I suppose.

Q: Did your wife continue in the Foreign Service?

MONROE: She did. Well, she dropped out after Cairo and went to work in a bank in New York and didn't like it, and so came back. She had wanted to resign from the State Department but was advised to take a leave of absence instead in case it didn't work out. She was thankful for that advice, as it made her return much simpler.

Q: What was Cairo like when you were there?

MONROE: It was a really interesting time in Cairo. As we go through this you'll find that I often seemed to end up in places just before—or sometimes right after—something really interesting or important happened. I arrived in Cairo just after the signing of the Camp David Accords, when the embassy grew from a smallish to the biggest embassy in the world, primarily because we had a huge USAID mission. The Embassy was awash with USAID employees and contractors, plus a good-sized military mission. Egypt itself was opening to foreign business and it was a lively, vibrant place that was opening up to the outside world after the relatively closed period under Gamal Abdel Nasser.

What made the assignment especially enjoyable for me were the Egyptian friends I made while there. Egyptians are just wonderful people, outgoing and friendly. Cairo was a fun city to live in. Sure, it was a dirty, dusty, stressful, difficult place to live, but also so vibrant. At that time the phones didn't work, so if you wanted to talk to somebody you couldn't call them up—you had to get in a car and go talk to them, which just exacerbated the city's terrible traffic problems. But it was still a great place to live.

At that time, Anwar Sadat was a hero in the United States for courageously bringing peace with Israel. Everybody thought he was the greatest. He was so popular in the U.S. Living in Cairo at that time, it looked a little different. Under the surface, there was a tension, a sense that things weren't quite as rosy as it seemed from afar. Sadat had his domestic critics. I remember discussing that with my parents, who just didn't see it. But I left in July 1981, and three months later Sadat was assassinated. I was shocked, like everyone, but wasn't completely surprised. I could understand where it was coming from.

Q: Did you find hostility in the street toward Americans?

MONROE: Well, not much, certainly not in the parts of the city I tended to frequent. Probably I could have found more hostility in certain parts of town. There is an Egyptian word "khowaga" which is a pejorative word for foreigner, and sometimes you would hear Egyptians hiss "khowaga" as you passed them, definitely not a friendly expression. But we didn't hang around circles of Islamists, who were just gaining steam at that time, or others who might be anti-American. Downtown Cairo was very westernized. The educated girls often went to French schools and wore shortish skirts, and weren't covered. The guys were fun-loving. And Egyptians are for the most part friendly, outgoing, positive people no matter what the circumstance. So I mostly felt warmth, and very secure. And I was the consular officer, so I was very popular.

Q: Did you continue in the consular section?

MONROE: I spent the first year in Cairo in the consular section, and because I was an economic-coned officer they were very kind and let me rotate into the commercial section for six months, which I enjoyed because it gave me a chance to work in the area of my cone. I was not a trained economist, but I was in the economic cone primarily because of my commercial background. That was before the Foreign Commercial Service, or FCS, was established in the Commerce Department, and State still had responsibility for all commercial work overseas. But FCS was set up while I was in Cairo, and like all economic-coned State Officers, I received a letter from Commerce inviting me to leave State and join Commerce as part of the new FCS. I had two problems with that. First, I had just left Commerce and didn't really want to go back. And second, I had left Commerce as a GS-12 and took a little bit of a pay cut to join State at what was then an FS-07. They were going to invite me back at the equivalent of my current State grade, which was a GS-9. That didn't make any sense to me. Why should I return to Commerce at a lower grade than when I left? Plus, I was happy in the State Department. So I decided to stay in the State Department. But I was now a commercial officer at a time when State no longer did much commercial work.

Q.. So you left Cairo when? 1981 was it?

MONROE: Yes. I left Cairo in 1981, and in doing so, I made a fateful decision. Logically, I should have gone back to my academic roots, and sought a position in the Soviet Union. I could have taken advanced Russian language training, and gone where my educational training had been leading me. But I enjoyed Cairo so much, and I enjoyed speaking Arabic in Cairo, so I decided that I would go to FSI in Tunis to study more Arabic. I had studied Arabic for six months in Washington before going to Cairo. Normally you study one year in Washington and one year in Tunis for the two-year program, but they let me go to Tunis after only six months of Washington training because I had picked up enough Arabic in Cairo.

Q: Well then you pretty well decided to be a Near Eastern hand?

MONROE: Yeah, I went to Tunis and studied Arabic and, leaving with 3 + / 3 + (speaking/reading language score) I was pretty solidly a so-called "Arabist," and I was quite happy. I still really enjoyed the Arabic. Things took a few more twists and turns in my career, but at that point it looked like the Russian was gone, and I was going to focus on the Middle East, and happily so.

Q: Did you ever get to Israel and take a look at the situation there?

MONROE: I've never been to Israel. I should have gone when I was in Egypt because at that point you could travel from Egypt to Israel. But I never had time, and it became more and more difficult for me to find an opportunity to go there as the years passed.

Q: How did you find the Arabic studies in Tunis?

MONROE: Well, the teachers were great. I don't know if you know the background there, but the program had been in Beirut for years, but after '73 they realized that it wasn't safe to keep it there. So they had to move it. They wanted to move it to Egypt, but Hermann Eilts, the Ambassador, was a strong-willed person, and he said, "No, my embassy's big enough. I don't want these students to add to the size of the Embassy, so they can't come here." Ironically, after Camp David the Embassy grew tremendously in size and the language school would have been a tiny part of the mission,

Anyway, they looked around and ended up in Tunis. Tunis is a wonderful place to live. The only problem with Tunis from an Arabic language perspective is that the Tunisian dialect is really different. We didn't learn the Tunisian dialect; we learned what it's called "Modern Standard Arabic" and we got very little reinforcement of our Arabic on the street.

I would go out in the street and try and speak the Arabic that I was learning, and they could understand me because it was classical type of Arabic. But they would come back with these words in the local dialect that I just couldn't understand. So I got very little language reinforcement on the street. It was not a place to practice everyday Arabic. That said, the teachers—most of whom came from Lebanon although there were a couple local teachers—were great. The programs were great. I enjoyed it. It was a great year.

Q: Did the teachers have their own story about Israel and the Palestinians?

MONROE: Oh yes. Some of them were Palestinian. They had very strong feelings, as all Arabs do, which was not a bad thing from an education and language perspective. Because, of course, as diplomats we would find ourselves often in discussions about the Israeli-Palestinian issue. So we might as well hear it in the classroom and hone our skills on that subject.

Q: At one point, they would give the students a couple of weeks off to travel in the Arab world, did you get that?

MONROE: The students from the military, who made up about half our class, received funding for travel in the region, but we did not.

Q: Was there a problem in Tunisia about fundamentalism?

MONROE: At that time no. Habib Bourguiba was still the president, and although he was barely functioning he was still in control, and the strong secular policies he had imposed were very much in place. So any religious fundamentalist leanings were pretty well hidden. There were obviously problems brewing. There were a lot of unhappy unemployed young Tunisian men, often seen hanging around coffee shops all day doing nothing. It seemed like these unhappy Tunisians hated the French, but wanted to go to France.

Q: Was Tunis a major tourist place for particularly the French?

MONROE: Tunis, the capital, not so much. The beaches—Djerba and places like that—were major tourist destinations. Tunisia was a popular tourist destination, not just for French but also British and Scandinavians. Many came on tour group packages for week-long stays at beach hotels. Unusual for the Middle East, many European women swam topless, which apparently was allowed and attracted a fair number of Tunisian male gawkers.

Q: So where did you go after Tunis?

MONROE: These days, assignments for long-term language training are normally tied to a follow-on assignment. But at that time, we all arrived without an onward assignment, and there were a couple of openings for economic officers at my grade. One was Abu Dhabi, and the other was Baghdad. I was encouraged to choose, and got assigned, to Baghdad. So in summer of '82 I went to Baghdad.

Q: You went to Baghdad from when to when?

MONROE: '82 to '84.

Q: Saddam was very much in charge in those days.

MONROE: Saddam came into power officially three years before. The war with Iran started about one year before. The air raids over Baghdad stopped about a week or so before I arrived. The oil exports from Iraq had been cut from something like 3.4 million barrels a day to 700,000 barrels a day. So you had a fascinating situation where the country was crawling with foreigners—5,000 French, 5,000 Japanese, 5,000 Germans, Koreans—all coming to finish projects when the money was flowing, only now the money had run out. There was a big question of how and whether the foreign companies were going to be paid to finish their projects. I was the mission's only economic officer,

so it was a great time to be there in terms of job responsibilities and, more broadly, career.

It was a much different era for a diplomat than we see today. In Baghdad, first of all, there were almost no Americans. We were not an embassy, we were an interest section, working under the Belgian flag. Our mission had a total of fifteen Americans. We had no security officer, we had no Marines, we had no information officer, just a small number of officers and support staff. There were maybe a hundred Americans in the whole country as opposed to as many as 5,000 each from several other countries. There was no foreign press based there. There were limited telephone connections abroad; it was almost impossible to get through by telephone. There was no internet, of course, so we were the main source of information for the State Department and the U.S. government more broadly. Washington couldn't just pick up a newspaper or get reporting from the New York Times about what was happening in Baghdad. No one knew.

Q: What was your job?

MONROE: I was the economic officer. One-man section.

Q: Was the economy running down because of lack of maintenance?

MONROE: No, the economy was running down because of lack of money. As I said, they went from 3.4 million barrels of oil exported a day down to 700,000. And Iraq owed enormous sums of money to pay for the extravagant construction effort—roads, power plants, factories—that had begun before the war, and now they had run out of money. They had no money to import food. They had no money to pay the contractors. Everybody was scrambling to get their bills paid. And they were fighting a war against Iran. You will recall that Iraq initially started the war because Saddam thought Iran would be weak, crippled when the U.S. cut off its support for the Iranian military. He thought Iran's military would quickly crumble, Khomeini would be overthrown, and Iraq would emerge stronger and the major power in the Gulf. But Saddam had badly miscalculated. Iraq was about one-third the size of Iran. Iran could throw hordes, waves of people at the Iraqis, and it looked like Iran could slowly wear Iraq down.

As Iraq's position began to look more and more dire, Iraq's ability to survive economically was an important question back in Washington. At one point, an NEA Deputy Assistant Secretary came out and grilled me on that very point: is Iraq going to collapse economically? Are the French, Germans and British going to run away if Iraq starts defaulting on its bills? I gave him my assessment that this would not happen. In my discussions in Baghdad, I did not see any sign that the companies were going to pull out. The credits, after all, were all guaranteed by their government export credit agencies, and rather than allow defaults they would certainly reschedule. The DAS questioned my conclusion, saying he was hearing something quite different in Washington, and said he would send out an analyst to investigate further. And the analyst came, and he went away agreeing with me. And in the end, Iraq did not collapse economically, so I felt vindicated. But the incident showed that, much more than today, when the world is so much better

connected through internet and modern communications, diplomatic information gathering in those days really could make a difference.

Q: How did you find the Arabic you learned worked in Iraq?

MONROE: There were two problems. One: it's a difficult dialect. I can remember our director of the Arabic school in Tunis, April Glaspie, telling me a story about the Iraqi dialect before I left for Baghdad. She described a time when she was meeting with some Iraqis in New York, and they started talking in Arabic. She, honorable diplomat that she was, interrupted to say, "I have to let you know that I speak Arabic fluently." And they looked at her and said, "You won't understand what we're saying." They were talking in the Iraqi dialect and she indeed didn't understand what they were saying. So that was one problem. You know, you can dumb it down so that you could communicate, but if they didn't want you to understand they could make it so that you couldn't.

The other thing was that it was very difficult for Americans to talk to Iraqis, except in very formal occasions like meetings, and a couple of safe places, like at the Alwiya Club, where I played tennis, and with the carpet sellers. For an American diplomat to try to make a friendship with an Iraqi was a death sentence, for them. So in our time there weren't that many opportunities to seriously develop our Arabic. I'll give you two examples of what life was like there.

I lived alone in a house a couple of miles from the Interests Section. One day, I came home and found that my house had been completely ransacked. Every drawer empty, everything turned upside down. I had some money in my bedside table; money was taken out but left very prominently on the bed. The Iraqis came when we reported this incident, and after investigating quickly told us it was a robbery. I asked how it could be a robbery when nothing was stolen - not money, not my TV or cassette player. Nothing. They were unmoved. They insisted it was a robbery. In fact, it was a not-too-subtle warning from the Mukhabarat—secret police—that they were watching me and could do whatever they wanted to me. Perhaps I had gotten a little too friendly with some Iraqis at the Alwiya Club. Perhaps it was just a general warning. Whatever it was, it was certainly unsettling.

A second example involved a French woman working at the French Embassy—she eventually became my wife, but that's a different story. One evening she was driving with the Iraqi daughter of a carpet seller in her car when they came to an Iraqi checkpoint. The Iraqi woman was absolutely petrified, terrified that she might be in trouble for being in a car with a diplomat. In the end, nothing happened, but this the incident left a lasting impression on my future wife.

The point is—although we could live a pretty good life in the expatriate community, it was an unbelievably oppressive environment under Saddam.

Q: Now who was your ambassador?

MONROE: We had no ambassador—we worked out of the U.S. Interests Section, nominally under the Belgian Ambassador whose one request to us was that we inform him in advance if the day came when we decided to normalize relations. Our Chief of Mission was Bill Eagleton, who later became Ambassador to Syria. Bill was a long-time Iraq-hand. He had served there back in the fifties and written a book about Kurdistan. He was a famous carpet collector; he knew all the carpet sellers and bought and bought carpets. He was a good guy in a difficult situation.

Q: What were you getting from people you were talking to about how the Iran-Iraq war was going to go—was it real concern?

MONROE: Yes, I think there was concern that the Iraqis didn't have money and didn't have people. Let's face it, there's a reason why Saddam resorted to chemical weapons because that was his one equalizer. The Iranians were throwing waves and waves of people holding Korans and convinced this was a path to heaven and virgins and the happy ever after. While there was no local reporting on the costs and casualties of the war, after every big offensive you would see taxis bearing flag-draped coffins coming back from the front. People were dying, and people knew it. One striking result was that there was an extreme shortage of men working in offices—so many were dying or deployed. In fact, I wrote a cable about it before I left—about how Iraq at the time had given a great boost to women because, with so many men gone, the Ministries were heavily staffed by women.

Q: How were women being treated in Iraq at that time?

MONROE: Decently. At that time, Iraq was very secular under Saddam. And with all the men gone women were working in large numbers, and they were in a fairly strong position.

Q: Sounds like a pretty difficult situation. How did you feel about being there?

MONROE: Professionally it was really good. Socially it was actually very good too. I met my wife there so that was obviously positive. With American Embassies, there is an interesting phenomenon. You can go to a big Embassy in a presumably important country, but you are one of many officers so your experience may be rather narrow. But if you go to a small embassy, you get much more responsibility even if the issues may be less significant. Unless you go to a place like I did in Baghdad: small mission, lots of responsibility, big issues, recognition in Washington. So for me it was a great experience.

Q: How about the local staff?

MONROE: The local staff was comprised mostly of Christians and Kurds. One exception was a gentleman named Khalid Talia, who was the Foreign Service National (FSN) in my economic section, but also openly advertised himself as also attached to Iraqi intelligence. Curiously, he had been arrested six months before I had gotten there for some reason and was in jail for several months before he was released and then re-

employed at our Mission. I think the reason we brought him back was that we found him to be very useful. In addition to support for the economic section—and he was smart and very helpful—he would also give a briefing to the front office every day on highlights from the Iraqi press. And given that we didn't have great access to the Iraqi government in those days, we felt fairly confident that we could use Khalid to get across to the Iraqis views that we wanted passed.

Q: Could you talk to staff of the Economic Ministry and all of that, or were things secret?

MONROE: We got little economic information of value from the government. Much more valuable was the information we could gather from foreign companies, or the economic and commercial officers from other Embassies. The other Embassies often had better access than us, and learned a lot from their deeply-involved companies. From them, I was able to collect good information, and would sum it all up in my annual Economic Trends Report, which was well-received by visiting journalists, bankers, and business reps. At that time, there really wasn't much else publicly available.

Q: Were you aware of an intelligence connection? I mean we were giving aerial photographs of Iranian positions and all of that?

MONROE: I wasn't aware of any specific details, because I wasn't involved with it. I certainly knew in a general way that we were providing some intelligence support, which Iraq needed, because, as I said, we didn't want the war to go badly for the Iraqis.

Q: How about shipping? Was there a problem with shipping?

MONROE: Well the port was closed. If you went down to Basra, you could see several tankers, big ships, sunk or stuck in the silted up Shatt al-Arab**.** Iraq used to export most of its oil out of the south, in the Persian Gulf, and that was all cut off. So there was no shipping coming into or out of the South.

Q: Was there any sense of Iraq doing something regarding Kuwait or were they pretty much concentrated elsewhere?

MONROE: Iraq had its hands full with Iran, and was not thinking of Kuwait at that time. In fact, it was quite was the opposite. Kuwait was giving, or loaning, large amounts of money to Iraq at that time as it did not want Iraq to lose the war. Of course, the Iraqis thought the Kuwaitis, and the Saudis for that matter, should have given more.

Q: Did you get married to your wife while you were there?

MONROE: No, afterwards

Q: She was at the French Embassy?

MONROE: She was a commercial officer at the French Embassy. And one of the things economic and commercial officers did was get together and exchange information because everybody wanted to know who's getting paid. We would consult with each other to get a feel of how bad the situation was and what was going to happen. And we had a monthly meeting of economic officers where we got together and exchanged information, and I met my wife at one of those meetings. She had more to offer than I did because the French were so active in Iraq. But at some point in early 1983, we started to give Iraq agriculture credit (they were called CCC credits) and she had an interest in knowing what that was all about, so we exchanged information. Which good diplomats do.

Q: Yeah.

MONROE: And one thing led to another, and by the time our tours ended we knew we wanted to get married, which we did after I left Baghdad in the summer of 1984. Unfortunately for her, the French government is less liberal about their diplomats being married to American diplomats then Americans are about their diplomats being married to foreigners. She wasn't a diplomat really, she was a member of the French Civil Service who had taken an excursion from the Ministry of Health to work for the commercial section in Baghdad. It when she left Iraq, they wouldn't give her another job overseas since she was married to an American. Which was sad for her.

Q: On leaving Iraq in 1984, how did you feel about your assignment there?

MONROE: I felt it was a great assignment. Professionally it was fascinating, personally it was very rewarding for me in many ways. It was fun, I met my wife, I learned a lot. It was an interesting time. I was lucky. I arrived in Iraq just after the last air raid and I departed a few months before the Scud War. There were several car bombs that went off while I was there, but they weren't aimed at us and basically I was there at safe time.

Q: Did you have any experience with people who suffered under Saddam; did anybody come in and say "oh my God they cut out my tongue," or you know…?

MONROE: Not directly. We certainly didn't hang around with dissidents or people who might get in trouble, but there were of course terrible stories. The one first-hand story we had didn't involve an Iraqi but rather an American. He worked for a French hotel and for some reason was arrested and taken away for several months. He finally was released, but he was tortured while he was imprisoned. We never figured out exactly why he was imprisoned. But we met him after he was released, and he told us it was rough.

Q: Where did you go after Baghdad?

MONROE: As you recall, when they stripped the commercial section away from the State Department and returned it to Commerce under the new Foreign Commercial Service, I was left in State as an economic officer with commercial but not economic

training or experience. So, I decided that it was time to learn some economics and went back to Washington and took the six-month economics course.

Q: Okay so well pick it up there at the economic course but we'll stop at this point

MONROE: Thank you.

Q: Today is the 13th of September 2018 with Bill Monroe part 2. And we left off I remember you left Baghdad and

MONROE: I just left Baghdad and I was going back to Washington to take the economics course. The sixth-month economics training course at FSI. As I think I've mentioned before I was Economic Officer with very little training, so I desperately needed to get the economic education to balance my commercial background, so it was obvious and natural fit for me to do that.

Q: That course is quite renowned, how did you find it?

MONROE: I found it intensive and really excellent. We learned a lot. They say it's a master's degree in 6 months. It's a lot—it's so much in such little time, so you probably don't absorb as well as if it was spread out over two years. That said, it was an excellent course—superb—and I needed it.

Q: Where were you living at the time?

MONROE: We lived in Arlington, Virginia.

Q: So this is from when to when?

MONROE: The course started in maybe August or September 1984 and finished in February 1985.

Q: Did you have an onward assignment before you went?

MONROE: None of us had onward assignments.

Q: How big was the course? How many people were in it?

MONROE: I would guess about 30, I can't remember.

Q: It was heavy math, wasn't it?

MONROE: Not heavy, but there was statistics and econometrics, so there was some math, which I don't particularly like but was doable.

Q: Was this sort of an academic exercise or pointed towards what Foreign Service people would be doing?

MONROE: It was more, I would say, academic oriented. In a way you could criticize that, but on the other hand the goal was to turn you into an economist, make you a master's-level economist.

Q: So after you finished the course where did you go?

MONROE: Well that's interesting. We finished in February and I would say most of the class went off to the mid-level course which was just starting up about that time which is a natural fit that would get everyone to the summer transfer season. But I was promoted to 02 at that time, so I had outgrown the mid-level course and I wasn't required to take it. It was an off-peak cycle time to find a job, so there weren't that many positions open. The other new element in my life was that I was married, and my new wife was not so interested in spending her whole life in the Middle East, and loved Asia. So she was really urging me to see if anything was open in Asia. Well, it just so happened that the embassy in Rangoon, Burma, of all places, had just gotten a new economic position in their Embassy. Just opened up, unfilled, immediately availability, and they were delighted when I put my name in and could come out there by March 1985. I thought that was terrific. So off we went to Rangoon.

Q: So what was the situation in Rangoon and what this was what year?

MONROE: We were there from 85 to 87 and, as I think I mentioned earlier, I seem to go to places just after or just before big things happen. So this was just before big things happened. In 1985, Burma was still stuck in the 50s. The flight from Bangkok to Rangoon was like going back in time 30 years. The British left in the late 40's and Ne Win took over in the early 50s. He introduced a Burmese way of socialism and basically cut the country off from the rest of the world. So there had been no new building since the 50s, all of the cars were 50s vintage American cars. There were no international hotels, fast food, any kind of franchises. So it was really just going back in time. All the houses and buildings were left over from British time; most of us lived in old British colonial houses, it was the ultimate colonial living experience. So it was kind of like paradise for us foreigners. Not so much for the local people, but for the foreigners we felt sometimes as if we had been dropped in a little tropical paradise.

Q: Well in many ways, here you are trained to deal with a sort of fancy economics, you would have found yourself dealing with it much more primitive society economic-wise.

MONROE: It was not the perfect place to take my brand new economic analytical talents to because there wasn't that much economic analysis to be done, to be frank.

Q: Who was the ambassador?

MONROE: The ambassador was Dan O'Donohue. A very powerful and strong-minded ambassador, very successful. Went on to be ambassador to Thailand.

Q: Did we have anything we wanted out of Burma?

MONROE: What were our interests in Burma?

Q: Yeah.

MONROE: There were two. One was very minor, which was monitoring rice exports. The Department of Agriculture wanted to keep track on rice output and markets around the world, so that was a minor but important task for the economic section. Our real interest and the focus of the embassy was counter-narcotics. We had a lot of cooperation: operational cooperation, such as a spraying operation with Thrush aircraft, DEA was there, we also had intelligence cooperation. The embassy was much larger than you normally would have thought primarily because we had so many people involved in various aspects of anti-narcotics cooperation. Burma was famously part of the Golden Triangle, after all.

Q: You know normally in a dictatorship you find that the powers-that-be will maybe take a strong verbal stand against narcotics but there's money to be made and what was the situation there?

MONROE: A little bit more complicated. They were quite willing to cooperate with us in some ways because a lot of the narcotics was handled by different warlords and different ethnic groups not totally under control of the government. So by fighting narcotics we could also help them fight their struggles against different minorities. But no doubt there was corruption.

Q: Was Aung San Suu Kyi a figure at the time?

MONROE: She was in London. A little later I can get into that, but we knew who she was, of course, because she was the daughter of the founder of independent Burma. But she wasn't really talked about much as she never visited Burma and there was no inkling of the role she later came to play.

Q: Did your work have anything to do with narcotics?

MONROE: Not really. No. State's involvement was very operational, dealing with aerial spraying and that kind of thing. We had one officer from the Bureau handling that. I forget what is was called then; now it is the Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL). We had DEA people cooperating with their counterparts and the intelligence community cooperating with their counterparts.

Q: How did you find your dealings with the government, like getting statistics and talking to the ministries and all that?

MONROE: Not bad. Certainly we had full cooperation on things like rice exports and rice markets. We had reasonable relations with the Foreign Ministry, but it wasn't that that powerful. Real power was with the military and, of course, Ne Win.

Q: Was Burma part of the non-aligned movement?

MONROE: Yeah, very much so.

Q: Were we concerned about its relationship with Communist China at all at that point?

MONROE: No, because Burma was pretty much going its own way. It didn't have strong relationships with anybody.

Q: Was there much going on economically between Burma and Thailand?

MONROE: Not much. There was smuggling, of course, but Burma was a poor country that, beyond rice exports, at that time had little trade with anybody. It only started to open up a bit towards the end of my stay there when they, for instance, let sailors bring in new cars so that by about 1986 you started to see new cars on the road for the first time. That was a startling development, but there wasn't much to trade.

Q: How about dealing with the Muslim minorities?

MONROE: That wasn't much of an issue back then. The focus was much more on the other ethnic groups: the Karen, the Shan, the Kachin**,** and various other ethnic minorities. We didn't hear much about the Rohingyas.

Q: Could you travel around much?

MONROE: The border areas, where all the minorities lived, were generally closed off. But you could go to the main tourist areas - Bagan, Mandalay, Inle Lake. We used to have a consulate in Mandalay, which we still owned and used as a guest house when we travelled there.

Q: Was there much tourism there?

MONROE: There was some. Burma only gave seven-day visas at that time, which allowed tourists to run the circuit quickly from Rangoon to Bagan to Mandalay to Inle Lake. But it was not a big tourist destination at that time.

Q: How was living there, for you and your wife?

MONROE: It was wonderful. We had a nice house, everything was cheap, the food was wonderful, just a great place to live.

Q: What was your wife doing?

MONROE: She worked for the commissary. She was number two at the commissary and she ran the Embassy snack bar.

Q: Did you have much of a staff in the economic section?

MONROE: American or local?

Q: Local.

MONROE: We had three: an agricultural specialist and two economic/commercial assistants. It was a combined political/economic section, and we also a political advisor who was one of those typical well-connected political assistant FSNs.

Q: Were you doing economic reports on business opportunities and that sort of thing?

MONROE: To the extent they existed, but there wasn't that much interest, so not so much. We did reports on the teak industry, and beyond rice, there was the beginnings of interest in the oil sector. So some oil companies came through sniffing around to see if there were any opportunities.

Q: I assume they had relations with the People's Republic of China.

MONROE: Yeah.

Q: Were the Chinese active there?

MONROE: You know, I don't remember their presence clearly. I know the Japanese were very active. The Japanese had the largest aid program by far. This was back in the mid-80s and the Chinese were not as active then as they would become. But there was a Chinese community in Burma and as you went farther north towards the Chinese border there was more and more business activity with the ethnic Chinese, with trade and smuggling across the border. But I don't recall, and I may be wrong, but I don't recall a big Chinese footprint there at that time.

Q: What about India?

MONROE: Not so big. There was an Indian population because the British had brought in lots of Indians to work for them, and they stayed on after independence, but at the official level when I was there they were not that prominent.

Q: Was this a challenging assignment?

MONROE: No, it was not that challenging in terms of work. At that time, other than the narcotics work, Burma was kind of a backwater. Although it did start to get interesting

my last year. Even then, we were still writing that the Burmese were Buddhists who would never rebel against the heavy foot of the military dictatorship. We simply didn't see any signs of a serious willingness or ability to rebel or rise up against the government.

But the government made one critical mistake when it decided to crack down on the monetary black market. They had kept the official exchange rate very low, 7 kyats for a dollar, whereas in the black market you could get maybe 50 kyats for a dollar. So everybody changed money on the black market and hoarded their kyats, creating a separate currency market outside of government control. The government wanted to eliminate this, so unexpectedly one night, boom, it demonetized all kyat and issued new currency with crazy denominations, such as 15, 35, and 75 kyat notes (Ne Win was into numerology which apparently played a role in this), but anyway the demonetization wiped out the savings of a lot of people who hadn't kept their money in the banks, which they didn't trust. The problem was that, to exchange old notes for new, you had to prove you earned the money legitimately. And many couldn't, so the wealth of many Burmese was wiped out overnight. his led to the first rumblings of an anti-government movement. If I recall, they demonetized again after I left, and that led to serious riots and demonstrations, which eventually brought Aung San Suu Kyi back. And then they had elections and her party unexpectedly won. And then the outcome was nullified, leading to a long difficult period before Aung San Suu Kyi eventually entered the government. All of that happened after I left, but the seeds of it were planted just before I left.

Q: I've talked to some people who serve there who've said that golf was important in Burma. That all the leaders played golf. Did you play golf?

MONROE: Golf was the sport in Burma. But I'm a tennis player, so I did not play golf which probably I should have. But anyway, golf was the sport in Burma, but that's true all over Asia. That's the sport of top business and political throughout Asia.

Q: You left there when?

MONROE: I left in '87.

Q: So where did you go?

MONROE: The long arm of the Middle East called me back.

Q: What?

MONROE: The long arm of NEA reached out for me. I actually bid on two jobs. I bid on a petroleum economic job in Jakarta, which was the job I wanted, and they wanted me. But I also bid—since you have to put in six bids—I bid on a political job at the embassy in Muscat, Oman. I was thinking that since I'm an economic officer, they wouldn't pick me, but they did. It went to a shootout and because they had no other bidders and I spoke Arabic, I was panelled to go back to the Middle East. So off we went to Muscat. Now the Ambassador at the time was a political appointee named Cran Montgomery. To sweeten

the pot for me, he said, "okay, we'll make it a combined political-economic section, which makes sense because it is a small embassy, and we'll make you in charge of the political-economic section." So I was assigned into a political slot, but was given greater responsibility. I was grateful to the Ambassador for that.

Q: So you served there from when to when?

MONROE: I was there from 1987 to 1989.

Q: What was it like at that time?

MONROE: It was pleasant. Oman was in the Dark Ages when Sultan Qaboos overthrew his father in 1970. The country had virtually no roads, no schools, nothing. It was like Burma, in a way, even worse—an isolated and impoverished country. But Sultan Qaboos opened things up, built roads, schools, brought people in to help modernize and run the country. It was very British. The British were still there in a big way. In fact, the Minister of Defense was British, the Head of Navy was British, the Head of Intelligence was British. The British were everywhere in the bureaucracy. Omanis are quiet and reserved, quite the opposite of Egyptians. Nice people, but very difficult to get to know because they keep much to themselves. It was a difficult country to do political work because (a) there wasn't much politics and (b) it was hard to get into society. But on the foreign policy side, Oman had some importance for us. We had a military presence there. The Iran-Iraq war was still going on and the Omanis had maintained relations with Iran, so that made it interesting to talk to them about Iran and what was happening in the region—more interesting than domestic policy.

Q: Well we had relations with them going back to Andrew Jackson period. Didn't we?

MONROE: That's right. A trade agreement was negotiated with Oman during the Jackson presidency.

Q: This is when Oman had…

MONROE: … Yeah, Oman used to have an Empire which included Zanzibar. When we were there, there were a lot of so-called Zanzibari Omanis, Omanis who had come back from Zanzibar. They were black, and some didn't speak Arabic very well. They were westernized and more accessible than the average Omani Omani, and they often spoke good English.

Q: I served in Dhahran back in the 50s. My consul general had gone to Oman, and he told me he had revised that first treaty which dated back to the Jackson era.

MONROE: Interesting.

Q: Were we working to bring the Omanis into a sort of anti-Iran coalition with the United Arab Emirates at that time?

MONROE: That wasn't going to work. Oman has a foreign minister who has, then and now, years later, maintained a neutral relationship between the Arabs and Iranians.

Q: Were they having any problems with the Saudis? The Saudis were quite aggressive in that area.

MONROE: Yes, but not really with Oman. Peace had essentially come to Oman when the Dhofar rebellion was resolved in the south, and the border with Yemen was normalized. I believe there may still be some unsettled questions regarding the Saudi-Omani border, but that's in pretty remote areas and the border certainly wasn't a hot issue during my time. So when we were in Oman, it was a quiet, peaceful place, a beautiful, beautiful country; just gorgeous.

Q: Were there movies being made there?

MONROE: No. When we were there, Oman didn't give visas, so there were no tourist visas and no tourists. Instead of a visa, you had to get a no-objection certificate, or NOC, and I don't recall any NOCs being issued to make movies, which was a shame because the scenery is so beautiful. In fact, Oman just started to open a crack when we were there. In 1986, the government allowed a charter of Swiss tourists to come, the first tour group ever to come to Oman.

Q: How big was your section? You said you had a combined political-economic section.

MONROE: We had three officers: two economic officers in addition to me.

Q: So there were really no politics there?

MONROE: No, not really. There were no elections, no elected parliament, no civil society.

Q: Who was the ruler?

MONROE: Sultan Qaboos.

Q: Well I heard that he was a rather progressive figure, wasn't he?

MONROE: Yeah, well he modernized the country, certainly opened it up from the Dark Ages when he took over from his father. It was obviously not a democracy, so I wouldn't go too far in calling him progressive. But living there, it felt very relaxed, not repressive at all. It did not feel like a police state.

Q: How were relations with the Trucial States or the Emirates, what were they at that time?

MONROE: It was the UAE, United Arab Emirates. Relations with the Emirates were normal.

Q: No particular problems?

MONROE: No. People drove up from Oman to Dubai all the time to enjoy the more modern, open society there. It was an easy drive.

Q: How did they feel about our relations with Israel?

MONROE: They didn't talk about it much, but they were more relaxed then other Arab countries. I mean, they weren't going to buck the Arab consensus on that issue and they didn't have relations with Israel. But the Palestinians were a long way away, there weren't any Palestinians in Oman, that wasn't…

Q: Too much of an issue?

MONROE: No, we didn't get hammered on the Palestinian issue then.

Q: Did we have any problems with Oman, any issues?

MONROE: No, not that I can recall.

Q: Which is a very good thing.

MONROE: We had a good relationship with the military. We had access to a base on Masirah Island and we stored forward-placed military equipment, so we valued the military relationship. I can tell you an interesting story. In July 1988, the defense attaché came running in one day and said with some excitement that the USS Vincennes was engaging with what looked like an Iranian military plane which appeared to be approaching in a threatening manner. A few minutes later he came back in great excitement to report that the Vincennes had shot down the Iranian military plane, a significant development with an apparently positive outcome for the Vincennes. But then, a bit later he came back with the disturbing news that the Iranian plane was not a threatening military plane after all, but rather a commercial plane coming from Bandar Abbas. It had been shot down with more than 200 people aboard.

Q: Oh boy. Yes, I remember that. That was still something that causes some issues from time to time.

MONROE: It was a terrible, terrible mistake and awful tragedy. One can make a case, I think, that it had a broader impact. The Iranians were obviously outraged, but they were a bit surprised at how little sympathy they got from the rest of the world. The world didn't rise up in outrage. It was just a month later that Iran sued for peace with Iraq. My feeling was that they were at a desperate point, heading towards a decision to end the war, but this might have provided the final push needed to end the war. They realized that no one

had their backs. It was time to stop. I don't know how much of a factor that was, but it felt that way to me.

Q: We had ships in the Gulf, and this is during the Iran-Iraq war, wasn't it?

MONROE: Right, we were reflagging ships exporting oil out of Kuwait.

Q: Anyway, it was not a quiet area?

MONROE: No, no. The Iranians were putting mines in the water, and the US was flagging ships in order keep them coming to a dangerous area and keep the oil flowing from the Gulf. The Iranians' hands were not clean, by any means. It was not a nice time.

Q: Did the Omanis take any sides or have any involvement in the Iran-Iraq war?

MONROE: No, well, I suppose if I were to recall they were nominally in support of their brothers the Iraqis, but they kept contact with the Iranians. They were playing both sides a little bit.

Q: Were you involved in sending any Omanis to the States as students or exchanges?

MONROE: I don't recall specifically. I am sure our section proposed names for different programs or exchanges.

Q: What was your wife doing?

MONROE: She was running the embassy snack bar.

Q: Was there much social life there?

MONROE: Yeah, mostly with expatriates because the Omanis were very reserved and you would rarely—at my level—get invited to an Omani house. Maybe here and there, certain people, perhaps an Omani with a foreign wife. It's a quiet town, Muscat was small, so it wasn't that active.

Q: How about the role of women there?

MONROE: It was a conservative society. There were some women in government. Several years later in fact an Omani woman became ambassador to the United States. But it was a male society. The women who were most active were most likely Zanzibari Omanis

Q: You left there in '89. Where'd you go?

MONROE: Back to Washington. I had to go; I stayed out as long as I could. I went back and I ended up… things would change soon … but I ended up with another low profile job. I went back to become Deputy Director of the Office of Pacific Island Affairs.

Q: So what was the geography of the Pacific Island affairs?

MONROE: It's geography was huge. It went from the Cook Islands in the south up through Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Western Samoa—a whole bunch of them.

Q: This was an economic job, wasn't it?

MONROE: It was everything, I was deputy director. It was a three-man office and I was number two. I took the job because I wanted to get back into EAP **(**East Asia and Pacific Affairs)**,** and that's the job that I ended up with. So for me it was a strategic move.

Q: How long were you in that job?

MONROE: I was there for two years. There's something called the South Pacific Commission which meets every six months in Nouméa, New Caledonia, so I went out there and represented the U.S. government for several meetings. This was an interesting introduction into multilateral diplomacy and the mindset that no matter how small the country, they still think they're important.

Q: Of course.

MONROE: And even Nauru with 4,000 people! I mean, there were interesting things going on. There was Fiji, which had a coup, and Congressman Stephen Solarz was interested in what was going on there, and then Papua New Guinea had a rebellion. There were enough countries to keep us busy. In fact, at that time President George Bush, believe it or not, on his way out to Asia stopped in Hawaii for a meeting that involved all Pacific Island countries. So it was a lot of countries covering a lot of territories, and a lot of votes to the UN, and just enough there to warrant interest even at the highest level, surprisingly.

Q: Australia was sort of the major power in the area, wasn't it?

MONROE: Australia and New Zealand both. They were both extremely interested and paid a lot of attention and had interests.

Q: New Zealand—was that included in your…?

MONROE: There was a separate office for Australia, New Zealand—it was the office of Australia and New Zealand. There was another office called the Freely Associated States, which included Micronesia, Palau**,** and Marshall Islands.

Q: Were there any particular issues in the area?

MONROE: Nothing big. They were island specific. We were absorbed with the rebellion in Bougainville Island (Papua New Guinea) and how that was going to play out. We were absorbed with the restoring democracy to Fiji. Things that seem sort of important in your smaller world.

Q: At one point we were concerned with the policy called Strategic Denial that was trying to keep the Soviets from establishing a base there. At this time, the Soviets were sort of on their way out, weren't they?

MONROE: At this point, which was '89 and '91, the Soviet Union dissolved, so that wasn't an issue. And China was not yet flexing its muscles particularly there.

Q: Was Japan at all an issue there?

MONROE: Nothing compared to Australia, New Zealand, or the United States.

Q: Did you travel there much?

MONROE: Well, I went three times to Nouméa for the South Pacific Commission meetings in New Caledonia, and took a side visit to two of my countries—Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands. So three trips in two years.

Q: Was Papua New Guinea a difficult place for people to serve?

MONROE: Yes, there was a lot of violence. It was a tough place, but a beautiful country. I don't know how it's doing now; I haven't followed it lately. There were concerns about the safety, from a crime point of view, of our people there.

Q: Did you find that you were sort of a minor sideshow in the Asia-Pacific Bureau?

MONROE: That's a good description. It was good for me, because I learned a lot. I both met a lot of people in the Bureau and I learned a lot about the various issues. It was like working at a small Embassy—lots of responsibilities and exposure to lots of issues. It was a good experience to understand the job of a desk officer, so later on, when overseas, I had ideas on how to work effectively with my desk officer.

Q: Would you sit in on staff meetings?

MONROE: Yeah, especially if I was acting director. I sat there with the directors for China and Korea and Japan. Part of Washington is meeting people and learning the lay of the land, so I did a lot of that. It was busy enough, it wasn't overwhelming, but intellectually it was interesting.

Q: What did this lead to?

MONROE: Well that's the point, it led somewhere. Keeping in mind the government had already invested a year and a half teaching me Arabic, it logically shouldn't have taught me another long-term language. However, the deputy director of the economic section in Beijing was opening up. It was an FS-01 job and I was an FS-01. It was language required, and this was back in 1990, when there just weren't many Chinese speakers in the Department, especially at the higher levels. Now it's different, but back then, we didn't have any Chinese speakers and the Embassy was suddenly growing quickly.

Q: There was sort of a junior core learning language, wasn't it?

MONROE: Right, they were starting to develop a core at the junior level, but at the FS-01 level there were not a whole lot of Chinese speakers. So this job opened up, I bid. I was the only at grade bidder, and there were no bidders with Chinese. Logically, HR should have said, "We just spent money teaching this guy Arabic, we shouldn't now spend two years teaching him Chinese. Plus he's 40 years old so, you know, what's the point?" But they needed to fill the job, and I got paneled.

Q: So that required studying Chinese before you went out?

MONROE: Oh yeah, two years. That's what I'm talking about. I already spent 18 months learning Arabic and now they gave me two years to study Chinese.

Q: Talk about your language muscles, that was certainly a challenge, wasn't it?

MONROE: Yes, and I can tell you that it was harder to learn Chinese at 40 then to learn Arabic at 30. It was a difficult challenge, but it was a wonderful experience. The Chinese in Washington was a language experience, but then we went to Taipei for the second year at the FSI Chinese language school there, and that was so much more - not only a language experience, but also a cultural experience. It was fabulous.

Q: Well, I would think Chinese, learning spoken language and all the written language, the memorization must be god-awful!

MONROE: It was the hardest thing I've ever done in my life. Part of it was that I was a bit older, and you could see the 20-somethings who could retain words and characters much quicker than I could. I had to work twice as hard as the younger students, but learning Chinese was crucial for the job, especially those days in China. So I worked hard.

Q: So part of it was in Washington and the other part was… ?

MONROE: In Taipei. Actually in Yangmingshan, a little town in the mountains above Taipei—above the pollution of Taipei—in the clouds. You felt like you're studying Chinese characters in a Chinese painting. It was just an unbelievable setting. The school and most of the houses were built for the U.S. military back in the 50s when the U.S.

military was there, so when they left we just took over those houses. It was 10 months of being immersed in Chinese.

Q: Was your wife taking Chinese to?

MONROE: She did, she took two years.

Q: Had she had any Chinese before?

MONROE: No. Certainly it's a wonderful opportunity for spouses. Thank you to the State Department because it makes life in Beijing is so much easier for officers and spouses if you speak Chinese. She ended up working for the Foreign Commercial Service in Beijing, so the Chinese helped her out there.

Q: You were in Beijing from when to when?

MONROE: I arrived in summer of '93 and left in '96. This was an extremely interesting time to be in China. We've talked about a couple of jobs I had that were rather low-key. Well, in Beijing, it was the opposite—high profile, I'd never worked harder in my life. I was in the economics section. I was head of the external side, so we did all the trade negotiations. We had trade negotiations on everything from IPR (Intellectual Property Rights) to textiles to space launches to prison labor to market access to WTO (World Trade Organization). Delegations coming in one after the other. It was hard, tough.

Q: I'm told that people on the commercial side of things had what was called "death by duck" because the delegations would come in one after another and afterwards you'd get treated to peking duck!

MONROE: You were lucky if you got peking duck. I can remember one time when a WTO delegation came and we were served scorpions or tarantulas or something like that, clearly aimed at unsettling our delegation. It didn't look very appetizing. Another favorite trick was to get a fresh fish, chop off the head, quickly cook the body, put the head back on the fish, and serve it on the table while mouth was still opening and closing. While this is going on you're supposed to take your fork or chopstick and remove the cooked fish from the body. Anything to get the visitors a little off their game!

Q: Oh! Well, particularly in economics side this was the beginning of "The Reawakening" of the Chinese giant, wasn't it?

MONROE: This was an interesting time because it was after Tiananmen Square. Tiananmen Square, you know, was a shock to the relationship, which was just getting off the ground. But then Deng Xiaoping took over, a year or two before I arrived, and decided to open China up. So I arrived at a fascinating time, especially on the economic side. American companies were rushing in; everyone wanted to get into this huge market that was suddenly opening up. It was just non-stop with delegations of high level business groups, business signings. I can't tell you how many banquets and signing

ceremonies I attended for new deals or factories. It was never-ending. But at the same time, the trade deficit suddenly became a huge issue, we became increasingly concerned about getting market access for our companies, and getting China to play by international trade rules. There was real tension. So we had constant visits by USTR trade negotiators, never-ending take negotiations, which were often testy, and on IPR brought us to the brink of a trade war. And we also began negotiating to bring China into the WTO. I took a couple trips to Geneva to work on the negotiations on China's accession to the WTO.

Q: You want to explain what the WTO is.

MONROE: WTO—the World Trade Organization. The World Trade Organization was the successor organization to GATT—the General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs—while I was in Beijing. China was not a member. It sets up the rules and provides framework for trade and tariffs, and so we thought it was in the interest of the international community to get China on the inside rather than the outside. There's some debate about that now as to how successful that effort has been, but at that time the goal was to try normalize China's trading behavior. Now, getting them into the WTO was one facet of that effort. We were embarked on separate efforts to reach agreements on IPR protection, market access, trade in textiles, and so on.

Q: Did the American government have any particular concerns about the Chinese role in international trade?

MONROE: China's role?

Q: In other words, were we concerned that the Chinese with cheap labor and an aggressive commercial policy would really challenge markets, included in the United States.

MONROE: Well yeah, that was driving the whole trade agenda. We had textile negotiations to somehow keep textile imports under control. We had civil aviation negotiations to make sure our airlines had the access to the Chinese market. We had market access negotiations to make sure the Chinese had rules that were fair for American companies that wanted to do business in China. We wanted to ensure that our companies' intellectual property—patents, trademarks, copyrights—were protected. With the exception of textiles, our focus was not in preventing Chinese goods from entering our market but rather ensuring that our companies could enter and compete fairly in China. We could see that China was opening up and becoming a big player on the world community, and we thought we needed to get them playing by the rules so our companies could have fair access there and they wouldn't cheat as they were exporting to us.

Q: Did you have problems getting information on industry?

MONROE: The challenge was indeed to figure out how things worked. We'd have our negotiating teams come in, and they'd present all sorts of questions and try to understand how things worked, how access was blocked or hindered, what kinds of regulations, or

subsidies, or illegal practices affected foreign companies trying to enter the market. It was a challenge, and not easy, I will say that.

Q: Were you getting any congressional inquiries, visits and all, that were looking at this changing phenomenon?

MONROE: Certainly congressional delegations were coming in left and right. It was a popular place to go because China was opening up. I think someone estimated that half the Senate visited while we were there. Now they weren't coming just for trade, but that was certainly on the minds of many. Another big concern was export of goods made by prison labor.

Q: How did you feel about China? Were they producing new products or were they pretty much working off of already developed projects, electronics and all?

MONROE: China was not that developed at that time—its economy was just taking off when I arrived—and technology transfer was a concern for companies coming to China. If a company wanted to invest and build a factory in China, it would often have to form a joint venture, and the Chinese partner would then have access to the invested technology. The fear was that in time the Chinese would copy the technology, then produce their own version of the product, and start exporting back to the U.S. The gamble, I guess, was that U.S. company could stay far enough ahead on the technology ladder so that it wouldn't really matter. But really, it would be much better to protect the technology. And as the Chinese got better educated and moved up the technology ladder themselves, these issues were only going to get more challenging.

Q: Where you there during this tremendous wave of Chinese students going to the United States?

MONROE: That was starting about then. I don't think it had reached the waves that would come later, but Chinese were starting to study in the States.

Q: Were they returning or were they staying in the States?

MONROE: It was probably too early in the game for me to make a judgment while I was there. So I don't really know, I think a lot of them did stay.

Q: Did you get around, travel much while you were in China?

MONROE: Yeah we did. When I was in Taipei as part of my study program I took a trip with a Taiwanese tour group and we travelled all over China, which was a fabulous experience. Both in seeing China, traveling all over the country, and spending two weeks with a Taiwan tour guide and 15 Taiwanese tourists who spoke little to no English. That was a great linguistic and cultural experience. While we were in Beijing, we traveled some—to Shanghai, Xian, Harbin, Inner Mongolia.

Q: The heart of industry is in the southern part of China?

MONROE: A lot of it is in the southeast, and near the coast, such as Shenzhen, because of the easy access out. Huge new cities and industrial zones were built while we were there. An incredible transformation was taking place.

Q: What sort of relationship did you have with the Chinese government in your job?

MONROE: Pretty active, pretty intense with what was called then MOFTEC (Ministry of Foreign Trade and Economic Cooperation). They were our go-to people for trade issues, a good bunch of people that we dealt with almost daily on different negotiations and discussions. And then a bit more broader in some of the technical agencies.

Q: How did you feel about labor relations in China? I mean you got a ruling party and a booming economy, but labor is always a factor and keeping labor cost down was important for economic growth

MONROE: We didn't really focus on labor relations and labor costs. Our big issue with labor, as I said, was with prison labor and the export of goods made in prisons. As for labor costs, they are taking a predictable path. Labor costs are rising, and a lot of those textile plants that used to be in China are now in Vietnam, or Cambodia, or Bangladesh. Companies are always looking for cheaper labor.

Q: What about western China—was there an effort to spread the industrial wealth to that area?

MONROE: No, for the practical reason that it was hard to get production from the western part of the country to the coast for export. You want to build your plants near the ports.

Q: Well how were living conditions for you and your wife?

MONROE: At that time all the diplomats and journalists lived in diplomatic compounds. In our compound, Jianguomenwai, there were some 15 high rise apartment buildings. Very basic. We lived on the fifth floor in our building. It was not modern, and not particularly nice, but for the kids it was great because it was a gated compound and all their friends lived in nearby apartments. We could just send the kids down and they could play with their friends in the open space below. Access to the compound was restricted, notably for Chinese who couldn't enter unless they had a card as a maid or something like that. And we were watched. You would come home and find that your computer has been accessed. You would pick up the phone and know that you were being listened to. Lots of strange stories, like one person hearing his own voice played back when he picked up the phone. Or one visitor who checked into her hotel, turned on the TV, and saw herself on the screen—something went haywire there. We assumed, and it was a correct assumption, that we were being watched and monitored all the time.

Q: Under the Soviet Union, there were times when the KGB would basically harass our people. Was there any harassing?

MONROE: I don't recall any physical harassment. But it was unnerving to come home and realize somebody has been in your house and looked through your computer. And of course the maid would be there, but the maid would not be able to stop that. That is certainly a form of harassment.

Q: Yeah. We've gone through various times of demonstrations against us when there was a Chinese fighter pilot crashed into one of our intelligence planes and one time we rocketed the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade. Where any of those things happening while you were there?

MONROE: No, I had left China by the time of the attack at the embassy in Belgrade. I was in Singapore and we definitely heard about it and got a demonstration at our Embassy there. But while I was in China we didn't have problems like that.

Q: How about in social life, did you go to Chinese performances, dance and that sort of thing, or was there much of that—Chinese dance or music or plays?

MONROE: Didn't do much of that. Social life… The Chinese never entertained at home anyway. They don't have the facilities or kitchens or whatever. Any socializing with the Chinese was done at the restaurants, always official. I ended up going out a lot. It was exhausting. The nice thing was that the Chinese would go straight from work to the dinner and then home. So the dinners would start early, end early, all done by eight o'clock, which was a wonderful way to entertain when you're going out a lot.

Q: Did you do much of your business at lunch, taking people out to lunch and that sort of thing?

MONROE: Some normal diplomatic entertaining.

Q: You left there when?

MONROE: 1996.

Q: And then where?

MONROE: Singapore.

Q: Your EAP credentials were firm by that time?

MONROE: Getting firm, but it wouldn't last. In some ways it was quite logical. In Singapore, I was the head of the economic-political section. I could use my Chinese since there was a Chinese presence there. It was a great follow-on assignment.

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

MONROE: Lee Kuan Yew was the leader, and if you can ever point to one man as having had an important role in his country's history, certainly the powerful personality and presence of Lee Kuan Yew made Singapore what it was and what it is. And he certainly made it an interesting place for American policy-makers and elected officials who often considered Singapore a must stop just to call on Lee Kuan Yew and get his wisdom on the region.

Q: Where did you live and what was the social life like?

MONROE: We lived in a semi-detached house, a house attached to another house at the back about two blocks from Singapore Botanical Gardens and about a half an hour drive downtown to the old embassy where the U.S. mission was housed when I was first there. We built while I was there a new Embassy which was about 5-10 minutes from our house. It looked like a big fortress on the hill near the Botanical Gardens.

Q: We've had all sorts of accounts of how strict, you might say, almost social controls are in Singapore such as no spitting in the street and that sort of thing. Was that something oppressive or apparent or…?

MONROE: It did not feel oppressive at all. Of course there was the notorious case of Michael Fay who before my time there was arrested for vandalism and sentenced to caning, and there were strict laws on things like chewing gum in public. But, you know, Singapore is a funny place. If you visit as a tourist it feels a little sterile, almost too perfect. But if you live there. it's actually a very nice place to live, especially once you get beneath that initial veneer. You eat at the food courts, visit Little India, see a real life, a pulse, that you don't necessarily feel as a tourist. There are very dynamic people. It was impressive and interesting in many ways.

Q: Did the Chinese dominate or the Malaysians or Indians too there?

MONROE: The Chinese were the dominant group, both in terms of population and influence. But there was an effort to prevent the development of ethnic ghettos. So, in the public blocks, which were an important part of the fabric of Singaporean society, there was a requirement that different ethnic groups, like Malays and Indians, have a certain amount of representation. But culturally, politically, in business, the Chinese community certainly dominated, not surprising as they made up about three-quarters of the population.

Q: Who was the Ambassador?

MONROE: We had two political appointees. Tim Chorba was the first one and Steve Green was the second one.

Q: I just saw the other day this movie, Crazy Rich Asians, which focus is on the very wealthy Singaporeans. Have you seen it?

MONROE: Yes I did see it. I love the movie. I love the pictures of Singapore. It's a very photogenic city as you can see from the movie. I never saw wealth to that excess, think that's probably a bit exaggerated. The wealthy are probably a little more discreet than that, but there's a lot of wealth. There's no question about that.

Q: Yeah. How big is Singapore?

MONROE: You mean and population or… ?

Q: Population size.

MONROE: It was about three and a half million when I was there, maybe five–six million now, but still very small. It's a remarkable story. We used to say that Singapore punched way above its weight. It's a little country with no resources that somehow became an economic powerhouse and one of the leading petroleum trading centers in the world. How could a country with no petroleum become a center for oil refining and trading? And an important financial center. And I think Lee Kuan Yew punched above his weight politically too because he had things to say. And Singaporeans were well educated. It's leaders and diplomats were skilled at articulating their views and policies. It was a fascinating place.

Q: They punch very much a weight above their weight militarily, in a way? They have a rather strong military?

MONROE: Well, they aimed to deter. They weren't going to punch outside of their boundaries. But they have big neighbors—Indonesia and Malaysia—with whom they had a history, so maintaining their sovereignty was an important national goal. We, by the way, have access to a base there in Singapore. They wanted us to have a presence there.

Q: How were relations with Indonesia at the time?

MONROE: They were fine. There was more concern about Malaysia based on past history between the two countries. The biggest concern with Indonesia at the time, besides any potential fallout from the fall of Suharto in, I think, 1998, was the impact in Singapore from huge forest fires raging in Indonesia. These fires arose from slash-and-burn farming practices, and blanketed Singapore with what was euphemistically called haze and created dangerous air quality. It was horrible, difficult to breathe. Going outside it felt like sticking your head directly in the path of smoke from a wood fire.

Q: Were there any issues between Singapore and Malaysia while you were there?

MONROE: Nothing that I can recall that particularly rose to the level of concern.

Q: Probably means there weren't major issues.

MONROE: There were concerns, there were always concerns. Singapore's water all came from Malaysia, and ensuring that this water supply remained secure was a concern. There was a concern that the impact of the 1997 Asian financial crisis in Malaysia might somehow affect Singapore. These were more general concerns, nothing that rose to a more serious level.

Q: During the financial crisis how did Singapore do?

MONROE: It did okay. I think Singapore's economy slowed a bit, but it weathered it. Not as bad as Thailand—Thailand was much worse.

Q: Was there much industrial connection between the United States and Singapore?

MONROE: There were some American companies that refined oil there, some American companies like Seagate that manufactured electronics, and then there's the financial sector, which is very active in Singapore. But Singapore is not a major industrial country, and certainly when I was there, it was clear to see that Singapore's future was not industry. There was, in fact, a huge American business presence there, largely because it was viewed as a great location for a regional headquarters. Travel in and out of the country to the region was easy, and the schools were great, so people often left their families in Singapore and did business around the region during the week.

I think one reason why Singapore started to open up a little bit while I was there was they recognized that information through the internet—the spread of information and access of information—was going to be crucial if Singapore was going to maintain its place as a regional hub. In addition to the great airport, companies need great information connectivity and that's not consistent with a tightly-controlled information state. So they needed to loosen up on that a little bit. To their credit, they did. It was interesting that, at that time, American educators were marveling at Singapore's education system because Singaporean students studying in the United States scored off the charts in terms of testing. And they were just like, "wow, Singapore must be doing something right because their kids do so well." But Singapore at that time was starting to send delegates to the United States because they realized their kids are book smart but they don't know how to think. They needed to go to the United States so that their graduates not only tested well but actually learned to think and be creative. Thinking can be dangerous if your focus is on control. But too much control can stifle thinking. To Lee Kuan Yew's credit, he recognized this and started to try to deal with it.

Q: How about Chinese influence there, Communist China?

MONROE: Well Lee Kuan Yew was very anti-communist. Interestingly, he used to tell visitors how grateful he was for the United States intervention in Vietnam. There was a communist movement in Malaysia and there were worries that it would spread down into Singapore. In his view, by making a stand, we slowed that movement down to give

enough time to countries like Singapore to get their feet on the ground and move forward and establish non-communist economies and countries. So he wasn't going to allow any Chinese interference in a political sense. He did recognize China's economic power and wanted to harness that and integrate China economically into the region in a positive way.

Q: When you were there, were there any issues with the South China Sea?

MONROE: Not at that point.

Q: It's always fun to be working in a country that's working very well, isn't it?

MONROE: It was really interesting in many ways. That experience was beneficial to me when I returned to the Middle East and worked in a countries like Bahrain that had aspirations to be the Singapore of the Middle East. I was able to look at that with a critical eye to see how far they were from what Singapore was. Part of Singapore was the drive of the people. Part of Singapore was the firm determination of leadership to stamp out corruption, especially petty corruption. They called it Singapore Inc. for a reason—it ran like a company.

Q: Well, for the material building of a successful nation, it's not bad to have a Chinese base to begin with.

MONROE: Well there's something to be said for that. I don't know whether it's a Chinese cultural or Confucian thing, with strong emphasis on education and achievement, there's certainly a lot of drive there that has made the Chinese successful all over the region and the world.

Q: You left there when?

MONROE: 1999.

Q: Whither?

MONROE: I went to Kuwait. The long arm of the NEA (Near Eastern Affairs) struck again.

Q: You were in Kuwait from when to when?

MONROE: 1999-2002.

Q: What was your job?

MONROE: I was the DCM.

Q: Who the ambassador?

MONROE: Jim Larocco. And with Jim Larocco, there's a little interesting story there. Jim Larocco also did the full Arabic and Chinese programs. Jim and I first met in Cairo back in '79. Jim was the deputy director of AIT in Taiwan when I was in Taipei studying Chinese. I never worked for him, but we kept up over the years and so when he was looking for a DCM he gave me a call and asked if I wanted to be his DCM.

Q: What was the situation in Kuwait when you got there in '99?

MONROE: It was a very interesting time. It was after the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and subsequent U.S. liberation, which had been eight years earlier. Because of our role in the liberation, Kuwait and Kuwaitis were unusually friendly to Americans. The people there deeply appreciated that we led the efforts to save their country. It was also the time we were still worried about Saddam Hussein. The U.S. military was running an operation called Operation Southern Watch, which patrolled the southern part of Iraq to make sure Saddam didn't move any tanks, didn't undertake any military missions in the south towards Kuwait. For that reason, in addition to a sizable army base at Camp Doha, we had access to two air bases in Kuwait. From those air bases we flew missions everyday over Southern Iraq to monitor what was going on and to make sure Iraq didn't do anything mischievous. We had a very interesting embassy with a large military presence. I would give high credit to Jim Larocco for setting what I consider the model for excellent State-military cooperation at an Embassy, working together for a common interest of the U.S. as a whole. It was the best I have ever seen. The Ambassador chaired a weekly meeting with all different military commanders from the air bases and army bases, the intelligence people, senior state people. In this meeting, we got together, shared information, reviewed what was happening in Iraq, discussed problems and issues, and made sure we and the Kuwaitis were all on board and on the same page. It was an amazing effort when I look back on it. In seven or eight years we didn't lose a single plane, even for mechanical problems. So it was amazing—kept the peace for many years.

Q: When you arrived, what was the feeling at the embassy about the threat from the north, from Iraq?

MONROE: I think we felt that with the job our military was doing, there was no real military threat from the north. It couldn't happen—we would knock them out. If they would move one tank the wrong way, we'd blow it out. That said, we were extremely worried about the potential for non-conventional attacks, chemical weapons, and anthrax. We all got anthrax shots. We didn't trust the Iraqis at all, and we were concerned that there would be some chemical event that would cause harm to our people. We were extremely vigilant about that, and it was controversial. The anthrax issue ended up being voluntary, but we offered anthrax shots to everyone in the embassy.

Q: Where did you live in Kuwait?

MONROE: I lived in a villa in the residential area of Kuwait, probably fifteen minutes from the embassy.

Q: Did you feel—following Singapore—sort of cooped up in Kuwait?

MONROE: No, not cooped up at all. Kuwait is different than Singapore. Singapore is a city where you really like to live—it's a wonderful place to live and see. Kuwaitis had an odd attitude towards their country. They lived in the nice villas behind high walls. On the weekends, their idea of great fun was going to the desert and camping out there for the weekend. They didn't really pay much attention to their city. It was just a city. There was nothing really interesting or attractive about the city at all. A couple of malls, but it wasn't a pretty place to walk around and unbelievably hot for six months of the year. So it was a quiet place in that sense. For the children, one of the more active and successful programs was a baseball league, up through high school. A Japanese company, I believe, had built a wonderful facility, two excellent fields with stands. It was very popular.

Q: Did you go into Saudi Arabia at all to visit?

MONROE: I never did. I guess I could have, but there was no reason to.

Q: At least going back to my experience, when I lived there for two and a half years on the Persian Gulf, it's not exactly a garden spa.

MONROE: There was a nice beach at the Texaco compound, which we went to from time to time. And before it closed, the SAS Hotel had a wonderful pool and tennis club that was very popular with the expats. But no, it was not a garden spa.

Q: What were the politics of Kuwait?

MONROE: Fairly dynamic. There was an Amir, and a powerful ruling royal family. But Kuwait was famously known for having the most robust parliament in the region. Just before I had gotten there, there had been an election. A real election, with campaigning and camping tents and people going around and electing outspoken people to the parliament. The parliamentarians were pretty feisty.

Q: Were there any issues between the United States and Kuwait at the time?

MONROE: Issues between us? Well, we had concerns about financing terrorism. It wasn't the government, but there was money coming from private Kuwaitis that was a concern. We had normal practical issues on the military presence. We definitely were interested in supporting American companies in their efforts to get contracts for oilfield development. But we were pretty good friends.

Q: In 2000 we had the election between Bush and Gore and normally an embassy throws a party, opens it up and shows how wonderfully the American elections work. Did you have one of those?

MONROE: Well, no. The election was during Ramadan. And in Kuwait, Ramadan is a special time. There's something called the diwaniya, and kind of open evening salon, where prominent Kuwaitis open the receiving room up once a week and people—Kuwaitis, diplomats, friends—can pop in for coffee and talk. It's well known which Kuwaitis hold their diwaniya on which night here they open up their house, every Kuwaiti family has a diwaniya. It's great for political officers because if you want to go out and get a sense of what is going on, you just go visit diwaniyas and talk to people.

During Ramadan, every night Ambassador Larocco led a van full of Embassy officers on a tour of up to 15 diwaniyas, paying our Ramadan respects. We would do this every night for almost three weeks. Needless to say, it was exhausting. We would start at about six o'clock, drinking coffee at every stop, get home at 1 o'clock and, while Kuwaitis were on Ramadan schedule and sleeping in, we were back in the office at 8 the next morning trying to struggle through work. The reason I mention this is that this Ramadan took place during the Gore/Bush election. At every diwaniya, they had the TV going. Every TV had CNN or some other station covering the election saga. So we didn't have our own election party, but night after night we went to diwaniya after diwaniya where topic number one was the election. And of course, the Kuwaitis had a favorite in this race. The Bush name was like gold in that country because of Bush number one and his role in liberating the country. So they were all in support of Bush Jr. They may have had second thoughts about that a couple years later.

Q: Were things building up? Did you feel there was a reason for eventually going back into Iraq or was this something created in Washington?

MONROE: 9/11 changed everything. There was some concern because Operation Southern Watch had been going on for many years and unbelievably we hadn't lost a single plane, but there was always the fear that sooner or later one would get shot out of the sky. So there was that, and there was the worry that the sanctions would break down sooner or later. Those concerns were out there, but before 9/11 no one was talking about invading Kuwait or invading Iraq.

Q: Was our military concerned that the Iraqis would attack again?

MONROE: I don't think anybody felt the Iraqis would attack again. Especially with the U.S. military presence there—how could they? It was not possible. I can get into it a little more after 9/11 but before 9/11, there was no sign of the Iraqis having any intentions, at least while all the US military presence was there, to attack Kuwait.

Q: And you were there at 9/11?

MONROE: I was the chargé because Jim Larocco left in maybe April/May of 2001. His successor, Dick Jones, didn't arrive until the end of September.

Q: Well, what was the immediate reaction, how did you all react to 9/11?

MONROE: The immediate reaction for everybody was shock, of course. And our immediate concern was the possibility of more attacks coming—there were these attacks in the U.S., immediate reaction, is there going to be an attack elsewhere? So, let's make sure our defenses are up, our people are warned, people are careful. We didn't have any intelligence that something would happen but you have worries and take steps. Kuwait, of course, was a little different than rest of the Arab world in that they were so grateful to us for liberating them. So the initial reaction among the Kuwaitis was overwhelmingly moving support. There was an article or notice in a newspaper saying "let's go to the American Embassy and show our support." Suddenly the next day, all of these Kuwaitis came with flowers and just showing their support. That was impressive. Then the deputy amir, who was not well and hadn't been seen much, made a kind of unprecedented visit to the embassy to pay his respects which got covered on TV. Then the parliamentarians wanted to come and express their condolences, which started to cause a little problem for me. Because, you know, these were well-known parliamentarians who want to drive right into the embassy and not have to walk in the blazing heat a hundred meters because we wouldn't let their cars in because of a possible security threat. So I had to make the decision to let these guys in. I made a judgement call, I just thought this was a time to let them in, and we did, and it was safe. But the RSOs didn't like that,

Q: Did you feel more under threat from terrorists after that?

MONROE: Well, an interesting thing happened. We hadn't really seen much anti-Americanism in Kuwait at all in my time, but a couple weeks later we launched the attack on Afghanistan and suddenly you started to see anti-American comments directed towards Americans around town. I think the Islamists in Kuwait, who were always there, started to get emboldened after we went into Afghanistan. Don't forget, one of Usama Bin Laden's right-hand men was a Kuwaiti. It started to get a little worse.

Q: When was it that George H.W. Bush came to Kuwait and there was a threat from Saddam Hussein's people to kill him?

MONROE: Oh, that was way before my time, I think that was in '94.

Q: Was that sort of in the air, or was that an issue?

MONROE: That was not forgotten, but it was a distant memory. George Bush, in fact, visited Kuwait a couple of times while I was there. On the 10th anniversary of the liberation of Kuwait, George Bush, his wife Barbara, Colin Powell, General Norman Schwarzkopf, and others in the Bush Administration came for a big celebration of the liberation at the Embassy. But there were no incidents, no threats, then or for any of the other Bush visits.

Q: You left there when?

MONROE: I left there in April 2002.

Q: Were things after 9/11, was there a different atmosphere for the embassy? More a feeling of being in an area of enemies?

MONROE: Yeah, but not terribly so. I think the atmosphere was more charged in the region as a whole, including Kuwait, because, as I mentioned, of what was going on in Afghanistan. But it was not oppressively so in Kuwait.

Q: When you left in 2002 where'd you go?

MONROE: I went to Pakistan—Islamabad. I was there from 2002 until 2004.

To get a sense of what I got into with Pakistan, let me just go back to how I got there. I was DCM in Kuwait, and I got a call—and this was in summer of 2000—from Wendy Chamberlain who was the ambassador in Pakistan. She was looking for a new DCM in 2002, and asked if I was interested. I was, and I got the job, which thrilled me because Pakistan is important country; DCM in Islamabad is an important job. And also, pre-9/11 it had a reputation of being a wonderful place to go with families. There is a superb school, the Embassy has a huge compound, wonderful facilities for employees and families, like a club.

So it was perfect. Good for families, good for kids—and a nice challenging and important job. So I was quite happy with that, and looking forward to it. Then came 9/11, and everything changed. They sent home all of the dependents because of the potential dangers. Quite logically. Which had me a little bit worried, but Wendy assured me that the way things were going, she was pretty confident that by the time I got there dependents would be back and it would be a normal post. And she was right, at least for a while, because in February the dependents did in fact return, and so I was looking forward to my transfer in the summer of 2002 with my family. And then, I can remember very clearly, it was March of 2002, I was on the tarmac in Kuwait waiting for a visit by Vice President Cheney. And I got a phone call that told us that a couple of terrorists had gone into a church next to the embassy in Islamabad, threw hand grenades, and killed a recently-returned spouse and daughter.

This was a tragic event for the embassy, for the family—it was horrible. And I could see the implications of this for me right away. All the family members were sent home again. It was a bit controversial because there were inevitably some questions about whether the families were brought back too soon. In hindsight, I suppose the answer is obviously yes, but at the time the judgment was made it was deemed reasonable, knowing that of course there are always risks.

All that to say, Islamabad became an unaccompanied post from then on. And then Ambassador Chamberlain was brought back to Washington early and, except for a final couple of weeks in April, she was gone. And then the DCM was called back in April to be the Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary, PDAS, in the South Asia Bureau. So there was a big hole in the top at Embassy Islamabad. And then I got a call from the Assistant Secretary who said: "Look, I understand things have changed. If you want to back out of

the assignment because you're not going to have your family there, you can. If you want to go, good. We'd love to have, you know, but we don't want to force you under the circumstances. But if you do go, we want you to go like next week, April, as opposed to July."

Needless to say, I had a lot to think about. What am I going to do with my family? I didn't want to be apart from my family for an extended time. Later, the Department developed an effective system for dealing with unaccompanied posts and their dependents left behind—as they staffed big embassies in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan—but in 2002 this was not yet figured out. But I was able to work out a solution that made sense for us. I figured that it was a good job, and I should take it. And my wife is French and she could go to Paris, go back to work, get a job suitable to her background and education, and our kids could go to the American school in Paris. We could handle that for a year.

And the Department agreed, and off I went to Islamabad while my family went to Paris. But it wasn't as smooth as it should have been. The Embassy in Paris wasn't well equipped to handle bureaucratically the arrival of a dependent wife and three children unattached to anyone working at the Embassy. There was actually an email from a GSO that said in effect, "We won't lift a finger for them. We will not do anything for these dependents," which I thought was not very collegial considering all we were going through. Now, of course, it's much different. It's a well-oiled machine, but it was just, you know, they'd never seen this kind of thing before. They didn't know how to account for the expenses and the burdens caused by a family that wasn't part of the embassy. They didn't know how it should work. My wife and kids all have French passports. They weren't really a burden to the embassy. But the attitude was discouraging. Later, it got much better.

Anyway, back to me. I arrived in April 2002 to a completely traumatized embassy. The officers who were left had seen their families leave in September, and come back in February, then saw two family members killed brutally in March, and then had the families evacuated again. It was a shell-shocked embassy that was soon to have a new chargé d'affaires and there would be no new ambassador for a while. Fortunately it wasn't too long before a new Ambassador was identified, Nancy Powell, who had lots of experience in Pakistan, India, and our region. She came out in an acting capacity prior to her hearings and confirmation in the summer.

Once Nancy arrived, we quickly realized that anybody who had suffered through the ordeals of the past year and wanted to leave, should be able to go immediately. We needed forward-looking people who wanted to be there, and weren't shell shocked from the trauma of the past year. So most of the embassy, with a couple of very important exceptions, left by the summer and we had a whole new team by summer of 2002. A very good team, very energetic. It was not easy to run an embassy that way when almost your whole staff turns over and you're losing a lot of expertise. It was tough.

Q: Well, what was the situation?

MONROE: There were two important issues going on at the same time. One, which was an ongoing thing, was the hunt for al-Qaeda people in Pakistan, which was a major operation. Our intelligence people did a wonderful job and got some very important people. That was a big focus for the embassy and certainly a big focus of Washington. After 9/11, Ambassador Chamberlain and gone in and had a very tough meeting with President Pervez Musharraf, one of those, "you're with us or you're against us." And he bought on the fight against al-Qaeda 100%. He didn't really bite on the fight against dealing with the Taliban, which is a whole different story. But at that point we were more focused on al-Qaeda than the Taliban anyway. The other issue which rose up right after we arrived was a big crisis between Pakistan and India. There had been a bombing of the parliament in India in December of 2001 which the Indians blamed on the Pakistanis. And then in, I think, March of 2000, there had been an attack on an Indian base in Kashmir that the Indians blamed on Pakistan or Pakistan-supportive elements.

India and the hardliners in India were furious—ratcheting up the pressure on the Indian government to do something, to retaliate, to respond against the provocations. And the Pakistanis were claiming innocence regarding the attacks, but also promising, threatening, to respond if attacked. And of course there was the concern that the Pakistanis, while outnumbered badly in terms of numbers of troops, did have nuclear weapons and were presumed ready to use them if existentially threatened. They didn't say it explicitly, but there was the worry that any outbreak of hostilities could spin out of control and could end up in some kind of nuclear event. We felt that the embassy in New Delhi, which was reflecting the seriousness of Indian attitudes, was focused a little bit more on reporting what the Indians were saying rather than pushing back and saying, "Hey, don't go there."

This was coming to a head within weeks after my arrival. So there was a lot on our plate in those opening months. The conflict with India actually resolved itself in an unexpected way. There were a lot of people who feared that war was becoming inevitable. Richard Armitage came out to try to mediate, which certainly helped. But I think the one thing that really helped defuse the tensions was a move by the United States that had an unintended impact. Alarmed by worries that the conflict could lead to the use of nuclear weapons, our Ambassador in New Delhi ordered the departure of some dependents as a precautionary measure. Well, one consequence of this was that American companies took their lead, as they do, from the embassy and they started evacuating their people. And even more importantly, American business started canceling business trips to India. So suddenly the Indians realized that what had been a kind of cost-free raising of tensions and giving a black eye to the Pakistanis for their support for extremists now had some economic costs. Because business was affected by the climate created by the Indians as they ratcheted the pressure. I'm convinced that was a big reason why they at that point decided to find a way to ratchet down the pressure. Which is what happened. And there wasn't a nuclear war.

Q: The possibility of nuclear war. What were you doing at the embassy?

MONROE: Well, we did not go to "authorized departure." I am sure we started looking at contingency plans. But we just looked at it differently than Embassy New Delhi. We thought that wiser heads would prevail. We were telling the Pakistanis to cool it, to dampen down the level of tension. But we were not in as alarmist a mode as they were on the other side of the border.

Q: What was your impression of the Pakistani government, with the military as the real power? Did you feel that too, or not?

MONROE: Oh, I mean, on the one hand we depended on them 100 percent in our war against al-Qaeda. They were our close ally in that, and very effective in helping us, all credit to them. On the other hand, as this was going on, we had President Musharraf, who had taken power in a coup and was trying to legitimize his presidency. And in trying to do that he made a few mistakes. He was actually quite popular because the prior government hadn't been very effective, and when Musharraf came in, he was almost a breath of fresh air. He seemed like an open, positive person. But as often happens, especially with dictators and military leaders, they start to believe a little bit too much in the importance of their role in the survival of the country and they misjudge how popular they are. Anyway, he decided that the first thing he had to do to cement his legitimacy was to have a referendum seeking approval of him and his rule.

He had a model of a previous referendum, Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq, one of his predecessors, who got a 95 percent positive rating. So he was determined to beat that to show he was the most popular ever. Well, he would have gotten probably 70 percent or so, he was very popular. He could have sailed through with a wonderful result. But he needed more than that. So he was helped in that by the military, which also helped in the subsequent elections. But the referendum, the way it was handled, tarnished his image.

Q: How did you find the staff of the embassy? Was it a fairly knowledgeable embassy and staff?

MONROE: Well, it was, except most of them left in the months after I arrived. Luckily our talented political counselor stayed on, which was invaluable to me certainly. A few people stayed on, but by the summer they were literally a whole new team. Many of them had no prior experience in Pakistan. An exception was, Ambassador Powell who came with lots of experience. But there was a lot of learning on the job. And I had no experience. I'd never been to Pakistan.

Q: It must be very difficult, I mean, to be dealing with issues and all that you don't have long experience with the background.

MONROE: It was very hard. And it was Pakistan, an important country especially at that time after 9/11, so people were paying attention to everything. You know, something would happen. The attempted assassination of the president, the phones are ringing before you can get to your office. What's going on? What happened? Who did it?

Q: How does one catch up on this? The knowledge and basic judgment, you should have background. And where were you getting the background?

MONROE: Initially from the few people who were still there who didn't leave right away. I was very fortunate, from a policy point of view, when Ambassador Powell came in who had loads of experienced on Pakistan. I certainly got a lot of sage guidance from her. And then I could focus on what was a monumental issue—managing a big embassy. This was a big embassy, and a complicated one, because we had a growing military component, an intelligence component, a new AID program that just started up after 9/11. We had all these new people coming in. So there were just so many components to our bilateral cooperation—INL, FBI, all these different organizations were all there. I came with some management skills because I'd been a DCM in Kuwait, where we had a huge and complex military presence, lots of different agencies. I had some experience in managing different agencies, getting the different components to work together. So I could bring those skills in, those skills that I've developed. And then the policy, if I went into a meeting, sometimes it was tough. You go into these meetings with senior Pakistani officials, like the director of international organizations, director of this or that, who've been there for 15, 20 years. For every argument you have, they can pull out something from 15 years ago countering it. And so it was tough. I had strong backing in the embassy and the ambassador which helped.

Q: Were you concerned about mob action?

MONROE: Yeah, that was a concern. The embassy was well fortified, especially after what happened when it was attacked and set on fire back in 1979. The embassy security position was better than it had been back then. We were pretty confident because we had a good relationship with Musharraf. He was not going to let that happen. Much more worrisome was the possibility of an individual attack. Like the attack that did take place on the church next to the embassy, or a potential attack on one of the houses of people who live outside the compound. In Pakistan, we have a huge Embassy compound, with several apartments, and the ambassador's residence is inside the compound, so she was pretty safe. The DCM house was about a fifteen minute drive from the embassy, on a corner street, a pretty major street that couldn't be closed off. It was a gorgeous house -- big villa with wonderful gardens, just a lovely place to live. But I was worried, quite worried the whole time I was there. It was almost a question of "why hasn't this house been attacked yet?" I don't know if you remember the movie Zero Dark Thirty, where the embassy employee was attacked in her car while leaving her residential compound. I worried that could happen to me. I had two exits out of my house. One on the main street, another on a side street. I could vary my routes, vary my times, but only so much. I had Pakistani guards around the house, but there were low-paid, and who knew how reliable they ultimately would be. We thought at times of moving me into the Embassy compound, but we never did. I breathed a sigh of relief the last day I left. I'd made it through my tour!

Q: How were relations with the Pakistan military, particularly the intelligence? Hard core nationalistic?

MONROE: Certainly very nationalistic. Relations were basically very good because we cooperated with them on all sorts of things, especially finding terrorists. They were less robust than we would like in going out and doing the hard work of cleaning up the tribal areas on the border with Afghanistan, dealing with the Taliban. But we definitely had a close working relationship with the military.

Q: What was the situation with the tribal areas? Was it a no go for Pakistani authority?

MONROE: Not quite a no go, but they were fairly independent. In some areas, I guess, it was difficult for them to go. I actually took a trip one of the tribal areas. It was wild west out there.

Q: What about with Kashmir? Did we see a solution there, or what was going to happen with Kashmir?

MONROE: Our concern was less on finding a solution than on keeping the peace on the line of control. There was no solution in sight. No one was putting active proposals for the problem, which I think is essentially unsolvable. Pakistan is not going to give up the parts that they've controlled, nor can it politically give up claims on the parts India controls. So what do you do? It hasn't been a real problem lately, I guess. It will always be an irritant for the Pakistanis. It's tied up in their nationalism. They'll never give it up.

Q: When did the Bombay attack occur? Before or after you were there?

MONROE: The Bombay hotel attack? That was later, 2008, I believe.

Q: Was there a feeling that there were independent forces within Pakistan looking to cause trouble?

MONROE: There's always the issue of "why don't the Pakistanis crack down harder on the militants that are causing trouble?" And I think the reason is that they don't want to give that card away because they want to have something they can use to keep India a little bit at bay. They want to have these guys to unleash when and if necessary.

Q: Did you have contact with the Indian representatives in Pakistan?

MONROE: We did. Pakistan's relations with India improved while I was there. And in fact, in my second year there, they improved quite a bit to the point where a series of friendly cricket matches was scheduled. An Indian cricket team came to Pakistan and it was the talk of the town,

I clearly remember our ambassador saying, "Okay embassy team, you're going to have to learn the rules of cricket because at every cocktail party all of your Pakistani counterparts and friends are going to be talking about cricket. And you have to understand what

they're talking about." So we had a sit-down session with one of our local employees who taught us the rules of cricket.

Q: I've been hearing about cricket all my life, but I never really learned the rules.

MONROE: Thanks to my stay in Pakistan, I understand something about the three-day test and the one day match and all this kind of stuff. If you like baseball, you like cricket. There are some differences, but many of the same skill sets.

Q: Did political parties play much of a role in politics there?

MONROE: Oh yeah. There have traditionally been two political parties—Benazir Bhutto's party, the Pakistan People's Party, PPP, and the party of Nawaz Sharif, the PML-N. And the two parties, Bhutto's and Sharif's, would alternate. One would win, and then maybe there'd be a coup, and then the other would win, so it'd go back and forth. We thought these parties were a little bit defunct when I got there because of the coup. But there was an election in the fall of 2002, and the leaders of both parties were out of the country, but their parties soldiered on and they were very active. And then Musharraf got his own party. It was a robust election. There's so many talented Pakistanis, we got to know the parties and they certainly wanted to know us.

Q: A lot of embassies, say the Brits, were they particularly active or did they leave most of the heavy lifting to the Americans?

MONROE: I would say the British were very active and important. Others were active in different ways. The Saudi ambassador was powerful. But I would say of the other foreign ones, probably the British. They had a sizable embassy and a very high profile ambassador.

Q: Was Al-Qaeda at that time fairly spread around the country?

MONROE: Well, if they were in the country, they were hiding. Khalid Shaikh Mohammed—KSM—was found hiding in Rawalpindi, not far from Islamabad. I think most of them were scattered about in more remote areas, including the tribal areas.

Q: Were we the only suppliers of military equipment or were the Chinese?

MONROE: I forgot to mention the Chinese, who also had a high profile presence. The Russians went with India and the Chinese went with Pakistan.

Q: How big a presence were Americans in Pakistan when you were there? Technicians and that sort.

MONROE: Not huge. I think precisely because we evacuated. We had no dependents, and companies take their lead from the embassy. And there just weren't that many big

U.S. companies anyway. There weren't that many Americans. Those that were there, they were probably often with NGOs. There was not a big American presence.

Q: My understanding was at one time anyway, that there was a very large refugee population from Afghanistan on Pakistani soil and the children were going to madrassa schools, which the Saudis were supporting and staffing.

MONROE: There were a lot of Afghan refugees in the country. Most of them were probably in the North West Frontier Province, although there was a sizable Afghan community in Islamabad. The Afghans may have been attending madrassas, but it was a much broader Pakistani issue and problem. We often discussed with the Pakistanis the need to get control of these madrassas. Every once in a while, they'd come up with some plan to reform, but not much progress was made. It's been 20 years since I was there, so I don't know what's going on with them right now.

Q: The Sheikh Mohammed, he was killed, wasn't he? What was his name?

MONROE: Khalid Sheikh Mohammed? He was captured, but not killed. He's in Guantanamo. He was captured in '02. When he was captured, they took a picture of him unshaven, it looked like they just got him out of bed, which they probably did. He was in a white tee shirt, and somebody took a picture of him. And that was the picture that went around the world. And he didn't look like an impressive terrorist model. Shaggy, disheveled—the guy looked terrible. So it was great. It was a real positive moment for us.

Q: And you were there for how long?

MONROE: Two years. Two years and two months. I left in 2004. I was going there for one year, but then for a number of reasons, including the fact that my wife had a good situation in Paris and my son was a junior in high school and needed one more year to graduate and I was able to go visit every four months. And it didn't seem right to leave Pakistan for one year. So I stayed.

Q: Was Nancy Powell the ambassador most of the time you were there?

MONROE: She was the ambassador the whole time I was there. She probably came in May maybe and became ambassador in July. Yeah, she stayed.

Q: Is there anything else?

MONROE: I think we've probably hit the high points or the low points. It was an experience I'll never forget.

Q: After your two plus years, where'd you go?

MONROE: I was lucky enough to be nominated to be ambassador, to Bahrain.

Q: Had you been to Bahrain before?

MONROE: Yes, I'd been to Bahrain when I was in Kuwait.

Q: I know Bahrain was the place I used to get beer.

MONROE: You still can get beer in Bahrain.

Q: Shall we talk about how you got to be the ambassador to Bahrain?

MONROE: Well, I was lucky. I think my three years in Kuwait during 9/11 as chargé d'affaires and then serving as DCM in Pakistan at a difficult time certainly gave me a profile that put me in the running for an ambassadorship. Beyond that, in a Bureau the principal deputy assistant secretary is the guy who traditionally manages the process, looking for and identifying people that the bureau wants to nominate to be ambassador. The PDAS in NEA at that time was Jim Larocco, my old ambassador in Kuwait. And so I let him know that I was looking and interested in being an ambassador. And putting all the pieces together, he thought it'd be a good fit.

Q: You went to Bahrain from when to when?

MONROE: From 2004 to 2007.

Although my transfer to Bahrain was not without incident. Keep in mind that I'd already been apart from my wife and family for two years and two months. I certainly wanted to rejoin them wherever I went. The day I was leaving, after I'd had my confirmation hearing in June, I came back to Islamabad to pack out. Late June, I went to the airport to go back to Washington for consultations and all that. The plane leaves at 4:00 in the morning through Abu Dhabi, and as I'm getting ready to board the plane in Islamabad, in the transit lounge, the VIP lounge, in comes the head of our military operation, General Stone. He has just arrived from Bahrain, I think, where there's been a big meeting of military people in the region. He said, "Bill, I got bad news for you. The Admiral in Bahrain has just ordered all of the Navy dependents to go home out of concern for their safety and security." The Navy has a huge presence in Bahrain, it is the regional headquarters for the Navy in the region, more than 3,000 sailors based there. Well, I quickly saw the implications of the Admiral's decision. If the Navy is going to send its dependents home, it'd be hard for the embassy to keep its in the country. The reason the Admiral ordered the Navy dependents home was related to an issue over six Bahrainis with connections to al-Qaida. The U.S. had pressed the Bahraini government to arrest them. When in June they finally did, everyone was happy. But a couple of days later, they released them. And that really upset the U.S. government, and the Admiral running the base in Bahrain decided that was too dangerous to keep the Navy dependents there.

In the end, the Embassy didn't send its dependents home, but we went on "authorized departure" status. This meant that while dependents already there could stay (or go if they wanted), no new dependents could come. That was a problem for me, of course, and any

other newcomers. But there was a second problem. There was a Department Of Defense Dependents School (DODDS) there called the Bahrain School, run for the kids in Navy families assigned to the base. It was a good school that also attracted a number of Bahrainis, Saudis, Egyptians, the kids at the U.S. Embassy, and other Embassies. When the Navy sent home its dependents, it also sent home all the teachers at the school. So that school was in jeopardy of being closed. There were other schools in Bahrain, but none were nearly as good as this one for Americans. So it was looking fairly bleak for me from a personal point of view in terms of family, but more broadly there was a very serious issue that had to be addressed—the safety of embassy people in Bahrain.

So I went back to Washington and I looked at two issues—how to deal with the security situation in Bahrain, and what to do with the Bahrain School. I first asked our Embassy to look at the security situation and prepare an assessment with recommendations. Since there is always some risk, it came down to a question of how serious were the risks, and how successfully could these risks be managed. In terms of the security risks posed by these six Islamist extremist, they really were more a threat outside Bahrain than inside. They had never made any threats inside the country, and in fact, at the time there were no credible threats against Americans in Bahrain. These six Islamists had never threatened anything in Bahrain. They were bad guys, for sure, and you could decide to punish Bahrain if you wanted. And maybe sending Navy dependents home was a useful signal to the Bahrainis that we were mad, but from a purely security point of view, there was no direct threat against Americans. In fact, you could make a case that the last thing the extremists would do would be to attack Americans in Bahrain, because that would have forced the King to crack down on them.

Anyway, the Embassy made its assessment, worked with the Bahrainis to develop a plan to enhance our security, and succeeded in convincing Washington that it could lift the authorized departure situation and return to normal staffing at the Embassy.

Obviously there was a risk. As we found in Pakistan, the hardest thing to do is to take a step like sending dependents home and then walk it back because, if anything happens, the blame goes squarely on your shoulders. So there was a bit of a risk there, but I'm not a believer in insisting on absolutely no risk, which is an impossible standard. With the State Department, we have Embassies in dangerous countries. There are risks, but you have to manage risk. We have to get out there; we need a presence in these places and there are going to be risks. That's why you get 25 percent additional danger pay. It's not because of safety. It's because it's risky. You look at the risks, you manage the risks, and you do the best you can. Anyway, I think we made the right decision. It's now 11 years later and there's not been a single terrorist attack against Americans in Bahrain.

The other issue was the school. I argued that, at a time when the United States is desperately trying to get positive messages out about the United States, if you popped up and said, "Well I’ve got an idea. Why don't we put a Department of Defense School in the Middle East and get all these Arabs from Saudi Arabia and Bahrain and Kuwait and Egypt to attend that school, to get an education taught by DOD-hired teachers with American classmates?” What better way to kind of spread a positive message out. So I

went to a lot of meetings at the Pentagon, at the assistant secretary level, as we wrestled with this issue. There were legal issues and financial issues. I think some people, especially in the DODDS system, just wanted to get rid of the school. It was a small school, and they wanted to put their money into the schools in Frankfurt, Germany, and Japan. They thought the Bahrain School was just an administrative nuisance, and the money could be better spent elsewhere.

And there was a sticky legal issue. They can't run a DOD school without military dependents in the school. Once the Navy sent its kids home, it no longer had Navy kids to teach. The answer to that was, "Well, we have a couple of military families in the defense attaché's office. Just a handful, but they would go to the school and that would solve the legal issue." In the end, the policy people in the Defense Department did the right thing. They kept the school going. Which made sense at a practical level, because then when you brought the Navy dependents back in five or ten years, they would have a school to go to and you wouldn't have to try to start one up from scratch. And it made sense from a policy point of view. The crown prince of Bahrain was a graduate of that school, for example. The crown prince is going to be king someday. You don't want to get him upset if it makes sense to keep it. And other Arabs, including the Crown Prince's son attended the school. So the school stayed open. The teachers were given like one week's notice to come back and they came rushing back. I arrived the week before school started with my family. I think that was one of my more significant accomplishments, keeping this school open.

Q: How about the Admiral, was he roaring mad about this?

MONROE: Well, he didn't care so much. It wasn't his problem anymore because the dependents were gone. There was some feeling that he was just as happy to have the dependents gone because they could be a headache. Running a base, or even an Embassy for that matter, without dependents is in some ways easier. You have less to worry about. I don't think it happened much, but with a whole lot of Navy dependents on that island, you worry about kids running around and getting in trouble. All sorts of things could happen. The Admiral no longer had to worry about providing security for Navy families. In any event, after a few months he departed and a new Admiral arrived. He was sympathetic to the idea of starting to bring dependents back. But that would take time.

Q: How about the ruling family?

MONROE: How much relationship we have with the ruling family? Well, it wasn't like the old days when the King's father had a beach house and people could just wander over there and go swimming.

Q: The political agent. The British had, it was a political agent.

MONROE: Well, that was a while ago, before independence. I am talking about more recent times when the previous King—well he was the Amir at that time—had essentially an open house on the weekends. Come by, go swimming, enjoy the hospitality. The

current King, Hamad, he changed his title from Amir to King. Access was not as easy as it was in the past. It was much more formal. We would see him, would see the Prime Minister, who was the King's uncle, and the Crown Prince, the King's son, still relatively young, western educated, went to Bahrain school, as I said, then went to American University, spoke English like an American. And there are royal family members sprinkled throughout the government—the Minister of Interior was royal family, the Minister of Finance, and others.

Q: Had the oil run out by this time?

MONROE: The oil did not completely run out. Most of the oil comes from a joint field they share with the Saudis, so they have some oil. But it's not a rich country. They have had to rely on other sources of income, such as striving to become a regional financial center. Tourism. They've got a big aluminum plant, Alba, which was a major aluminum exporter. It's not a rich country, although it is often mistakenly lumped in with its rich neighbors.

Q: What about the population ? Going back to the late 50s, there was concern about Iranian migration, a fervent, Islamic Iran. What was the population and political situation?

MONROE: Well, that's the key question. In some ways, the dynamics have not changed much. The King and the ruling royal family are Sunni. The Sunnis make up, it's hard to say exactly, about 35, 40 percent of the population. The majority is Shia. There's always been a worry about the demographics. After the King took power, he started a liberalization program, a sort of a semi- democratization of the country, with a parliament and real elections. The problem was, it's hard to give people a little democracy, because if you give them a little they want the whole thing. Real democracy will not work in Bahrain in the current environment because, with real democracy, the Shia majority would probably control the government. And the Saudis would never let that happen. While I was there, the King was trying to walk a fine line, trying to quite reasonably open up, let a big Shia party run in elections, and get some seats in parliament. And all this might have evolved in a positive way, I think, if it were not for the 2003 invasion of Iraq, which exacerbated the Sunni-Shia frictions and fears in the region, and then the Arab Spring.

The Arab Spring broke out in 2011, after I left, and some of that fervor spread to Bahrain, and the Shias there. The initial protests, by the way, included some Sunni, but basically it was viewed as a Shia uprising, and that became too much for the Saudis, for the Bahraini government. It was squashed, and the political climate is much harsher now than when I was there. When I was there, there were reasonably free elections, which we encouraged, and the main Shia block, Al Wefaq, which had boycotted the previous election, decided to participate. With the blessing of the leadership, I met with the leaders of Al Wefaq, which was an indication of the more hopeful political climate at that time. About a year earlier, the British ambassador had been lambasted in the press for doing that. And Al Wefaq did pretty well in the elections, it won a sizable amount of seats.

But the Sunni-Shia relationship remained sensitive and delicate, and was exacerbated by the role of Iran. One can debate the extent of Iranian involvement in Bahraini politics, but there was a history of Iranian meddling, and Iranian connections with at least certain elements of the Shia community were at a minimum worrisome for the Bahrainis, and in fact, a real concern. So the whole issue of how to bring the Shia majority, which was disproportionately poor, into the political arena, was a challenge. A challenge complicated by the growing Sunni-Shia sensitivities after the U.S. invasion of Iraq, by growing Iranian interference and meddling in the region, and in Bahrain by the currents of the Arab Spring. All this made it much more difficult to try to bring the Shia into the political system in a gradual, non-threatening way without overturning the entire structure. Which the Bahraini government, and the Saudis, would never let happen.

Q: I recall seeing reports of Saudis sending troops there and all this put down, was that during your time?

MONROE: No, no, that was during the Arab Spring uprising in 2011. I left in 2007. And that goes to my point. The Saudis are not going to let Bahrain be overrun and become a Shia-run country. The Saudi concern is the eastern province, which as you know is Shia. So if there's too much unrest and turmoil over in Bahrain, they don't want that spilling over into the eastern province of Saudi Arabia. The Saudis have a very watchful eye on what happens in Bahrain.

Q: How did the King Fahd Causeway—when I was there, there was no causeway. You used to take Gulf Air back and forth. Was there much traffic across the causeway?

MONROE: Oh yeah. On the weekends, it was bumper to bumper with Saudis coming in.

Q: What do they do?

MONROE: They came to have fun. They could go to the malls and walk around with their wife and their family, enjoying themselves together. The could eat in restaurants together, go to movies. There were actually two kinds of Saudi visitors. There were the families, who just wanted to come and have a family outing and go to the mall and shop and eat and not be hassled. And then of course, there were the men, often young men, who came to drink and have a good time and enjoy the freer atmosphere.

The causeway was a great economic success for Bahrain because the Saudis came and spent money. For a country that needs money, it was a 100 percent success.

Q: How about the American Navy dependents ? Were they a problem or not? Did they keep to themselves or...?

MONROE: They had departed by the time I got there.

Q: But did they come back at all?

MONROE: Not while I was there. I think they've come back, at least to some extent. I don't know the numbers.

Q: But when you were there—Probably saved you a lot of trouble too.

MONROE: It might have, although I think the problem would have been pretty well handled by the Navy leadership. Actually, when the Navy dependents were there, I don't believe there was much of a problem.

Q: So your wife came with you?

MONROE: She came and she became the manager of the American Chamber of Commerce. So that was a good job for her. She enjoyed that.

Q: Was there much commercial, American commercial interest in Bahrain?

MONROE: There was some. I think my other big achievement/accomplishment was the free trade agreement between our two countries. Actually, it was negotiated before I got there, but I had to run a lot of hurdles to get over the finish line, and it was finalized, signed and implemented while I was there. There were some tough issues at the end, but it came into effect and started to boost trade.

For the United States the free trade agreement (FTA) with Bahrain was as much a political agreement as it was a commercial agreement because, frankly, Bahrain is not a major trading partner with us. But the agreement was important symbolically as an indication of our ties to Bahrain and the region. And it was watched closely by the U.S. Congress, not so much because of Bahrain, but because they didn't want this agreement to undermine some basic free trade agreement principles, such as in labor. And there was an issue regarding the Arab boycott. So I had to work closely with the Bahrainis to iron out the final details, which sometimes are the stickiest. Anyway, at the very end, my phone rang one day and on the other end was Congressman Charles Rangel, who wanted my assurance that everything had been settled satisfactorily. I think he really just wanted to be able to say that he had talked to the U.S. Ambassador, and everything was good to go..

Q: Was Bahrain a center of smuggling?

MONROE: No, not really. A lot of the Iranian trade goes through the Emirates. Dubai was much more of a trading hub than Bahrain.

Q: You left there when?

MONROE: 2007. I was ready for a rest after Kuwait, Islamabad and Bahrain—eight pretty intense years. I'd been asked if I wanted to go to Iraq. Unaccompanied. Logically, maybe I should have, since I had served in Iraq before, but I wasn't ready for another

unaccompanied tour, and I wanted to go back and help my family get settled in Washington. So I went back and worked with the Board of Examiners, or BEX, interviewing candidates for the Foreign Service. It was a wonderful experience. Just to see the talent that wanted to join the State Department, and interviewing them.

Q: I did it for a year. It was great experience. Actually it's very good for what I'm doing now, you know? Getting people to talk.

MONROE: That's right. When you did it, I think the process was quite different.

Q: When we did it, it wasn't all prescribed and we could make up our own questions.

MONROE: It's much different now. It's structured. You begin with a group meeting where five or six candidates sit around and try to resolve a problem together. Then you have individual sessions where you go through a series of set questions and scenarios. The format is very defined. And the talent of the people coming through was really impressive.

Q: Was there a concern that we weren't getting enough applicants?

MONROE: No, that wasn't the issue. The issue at that time was whether we were getting enough minority applicants and diversity. Diversity was an issue. So my year they introduced a new process that added a new step. If you passed the written exam, you had to fill out an application form, which we reviewed to decide who to bring in for an interview. The concept, in my view, was a bit misconceived. The idea was that there might be some great candidates, including minorities, who might not test as well on a standardized test but have great résumés that we might miss if only judging candidates by the results of the written test. The problem was that often the people with the best résumés were wealthier candidates who could do unpaid internships or other fabulous things that look great on a résumé. And those with less money may have to work summers in a fast food place or something, maybe great experience in some ways but not jumping off the page on a résumé compared to someone who did an unpaid internship with, say, an NGO in Africa.

Q: Did you find that if a person of color or disadvantage came before you that you were using a different set of standards?

MONROE: No, the issue was not to apply different standards during the interview. It was to make sure we got diversity in the door

Q: So then what happened at the end of your time with BEX?

MONROE: I got a call in April 2008, I think, asking if I wanted to head up the senior division of CDA, the office in charge of assignments for senior-level officers. And I said, sure, why not? That'd be interesting. I think one year in BEX is probably enough anyway, so why not try something new. The office provides career counseling to officers, and

coordinates their assignments. At the senior level, there is less interest in or need, I suppose, in counseling, but assignments are of course competitive at that level, and we organized the DCM committee meetings, and got involved in Ambassadorial assignments. As Director, I was Career Development Officer (CDO) for the Ambassadors, so I had an interesting client list. It was a good year. It was one of those jobs you say "I wish I'd done that 20 or 30 years ago." I learned a lot about the assignments process.

Q: So after that, what happened?

MONROE: Well I didn't retire, as I had initially anticipated. It turned out that the DCM to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in Paris had to curtail after eight months because of an illness; one of her children became sick and had to return to the U.S. So that job opened up and I thought about two seconds and concluded: okay. I'm an economic officer. I've lived in difficult, 25 percent hardship posts my whole career, this would be an interesting change. And my wife's French. And, multilateral diplomacy would be a new challenge. I hadn't done much multilateral diplomacy, except a little bit in the Pacific Islands. It would be a good job, with all kinds of interesting economic issues. So, I bid on it, was paneled and off I went to Paris

Q: And you were there for how long?

MONROE: Two years and three months.

Q: What were the issues that you dealt with?

MONROE: OECD dealt with all sorts of issues. The full range of trade and economic issues, including development. But one of the biggest challenges we faced was adjusting to the changing global economy. OECD was founded by the developed capitalist economies of the West—for that reason it was famously called a “club of rich countries.” In a way that made sense because you had like-minded countries, market economies trying to set up law-based rules of the road, whether it was traditional trade, such as global standards for export of chemicals or new things, such as internet commerce or nano-technology. Some of this was very dry, some of it very interesting, but all of it was important. It was a group of like-minded countries getting together and setting standards to facilitate trade that the rest of the world could adhere to and benefit from. This worked fine for years. But of course the world is changing, and now you have big economies like China, India, and emerging economies in places like South Africa and Brazil. And you have Russia.

There were two issues. One, do we want to bring in more countries as members and how will that impact OECD’s governance and ability to maintain its standards? And two, how do we engage these big emerging economies that may not be ready for membership, or may not want it, but have an increasing impact on global trade? Ignoring these countries could risk making OECD irrelevant. So OECD launched an initiative, it actually started before I arrived, called enhanced engagement with countries like China, Brazil, South

Africa, Indonesia, and India. This was a big challenge, to keep the mission and the ability of the OECD to do good and effective work, and at the same time remain relevant by bringing in other countries who would work with us and help support (and not erode) the standards.

Q: I assume that by this time information was becoming almost a commodity; a major product of an economy. Were you involved in that?

MONROE: We were starting to. Our ambassador was very interested in internet policy, and there were starting to be some big meetings on that policy, which was just emerging as an issue. And there were other new issues. I mentioned nanotechnology. Periodically, these nanotechnology experts from around the world came and discussed cross-border issues regarding nanotechnology. Not something I had given a lot of thought to, I admit. We don't think about it, but global standards are so important, even in the most basic industries. Trade in chemicals would ground to a halt without global standards, if each country had its own standards for importing chemicals. Thankfully, OECD members got together and developed standards, which members and non-members could adhere to, saving money and facilitating trade. OECD is a multilateral organization that is cumbersome and doesn't always work perfectly, but it's got a lot of expertise and it does really good work.

Q: Did you find it to be a very technical job, or at your level were you trying to resolve differences?

MONROE: It was not a technical job for me because as DCM I operated more at the policy and management level. And we had individual officers, the labor person, the trade person, the energy person, who covered their areas of focus and expertise. So I didn't have to be an expert, although you certainly had to have an economics background and have a familiarity with the issues and the players back in Washington. And you had to have enough of a command of the issues to deal with the OECD's very active Secretary General and senior staff, as well as colleagues at other missions.

Q: Did you have fun?

MONROE: I did. From a substantive point of view for an economic officer it is a great place to work. For a mid-level economic officer it would be a fantastic experience—exposure to the broad range of issues OECD covers, as well as honing diplomatic skills in a multilateral setting. Alas, a little late for me, on my last assignment as an FSO. At the DCM level, the whole range of diplomatic skills were sometimes required. I remember a classic example, when I was chargé d'affaires in fact, and we were negotiating a final communiqué for the annual ministerial meeting. It was a complex process, requiring the concurrence not only of the 30 some members and the OECD secretariat, but also of the various U.S. departments and agencies that had an interest in the issues covered. And countries and agencies take all this very seriously—slight changes in wording can get very controversial. At the final moment, I was standing outside the conference room and I had a Treasury official on the phone and a group of Ambassadors standing around me,

trying to hammer out the last bit of language. In the end, we reached agreement, but it was quite an experience in diplomacy.

Q: Did you retire at the end of this?

MONROE: I was retired. I reached the time limit of my MC, you have 14 or 15 years from the time you enter the senior foreign service. It is extremely difficult to get to the next level in any event, but I had made a decision, I had taken a career path after Bahrain - BEX, CDA, DCM at OECD - that essentially precluded a further promotion. Which was fine. I was fully satisfied with my career.

Q: Where did you retire?

MONROE: Well that's an interesting question. We bought a house in Sarasota, Florida, which is where I am now, which is where my parents retired. And so I spend about six months of the year here.

My wife and I, as we talked about retirement, we had kind of a deal. She had quit her job to follow me around the world. She had cobbled together a career that was not what it would have been had she not done that. So the deal was, okay, when we retire she gets to pick what we do and where we go. And she had an enduring love of Asia, which was one of the reasons I went to Asia in the first place, and she wanted to try living in Asia, in particular, Southeast Asia. So, during our last year in Paris, she went off and explored the possibilities. We had kind of narrowed it down to Thailand and Cambodia, and she came back and said we should try Cambodia. It is smaller than Thailand. Visas are not an issue. It's a dollar economy. It's very cheap. You know, we can go there and if we like it we can stay. If we don't, we can try something else. That was seven years ago.

Q: So did you go there every six months or something like that?

MONROE: I leave in October and come back in March or April.

Q: Well sounds like you have had a fascinating career.

MONROE: You know, I would have never scripted it the way it went. I would have thought I would've focused on the Soviet Union, based on my academic experience and interests, but it never happened. I have no regrets. There's an advantage to sticking to one language or region. I admired people who did the Arabic and stayed in the Arab world for 30 years, and really developed an expertise in the language and region. Or the people who studied Chinese from an early age and were fluent in Chinese and understood China in a way that I never would. I probably could have done that with Russia, had I built on the Russian I studied in high school and college. I had a little bit of regret about that, but I also liked the way I did it because I found after 10 years in the Middle East it got a little stale. This Palestinian issue again and again, one dimensional oil economy again and again. By going to different regions, there were different issues, different cultures. I felt I

was recharging my batteries. You get a broader perspective, an ability to compare and contrast.

Like I said earlier, you can go to Bahrain and when they say they want to be Singapore, you say well that's a good idea. But I've been there, and there are a few challenges you should be aware of. Or after hearing nothing but criticism of Israel, go to Burma or Singapore and have Israeli colleagues and friends that you didn't have in the Arab world.

Q: Do you have young people coming to you? Do you recommend the Foreign Service as a career?

MONROE: I always do. But my own kids aren't interested. My oldest is one of those Foreign Service kids who live around the world but when they got back to the U.S. they settle down there and have no interest in living abroad. My second son went to Stanford like I did, went to Fletcher like I did, specialized in the Arab world, but now he's getting his PhD and he doesn't want to join the Foreign Service, which is fine. He wants to teach. My daughter went with the Peace Corps in Botswana and is now getting a master's in public health. She won't join the Foreign Service, but she'll be out there with some NGO or something, in Africa or Asia or somewhere. She definitely caught the international bug.

Q: Well, thank you once again.

End of interview