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

AMBASSADOR PATRICK THEROS

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy
Initial interview date: April 25, 2002

POSTS

Junior Officer, rotational; Jeddah	1963-1964
Consular Officer; Dhahran	1964-1966
Political Officer; Managua Nicaragua	1966-1968
Operations Center, Washington, DC	1968-1969
FSI, Beirut	1969-1970
Junior Political Officer; Amman, Jordan	1970-1974
Armed Forces Staff College	1974
Special Assistant to Under Secretary for Management	1974 to 1976
Economic Counselor/Commercial Attaché; Damascus, Syria	1976-1980
DCM/Chargé; Abu Dhabi, UAE	1980-1983
Political Military Bureau; Washington, DC	1983-1986
Senior Research Fellow, National Defense University	1986-1987
DCM; Amman, Jordan	1987-1991
Political Advisor, Central Command	1991-1993
Deputy Coordinator for Counterterrorism; Washington, DC	1993-1995
Ambassador, Qatar	1995-1998
Retirement	

INTERVIEW

Early Years, Until Foreign Service Exam

Q: Today is the 25th of April 2002. This is an interview with Patrick N. Theros. What does the "N" stand for?

THEROS: Nickolas.

Q: This is being done on behalf of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training, and I'm Charles Stuart Kennedy. Do you go by Pat?

THEROS: Patrick.

Q: When and where were you born?

THEROS: Ann Arbor, Michigan, on the 21st of August 1941.

Q: Can you tell me a bit first on your father's side and then your mother's side, their background?

THEROS: My father immigrated to the United States in 1913 from an island on the west coast of Greece called Lefkas. He had been accused of shooting somebody during wedding festivities (a common practice at that time). In 1932 the man who actually did the shooting confessed on his deathbed. He went first to Sioux City, Iowa, to work on the Illinois Central Railway and then moved to Detroit "to get warm" as he told me and opened a coffee shop. My mother left Greece in 1930. She was from the island of Khios, in the Eastern Aegean. She was unique for her time, as she was a university graduate and a high-school teacher. She sought an assignment to a teaching post in northern Greece, where the Greek Government was trying to use education to assimilate the large numbers of refugees. At the same time the Bulgarian predecessors of the present Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonian government had a conflicting claim on all of Macedonia and were shooting schoolteachers. My grandfather decided teaching in Macedonia was a bad idea and had the political influence to get her an appointment to a poshy private school in Athens. This so offended my Mom's nationalist sentiments that she arranged a fake marriage so she could come to the States in 1930. She went to Ohio, where her sister and brother lived.

Q: You're talking about universities?

THEROS: No. This is to where they immigrated. My mother finished university in Greece.

My grandfather, my mother's father—who was a priest involved in politics—was actively involved in the failed counter coup of the Venizelist (republicans) in Greece in 1935. When things went south my grandfather kept on going and came to the United States in 1935. He was assigned as a priest to the new church in Ann Arbor. My dad who was in Ann Arbor and on the Board of the church and said to him one day: "I'm going to Canton, Ohio. I know your family is in Warren, Ohio. I'll drop you off in Warren to see your family during the week and I'll come pick you up on Friday." That's how my father met my mother.

Q: What type of business or activity was your father involved in?

THEROS: Primarily the restaurant business. He used to write numbers and run bootleg in the old days, in the '20s and '30s, in Ann Arbor and Detroit. We came to Washington in 1950.

Q: What was Ann Arbor like, from what you gathered from your parents?

THEROS: It was a nice, quiet place. There was the university in the town and not really terribly good relations between town and gown. But in those days they didn't let university students vote, so they didn't have much of a voice. Now they do. I talk to my relatives in Ann Arbor and they think it's horrible.

Q: The restaurant business usually means the whole family gets involved? Did your mother get involved?

THEROS: Not until we came to Washington. She was teaching in Ann Arbor at a private school. When we came here after a while it became necessary. My dad had a truck stop in the old Florida Avenue Market, Fifth and Florida Avenue Northeast. It was open seven days a week, twenty-four hours a day. I used to go in on the weekends sometimes to do my share.

Q: Where was this located?

THEROS: Fifth Street, about two blocks up from Florida Avenue Northeast. It's behind Union Station, is about the best way to describe it, and was called Union Market. It used to be the wholesale market in Washington.

Q: I see. The restaurant would be essentially servicing the truck drivers who were bringing the produce in.

THEROS: That's right.

Q: I imagine at an early age you must have gotten involved.

THEROS: Oh yes. I used to go down on the weekends and so forth, and during the

summer I would go down during the day. It was illegal, technically, for me to work there because you couldn't work in an establishment that sold beer or wine until you were eighteen. I was twelve or fourteen, but the cops looked the other way.

Q: You went to school through …

THEROS: D.C. (Washington D.C.) public schools.

Q: Where did your family live?

THEROS: An area called Manor Park. We lived on 618 Somerset Place Northwest, which was about a block from Coolidge High School and about six blocks from Walter Reed.

Q: Up near Sixteenth Street then?

THEROS: Yes, but east of Sixteenth Street, near Fifth Street.

Q: Near Georgia, I guess.

THEROS: Yes. Georgia was our downtown, pretty much, as kids.

Q: In grammar school, where did you go to school?

THEROS: I did two years at Bach Elementary School—kindergarten through first grade--in Ann Arbor. Then we moved temporarily to Warren, Ohio, for two years (Garfield Elementary School) and came to Washington in fourth grade. I attended Whittier Elementary School, Paul Junior High School, and Coolidge High School.

Q: What sort of things interested you in school?

THEROS: Things military. In those days the District of Columbia had compulsory Junior ROTC (Reserve Officer Training Corps) for high school cadets, and I ended up being the cadet lieutenant colonel, commander of the regiment of cadets in our high school.

Q: How about other things?

THEROS: There were seven of us, kids who grew up together, went to church together, and we played football every weekend of the year together. And that, as I got older, I found out I wasn't very good at it.

Q: Was this seven in your family or in your group?

THEROS: No, a group of seven boys. We're still friends.

Q: Was this pretty much a Greek area?

THEROS: No. As a matter of fact, the Greek area had dissipated in the ‘30s. By the time we came here there was no longer a recognizable area, though most of the kids at my church were either at Roosevelt High School or Coolidge High School. The neighborhood was actually largely Jewish.

Q: Did the Orthodox Church split up as so many others, like the Jewish church —I mean most of the churches you can think of —usually ends up breaking up into stricter, more conservative reformed …

THEROS: No. Partly it’s because there was already a split along nationalist and ethnic lines. That occurred a thousand years before. But theologically the Orthodox Church has never had any internal contradictions. It’s an interesting church because even though there’s a hierarchy like the Catholic Church, the laity is in fact stronger. We had our bout with who’s in charge, the pope or the emperor, a couple of thousand years ago. In our case the emperor won.

Q: But I take it your family was a strong Orthodox family.

THEROS: Yes, virtually every Greek I know is … somebody once described my father as typically Greek; he would die for his faith, he simply won’t practice it.

Q: Did you find that being Orthodox had any influence on your growing up or not?

THEROS: Well, we were simply told that we were the smartest and best-looking people in the world and everybody else was inferior, so it was actually tremendous self-confidence for the kids. Most of the kids that I knew —my friends —we were all fairly arrogant as to who we were. We were told that the combination of being descendants of Plato and Greek Orthodox was superb, that nobody else could really live up to it.

Q: How about in school? What sort of things, other than the ROTC, were you interested in?

THEROS: I played, let me say, sports. I did football through junior high school and then all the other kids grew up faster than I did, so that became dangerous to me. Primarily, I was a very good English student, I was a very good history student, and I was a terrible at math. My grades were a mixed bag of A's and D’s.

Q: What about outside reading? Were you a reader?

THEROS: I was an only child. My father refused to get television, so they would buy me books. I remember my twelfth birthday gift was an Encyclopedia Britannica. And when you’re an only child you tend to get either be a reader or talk to the walls. So I read.

Q: What were you reading?

THEROS: Well actually I read —this was my great claim to fame when I was twelve years old —before my thirteenth birthday I got through all twenty-four volumes of the Encyclopedia Britannica.

Q: Were things outside, both national and international affairs, of interest to you or to your family?

THEROS: Yes, intensely. The only thing that really concerned my father was international politics. I don't think he ever read the sports page in his life.

Q: So how did this play out?

THEROS: I grew up in an intensely political family. As I said, my grandfather fled the country for political reasons. Politically my mother and my father were on opposite ends of the political spectrum in terms of Greek politics.

Q: Who was where?

THEROS: My father regarded the king as a dangerous leftist but supported the monarchy. My mother's family was very strong and zealous anti-monarchists at that time. But my mother was smarter, so she didn't make an issue of it. My dad became a life-long Republican in this country.

Q: What was the newspaper?

THEROS: Well, we generally read the Evening Star and we got the Washington Daily News at the restaurant. When I got to Washington we had the Times, the Herald, and the Post, and the Times-Herald merged—I forget who gobbled up whom. In the early 1950's.

Q: But the Post was not the pre-eminent paper?

THEROS: No it was not, but it was competitive.

Q: What about at your father's restaurant? This must have been labor intense. Was he around much?

THEROS: Yes. He would come home twice a day and leave twice a day. Basically the rush times at the restaurant were between four in the morning and ten in the morning. Actually, oddly enough, lunch was not a terribly busy time. My mother would spell him at lunch time and then he would come home and sleep until about three or four and go back until about three-thirty, four o'clock, and come back about midnight, one o'clock in the morning. So he got four hours of sleep, twice a day. But it was a good-sized place; we could seat seventy-five in front and forty in back.

Q: Were you waiting or…

THEROS: No, the register. I had to be a little careful because, as I said, the District of Columbia blue laws in those days said that it was illegal for me to work in a restaurant. Behind the register, the cops, if it wasn't in their face, it wasn't something that they had to pay any attention to; they didn't care. So I worked the register. If I had tried to wait tables and serve beers, the cops would have been forced to do something about it.

Q: Did segregation and desegregation hit your place?

THEROS: Yes. I can remember I had been in school in Ann Arbor. There were no black people living in Ann Arbor that I knew about when I was a kid. Schools in Warren, Ohio, were integrated but the neighborhoods weren't. I got to Washington, D.C. and the schools were all segregated. It struck me as sort of strange, but this was the climate at the time. Nine-year-olds don't have deep socio-political concepts. … Actually, what was more important to me was that in Warren, Ohio, corporal punishment was allowed and encouraged in elementary school and it was not in Washington. It made a big difference in my life. [Laughs.]

Q: It made it easier to sit down.

THEROS: Yes, exactly. [Laughs]

Q: Were you in school when desegregation hit?

THEROS: Yes. If you remember, the D.C. public schools desegregated ahead of the national schools because Dwight Eisenhower's first executive order as President on the 21st of January in '53 was to integrate D.C. public schools. So we were integrated that year, immediately. It was odd because my school district—elementary, junior high school, and high school—actually included the richest black neighborhood in Washington: the so-called Gold Coast (Blagden Avenue),

Q: This was up the Sixteenth and Georgia corridor.

THEROS: Between 16th and the Park. And so as the schools integrated I pretty much got the impression that most of the black kids I knew had more money than I did, which was not the normal experience. One of my high school classmates, and good friend, is Hugh Price, who is now head of the National Urban League. He was head of my graduating class.

Q: How did your family feel about this?

THEROS: My dad's view of life was that everybody had one color and it was green. The restaurant was segregated; it had a front part for whites and a back part for blacks, the kitchen was in between. When integration came it was a little bit touchy because our truck drivers were all from Ocala, Florida, from the Deep South, and the black customers were most of the people carrying things in the market. I'd say that the place stayed de facto segregated for the next several years.

Q: The carriers weren't exactly going to challenge the truck drivers.

THEROS: That's right. Basically we had four kinds of customers. We had the carriers, the common laborers, who were overwhelmingly black. We had truck drivers who were all from the Deep South; Ocala, Florida sticks in my mind as where most of them came from. We had farmers mostly from rural Maryland who were actually more southern in outlook as well. And then we had the commission merchants who had the little shops right across the street from my dad's restaurant, and they were from everywhere. They were all wealthy people whose job was to distribute what the truck drivers brought. So that was a mixed clientele there.

Q: As you were doing this, was this one of the things that you swore you would never get into the restaurant business?

THEROS: Actually, my father made me swear to that. [Laughs] The only time he looked rested was when he was hospitalized. But he worked hard.

Q: There seems to be very much a pattern. When I was Consul General in Athens, you could see it. The first generation worked their tails off in a restaurant running it and using the money to send the kids to good schools, and heavy emphasis on education, and also to buy property. And now one goes to the Greek restaurants around here I can remember when waiters were pretty obviously junked Greek seamen. Now they're mostly from Guatemala.

THEROS: Exactly. The community still owns most of the restaurants in this town but they don't man them anymore, so to speak.

Q: Was there this emphasis on education?

THEROS: Absolutely. It was made very clear to us that our choice was go to college or die. [Laughs] Of about 440 kids in my graduating class, about 350 were Jewish and about 40 were Greek, and then there were the others.

Q: And of course you were all on the same track in a way, weren't you?

THEROS: In a way, yes. Actually, we had a much higher percentage of kids going to college than the Jewish people did. Largely because, as I said, the option at home was college or die. We weren't presented with other alternatives. [Laughs] The fact that my mother was a university graduate was almost unique for her time. It made it even more difficult for me to consider an alternative career to university.

Q: While you were particularly in high school, were you looking around at Washington and sort of the things that are available for Congress or the museums?

THEROS: The schools were very active in pushing us into all of those things. I liked my

school experience, in the academic sense. I had to go to the Library of Congress every couple of weeks because it was a school assignment. They would take us around to concerts. The schools were actively involved in getting the kids to go do things downtown. So it wasn't even a question of looking around and making your choice.

I remember we had a fifth grade assignment, which was to go downtown and count the windows in the old Army-Navy War Building— the War/State Building, now the Executive Office Building. It was a test in social studies, how many windows were in that building. Nobody was even close. In those days you could walk around it.

Q: Did the Foreign Service ever pass your radar?

THEROS: Yes, all the time because remember I grew up in Washington and there were all these people with dip tags running around who could park in illegal spaces. The Foreign Service focused on me very much when I got a driver's license. It was the first time that I realized that it was something interesting.

My mother wanted me to be a naval officer. She was absolutely determined that I was going to enforce that.

Q: Well you had the cadet experience. When you got ready to graduate from high school, did you pursue it?

THEROS: I got an appointment to Annapolis and flunked the physical. So Plan B came into effect. I decided I wanted to go and do something in the Foreign Service, so I applied to Georgetown, GW, and American University, all three schools that had some sort of Foreign Service program. I got accepted to Georgetown and went in and then I had this monomaniacal idea that I was going to get into the Foreign Service. It wasn't until the last year of school that I realized that the odds were really slim and I took some business courses as a fallback. But fortunately I passed the exam and came straight into the Foreign Service.

Q: You were at Georgetown from when to when?

THEROS: Fifty-nine to '63.

Q: What was Georgetown like when you got there?

THEROS: Girls had just been introduced to the Foreign Service school.

Q: But not the regular …

THEROS: Not to the College—the only other girls were in the nursing school and the Foreign Service School had a quota of ten percent girls in the entering class. But the Foreign Service School was small, select, and regarded itself as leading the university.

Q: Father Walsh had passed.

THEROS: Father Walsh had passed on. Father Frank Fadner, S.J., was the leading Jesuit in the Foreign Service school. Father Bunn, I think, was the president of the university, if I remember correctly.

Q: Did you find any conflict between going to a Jesuit-run school and being Orthodox?

THEROS: It made me feel much more fanatically Greek Orthodox.

Q: [Laughs.]

THEROS: I developed a tremendous amount of respect for the Jesuits. I think they were some of the best professional educators in the world. I remember no particular attempt at proselytization. Non-Catholic students were not required to take theology. Everybody had to take Ethics, but there was another course called Development of Political Thought, instead of theology.

Q: Which put you, as a Greek, right into your medium?

THEROS: Yes, but I have to say that was a heavy-going course. Unfortunately the professor teaching the Political Thought Course was an alcoholic but he sort of liked Mediterranean people.

Q: What was your social life like at that time?

THEROS: I was broke. My mother had died a few years before and my dad had lost the restaurant and he had been sick for about a year. So by the time I started university I was really broke. The first year at school I was holding down two part-time jobs for a total of forty-four hours a week, and going to school full-time.

Q: What were you doing?

THEROS: I was working at Posin's Kosher Grocery Delicatessen on weekends and at Giant Food Store every evening as a cashier.

Q: Back in your alternate profession.

THEROS: That's right. And in summers I was a Good Humor man. So it wasn't until about the third year of school that I actually was able to recover the social life and pick up from high school. The National Defense student loans first came in my junior year. The freshman and sophomore years I paid all my own bills.

Q: In the School of Foreign Service, did you concentrate on any particular areas?

THEROS: Yes. The areas were International Affairs, Foreign Trade, and International

Economics. I was in International Affairs, but there really were no electives allowed until senior year. The three major areas overlapped. In retrospect I took a little less economics than International Economics, but the three courses were not terribly distinct. You had to take language. What I remember most about the way the school was the idea that you had to remember everything you ever learned because we had oral comprehensives in History, Government, and Economics at the end of senior year. As a matter of fact, the class valedictorian failed to graduate because she clutched in her oral comps. It didn't matter what your grades were, to graduate you had to pass the oral comprehensives; and they, in fact, were what kept everybody terrified.

Q: I can't help but ask what happened to the young lady.

THEROS: She retook them two or three times until she finally memorized it all. [Laughs.] But she was a very good student.

EXAM TO DEPART FOR JEDDAH

Q: Yes, it's just the oral exams can do that to you. Speaking of which, when did you take the Foreign Service written exam?

THEROS: I took the written exam in the fall of my senior year, which would have been the fall of 1962, at Roosevelt High School.

Q: Did you pass them the first time?

THEROS: Yes, and with very high scores. I am one of those people who can take a multiple-choice machine-graded examination without the questions and pass it. I did very well. To this day I can get through a machine-graded multiple-choice examination like gangbusters.

Q: Even if you don't know the subject?

THEROS: [Laughs.] Even if I don't know the subject. No, there's a technique. One of the techniques is finishing. If a question takes more than a minute …

Q: At one point I was with the Board of Examiners who were helping set up questions and the man who was doing this was saying he could do this. He could take the real-estate exam and get qualified without having ever studied it.

THEROS: There's a rhythm; there's a technique. Yes, basically my way of doing that is—I learned this in about eighth grade because they kept giving us these multiple choice machine-graded examinations—first the key is you have to finish it. So you go through like gangbusters for all the easy questions and you do all of them, because the biggest tragedy in the world would be to have twenty easy questions at the end that you didn't

answer because you got hung up, and then go back to the beginning and go through all the questions that required some thought. My theory on that one was if I could eliminate two of the answers, or three of the answers, I'd guess on the other two. And since they only subtracted a percentage of the wrong answers that was okay. And then I would go back and do the hard ones, and even then if it took more than a couple of minutes I'd go on to the next one. The only problem with it is you had to keep your wits about you and make sure that you hadn't gotten out of the sequence.

Q: After passing the written exam, when did you take your oral exam?

THEROS: The first day it was offered. In early January 1963.

Q: Do you recall questions?

THEROS: I recall that it was a very friendly, a surprisingly friendly, Board. I got down there and it was an elderly Foreign Service officer, a USIS (United States Information Service) officer, and a civilian, so to speak.

There were a few trick questions like, "What did de Gaulle announce this morning?" I was lucky because I had the radio on in the car and heard the news when I went down there. The only question that I really had difficulty getting my arms around just then, because I wasn't thinking fast, was, "How do you explain to a foreigner that the United States has such strict visa requirements when the Europeans don't?" I found that I had to sort of beat around the bush on that one. They spent a great deal of time on me personally. If you remember, at that time you had to do an autobiography and the autobiography inadvertently advertised my poverty at the time, so it was interesting because they said, "Well, you did real well on the economics part of the examination, presumably that's because you grew up in the school of hard knocks." It was an exceedingly pleasant board.

They finished, I went back out; about thirty-five, forty minutes later the secretary of the Board—a young girl who was possibly younger than me—said, "By the way, I'm not supposed to tell you this, but you passed." So then I went back in and was informed that I'd passed. The Foreign Service officer, after everybody else had left, stayed and told me that I'd passed added: "I only have one piece of personal advice." He said, "You have to be a little bit more animated in the way you talk." Well, by nature I'm very animated, but people warned me not to do this, so I sat on my hands all through the examination.

Q: So you let your Mediterranean genes go after that? [Laughs.]

THEROS: Exactly. [Laughs.]

Q: When you were at Georgetown and just being part of the Washington scene, had you met any people from the Foreign Service?

THEROS: Yes, I actually knew the granddaughter of U. Alexis Johnson. It was a girl a

little older than me that I had gotten to know. There was another Senior Foreign Service officer named Mark whose family I had met. For some odd reason I got to know the Peruvian ambassador very well. I'm not quite sure why, but I got invited to the Peruvian embassy several times. That was pretty much it. There were odds and ends of people I would meet from time to time. (Polish World War II resistance movement fighter) Jan Karski was teaching at Georgetown at the time. There were a number of other sorts of Diplomats Emeritus that were retired or people who had been political appointees that were there.

Q: Did you have any feel for what the Foreign Service did?

THEROS: Yes. It didn't surprise me when I got into it. I knew diplomats in Washington from the time I was growing up, just because I went to high school and junior high school with a lot of foreign diplomatic kids and Foreign Service kids and so forth. So I knew a lot of people. It didn't really have a lot of surprise for me when I came in. It proved less difficult than I expected it to be.

Q: You came in in '63?

THEROS: Yes, I came straight out of school into the Foreign Service. I was broke. I had also passed the graduate law exam and been accepted to Georgetown. I realized that my options were spending three years paying them money or going straight into the Foreign Service and being paid money.

Q: Had you met your wife?

THEROS: No. She was still in Greece. She had not even immigrated yet to the States.

Q: How about your A-100 basic officer course? Do you recall its composition and how it struck you?

THEROS: Yes, most of my colleagues were a little older. I was twenty-two by the time I came in. But, most of them were fairly young. I would say the median age of my A-100 course was around twenty-five; the majority was single. Of course, you couldn't join the Foreign Service if you were over twenty-nine at the time. There were very few Washingtonians; in fact, there was only one Washingtonian. One kid that I went to high school with, actually, was in my class, but he quit the Foreign Service a couple years later. Eight of my comrades at Georgetown went into the Foreign Service, but they all delayed their entry, whereas I was in the first A-100 class that was available. So I actually entered the Foreign Service ahead of most of the other graduates.

Q: Did you have any thought when you came in; "I really want to do this or that"?

THEROS: Basically I either wanted to go to Eastern Europe or the Arab world. That was, I'd say, from way before. Those were the two parts of the world that fascinated me.

Q: Any particular reason?

THEROS: I was just fascinated by them and the politics of the area impressed me, in both cases. I can't say that I had clearly thought it out, but I pretty much was interested and I took a lot of Russian studies. Whenever I had an elective, for example, you had to take two history courses and you got a choice of which history course you took, so I took the Russian history course. You had a choice of which economic geography course you took so I took the Soviet economic geography course.

Q: At the FSI (Foreign Service Institute) how do you think the training was there?

THEROS: Superficial, almost useless [Laughs.]. I thought the A-100 course was fun, but it was a complete waste of time. I remember nothing that was useful in the A-100 course.

Q: It was time to get processed in, I guess.

THEROS: Yes, pretty much. Actually, what happened is that they told me the first day of A-100 course would start the week after Labor Day, and this was June, and I was going to go work for Good Humor again until I could get in, and they said, "Well, we're willing to let you in as an FSR starting in July." So I worked for one month as the Good Humor man, and then came in as an FSR and was assigned to RPM—what later became EUR/RPM—until the A-100 course started. I was formally commissioned in September and went right into the course.

Q: When you were there did you get a chance to say where you wanted to go?

THEROS: At the end, they asked us, "Give us your career progression," I thought, "What do I know?" So I just put down a series of posts that struck me as my "why and why not." It's funny because at the last week of the A-100 course they announced where all of us were going to go, and they held mine to the last. They said, "Mr. Theros, you're going to Jeddah." The rest of the class thought that it was horrible, but I was looking forward to it. I came home and told my parents where I was going and they practically had a requiem mass for me before I left. [Laughs.]

Q: Did you get any training?

THEROS: I did the consular course and a one-month Middle Eastern orientation course. I arrived in Jeddah on the night of the 30th of December '63.

Q: When you took the consular course, was this useful?

THEROS: It was useful. It was probably the only course that taught me anything else at the time.

Q: It wasn't the present-day Consul General Rosslyn thing? It was pretty much being told to read the books and to answer problems.

THEROS: That's right. It was how to use the manuals. The whole course was how to use the manual. It was very logical, very well put together, and you actually left with a sense of you knew something, whereas, I'll tell you, I've supervised a lot of junior officers since then who have been through CONGENERAL Rosslyn. Thank God I spent three years as a consular officer because they had learned all the wrong lessons. When I was DCM (Deputy Chief of Mission) or Ambassador, I spent a lot of time walking consular officers through their paces and judgment calls. I think CONGEN Rosslyn is a little bit too much hands-on and it doesn't give people confidence in the minutiae of the work, which is very important in consular work.

1963 to 1966: Saudi Arabia

Q: So you went out to Jeddah in December of 1963.

THEROS: Actually, the 30th of December.

Q: What was the situation both in Saudi Arabia at that time and the Middle East, as you saw?

THEROS: When I got there I can't say that the Arab-Israeli problem was the problem. It was a problem in the Middle East. The key issue affecting us in Saudi Arabia was the civil war in Yemen, and because the Egyptians had bombed a couple of targets in Saudi Arabia, we deployed an F-100 squadron to Saudi Arabia. I remember it was called "Hard Surface." That was the code name for it. There were four airplanes at Jeddah airport and four airplanes at Jizan and so forth. Periodically we would get to see Egyptian prisoners of war who would be brought back up by the Yemeni royalists and were released in Saudi Arabia.

Q: And the Ambassador was?

THEROS: Parker Hart.

Q: Your job was what?

THEROS: I was the junior officer rotational. I arrived there and after a couple of days I was told I'm a consular officer. The consular officer was also a part-time political officer but the political section had a couple of heavyweights. Dick Murphy was the chief of the political section; Charlie Marthinsen was the other political officer. They were both very, very impressive people. So my only job in the political section was to reorganize the files, nothing else. But then I spent most of the first six months of my time in the consular section. I had Shahab, a Syrian, who was a consular assistant. We didn't have visa lines then. It was casual. I did a lot of different things. I also got out on the street a lot.

Arabic was essential; I didn't have Arabic so I got the Embassy Arabic teacher, Mrs.

Dajani, and I said to her, "This is getting desperate. Most of the people I run into don't speak English and I have no Arabic and no time to learn it." She looked at the FSI Arabic books, the short course overseas, and she said: "This is worthless for teaching you anything. Look, I'll tell you how I'm going to teach it to you. First of all, forget the book is written in Latin characters. If you don't learn in Arabic characters it's worthless. I'm going to teach you how to read documents. This is the passport; this is a birth certificate; this is a police certificate; this is this, and this is that. I'm going to teach you how to read those documents. And then I'm going to teach you basic Arabic, which is all vocabulary but only basic grammar—things like two plural forms rather the two dozen used, then you just put a number in front of it. Instead of various future tenses it would just be 'sawfa' in the future and 'kan' in the past in front of a present-tense verb. Arabs will understand and even appreciate your effort." I actually got fairly fluent in a horrific version of the language by the time I left.

Q: Was the Embassy small enough so that you kind of were able to participate when it was the Ambassador explaining things?

THEROS: I got to attend Section chiefs meetings, of course, because I was the consular section chief. As long as I sat in the corner and didn't express too many opinions I was all right.

It was very collegial at the Embassy. It was a very impressive bunch of people. Parker Hart was Ambassador; Nick Thatcher was the DCM; Morris Draper was the chief of the economic section, and Isa Sabbagh was the head of USIS. I was very impressed. As a matter of fact, I've never been at an Embassy since that was that so well staffed since then. It was one of the most impressively staffed embassies in the Foreign Service at the time. I was in awe of all these people. It was very collegial. They actually gave me, a junior officer, the time of day. It was sort of, "Don't come to us with dumb problems, but if you've got a problem, we will listen." Pretty much as long as no one complained they would let me run the consular section any way I pleased.

Q: Did you have problems trying to sort out who should get visas from those that really didn't deserve them?

THEROS: I developed a technique that suited me very well. The government visas were straightforward; that was pretty easy. But most of my time went for non-immigrant visas. Immigrant visas were very mechanical; if you have the right documents, you get a visa, if you don't have the right documents, you wouldn't. But non-immigrant and student visas were sort of a tossup. Saudis were easy because no Saudis were staying in the United States. But there were lots of other nationalities. So my technique was simple. You had ten minutes to talk to the applicant. It wasn't like now, where the junior officers are behind this teller's window and they get thirty seconds to make up their mind whether this kid in front of him is who he says he is. You had ten minutes to talk to each kid and size them up, and my theory was if the applicant looks like someone who, if he goes to the United States and decides to jump ship and convert status, does he look like the kind of person who would, upon becoming an American citizen, register as a Republican; and

if he looked like that kind of person I'd give him a visa. You got a blue slip if one of your visas converted status. I got only two blue slips in a year in Jeddah. I have no idea if these guys registered as Republicans, but the appearance was a good indicator.

Q: Did you have any dealings with Americans who got arrested, in trouble, and that sort of thing?

THEROS: Some. More so later in Dhahran, but in Jeddah the only real continuing problem that I had was that the University of Texas had entered into an arrangement with the Saudi Ministry of Education to provide English teachers for the Saudi high schools and the University of Texas did a terrible job of selection. I think they just put something up on the bulletin board asking, "Who wants to go teach English in Saudi Arabia?" And then these kids were scattered the length of the kingdom by themselves to teach English. None of them got into serious trouble, but they all had trouble. Actually, it was usually the Saudis who would bring one back to Jeddah for us who had been reduced to gibbering English because he couldn't take living in this village in the middle of nowhere teaching English. We had one in trouble in Jeddah. I think he was having trouble with his wife because she had taken up with a TWA (Trans World Atlantic) pilot, because TWA was running Saudi Arabia Airlines at the time and tried to commit suicide. The first time he drank a pint of aspirin. Well, a pint of aspirin won't kill you. The second time he slit his wrists, except he missed and slit the palms of his hand, and the third time he leaped from a window, but it was a first story window so he sprained his ankle. It finally dawned on us that this kid really should go home.

Q: At the section chiefs' meetings and all of this, did you get any feel about how the Embassy officers, particularly the Ambassador and political officers, viewed—was it Faisal at the time?

THEROS: No, at the time Saud was still alive. Saud bin Abdulaziz.

Q: How did they view Saud?

THEROS: They thought he was a disaster. They thought that he was profligate, not terribly bright, very corrupt, and certainly a menace —not to the relationship because he was very friendly to the United States, but certainly a menace to internal stability in the country. There was universal belief that Saud was a serious problem.

Q: Was there concern about Palestinian and Nasserite influence?

THEROS: Nasserite, but not Palestinian. The Palestinians were not very much on our screen. There were lots of Palestinians. My language teacher was a Palestinian and so forth, but they weren't regarded as a political factor.

Q: What about Nasser?

THEROS: Nasser ranked up there with Joe Stalin as the biggest threat. Of course, the

Embassy in Cairo didn't agree with us. The first thing I learned was how embassies all fight each other, taking up cudgels on behalf of their host government.

Q: Were we watching how the war down in Yemen was progressing?

THEROS: Yes, that was probably the single, biggest political issue affecting the Embassy in the ten months that I was there.

Q: During that time what was happening down there?

THEROS: Basically the Yemeni royalists were slowly but steadily chewing up the Egyptian army and the younger Republicans were almost invisible.

Q: Did you have that much dealing with ARAMCO (Arabian-American Oil Company) from Jeddah?

THEROS: Not in Jeddah; when I got to Dhahran later, but not in Jeddah. In Jeddah the single biggest American element present was TWA, which was running Saudi airlines. Remember, at the time the entire Saudi government was concentrated in Jeddah. The lower bureaucracy was fighting tooth and nail to avoid being transferred to Riyadh. Saudi Arabian Airlines was headquartered in Jeddah and at the time it was a largely TWA operation, the single biggest American presence in Jeddah.

Q: How did you get transferred over to Dhahran?

THEROS: I had been there briefly in April of '64. A Lebanese International Airlines plane went into the sea off Dhahran and there were a lot of Americans on board. I went up there for two weeks to help with the body count and inventorying houses. The principal consular officer in Dhahran, Tom Carolan, had got married the day the plane went in and the Consul General (CG) at the time, Jack Horner, felt it was unfair to call him back from his honeymoon, so I was sent there for two weeks as the consular officer. Then I came back to Jeddah. In October Dhahran got a new position, economic commercial officer —it had not had one before —and Horner, the CG, wanted Tom Carolan to be the economic commercial officer, so he was transferred over there. Somehow in the process I was selected —I didn't ask or volunteer or opt in, but I was simply selected —to go to Dhahran as consular officer.

At the time I was very unhappy because I had just transferred from the consular section to the commercial section to be the commercial officer. I thought I was really getting good at what I was doing and all of a sudden I was going to go back to consular work. So I fought it tooth and nail, but in those days all junior officers were fighting against being in the consular section tooth and nail … [Laughs.]

Q: Yes. You might get some moral satisfaction, but you sure didn't get any result.

THEROS: Not at all, so I went to Dhahran in October of '64.

Q: And you were there until when?

THEROS: I was there until the summer of '66.

Q: What was Dhahran like when you were there?

THEROS: Weird. Dhahran essentially was the consulate for ARAMCO, the US Air Force and the British-occupied Gulf sheikhdoms. It sat on its own little hill, above this two-lane road that went down to the airbase where the military—the U.S. Air Force—was, and the Saudi air force, and there was this other two-lane road that ran over a hill to ARAMCO, and then this other two-lane road that led to Khobar (al-Khobar), and then finally a two-lane road that led to Dammam and swung off towards Hofuf. ARAMCO itself was like a suburb of Los Angeles without Los Angeles. The consulate was very small. There were six American officers. Nice building. My only problem was that there was housing for five, so as a junior officer I spent three months in virtually every house on the compound being transferred from one to the other.

But the main aspect of life for me there was the fact that I was the consular officer for the Gulf. I had a regular consular trip, spending two days in Bahrain, two days in Doha, two days in Dubai, and then another trip with two days in Bahrain and then ad hoc trips to Abu Dhabi and two other places, Muscat and Salalah.

Q: I'd go about once a month to Bahrain and then pick up Doha, from time to time.

THEROS: Mine was a locked in, regular schedule. The key element of that is this is where my Anglophobia stems from. The British clearly did not like us being there and they went out of their way to make life unpleasant for me the whole time I was there.

Q: The British actually didn't have relations with Saudi Arabia, at least in my time they didn't.

THEROS: They did. The Anglo-American Buraimi Oasis war was over.

Q: Let's stick to Dhahran first. Who was in charge of the eastern provinces?

THEROS: Prince Saud bin Jaluwi.

Q: Bin Jaluwi. He's still there. He was, of course, one of the great figures of Saudi folklore.

THEROS: Yes, he's still there. He's a great man.

Q: What were you doing as a consular officer there?

THEROS: Everything in the book. I did a lot of seamen and shipping work. [Laughs.] I

was probably the last guy to work seamen and shipping. I even did crew changes. I had a mutinous sailor who tried to kill the captain of a tanker. I had one case where the crew tried to kill the cook. It was the same tanker called the Thetis Bay. Every time it came in there was always trouble. The Thetis Bay was a trouble ship.

I used to go to Riyadh once a month for two days to do consular services in Riyadh. There was lot of passport work. I got writer's cramp because I used to do all the legalizations for the shipments of oil to the states; there were lots of people who were immigrant-visa applicants there. Oddly enough, I had three Japanese Americans regaining their citizenship; people who had lost their citizenship during World War Two for serving in the Japanese army. A Supreme Court decision restored their citizenship. There were three of them that I actually gave the passports to.

I don't know from your time, but we were the visa-issuing post for the Lebanese.

Q: No, we weren't.

THEROS: So we used to issue about seven hundred Lebanese visas in a month. It was fun going to Beirut because I would issue myself a Lebanese visa and had my own stamp with no name on it. I made sure my Lebanese visa was right next to the information page of the passport. So I'd go to Beirut and it was always fun watching the expressions on the [faces of passport control] when they would realize I had issued my own visa to myself.

Q: What about the protection of welfare side of it?

THEROS: More of it in the Gulf. In Saudi Arabia itself, ARAMCO was mother to Saudi Arabia, and the only thing that occurred was the occasional automobile accident with non-ARAMCO. Anything that had to do with ARAMCO was taken care of by ARAMCO. It was very rare that there would be some ARAMCO person involved. Even in liquor violations ARAMCO would just make the problem disappear. A man named Kenneth Kieswetter, who must have been a member of the Gestapo in another incarnation, was the head of security at ARAMCO, and he ran that place very tightly. I remember ARAMCO used to interfere aggressively in the private lives of their staff. They had this huge investment and they weren't about to risk it all because some guy was stupid.

On the non-ARAMCO side, four men from Ford Foundation had an accident. They ran into a camel coming back from Riyadh one day. They were arrested because, in those days, killing a camel meant you had to pay a fine. I went down to the police station and we got into an argument because the shepherd was insisting that not only was it his camel and she was not only pregnant, but she was pregnant with twins. The police chief kept saying the likelihood of a camel having twins is one in a 1,000 and the man swore she was big and stuff like that. In the end the police chief, me, a butcher and the shepherd all drove back up the road to find the camel, which by this time had been dead in the sun for about three days. The butcher slit her open and she was pregnant with just one. The police chief walked over to the shepherd and backhanded him.

A few stray Americans in trouble, the occasional death, and seamen and shipping were most of my protection and welfare duties. Automobile accidents were a bit of a problem with non-ARAMCONs. However, even ARAMCO couldn't take over and manage the death cases, they were left to me as consular officer. They were messy and time-consuming. I would do the inventory of personal property, and their house, and get the bodies back to the States. I had to get one person out of jail once in Saudi Arabia.

Another time I had to help four Americans, two men and two young women who were selling mutual funds in the Eastern Province. Unfortunately, the girls were selling the funds on their backs, so to speak. To complicate matters, one of the girls had gone to the same high school as me. The Saudi cops tumbled to their dealings but did not want to create an incident that would have put four young Americans in danger of being stoned to death. So we connived with the Saudi police to force them to leave the country.

Q: Do you run across the problem of American women marrying Saudis or other people from the area having children and then …

THEROS: It wasn't a very visible problem in Dhahran. In Jeddah it was more of a problem. In Jeddah we had maybe a half dozen cases of Americans who had married Saudis. There must have been a case in Dhahran; I can't imagine there wasn't. But I just don't remember it.

Q: Who was the Consul General?

THEROS: It was Jack Horner at the beginning, and then Arthur Allen, who came from Aleppo and who was a difficult man to deal with, replaced him.

Q: How did you find the Dhahran family, the people there?

THEROS: They were all nice. A couple of them decided that … Gene Bird wanted to keep introducing me to his teenage daughter in hopes that something would happen. Tom Carolan and I became very good friends. I had too much to drink once and Tom Carolan took me home. The six of us were always popular because we had access to liquor and nobody else in the eastern province did.

Q: How did you get liquor?

THEROS: Somebody would go to Bahrain to get liquor. Because I would go to Bahrain all the time, it was my turn most of the time.

Q: The grey Mackenzies and load your suitcases?

THEROS: Well, no actually, we used pouch bags. The Saudis knew what we were doing.

Q: Yes. I had to take them in suitcases.

THEROS: Well, the Saudis at that point decided they had to be in a pouch bag.

Q: Good.

THEROS: The Saudis were very cooperative. We didn't have any trouble with them at all. Once there was going to be a Fourth of July party —you know, Washington's birthday —and the Consul General told me I had to bring three cases of different kinds of whiskey back. I decided that all whiskey was going to be Ballantine's because Ballantine's comes in a square bottle in a square piece of cardboard, so it's easier to carry. Bob Ames, who later died in Beirut when the Embassy was blown up, was then there in the commercial section. I told him, "There's no way I can carry three pouch bags full of enough whiskey for your 400-person party." So Bob Ames came up—he's a big guy; big and strong, ex-football player and so forth—and he grabs the pouch bag and he swings it up. He didn't realize just how heavy it was and it landed on him and flattened him. One of the bags broke and leaked and so the Saudis grabbed the bag and took it into the back room and told him to come back the next day and I did. I walked into the storeroom and the smell almost knocked me out, but it mostly evaporated so I took the bag the next day.

Q: I was always afraid that something would happen and a bottle would roll out or my suitcase would burst, and then the Saudis would have to do something, and thereafter Kennedy would be known as "he was kicked out of Saudi Arabia," or something; "it was something about liquor; he probably an alcoholic," or something like that.

THEROS: Well your successor was. I'm trying to remember his name.

Q: It was probably my successor by two, or by one; I don't know.

THEROS: He was thrown out in '63.

Q: I left in '60, so it could well be me

THEROS: And he had several run-ins with the Saudis. One of them was he beat up a Saudi policeman once.

Q: Oh my God ...

THEROS: And the Saudis forgave him that.

Q: Oh my God!

THEROS: But then one night the Saudis found him on the pier in Dammam, unconscious in his car, just stinking of liquor. The Saudis also have a sense of humor. They came back down, about three o'clock in the morning—you know how the CG's house has a screen door?

Q: Yes.

THEROS: They wedged him between the screen door and the front door of the house and then sat on the doorbell until they heard noise inside the house, and then drove away. Jack Horner opened the door and this body fell through.

Q: Oh.

What about relations with ARAMCO at that time?

THEROS: They were good. I didn't have any sense of hostility. There was a normal mutual resentment of they got better housing than we do, we got liquor and they don't. And our women could drive. The consulate women could drive to ARAMCO or they could drive to the airport —they were the two places —and nobody else could.

Q: Just an aside, but our Consul General Schwinn, I accompanied him one time when he went to see Bin Jaluwi. He said, "Emir, I have a problem; my officers are being shamed." Prince Bin Jaluwi said, "What is this?" He said, "Well, in America driving a car is a woman's job and my officers are having to take them to the market and doing things like to go to the air base and to go to ARAMCO." And so Bin Jaluwi said, "All right. They can drive, but only to the airport and ARAMCO." So that was a period of time, but now I think it's gone.

THEROS: Life is much more difficult in Saudi Arabia than it was then. I'll give you an example. I got to be friendly with two or three of the rich Saudi families in Dammam: Al Gosaibi, Fakhroo and Kanoo …

Q: Al Gosaibi was of course one of the big ones.

THEROS: And I would be invited to their house for dinner and their wives and daughters were at the table. It was a totally different atmosphere than it is today.

Q: Yes. Did you get any feel for the concerns of the politics of the eastern province while you were there?

THEROS: These were the better times, when I was there in the eastern province. Bin Jaluwi was being nice to the Shia and I'd say at that point ARAMCO was overwhelmingly Shia in its employment. We had one Saudi employee at the consulate, Bubshait —I can't remember his first name—and he was Shia. He was a nice man. You knew that the Shia was the underclass, but they weren't this desperate underclass that they became later. The White Army, the old National Guard, was active in the area, but again, you weren't terribly conscious of it. It wasn't something at the time that leaped up to affect you. Like I said, it was good economic times. Bin Jaluwi was in his later years and being nice to people. There was progress in the Shia villages and so forth. They had been denied human rights, but then, of course, all Saudis had them denied.

Q: Both when you were in Jeddah, and then in Dhahran, among the American Foreign Service people, was there, if not a debate, a questioning going on about whither the House of Saud —will it last, and all of that?

THEROS: There was, and it was a big sigh of relief when Faisal deposed his brother—a feeling that we had a competent Al Saud running the place. Certainly under Saud bin Abdulaziz there was a tremendous fear that the man's corruption and incompetence would cause trouble. Nasserism was seen as the primary threat. Sometimes I have the impression the Saudis played it for more than it was worth. The Saudis had a tremendous fear of their military and as a result kept it from doing any training. The Saudi military was pretty much a joke.

Q: Well the White Army was considered essentially a tribe of backward guys. In those days it was considered to be the loyal…

THEROS: Yes. It was clear the White Army was preferred over the regular army.

Q: How did our ties to Israel play while you were there?

THEROS: They weren't the big issue that they are now. This was before the '67 war. I mean the '67 war was a watershed in the relationship. We were not seen as the supporters of Israel. We were seen as people who, along with others, had acquiesced in the establishment of the state. Remember, American aid to Israel wasn't terribly big. There were a lot of things on the boycott list but there was not this fixation on the U.S. as the supporter of Israel. And there were many things taking place in the U.S. that were not terribly pro-Israeli at the time.

Q: Also, this was not a period when the tremendous oil wealth was coming in.

THEROS: It was tremendous oil wealth relative to what they had before, but it was not this huge transfer of wealth that took place after the '73 war.

Q: So it wasn't changing the whole society there.

THEROS: It was clearly making progress. There were a lot of things being built. They had a hell of a lot of money, but it wasn't the drama of what happened later.

Q: While you were in Dhahran, did you get involved at all with promoting commerce?

THEROS: A bit. I did more of that in Jeddah, as a matter of fact. In Dhahran I was a consular officer and it was a full-time job. It was a job and a half to be the consular officer in Dhahran and take over the traveling.

Q: When you were in Jeddah was there much interest from American firms in Saudi Arabia?

THEROS: A limited number there were. With Morris Draper we had a very aggressive —you'd call it an advocacy program now. Morris ran a shop that was aggressively pushing American business. We would do things like spread false stories about the quality of British goods and things like that.

Q: I was at one point an economic commercial officer in Dhahran and I remember there was a complaint, actually from Bahrain, that Chesterfield cigarettes used to run its name up and down the cigarette and then they decided, sometime, to put it circling the cigarette. The people that sold Players and other English brands let the suit know that this was a plot to poison Arabs. So if it had a circle around it you shouldn't smoke that. [Laughs.] Let's say that more than one country was playing that game.

THEROS: In Jeddah we were very aggressive in pushing U.S. business.

Q: The problem I found was the lack of real interest in American business. Many would fly in on Thursday night and leave Sunday morning.

THEROS: Nothing has changed.

Q: Of course everything was shut down on Friday and there they'd sit.

THEROS: Basically, American exports consisted of a couple of dozen American companies doing ninety percent of the work. I remember even Lyndon Johnson's lack of devotion to the advocacy of American products. The Saudis wanted to buy F-5s from us.

Q: Export fighter planes.

THEROS: And the British prime minister shows up in Washington and tells Johnson that the BAC, the British Aircraft Corporation, would be in serious economic trouble if it didn't sell the airplanes to Saudi Arabia. So Johnson put out a presidential order withdrawing Northrop's license to sell the F-5s, giving the Saudis no choice but to buy the English Electric Lightning. The Saudis were very unhappy with that. They did not want the Lightning.

Q: It was not that good of a plane.

THEROS: Well, actually it was a fighter plane. It wasn't bad but it was a single-mission airplane.

Q: I mean an F-5 you could drop bombs and you could load it up and expand them. It was really very good.

THEROS: The Lightnings were not. The Lightnings were inferior. And the Saudis were very unhappy at the time. I knew the Northrop man out there and he was also very unhappy, obviously, because his company had invested a lot of money and time into the

sale.

Q: Where we, particularly in Dhahran, seeing Iran as a problem?

THEROS: You had the feeling that the Saudis did. We clearly thought Iran was on the side of the angels and we spent a lot of time, as I remember —this was in Jeddah, not Dhahran. In Dhahran, the foreign affairs of the Gulf were very much a British issue. The British influenced Kuwait and occupied the lower Gulf. Their relationship with Iran was not terribly good. As an entity, American issues in Saudi Arabia and in Bahrain were isolated from the Iranian issues because the British were very much the dominant power. We had a naval control of shipping office in Bahrain and one ship in the Gulf, an old converted seaplane tender and that was about the whole of our presence.

Q: It was the Greenwich Bay or? Something. Two ships rotated.

THEROS: It was the USS Duxbury Bay and the USS Greenwich Bay.

Q: The British hadn't pulled out.

THEROS: No, the British didn't pull out until '71. The British were dominant in Bahrain. As I said, they made it very clear that we were not welcome there.

Q: Did you go out to the guesthouse in Awali?

THEROS: Yes. I preferred staying in the Speed Bird Hotel.

Q: You can tell by, anybody listening to our conversation, there are two places you could stay in Bahrain. [Laughs.]

THEROS: But then BABCO complained to the Consul General that they were offering me free housing at the guest house at BABCO, so the Consul General said, "Why am I wasting the American taxpayers' money?" I pointed out there was a bar with unattached girls in it at the Speed Bird and there was a bar at the guesthouse, but the bar there was with married British women. It wasn't the same thing.

Q: It wasn't the same at all.

THEROS: That argument fell on deaf ears.

Q: [Laughs.] In going to Qatar and the Trucial states, were there any particular problems or concerns of ours?

THEROS: Again, the relationship between Dubai and Abu Dhabi was an issue even then. Dubai was certainly the more advanced place, though. Abu Dhabi had just hit oil big time. They were both pretty primitive. Qatar was the spiffiest place in the Gulf at the time, with paved roads, water you could drink, and a dial tone whenever you picked up

the telephone.

Q: Das Island was a problem.

THEROS: Das Island was a problem. The problem with Iran hadn't started yet. The British still controlled things.

Dubai would periodically come to blows with Sharjah. Umm al-Quwain, Ajman, Ras al-Khaimah, and Fujairah were nothing.

Q: They were little castles sitting in the oasis, really.

THEROS: Yes, exactly.

Q: It was great. It was sort of going back to the thirteenth century.

THEROS: Places that the only source of income was stamps. I remember once we had arrested three Mafiosi in New York traveling on Ajmani passports.

Q: [Laughs.]

THEROS: The Department was convinced that these were fake passports, so I was dispatched with orders to go to Ajman to verify that they were fake passports. When I got to Ajman, after what was then a very harrowing trip through the desert I got to see the ruler's son who was the minister of everything. I managed that meeting on my own in Arabic and mixed English a little bit.

I asked about these three passports and he said, "You have to go to our passport office in the souk in Dubai because they're the ones who do the issuance of passports to naturalized citizens." He actually used the term "naturalized citizens." So I turned around and drove through the night to Dubai. There were no hotels; I had to stay with Conoco families.

In the morning, after about two hours of searching, I found this Iranian rug merchant in the souk who was also the Ajmani passport bureau. I sat down and we had tea and talked for a few minutes; he spoke excellent English. I said, "We have these three cases of people who have been arrested in New York carrying Ajmani passports. We're convinced that these passports, are forgeries." I gave him the names; they all sounded like Corleone and the like. He asks, "What are the names again?" So I gave him the names and he pulls a drawer out of the side of his desk and says: "Ah, yes. Corleone. And the other names as well. Yes, we issued them all passports." "Why? Did you say they qualified as Ajmani citizens? What are the qualifications to be an Ajmani citizen?" He replied, "A hundred pounds each."

Q: [Laughs.]

THEROS: There was the emir's stamp; there was the sheik's stamp. It was all legal documents. So we had to send the bad news back to Washington that Ajman had exercised its sovereign right to issue a passport to whomever it damn well pleased.

Q: [Laughs.] Well you left there when?

THEROS: It would have been about May, June of '66.

Nicaragua: 1966 to 1968

Q: Where did you go?

THEROS: When I left Dhahran; it was sort of funny because another man named Richard Storch was supposed to replace me. He had taken Arabic in Beirut and then he flat out refused to come. So I was being extended at one-week intervals.

Q: Was it that he just didn't want Dhahran?

THEROS: He didn't want to come to Saudi Arabia. Actually, I think he intended to quit and go to work for some private company because now he spoke Arabic.

I was being extended at one-week intervals. Storch was delaying and the Consul General was insisting that there be a hands-on transfer. Again, Storch wouldn't get on the airplane. I'd come to hate the man. Finally, the third time I was all set to leave, and again the Department extended me. I was in tears by now. I wanted to go home; I hadn't been home for two-and-a-half years. You couldn't even make a phone call in those days from Saudi Arabia to the States. Finally, the Consul General said, "If you want to leave, I'll just tell Washington we didn't get the word until you got on the airplane, but I really need you." So what can you do? I stuck around two more weeks and the man still didn't show up. At that point the Consul General just said, "Go home."

I was going to be assigned to Costa Rica as the political officer and I had been back in Washington a week, with my family before I wandered down to the Department. Bob Service was the desk officer for Costa Rica, for Central America in general, so I walked in and I was really looking forward to Costa Rica; the idea of Costa Rica and girls was very appealing. I sat down for a couple of minutes and I said, "When am I supposed to leave for San Jose?" Service says, "You're not going. There's a commercial officer that's supposed to be in Costa Rica." I said, "I'm not going. What do you mean I'm not going?" He said, "You've been assigned to Managua as the political officer." I just about fell out of my chair. I had gone from one place with a bad song—you know the "Jeddah, Jeddah;" remember that old song? "Jeddah, Jeddah, jing, jang, jang." And then to go to Managua, the next assignment, which also had a bad song: "Managua, Nicaragua is a wonderful spot. It's got coffee and bananas and the temperature's hot." So I went off to Managua.

Q: So you went to Managua and you were there from when to when?

THEROS: I was there from the late summer of '66 until September of '68.

Q: What was the political situation there at that time?

THEROS: Somoza ran the country. It was a private fiefdom.

Q: This was?

THEROS: Actually, at the time the Somozas had taken a vacation and Lorenzo Guerrero was the president. Luis Somoza had been president and gone on later to become president again; and Tachito (Anastasio Somoza Debayle) was hanging offstage, running the National Guard.

Q: How thorough was the government in place? Was there anything happening.

THEROS: It was solid. It was thoroughly solid. The Nicaraguan ambassador to Washington, Guillermo Sevilla-Sacasa, was the dean of the corps; he was also Lyndon Johnson's best friend. He had an influence in the United States that was awesome, with the Johnson Administration. Americans were giving small amounts of aid to Somoza. The dictatorship was regarded as fairly acceptable at the time. The truth of the matter is that the opposition, the Partido Conservador, was made up of landed gentry that were so generally discredited that even people who didn't like the Somozas would probably not have voted for the opposition if there had been free elections. The general consensus was that, in the event of free elections, Somoza's Partido Liberal would win.

The country was in a bit of a doldrums. There was some economic progress. The National Guard/police force, the Guardia Nacional, was a relatively efficient group. The only three problems that I remember with the country was one, that everybody was drunk most of the time; everybody had guns and killed people most of the time—in a non-political fashion— and there were lots of girls. Other than that it was your typical banana republic, except they didn't produce bananas anymore; it was sugar and coffee. Coffee, primarily, was the export of Nicaragua. There were no big American companies in there—none of these traditional patterns of gringo exploitation.

Q: So the American interests were minor, would you say?

THEROS: Yes. I mean there's the overriding American interest in Central America, but direct commercial interests in Nicaragua were fairly small. A lot of Nicaraguans had dual citizenship and a lot of them were prominent ones.

Q: I remember in the Dominican Republic we had an awful lot of trouble because there was some congressman who was so close to the dictator of the Dominican Republic. Were there American congressmen who were overly identified and sort of creatures of Somoza?

THEROS: No, the creature of Somoza was Lyndon Johnson. And the other was (Army General) Maxwell (D.) Taylor. The people who were overly identified with the Somoza regime were the top of the Administration at the time—but specifically Lyndon Johnson.

Q: What was General Maxwell Taylor's tie?

THEROS: He had been a classmate of Somoza's at West Point. Somoza had graduated as the "Goat" of his class, but apparently he was a friendly sort of guy.

Q: What about Cuba? Was Cuba a problem at that time?

THEROS: There were lots of Cuban exiles in Nicaragua but they were scattered through the country and they were not much of an issue in Nicaragua. The Nicaraguans, off the east coast, had provided air bases for the Bay of Pigs. In Nicaragua, the Cuban exile air force —B-26s—had taken off from there from an airport called Bluefields, in the isolated east of the country.

Our issues were primarily, at the time, a question of modernization, economic progress, and democratization of the whole of Central America. At the time we were very regionalist and trying to get some sort of Central American common market together, trying to get economic progress. The AFL-CIO was down in Nicaragua big time, operating under the aegis of the American Embassy. We had a lot of student programs. It was sort of a dichotomy; at the professional level there was this assumption that the objective of American policy in the region was to encourage a transition to a modern economy and a modern democratic state, which of course contradicted what seemed to be the tendency out of the White House, which was to keep Somoza in power. But we managed to avoid having to face up to that particular contradiction.

Q: Before we get to some of the particulars, what about Nicaragua's neighbors? You know, El Salvador, Honduras, Costa Rica, and all that.

THEROS: Honduras was an enigma to me. I got up to the north coast of Honduras sometimes—San Pedro Sula—where in was largely Arab owned and occupied. The Arabs simply owned all of the north coast of Honduras, which was probably the most prosperous place in Central America at the time. The rest of Honduras was Nicaragua minus the progress. El Salvador was a problem. There were enormous social and racial differences in Salvador that constantly broke out in internal violence. Costa Rica was regarded as stagnant, pleasant, nothing much going on most of the time. Panama was another issue that used to occupy us a lot because there were a lot of different tendencies and what happens to the Canal and so forth. There was a constant discussion with the Nicaraguans on and off about an alternative canal through Nicaragua. It never came to anything, of course.

Q: Yes, but it's always been there.

THEROS: It's always been there. As a matter of fact, that was the first route. The route for the canal was through Nicaragua, because you can run along the river for most of that lake.

Q: Internally in Nicaragua, were there any rebel movements or dissident Indian groups, or this sort of thing?

THEROS: The Indians, by and large, had been biologically integrated into Nicaragua. There were no Indians, per se. There were no Indian tribes except for the Miskito on the east coast. The rest of society was thoroughly mestizo from top to bottom; the east coast was more of a black Indian mixture. The mestizos in the West coast generally. The East coast was English-speaking Protestant blacks, "costeños", and the west of the country was Spanish-speaking non-practicing Catholic mestizo. So ethnically those were the only divisions in the costeñas. In the east coast people were so few, relatively speaking, that they weren't much of a problem. As a matter of fact, the Somozas tended to give them some favored treatment.

The issues in Nicaragua were entirely social issues. There was a terrible dichotomy between the lower classes and the upper class—and this was in a social sense, not necessarily an economic sense. In a social sense the ninety-five percent that were not upper class, and the five percent that were. Even then, ethnically the differences weren't that great. The upper class was also mestizo.

As a good example, I went on a date with a girl a couple of times whose father was a successful businessman; he was Maltese, her mother was fairly mestiza, and I took her to the most exclusive night club in Managua. The next day I got a phone call from a friend of mine who said, "Patrick, you're a friend of ours and we know you're a foreigner, so you don't fully understand that. But you can't take a girl like that to that club because you'll be socially ostracized." And I said, "Why?" "Well, she's not of our class." I said, "What's the definition of class? Her father's a European; her dad's got some money." He said, "No, she's not of our class. She doesn't come out of the same background as we do." And these were leftist college students who told me this.

Q: Was it one of these things where you had to be born there to understand the system?

THEROS: Either born there or married to somebody who was born there, pretty much.

Q: The guy you knew who was—they knew but you didn't know?

THEROS: They knew.

Q: You were talking about leftist students and all. Was this sort of a chattering class making noises or was there a serious leftist movement?

THEROS: There was a chattering class making noises over some people who were serious. They were all well-intentioned kids and they certainly wanted to see social

change, and the only social change that was coming was coming from the Left. The students, at the time, were divided into three groups, of which the communists were a very small group; the standard leftists, the socialists, and then there was a Christian Democratic student movement, but they were all somewhat superficial. They were all anti-Somoza; they were all advocating for internal change, and they were all fairly ineffectual.

Q: What were the Somozas actually named—I've forgotten this—the Trujillos? In the Dominican Republic they were really nasty. Were the Somozas nasty?

THEROS: Not under Luis. Luis was the elder brother. I mean he was determined to stay in power; he wasn't about to give the power up, but Luis' approach to life was to co-opt the opposition. Everybody got a little piece of the pie. Everybody got some favors; everybody got things done for them. It was made clear that if you were not good to the Somozas, good things would not happen to you; bad things might happen to you. Luis never saw the need to cut people out. After he died of a heart attack about halfway through my tour, Tachito came to power—the younger brother. There was a reason that Tachito was the "Goat" of his class at West Point; it was because he was dumb. His approach to life was greedy, it's all mine; you can't have a share; I want a part of your share, too.

Q: Who was our Ambassador at the time?

THEROS: Aaron Brown was the first Ambassador and the second Ambassador was a fellow named William Walker, which was a very unfortunate choice of a name.

Q: Really?

THEROS: Yes, his name was William Walker. God knows where they found him.

Q: The gray-eyed man of destiny.

THEROS: He was about fifty, petty and vicious. William Walker was the name of the American filibustero—basically a U.S. Government-sponsored pirate who took over Nicaragua and whose conduct provoked the second Nicaraguan revolution.

Q: What was your job?

THEROS: I was the number two in the political section and I had two portfolios, students and labor.

Q: Before we get to that, was there a political party line or something?

THEROS: Yes, they had elections and the "Liberales" always won. Until Tachito ran later in my tour, generally the elections were structured in such a way that the "Liberales" won, but there was always a significant minority for the "Partido Conservador," for the

conservatives. In fact, they participated to some degree or another in government. The press was relatively free. The Conservadores had a newspaper called La Prensa, which was actually a pretty respectable paper; it would regularly attack the government.

If you were the casual visitor there, even during political times, you did not get the impression of an impressive dictatorship. The dictatorship was there, but particularly under Luis the dictatorship was well camouflaged. The worst thing that you saw was the social differences, which both political parties maintained.

Q: How did you feel? You were the new boy on the block and this was all new to you. Did you feel that by going there that you were sort of ending up in something out of an O. Henry story?

THEROS: There were moments there.

Q: I mean a sleepy little banana republic of no particular interest.

THEROS: A little bit. I was unhappy at first because I had expected to go to Costa Rica as the commercial officer and that was changed when I got to Washington. These were the days, of course, when Washington never asked you what you wanted to do. On the other hand, I was excited at being the political officer. In those days being the political officer was and it still is, I suppose, the elite job. I was excited in the new job. Managua itself was so alien to me. It was interesting; I found Saudi Arabia much less alien than Nicaragua. But on the other hand, there were lots of girls running around. I cultivated students enrolled at the universities. The labor union work was okay. There were a lot of things to do. I could get as busy as I wanted and being busy actually was fun because doing my job meant I got to hang around a lot of people who were fun while I was doing it. The professional part of my job was a lot of fun. The work provided my social life.

Q: [Laughs.] Welcome to the club.

Let's talk about the students. So often in the Latin American context the universities and all are hotbeds of Marxism and sort of a place where kids go out and raise hell there and then they graduate and immediately put on a suit and tie and become a part of the establishment.

THEROS: That's true.

Q: What was happening?

THEROS: It was pretty much the same. A few of the students came out of university and still stayed on as political opposition. What amazed me was despite the fact that there was a general anti-Americanism in the political sense, that didn't extend to individuals so much because there were so many Nicaraguans who were dual nationals and there were so many Nicaraguans living in California. It was a little hard to be anti-American beyond that. But that fact that, here I was the junior political officer in the Embassy responsible

for student affairs and labor. But I enrolled at the university and took two classes a day, and was generally accepted as one of the boys.

Q: What classes were you taking?

THEROS: I was taking mostly Spanish literature and Latin American history. I was pretty much accepted. I was one of the guys. I used to go drinking with the most politically active students and they accepted me.

Q: Were people running around at this time with pictures of Che Guevara? He was sort of the idol of the Left in the United States, among other places.

THEROS: I don't remember Che Guevara being up a lot. I mean there were people who liked him—there were some Marxists—but insofar as he was a revolutionary hero, they had their own, Sandino, and Sandino filled the imagination of all the opposition there. This was even before the Sandinistas became an active group.

Q: Could you explain for the listener what the role of Sandino was and how it was portrayed during this period when you were there?

THEROS: Well Cesar Augusto Sandino was a political conservative who when the Liberales came to power many, many, many years ago —back in the teens to the '20s — took to the mountains. He was a politically conservative Marxist, for want of a better term. He called himself a Marxist but he was associated pretty much with the Conservative Party, while the Liberal Party was trying to maintain order and itself in power. The United States came to its support, and as a matter of fact, the Marines occupied Nicaragua for about fifteen years. As a result of the campaign in Nicaragua the Marines wrote a manual called the Small Wars Manual. It is still the best piece on how to deal with small wars.

But Sandino pretty much managed to keep everybody chasing him fruitlessly through the mountains and they were pretty exhausted—until in the end Somoza killed him. It is a tragic funny story; it is documented in the History of Foreign Relations of the United States. The US Marines created and trained the new National Guard, La Guardia Nacional, and the American Ambassador was the Proconsul that had to pick from among one of the three or four candidate officers recommended by the Marine commanding officer to be the new Commandante. … And according to the official US history, the Ambassador selected Anastasio Somoza, Sr., because the Ambassador's wife said that he was the only person of the four that she would allow socially into the house and that she could dance with.

Q: [Laughs.]

THEROS: "Tachito" (Anastasio) invited Sandino to a peace conference. The latter took him at his word and came to the meeting, upon which Somoza had him murdered when he showed up. That pretty much brought that little piece of history to an end. But we

always looked upon as this as the story of a leftist, Marxist, revolutionary who had fought the Americans, and both sides in Nicaragua cultivated that image, too. Sandino's flag was black and red, indicating a union of the Conservatives and the communists.

Q: But Cuba wasn't playing much of a role there, and neither was the Soviet Union.

THEROS: I never had that impression. I don't think anybody at the Embassy really thought that Cubans were a serious issue there.

Q: Was the United States portrayed as it was in so many Latin American countries as the "Colossus to the North?"

THEROS: Actually, the "Colossus to the North" was Mexico.

Q: I was going to say, for the Nicaraguans their Colossus was Mexico.

THEROS: And there was a certain fondness towards the United States at the time that didn't fritter away until years later.

Q: You mentioned that the AFL-CIO was down there doing its thing. This was all part of sort of tying in to the Alliance for Progress. The AFL-CIO was pushing hard to get labor unions. As I recall, one of the things being the idea that companies had been exploiting the laboring class —the banana republic type of thing—if we can get in there and get these unions well organized they can sort of take care of themselves. What was happening and what were you doing?

THEROS: I was a labor attaché, technically speaking. There was a labor officer at the AID mission and he was an organizer from the Cable Workers of America (CWA); he had a small staff. It provided a cover for the trade unions to offer that the American Embassy was out there helping the trade unions. The CWA and others ran programs on training people on education, household help. They were respectable programs; they just didn't make much of a dent on the society. Underemployment was so high that finding scabs and strikebreakers was very easy. And none of the industry there was so high-tech that the skills-based union could wrap it up and fight off management. But it was there and they were trying. Nicaragua had a very paternalistic labor law that actually gave a lot to the employees, except salaries. It was difficult to fire somebody. It included all sorts of things: free medicine and education, of sorts—so that the government pretty much was providing the things that unions would usually go after. The government was also partially into picking unions. While the only thing that the unions should have gone after—higher wages—were undercut by the fact that there was so much unemployment.

Q: What about the social life at the Embassy? How did the five percent of the society embrace the other?

THEROS: Fairly. One hundred percent.

Q: Yourself included?

THEROS: Myself included. The students were heavily drawn from the five percent too, but not my labor connections. I had a lot of fun. I probably got out more than anybody else did. I probably saw more people than anyone else did. My Spanish was good. Most of the Embassy staff went to Embassy parties. I didn't go to Embassy parties because the Embassy didn't want to hang around with my student friends, although those who came to my parties were pretty much the sons and daughters of the people who were having dinner with the Ambassador anyway, even the leftists.

Q: As you moved around you weren't feeling a population that was seething underneath or something like that?

THEROS: No. There were several reasons why that wasn't the case. One, life is not hard even on poverty wages in Nicaragua. The weather never got out of hand, the definition of shelter was fairly charitable, the definition of clothing was fairly charitable; food was the only thing that one had to worry about, but there was no starvation. The Aristocracy pretty much still lived in the land. They weren't absentee landlords. The landowners had moved to the city. So when you saw somebody's Jeep in Managua and it was all covered with mud, it was honest mud. Most of the latifundistas still worked their estates themselves. They didn't have managers out there running it for them. Nine-tenths of the time when you get invited to somebody's house for dinner, particularly among the Conservatives, you have to drive twenty-five miles out to their farm or something. Even with students, I spent a lot of time at parties and visiting people on their farms. There were social differences and there was enormous social separation, but it didn't apply at work, so to speak.

Q: Was there a feeling that there was really a peon class, people doffing their hats, or was it just …

THEROS: Yes, there was a lot of that but the peon class hadn't figured it out. There were Marxists spouting dialectic out there someplace, but they were at that stage in development that they hadn't yet figured out that they were the peon class. There were people agitating for democracy and the leftist ideals were all for people who would have suffered if their dreams had ever come true.

Q: How about the National Guard? Did they have a heavy hand or were they relatively benign as long as you kept in line?

THEROS: As long as you kept in line, and they had a limited mandate. Like crime prevention was not high up on their list. They were there for regime protection. They had traffic cops and stuff like that, but crime was rampant. It's the only place in my life I've ever carried a gun all the time. It was the only place where every neighborhood had four or five private guards armed. A significant part of the population was employed by well-to-do people to protect them.

Q: I've often wondered about something like that. When you carry a gun, what does this mean? What were you expecting and what could happen?

Well actually I used the gun once to get myself out of trouble. I had been to a student political event at the national university in Leon, which is about 100 kilometers north of Managua, and I was at dusk coming back down the Pan-American Highway, the Carretera Norte. You know how with dusk there's no contrast out there? I had my lights on but I still didn't get much reflecting contrast, and what I didn't see right in front of me, stopped in the road, was a Jeep with a trailer and four campesinos who had been drinking rather heavily and who were unloading a large bull from the trailer. They were in the lane but I didn't see them until it was too late. I slammed on the brakes, but piled into the trailer. I killed one person in the accident as well as crippling the bull and wrecking the car. The girl that was in the car with me—a girl named Myra —a very active leftist Christian Democrat student, hit the windshield. The USIS officer was in the back seat and he got banged up a little bit.

I stepped out into this carnage and saw what had happened. I had pushed the Jeep into on oncoming car, which also crashed, and then a car hit me on the road from the back and soon we had about five or six cars piled up. The thing was getting bigger. And I suddenly realized that the son of the man who had been killed—an elderly fellow—was looking for me; he was looking for me with a very large pistol in his hands. Fortunately there was a large crowd and he was drunk, so he was having problems locating me. The crowd was not being terribly unfriendly at that point, so I went back to the car and took out the gun I had in the glove compartment. I went over, went through the crowd, went up behind him and one of his friends was with him with a pistol as well. I stuck my gun in the back of the other man with the pistol and I said, "Would you please put your gun away and tell your friend to put his gun away because otherwise I'm going to shoot you, because he wants to kill me." And they did.

There was still a lot of shouting and then the police showed up and they took a look at the situation. They took me back up to Leon. The girl was hurt fairly badly, not life threatening but she was bleeding profusely, and one of her relatives happened by and we put her in the car and her relatives took her off to the hospital and so forth. I went back and spent about an hour or two in the police station in Leon, more for my protection than anything else, and then I was released. It was interesting; there was some discussion in the Embassy as to what should be done with me. The Nicaraguan Government did not seem to care. Then one of the smaller leftist newspapers in the country attacked me personally; there was an editorial—"Licencia para Matar," license to kill—attacking diplomats and diplomatic immunity. But in the editorial the paper implied that there was something immoral going on between this girl and me. At which point the leftist students at the University of Leon went to the newspaper and told them to cut it out because otherwise they would burn the newspaper down because they were insulting their classmate Myra. So that killed the story. At that point the Ambassador decided he wasn't going to pursue it anymore.

The only thing it cost me was I paid for Myra's plastic surgery. As a matter of fact, once

it was over, within a few weeks it was no longer a subject for discussion. Some years later a Congressman who had a constituent who was related to the victim later asked for the file on the subject, but he was from Ann Arbor, Michigan, where my father's family are, and a couple of my relatives called him and that was the end of that. It's simply an explanation; these guys were drunk and they were unloading the bull in the middle of the Pan-American Highway at dusk.

Q: Yes.

THEROS: The murder rate in Nicaragua was enormous. The city of Managua averaged eight murders a day. Leon, which was a city of about 80,000, averaged three murders a day. It's the only time in my life I've actually seen three murders. One was I was going to the Port of Corinto on the northwest Pacific coast with my newly-arrived political section chief and his wife (he was the political first secretary; we didn't have counselors at the Embassy except the DCM). We were driving through Leon past the train station and I was recounting gleefully about how there's been a murder at the train station every day since 1951. As we drove past the train station we literally saw this man killing another man with a machete. The political officer's wife later accused me of having arranged for it to happen. That was the first murder.

The second murder that I saw was at a political rally. A man was standing in the back of a Jeep; another car pulled up alongside, someone got out of the car, whipped out a pistol and shot him down. I was sitting at a bar about ten feet away with some students. The man shoots this man in the back of the Jeep, gets back in his car and drives away. The students that were with me—you know, I panicked—sort of looked over, saw who the protagonists were, and said, "They're old enemies," and went back to drinking. Somebody else picked up the body. The third shooting was an accidental shooting. One of the guards in our neighborhood shot at what he thought were intruders—he had a .44—and the bullet went through the wall of a house and killed a maid living in the back room of a neighbor's house. So anyway, that was my experience with criminal murder.

There was another case where I was driving to a party in Grenada, south on the highway, and we almost ran over a body lying in the middle of the road. The girl that was with me was a little concerned. There was this body lying there. So before I stepped out of the car I took out my pistol and fired three shots into the air, at which point the "body" got up and ran away and two people in the underbrush also ran away. It was a fairly lawless society; I once went to a cantina, where a bunch of drunks started shooting at each other. Fortunately, they were so drunk that the shots went high and no one got hurt.

Q: I heard about a story of a woman who was pretty upper class. I'm not sure if this was in Nicaragua, but it probably was. Some man was pestering her maid and she just said, "Well, I just had to get rid of the man." You know, paid somebody $25 and he was killed.

THEROS: No, in Nicaragua she would have killed him and gotten away with it. There are two stories along this line. One: I had a "costeñas," a black maid from the east coast, and there they practice sort of voodoo—similar to Jamaica. , She came to me one day and

asked for two weeks advance on her salary. I was paying her two dollars a day or something like that. I said, "Sure, but why?" She said, "Well, there's one of the girls from the coast; this evil man has her documents and he's forcing her to prostitute herself." The costeñas were much more prudish than the main part of the population was. "Another girl and I are going back to Bluefields and were going to get a "buyel" to stop this." And I said, "What's this buyel? She described some sort of a voodoo witch doctor. She said they had some article of the bad guy's clothing or something like that and they were going to go back and pay the buyel to get rid of him. I felt a little bit like an accessory to a crime but I gave her the two weeks advance salary. She went and came back a couple days later, and she says it's all taken care of; they had given him his shirt and other personal items. And then it slipped out of my mind. About two months later I asked her, "Whatever happened to that case?" She said, "Well, he's dead." He had died. It was never quite clear to me—and I decided not to pursue this issue much further—as to whether the witch doctor decided to prove that he was good at it and have the guy bumped off, or if it was just the power of suggestion that did it.

The other story: a journalist named Pataki, same last name as the governor of New York, Hungarian by origin, he had made it into the upper class. He had this huge, modernistic nude in his living room.

Q: A portrait or…

THEROS: A portrait, yes—or a painting. She looked like the wife of a prominent politician. And Pataki always wore a gun, a small gun, because the word was out that he had painted this from a live model and this prominent politician was looking for him.

Q: Did you get any high-level visits while you were there?

THEROS: Not much. The Nicaraguans were in Washington so frequently that it was sort of pointless.

Q: Was there the sort of feeling that the Nicaraguan Ambassador pretty well took care of all business?

THEROS: He did a really good job. I have to say that if I were going to be the dean of the corps in a major capital, Guillermo Sevilla-Sacasa would be my role model. President Johnson would show him reports from the embassy in Washington. There were two or three cases—one case where the Nicaraguan vice president had said something off color about Somoza, and I dutifully stuck the remark into a reporting cable. Two weeks later the vice president confronted the Ambassador for having reported it to Washington because Lyndon Johnson, who thought it was funny apparently, showed it to Guillermo Sevilla-Sacasa, who promptly reported it back to Somoza, who promptly chewed out the vice president for having said those things.

Q: [Laughs.] After living in this sort of never-never land or something, where did you go from there?

THEROS: Actually, there was one very important event, which I might as well talk about, while I was there. There was a huge political rally in Managua in November of '67. Their elections were coming up. Luis had died of a heart attack; Tachito was the candidate endorsed personally by Lyndon Johnson, and all of the opposition groups had come together for a rally in Managua. At about the middle of the afternoon the rally broke down in gunfire and it was extremely serious. Hundreds of people died that night. There were three of us sent from the Embassy, Richard Mancuso, Walter Cadette, and myself with instructions to follow the demonstrations and report back. We scattered in different directions when the shooting started. After this event, by the way, things began to get ugly politically in Nicaragua.

I ran into a friend's house right down the street from where the fighting broke out, called the Embassy and reported what had happened. I got the Admin officer on the phone, who was a complete fool, and who told me not to panic; I just held the phone up because there were bullets coming through shutters in the windows. The Ambassador came on the phone and told me to get down to my apartment because he heard that there were things going on at the Grand Hotel, which was right next to my apartment, to find out what was going on. Mancuso ran into a Guardia station and forgot that he had an abolition campaign button on his shirt and they beat the bejesus out of him. They really beat him up pretty badly before he could identify himself as an officer from the Embassy. Walter Cadette ran downtown and took refuge in the Grand Hotel. He was in the hotel when about 800 of the armed opposition came in and took over the hotel and barricaded themselves inside, and the Guardia showed up around them and started firing into the hotel.

In my next phone call, the Ambassador told me that he had heard there were people trapped in the hotel —including 125 American tourists —for me to go down there and find out what was going on. So I came down this one street —it was fairly hairy but when you're twenty-four years old you think you're immortal —and I finally ended up on the other side of the lines where the opposition was shooting back in the other direction. I got to the side door of the hotel at the bar, and the door was locked. While I'm standing there trying to figure out what to do next a window breaks out overhead, someone sticks a rifle out of the window over my head and starts shooting down the street. I look down the street to see what he's shooting at and it's a Guardia armored car coming up the street. While its coaxial started firing back I ran. I believe I hold the world's record for the 64-yard dash) I later measured the distance from the bar door to the corner). Then I called the Embassy and reported what I had seen. The Guardia had surrounded the hotel and they were shelling it with 37-millimeter guns off the armored cars. I had gone to my apartment overlooking the hotel and could see it all. I called the Ambassador and the Ambassador told me to go down and stop them. [Laughs.] I gave some unintelligible response like, "Are you serious, sir?" He said: "Yes. I'm trying to get a hold of Somoza to get him to stop it. If there are Americans in there and if there are Americans killed we're going to have a really big problem. In the meantime, until I find Somoza, I want you to go down there and stop them." I didn't know if that was a lawful order, but you know, at twenty-four years old you will do anything.

I went back downstairs; I got out on the street waving my diplomatic I.D. (identification) card, met a Guardia patrol and said, "Take me to your leader." They took me to their leader and then I thought I'd really made a mistake because he was a Guardia major whom I knew. He did not like me and I did not like him. He wanted to know what I was doing there and I explained and then he asked me if I were drinking, and I told him that I wanted him to stop shooting at the hotel. The major thought I was really crazy, so I had this argument. I was fairly persuasive. I said, "Look, my Ambassador is trying to find your president to get him to stop shooting. If there are Americans in the hotel and you kill any of them you're going to have a big problem." You know: "We can ignore everything else. As long as you're killing Nicaraguans, it's okay. If you start killing Americans, people are going to get bent out of shape and Washington is going to react badly now that we've passed the word to you, if you kill anybody." So he agreed to stop shooting for half an hour. He kept telling me, "You stay here. You better be right." I started smoking again that night. Word came back twenty minutes later that the Ambassador had spoken to Tachito and Tachito gave instructions that no more explosive shells would be fired at the hotel, only armor piercing, non-explosive shells. These bullets would go through the hotel and out the other side. This was during the night.

In the course of this action, one round came through the manager's office where Walter Cadette was hiding and a fragment cut off Cadette's ear. So this is now referred to—in the annals of those who served in Nicaragua—as the "War of Cadette's Ear." He left the Foreign Service at the end of his tour there and he is now a successful investment banker in New York, having done what the rest of us should have done. That was my big episode. I got a medal out of it.

(I also encountered real injustice for the first time in my career. The political officer put me up for the Medal for Heroism. The DCM, who treated me with disdain, could not stomach the idea. He was a "Brahmin wannabee" and had married an English woman who felt she had married below her class, and I was clearly not of the class that he imagined "fit" in the Foreign Service. He reduced the award to the Superior Honor Award. He also noted in his review of my efficiency report that I "may have been the best outside man in the Embassy" –as my boss had written – but he doubted I had the class and background to serve successfully in Europe.)

Q: How was the death of Luis seen at the time? What were you getting as a political officer?

THEROS: Catastrophic. Luis had brains. Tachito did not. Luis knew how to massage people; Luis knew how to take care of people. Luis knew how to co-opt people. Luis knew how to make sure that when bad things happened, they were gussied up and looked pretty. And Luis made sure that people prospered under the Somozas. If you don't like the government, I'll get you a job. Tachito was really clinically stupid. Most people agreed that he was one of the dumbest people that ever graduated from West Point. As I said, there was a reason why he was the Goat of his class.

Q: Was this one of the graduations at West Point that was sort of a political graduation?

THEROS: That's the general assumption. He came to power and pretty soon La Guardia Nacional turned very bad. . First of all, about four hundred people died in three nights in the insurrection in Managua. The situation became ugly after that. People began to die in different places. Some students were tortured. The first Sandinista group went off into the mountains—students, some of them I knew. They were a fairly incompetent bunch and La Guardia tracked them down and killed them all. Tachito held elections and there were actually districts where the registered opposition candidate didn't get a single vote. You know, he should have come up with something like a ninety-one percent vote. Yet, he had the full support of Lyndon Johnson.

Q: At this demonstration, who started the shooting? Do you know?

THEROS: I think there were people of the far left, provocateurs, who started shooting at La Guardia. The intent was to provoke La Guardia into retaliating. It was actually a belief by many politicians that if they could get the casualty rate high enough, if there was a real bloodbath, the United States would intervene and occupy the country. And that's in fact what many people were trying to provoke.

Q: Were you hearing this and were Americans—you and others—trying to disabuse them?

THEROS: No, no. It was not that we had expected this; it was that they had planned it beforehand. The outbreak, the fighting, came as a complete surprise to us. No one expected the demonstration to be anything more than some tear gas and some stones. It was after the fighting began that they were trying to get the casualty rate up. They were trying to get enough people killed. Their magic number, I think, was a thousand dead. If they could get to a thousand dead the Americans would intervene and occupy the country.

Q: So they were really looking forward to the Marines coming back?

THEROS: They were looking forward to the Marines coming back. They felt this would be the only way that Luis was bound to sort out the country; in retrospect, I wish they had. We could have avoided a whole unhappy chapter in Central American history.

Q: Well this of course was a rally cry of the liberals during the early Roosevelt regime, of high school debates; should the Marines leave Nicaragua and that sort of thing. It wasn't going to happen.

THEROS: No, it wasn't. It was very clear after this that there were a large number of people in Nicaragua—mostly in the opposition, but even a lot of people within the Partido de Colorado, the so-called Liberals, who were afraid to challenge Somoza within the party—who would have loved to see an American intervention to set things straight.

Q: Well of course a little early—I'm not quite sure if it was during your time—that we had put paratroopers into the Dominican Republic.

THEROS: They were still there when I was in Nicaragua.

Ops Center: 1968 – 1969

Q: So there was this real—After having stopped your war and all this, what happened?

THEROS: I came back to Washington. I went into the Operations Center for fourteen months.

Q: You were doing that from about '68 to … ?

THEROS: Sixty-nine.

Q: What was the Operation Center like at this point? It's gone through several …

THEROS: It's gone through several metamorphoses now.

Q: Yes.

THEROS: It was the same location, a lot less space. It looked a lot less sophisticated than it does now. We didn't have screens up on the walls. It didn't have much in the way of computers and things like that. We had a bank of telephones. The senior watch officer (SWO) and the associate (junior) watch officer would sit at this phone bank and in the back room the editor would sit, and the military man would sit in another room. So there were basically five of us on shifts: the SWO, the AWO, the associate watch officer, the military representative, and the editor.

Q: You were still single by this time?

THEROS: Determinedly single.

Q: Well this was, of course, a great place to be single.

THEROS: Yes. Managua was a great place to be a single diplomat.

Q: How come you didn't come out with a blushing Nicaraguan bride?

THEROS: I very rarely associated with people who blushed.

Q: [Laughs.] Okay.

THEROS: I had a long-term relationship with one girl who later—and I flatter myself

into thinking that I caused this—went on and joined the Sandinistas and at one point was stationed as the Sandinista station chief in Washington.

I actually developed a good relationship with Bayardo Arce who was the Sandinista defense minister. I used to regularly get Christmas cards from him, for years. This was my leftist era.

I've had a good time in the Foreign Service. The Operation Center was fun. It was two days day shift, two days evening shift, a day off, two days night shift, two days off, and back. It actually meant that I couldn't form any permanent relationships, which I didn't want to form. It was great because the job ended at the end of the shift.

Q: Did you find yourself getting involved with any of the issues of the day?

THEROS: Yes, I remember I was supposed to take my birthday off, which was the 21st of August 1968, when the Russians rolled into Czechoslovakia. There were constant issues. There was fighting in Amman towards the end of my tour. The other thrilling thing is the way it would work; the junior people would spend six months as the AWO and then six months as the editor, and then in those days the Daily Summary that you would prepare, actually got to the President. It was the first thing the President saw, so there was the weight of importance on the shoulder of this fairly junior editor writing the stuff that was coming up during the night.

Q: Did you feel any change in the atmosphere in the '68 to '69 period, because this was when Nixon was elected? I'm talking about from your fellow officers and …

THEROS: Nothing particular. I would say that, until the mid-'70s, I found the Foreign Service to be pretty apolitical. There were a number of people—the older people in the Foreign Service—who told us they never voted because they felt it would be unethical because they felt they couldn't represent themselves to foreigners. Their opinions, as I said, of the Foreign Service was on the whole fairly liberal, but not terribly vociferous in their views. Most people seemed to observe the Hatch Act—the spirit as well as the law.

Q: Sixty-eight to '69 was in the absolute eye of the anti-Vietnam hurricane. Did that arouse your colleagues?

THEROS: We were impressed by the incompetence of the Johnson Administration. It was very obvious that he was a micromanaging President. By then I would say the bulk of my colleagues thought that Vietnam was worth doing, but were becoming increasingly more appalled at how badly it was being managed in Washington.

One of my jobs was managing a series of military messages known as the Joint Operations Report—the JOPREP Jiffy. Every, repeat every, air strike would be reported to State and through State to the White House at each step. One would be target designation; two would be the designation of the units; three would be the approval; four would be the units that have launched; five would be the units that have arrived over

target and engaged the target; six and seven, who got shot down and who came back. JOPREP Jiffy One would always be sent to the White House, followed in sequence by the others. As the evening wore on it became obvious that the President was reading them all, because from time to time we'd get this message from the White House, conveyed back to the Defense Department, that this target had been disapproved or the number of airplanes had been disapproved or the ordnance had been disapproved.

I remember once early in my time there, the phone rang at about two-thirty in the morning and I picked it up and the man, with a Texas accent, says to me, "This is the President. Can you tell me what Senator [what's-his-name] said about me tonight?" I turned to the SWO and I said, "He says he's the President." He looked at which phone it was and picked it up himself: "Yes, Mr. President," "No, Mr. President." "Yes, Mr. President." He then went off and got the teletype and faxed it over to the White House. My only question there was what in God's name was the President of the United States doing talking to a twenty-five-year-old junior officer at two-thirty in the morning?

Q: Yes.

THEROS: We did not have the feeling that with Lyndon Johnson the republic was in safe hands. And when Nixon came in much more feeling of these were somewhat more serious people. Nixon gave us the impression of being less hands-on. Because of these weird hours we kept, we didn't get to see much in the way of the demonstrations outside.

Q: How about your colleagues? Was there unrest with them?

THEROS: No. By and large, I'd say the majority of my colleagues in 1968-69, felt that Vietnam was worth doing.

Q: I was in Washington at the time. Hell, I even volunteered and went to Saigon. I mean I felt so.

THEROS: I don't believe that, other than students in the far left of the United States, it dawned on us that this was a mistake until the early '70s.

Q: The Operations Center was considered to be a good place to learn how the system operated and all. How did you find that?

THEROS: I thought the system in the Department of State operated reasonably well. The bureaucracy was a lot smaller and was very responsive. It gave me almost the impression that there were—maybe they were adults relative to me, but there were more adults running around than there were later in life. The only run-ins I ever had were like, for example, they would reward junior officers by letting us be the bag-and-passport carriers on official trips abroad. So I did what's called the "econ-con," which is this—four cabinet members would go to Japan and then the Japanese would come here in the alternate year. I was part of the group that took four of Nixon's cabinet officers to Japan in the summer of '69—two of them later ended up in jail—and we flew on Air Force One. The wives

were real pills. But that was the only time that I felt that the Admin people in the Department of State were not really all that good. They took care of Number One but didn't take care of the other staff. But I had a good time in Japan.

I had spent a large part of that year campaigning to take Arabic language. I had been asking to take Arabic language when I left Saudi Arabia, asked again when I was in Nicaragua, and the system was constantly defeating me. At the time the answer was, "You've already got a 4+/5 in Spanish and a 4+/4+ in Greek. Why should we waste money to teach you another language?"

Q: Were they trying to stick you into ARA or into NEA (Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs, Department of State)? Greece was part of NEA.

THEROS: No. At that time if you were a "hyphenated"-American you did not go to your home country. That was made very clear at that time.

Q: I would've thought there would have been tremendous pressure then to make you into an ARA student.

THEROS: I made it so clear that I was never going to go back to ARA ever again [Laughs.] and that I wanted to get into NEA. And by the time I came out of Nicaragua I fought it tooth and nail and I just kept campaigning for Arabic-language training. I kept fighting for Arabic language training all the way through the Ops Center. One of the good things about being in the Ops Center is it meant that I was an SS (the Secretariat – the Secretary's support office) and it meant that I could meet people who could pull strings. So I'd say by Christmas, January of 1968, '69, I was on the road to the language school in Beirut.

Q: How did you find NEA?

THEROS: I liked NEA. NEA gave you a sense of being part of the crowd. They treated us with respect. NEA was the least politicized of the Bureaus, at least from what I knew of ARA and a little stint in EUR (Bureau of European & Canadian Affairs, Department of State) that I had done early on. I was very impressed with the professionalism of the people. I was not impressed with the professionalism of the senior people in ARA. ARA struck me as a dead-end Bureau.

Q: I came into the Foreign Service in '55 and I would sort of learn that in the corridors. You know, it's a black hole if you go there. Very obviously, it's not the forefront of American concerns—and it still isn't, with minor exceptions.

THEROS: You got a feeling that the political drudges ran ARA. It was not an impressive Bureau then. I wanted to get into NEA really badly and I wanted to take Arabic really badly.

Q: So how were they teaching Arabic? You took Arabic from '69 to '70. How did they teach Arabic in those days?

THEROS: The system had instructors and scientific linguists. The instructors had a rather rigid curriculum that began with teaching spoken Arabic. No one really knows how to teach Arabic. It's still one of the big mysteries of the world. They had six months of spoken Arabic using transliteration and then after that you picked up the writing system as a separate course of study. I had already learned, through Saudi Arabia, the writing system and had a very large vocabulary with a Saudi accent and very poor grammar. And then what they were teaching the first six months was sort of Palestinian Jerusalem Arabic colloquial, with a grammar … I had learned it with bad Saudi grammar and now they were trying to teach me a spoken language which they would refuse to let me read except in Latin characters. But I was good at it. I was very good at it. I had a large vocabulary. And I was single. There was also a rule that if you were in Beirut and single, you learned Arabic better than if you were in Beirut and married.

Q: Oh yes. I mean this is true of any language.

THEROS: And I got out a lot and met a lot of Lebanese, a lot of Palestinians and so forth, and I did very well in Arabic. I had this running gunfight with the instructors. It was the instructors who taught and the scientific linguist who would monitor the classes and who would give you the tests. The instructors were all native speakers and they were all very rigid. They had a curriculum and they would just follow the curriculum by the book.

It wasn't a bad system. I was off-center on it because I came in with Arabic and they had trouble trying to figure out where to put me because, as I say, I came into Arabic backwards; I came into Arabic with a huge vocabulary, no grammar, and an accent that was very alien to the accent of what they were teaching. Usually there were three to five people in every class; I spent fourteen months there with individual instruction almost all the way through because I didn't fit. There were a couple of times when they would stick me in with somebody else's class, but by and large I simply didn't fit. I either lacked the knowledge of the more advanced students but knew too much to be with the new students. The instructors accommodated this well. I have to say, in fairness, the scientific linguists also tried to individualize and accommodate the instruction to me.

Again, Beirut was a nice place to be single.

Q: Were you there during Black September?

THEROS: No, I went to Jordan for Black September.

Q: Were you able to pick up the residue from?

THEROS: In October of '69 fighting broke out in Beirut. We didn't see it so much

downtown in Beirut, but you could hear the gunfire in the distance, and this was when the Lebanese government made the fatal mistake of legitimizing the existence of the Palestinian militias, under pressure from the other Arabs. It was a really stupid mistake. Then the Palestinian militias began to be more visible in the street, which would then anger the Lebanese militias, which would then lead to occasional incidents. But then the focus shifted to Jordan, where things had been falling apart steadily since the '67 war. In April of 1970 there was a series of incidents, including the rape of two women dependents at the American Embassy.

Q: By whom?

THEROS: By Palestinians —whom the Palestinians promptly arrested and hung,

Q: But I don't think of rape as being a particularly Arab trait.

THEROS: No, it wasn't. These men were bragging about it and the Palestinian military police picked them up and held a summary trial and hung them the next day for having done this.

There was a fair amount of sympathy in the United States, particularly in academic circles, for the Palestinians. The Israelis were clearly hoping for a Palestinian victory and the Syrians were hoping for a Palestinian victory. King Hussein looked to be pretty much on the ropes.

Q: You're talking about a Palestinian victory in ….

THEROS: In Jordan. I'd say this for Nixon: Nixon hung in there. He did not think a Palestinian victory in Jordan would be a good thing. They essentially tried to browbeat the U.S. government but ultimately the neighbors of Jordan came to accept that this was an American position.

Q: Why would the Israelis opt for the overthrow?

THEROS: They wanted a Palestinian state. And once you have a Palestinian state, all these Palestinians living west of the Jordan River have a legal status that undermines their status in Occupied Palestine. They would become legally Palestinian citizens and they could ultimately be encouraged to migrate across the Jordan River to the new Palestinian state. Ariel Sharon still talks about it.

So, in April, May, several of us who were in Arabic language and who were single were told that we would be going to Jordan. The Department had made the decision to pull all the married people out of Jordan (they didn't know how long this crisis would go on) and replace everybody in Embassy Amman who was married with single people, as much as they could.

Q: While you were in Beirut, were you able to pick up any feeling of your fellow officers,

the Embassy and others, towards Israel?

THEROS: Generally I would say most of the officers who had Arabic were more sympathetic to the Palestinians. The issues were not quite so painful as they are now. For example, you were allowed to talk to the Palestinians. This was pre-Kissinger; isolating the Palestinians to make them into pariahs. Washington was less hard over. It was possible— 242 was still U.S. policy.

Q: This was UN (United Nations) Resolution 242 returning the previous '67 boundaries to the various parties.

THEROS: So the issues were more clear-cut than they are now. The Palestinians were still not recognized as a real entity even though they had the PLO (Palestine Liberation Organization). People were still thinking in terms of the Jordanians getting back the West Bank and then figuring out what they were going to do with the Palestinians, and the Egyptians getting back Gaza. At that point Cairo and Amman had not yet reached the point where they were trying to discourage this line of thinking. The Egyptians, of course, were more concerned with getting Sinai back at that point.

It always looked like there was some solution just around the corner.

Jordan, 1970-1974

Q: Well this was not a period where the Nixon Administration got very engaged in this area, was it? You had the Rodgers Plan and other things.

THEROS: The first real engagement came with Black September, or Glorious September, as the Jordanians refer to it. When we moved two aircraft carriers off the Lebanese and Syrian coast and began to fly military supplies in to the Jordanians was the first serious engagement.

Q: By that time you were already in Jordan.

THEROS: No, I was scheduled to arrive in Jordan on the seventeenth of September and the Jordanian army attacked the Palestinians on the sixteenth, so I was stuck in Beirut for one more month.

I remember distinctly a few days after the first of October or so Nasser died, and Beirut just exploded when Nasser died. Shortly thereafter I went to Amman the day after the airport opened, which would be around the fifth or sixth of October.

Q: You were in Amman from October 1970 until …

THEROS: Just after New Year's Eve 1973 -74.

Q: Black September was essentially referring to September 1970.

THEROS: Yes, it actually lasted for six months. This is one thing historians forget. It was not one big bash, and then it was over.

Q: While you were in Beirut still, was the feeling that the Jordanians probably wouldn't make it?

THEROS: The American press was terribly sympathetic to the Palestinians. The international press generally was also sympathetic to the Palestinians; American and European academia—the think tanks insofar as we had them in those days, and the people who were writing articles—were very sympathetic.

Q: Were they trashing the king?

THEROS: They were trashing the king, trashing the East Bankers as such as illiterate Bedouin. The king didn't have a lot of friends other than Richard Nixon at the time, and it wasn't until the first round, the two weeks beginning on the seventeenth of September, that it became obvious that the Jordanians were not going to lie down and get walked over.

Q: Was the reading from the Embassy was that the Palestinians would probably take off?

THEROS: No, the Embassy was probably the only voice in the U.S. government at the time.

Q: You're talking about the Embassy in Jordan.

THEROS: The (U.S.) Embassy in Jordan. It was probably the only voice in the U.S. government at the time that was saying the Jordanians are going to win and the Palestinians aren't.

Q: Was the calculation that the Arab Legion was really the only organized military force?

THEROS: (Yes, they were) a professional military force. The Palestinians were engaged not in guerrilla warfare against them, but in conventional warfare. It was street-to-street fighting, but it was still conventional warfare. And there was no unity of mission behind the Palestinians. Arafat was not in command. It was unclear who was in command, but he wasn't. There was no unified plan.

Q: When you arrived there in October of '70, what was the situation on the ground?

THEROS: The Palestinians controlled inner Amman entirely; the Jordanians controlled the suburbs. The Embassy was just inside the line that the Jordanians controlled. It was interesting; there would be three or four days of truce, then three or four days of fighting.

During the truce, we went downtown into the Palestinian-controlled areas. People moved around freely and so forth and then the fighting would break out again. The point where everybody met was the Intercon because this was where the Arab League Higher Truce Follow-up Committee met.

Q: The Intercontinental Hotel.

THEROS: Yes, the Arab League Higher Truce Follow-up Committee is a rough translation, and this was a group that was sent there to look after the truce and try to maintain order, and every time some fighting would break out, the two protagonists would show up and blame the other guy for starting it.

Q: Who was our Ambassador at the time?

THEROS: Our Ambassador was Dean Brown, L. Dean Brown. He was one of the best guys I ever knew in my life.

Q: Tell me how he operated.

THEROS: I remember that he looked like Jimmy Cagney, and he felt that was an appropriate description. He'd seen enough Jimmy Cagney movies. He was short, bouncy. He saw people. I thought he was one of the best Ambassadors I ever served with. He knew what U.S. policy was, and he had an intelligent approach to its application. He had certain Scotch terrier qualities: putting his teeth into something and not letting go.

Q: Did you get any feel for the relationship between Ambassador Brown and the king?

THEROS: He was the first American Ambassador we ever sent out there who was no taller than the king. That was a serious factor in this. Remember, the king had PNG'd (declared persona non grata) our previous Ambassador, Harrison Simms, I think it was.

At that time Joe Sisco was supposed to come to Amman, and there was a riot around the Embassy. They burned some of the Embassy cars, including the Ambassador's car. The Ambassador sent a message to Sisco not to come because they couldn't guarantee his safety. He was more pissed off about his car. The king summoned him to demand an explanation as to why Sisco hadn't come. Harrison Simms, at about 6 foot 5, made the mistake of leaning over the king's desk to make his point and even when the king stood up he was still leaning over the king. At the end the king terminated the interview by telling him that he wanted him out of here and out of the country. That was the first and only American Ambassador ever PNG'd from Jordan.

Q: What were you doing?

THEROS: I was the junior political officer again. Hume Horan was the political officer and then Hume's bad luck, and my good luck, was that Hume went water-skiing with a congressional visitor in Aqaba. He dove off his skis head first into four inches of water.

He came back up and had actually broken several vertebrae and was medically evacuated. I was political officer for the next six months. There were those who accused me of having arranged Hume's accident, but I liked Hume so I wouldn't have done that. [Laughs.]

Q: What were you doing at the Embassy? You say you had a period of months while there was a war going on.

THEROS: We got out and tried to know what was going on. It was basically a very small Embassy at that point and other than a very small military mission sending supplies to the Jordanian army, AID (Agency for International Development) had been shut down, the commercial people had been shut down, and it was half a dozen of us left. Our principle task was information collection. I don't think we did anything else but information collection.

Q: Besides collecting information, were we also trying to buck up the Jordanians?

THEROS: That wasn't necessary. Restraining them was more the issue. The Jordanians had the bit in their teeth.

Q: Restraining them from doing what?

THEROS: Surprising us with things they would do. We didn't want the Jordanians blamed for breaking the truce, and most of the time they were breaking the truce.

Q: Were we talking to the Palestinians?

THEROS: Yes, at that time we could.

Q: What were the Palestinians saying? Were they saying they were going to take over this country?

THEROS: Pretty much. There were two sides locked in battle. It was war. The number of people looking for a compromise was very small. I think both sides recognized that there was no compromise. The Palestinians had boxed themselves into a situation in which it was victory or death to free the country.

"The Palestinians" does not mean the Palestinian population of Jordan. It means the militants of the PLO. Most of the Palestinian population of Jordan was perfectly intent to sit this one out, try to keep body and soul together, and figure out what they were going to do with their lives when it was all over.

Q: We'd report what was going on, but was it a feeling for some time while you were there that Amman was sort of a lonely voice in sort of the American overseas apparatus?

THEROS: What's the old saying? Is it that "victory has a thousand fathers; defeat is an

orphan"? Well once it became clear, I'd say probably by about November the Jordanians were going to win, and all of a sudden everybody agreed with us.

Q: [Laughs.]

THEROS: Some of the press hung in there a little bit, but not very long. By November - December it was clear that the Jordanians would win.

Q: It's interesting when you talk about the American press and American academics, that the Palestinians were sort of the forces of good as opposed to the old medieval forces of the king or something.

THEROS: What's interesting is that when the Palestinians were leftist dictators, with leftist dictatorial tendencies, they had the support of the American press. Now that they've become sort of centrists committed to democracy, they've lost all American press support.

Q: Were you getting visitors while you were out there?

THEROS: We got a lot of congressmen out there. Towards the end we got Henry a lot.

Q: Henry Kissinger.

THEROS: Yes, but we also got a lot of congressmen early on. During the fighting we got nobody, then we got a certain steady flow of congressional visitors, the occasional military visitor, and then after the '73 war during October of '73 we were suddenly unable to get rid of Henry Kissinger.

Q: We were flying military supplies in from our carriers and all?

THEROS: Well, they'd come down from Europe.

Q: What was the role of the British?

THEROS: The British were generally supportive but didn't have a lot of resources to throw at it. They delivered some supplies to the king.

Q: Well there was this period of time—I don't know where you were at that time—when the Syrians were mobilizing.

THEROS: Actually, the Syrians pushed two divisions across the border with Palestinian shoulder patches on them. One division pushed to seal off northeastern Jordan and the other one pushed down the road to Amman. Two things went wrong for the Syrians. The first one was that Hafiz Al-Assad unilaterally refused to commit the Syrian Air Force to this adventure. His argument was, if you're posing as Palestinians how can you have the Air Force committed?

Q: Yes.

THEROS: So in the Jordanian Air Force took its very few airplanes that were able to go out and hit tanks on the ground.

The other factor was that clearly the Syrians officers were not committed to this. They saw that this was a crazy scheme. As soon as they suffered reverses, the officers commanding the two divisions just turned the units around and went home; and this led to the overthrow of the Syrian government by Assad a couple months later.

Q: Was then the implicit threat that the Israelis might move in if things get bad?

THEROS: This is one of these myths that had been passed around. At the risk of coming close to violating classified information, I don't know how much I'm supposed to talk about, since back then it was classified.

Q: Time has passed.

THEROS: The king asked us to send a message to Israel saying, "I need your help." Things were really desperate in the early days of Black September. After about three days, the Israeli message arrived within about the same time the Syrian army. The Israeli response was: "This is really none of our business. This is an inter-Arab, Jordanian-Palestinian issue that we will not interfere in." The story that the Israelis mobilized and sent troops to intimidate the Syrians is complete balderdash. I'm not going to use a stronger term.

Q: It's very interesting because that's been around for a long time.

THEROS: Now, two U.S. carriers off the Syrian coast were not balderdash. I remember in Beirut I was sitting in a restaurant for a little bit and all of a sudden the television started going blip every sixteen seconds; and what was interesting was the waiters in the restaurant knew what it was. It was the early warning radar of the American carriers. They knew exactly what it was. They were looking forward to the Americans coming back to Lebanon to spend money.

Q: Were you getting any feel for what was the ruling political class, or whatever you want to call it, of Jordan?

THEROS: There wasn't one. Jordan is a rather egalitarian society. There was the king's inner circle, but it was drawn from different people, the clans of Jordan. Arab society, unlike Latin society, is organized vertically. Family counts for more than class. If you've got a poor relative who was in a fight with a rich foreigner with whom you're doing business, a rich Majalli will support will support a poor Majalli against a rich Habbabni, because family and clan and the vertical nature of society comes first. Muslims from Karak will support Christians from Karak in a dispute against Muslims from another

town. It's an intricate web of clans, and basically the king had to draw each of the clans, but it was not a class per se.

The Circassians could be regarded as a clan, for example; all of the Circassians. Even the Palestinians were still organized vertically, but the families were not as large. There was a very significant number of upper class Palestinians who had thrown in their lot with the king.

Q: Where, as a political officer, were you working with others to break down these family webs and all, or did you have more on your plate than to worry about that sort of thing?

THEROS: It was actually easy. I praise myself a little bit, but I've got good Arabic, and I come from a culture that is extremely similar to Jordanian culture.

Q: Having served in Greece for four years I always felt that there was a tremendous mistake by putting it into the European Bureau.

THEROS: I feel that very strongly.

When I got to Jordan and got to know the society, I concluded that it was like the Greece that my father had described when he left in 1913. My father left Greece, I think I mentioned, because he was accused of shooting somebody at a wedding. I went to a number of weddings in Jordan that were accompanied by automatic gunfire.

Q: [Laughs.]

THEROS: So I got into the society very well. I flatter myself that I probably got into the society better than anybody else.

Q: How were Americans perceived in Jordanian society?

THEROS: The East Bank Jordanians loved the Americans at that point. Collectively and individually they loved the Americans. The Americans could do no wrong. The Palestinians were too busy figuring out how they were going to conform to the new society where the Jordanians were clearly in charge, because the Palestinians were more influential and powerful in Jordan before the civil war. They did not want to show a lot of hostility towards Americans. Basically, Arabs liked Americans for a long time. So even though you could be mad at the U.S. government as a polity, you didn't take it out on the individual American very much.

Q: Did our policy toward Israel at this particular moment, during the Black September time, have any particular effects or was this something that almost was beyond that?

THEROS: It wasn't as blatant, our support for Israel, in 1970. I mean the Rodgers Plan was clearly the kind of plan the Israelis didn't like. The U.S. government had taken a number of initiatives in '69 and '70 that the Israelis objected to and it was obvious the

U.S. government was viewed as more balanced; it was supportive of Israel, but there were limits to its support.

Q: What was the Jordanian government's view, and you might say population view, towards the West Bank? Because this had been at least under the protection of Jordan.

THEROS: Well, remember Jordan annexed the West Bank at the request of the West Bankers, the Palestinian "notables" in 1949. After '67 the general view among East Bankers was that they wanted nothing more to do with the West Bank, after '70 in particular. But the king and the government still regarded it as their responsibility. It wasn't until '87 that the king finally severed all his ties with the West Bank.

Q: Well when you say responsibility, it wasn't a sense of acquisitiveness; it was sort of a duty.

THEROS: There were two parts; one is juridical, they regarded the West Bank as part of Jordan; two, Dean Brown once described the king as the last man in the world who still read Kipling and believed him. This was a man who was obsessed with what the history books would say fifty years after his death. The Hashemites had already lost Mecca and Medina and if they were to lose Jerusalem this would be a disaster compounded upon catastrophe. I think until the day of his death the king's role in Jerusalem was uppermost in his mind. What would people say of him if he was the one who abandoned Jerusalem?

Q: Was there a feeling of we shall return, and all of that, realistically?

THEROS: Among the Palestinian population, yes; among the Jordanians, a little less so. But Jerusalem was another issue. The king was so tied up with Jerusalem that no one even spoke differently than that.

Q: Whom were you seeing of the Palestinians?

THEROS: Everybody. The Palestinians were fairly integrated in Jordanian society. They completely controlled commerce. They controlled most of the technical ministries. The only ministries that were not Palestinian-controlled were interior and foreign affairs. The military was numerically Palestinian but East Bank Jordanian in its leadership. I'd say the breakdown of the military was about fifty-fifty, with the preponderance of East Bankers in the officer corps.

Q: But they held true?

THEROS: They held true. There were less than a thousand people who deserted in 1970.

Q: When this thing wound down, was there concern about what to do about the Palestinians?

THEROS: No. The militants had fled to Lebanon. The armed people had fled to Lebanon

and it was now Lebanon's problem. The Palestinians remaining in Jordan who identified themselves as Palestinians were working full-time and not being visible as Palestinians. They were also training their kids on how to pronounce words with a Jordanian accent.

Q: So you were there, again, from '70 to when?

THEROS: Seventy-four. Now that I think about it, I actually left on the third of January '74.

Q: Is there anything before we move to the October war?

THEROS: I'm trying to think if there's anything significant to remember. I was assigned to Benghazi as Consul General and then Libya broke relations. They closed the consulate in Benghazi so I extended for a year in Amman.

Q: After the war was over, what was a political officer doing?

THEROS: Doing much of the same thing, which was collecting information. Throughout the whole time I was in Jordan, I was primarily the chief State Department intelligence collection officer, and to a lesser degree I was Dean Brown's dog walker carrying the bag. I did a lot of translations. I would go with him to a lot of meetings and translate. I was also sort of the Bedouin outreach officer. A lot of people wanted to invite the Ambassador to lunch to the "mansaf" the big rice-and-lamb spread. The Ambassador felt he had to go to one once a week. One of my corollary duties was to rank order the Bedouins and arrange a different lunch meeting each week, and then I had this duty list as to who goes to lunch this week.

Q: When I was in Dhahran you would go to a lamb grab.

THEROS: That's right. We did it about three to four times a month. It was always my duty to arrange it. I would do the social part of it. There was a lot of that.

Q: Well then we move to the October war. How did this hit you when you first heard about this?

THEROS: Well, I have a special story to tell.

Q: All right, let's have the special story.

THEROS: In the course of arranging lunches for the Ambassador out in the middle of the desert, I had developed a close personal relationship with a Bedouin smuggler whose tribe was the furthest tribe out near the Iraqi-Jordanian border. One day he and I were having coffee together at the Intercontinental Hotel and he said, "by the way, Syria is going to attack Israel next Saturday evening, the sixth of October 1973." And I said, "You've got to be kidding?" He says, "No. They're going to attack them on Saturday." I said. "How do you know?" He said: "Well, I conduct a lot of smuggling operations

through Syria to Turkey and all of a sudden my tribe was having their trucks commandeered. So I went and asked my cousin why the trucks were being commandeered and he said, 'because we're going to attack Israel on Saturday.'" I said: "How does your cousin know?" He said: "Well he's deputy chief of staff for operations of the Syrian Army." [Laughs.]

I was sort of at a loss as to what to do with this at that point, because the man was reliable; he had been a reliable source in everything else he'd ever said. But this one struck me as so bizarre. I thought he was pulling my leg, so I grilled him a little bit more and that was his story; he was sticking to it. So I wandered back to the Embassy in a bit of a shock. Ambassador Dean Brown was on leave. Pierre, I can't remember his last name, was the brand-new DCM; he'd just arrived in Amman. He'd been there about a week at that point; knew nothing about the Arab world, having never served in the Arab world before. A couple of my elders, like the defense attaché and some other folk, all decided this was balderdash.

The attaché who was a hawkish sort of man was known as "Clarence" of Arabia. [Laughs.] He was a very silly man. The army attaché was a good man. I went to them, shared the information with them. The senior people, except the DCM who was totally ignorant of what this represented, did not want me to report it. The junior people said we should. The DCM finally said, "Report it, but stick a caveat in." The caveat was to begin the report with the line "Incredible as it may sound…" and then went on to report.

Nothing happened on the second, third, fourth of October. On the morning of the fifth of October we received a message from the Department that said, they have shared this with the Israelis, and the Israelis know all about it. "It is only a training exercise"—so we went to bed quietly. Actually, I had a particular problem because I had a tapeworm at the time and I decided that since nothing was going to happen on the sixth of October I was going to get rid of the tapeworm by taking this massive dose of medicine the night before

Q: This is to flush you out.

THEROS: This is to flush you out. This is really dramatically to flush you out.

People don't realize how often we talk about being flushed out of the Foreign Service, particularly in this part of the world. So I'm lying in bed at two o'clock in the afternoon when the cook comes, just screaming with his hair on fire, in the bedroom saying, "War! War! War!" War had broken out. I decided to defer further use of the tapeworm medicine until the end of the war.

All the man's information was correct. He told me the afternoon on the sixth of October, and I heard him say the morning of the sixth of October. Otherwise he was accurate. The Syrians had attacked. It was a complete surprise to the Israelis. The Egyptians had attacked at just about the same hour.

What was fascinating was listening to the radio. I had listened to Arab radios and Israelis

radios in the 1967 War and then the War of Attrition in 1968, ‘69, and ‘70, and it was always the Arab radios that were hysterical, announcing great victories, and the Israelis radios that were calm, cool, collected and just giving news as it was. Israel had developed tremendous credibility at a period of time before then. During the early days of the ’73 war the role was flipped. It was Cairo and Damascus reporting the news fairly straight, fairly accurately, and it was the Israelis who had lost it and were reporting with a great deal of hysteria. Unfortunately, the Syrians and the Egyptians had lost credibility in the ’67 war, so no one believed them.

It wasn’t until after the war was over that we realized just how deeply inside Israel the Syrians had gotten. I spent that day with the Ambassador, and the Ambassador decided we were going to destroy all the files at post.

Q: Now had the Ambassador come back?

THEROS: I’m sorry. I digressed. The Ambassador happened to be in Washington when the war broke out. He didn’t tell Washington what he was doing; he got on an airplane to London, he called the king; (there was no flight into Amman) so he got an airplane to Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, and the king sent an airplane down to get him and they flew sort of over the treetops—there were no treetops; it was the desert all the way—back to Jordan, He arrived backed in Jordan really fast. He left in the afternoon of the sixth from Washington and was in Jordan sometime on the eighth.

At that point the Jordanians still had not realized that the Syrians were winning. Is this a good place to put what we got on the after-action afterwards?

Q: Yes, sure.

THEROS: We didn’t know at the time, but what had happened was that the Syrians had lined themselves up on the Golan in what was generally classic Soviet tactical formation, as you echelon your divisions one behind the other, and they launched the First Corps. Standard Soviet tactics had the first division plow into the enemy lines and get eaten up; the second division crossed through and continued hitting them. So it’s a series of blows into a single point. And the Syrians had succeeded beyond their wildest expectations. They had essentially shattered the Israeli lines on the Golan. I went to Israel about two weeks after the war was over and saw burnt-out Syrian tanks in the Golan; there were burnt out Syrian tanks in Tiberius. The Israeli army had lost cohesion in the larger units; the individual platoons and companies were fighting bravely, but they were not fighting as a cohesive force.

The problem was that the lead Syrian units had also lost cohesion and their communications were no longer operating effectively back in Damascus. This all came from, by the way, debriefing the Jordanians after the war ended. The Syrian general staff, expecting defeat in a political war, concluded that the first echelon, the First Corps, had been wiped out and was unaware that they had actually broken through. The road to Haifa was open. There was no Israeli unit larger than company size between them and

Haifa. But the First Corps had been pretty much been decimated itself. The battle was confused. The First Corps actually penetrated the Israeli lines and crossed the Jordan River; however, Syrian command communications broke down and, not having enough information, the Syrian General Staff concluded the First Corps had been defeated and pulled Second Corps back into a defensive position, not knowing that the First Corps had actually succeeded. This gave the Israelis a chance to regroup and counterattack.

Something very similar happened in the Suez Canal. The Egyptian army—expecting again, a very defeatist view, as a result of having been defeated in '67—had prepared attacks at seven points across the Suez Canal. They had assumed that most of those attacks would have failed. So they had lined up armor along on the west side of the canal and the operational order to the armored units was that the first bridge that gets across and stays up, all the units funnel across that one bridge assuming most of the other attacks would fail. In fact, all seven of the attacks succeeded. All seven of the infantry brigades got their bridges across, and the armor behind the canal, the armor west of the canal, crossed on the bridge in front of it automatically, not knowing that the other six succeeded as well.

Their difficult problem there is there's no good lateral road on the east bank of the canal, so the Egyptians couldn't get their units together. They had great difficulty connecting with the unit that had crossed the canal at the same time. And the only place that could come together was at the Mitla Pass, which was about forty miles in from the canal. And that's when the Egyptians came out from under their defensive air strikes that had kept the Israeli Air Force from attacking them, too quickly. They got out into the open desert and came to the Mitla Pass, and that's when the Israeli counterattack succeeded.

What was interesting was that the Syrians and the Egyptians were both concerned about Israel having nuclear weapons and broadcasters were constantly reassuring messages from the Syrians and the Egyptian to the Israelis that their objectives are only the territories occupied in '67, and no further than that. They put great pressure on the king to attack, from Jordan. The Jordanian army had mobilized and was beginning to move down into the Jordan Valley. We spent most nights out listening to the Jordanian army to see where it was going.

Q: Let's move to Amman and what you were doing.

THEROS: Like everybody else, we and all the other Western embassies were on the streets every night trying to figure out where the Jordanian army was moving. Basically they were moving their major forces down into the valley against the river.

Two things happened to prevent the Jordanians from winning the war there actually. One is the king's overall reluctance, having been sucked into the '67 war, to get sucked into what was likely to be another losing operation; the second was intense pressure from the United States.

It was Ramadan and I went with the Ambassador, mostly as an interpreter. He saw the

king every night between about one o'clock and three o'clock in the morning, urging him not to get involved. He passed on the message to the king—falsely as we later discovered—that the initial Israeli defense had been successful. The Israelis also pulled a deception that was fairly successful. The Israeli mobilization had fallen apart and what troops it could find were being sent off to the two fronts of attack. What they did do, however, is that they moved the communications units of about two divisions to the valley and these guys began to chat back and forth. So there was an intense amount of Israeli communication.

Q: When you say the back, you're talking about the Jordanian front.

THEROS: Yes, so there was an intense amount of Israeli communications going on in the valley at the same time, lending further credence to the argument that the Israeli army was up and standing. The truth of the matter, as we later discovered, there was nothing between the Jordanians and Jerusalem, except the border guards. Had they launched across the river, they probably would have gotten to Jerusalem. The Israelis were that close to a catastrophic defeat. Of course this then raises the question of the nuclear option again, but that's something that they never had to face.

Q: What was the thinking about what might trigger this?

THEROS: Catastrophe. In other words, the problem is we didn't know what the Israeli definition of catastrophe was and neither did the Arabs. The assumption was that there was some line. They hadn't developed nuclear weapons just for fun. The assumption was that there was some line that the Arabs had to cross that the Israelis would see as irretrievable disaster, from which they could not recover. Certainly defeat in the Sinai was not such a line because the bottom line is if you've lost Sinai, what have you lost? In the Golan it would have been more the agricultural heartland of Israel right up against the Golan Heights. And had the Jordanians crossed and headed for Jerusalem, then you might have crossed some emotional lines.

The dilemma for the Israelis, however, was that had they used their weapons strategically it would not have stopped the army. If they were losing, the Arab armies, particularly the Egyptians and the Syrians, were Soviet-trained, Soviet-equipped armies designed to continue to operate even after you've decapitated their political leadership. They're sort of a "launch and forget" army. So nuclear strikes in Cairo and Damascus would not have made any difference except it would have gotten a lot of people really pissed off. And it would not have affected the fortunes of the conflict. If, as I say, in a catastrophic situation, tactical nuclear strikes would have meant nuclear strikes on Israeli territory in Israeli towns, so again you have to balance that off. No one really knows what would have occurred.

The Israelis regained the initiative. We all know its history. They pushed the Syrians back to about where they had been when the war broke out, maybe a little further back. They achieved a brief bridgehead on the other side of the canal, and then Kissinger stepped in and we had a massive American resupply.

One of the dramatic moments of the war came when the king decided to make a token gesture and sent the Jordanian army Fortieth Armored Brigade to the Syrian front. The Israelis delivered an ultimatum to the Jordanians not to do it, or they would attack Jordan; the king called their bluff, and he sent the brigade. It was sort of a bad night for us; we all went up on the roof of the Embassy. It was a clear, moonlit night; somebody said it was a bombardier's moon, but nothing happened. The fighting was confined to the Golan front. The Israelis did not even bomb the Iraqi troops coming down from Iraq, through Jordan, into Syria. The Israelis clearly understood it was not in their interest to widen the war. I remember the Saudis sent a brigade to the front, and it got lost out in the desert. The Saudi army was still a question of whether they were just incompetent or unwilling to engage. In any event, they never made it to the front lines.

Q: When Brown came back, did you get involved with Brown? What was his role?

THEROS: Yes, at that point I was his fair-haired boy, considering the color of my hair was not very impressive, but he basically kept me along as his note taker, dog walker, translator, and anything else that was needed. I went to all the meetings with him.

Q: So let's talk about when he came back. What did he do when he came back?

THEROS: He saw himself as having one mission, which was to keep the Jordanians out of the war. And of course to do the necessary things: to get the Embassy ready in case the war did come. I remember he ordered the destruction of all classified material. The equipment was designed to destroy everything we had at the Embassy in two hours. It turned out that of course everybody squirrels away more stuff than you could ever want, so it took us fifteen hours to destroy it.

Q: Okay, the Ambassador comes back and he goes immediately to see the king?

THEROS: Pretty much.

Q: What was he telling the king?

THEROS: He was telling the king that he should stay out of the war. His arguments were that, one, "you got sucked into the war in '67 and it was disastrous for you; don't do it again. Two, the Israelis will win, and three, you're entering the war will only get the Israelis mad at you; it will not be enough to tip the battle in favor of the Arabs". The last argument, in fact, turned out historically to be wrong, which is one of the grudges that King Hussein harbored against the Americans for the rest of his life. His later said he made two great mistakes in his life: one was getting involved in the '67 war and the other was not getting involved in the '73 war.

Q: Was Brown acting more or less on his own? Had he his marching orders, or were there a series of instructions coming from Washington?

THEROS: It was, I'd say, four-fifths he knew what to do; one-fifth the instructions were catching up to what he was already doing. But he clearly saw this as his mission to keep the Jordanian government from joining the war.

Q: It went without saying that after the '67 war the results of that hung heavily, particularly on the Arab side. They went into it with the idea that eventually they'd lose.

THEROS: That certainly was Sadat's view. I'm not sure that Assad actually had that view. I think Assad may have felt that he could have retaken the Golan.

Q: Yes. Well, they had a limited objective.

THEROS: They had more limited objective.

Q: In a way, the Jordanian army probably was the only one to really threaten the vitals of Israel, wasn't it?

THEROS: In a sense. It had four divisions, one armored, two mech, and one foot infantry. It could have gone for Jerusalem.

Q: Did you have the feeling? Or did Brown have the feeling and was conveying it to you, or not, that there were people on the Jordanian side fighting for the king's soul in a way? You know, his military commanders, political commanders, saying, "Go for it," or not?

THEROS: The military was being very quiet. I had a lot of friends in the Jordanian military at the time. It was simply, "What do you want to do, and we will do it". One had the impression at the time that the military was not leaning in either direction. They were simply giving the king a professional assessment of what was going on.

The assessment, I think, tended to push him towards caution because Jordanian intelligence was picking up contradictory information. On the one hand, the Jordanians had a radar station in a place called Ajloun that looked down into Israel, and they could count the number of airplanes that took off heading for Syria, and they could count the number of airplanes coming back. There were always fewer coming back, so the Jordanians had actually a fairly accurate assessment of what Israeli losses in the air war were. That would push the king towards a decision to get involved.

On the other side, the Jordanian intelligence—the Jordanian signals people—were picking up an intense amount of traffic from these phantom Israeli units that were up against the valley and were reporting back to the king that they had traffic representing the existence of perhaps two to three Israeli divisions moving up. It was a well-done deception on the part of the Israelis.

Politically, I'd say that most people in Jordan were wary of what had happened in '67. The civil war, remember, in Jordan had just ended in the summer of '71. So there was still a lot of exhaustion left over. There was not a lot of war fever.

It got a bit dicey because the Egyptians did some very smart political stuff. The Egyptians took about a couple thousand Israeli prisoners in the Canal, including a significant number of officers, and they did some very well choreographed television presentations of the interrogations of these officers. There was a brigade commander of this brigade that had been annihilated. He had been captured. The man was broken. His morale was shot. It was a classic case. Two very civilized Egyptian colonels who were offering him cigarettes and a drink and so forth were interrogating him; his hand was shaking, and he was crying. He was recounting how this tank blew up, and that tank blew up, and that tank blew up, and they didn't know where the fire was coming from. This began to encourage people in Jordan to think maybe they ought to join the war. At the time that was being broadcast, the focus of the war had actually changed and it was losing now.

Q: How did the king respond when you and the Ambassador went in to see him? Was he by himself?

THEROS: Usually it was the king; Crown Prince Hassan and Sharif Zaid ibn Shaker, who was the commander of the army, sort of the minister of defense; the king's cousin; and maybe one or two army officers, were around. So essentially Hashemites plus a couple of senior army officers were at all of the meetings. All of the meetings, with one or two exceptions, took place wherever the king happened to be that night, and it was usually in some army unit.

Q: Was the Ambassador going on almost a daily basis there?

THEROS: More than daily. He'd see the king at least once or twice a day.

Q: Well he had the same message to say each time.

THEROS: Yes, with just a little more information, a little more reason why the king shouldn't do it.

Q: In other words, we were feeding him information that we thought was accurate. Is that right?

THEROS: He certainly thought that it was accurate.

Q: Who did?

THEROS: The Ambassador. He certainly thought it was accurate. My impression is that Washington thought it was accurate when they were feeding it to him. I don't think there was an American attempt to deceive King Hussein. There certainly was an Israeli attempt to deceive the Americans and to deceive King Hussein.

Q: So the Israelis may have been using their American connection to foster this idea that this is a losing war for the Arabs?

THEROS: Yes, I think, as a matter of fact, they even kept the extent of the initial two-days disaster from us because they didn't want the Arabs to learn how badly they had been hurt.

Q: How did you find the CIA (Central Intelligence Agency)?

THEROS: We were getting good stuff from the Arabs, which, as I said, later turned out to be more accurate than we had thought at the time. The Arabs weren't getting good information, in the sense that what was feeding up from the front line units to the Arabs in Cairo was where we had minimal representation, and in Damascus we had no representation, and then being fed from Damascus to Jordan—where we did have representation and access—was, by the time it would come up and get through several filters, fragmentary and contradictory. A lot of what I'm telling you now, what actually happened, we didn't actually put together until after the war; and the fog of war was alive and well in 1973.

Q: Was your mindset and Brown's mindset influenced by the '67 war—that somehow or another Israelis are all-powerful?

THEROS: It was more a lack of confidence. Most of us had seen the Israeli army crossing the border. We were not impressed with it. However, we were even less impressed with the Arab armies. The Egyptians and the Syrians particularly looked sort of rag-tag.

Q: This is one of the themes that come through people there. I think here in the United States there's a feeling that somehow or another the Israeli army is practically without flaw, and I've talked to people who have seen it in action and they say it's what one might expect. It's a reserve army essentially, not terribly well trained.

THEROS: My personal opinion is the Israeli army has a few superb units at brigade level, a couple of other good army units, and some of their command units as well. The average Israeli brigade is probably not much better than the average Syrian brigade, given the same equipment. The Israelis are much better equipped. The Air Force is where it changes. The Air Force is first-class. It has excellent airplanes; they train extensively. When the Air Force was almost defeated in '73, it wasn't by the Arab Air Forces; it was that the Israelis had underestimated the effect of modern air defense system.

The Syrians solved a tactical strategic problem with their air defense. They decided to abandon the rest of the country and to pack all their air defenses between Damascus and the front. It was 110 kilometers wide and 80 kilometers deep and the Syrians just had packed their air defenses in there. Quite literally there was not one successful Israeli air strike into that area during the entire war. The Egyptians simply lined up a big concentrated area in defense of the Canal, and over the Canal, they were able to prevent the Israelis from providing close air support. But beyond that, when it was air force to air force, the Israeli Air Force generally was successful. They lost a few airplanes, but the

bulk of their losses were sustained from air defense units in very tight, very restricted areas within the front lines.

Q: Back to the king: Brown kept coming to him with this. I would think at a certain point it was questioned why the King was letting Brown come to him all the time.

THEROS: Because the King didn't know what to do. He sort of understood the historical significance of what he was about to do, in either direction. When I think back through my career, it was probably the moment of greatest historical significance. Had Brown failed, and the Jordanians had crossed the river against no opposition heading for Jerusalem, what would have happened? I might have been incinerated. I might not be here to tell you.

Q: One keeps forgetting about if, at a certain point, the Israelis had these nuclear bombs.

THEROS: Yes, keep in mind, this is in '73. Probably, and God only knows, this was early in the development of the Israeli nuclear program, so they probably had a limited number of large bombs. Large bombs are easier to make than small ones, so it wouldn't have been the kind of precision weapons they could have used against troops in the field. The only probable target would have been cities.

Q: Brown, right after these meetings with the king, would he say what his impressions were?

THEROS: Generally they were, "We've got another night; we just got through another twenty-four hours." It was about like that.

We had one moment of great embarrassment. Just before the war, the Jordanians had asked us for TOW anti-tank missiles, and we had refused. In refusing them we had informed the Jordanians that they were not released to anybody in the Middle East. About the fourth day of the war, the king said: "Do you remember when I asked for TOWS, and you told me that they weren't even being given to the Israelis? Well, I'd like to ask you what this is?" The Syrians had brought him a captured TOW that he showed us.

Q: Was there, as time went on, a tension building between the king and the Ambassador?

THEROS: No, they had a tremendous personal rapport. There was an understanding that they were both interested in the welfare of Jordan. Rapport is built on true interest in the welfare of the other guy; you want him to do what you want him to do, but you're conveying the empathy that's necessary. Otherwise you have no credibility. You might as well be a fax machine.

Q: Did the crown prince or any of the people during these meetings listen or take part in dialogue?

THEROS: I'd say it was three-quarters dialogue and one-quarter others getting to

participate. I never got to participate; I was just there to keep the record.

Q: Were you listening to asides in Arabic?

THEROS: Occasionally when the crown prince was there, he and Sharif Zaid bin Shaker, Chief of the Diwan, were generally polite enough to always keep it in English. The only time somebody would speak in Arabic might be if one of the senior army officers present said something to the king, but they were all conscious of the fact that I spoke Arabic, so it was not an attempt to hide information from me.

Q: Were we monitoring the Palestinians and obviously the Jordanians to know what was happening with the Palestinians that were in Jordan? After Black September, were the Palestinians pretty quiet within Jordan?

THEROS: There was a feeling that they had just been through a terrible war—from '69, the War of Attrition, through the end of Black September, and through the end of the Jordanian Civil War. There was not a lot of war passion in the whole population. They were cheering when they would see Egyptian television, but it was actually more sort of quiet. They had never seen defeated Israeli troops on television before.

Q: What traffic were we getting from the American Embassy in Israel?

THEROS: You know, I don't remember. That's really a good question.

My impression was that they were just putting out whatever reporting they had. I don't have the impression that Tel Aviv was spending a lot of time trying to influence the course of events on its own, other than just reporting what it was getting.

Q: Did you have any feel that Henry Kissinger was terribly involved?

THEROS: Yes, at the end of the war, but not at the beginning or the middle. At the beginning of the war, we were really looking at this thing through a very narrow prism, which was, "How does it affect us in Amman?" The decision by the United States to begin resupplying the Israelis, which if my memory serves me well, took place at about the tenth or the eleventh of October, which was when the Israelis owned up to just what they had lost. By the time it came, it came as a bit of a shock to us, but it was inevitable. In fact, I don't think it made much difference to the course of the war. The Arabs lost the war because the Israeli general staff was superior to the Arab general staffs.

Q: How was the Embassy operating? At the time, you were obviously locked by the hip practically to the Ambassador, weren't you?

THEROS: Yes, in those days no one thought very much about evacuation. There's been a big change in the Foreign Service since. In those days, if you had a war you just went to ground, and then you waited for the war to be over. Now you try to get everybody to leave. In 1973, there was no thought of evacuating. There was no way out even if you had

wanted to evacuate Americans. What the Embassy did was it went to minimum operations, destroyed everything possible, stocked up food at home, and just huddled down and waited. All the junior people were out on the street trying to find the Jordanian army. That was the big game of every night.

Q: Were there any noises that you recall from Baghdad?

THEROS: Only the large Iraqi units coming down the road, heading for the front. They actually got to the front. The Iraqis, by the end of the war, had moved something like seven or eight divisions to the Golan. We drove up to Zarqa, which was a crossroads town on the road down from Baghdad, and the road up for as far as the eye could see was bumper-to-bumper Iraqi vehicles coming down. The attaché would have situation maps, the old ones with the flags up and each unit represented, and the Iraqi ones were like this; they were identifying units. The Iraqis reacted slowly, but they reacted massively. They clearly had also not been told about the attack.

Q: This war lasted about how long?

THEROS: This war lasted about seventeen or eighteen days.

Q: Was there a point when all of a sudden it looked like things had really turned?

THEROS: Yes, the war started on the sixth, and I'd say things turned around on the tenth. Things on the Suez front turned on the fifth day (October 11) when the Egyptians tried to break out of their multiple bridgeheads, but did not succeed. Things finally turned on the Golan front about the tenth or the eleventh of September. As I said, the Syrians had stopped the Second Corps in place, taking up defensive position, and allowed the Israelis to form up a counterattack and push the First Corps back across the line.

Q: Were families taking off across the desert towards Iraq?

THEROS: No, everybody just huddled down. There was no refugee movement. The Jordanians were doing things like distributing weapons to militia units, primarily East Bankers. These guys were armed to the teeth anyway, so this was sort of giving them a little bit more.

Q: Was there any movement of East Bank Palestinians towards the West Bank?

THEROS: There was no movement. It was very quiet in Amman. After the first couple days of stripping the supermarkets of everything they had up for sale, people just went home and stayed home.

Q: People couldn't get in or out, could they?

THEROS: There were no flights. Essentially the country was sealed off. People were driving to Damascus, and that was it. The thing was once you crossed the road then you

were in danger of either getting gunned down by some over anxious Syrian border policeman or getting machine-gunned by an Israeli airplane.

Q: We didn't have an Embassy in Syria?

THEROS: No, the Italians were the protecting power.

Q: How about the other embassies? Were they sort of asking us what was happening?

THEROS: The British and the French were out in the streets with us, and very cooperative. The French had some good contacts there; the British had excellent contacts there. We'd see their junior officers crisscrossing right after us. The Russians were out there, too, but they weren't quite as cooperative.

Q: Were you having Jordanian contacts coming to you and asking, "What the hell is happening"?

THEROS: A lot of people were. However, by that time, after the second night, I was so locked in with the Ambassador, my personal life had disappeared, and all my Jordanian army friends were with their units.

Q: Was there any feeling on your part or on behalf of your colleagues that you've been sitting on the Arab side, essentially the losing side, and left with a certain feeling of, "Well, it's not too bad for the Israelis to get their comeuppance"?

THEROS: Sure. I mean these are people you live with, and the Israelis were sort of unbearable. The Amman Embassy had gotten to the point where it sort of hated the Israelis because at that time we would go to Jerusalem frequently, and the Department wouldn't issue us a second diplomatic passport, so we had to travel on regular passports to do some business. The Israelis would make our lives miserable at the border, and we were treated as badly as they treated Arabs even though they knew we were American diplomats. People were really mad at the Tel Aviv Embassy that aided and abetted the Israelis on the grounds of, "Well, who knows, the American diplomats might be terrorists, too." The relationship between the Tel Aviv Embassy and Amman Embassy was far worse than the relationship between the Israelis and the Jordanian government.

Q: In these meetings with the Ambassador and other sources, did you have the feeling that the Jordanians and Israelis were in close contact with each other?

THEROS: We knew they had been in close contact with each other until the sixth of October. I mean there were messages coming back and forth, but what had happened was that the tone and tenor of the messages had changed. It was no longer exchanges of information. It was much more "Stay out of the war", accompanied with obscene gestures. There was very little in the way of an exchange. Rather, it was two monologues at that point.

Q: Did you get the feeling that the State Department had also been caught off guard and was sort of floundering?

THEROS: Everybody had been caught off guard.

Q: Every side?

THEROS: Every side.

Just to illustrate this, when we went to destroy everything, there was one book that used to come out every six months called The Arab-Israeli Military Balance, and it would describe the best assessment of the entire intelligence community on what the military balance was between the two. I walked up to Dean Brown and I said, "Let's not burn this; I want to keep it for the record." This latest one had been issued about a month before the war. The last paragraph of the article on Egypt was, "It is the considered opinion of the intelligence community that the Egyptian army is unable to mount anything larger than a battalion-size raiding operation across the canal." We figured we'd put that up on the wall and say so much for good assessment.

If you remember, at the time, the DIA (Defense Intelligence Agency) was an amateur program. Almost all the Arab-Israeli analysts in DIA were fired or transferred after the war.

Q: Was this after the war?

THEROS: Yes, this was after the war.

CIA and State INR had at least caveated these estimates and DIA goes on record throughout the writing of this book objecting to the caveats.

Q: How did this come about, do you think? Within your ranks, looking at this afterwards, did the Defense intelligence people become sort of the captive of the Israelis?

THEROS: These were people who never left Washington and never left the job. It's one of the biggest problems with the DDI and DIA. One of the things, in my view, that has made INR better at analysis than the DDI or DIA is the fact that a lot of Foreign Service officers have been cycled through INR, whereas at the DDI, the CIA and DIA, the guys who work there are all permanent civil servants who only do this for their entire lives; and a culture develops—I say "culture" in the sense that when conventional wisdom begins to replace analysis—it then acquires the trappings of analysis, and it acquires the sanctity of certainty. I think the DDO suffers this much less because they did have case officers assigned to DDI; but certainly the DIA was just a captive of mostly civilian professional intelligence analysts,

They got good information from the Israelis. They got bad information from the Arabs. They read the press, which got good information from the Israelis and bad information

from the Arabs. There was the incontrovertible history that the Israelis had generally defeated the Arabs, and very little reference to the few cases where Israeli units had been defeated by Arab units. My take on most analysis from Washington is that when there's a disagreement, you don't fall back on compromise, you fall back on conventional wisdom. The DIA was at that point a captive of conventional wisdom, having concluded that the Israelis were stronger than the Arabs, which was an accurate conclusion, but then went ahead and sought information to justify that conclusion, which then reinforced the conclusion, and you had positive feedback to a preordained conclusion.

Q: What sort of military staffing did we have at the Embassy attachés office?

THEROS: Defense attaché was an Army Colonel, otherwise known as "Clarence of Arabia". He was not widely respected by anyone. His Army attaché and his Air Force attaché were both good men though. Then there was a military mission with about four or five officers who tended to be very specialized and were pretty good. The two Attachés, though, had very good contacts inside the armed forces.

Q: You had quite a professional small army, which you had easy access to.

THEROS: Right. My best friends are still Jordanian army officers who are retired now like me.

Q: So, were any of them saying, "Hey, you know, you ought to take another look at the Egyptians and the Syrians"?

THEROS: They had a low opinion of the Egyptians, and they had an equally low opinion of the Egyptian army. The Egyptian victories on the Suez front were just as big a surprise to them as they were to the Israelis and to us. They had a higher opinion of the Syrians than we did. They thought that the Syrian Officer Corps was better than the Egyptian Officer Corps. They thought that the average Syrian soldier was better than we gave them credit for. They feared the Syrians, but they were not particularly afraid of the Egyptians.

Q: What about the equipment? The Syrians and the Egyptians were armed with Soviet material; particularly, I think, the air defense proved quite effective, and the Sanger rockets were equivalent to our TOW rockets.

THEROS: Well, the general view of the Jordanians, and frankly of most of the American military, is that well-trained, well-motivated troops with muskets will beat poorly trained, poorly motivated troops with M-16s. The human is much more than the material; Napoleon said, "The morale is ten times the material."

Q: When the war started to go badly for the Arab armies, did you find the king's mood had changed?

THEROS: Relief that he hadn't gotten into the war; unhappiness that it had gone that way, but mainly relief that he hadn't gotten involved. He was really upset after it was

over when he realized the degree of the deception.

Q: How long were you there after the war?

THEROS: I was there until the first couple of days of January of '74.

Q: While you were still there, what was kind of the mood in the Embassy?

THEROS: We didn't have a mood. In a sense, we were inundated by American diplomacy. Nixon showed up and Kissinger showed up. I mean, we must have had three Kissinger visits; we had other visits as well. Overall, we had people coming through like mad. The Embassy at that point never got a chance to think about anything.

Q: So, you were the hotel operator, or the tour guide?

THEROS: Yes, I spent more time out meeting airplanes.

Q: Well, let's talk about, in the first place, the Nixon visit.

THEROS: The Nixon visit I prepared for; it took place after I left. I had two Kissinger visits.

Q: How did things work? Kissinger was sort of renowned for his avoiding the Ambassador and going in and doing his own thing?

THEROS: You couldn't avoid Dean Brown. You could not avoid Dean Brown, and King Hussein was not about to let him avoid Dean Brown. So there it was fait accompli, he dealt with the Ambassador. I remember being present at one, sort of sitting on the edge of one conversation. Dean Brown was about to depart Jordan himself; matter of fact, he left just before I did. At the airport Kissinger jokingly said to King Hussein: "Well, what are you looking for in a new Ambassador?" King Hussein turns around and looks at Dean Brown and says: "Make sure he isn't taller than him."

Q: He isn't what?

THEROS: "He isn't taller than him." Remember, King Hussein was five-three; Dean Brown was five-three, and Kissinger towered over them at five-four. And guess whom he sent? Tom Pickering, who was six foot six.

There is a story behind that. You know Harrison Simms had been PNG'd by the Jordanians in 1970 among other reasons, because he was six foot five, and when he lost his temper with the king, he leaned over him. Height counts.

Q: Did you get any feel for, at this point, Jordan as a player?

THEROS: Jordan was trying to become a player. Jordan saw the handwriting on the wall

and was trying to change it. Henry Kissinger was working on a plan that, at its essence, the Syrians and the Egyptians would get some reward for the war—that there would be some improvement in the status for having gone to war and the way to achieve that with the Israelis was to give Jordan nothing. That's when King Hussein told everybody that his second big mistake was not going to war in '73.

You know, it's a little hard for me to tell because a lot of this materialized after I left Amman.

Q: At the time, was the feeling, after it was all over, that you all were kind of left out of the game?

THEROS: Well, when I left the mood in Jordan was one of, "The Americans are working on a comprehensive plan to finish the Middle East crisis once and for all." It did not become apparent that this was not Kissinger's plan until, I'd say, the summer of '74.

Q: Before you left, because I try to keep this to your perspective, you were saying your officer contacts in the Jordanian Army were saying: "Thank God we didn't go to war", correct?

THEROS: No, actually the general feeling was they should have gone to war. We collectively—the American Embassy, the Jordanians and everybody else—figured out what had happened in those first few days of the war only after it ended. The Israeli deception became evident. The eye opener for me came at the end of November when I went to Jerusalem carrying the pouch, and I took a few days off and went up to Tiberias. I, as well as other people, realized just how far the Syrians had gotten. I don't know if you have ever been to Tiberias. There were burnt out Syrian tanks in the suburbs of Tiberias, including one burnt out Syrian armored personnel carrier about six kilometers past Tiberias on the road to Nazareth.

Q: Immediately afterwards, did you feel that the earth had moved, that things had really changed, as opposed to, "This is just another Israeli conflict"?

THEROS: No, there was a feeling that we're in the last quarter—that we have finally reached a situation where it is obvious to both the Arabs and the Israelis that the time has come to end this. I'd say the mood in Israel and the mood in the Arab countries that count (Egypt, Syria and Jordan) was, "This is our chance to resolve it, let's see if we can start moving toward peace." The one place where this was not present was Washington. Washington was basically trying to restore the status quo.

Q: When Kissinger came was the Embassy somebody he dealt with as a tour guide?

THEROS: No, as I said, Dean Brown you didn't treat as a tour guide.

Q: Well, Dean Brown could sit down with Kissinger.

THEROS: He was in all the meetings. To the best of my knowledge, if there were any private tête-à-têtes between the king and Kissinger they didn't last more than five minutes. I was Dean Brown's note taker for most of the meetings or the senior political man, Dave McCormick was, but I don't remember much of Kissinger being alone with the king. About the only time the king was alone was if he needed somebody to take him to the airport.

I do remember that the Jordanians dropped gifts like mad, and Henry was stowing them away in the airplane.

Q: (Laughs.) What sort of role was Kissinger playing with Jordan?

THEROS: The role the Jordanians deduced from Kissinger's visit, initially, was that he is out there trying to figure out how to end the Arab-Israeli conflict, and his coming to Jordan was to get Jordanian input and to see just what the parameters were. This was a time when Jordan still regarded the West Bank as lost territory and there was still no question of negotiating on behalf of the Palestinians. That didn't happen until fourteen years later.

Q: When you left there in early '74 what were your feelings?

THEROS: Oh, my feelings were wildly optimistic. The end of the crisis that I had worked on for fifteen years, at that point, was at hand. Fat Chance!

Armed Forces Staff College

Q: So where did you go?

THEROS: I went to the Armed Forces Staff College in Norfolk, Virginia. It was one of these typical things in the Department; I didn't like the assignment I was going to get, this was before you had bidding, but if you called enough people … so I got myself, because it was off-cycle, you know, a December transfer, so there was a five months course at the Armed Forces Staff College in Norfolk.

Q: And that put you back in the cycle …

THEROS: That put my back in the cycle. That was actually a lot of fun.

Q: What sort of thing had they originally assigned you to?

THEROS: INR, I didn't want to do INR.

Q: At the Staff College, what were you doing?

THEROS: The Armed Forces Staff College is the first joint service school. It is for

majors and lieutenant colonels, guys who until then had been only in service schools, only in Army schools, Navy or Marine Corps, or what have you. This essentially was to prepare these officers for service in the Pentagon or other joint operations. So there are seminars of about 30 officers each. There were thirteen seminars and we had thirteen spots; we could have put a FSO in each seminar but we rarely had more than one FSO assigned. In 1974/1st half it was only me. We did two things: we learned how to write staff papers, how to do briefings, and how to plan an amphibious operation. Don't ask me why the amphibious operations, but that was put as the planning cycle. We did a simple amphibious operation and then a more complicated, but at the same time we did all the staff things. We learned how to use blue paper and green paper and all of the things that the Pentagon did. It was the first experience for most of these officers of a situation where they were not entirely within their service.

Q: Amphibious, obviously, would involve ground, air and sea.

THEROS: Exactly. But it was the first experience for most of these officers of a joint environment.

Q: Did you find, was the military looking, at that level, at what happened during the October War?

THEROS: A few were, but remember, this is the beginning of '74, this is the aftermath of Vietnam; the military was still going through the trauma of Vietnam. If you wanted to start a bar fight, you'd have a philosophical discussion on what went wrong in Vietnam and whose fault it was.

Q: Well, the final collapse hadn't come.

THEROS: No, but we were pulling out so fast that it was obscene and there was a lot of recrimination. This is sort of the low point of the U.S. Army.

Q: Were there a lot of recriminations of the State Department? "You got us into this war" and that sort of thing?

THEROS: Not that much. There was a great deal of popular hatred for Lyndon Johnson. I mean, real palpable hatred for Lyndon Johnson. There was a lot of dislike for the political structure and the way it was set up, and an intense dislike of the press was also very tangible. I didn't feel as a FSO that I was particularly being blamed for anything. Remember, we had higher casualties in Vietnam than the Army did, per capita. So, there's a lot of respect for that. There were more FSOs killed in absolute numbers than general officers in the Army and as a percentage of casualties we were about twenty times the Army's for the percentage of people there.

Q: But then your Middle East experience at that particular point wasn't particularly tapped.

THEROS: Was only in the sense that we kept exercising the amphibious operation of Tunisia.

Q: (Laughs.) So you were ready to invade the beaches if you could get rid of the French tourists?

THEROS: That's right, exactly. There was some discussion of the Middle East in that, you know, I talk too much, so I could always, when they were sober, steer the discussion in that direction. But I had a lot of fun. I learned that there were four services, and they are four distinct civilizations that very rarely touch each other.

Q: What are the four services?

THEROS: The Army, the Navy, the Air Force and the Marine Corps. And they are all different. I have told this story to members of all four services and they all agree with me, 100%.

The Army is "Hail fellow, well met. " They are the good guys, they are the best guys to go out drinking with and have fun and so forth and if you ask them a question they will answer the question. If you want to know about the division in the attack they will tell you about the division in the attack. The one overriding characteristic about U.S. Army officers is that they have clearly shot all of the dumb ones and the smart ones. They made it clear that if you were terribly smart or terribly dumb you had no future in the Army, so you had to be pushed into the center. They were all good guys. Very rarely did you find somebody who was not a good man.

Two, was the Navy. The Navy were like the Masons ... a secret society. I knew as much about the Navy when I left the Staff College five months later as I did when I entered. You got nothing out of them. It was their own club and they were very elegant and well read and when they did their week on, "What does the Navy do?" you got pictures of aircraft carriers and you learned nothing about the Navy.

The Air Force consisted of two categories of people. There were the rated pilots and the non-rated, non-pilots. The non-rated people were all specialists. They were specialists within specialties. Cooks and bakers specialize in cream cake or strawberry shortcake. These guys were the ultimate tunnel vision —the man who knows more and more about less and less. And the pilots I identified with immediately are exactly like FSOs—self-centered, egotistical, felt the world was there to serve them and to take care of them; that they were the elite of the world.

The Marine Corps was interesting. Three quarters of the Marine Corps officers were the dumbest guys in the seminars; they were the opposite of the Army. And one quarter were the smartest guys in every seminar—head and shoulders, intellectually, above everybody else in that school. So I asked, finally, one of the guys at the upper end, whose knuckles were not dragging on the ground, about this and I asked him why. He said, "That's very simple to explain, Dummy, planning an amphibious operation, (as he described it, to use

his language,) is the most difficult evolution of the military art. Leading the first wave requires an officer of incredible stupidity."

Q: Well, it's interesting because people I have talked to that have gone to the War College, which is at the colonel level and the naval captain level they've all ranked the Marine Corps, at that level, as being the smartest, most intellectually aware, thoughtful, which would mean that by that time you have gotten rid of the people who are going to lead the first wave and you are moving into ranks. Because this goes against intuition, which is that the Marine Corps people, you know, you point toward the hill and say "Take it" and they'll charge up and not …

THEROS: You see three quarters of them will; the other quarter will figure out how to do it. But, as my classmate pointed out to me, he says, "Remember, at Tarawa there was not a single officer that survived the first four waves."

Under Secretary for Management Office, 1974 to 1976

Q: Yeah. That was during World War II on a Pacific island, poorly done in ways. Well, then, Pat, after your exposure to the military and the clubs that compose it, where did you go?

THEROS: I spent the next two months negotiating with Washington, who kept trying to stick me in INR. And I didn't want to go to INR; I didn't like the jobs in INR. Well, in retrospect, what happened was still better but it was not as interesting. I later got around to INR and they weren't as bad as I thought they would be, but at the time …

Q: Well, INR had a reputation as being sort of outside the policy channel

THEROS: In fact, none of their officers had windows. So I came up to see Dean Brown, who by this time was Undersecretary for Management and at that point I decided I was going to call in markers; but, you know, he liked me, so he created a position in management as Special Assistant and I got assigned to that job.

Q: What was the job's title?

THEROS: Special Assistant.

Q: To whom?

THEROS: To the Undersecretary for Management.

Q: And you did this for how long?

THEROS: I did this for two years. I did this from summer of '74 until the end of '75, so I did this for eighteen months. However, Dean Brown quit at the end of six months—he

got into a big fight with Henry Kissinger and he quit then.

Q: What was the fight about?

THEROS: Dean Brown was brought in as Undersecretary for Management. He was, in my opinion, the first man in years that had a clear idea about how the Department should be reorganized and set about implementing his plans. Henry Kissinger, who approved them, had cleared all these plans and things were getting done. Problem with Henry Kissinger is it was easy to get to him by somebody else. And it was a constant stream of Dean Brown initiatives that were approved by Kissinger and then somebody got to him and then pulled back.

Q: This, of course, is also talking about the bureaucracy, that if you try to implement any changes, somebody's ox is going to be gored. So Henry Kissinger was inconsistent.

THEROS: A lousy manager.

Q: Which might be expected, he was an academic, a thinker. Well, how did Dean Brown operate at the time?

THEROS: Dean Brown again was always focused on what he thought was the right thing. He spent a lot of time all over the building. One of the things, for example, is he was trying to break this culture of the self-imposed overtime. He would walk into offices at six o'clock and demand to know what people were still doing there. He would chew people out, for, you know, "You are keeping three secretaries here, paying overtime, why are you doing that?"

He was a leader; he pretty much initiated this idea of going to the private sector for a lot of the services being previously provided by GSA. He let the first non-GSA contracts for painting the building on the inside. Remember, the GSA bid on painting his offices and he didn't like the price of what they were offering; it was all the same color of blue, green and drab. Everything was drab—floor, ceilings and everything else. So he goes out and he says he wants private contracts and we get to pick our colors. GSA came to each of us, and he asked us what we wanted. Well, I had a windowless office and the inside was pretty dim, so I asked if he would paint it high-visibility orange and the GSA contractor was unable to offer high-visibility orange, so we had it done by private contractor.

He tried to reduce this enormous overhead posed by the Fly America Act on how you fly, how you fill out vouchers.

Q: Could you explain what the Fly America Act was?

THEROS: It was a law passed by Congress that says all official travel has to be conducted to the maximum extent possible on U.S. flag carriers. This is a very expensive way of doing business. But that's understood, a lot of countries do that, I think most of the foreign services live with that. But then, the reporting procedure, the vouchering

procedure to get reimbursed for your travel was so difficult, so complex. Right now a good estimate is the Department of State spends between thirty and forty million dollars a year reviewing vouchers—which are all identical, they never change anyway. But there is a whole bureaucracy there: hundreds of people in Arlington who review vouchers and Dean Brown tried to see what he could do about this.

It was interesting. This was the early days of the computer in the Department and he was enamored of computers, he thought they could "do things." So, one day I was given a task; I was told to go out and see if using a computer search of records we could identify the kinds of people who did well on the MLAT, the Modern Language Aptitude Test. And what is interesting about the MLAT is you either fail it or you are gangbusters. The only people who ever end up in the middle are the gangbusters who had gotten drunk the night before and had a hangover; otherwise, you're either at the top, a third, or down in the bottom, part of the two-thirds. And so we ran every possible parameter that we could through the computers we had then, trying to identify what the difference was between this third and that two-thirds and we never came up with any consistent factor. It wasn't education, it wasn't ethnic origin; we even tried religion, for God's sakes. Nothing, we could get nothing. The only thing that was sort of interesting … the very small number of officers that we could identify as having grown up bilingual was all in the upper group. But there were lots of people that we could not identify in either direction. But maybe a couple of dozen officers out of a couple thousand that we had identified as being bilingual we all in the upper group. Nothing else. There was no other correlation.

Q: I wonder if you could talk for a minute, explain the view at the time; I have a consular officer background, and I used to observe this self-induced overtime syndrome at embassies and all Department offices

THEROS: NEA was the worst.

Q: And for a Consular officer, you did your job and you went home. Could you explain what this was and how it manifests itself?

THEROS: I know what it did; it simply, it was almost a cache of pride—how hard you were working. It was particularly prevalent in the Department and it was a consequence of the nine-tenths of the work in the Department is work generated by other people in the next office. It had very little to do with substance. It had a great deal more to do with a system that kept imposing more and more paperwork requirements, clearances, and stuff like that, and it was a failure by upper management to set priorities. So, middle management saw the fulfillment of all instructions, all objectives, at the same level and that just was not possible. So people worked harder and harder, staying later. There was no willingness to simply say, "I am not going to do this, it's stupid." And, every piece of paper generated three more pieces of paper. And it was self-fulfilling; there were many people who enjoyed bragging about how late they stayed. Most people had, simply, this inability to cope with middle management and upper management inability to set priorities. I have never heard anybody say, "Don't answer it, it's stupid," except in the field, occasionally.

Q: Another thing, too, there seemed to be, in the morning, starting off very slowly and by the evening, you know, almost saving things to do in the evening.

THEROS: Well, that was the staff meeting. Every morning is consumed with staff meetings because your importance is judged on the staff meeting. There is this one belief in the Department and among upper-level bureaucrats that efficient bureaucracies are ones that have wall-to-wall staff meetings. Remember, the Secretary has a staff meeting at seven for all the Assistant Secretaries. All the Assistant Secretaries come back at eight or eight-thirty and have a staff meeting for all of the Office Directors about nine. Then all the Office Directors go back about ten-thirty and have a staff meeting with their officers. This means not being out of a staff meeting before eleven-thirty in the morning. And all you have done is repeat this. Nothing gets done before eleven or eleven-thirty in the morning unless you cut a staff meeting and something gets done. And then you get these inspectors who come out to post.

Dean Brown did not believe in staff meetings; he felt that staff meetings were an admission of incompetence. He had regular staff meetings, he had a staff meeting when it was necessary to convey information; otherwise you just consulted quickly among the key people involved in a specific issue. And the inspectors came out and the only thing they pinged us on in Embassy Amman was "Don't have staff meetings." So, after the inspectors left Dean Brown called a staff meeting and he says, as he glowered, "I am calling this staff meeting because the Ambassadors have criticized my failure to call staff meetings, so now I have a staff meeting. Does anybody have anything to say?" Silence for about two minutes in the room; he said, "Good, meeting's over" and he walked out. His idea of a staff meeting was to show up in somebody's office and talk about something.

Q: Well, now, what happened, were you noticing a frustration from Brown?

THEROS: Yeah, but the decision to depart came as a big shock to me. He is such a feisty man, he looks like Jimmy Cagney and he acted like Jimmy Cagney, so since he was in a constant state of turmoil with everything you didn't realize that he had reached the end of his tether. And he did. He walked into the office one day and he says, "Patrick, I will tell you this, I'm resigning, and I'm taking my retirement now." Which left me sort of flabbergasted. Because I hadn't hit him up yet on my next post, which was terribly important to me.

Q: Who took over?

THEROS: Larry Eagleburger. As a matter of fact, (Larry Eagleburger), when Dean Brown walked in and resigned he said Henry Kissinger, he said: "Look, the vehicle that undermines me is people going to Larry Eagleburger, who is your Executive Assistant, and he is the man that then comes to you and says that this Assistant Secretary and that Assistant Secretary can't live with one of my decisions. So, why don't you make him Undersecretary for Management and that way he can be the conduit to you and the

Undersecretary for Management?" And Kissinger took him up on it. So Larry Eagleburger became the Undersecretary for Management.

Q: Did you work with him?

THEROS: Yeah, for a year.

Q: How did he operate?

THEROS: You know Larry.

Q: Yeah.

THEROS: He's the guy who is going to be found dead one morning, with his face in a bowl of peanuts on his desk. Larry Eagleburger worked a lot harder than Dean Brown because he had two jobs, not because he was a workaholic. I admired him because he was the only man in the Department, who, when the Secretary would lose his temper, which was occasionally profane, would just stand there. He was also big enough, so, the Secretary was slightly intimidated by him. And he'd stand there and let the Secretary vent and scream and shout and he'd sort of lean into the wind and then when the Secretary calmed down, he said, "Yes, Mr. Secretary, but …" and then the conversation would continue. Meanwhile all the staff aides were hiding in the curtains and stuff like that because watching Henry lose his temper was a sight. He tried very hard to implement some of the Dean Brown ideas; he did not differ with Dean Brown very much. However, he was not prepared to fight it out as hard. On the other hand, he had a full time job being the Executive Assistant to the Secretary. And the way he organized his office was those of us who did Undersecretary for Management stuff, like me, would come in at the crack of dawn or earlier and those guys who did Executive Secretary stuff for the Secretary like Wes Egan would come in late and stay late. Wes Egan and I shared the same office, which was about half the size of this one, but we only shared it for about four hours a day. Wes and I worked a twelve-hour day; mine beginning eight hours before his and his finishing eight hours after mine. I would do all of the Executive Secretary stuff and Wes did the policy work.

Q: With the Brown-Eagleburger regime while you were there, did you see any changes in the administrative establishment?

THEROS: Not in the end; not that you'd notice. Dean Brown wasn't there long enough and Larry wasn't going to fight hard. Working at it, I learned a lot in there. Trying to improve systems always sort of interested Brown. Eagleburger gave far more of his time to Kissinger than the Department. (It would not have worked out any other way.) The signal event of the Dean Brown tenure when I was there was the conflict. The invasion of Cyprus, because we got involved with that.

Q: That's in July of 1974.

THEROS: Yep. We were involved with that because Undersecretary of Management was at the time responsible for non-combatant evacuation. I was assigned as the man who was supposed to coordinate the non-combatant evacuation, which, of course, never took place. The crisis had been building; there's sort of an interesting story on that. The crisis had been building for about a week or ten days, the Greeks had overthrown Makarios, there was a crisis in Athens, but there was a bigger crisis in Washington, the end of the Nixon Presidency. Nobody in Washington was paying attention to anything outside. The general belief at the time was that nothing would happen; it was a bluff. Two weeks before the crisis began they had taken Greece, Turkey, and Cyprus out of the NEA Bureau and given it to the European Bureau. This proved a crucial component of our being surprised. In the Near East Bureau war is a likely, common occurrence and in the European Bureau there is an understanding that the Europeans don't go to war …

Q: No, and NATO

THEROS: Somebody joked once, that the difference between EUR and the NEA is when an NEA country reservist is called up in the middle of the night he doesn't know if it is an exercise or the real thing; in a European country when a reservist is called up in the middle of the night he knows it's an exercise. And the problem was Greece, Turkey, and Cyprus were politically NEA countries that had been transferred into Europe and the whole Europe Bureau simply ignored them.

Q: You really had a feeling, I mean, these are sort of peculiar people there, it's just a different culture.

THEROS: The EUR hands were the ones who gave the rest of us some bad names: that diplomats only go to cocktail parties and so forth.

Q: Yeah. Yeah.

THEROS: So, the morning that the Turks went into Cyprus I got a call. I went in about three o'clock, two o'clock in the morning, Washington time. Dean Brown comes in; there's a meeting in Undersecretary for Political Affairs Sisco's office and the Turkish invasion is happening as we meet. And Henry is in California with Nixon. You know these are the final days; he is presiding over the collapse of the American government. Sisco and the EUR assistant secretary call Kissinger. Hartman's on the phone with him; they put it on speakerphone, there are about ten or twelve of us sitting in the room there with Dean Brown. As I say, I'm the man who's been tasked with getting the paperwork together for the non-combatant evacuation. And Henry was clearly disturbed, not disturbed at what was going on, but disturbed that he had been called. He had more important things to do and felt that the invasion of Cyprus was, you know, these incompetents in the State Department were calling him because they were too stupid to do anything about it themselves and her was making it clear that this was his attitude. Mind you, all this time the Turkish troops are landing in Cyprus and he says, "What happens if I do nothing?" And this Air Force major in the back of the room shouts—trying to get a voice for himself—"Then they will overrun the island in twenty-four

hours." Kissinger says, "Let them," and hangs up.

Actually, this was one of the few times that I think I should have spoken up, because I had just come from the Armed Forces Staff College, where we kept doing amphibious operations exercises. It was obvious to anybody who had ever been to the Armed Forces Staff College and had been through the amphibious exercise process, would know that the Turkish military, regardless of its fighting quality, simply lacked the logistics to land in sufficient force to overrun8n the island in less than a week or ten days. Therefore, any successful invasion of the island would take far more than twenty-four hours.

Henry hung up. In the next three days the invasion went bad. The Turks hung on to a small enclave on the coast. There was a ceasefire and then they had built up off the enclave and in August they attacked again and occupied half the island. And this is a good example—the reason I want to stick it in here—of how decisions are made on the basis of stupid information given to you by people who should keep their mouths shut. Pardon the politics, and the soapbox. Henry Kissinger, whatever else he was, was not a stupid man; he understood that if the Turks had been able to occupy and overrun the entire island in twenty-four hours, the political consequences of that would be different than the political consequences of a six-week campaign to occupy the island. Some idiot told him that it would be over in twenty-four hours; he was predisposed to get off the subject, and hang up and say, "Let them." This was probably the one event in his career that wrecked it.

Q: Yes, and he's still living with the problem.

THEROS: This is a good time to get in another rant; the paramount importance of personal relations at the leadership level. They frequently trump rational decisions. Prior to his coming to Washington, Henry Kissinger ran an international leadership seminar at Harvard. Certain countries sent students frequently, others not so much. Turkey ensured that every course included a Turkish politician or other important figure. One student, Bulent Ecevit, attended the course and became a close personal friend of Dr. Kissinger. Ecevit went on to become Prime Minister of Turkey and, in his tenure, Turkey attacked Cyprus. Ecevit made a point of talking to Kissinger frequently. At one point, and this story has been corroborated elsewhere, the Turks mistook a small lightly-armed Greek Navy troop carrier trying to get out of harm's way on the first day of the attack for a major Greek navy intervention. The Greek ship fired a few dozen rounds at a Turkish ground position on the island. Ecevit panicked and called Kissinger to complain – at 3:00 AM Pacific Time! Mrs. Kissinger overheard the conversation and told her husband "Tell them to sink them himself!" so she could go back to sleep. Kissinger did so and the Turks sent a wave of F104s to attack the "Greek" Navy off Cyprus. They spotted several destroyers and attacked and sank one of them; which turned out to be a Turkish destroyer also looking for the Greek Navy! The Turkish sailors reportedly brought down a few F104s as they went down.

Kissinger's close friendship with Ecevit gave rise to the not unreasonable speculation that he had helped orchestrate the Turkish attack in order to punish Cypriot President

Archbishop Makarios whom Henry truly hated. I saw nothing in those days to indicate the Kissinger, nor any other senior ISG official, had any inkling the Turks were not bluffing and would attack in June 1974. On the other hand, when the Turks later violated the initial ceasefire and occupied 45% of the island in August 1974, the USG clearly knew in advance and had given some sort of green light. Defense Secretary Schlesinger explicitly said as much when he told a press conference that the "Turks had advanced further than they had told us." Again, I believe Kissinger was influenced by personal friendships rather than policy. Why else would he pick sides when two important NATO allies went go to war with each other rather than stop it as Johnson did in 1968?

Q: You left there in late '75?

THEROS: In late '75 I went to the economics course. I had been trying to go to Trieste as Consul General.

Q: Yes.

THEROS: I really wanted to go to Trieste as Consul General. I figured this was going to be my vacation post. The Ambassador in Rome at the time—I forget who he was, a political appointee—had somebody who had been a ward heeler in the Bronx who wanted to go to Trieste. Eagleburger took it as a personal insult that his staff assistant couldn't go anywhere he wanted him to go. So he was going to stuff me down the Ambassador's throat; at that point I came to my senses and realized this was a losing proposition. I went to Larry and I said, "You're going to stuff me down his throat. The problem is after I get out there I'm going to be down his throat and you're not going to be there and then he's going to swallow and I'm dead." So I looked around and the other really good job that I wanted was the economic officer in Damascus. Damascus was always my dream post. I had always wanted to go to Damascus. Economic officer was one of the best jobs in the Embassy.

Q: So at the time you went to six months economic course and then you were part of the cycle.

THEROS: That's right.

Q: Okay. Why don't we pick this up in early 1976?

THEROS: Okay.

Q: One question before we go: did you get involved in the exodus from Vietnam?

THEROS: Only marginally. I had just gotten to the Department when the exodus happened in '77.

Q: Okay. Well, we'll pick this up in 1976 and we'll talk a little about the economics course and then we'll move on to Damascus. How did you find the economics course?

THEROS: I found it to be one of the best courses I ever took at FSI. My own somewhat checkered academic career enlightened me. I had done badly in mathematics all the way through elementary school, junior high school, and high school. But there was a professor from GW teaching one of the courses and he said that if you could do the most complex math to keep your wits about you, and if you could do that, then you could do almost anything. Just don't drop any steps and you don't forget what you're doing. So, from a personal point of view, it was an extremely useful course. As I say, it was probably the best course at FSI I ever did.

Q: Did you find that it was practical? I've heard some people say there's also a problem about economics: One, that there's economic theory, which doesn't mean a darn thing for being a Foreign Service officer—this is what people have said—except that it allows you to have credentials so you can chat with other economists. But as a real theory it's kind of done back in Washington, and what you're doing is gathering the data and understanding what's happening. And that's what I wanted to touch on. Could you comment on that?

THEROS: Actually, most of the people who took the course found it useful. Perhaps the least useful of my assignments was the financial course on corporate finance issues at the kind of levels of the GMs and the big companies of the world. But world economics was pretty useful because I was able to write, for example, later in Damascus economic reports that not only were credible, and writing and talking to people who knew more about economics than I did, but, in fact, were credible in telling Washington what was going on in a rather complex economy; Most observers saw the Syrian as a kind of mutated fraud. It was in fact an economy that was socialist at the time—a socialist name tacked onto something more bizarre but still a functioning economy. The Syrian bankers were a very knowledgeable lot and the course enabled me to talk to them in their own terms —it wasn't just chat. Since —and I think I've said this—I often doubt that the United States has any sort of policy most of the time anyway, having policy planning in Washington is a bit of an oxymoron. Other than, the course enabled me to work with a number of my colleagues, some of whom I liked much more after the six months were over and some of whom I liked much less after the six months were over.

I will say something though that is interesting. First of all, I got married during the course. They wouldn't give me leave so I lied and said I was sick so that I could take a three-day honeymoon, and two weeks later came down with a really bad case of the flu and had to come to class. About six weeks after that—this would be late March—I got a phone call from Ed Abingdon who was in the Secretary's office. Ed calls me and says, "Patrick, are you sitting down?" I said, "No," and he said, "You should." I said, "Thank you." He said, "Now go home and pack. You're going to Beirut tonight." I was very taken aback by what they were talking about. This was at the time when the situation in Lebanon was falling apart rather dramatically, and the powers-that-be in the Department had finally got Sisco to go to Kissinger who had steadfastly ignored Lebanon. We all know Kissinger didn't allow anybody to work on anything without his direct supervision. By the time Sisco got to him and said, "If you don't do something about Lebanon very

quickly, you're going to have a war on your hands. A major war between the Syrians and Israelis, both of whom I've found ready to intervene."

So Kissinger called in Dean Brown and said, "I want you to go out and basically talk everybody to death." And Dean Brown said he wasn't going until after they worked it out. He also said he wasn't going until he had somebody with him; he was retired by this time. So he told Kissinger he wanted me to come with him. I was at the FSI Economics course; FSI had this absolute rule that nobody could be pulled out of the course, so the head of FSI called the Secretary's office—I forget who the head of FSI was at the time—and had his head taken off when he objected.

I had only been married six weeks. I went home to get my luggage to pack up. My father was home and I couldn't find my bride Aspasia (Stacy to her friends). This was in the day before cell phones. And after about an hour I had to be at Dean Brown's house. I had this vision of leaving this note on the table saying, "Hold dinner, I'll be late." [Laughs.] I finally tracked her down; she had told me she was going to exchange a couple of wedding gifts and I tracked her down to that store and I said, "I'm going to Beirut." She said, "We are?" I said, "No, I am." She threw a temper tantrum. She was very upset. We went over to Dean Brown's house. At first I wouldn't let her come in, she was so angry. However, she then ran into Dean Brown's wife, who was equally angry, so it worked out. I went to the airport that night, Dulles, with fake names and dark glasses and got on a flight; changed planes in London. As soon as we got on the airplane I said, "Boss, where are we going and what for?" He replied, "It beats the hell out of me." He had been called the night before and the Secretary wanted to see him at eight o'clock in the morning. His relationship with the Secretary was a little bit rocky and his response was, "I'm retired; I don't see anybody before nine in the morning."

But essentially the mission was to go out there and create a great deal of smoke in hopes of delaying bad things. Plus the Embassy was falling apart. We also had to go out and see what could be done about the Embassy.

Q: Had the Ambassador been killed?

THEROS: No, this was before he was killed. The Ambassador was on sick leave; it was Matt Godley. He had had an operation on his throat; he had cancer of the throat. The DCM was not doing well. Nat Howell was the political officer. By and large the Embassy was sort of on its knees at that point because it had disintegrated around them.

We both had the fish dinner on the United flight to London and we both got sick, spent the entire layover in London in the bathroom, and then got on a Middle East airlines flight. We were the only two people in first class to go to Beirut. I spent fifteen days in Beirut; Brown spent a little bit more. We had a meeting with every single significant political leader in Lebanon. I frankly came away convinced that if the people deserved their leadership, then they deserved their civil war as well. The Lebanese leaders were the biggest bunch of clowns I ever met.

They would all begin with the recitation of Lebanese history. Just to give you a flavor of what it was like: the Shia leader, Imam Musa Sadr, who was later murdered by the Libyans, was the only man that sounded like a patriot Lebanese, as opposed to a sectarian leader; and he was an Iranian in origin, not even Lebanese. We saw Lebanese President Suleiman Frangieh, who at the time was regarded as the spokesman for the extreme right-wing leaders of the north. His interpreter at the time was a fellow named Samir Geagea, who later murdered Suleiman Frangieh's son. This was the way politics ran in Lebanon.

This meeting also made me a footnote in Lebanese history. Someone started a rumor that Dean Brown told Frangieh that the United States had a fleet of ships offshore prepared to take the entire Christian community of Lebanon to the U.S. and Canada and leave Lebanon for the Muslims. This rumor has now become an established fact in the fantasy world that passes for political history in Lebanon. I have been interviewed time and again across the entire spectrum of Lebanese media about this story and always tell people it was both impossible to execute and ludicrous in concept.

I spent fifteen days there, at the end of which Brown said, the Embassy was collapsing, and he needed work done back in Washington. As a result of my return we pretty much replaced most everybody in the Embassy. One day after I returned I was summoned to the Secretary's office. I'm waiting in the anteroom for a meeting to break up in the Secretary's office and Joe Sisco comes out and he then tells me, "Whatever you do, don't tell the Secretary that we need the Syrians to intervene to restore order." I wasn't really planning on saying that, but it certainly was an option, and I said, "Why not?" He said, "Because that's what we've all been telling him, and if you tell him that, he will think we put you up to it." So I went up to Larry Eagleburger, who was also coming out of the meeting, and told him what Joe Sisco said and he said a bad word, and he said basically, just tell the Secretary the truth or whatever you think is right.

So I went in, and in fact it wasn't a presentation on my part. I sat down in front of the Secretary and this jury of Undersecretaries and Assistant Secretaries. The Secretary then interrogated me for fifteen to twenty minutes. He just asked questions without ever once having said anything about Syrian intervention. And then he says, in his German accent, "So, you too, Mr. Theros, think that we should allow the Syrians to intervene." And I don't know how he had come to that conclusion, but I said, "Well, that seems to be the only way of stopping the civil war." Then I was excused. I went back to the FSI, having missed a significant portion of coursework—I had been gone about three weeks … including one key section on corporate finance. , I took the exam for that section and I had no idea what I was doing and failed it, but then completed the rest of the coursework. Of the five subjects I had four good grades and an incomplete.

Q: What is the background of your wife?

THEROS: She was not quite the girl-next-door, but out of the corner and turn right. She's Greek. She was born in Greece, actually. She was a Spartan by birth, with all the baggage that carries. She actually is related to about a hundred of my closest friends, but I had never known her because her family didn't come to the United States until after I joined

the Foreign Service. She proved to be a fantastic foreign service wife. She took to the social component of our work like a duck to water. She could gin up a great dinner for 50 distinguished guests by gussying up Damascus street food. More amazingly, she loved to move every few years; it left all the baggage behind!

Q: I always wondered how these ethnic things work. I mean here you are off dealing with the Arab world and all, and all of a sudden this marriage comes and hits you.

THEROS: It's a conspiracy. There are any number of people who are always maneuvering to introduce you to their cousin. In this case it was pretty blatant. Her first cousin was hot for one of my best friends and he was resisting her advances; so she thought that the best way to improve the relationship would be to introduce me to her first cousin, and that worked. In fact, she later married my best friend. [Laughs.]

Q: [Laughs.] I think she had the long-term.

THEROS: It had the long-term. It would be the same for 3,000 years.

Damascus

Q: [Laughs.] I just find it incredible.

Well then, you went to Damascus, right?

THEROS: I went to Damascus.

Q: You were there from '76 to '80.

THEROS: Yes, I was in Damascus a few weeks short of four years.

Q: What was the political and economic situation in Syria? What was America's relationship with Syria when you arrived in '76?

THEROS: The U.S. – Syrian relationship was improving. It was probably the high point.

In the four years I was there, we had a USAID mission with a large number of ongoing programs. Things were going really well. American business was improving, and it was an ideal time for me as the commercial attaché. I began my tour with my card saying "economic counselor." I changed the wording from "economic counselor/commercial attaché" to "commercial attaché/economic counselor." Finally, I just dropped the economic counselor title entirely. This change vastly improved my access in Syrian society.

The smartest change was moving my office out of the chancery into a separate office. I remember saying to one businessman who used to come over frequently: "When I was in

the Embassy you wouldn't come and see me. Now that I'm outside the Embassy in another office, I can't get rid of you. You're here all the time. Why?" He replied: "When you were in the Embassy, every time I came to see you, I'd then be taken over to the secret police headquarters and be given a two-hour grilling on what the inside of the Embassy is like. They would ask me the color of the walls, who sits where, and where I thought the CIA was located. I was asked to draw them pictures, maps and so forth of everything I had seen and everybody I had talked to. Now that I'm here, the only time they bother me is when they think that there is a deal that some corrupt member of the secret police may be able to cut himself into it."

I asked: "What's the difference? The plaque on the other place reads U.S. Embassy, and the plaque here reads U.S. Embassy."

"No," he replied. "Yours reads U.S. Embassy Commercial Section. This is a country where commerce is king. We understand business. We invented it 8,000 years ago, and we're still better at it than anybody else."

Q: Let's talk about the economy as you saw it.

THEROS: It was a huge black economy. It was operating with the knowledge, and occasional incursion, of the government. This was a socialist state, with a socialist economic system imposed for political purposes by people who didn't believe in socialism on a people who didn't believe in it either. The Syrian business community was easily the most competent business community in the Middle East and one of the most competent in the world. The only problem was that instead of devoting their energy and skill to business, they were devoting it towards corrupting the government. They are very good businessmen; they are conscious of their history. They take the long view of things and hold the Lebanese and Jews in some contempt as being Johnnies-come-lately to the business world.

The country itself is like France; it's almost self-sufficient. It produces a little bit of everything for export and produces enough oil to take care of itself as well as export. Syria also produces food and industrial goods for export. If it were not for the corruption of the socialist regime, it would be like Belgium—a free-enterprise democratic Syria based on an educated population and a dynamic entrepreneurial population. If the country were a democratic nation with free enterprise, it would have the standard of living of any Western European country. It certainly is the most Europeanized Mediterranean country in the Arab world.

The social mores in Damascus were the social mores in other Mediterranean countries with a little bit of the immediate pre-war mores of say Italy, Spain, and Greece. Girls went on dates; they wore mini-skirts. Everything was mixed. Everybody drank, but nobody drank to excess. The liquor bill for entertaining was the lowest in Damascus of any place I've ever served in my entire life, and yet everybody drank; everybody took a drink. People were also extremely tolerant in terms of religion to the extent it was actually bad manners to ask somebody about his religion. The regime was horrid, but

being corruptible made it tolerable.

Q: Which made it tolerable.

THEROS: It made it tolerable. Even the corruption was sort of institutionalized, so one knew how to deal with it. There was intense distrust of the United States, but a willingness to have a relationship. At the practical level it meant that as a commercial attaché, I was the "permitted" American contact. Anytime I would invite people to my house, they would come to my house. They would go to the Ambassador's formal events, but they wouldn't go to anybody else's house. The DCM would invite twenty people to dinner, and four would say they were coming. I'd invite twenty people to dinner and twenty-four would say they were coming. They would show up, and they would bring their friends. The commercial and economic relationship with the United States was a committed and encouraged relationship.

The AID mission there had a fairly big budget. I have to say that it was probably one of the most earnest, least well-managed AID programs going on.

Q: What were they trying to do?

THEROS: The principal reason the Syrians invited them in was because we promised to build roads. Then the lobby in Washington decided that Syria shouldn't have roads.

Q: Was this the Israeli lobby?

THEROS: Yes, so they started spending money on other things like agriculture, which the Syrians were already pretty good at.

It was clearly a militarized society. There was military everywhere, and you were conscious of the presence of secret police on the streets. As I said, it was a society that, as one Syrian put it, "A long time ago we discovered that all government is bad." There's a story told in Damascus that is essentially from the days of the Sultan Harun Al-Rashid. All the people of the court were telling the sultan how much they loved him and how they were the happiest people in the world. The people basked in his presence. One day the sultan said, "You're all a bunch of liars. There is only one person in my kingdom who is happy and that is the person who has food in his stomach, a roof over his head, clothes on his back, and whom the sultan does not know."

The upper-class citizens' houses had blank walls. Upon entering, the first couple of rooms were dingy and small, and to the left were the bedrooms where the cops never went because it was understood that a stranger does not go into the bedrooms. As you got further inside the house, it would become more and more sumptuous until deep inside the house you might find something akin to the palace in Versailles, but the first couple of rooms were deceptive.

Q: These were the parlors for receiving officials.

THEROS: That's right. That's as far as the tax collectors got. The reception parlors were made to look poor.

Q: Where had this taken place?

THEROS: Hama, but that was after I left.

Q: That was the city that was basically leveled by the government.

THEROS: Yes, that was not unpopular in the rest of Syria. Syrians, as I said, by and large tend to be non-sectarian and relatively secular in their approach to life. They may be individually religious, but they are quite tolerant of others. The people of Hama have a history of not being tolerant, and what Hafez al-Assad did to Hama in '81 was the third time that it had been done since the end of World War II; he just did it more thoroughly.

After the flattening of Hama, I asked a Muslim-Sunni businessman from Homs, another town down the road that is much more liberal, what Homs' reaction was when the Syrian army decided to pave their road. He said: "Well, we thought about it, and it probably took about fifteen minutes off the drive to Aleppo."

I asked this man outside the country. He was a friend, so it wasn't a political answer. Most of the troops that went into Homs were Sunni Muslim troops too.

Loyalties in Syria are town loyalties. More than religious, sectarian, or class loyalties what comes first is your family and then your town. For example, a Christian from Damascus can count on the support of a Muslim from Damascus in a dispute with a Muslim from Aleppo. (As a later note: what happened in Syria after the Arab awakening has left me speechless and dumbfounded!)

Q: How was Hafez Al-Assad viewed?

THEROS: He was such an improvement compared to the fourteen people that had preceded him that people were willing to overlook that fact that he still ran a government that was not a terribly good government. He was simply better than his predecessors. First of all, he brought stability. Secondly, he tried very hard to co-opt the business class in support of the government. The problem was the Alawite army generals. Here's a little bit of history: the Alawites had been at the bottom of the social status in Syria for the past thousand years. They were the servants and serfs. They were at the actual bottom of the social pile. The only place the Alawites functioned as a normal society was in the mountains above Latakia. That is from where Hafez Al-Assad's family came.

The Syrians, as a merchant society, regarded military service as a lower-class occupation. This meant that the good Sunni families would not send their sons into the military. It was actually more socially acceptable to be a policeman than a soldier; therefore, when the French set up their colonial military force in Syria, seventy percent of the volunteers

were Alawites and twenty-nine percent were Christian. Only about one percent was Sunni Muslim. Joining the police was an honorable occupation. The best families could be policemen. For example, the chief of police in Damascus came from one of the most prestigious families. If you were upper class, your daughter could marry a police officer. She couldn't marry an army officer.

The Alawites went into the military, and ultimately they realized that their sect dominated the military. An Alawite held every key command position. There was a lack of Sunnis to uphold these positions.

A Christian, not a Sunni or an Alawite, established the Ba'ath Party, governing Syria under the thumb of the Alawite generals. There was an agreement between the Ba'ath Party that was very secular and the Alawite-dominated army to govern Syria. Every time that Hafez Al-Assad would make some sort of opening to the business class, which was heavily Sunni Muslim, the army would cringe and put pressure on him. There was always the seesaw between Assad opening the economy up, seeing things improving, and then the army insisting that the Ba'ath Party bring it down.

Q: Was it control or was it ideology?

THEROS: It was a fear of the Sunni taking over again.

Q: So, they didn't want to see the Sunni make money.

THEROS: No, they didn't want to see them politically succeed. They said if you make money, you have more influence. For reasons I still don't understand, the Alawites never encouraged their kids to be businessmen.

Q: By this time, it's ten years or more after the '67 war, and you'd also had the '73 war. The Syrian army, particularly the air force, really hadn't done too well. In '73 they gave the Israelis a bloody nose for a while, but basically little Israel beat the hell out of Syria.

THEROS: The perception is different than the facts. The perception here is the United States making possible Israel's victories—that you're not really fighting Israel, you're fighting the United States with the Israelis upfront. The close association of the United States with Israel is a guarantee of Israeli security, and expansion by the United States in effect relieves the Arabs of any need to deal with Israel in popular perception. Israel is only the instrument of America's will. Now they will say that America is the instrument of Israel's will. Nonetheless, losing to Israel would be humiliating when you outnumber them while losing to the United States is a lot easier to explain. We have convinced the Arab people through our actions, and through our public statements and support, that they're not fighting Israel, but they're fighting us.

Q: You were there during the period of negotiations at Camp David. How did that play out?

THEROS: Camp David was interesting. Sadat's speech of, "I want to go to Jerusalem," arrived one morning like a blockbuster. It really shook everyone. He had, as usual, not consulted with the Syrians, so the Syrians were outraged. They were mildly relieved at Israeli Prime Minister Begin's speech a couple days later, which appeared to throw cold water on Sadat's proposal. Then Begin backed off because he was under tremendous pressure from elements within Israel and from the United States. Before Sadat went to Jerusalem, he flew to Damascus with the intent of convincing Assad to come along. The Israelis were terrified of that possibility, since they really didn't want Assad to come with Sadat. It's not clear that Sadat really wanted Assad to come with him and their meeting did not go well. I went with the Ambassador as note taker to a debriefing with the foreign minister immediately after the Sadat visit. The foreign minister was literally in tears. He was so angry and so upset. In his eyes, this was a betrayal of the Arab world.

Syrians have always seen themselves as le Arab, as the real Arab. Everybody else is sort of a second-rate imitation. Damascus is known as the throbbing heart of the Arab world, and Syrians as the most civilized, best looking, most intelligent Arabs—the natural leaders of the Arab world. Egypt is always regarded as a country whose Arab identity is constantly in question, but Egypt is the biggest, most powerful country in the Arab world and therefore its defection presented a serious problem for Syria. The meeting essentially consisted of Sadat trying to convince Assad to come with him to Jerusalem, and Assad trying to convince Sadat not to go. There was some feeling that maybe Sadat didn't try quite hard enough. Then came probably the biggest mistake in Carter's efforts. Once the ball got rolling again, about four months before he invited them to Camp David, Carter met Assad in Geneva, and they had a very good meeting. Assad came back having met somebody with whom he could deal. Carter's final comment to him was, "We disagree on the question of Egypt and Israel negotiating, but we value our relationship, and I will assure you there will be no surprises. I will keep you informed as to what is going on." Assad took Carter at his word and came back feeling a little bit better. That was the last communication from the U.S. government. The U.S. government never again informed the Syrians about anything, and that was when the relationship began to deteriorate.

Q: Did you get any feel for why this was? Was it just sort of forgotten or was there a motivation back in Washington?

THEROS: I think the Egyptians put on a full court press to prevent the Syrians from being included. I think the Egyptians said: "Look, this is our peace treaty. We're taking the risks, and we don't want the Syrians involved. We don't want you dealing with the Syrians." I think the bureaucracy in Washington finally persuaded the President this was a promise he didn't need to keep, but I'm also reasonably convinced it was the Egyptians who swung him back. Sadat appeared to fear that the Israelis would refuse to give back the Golan, and this would jeopardize Egypt getting back the Sinai.

Q: What was the feeling when Sadat came to Damascus before going to Jerusalem and then went to Jerusalem? How was this received by our Embassy?

THEROS: Well, we were all enthusiasts. We were all working full-time trying to

persuade the Syrians that this wasn't a bad idea, and they would be better off tagging along. Unfortunately, the help we got from Washington made this impossible. The messages from Washington were more of a threatening nature rather than cajoling. Senator Byrd came out at one point. Assad wouldn't see him; he saw Abdul Halim Khaddam, who was then the vice president for foreign affairs. Senator Byrd was up to the same standard, and they had a rather stormy meeting in which I was one of the two interpreters. I was interpreting from Arabic to English, while their interpreter was going from English to Arabic and taking notes at the same time. Byrd began to use sort of Mafiosi language with him. You know, "This is the only game in town. We'll break you if you don't cooperate." It was that sort of threatening language. And Khaddam turned to the interpreter who had just finished translating and said: "Is this man threatening me?" The interpreter said: "It sounded like a threat." Khaddam turned to Byrd, and in essence said, "if you think you're threatening me, let me tell you what we do to people who threaten us." I had a hard time interpreting his answer so his interpreter pitched in. The entire dialogue was the kind of dialogue you got out of a B-grade mafia movie. That dialogue soured the relationship.

What truly soured the relationship was the Syrians saw this as an Egyptian betrayal of the Arab cause—that the Egyptians had shown their true colors, and they were only interested in the welfare of Egypt. Egyptians were not Arabs and had no right to be included in Arab councils because they essentially walked away from the Palestinians. In Damascus, the idea that the Palestinians were a separate issue, and not an Arab issue, was anathema.

Q: The Syrians hadn't coped very well with the Palestinians, like all the other Arab countries.

THEROS: There were about 350,000 to 400,000 Palestinians in Syria. They didn't have passports; they had Syrian laissez passers, or travel documents. On the other hand, they had a full work permits. This was better than in Lebanon, but not as good as the Palestinian treatment in Jordan. A Palestinian in Syria could engage in any business he wanted. He had the right to work, as any Syrian citizen did. What he didn't have was the full legal rights of a Syrian citizen. In terms of just simply working to make a living, the refugee camps in Damascus were reasonably prosperous.

Q: Did you get any feel for the dedication of Syrians to the Palestinian cause of the eradication of Israel?

THEROS: The Syrians have a view of themselves that's sometimes difficult to describe. They are "Syria." The French would be comfortable in Syria. They have a "we are simply the best" mentality. "We are the leaders of the Arab world. Within that leadership of the Arab world, there is a nation called Syria, and the nation encompasses pretty much all of Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, and Palestine. These other people may not know it. They may be too stupid and ignorant to know it, but they're all Syrians; therefore, it is our obligation to free them. If Jews want to be citizens of Syria, that's perfectly okay with us."

As a matter of fact, perhaps one of the biggest frauds ever perpetrated in the United States was the idea of the persecution of the Jews in Damascus. Even Mike Wallace of 60 Minutes did two programs on them, and his conclusion was that Jews were no more badly treated than the rest of the Syrian population, For Syrians; it was not that a Jewish homeland shouldn't exist, but it shouldn't exist outside the Syrian family.

We used to go to Lebanon to go shopping all the time. The prices were better because of the Syrian occupation. A free-enterprise country with civil war has got more consumer goods at a better price than a socialist country without civil war. I'd go shopping in Lebanon on a very frequent basis. Periodically, if I went by myself, I'd get stopped at a Syrian army checkpoint and be asked to take a couple of hitchhiking soldiers back with me. I did, and I would engage them in conversation. What was interesting about the conversation was these Syrian soldiers with muddied boots would complain about being in the army and about their officers, sergeants, food, and where they wanted to go. I never once heard a Syrian soldier ask what we were doing in Lebanon. As far as the average Syrian soldier was concerned, being in Lebanon was defending Syria, and Syria was Lebanon. This idea ran through the entire population.

Q: As commercial officer, what were some of the things that you were able to push and what did you have trouble dealing with?

THEROS: I ran the American participation in the Damascus International Fair. We hadn't participated for several years, but I got that up and going. Getting companies to participate at first was sort of hard. My most successful year was getting the state of Ohio to sponsor the entire fair. Ohio is a marvelous place. Like Syria, it produces everything. I had about fifty-five companies from Ohio with exhibits. The actual participation in the fair was generally successful. The problem was that follow-up on both sides was never that good. The American companies didn't know how to deal with the smaller American companies in the Middle East, but the Syrians had thought they did. There was always this disconnect.

As a good example: a Syrian businessman wanted to build a middle class resort and hotel near Latakia. He was going to use manufactured housing, and buy it from France, but I got an American company to bid. The American company's stuff was just as good, and it was half the price. This process had been going on for a couple of months. Everything was set, and one day I got a call from the businessman asking me to come over to his office. I went over, and he showed me this lengthy telex sheet that went on and on. This American company had never exported anything. It delivered its products at the loading dock, unaware that exporting was a different process. In order to open a letter of credit for them, the Syrian businessman had to open a letter of credit. Then the American company, in order to secure the letter of credit on its end, was supposed to put a little bit of money down which it would get back when the letter of credit was paid off. They refused to do so because they didn't know the process. They had absolutely no idea what a letter of credit meant since they had never dealt with one. The company based out of Galveston, Texas, had no idea what it was doing. The businessman actually had to fly to New York to pick up his banker and fly down to Galveston to straighten things out. Still

the company still wouldn't comply.

My mother's family lives in Ohio, and I was taken to dinner once in Columbus. It so happened that the head of what later became Bank One was at dinner at my cousin's house. We were talking about Syria, and he said, "You know, I'm a Harvard MBA; since taking over at the bank, I have never opened a letter of credit, and this is the most heavily industrialized state in the union." The conversation just went on like that.

Another time, another Syrian businessman called me, outraged, and I went over to see him. He was the representative of a locomotive manufacturer in the United States. There was, for the first time in years, a tender for three hundred locomotives. He had just received a telex informing him he was no longer the direct agent to this company, but the sub-agent for some Lebanese in Liechtenstein. He was just outraged, and he told me that he was going to make sure that the American company never sold another locomotive in the Middle East. Every relative was going to hear about the way he had been so badly treated. I passed this message along.

A couple days later I get a phone call at home from this man who is the locomotive company's representative for Europe and the Middle East. He said, "Can I see you at home? I don't want the local businessman to know that I'm in town." He came over to the house, and he said: "You wouldn't believe what happened. Some nice looking young Lebanese guy in Gucci shoes and an Yves St. Laurent suit with a Rolex watch and flashing teeth is introduced to the chairman of the locomotive company by some mutual friend. They have a meeting, and he convinces the chairman of the locomotive company that he is the most important businessman in the entire Middle East. The chairman on the spot directed the CEO of the company to make the Lebanese the agent for the entire Middle East. This in turn made the agents in the seven Middle Eastern countries, including Syria, sub agents to him." It later turns out that this guy's only worldly possessions were the clothes he was wearing, plus a brass plaque on the office of a lawyer in Liechtenstein. It cost the American locomotive about three million dollars to get their agency back. This happens far too frequently. Other than the really big companies, such as the oil companies and so forth, who really know what they're doing, most small American companies are really disadvantaged. The honest ones are babes in the wood and the dishonest ones are just dishonest.

Q: Did you find you could straighten these issues out?

THEROS: I could straighten them up, but it just took a lot of work.

That one I discussed was not fixable. The guy who didn't know how to open a letter of credit on the other hand was fixable.

Q: What about the Department of Commerce?

THEROS: Secretary of State Vance gave away the commercial function from the State Department to the Department of Commerce. What he essentially did is the U.S.

government took the commercial function away from an agency that gave it a very low priority to an agency that was incompetent. I think it was a mistake to give it away, from the State Department's view, but Vance clearly didn't care. Most of the senior people really didn't care. They regarded it as a function of the Department of Commerce, but I honestly think they thought that this was the place where it belonged. The Commerce Department's problem was that the career-enhancing part of the Commerce Department was on the regulatory side. Export promotion was not career enhancing. Quality people in the Department of Commerce, with a few exceptions, avoid the export-promotion jobs. No one believed in all the signals from the agencies of the U.S. government until Ron Brown came along.

Q: The Department of Commerce has over the years been so riddled with political appointees, more than anywhere else. It seems to almost be the dumping ground of the political appointees you didn't know what to do with. People were coming and going all the time.

THEROS: The worst appointees were stuck over on the export side. I had learned that the most the Department of Commerce could do for me was to give me telephone lists.

I had a pretty competent Syrian staff. I had two American assistants and an American secretary that I later traded in for a Syrian secretary, and three or four other Syrian staff, all of whom were really quite good.

Q: Let's talk a bit about the Embassy. Who was the Ambassador, DCM, and how did they operate?

THEROS: When I got there, the Ambassador was Dick Murphy for two years. I knew Dick Murphy quite well; he was a good friend. He was my first boss in the Foreign Service. He had a dignified relationship with the Syrians that was quite good. After two years, he was replaced by Talcott Seeley, and he was, and still is, one of the most remarkable people I've ever known. He essentially believed that development of diplomacy had stopped with the Treaty of Westphalia. He was very, very formal. However, once I figured out what he wanted, he was a gem to work with. He had this idea, "This is the way embassies are run, which was whenever the Treaty of Westphalia was; this is how I want my junior people to work." He was strictly hierarchical. I had an assistant who disgraced himself on several occasions. The Ambassador never reprimanded him. Rather, he would call me and tell me about my assistant. My office was my responsibility. Formality was the key word. I'll tell you what I learned from Talcott Seeley: formality works once you figure out the rules.

Q: Did you find much interest in the commercial side?

THEROS: No, my bosses did not, they had a lot of interest in the fact that I was the chief political reporting officer because I had more access than anybody else did. It was sort of, "Theros is having dinner. Is he going to invite the political officer, so he'll talk to people." I scooped the Embassy almost every time on everything because I had access,

and no one else did. I don't think this means that I was particularly better than the political officers; it was simply that I had access to people who would talk to me.

My wife had equally good and occasionally better access. She would come in with amazing reports. She scooped the Embassy on the news of the massacre of the artillery school cadets in Aleppo, the first large-scale terrorist incident in Syria in years. About a week after our first-born came, some prominent Damascus ladies visited her. When I came home, she told me that the news from Aleppo was such a shame. I had no idea what she was talking about. She told me some Muslim Brotherhood gunmen had gotten into the artillery school in Aleppo and machine-gunned almost 150 cadets. The rest of the Embassy confirmed this only two days later! A few months later she noticed that the tarps slipped from a convoy of tanks on lowboys to reveal the arrival of newly minted Soviet T-72s, which we did not know, were in country. On a scale of one to ten compared to our friends in the intelligence world I would give her a solid seven and a grand prize 10 once in a while.

Q: What was of interest to us in Syria?

THEROS: We were interested in Syria's stability and its attitude towards the Arab-Israeli internal stability and towards the Israeli situation. To a lesser extent, we were interested in the relationship with Iraq and Turkey and, of course, Lebanon.

Q: What was the feeling about Lebanon? As you said, the leadership in Lebanon is not something that you ever want to have to deal with.

THEROS: The Embassy's general view was that we understood what the Syrians wanted. I once had a conversation at church with the secretary general of the Baath Party, who was Christian Orthodox. I met him through some mutual friends. We'd have some conversations, and one day standing outside church smoking a cigarette—which is what most good Greek Orthodox males do while their wives and kids are inside—I said, "Look, I've just about failed to understand your policy on Syria. What do you want in Lebanon?" He looked at me, smiled and said, "We want Lebanon's sovereignty; we want Lebanon's stability; we want Lebanon's independence." I asked, "What does that mean?" He said, "We don't care if the Baha'is rule Lebanon. We couldn't care less. All we want is that Lebanon marches with Syria." I said: "What does 'marches with Syria' mean?" His response was very simple: "There are two conditions: One is that Lebanon not permit its territory to be used as a nesting place for the enemies of Syria, and secondly, that the foreign ministry call Damascus every morning for instructions on foreign affairs. Other than that, we couldn't care how they run their country internally, as long as they're stable."

I think that was pretty much it. It wasn't so much the Syrians wanted to take over Lebanon, as that they wanted to be the hegemony of foreign affairs. I think right now the Syrians have accomplished what they wanted to accomplish because Lebanon does not have independent foreign affairs.

Q: I would have thought that the merchant class, as the entrepreneurial people in Syria, would look at Lebanon with envy because Lebanese people were very freewheeling.

THEROS: First of all, Lebanon's economic miracle of the '60s was a direct result of the '50s socialist takeovers in Syria. The flight of capital from Syria to Lebanon in the '50s and the '60s created Lebanon. They felt that Lebanon was an appendage of families. Every Syrian businessman worth anything had a foot in Beirut and a foot in Damascus. They wanted stability in Lebanon; they really didn't want control. Actually Lebanon worked out well for the bigger Syrian businessmen because their presence in Lebanon enabled them to even more effectively corrupt the political system in Syria to their advantage. For the rich Sunni businessmen, the situation was an acceptable, tolerable situation so long as political stability returned. The Syrians wanted to stop the civil war because it was hurting them badly. Syrian television, virtually every night, would do a news program followed by a television tour of the ruins in Beirut, with the message of: This is what happens when you get religion get into politics. It was a regime that was fiercely secular and non-sectarian, Unlike Turkey, where the manifestation of religion is forbidden, but any indication of sectarian difference was crushed ruthlessly.

Q: Did Syrians that you met know what was happening in Israel? Did they follow Israel?

THEROS: Like everybody else in the Middle East, they don't know what's happening on the other side. I don't know many Israelis, other than in think tanks, who know anything about Syria. Syria didn't even have think tanks. Nobody in the Middle East knows what's happening on the other side. The only ones who do are the Israeli Arabs.

Q: Did the Israeli lobby play any role? You mentioned the aid keeping them out of roads. Did you feel the Israeli lobby in Syria?

THEROS: Most of the time the Syrians just went their own way, I felt the effects of the Israeli lobby in two ways: first, there were a lot of goods that couldn't get export licenses for Syria; second, there was an earnest campaign in the United States to portray the Syrian Jewish community as persecuted and oppressed, in attempts to get them to come out. The Syrians sort of played into their hands by not letting them emigrate. When they finally emigrated, virtually the entire community emigrated to New York.

Q: Were you there when (Congressman) Steve Solarz was?

THEROS: Oh yes, I was.

Q: I've interviewed Steve Solarz. Could you talk about your experience with him?

THEROS: Most of the time I was kept away from Steve Solarz because the Ambassador didn't want to contaminate what was a perfectly good relationship that I had with the rest of Syria by letting me do anything with Steve. I was only able to go along a couple of times.

Q: I could see you and Steve wouldn't probably be best to mix.

THEROS: Actually, we got along quite well.

Q: I'm sure you did.

THEROS: Later, when I was in Jordan, he and I got to know each other quite well. It was sort of the Ambassador saying: "You've worked yourself into a really advantageous niche here in Damascus, and if you hang around with Steve Solarz, you could risk that. Once Steve Solarz showed up with one of his constituents, who was originally a Syrian Jew, on one of his campaigns, and there was nobody else who spoke Arabic in the Embassy. It was just one of those days when somebody was on leave, somebody was gone, and somebody had been transferred. Things happen, and I was the only competent Arabic-speaking officer available, other than the Ambassador. The Syrian Jewish community did not speak English, by and large. I was told: "Okay, you can go this time, but never again. This is going to be your only chance to go." I went along with Solarz, translating for Doctor Tuta who was the head of the Syrian Jewish community. It was a fascinating meeting. I have two anecdotes of that meeting.

The first one was that while we were sitting there, they were just bringing out tons and tons of sweets, food, and more sweets. Solarz was getting a little green around the gills, so he said: "You're hospitality is overwhelming." I dutifully translated this to Doctor Tuta, and his response was: "What do you expect in an Arab house?" I chose not to translate that for Solarz because the man that was with us, who was a Syrian Jew, just rolled his eyes back when he said that. This is a community that is permanently embedded in Syrian life. Their presence in Damascus precedes the destruction of the Temple.

Later in the day, while we were still talking, somebody got up, and accidentally shifted the carpet in the living room where we were sitting. Under the carpet was a Hellenistic mosaic. I thought it was a marvelous copy, but it was an original. They pulled the carpet back and showed it to us. It was a little the worse for wear, but it wasn't too bad. Solarz said, "My God, how long has this been in the house?" He replied, "As long as anybody can remember." Solarz asked, "Well, how long have you been in the house?" He said, "As long as anybody can recall in the family." Down the Street called Straight (now known as Medhat Basha) where Saul went when he was blinded on the road to Damascus. It's an area called Bab Sharqi. This is still the Jewish quarter, and it has been the Jewish quarter for at least 2,000 to 2,500 years. We were about six feet below the street outside. I said, "This must have been the ground level when the house was built." One of Tuta's sons said, "No, of course not." A couple of the sons muscled this big armoire to reveal a door behind it. When they opened the door, there were eight more steps leading down to the street, except the street by this time were six steps up and eight steps down. We had gone up fourteen steps since the house was built. As far as anybody knew, this had been the home of a Jew since that time.

Solarz was pushing for the Jews to leave Syria. The Jewish community was more

concerned with getting the brides out.

Q: Could you explain the situation?

THEROS: The situation was not a problem so much in Damascus where the community was fairly vibrant economically. There were smaller communities in Aleppo and some smaller towns where the young men had left, largely for economic reasons. Up against the Iraqi border, tensions had been higher. The young men had left for jobs abroad, so they had a large number of girls growing up now without Jewish husbands while a few were finding husbands in the larger non-Jewish community. They were determined to prevent this, so it was exploited for political purposes to get these brides out.

Q: It was exploited on the American side?

THEROS: That's right.

At first they demanded all the brides to go to Israel. The Syrians said, "No, we'll let them go on two conditions: that you have a groom—a man shows up at the Syrian consulate in New York or someplace and confirms he is going to marry the girl—and proof that he is going to follow through with marrying the girl." They were siphoning out the women in the northern communities, which meant the communities were dropping in number rapidly. You didn't feel this in the Jewish community in Damascus as much as you did in Aleppo. At the time I left, the community in Damascus had no real interest in exporting their daughters unless somebody could arrange it, because they did have relatives in New York who could arrange a good wedding. By and large, the community in Damascus didn't like Solarz. Solarz was a benefactor in that he brought them monetary assistance from the Syrian American Jewish community in New York. They didn't necessarily need it, but they certainly appreciated it, so they were polite to Solarz even when he was not polite to them.

Once we were at the hotel and the elders of the Jewish community in Deir Ez-Zor had to drive to Damascus to see him. They hadn't shown up by eleven o'clock. He didn't wait for them past eleven; instead, he went to bed. The Jewish community as a friend did not perceive Solarz. He was seen as somebody that they had to be nice to because he brought them goodies.

Q: What were relations with Jordan? At this point, you were not that far away from Black September in 1970.

THEROS: The Jordanians had a healthy fear of the Syrians. It wasn't so much a fear of invasion as much of a fear that the Syrians would do whatever they could to exercise control. The Jordanians, in order to do this, were trying to shift the whole of their economy away from Syria, towards Saudi Arabia and the Gulf. This was politically smart, but it was economically poor, because Syria and Jordan were in many ways complimentary. The Jordanians believed that trade with Syria would lead to Syrian control, so they were working very hard to make Iraq their principal trading partner. They

had a point of doing that because if you look at the map, it is almost equidistant from Baghdad to Aqaba as it is from Baghdad to Basra. The Jordanians worked very hard to build up that relationship.

Q: That's the shortest shipping route.

THEROS: That is exactly the case. When you added in the cost of shipping goods from, for example, Amsterdam to Baghdad, shipping through Aqaba was probably cheaper than shipping through Iran. Shipping through Syria was also cheaper.

Q: Building a good railroad would make sense.

THEROS: A railroad would have made great sense. Like I said, the Jordanians certainly worked very hard to shift Jordanian trade away from Syria.

Q: What was the relationship between President Assad and King Hussein?

THEROS: They respected each other as people who were in charge of their countries. I think that they reflected the national will. Assad felt that Hussein should recognize Syria's role, and Hussein was always afraid of Assad's hegemonic outlook. Assad was a Syrian who personified Syrian national security policy in a way that pretty much reflected the Syrian population's view of themselves.

Q: How about Iraq?

THEROS: Of the four years I was in Syria, there was one year of good relations while the rest of the time we had to deal with bad relationships. The two wings of the Ba'ath Party, which were the military wing that dominated Syria and the political wing that dominated Iraq, were bitter enemies. There were at least one or two terrorist incidents shortly after I got there during November of '96. Five terrorists hijacked the Semiramis Hotel.

Q: So, the terrorists took over the Semiramis Hotel?

THEROS: They actually hijacked a wedding party. Their intention was never quite clear. They mistakenly thought the wedding party was for someone important. There were a lot of casualties. The government managed to kill two of the terrorists and capture three. A number of hostages were also killed in the rescue operation. I remember watching this on television. As they brought the terrorists out, the police had to club the mob to get them out of the way. A trial was held the next morning, and during the day the terrorists were convicted of murder and sentenced to death. Their case went all the way to the Supreme Court and then to the president who also confirmed the sentence. They were paraded on Damascus television that night, looking like they had had being interrogated for a long time. They all confessed to having been sent by the Iraqi intelligence service to carry the attack out and were hung from the bridge opposite the hotel where they committed the attack at six o'clock in the morning. When the police went to cut them down, a mob attacked them. The police had to go through an ordeal to cut them down by noontime.

That situation pretty much characterized the relationship between Syria and Iraq that lasted about eight months. It was a tense time between Syria and Iraq, then business picked up, and the business community was happy. A major Shia shrine south of Damascus was getting tens of thousands of Iraqi Shia pilgrims. This fairly positive relationship went on for about eight months, and then everything went to hell again.

Q: Should there have been a natural affinity? One always thinks of the rivalry between Baghdad and Damascus.

THEROS: There is a who's-in-charge aspect. The populations are similar in many ways, but it could be an accident of history. The Syrians are a very Mediterranean people who are tolerant and have their tradesmen. Syrian society is much softer in its relationships with each other. Even its dictatorships are softer than how Iraq deals with its people. The Iraqis are a much more brutal people. For example, of the four countries in which the Kurds live, the Syrians are the ones who have most integrated them. Every fourth prime minister in Syria is a Kurd. Essentially to the Syrians, if you want to speak Kurdish at home, if you want to be a Shia or an Alawite or something like that, that's all perfectly all right as long as you don't stick it in their face. If you come to Damascus civilized, eat well, set a big table and speak cultured Arabic, they don't care who your father was or what you did for a living. Family counts for more than social class. The Iraqis, through the centuries, have settled the differences in Iraq between the sectarian groups and between the clans very brutally.

Syrian coups tend to kill very few people, and usually the losers end up as ambassador to Paris. They worked like Latin American coups. At one point, one of the few coups that was bloody was about the takeover, but it was still the leadership killing each other. The average Syrian was able to go to ground, stay in his basement, and not get hurt.

Q: The Soviet military was there. What was the relationship with them and the opinion about Soviet equipment?

THEROS: They Syrians felt sorry for the Soviet military mission. Syria was on the verge of taking up collections to feed these people. Service in Moscow was very popular in the Syrian military because it was an opportunity to make money. The Soviet Union couldn't produce enough clothes, and Syria was a big exporter. These Syrian officers would take clothes in their luggage to sell in the USSR. When in the Soviet Union, they'd buy goods like Cuban cigars, and sell them in Syria. It was quite a business. Being assigned to the Syrian military mission to Moscow meant that you could probably make a year's pay in two weeks.

Most countries developed doctrine and equipment for their army. Very few small countries have the luxury of developing doctrine for their own army, and even fewer countries have the luxury of developing equipment for their own army. I once had a conversation with the chief of staff for the United Arab Emirates (UAE) armed forces when he came back to Abu Dhabi. He had just graduated at the top of his class from the

Imperial War College in London, and I was chargé. He said: "The problem is that you Americans, British, French, and Russians teach us how to defend America, Britain, France, and Russia. You don't teach us how to defend ourselves. Our conditions are different. For example, in the UAE, I have no manpower, unlimited money, and a certain set of enemies. I can't organize my army like the British army or the American Army."

The Syrians, not having a strong military tradition, never quite figured out that the Soviet army had Soviet tactics, and the Russian equipment was designed for the defense of Russia operated by Russian troops. The Russians abandoned their equipment when it broke down. Follow-on forces picked it up and took it to depots, to be revamped. The Russian supply system was just to push equipment to the front. There was a very low skill level among the average Russian soldier. When a Russian convoy was on the road and a truck broke down, they just unloaded the truck, loaded it into another and kept on going. Their wrecker would come along and pick up the truck to take it back to depot. Beyond oil changes, there was no field maintenance in the Russian army.

When the Syrian army was on the march and a truck would break down, everybody would try to fix the truck because the Syrians have the world's greatest mechanics. What they did not realize was that these vehicles were not designed to be fixed on the field. If the engine needed to be fixed, you had to take the whole engine out because of its design. Their equipment did not break down much, but when it did, it could not be fixed on the spot.

The Syrian high command never understood that Soviet tactics were very mobile. They trained their officers not for one set battle, but for six options. For example, when a Russian division would run down the road at high speed, it would run into an enemy force head on. The Soviet division commander then decided the situation called for Option Three and would communicate to those units that they were executing Option Three. The units knew what Option Three was and kept on going. The Syrian army had Russian equipment, Russian doctrine, Syrian soldiers, and a high command that failed to understand that there was a mismatch.

Syrian troops were very bright soldiers who had a lot of initiative. They didn't fit in a system that gives you just three options. Syrians are nothing but improvisers. The failure of '73 was a failure by the Syrian general staff. The Syrians simply were full of Soviet doctrine. They just stacked their divisions up in echelon and launched their First Corps right at the Golan Heights. Two things happened: The First Corps succeeded beyond its wildest expectations, totally shattering Israeli defense with tanks crossing the Jordan River; there were Syrian tanks in Galilee. In doing so, the corps disintegrated as a command structure because the casualties on both sides were ferocious. If it were a Soviet or Russian general, he would have launched the Second Corps without a moment's hesitation. It didn't matter that the First Corps had disintegrated. He had a plan that he would hold to, and that Second Corps would have gone right through. Syrians would have gotten to Haifa if it were a Soviet general who was in charge. Instead, the Syrian general staff did an analysis and concluded that things had gone badly and stopped the Second Corps in its tracks.

I've seen Soviet equipment against American equipment in the Gulf War. At 3,000 meters in open desert at night an M-1 Abrams tank had a greater advantage over a T-72. At 500 meters in a built-up agricultural area with trees and a lot of cover, I'd rather be in a T-72. It's just what it is.

No Arab army that I am aware of has developed a doctrine that fits the equipment to the needs and to the resources of its country, and this is something that is a characteristic of military doctrine. No Arab country has a military tradition since their people are not people who want to be soldiers.

Q: I read an article one time about why Arab armies lose. One of the answers, according to the American military man who wrote it, was that the Arab officers don't pass things they learn to their men. They want to hang on to the knowledge and not pass it around.

THEROS: This probably is true of the Egyptian army. There's a real dichotomy between officer and soldier in the Egyptian army. This is to a lesser extent in the Syrian army. In the Jordanian army, it is not true. The problem is that the officers have learned how to go to war from us or from the Soviets. They don't have a system of integrating their own army into their own conditions.

The Iranians on the other hand have a long military tradition. This is what gave the Iranians an advantage over the Iraqis. It wasn't until the end of the Iraq-Iran War that the Iraqi army began to develop its own doctrine. Saddam killed all the generals who did this after they won the war.

The Turkish army, the Greek army, and others have a tradition. They have their own schools, and they have sat down and said, "These are my conditions. How do I fight a war?" Most Arabs look to the Americans, the British, the Russians or the French to learn how to fight war, and even when they try to adapt it, they've begun with one hand tied behind their backs. The difference, I suppose, is tactics should vary with the weapons, the terrain, and the quality of the troops. Strategy is a national strategy. I don't know of an Arab state whose armed forces have developed a national strategy. They're still trying to work within what we have taught them.

We were so arrogant sometimes that we kept telling them that if they devised things for themselves, they wouldn't succeed. I'm a World War II buff, so I know a lot about the affairs in Greece during the war. The American and British attachés were reporting that the Greek army would disintegrate because they had such a negative opinion of the strategy devised by the Greek general staff for World War II. The Greeks demolished the Italian army and did a pretty good job on the Germans before they were finally overrun, because this was an army that had developed its own strategy. It was our mindset that how you defend the United States and Britain applies everywhere. The Syrians, the Jordanians, and the Egyptians tried to make their raw material of an army fit in the shoe of Western strategy, and it couldn't because they had different strengths and different weaknesses.

Q: I heard a joke that the Soviet advisers were with the Egyptians and said, "Well, how should we fight this war with Israel?" They said," Establish a strong defensive line and wait." They asked, "Wait for what?" They replied, "Wait for winter." [Laughs.]

How about in the air?

THEROS: Again, in the air, Soviet doctrine has massive tightly-controlled interceptors. Essentially a Soviet interceptor has characteristics that make it a very formidable airplane. Lots of Soviet airplanes are quite superior to their Western counterparts. The truth is if you put the same pilot, of whatever nationality, in a MiG-29 facing an F-16, the F-16 is going to be in serious trouble. If you take a Sukhoi-27, and you put it up against an F-15, the same pilot, one-on-one, the F-15 is going to be in serious trouble.

Soviet doctrine works very well for masses because their equipment is cheap, but when it breaks down, it's a catastrophic failure. For example, their tanks work really well until they break down and can't be repaired in the field. Similarly, they put masses of tightly-controlled airplanes into the air. Essentially the Soviets see fighter interceptors as piloted missiles in which the pilot is guided to within an engagement range by a system that then releases him to go fight his battle. The system tries to get fifty Russian fighter planes to intercept twenty Western fighter planes.

For a variety of reasons, the Israelis always were able to attack in mass numbers, often because they could jam electronics. The Syrians never had the numbers, and therefore trying to follow Soviet doctrine was not possible. Syrian pilots were trained to be directed until the final engagement, putting them at a disadvantage against Israeli pilots who have much more freedom of action. Training an Israeli pilot costs more than it does to train a Syrian pilot; therefore, the Syrians got the worst of both worlds. They didn't have enough pilots to overwhelm the Israelis. Keep in mind the scope of the Soviet Union. (Field Marshal Friedrich) Von Paulus, the man who commanded the German army at Stalingrad, was interviewed after the war and said, "One German soldier was worth ten Russian soldiers." The interviewer said, "Why did the Russians win?" He said: "Because eleven Russians kept showing up." It wasn't that the Russians had eleven times more men. They had about three times more men than the Germans overall, but they had better generals and the ability to work on huge open spaces. They could move forces rapidly over huge expanses of land, so suddenly the Germans would be overwhelmed. Neither the geography of Syria, nor the population of Syria, permitted them to do what the Soviet doctrine called for.

Q: Did you find any questioning of why the Israelis kept beating the Syrians?

THEROS: The Americans were certainly the cause.

Q: All this came back to the Americans.

THEROS: Yes, it put us on a level playing field. Some of this I think was delusional;

however, some of it was true. The fact that the Israeli general staff consisted of European- and American-trained Jewish officers at the beginning, enabling the Israelis to develop their own doctrine for the defense of Israel, was a tremendous advantage over the Arabs. Other than that, at the small unit level, the advantages were not so apparent. It was sort of guaranteed that if an Israeli artillery battery got into a duel with a Jordanian artillery battery, the Jordanians would win. The Jordanians would get to the Israeli battery before the Israeli battery could get to the Jordanians.

The Jordanian problem was they couldn't put a synergistic command together. They couldn't put this air, ground, artillery and the multi-unit tactic together. At the Battle of Jenin in 1967, the Israeli Air Force reported that it destroyed a Jordanian tank battalion.

What they didn't realize was they hadn't destroyed the Jordanian tank battalion that was the first one on the road that the Israelis were facing, but they had destroyed the one in reserve. An Israeli battalion ran headlong into a Jordanian unit, about evenly matched, and the Israelis were annihilated. Out of forty-four tanks engaged, they lost forty-two within five minutes. The individual Jordanian gunner and tank commander was significantly better than his Israeli counterpart while Jordan's overall command-and-control system was significantly inferior to the Israeli system.

Q: You were there during the fall of the Shah and developments in Iran at the beginning of the hostage crisis. How did that play out?

THEROS: Initial Syrian reaction was extremely negative. They didn't like the Shah, but they were comfortable with him. The Syrians were very anti-religious; particularly when it came to politics, so the idea of the mullahs coming to power in Iran received a negative reaction.

They were very negative about it. The only good thing was the small Shia population in Syria thought, "For the first time now we run things, because the Shah was never seen as a real Muslim." Syrians were very unsympathetic to the regime. Later, change came as a result of U.S. hostility in Lebanon. After I left, we essentially drove the Syrians and the Iranians together.

Q: Was there any feeling of either sympathy or hostility regarding the Americans who were hostages in the Embassy?

THEROS: Syrians are very legalistic, so they believe that it wasn't acceptable to do this to diplomats.

Q: Yes, I think to a lot of people this was upsetting.

Abu Dhabi, UAE

Q: I think this is a good place to stop and we'll pick this up in 1980. Where did you go?

THEROS: Abu Dhabi.

Q: You were in Abu Dhabi from when to when?

THEROS: From the early summer of 1980 until roughly late summer of 1983.

Q: What were you doing there?

THEROS: I was DCM for the first three months and then I was Chargé for the next year-and-a-half, and then I was DCM again.

Q: In Abu Dhabi, what was the state when you went out there? It was the United Emirates.

THEROS: It was the United Emirates, but most of the action was in Abu Dhabi. On the economic side it was quite good. American companies weren't actively involved across a broad spectrum of economic activity but dominated the hydrocarbon sector. However, there were a lot of American cars on the street. Generally, Americans were well regarded. There was some heartburn over U.S. policies towards Israel, but in 1980 they still weren't out of hand. The political relationship was distant. It wasn't cold. We had simply treated the entire Gulf at the time, other than Saudi Arabia, with benign neglect. Our two client states in the area were Saudi Arabia and Iran. Ninety percent of our activity was in one state or the other, and the lower Gulf States were generally ignored. The Brits and the French had free run there and we weren't, other than the economic side; that was American oil companies operating without the benefit of much help from the United States government.

Q: You mentioned Iran, and of course we were going through a terrible period with Iran when you arrived there. The situation with the hostages in our Embassy wasn't going anywhere at the time. Was that an issue at all?

THEROS: It was because the Iranian revolution was seen as terribly dangerous because now, in addition to normal Iranian hegemonistic activities in the Gulf, Iran under the Shah was the enemy, together with Saudi Arabia, which was also the enemy of the UAE with border disputes. But the threat from Iran until then was largely a threat of political influence, political hegemony, and occasional seizure of territory—remember that with independence in '71 the Iranians under the Shah had seized these offshore islands. The Shah of Iran was always regarded as threatening. Now you had, in addition, the threat of internal subversion, because the coming to power of the ayatollah and the religious extremists in Iran was not seen as materially changing Iranian foreign policy. In fact, it was seen as making the Iranian threat stronger because now the Iranians had another threat, which was internal subversion through religion.

Q: What was the religious situation? You had sort of the Wahhabi Saudis on one side and the ayatollah's Shias on the other side. Where did the Emirates?

THEROS: The Emirates are sort of a majority of mild Wahhabis. I'm not even sure they would refer to themselves as Wahhabis; it's a fairly religious Sunni, fairly relaxed, that befits the seafaring people with regard to their social lives, relatively speaking—with a Shia minority varying from Abu Dhabi to Dubai, and very strong in Dubai, that was innately distrusted. I mean they were not persecuted in any sense. Some of them were really quite prosperous. But there were very few Shia that found their way into positions of influence and power outside of business.

Q: Was it somewhat the same situation as you had in Bahrain where the Shia had sort of come over, essentially illegally, over a period of time and were considered to be possibly a subversive element?

THEROS: I think the Shia would object to that description. The Shia regard themselves as very much the native population of Bahrain and believe that the Sunni are people who are Bedouin who drifted over through the years. There's a large Shia population on the eastern coast of the eastern province of Saudi Arabia as well. There has been a lot of back and forth across the Gulf. There has been more movement of people across the Gulf back and forth than there has been from the desert to the Gulf, and I think you could probably regard the Shia there about as indigenous as the Sunni.

Q: Who was your Ambassador when you arrived?

THEROS: It was Bill Wolle.

Q: How did you deal with it? You dealt with seven emirates, don't you?

THEROS: The only emirate that was a problem was Dubai. Or Dubay, if pronounced locally. In Dubai we had a branch office with one officer; later it augmented to two. Much, much later it became a consulate general. There was always very lively tension between Abu Dhabi and Dubai. Federal positions were duplicated between the two. There was a private agreement housed in the British embassy that said if the president of the federation was from Abu Dhabi, the vice president or prime minister would be from Dubai, or vice-versa; the top two positions could not be occupied by somebody from one or the other. Abu Dhabi called the shots in the other five emirates because it simply provided the money for the other five emirates. Dubai, however, because of a combination of some petroleum and a lot of business acumen, and industrial development and so forth, was very much not under Abu Dhabi's thumb. I suppose the other five were.

There were two military commands. There was a minister of defense was in Dubai while the chief of staff was in Abu Dhabi. The Dubai brigade and the UAE armed forces were separate brigades. The Dubai police were a power unto themselves, as opposed to the other emirates where the federal police were more important, and Dubai was very, very conscious of its semi-sovereign status and lost no effort to assert it whenever it could. This meant that the Dubai authorities would always deal with the branch office in Dubai rather than the Embassy whenever possible.

What made this all tolerable was the personal relationship between Sheikh Rashid, the then ruler of Dubai, and Sheikh Zayed, the president of the federation. It was probably to describe it as cordial but it was quite good. They both pretty much agreed on the need for solidarity within the emirates in order to protect themselves against bad people like the Saudis and the Omanis and the Iranians. For us it meant that, as I said, as DCM I wasn't really terribly welcome up in Dubai; they preferred dealing with the OIC at the Dubai office, a consular officer. In my time it was a nifty guy named Tom Dowling, if you ever run across him.

The British operated differently. Their ambassador was in Abu Dhabi. Their equivalent to the DCM, the counselor of the embassy, was also the consul general in Dubai. So whenever the ambassador was gone, the consul general in Dubai would become chargé. It led to some interesting permutations. For us, Dubai was a branch office, had no communications—it was secure otherwise—and was supposed to do consular work and commercial work. It was fairly busy. The Dubai authorities treated it like a full-fledged Embassy.

Q: [Laughs] It must have been fun for the consul there.

THEROS: It was. As a matter of fact, one of the problems was that every second consul destroyed his career in Dubai because it was a very junior position and it takes a very responsible junior officer with a breadth of vision and a lively sense of self-preservation not to let it all go to his head.

Q: Yes.

THEROS: It was almost a rule that every other principal officer in Dubai would destroy his career because he just couldn't understand that he was not independent. It was pretty heady stuff, being treated as the Chief of Mission by the local authorities.

Q: Dubai has always been sort of the center for—I'm using the term, which is a pejorative one; it's not really the right thing—smuggling.

THEROS: That's where it made its money originally.

Q: This was gold and other stuff.

THEROS: If you remember, we were talking earlier on about being consular officer in Dhahran, Dubai lived from smuggling gold to India, cigarettes and liquor to Iran—whatever; it was just really quite nicely placed.

Q: What was happening with Iran at this point?

THEROS: They were watching Iran about the way somebody watches a cobra. They were making tentative approaches through London to get the islands back. The UAE,

especially Dubai, were still of the mindset that the British were their protectors, except the British were putting more and more distance between themselves and the region. We had really gone out of our way to snuggle up to Iran during the '70s. We would sell them anything military and nothing to the Gulf states. When I got there we were just beginning to change that policy. But we were still treating the Gulf States as second-class citizens. Our idea of the defense of the Gulf was that the Gulf states fell under the Saudi umbrella and we worked through the Saudis. There was very little interest on our part in working with each of these countries as independent states, perhaps with the exception of Kuwait (and maybe Bahrain on exception). Everything else we tended to see as, let's work through the Saudis, and this was not terribly welcome.

Q: How were relations between the UAE and Saudi Arabia? Was Buraimi still an oasis? Was Buraimi still a problem?

THEROS: Buraimi was no longer a problem, but there were numerous border disputes, the most painful of which concerned the UAE's far western border with Qatar. Qatar and the UAE had a border dispute of about 110 kilometers of howling wilderness.

Q: And there is nothing there.

THEROS: There is nothing there except the road linking them. They had settled it in a way in which the Qataris had put their border posts on the furthest reach of the UAE claim—or the Abu Dhabi claim, actually, technically speaking, because each of the emirates defined its border separately. Qatar put its border posts at the furthest limit of the Abu Dhabi claim and UAE put its border post at the furthest limit of the Qatar claim, giving about 110 kilometers in between. The Saudis meanwhile were making grandiose claims. Essentially they said to the UAE, "Look, we'll let up on Buraimi if you give us a window to the sea." So the UAE ceded both territory and its claims on Qatari territory to the Saudis and then kept it a secret. And since it was a howling wilderness no one much noticed. This became a story for me about fifteen years later, but at the time the Saudis didn't exercise sovereignty in the area even though the UAE had signed it all over to them. Essentially what happened is the UAE moved its border post another thirty, forty kilometers back from where it had been. As I say, the word was out but it wasn't out. It was one of these things that everybody knew about it, but nobody knew about it officially.

Q: Was there Saudi representation in Abu Dhabi?

THEROS: Oh yes. There was a Saudi embassy there. Their ambassador tended to want to be treated like the pro-consul, but that was the British Ambassador primarily, for us, depending on the mood.

Q: While you were there were the Brits still kind of the first among equals?

THEROS: To an extent. In Dubai they really were because Dubai had a very cozy relationship with the Brits. In Abu Dhabi it was they would have preferred to have a cozy

relationship with us, but we weren't playing that game very much. I'll give you an example: The entire Embassy when I got there had twelve Americans, including the man in Dubai, and nineteen local employees. We were barely able to keep our heads above water. There was the Ambassador, the DCM, a Political Officer, an Econ/Commercial Officer, two Admin people, one GSO (General Services Officer), one B&F, and consular officer. We didn't even have an Attaché initially. We slowly began to augment that.

Q: Was it a case of out of sight, out of mind and, as far as you were concerned, just as well regarding the State Department? Or were you trying to get American influence in?

THEROS: At the time of the Iranian revolution, the United States made the decision that it wished to now have close relationships with all the countries in the Gulf—close military relationships. But we went about it in a haphazard way. It was still very much Saudi-centered. Everything that we wanted to do would come out of Saudi Arabia and it was visible to the locals. We would agree to do studies for them in air defense and we had just done an air defense study for them just before I got there. But then we wouldn't agree to sell them anything. We wanted ship visits, but we … we wanted, in effect, their cooperation without giving them their due respect in return. … I remember writing a message back there saying —at this time I'm the Chargé — "My instructions seem to be that we want to set up a major American airbase in the UAE, moving from benign neglect to close alliance without going through any of the intermediate steps of building confidence." It was not a terribly welcome message back in Washington because I was seen as somebody who was talking about the emperor having no clothes. To me the most significant event of the first few months I was there was that Ambassador Wolle's wife, Mimi, got seriously ill and was medevaced. Ambassador Wolle, a week later, walked into my office and said: "You know, I've been Ambassador once. I don't have to take this crap any more. I quit." [Laughs.] He said: "I don't want to be a bachelor anymore; I don't want to be separated from my wife. I'm going back to Washington. You're in charge. Goodbye."

Q: [Laughs.]

THEROS: And I was left as Chargé on about four days notice and stayed Chargé for eighteen more months. This was in September 1980. I stayed Chargé from April 1981, until October 1982.

Q: When you were there, until January of '81, the hostages were still kept in Iran. Was this an issue with them or were they really worried more about Iran and this was just for them not an issue?

THEROS: This was a sideshow. I mean it was an issue in the sense that they would raise it with us. Their relationship with Iran was pretty bad though. Of all the Gulf States, because of the islands, perhaps they had the worst relationship with Iran.

Q: What was the island situation?

THEROS: There were three islands—two islands called the Greater and Lesser Tunbs and then an island called Abu Musa. Abu Musa belonged to the emirate of Sharjah; the Greater and Lesser Tunbs belonged to Ras al-Khaimah. In 1971, when the British pulled out, the Iranians did two things: They formally renounced their claim to Bahrain and on the same day landed troops and seized both Abu Musa and the Tunbs, claiming that these were Iranian islands. Abu Musa was a particular problem because of a significant Sharjah, UAE population there, and all of Sharjah's oil was in and around Abu Musa. So the Iranians set about a kind of protectorate on Abu Musa, in which they ran it but allowed Sharjah to continue to provide public services—teachers and schools and stuff like that—and they split the oil between Sharjah and Iran. It wasn't worth much. I think at the time I was there it was 10,000 barrels a day, or something like that, coming out of the field. Tunbs they just occupied and wouldn't let Ras al-Khaimah do anything about them. Both the ruler of Ras al-Khaimah and the ruler of Sharjah were both in Sheikh Zaid's anteroom every other day demanding that he do something about the islands. It had become pretty much of a national issue. It was clear that the cooperation of Sharjah and Ras al-Khaimah was in large part dependent in the emirates on how much Sheikh Zaid carried water on those two islands. This was important because Ras al-Khaimah was the most populous of the emirates and Sharjah was the third most populous in the Emirates. In population it was Ras al-Khaimah first, Abu Dhabi second, Sharjah third.

Q: Was any progress made on that issue?

THEROS: No. No progress at all has been made. There has been polite conversation between the emirates and Iran but no progress has been made at all. The most that ever happened was a certain amount of arrangements to alleviate the personal situation of people living on the islands.

Q: Where did Das Island fit in?

THEROS: Das Island was the center of the Abu Dhabi oil production with the facilities, and all the pipelines would end up there, so the ships would load at Das Island. Someplace north of Das there was a significant territorial dispute—seabed dispute—between Iran and Abu Dhabi, but Das itself was not in dispute; it was the areas north of it that were.

Q: How significant was oil? Was oil it as far as the economy went?

THEROS: In Abu Dhabi oil was it. Abu Dhabi was fairly good at permitting private business and some industry to flourish. The truth is, however, that the average Abu Dhabian was not as entrepreneurial as the average Dubai citizen and the government of Dubai was the ultimate no-holds-barred free-trade government. You could do anything you wanted. They had tremendous investment into infrastructure of big airports and so forth, and they'd positioned themselves to be the commercial center of the Gulf.

Q: When you were there had we moved towards this forward positioning? In other words, having bases where you set stuff up, getting ready …

THEROS: We were in the process of the negotiations to do that. When I arrived there was no U.S. military presence there; when I left the situation had improved to the point we had regular ship visits. I honestly don't remember if we had an exercise with them or not. We had our first major military equipment sale there in late 1982, which was Hawk anti-aircraft missiles. We had a real fiasco on airplanes.

Q: What happened?

THEROS: The UAE was shopping for a new airplane and it had gone through the entire list and decided that it wanted the F-18. The U.S. government, for reasons that now make no sense whatsoever, but at the time seemed logical in Washington, had decided the UAE shouldn't have F-18s. At first they didn't want to give the UAE anything, and then they said "Okay, you can have the 5s —the F-5 A, B, and C." The F-5 was then metamorphosed into an improved F-5, called the F-20, which we tried very much to sell to the UAE. They said it was impossible because the U.S. Air Force refused to buy the F-20. Aside from the credibility of the airplane, it also meant that there would never be an improvement product update on the airplane. So it was a lost cause, but by God we kept trying and trying and trying.

Q: How about the French and the British?

THEROS: The British were offering the Tornado. The Tornado is an excellent airplane in the British context—not the air defense version so much, but the strike version. It was rejected for cost reasons; not that the UAE didn't care about costs, but it was an inappropriate aircraft for the UAE's needs.

Q: It really needed an air defense one rather than a strike one anyway, didn't it?

THEROS: Yes. And the British had made the air defense version; it was not the right airplane for the UAE, so they were never really in the competition. The British tried to sell the Harrier—probably would have sold the Harrier—had a really good chance of selling the Harrier, except there was a terrible, terrible accident during a Harrier demonstration. The plane was coming down, hovering over the hardstand, and the pilot got a little bit disoriented and, as he started descending over the hardstand, he got over the sand. As he came down, the down blast kicked up this huge cloud of dust, which circled up and got sucked up into the airplane's engines. I've seen the film. The thing just went like this [demonstrates], into the airplane's engine, was sucked in, both engines flamed out, and the plane fell about 150 feet, killed the pilot and destroyed the plane. The pretty much killed the Harrier.

So, there was a brief moment there where they toyed with the MiG-29 and another Soviet aircraft. They weren't really serious, but they were just trying to keep the Soviets within the competition to get the French price down. The French offered the Mirage 2000 and they wanted the F-18. And it got pretty bad. Oh, John Glenn came out; I'll tell you about John Glenn later. It's a really great story. But at one point Sheikh Zaid said, "Look, it's

the politics that are important. If your government would just announce that they're willing to sell us the F-18, I'll give you my word that we'll buy the Mirage 2000." And John Glenn couldn't satisfy him. When they finally did buy the Mirage 2000, because we kept pushing the F-20, delegation after delegation, telling him what a great airplane it was; it was a non-starter. It was certainly clear to me that it was a non-starter and I made no secret of it. In the end, the chief of staff called me in one day and he said, "Patrick, I'll congratulate you. Please inform your government that they are the single biggest sales representative the French have had here for the sale of the Mirage 2000."

Q: So they went to the Mirage people.

THEROS: They bought the Mirage 2000.

Q: Were you there long enough to see how that worked out?

THEROS: Just at the beginning. It's a decent airplane. In some ways it's closer to the F-16 than it is to the F-18, as an airplane. But it's a decent airplane and in some ways, in that particular era, somewhat better than the F-16 and somewhat inferior.

They got gouged on the price. The French believe in differential pricing. Their pricing is how much the market will bear. There's no manufacturer's recommended sales price for airplanes. You know, you want to buy the Mirage 2000? We won't tell you what we sold it to the Greeks for. It's what it's going to cost you. The differential in that particular case was six million to ten million dollars. The Greeks paid six million for a copy of the airplane and the UAE paid ten million dollars a copy. As a matter of fact, there was even a huge bribe paid by the French at the time to some relatives of Sheikh Zaid, which they hadn't earned because the chief of staff later said to me, "I can't figure out why they paid the bribe. They had no competition."

Q: You know, had you had a Political Officer; were there any politics there?

THEROS: Oh, between the emirates?

Q: Yes.

THEROS: A lot. The federation was only ten years old when I got there and its shape was still in the process of being formed. Sheikh Zaid took very, very much to heart—the Bedouin that he was—this idea of developing consensus amongst the sheiks. He clearly was, except for Dubai, the top dog, at least on the block. But there was money. He always used his money to develop consensus. He went to great pains to make sure that the rulers in the other emirates were on board. So he always regarded the federation as a voluntary association. He was terribly careful to make sure that Abu Dhabi was not perceived to be the country that called all the shots, and that the others could share in the Abu Dhabi-created wealth.

Q: What about Oman? How did that relate to the UAE?

THEROS: The relationship with Oman was not terribly happy, mitigated by the fact that most Abu Dhabians were related to most Omanis, or at least northern Omanis. There was no Omani Embassy for a time. It was a little bit like the relationship between Syria and Lebanon. There was no Omani Embassy for a long time in Abu Dhabi because Oman did not regard the emirates as a legitimate independent state. It was more that they should have been some sort of feudal vassal to Oman. And the sultan was sort of an insufferable suzerain.

There were a lot of Omanis in the Abu Dhabi armed forces and they handled this in an interesting way. One bright day sometime in the late '70s Abu Dhabi gave every Omani citizen in the UAE armed forces the option of UAE citizenship. The process was that you had to renounce Omani citizenship, take UAE citizenship, and then you could stay in the army and they'd even give you a promotion. About half the officers and about three-quarters of the enlisted men took the option.

What it meant was that they could never go home to Oman again. Tribal loyalties in a lot of these areas were stronger than regional or political loyalties. I understand that the officers who decided to stay, and the enlisted, were generally from certain tribes from the Buraimi Oasis region, which had no border controls.

That was one place we'd take the kids picnicking that was actually six or seven kilometers inside of Oman. We never went through the border post on the road; we'd just take the Jeep Land Rover and do this on a side road.

Q: Was there anything going on in Oman that was disturbing the UAE?

THEROS: Yes, the Omani desire to rectify the borders to their interest.

Q: There had been something going on when I was in Dhahran back in the '50s.

THEROS: Oh, the Jebel Akhdar. That had been pretty much crushed. That was dead and gone.

Part of that was successful because Sultan Qaboos' father, Sheikh Taimur, was such a terrible man it was pretty easy to stir up a rebellion against him. Of course Qaboos is regarded as much more benign and benevolent.

Q: I remember Shakhbut.

THEROS: Shakhbut was ruler in Abu Dhabi.

Q: At one point he was considered one of the world's great misers. He kept the entire treasury under his thumb.

THEROS: It was special until the mice began to eat it.

Q: [Laughs.] Were there developments, while you were there, in Oman, of our forward positioning bases and stuff like that, or had that not started?

THEROS: That was just beginning to evolve. There was more movement in Oman. I'm trying to remember right now, but I think we maybe even signed the first agreement from the Masirah Island in that period of time. We had already signed up with Masirah, because Masirah was the launching pad for Desert One. Remember the fiasco of the hostage rescue?

Q: Did you sense sort of one of these earth changes that was going on in diplomacy as we began to look at Diego Garcia and that whole area as strategic real estate. …

THEROS: Diego Garcia—we had been there for some time. By this time it was a fixture.

Q: I was wondering if there was the feel that we were really after, with the fall of the Shah, two things: One, that the Iranians might do something, and the other one was that the Soviets might —they always were saying "I'm going for a warm water port;" it never made much sense, but there were arrows in the newspaper showing how the Soviets could move down to the Gulf and all that. Were we beginning to rethink the whole area?

THEROS: This was the creation of Central Command. Central Command took itself seriously, but at that time no one in Washington took it seriously. The European Command and the Pacific Command, whose boundaries met someplace in that area, had both relegated the Persian Gulf to obscurity, but now decided we needed a command. Generally the general officers assigned at that time to that command were those whose career futures in Washington were somewhat limited.

But the catalyst was not the Iranian revolution. The catalyst was the Iraqi attack on Iran. Because until then I don't think any of the Gulf States really felt that they had thought through the de facto relationship with the United States, and the U.S. was being a clumsy suitor, for want of a better term. We weren't terribly good at what we were doing and really hadn't made up our mind to what we were going to do; we were not clear whether we wanted bases, whether we wanted allies, or what we were doing there. The only thing coherent in the request coming out from Washington was ship visits—could we get ship visits in the UAE. I can't say they had gotten comfortable with the ayatollahs but they were beginning to deal with them, in the sense that there was still this unspoken fear of their intentions. The over-the-horizon American presence was probably sufficient to deter an Iranian attack of any sort, and there was no evidence that the Iranians were interested in an overt attack. And dealing with the subversion was probably something that we couldn't help them very much with, and they understood that. It was the Iraqi attack on Iran in October or November of 1980 that focused them because it bode to bring chaos to the Gulf.

Q: How was Iraq seen at that time?

THEROS: Iraq was seen as a counter-weight to Iran. It was seen as the principal threat against Iran. As a matter of fact, part of the deterrent was the Iraqi threat to Iran. But a deterrent is best when it's not used. Now Iraq had attacked Iran, and after some initial successes the war started going badly for the Iraqis. And then you had the attacks on the tankers and tanker rates went up. There were a thousand negative consequences to the attack on Iran and this began to focus the Gulf States on their security and their relationship with the United States.

Immediately after the attack on Iran, and as things started to go bad, generally, in the area, the UAE called in the British ambassador and said, "We have a treaty of guarantee and usual support and we'd like to call it in right now. We want a firm British commitment, at least in words, and at least some token presence on the ground that the treaty is in place and that Britain will defend the UAE against attack from whatever quarter." The British thought about it for a week or so and politely declined, pointing out that subparagraph C of the third chapter of the fourth volume [Laughs.] called for consultations after the enemy had already overrun Abu Dhabi, or something like that.

So then they came to us. When they first came to us, the U.S. government made a rather forthright statement, which was that we would regard an attack on the United Arab Emirates as a serious threat to American interests, or something. It was fairly forthcoming by American standards. And then about two months later we clearly decided we had made a mistake making that sort of commitment and spent the next three years trying to weasel out of it.

Q: Were you a part of the weaseling?

THEROS: Yes. I kept telling Washington, "You tell them. I'm not going to tell them."

Q: We had a group called COMIDEASTFOR in Bahrain. Did that play any role?

THEROS: Yes, they were the American presence in the Gulf. One of my principal tasks was to get COMIDEASTFOR visits at the UAE, and other things; I kept working on it, and working on it, and working on it. There were a whole series of things that we were asking the UAE for, none of them, in today's world, terribly dramatic, but it was overflights, landing rights, refueling rights, of aircraft; a collection of many small requests. I worked on it fairly assiduously for about six months. At this time we are in the summer of '81, early fall of '81, and I had a very funny story—this had been going on, I'd say, for some time. One evening I'm at home and a senior official of the court chamberlain—a man who had been my primary point of contact on this—calls me and he says, "Patrick, would you care to come over for tea?" I said, "Sure." I walked into his majlis to find that virtually the crème de la crème of all UAE society was in the majlis. I was the only foreigner.

Q: The majlis being the reception hall.

THEROS: Yes, a huge living room, for want of a better term.

There must have been 130 people. Some people were sitting on the floor, some people were sitting on chairs, and I walked in and I thought clearly I had gone to the wrong place. But, "No, no, no. Patrick, come on in here and sit down." The court chamberlain invited me over and we sat down and spent the first half hour drinking tea and telling funny stories. In the back of my mind I thought "I must really be entertaining because I have absolutely no idea why I am here." And then after about a half an hour, forty minutes, the conversation turned serious and the court chamberlain raised various discussions we had had on military cooperation and future relations. He raised them in sort of casual conversation. Then he walked me back through all the security-related conversations we had conducted—that took another hour—in front of 120 people.

My first reaction was all this is classified, secret and higher; my second reaction was this is his country—if he's the guy having the conversation, then who am I to object? He didn't raise any new points. He merely walked me back through and reviewed all the old points. And after about an hour and a few minutes of that, he went back to telling funny stories and joking and stuff like that, and then pretty soon it became clear that teatime was over and I left. I walked home and told my wife I had the most bizarre two hours I've ever spent in this man's Foreign Service. I couldn't even think what to do with it. I didn't report it. It didn't fit any known development in the diplomatic art. It didn't fit any pattern.

So I went back and reported this by phone without comment from Washington. About a week later the first permission for a ship visit came in and then we started getting answers on our twenty-odd requests, some positive, some negative, but we started to get answers on the requests we had put in. Clearly what had happened is Sheikh Zaid had decided that he now knew clearly what it was the Americans wanted, so he satisfied himself with what the Americans wanted, and the time had come to share it with the establishment; and what better way to share it with the establishment than to call the American Chargé up on the stage and have him do his act. People would ask on the floor. It was not a lively discussion; as I said, it was nothing new. The court chamberlain dominated most of it. People would ask, you know, get a comment from me and then I went away. Things began to happen. We had our first ship visit about a month later.

Q: Well why hadn't we been ship visiting?

THEROS: Because they didn't see much advantage to it. It was, "Why should we allow them to visit when we don't know what they're here for and we don't know what our relationship is with them?"

Q: You mentioned John Glenn, by the way. You were saying Senator Glenn came out?

THEROS: Yes, he wanted to come out and visit. He and his senior staff—I forget; a man named Hathaway or something, after some shirt or something like that. It was my first CODEL (Congressional Delegation). We were at the end of nowhere back then. And John Glenn was the first, so I decided to pull out all the stops. I sent the request in to

Protocol; Protocol processed the request and so forth and said, "Yes, Senator Glenn was most welcome" and he would meet with Sheikh Zaid on such and such a day in his farm in Al Ain. It was a good time; John Glenn came out in the winter. It was raining, which was rare. Arabs love rain and so it came out.

I pulled out all the stops. I put the Ohio state flag up over the Embassy and all of these things. And then we drove down to Al-Ain to see Sheikh Zaid and we get there at ten o'clock in the morning, a few minutes before the appointed time, and we wait and we wait and we wait. We're waiting and waiting for an hour-and-a-half. By this time John Glenn is [saying], "Damn it, I'm a United States Senator. I'm not going to wait any longer," and I was trying to keep him calm. Just about the time that he was all set to walk, we look out the window and there is this long line of Land Rovers coming in from the desert, raising dust. I said, "That must be him." He was still fuming a little bit and I walked out of the room and into the hallway. Sheikh Zaid gets out of his Land Rover, looks at me, and does a double take and turns to his chief of protocol and says, "What's going on?" The chief of protocol blanches. He had forgotten to tell Sheikh Zaid that he had an appointment with an American senator. Furthermore, the chief of protocol had forgotten whom the appointment was with. All Sheikh Zaid knew is that the American Chargé and somebody he did not know was standing at the end of the hallway and no one knew anything about it. [Laughs.] And he didn't even have his interpreter with him. He brought in a nice guy from the personal staff, whose English was imperfect at best. The best thing I can say about his English is that we were about evenly matched with my Arabic.

They come into the room and I introduce John Glenn. Sheikh Zaid still doesn't know; the name John Glenn means nothing to him. And we're sitting down and we're having one of these conversations where sides are not connecting. I turned to John Glenn, and I said to the Senator: "They haven't told him about this meeting. This is the first indication he's got. He has no idea who you are." Without embarrassing him—you don't want to make enemies with the protocol staff either—I was searching in my mind for conversation that would let Sheikh Zayed know what was happening. The Arabic word for senator is also sheik, so it also leads to a certain amount of confusion, and I couldn't remember the word for astronaut. Finally, after about seven or eight minutes into the conversation, the light comes on and Sheikh Zaid's eyes were like, "Ahhh! Now I know what it is," and then we rolled into a good conversation. You know, rulers don't apologize for being late. It was clear that was a day that you didn't not want to be an employee of Emiri protocol. [Laughs.]

Q: [Laughs.] How did you see the society in the Trucial States at that time?

THEROS: The Trucial States is fair enough.

Q: I mean the United Arab Emirates. For example, democracy role, women, human rights; that sort of thing.

THEROS: It was still a very conservative society. My wife assiduously tried to make

lady friends and she was kept at a great distance. Dubai was different, but we didn't have much to do with Dubai. But in Abu Dhabi, into three years there, she probably had two or three Abu Dhabi lady friends. They really kept at a distance. For example, all land in Abu Dhabi belongs to the tribe. The ruler, Sheikh Zaid, as the head of the tribe, owns all the land. And what he does is parcel the land out in, British lawyers call it a "usufructuary" lease; a kind of lease where you can have a virtual in perpetuity, but as long as you observe certain restrictions. …

For example, the rulers grant vast tracks of land you could build on it but you can't rent it to foreigners. It pretty much kept the UAE population separated from the foreigners socially.

You know, you may get invited to big weddings and social events like that, and Protocol would invite women, but it was very difficult developing a personal relationship at the family level. The society was quite distant. There were a few women of importance; for example, they formed the women's army unit when I was there; they had women in the police force when I was there. So, in a sense, they were making progress in this direction, but it was always at a distance. The big event that happened when I was there was that they asked if we could provide a trainer for their women's army unit, but all that transpired after I left.

Society itself was quite conservative, but fairly tolerant conservative. But not terribly outgoing. The people at the top were pretty outgoing. My wife called on Sheikha Fatima twice in the three years we were there and was twice invited to events by Sheikha Fatima -- very large formal events. Sheikha Fatima being Sheikh Zaid's favorite wife.

Q: What about students? I'm talking about the upper classes, the rulers and their clans.

THEROS: When I got there they were beginning to change from a majority going to the UK to a majority going to the United States, other than a lot of them going to Arab countries.

Q: Were you seeing, at that point, any results of the return of these young people from …

THEROS: A lot of the management had come from the United States as well. They had been going to the United States for a long time, it's just the numbers began to increase in the years that I was there; the percentages began to change in the years that I was there, the proportions.

Q: Was that a help to these people or was it almost a detriment because they were away from their tribal roots?

THEROS: No, no. You can take the boy out of the tribe but you can't take the tribe out of the boy. You come back and you know exactly where you fit in society. Four or five years in the United States doesn't change that.

Q: Any problems with American wives who came with them, or not?

THEROS: Yes, it was a continual problem. As a matter of fact, that is a problem that has haunted me in every post I've ever been in in the Middle East, except in Doha and in Dhahran. In Qatar it was because there was so few, in Dhahran because ARAMCO sorted things out Divorce was difficult. American wives coming back and finding it very difficult to adjust to life. Trying to leave they want to take the kids with them; they won't let them take the kids with them. On and on and on, the court cases. When I was in Abu Dhabi I had perhaps ten to fifteen cases, with more than one kid in some cases, of the kid being held in the UAE by his UAE father and the American wife had left the country and so forth.

Q: Could you resolve these?

THEROS: No. The best you could hope for was to get the couple back together again, and this was actually regarded as something the Department didn't want you to do. I don't know why, but you couldn't play marriage counselor. After that the best you could do would be to get fairly generous visitation rights for the wife, and that wasn't too difficult if the wife was prepared to come to the UAE. I had cases where we managed to persuade the husband to pay significant amounts of money to let the wife come out and visit her kids. It generally ended up very unsatisfactorily with letters from congressmen. It was something I didn't know any way to resolve, and I don't think any of us still do. But it was not a major problem in our relationship. Our problems rarely concerned the UAE nationals from big families. If anything, probably at least half the cases were other Arabs who were working there.

Q: By this time was the UAE drawing on Egypt or the Palestinians for a work force?

THEROS: There was a very large—perhaps 30,000 or 40,000—Palestinian community. The Egyptian community was larger, but it was a little less visible. There were some Iranians, lots of Pakistanis and Afghans and stuff. I'd say the majority language on the street was Urdu.

Q: How did this work?

THEROS: Reasonably well. Like all the other Gulf States, the UAE tried to cycle its foreign workers. So you come, you work on a project, the project is over and you go home; you can't come again for a couple of years. And it worked most of the time, but there was an elite foreign work cadre that just stayed there forever; some of them established themselves in business and so forth. Business arrangements between the UAE businessmen and foreign businessmen located in the country were always a point of contention because the UAE had one law was particularly bad—that if I work for you, or if I'm your partner or something like that, you can't leave the country without my permission. A lot of them who were unscrupulous—the Abu Dhabi businessmen—would abuse this. They would say, "Okay, you want to go home for your wife's wedding? Reimburse me half your salary," or something like that. Or "We're going to renegotiate

the terms of your contract." It was a form of blackmail.

A particularly bad case involved an American construction company that had come out to dig the storm sewer in Abu Dhabi. Without going into too much detail, the American company went bankrupt; the owner of the company died of a heart attack in the UAE, and the family was kept there virtually under house arrest for a year. It was really dreadful. It went on for several years while I was there. The partner was high up in the family, but that wasn't what, that the ruler didn't like him; it was simply that he had availed himself of UAE law, and UAE law says that if you owe money to a UAE citizen, I'm going to keep you here until you pay him.

A good example of how the law functions: we had one serious incident where there was an American girl, a New Yorker—a young girl—who was the secretary to a local businessman with whom she was also having a relationship. This girl was good-looking in a New York sort of way. The businessman's wife didn't like her and one day the girl discovered she was pregnant. About two or three weeks after that she aborted herself with a wire hanger and then put on all her jewelry, and nothing else, and walked out onto the street. That night she attacked and knifed one foreign worker—a Pakistani—and then was caught by the police chasing another group of them down the street, holding this big butcher knife. She was taken in. She looked pretty calm until the picture was taken for her mug shot and then she grabbed some large, blunt instrument off the table and laid out a UAE policewoman with stitches in her head. They beat her up a little bit and threw her in jail. During the night she began to bleed heavily and they took her to the hospital. That's about the time we found out.

What was interesting about this—it was a really complicated court case because the wife had brought legal charges against her for adultery and so forth. I had visions of this thing going very badly. … She had at least one capital charge against her, and so forth, so I went to see the government and said: "This girl is crazy. This girl is certifiable. There's no doubt of her insanity. You really don't want her here. I know there is no insanity plea in Sharia, but do you really want her here? How about you just let me send her home?" And she was sent home. But the funny thing was that at the time the only thing that I was asked by the government was, "Does she owe anybody any money?" The government was able to quash all the criminal charges, but would not have been able to deal with the money case. Once it was clear that she didn't owe any money, then the government called in her employer/boyfriend and started (figuratively speaking, of course) pulling his fingernails out until he agreed to pay for her ticket home.

Q: Oh boy. No, that money thing, I know this. Was there any feel that this really had to be taken care of if you wanted to have good business relationships?

THEROS: To varying degrees. The government wasn't too bad. The government didn't get bribed. The people who got bribed were the people sitting on the technical evaluation committees. They were almost all foreigners. There was little indication of real corruption at the ministerial level. The system that was corrupted were the men that evaluated the system. At one point the crown prince, Sheikh Khalifa, called in the

ambassadors of all of the arms-producing states, one by one, and he said, "I will not tolerate any agency commissions fees on arms sales. Here are the rules; here are the small exceptions, but if you want to sell weapons to the UAE armed forces, these are the rules you follow and there are not commissions on this." This was after the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act, so I had to send a report back to Washington saying this is what I was told. Because you didn't have to put it down the writing, which was a problem; it was always an oral thing. My colleagues, the Ambassador colleagues, did not think that he was serious. The German Ambassador, in particular, thought that Sheikh Khalifa had made a terrible mistake. They thought he was not going to do it. And it turned out he was serious because about a year or two later the UAE discovered the bribe the French had paid to their agent in the UAE for the Mirage, which was several hundred million dollars, and the agent was the ruler's brother-in-law. Two things: They made the French pay the bribe back; they made the French reimburse the UAE government for the amount of the bribe that had been paid to the brother-in-law, and then they threw the brother-in-law in jail and kept him there for a lengthy time. So they were serious about that. But, as I said, the technical evaluation committees were all foreigners, because they were the only ones that had the technical skills, and were often bribable.

Q: How did Americans do business there?

THEROS: This is an interesting question. Sometimes you could simply make the case that your product was so better or so much cheaper, or you could deliver it better, that they could overcome the bribe. Sometimes companies would in effect delegate it—you know, make sure that the local agent got a lot of legitimate business and then let the local agent fend for himself.

Q: Were there any big trade disputes you got involved in?

THEROS: That's a good question. I'm trying to remember. The only that took up most of my time was the construction company whose owner was trapped in country. That's when I first met the Motion Picture Association complaining about pirated videocassette tapes, which was a brand-new business at that time. No, I don't remember anything else. There may have been, just nothing comes to mind right now.

Q: You got an Ambassador just before you left?

THEROS: Quincey Lumsden came in the summer of '82. And I've got to say a lot of nice things about Quincey. One of the things I had learned in the DCM's course was that if you have been Chargé for a long time and then you get an Ambassador, the first thing you do is you leave immediately on the Ambassador's arrival. This is a good point to put it in: The UAE kept thinking that there was a political reason as to why an eighteen months had passed without an Ambassador. They liked me, but I kept getting these questions about why is there no Ambassador; what message is the United States government trying to send us? Telling them the truth just made it worse.

Q: What was the truth?

THEROS: The truth was that there was a man whose name is Crane, whose wife at the time was one of the most powerful fundraisers in the Republican Party in Virginia, who decided that he wanted to be Ambassador to the UAE. Now, he was really incompetent. I mean he was beyond incompetent. He was so incompetent that for once the Department of State girded up its loins and was saying, "No, no. We're not going to take him." But he had a lot of influence in the White House. So to just paralyze the situation he prevented anyone else from being nominated for the job. And then he committed a series of errors. He began leaking to the paper that he was announcing himself as the next Ambassador to the UAE. I got called in a couple of times saying, "What's this item there?" and I kept saying, "I haven't the foggiest notion." I didn't even know who this man was, other than he did have obvious political friends, so I was being somewhat careful about what I was saying. But I had not been notified; he had not received a letter of agrément or anything like that.

So things drag on and then the court chamberlain is in Washington and the man pigeonholes him at a cocktail party and tells him he's going to be the next Ambassador to the UAE. The court chamberlain comes back and questions me again. I keep getting these contradictory messages from Washington while Crane is feeding this story. The Department is fighting him tooth and nail. He's made some enemies by leaking the story, but still not enough to kill him. He had the clout to prevent anybody else from being considered. He was apparently planning on wearing the Department down. Time passes and one day another one of these reports surfaces and I get called over, and they said, "Tell me about him. Who is this man?" and I honestly had to say, "I don't know." And the answer was, "A hell of a lot of good you are; you don't know." So I made some phone calls. Oh, he wrote me a letter actually, if I remember, at this point saying how happy he was to come back to the Gulf.

I had no idea what he meant by coming back to the Gulf, so I made some phone calls and it turned out that he had been in Bahrain —he was a lawyer—on a reimbursable AID detail. The Bahraini government paid for it, through AID, to the Bahraini Ministry of Justice. So I made some more phone calls and then finally, at that point, I called somebody—a friend of mine who had been in Bahrain at about that time—and apparently what this man had done is he had been the senior advisor to the minister of justice in the rewriting of the commercial code in Bahrain, and when the minister of justice was absent, began to issue decrees in the minister's name, and the Bahrainis promptly sent him home. So I went back to the court chamberlain and said, "I have no idea, but you might want to call your buddies in Bahrain because he worked there for a time at this particular date in this particular job." A week later I got a call back and the chamberlain says to me, "Patrick, It's very, very bad politics for a small country to refuse agrément to the Ambassador of a superpower, so please don't put us in that situation." I called the Department and I believe it was Bob Pelletreau, who was country director, and told him the story and he said, "Thank God!" About two months later Quincey Lumsden was named Ambassador. But it took that to get the Department to be able to muscle the White House into dropping him.

Quincey was great. When he showed up, I said to him, "I'm going to leave as soon as you show up," and he says, "No you're not. You're going to stick around to introduce me to anybody." Because the argument was that you've been Chargé for a year-and-a-half. You know everybody and you will continually upstage the new Ambassador. He took me aside and he said: "Look, you've been Chargé for a year-and-a-half; you know everybody in this town. I'm not going to stop you from knowing anybody. I'm not going to get in the way of anything. The only thing I request is that in your next meeting with every one of your friends, I come with you to be introduced as the Ambassador, so that I have at least met every one of your friends." And that took about six weeks and then I went on leave. The Department had not let me leave to go on leave for two years. I was beginning to make gurgling noises as I walked down the hallway, rolled back and you could see the whites of my eyes.

Q: [Laughs.]

THEROS: They simply said, "Your post is too junior and you can't leave. You can't go on leave." So I was there without a break from July or August of 1980 to August of 1982. The only time I ever left the country was when I had to take this picnic into Oman, five or six kilometers into Oman.

Q: Did you have any contact with Ambassadors in Muscat or Doha or Manama?

THEROS: No particularly. We exchanged messages and stuff like that, but they were not part of my life in the sense that …

Q: There wasn't any sense of cohesion then?

THEROS: No. The GCC wasn't formed until '82.

Q: What is that?

THEROS: The Gulf Cooperation Council. It was not formed until the early summer of '82, and that was the first indication the Gulf States themselves wanted to be a cooperative body.

Q: Was the Iran-Iraq War looming over you all the time?

THEROS: All the time. The UAE was perfectly happy to see the two sides bleed themselves to death, but it was very clear that when the bleeding was over they wanted the Iraqis to die second. They didn't want Iraq to lose. They wanted Iraq to win, but their ideal situation, the one in which Iran had bled to death and Iraq was almost dead.

Q: From the UAE perspective Iran was a close neighbor and Iraq was over the horizon.

THEROS: Yes, well over the horizon. And was seen, as I said, as a counterweight against … They, like the Kuwaitis, gave a lot of help to the Iraqis.

Politico-Military Affairs and Limbo

Q: In '83 where did you go?

THEROS: I came back to the Department and went to Political Military Bureau, and I was there from '83 to '86.

Q: How did you find PM at that time?

THEROS: It had very interesting things to do. It had a mission difficulty. It was a little unclear to me that PM really knew what it was supposed to be doing. There was a very strong dichotomy between the people who did arms control and the people who did ordinary things. The people who did Europe and arms control varied from dominant to all-dominant in PM. There were constant reorganizations at PM. At one point PM got reorganized so that there was a single directorate that was jokingly referred to as ROW, the Rest Of the World, and I was in charge of it; I was the directorate for ROW. Lebanon consumed most of my time at PM, the intervention of Lebanon.

We dealt with a lot of issues that were outside the realm of arms control. But the arms control people clearly dominated the meetings; and I would go to staff meetings every morning and my views were neither desired nor expressed most of the time; by the time we finished the hour-and-a-half discussion about throw weights.

Q: Where was the Disarmament and Arms Control Agency?

THEROS: It was a competitive agency, the ACDA. So PM had to work twice as hard to shoulder ACDA out of the way. ACDA was competitive, but it didn't have the staff to compete with us.

I got terribly cynical about government in my three years in PM because I concluded that the main function of government in the United States is to fight for turf, and the interests of the Republic ranked down near about the fifth priority. I remember having a conversation with the late Arnie (Arnold Lewis) Raphel, when he was leaving to be Ambassador to Pakistan, and I told him how jealous I was that he was getting out of there. He says: "No. If it wasn't for being Ambassador, I wouldn't go. This is where the action is. Being in the field is not-important. This is where the action is." I said, "Arnie, if the American taxpayer knew how you and I were spending our time, they'd throw us both in jail." I had literally spent seventy-five percent of my time on internal turf battles.

Q: Can you give a little description of how this worked? I mean, a turf battle.

THEROS: Say on arms sales, it is who decides on arms sales, between Defense and State, and within State, between PM and the regional Bureau. Most of the time you fought you didn't fight over what the decision was, you fought over who was in charge of the

decision. You fought over who wrote the paper that went to the Secretary, who had to clear the paper. You know, clearances would stack up like this because everybody had to have a role in it. You fought over who would go to meetings. You fought over who would be the head of the delegation at Brussels.

Q: Was this a renewable battle? It sounds like, you know …

THEROS: It never stopped.

Q: You would think that at a certain point the chief of delegation going to Brussels would be either from one place or another, or this …

THEROS: As long as the subject was the same, but what would happen was as soon as the subject would change suddenly, the other Bureaus would come in and say, "No, we're in charge," and then you'd have to refight the battle.

Q: What about with the Pentagon?

THEROS: I had a cordial relationship with the uniformed military; a mixed relationship with the non-civilians in the Defense Department. Some of them were allied and some were hostile.

Q: Above and beyond who is going to get the credit, who is going to go on the trip, who is going to sign the paper, when you had the rest of the world, was there a thought process or a standard —you know, how do we sell arms?

THEROS: There was a standard and there were rules, but almost all the rules were observing the exception. There were some countries you couldn't sell anything to and that was pretty clear. But then as you got into dual use, the …

Q: Let's take Latin America. Was the fight over trying to keep advanced jet aircraft out of there going on while you were there?

THEROS: There was some of it there. Latin America we—this would be '83, '86; I'm just trying to remember what the issues were at the time—Iran-Contra was the issue. That we got involved in quite a bit.

Q: Can we talk about that?

THEROS: Sure. We knew the protagonists did not know what they were up to until the thing began to reveal itself in the press. There were a number of youngish officials—most of the military and some civilian in the NSC staff—that were true crusaders for democracy, anti-communism and so forth, and who pretty much were trying to isolate President Reagan from the bureaucracy. It was a constant battle trying to make sure that when your papers went to the White House that they didn't get scribbled on, changed—they couldn't change them, but that they didn't get scribbled on, didn't get notes attached

to them. One of the things that the White House staff would do, sending it up to the President, would be to summarize the summary, on the assumption that the President, being overworked, would only read the summary's summary. Frequently we would get information back that the summary had considerably distorted the summary. These were men that tried to provoke a war with Syria, in Lebanon. They clearly had gotten carried away with helping the Contras.

Q: Iran Contra. You had the feeling that things going to the President were going through a filter.

THEROS: That's right. The youngish people, people like Ollie North, Howie Teicher, Robert MacFarlane and others who were in the White House staff at the time; and it was very painful.

Q: What are we talking about?

THEROS: A large part of it was that in the Latin American bureau, which I frankly didn't pay much attention to, as everything to do with Nicaragua and Sandinistas had been taken out of the official channels. Concerning Lebanon, which we were intensely involved in, there was what can only be described as a desire to get the United States actively involved in hostilities in Lebanon against Syria. The White House staff (not Reagan) was trying very hard to do this.

Q: What was behind this?

THEROS: Well I think there were two things. On the one hand some people had this belief that if we could attack Syria, we'd take care of Israel's problems for it. The other one was the people who actually wanted a confrontation with the Soviets in the Eastern Mediterranean because it would be on our turf. They thought that we might be able to provoke that. I thought they were insane.

Q: This is pretty mega stuff.

THEROS: It took a lot of adult intervention, because we spent a lot of time trying to find out what the NSC staff was telling the President, so we could then go to our Assistant Secretaries and Undersecretaries and get them to intervene. We did this frequently.

Q: So you were treating the NSC as sort of an unguided kindergarten or something?

THEROS: Yes, close. It was a kindergarten with an agenda, and the agenda was certainly warmongering.

Q: That's sort of scary.

THEROS: Yes, it was. It was really scary.

Q: Was there the feeling that the President was in this or was he just sort of a figurehead?

THEROS: No, no. We thought the President was clearly in charge, but he had personal biases that may have created an atmosphere that was somewhat welcoming to these ideas. There had to be intervention by other adults. The President was no fool. The President was a very smart man. You know we all have biases and the biases were all in that direction.

Q: Did you get involved at all, or run across these TOW missiles to Iran and that sort of thing?

THEROS: Not at that level; I mean that all came out afterwards. We just knew that there was something going on because we found out that some of these people went to Iran and it was not quite clear what they were doing going to Iran when they were out of it. But we kept feeding the information to our principals.

Q: What about the Lebanon assistance? You had Israel going into Lebanon in what was an invasion, using up large quantities of American military equipment. Were we trying to control this or do anything?

THEROS: We started out as, under Alexander Haig, very much in favor; then when Haig fell … as a matter of fact, when I was still in the UAE. The siege of Beirut was a really terrible event. Then the Marines came in and they had arranged for the Palestinians to leave; the Marines leave; there's the massacre at Sabra and Shatila; the Marines go back in, and then what began as an operation to protect the Palestinians soon became a confrontation between the United States and the Left in Lebanon.

Q: Was there a sense of frustration, of saying what the hell are we doing there?

THEROS: Less what we were doing there because there seemed to be a certain logic in why we were there; the frustration was with the way policy was being pushed.

Q: Was the Pentagon involved in this?

THEROS: The Pentagon were generally reluctant warriors. In Lebanon it was much more reluctant than the NSC.

Q: Was there any feel of, "Let's get our guys out?"

THEROS: The Pentagon had that very strong feeling. It was continuous. We really were inundated with details. Our problem in PM and elsewhere was that I don't think there was much big-picture planning in the Department of State, in the Department of Defense, below the level of Secretary, the Undersecretary and the Deputy Secretary. There was much discussion of the why were we there. We spent all our time trying to figure out how you'd get to the next day.

Q: What sort of things were you trying to get to?

THEROS: Like arming the Lebanese forces, arming the Lebanese army, putting troops ashore, negotiating with the French and the British and the Italians, who had troops there. Trying to build a stable Lebanese army, which turned out to be a fiasco. Negotiating with the Israelis over, "Don't interfere with what we're doing." There were several times in there in which the Israelis clearly took actions that were inimical to U.S. interests. The Israelis themselves double-crossed the Lebanese on a couple of occasions. All these things happened.

Q: Did you get the feeling that if the Israelis wanted to do something and they could do it, they were calling the shots within our government?

THEROS: It was not as clear then as it became later. The time, for example, if you remember, Reagan made a speech in '82 in which he basically demanded that the Israelis get out of Lebanon.

Q: By the time you were there, was there a sort of a sense of outrage about what was going on in Lebanon? You talk about the bombardment of Lebanon and all of that.

THEROS: In the government we were inundated by the details, by working through today's problems. I don't think we had much chance to think about the greater picture. You'd come home at ten o'clock, eleven o'clock at night. It was very tiring.

Q: You know Political/Military, PM, has gone through various stages, and at one time it was considered to be really sort of an elite place. You looked at who was there and it was pretty first class. How was it when you were there?

THEROS: It was still regarded as an elite place, but the internal differences there was that the elite were the arms control people. The guys who did arms control, the guys who did Europe. They pretty much dominated. We also regarded ourselves as elite, clearly we were the very good at what we did, but to the 7th floor and the leadership of the Bureau we were not important.

Q: In a way the arms control relationship wasn't particularly going anywhere, was it?

THEROS: No, but the process was. It didn't succeed at anything. I remember attending one meeting, which was just after Reagan had met with Gorbachev in Reykjavik, and they announce the zero-zero plan for nukes; both sides would aim towards the elimination of all nuclear weapons. I went to the PM staff meeting the next morning—again, as the only man doing the Rest of the World; I attended a meeting at which all I heard was the cries of outrage and anger at the President. There was one lady there who said: "The President does not understand. Arms control discussions are not about disarmament. Disarmament has never been our objective. Arms control discussions are about the process of arms control."

Q: [Laughs.]

THEROS: And she was shouting. And everyone around the table agreed with her.

Q: Oh my God.

THEROS: The President was wrong! The President had to be stopped. How can he give this away?

It seemed to me the principal concern was that if you actually had disarmament, then there would no longer be a process and there would no longer be jobs for any of these people.

Q: Yes. They were really people set aside. Did you have the feeling you were dealing with the real world and they were dealing with a process?

THEROS: They were clearly dealing with a process, but they were having a lot of work and fun doing it. In a way it was good for me because I only had three minutes with the Assistant Secretary and he would usually say, "Yes" to anything I said.

Q: Who was the Assistant Secretary?

THEROS: I went through several. General Chain, an Air Force general; Richard Burt, and Jonathon Turnbull Howe. There were some of the most interesting people I've ever met in my life.

Q: At the next time, could you talk a little about the Assistant Secretaries of PM and your impression of them and where they were coming [from]? You already talked about the dichotomy between the arms control people who dominated it, and you dealing with the rest of the world; but you might talk about the various personalities and outlooks of arms controls Assistant Secretaries. And then we'll move on. Where did you go in '86?

THEROS: In '86 I was exiled to the NDU (National Defense University).

Q: First we're going to talk a little about your imperious leaders in PM. As you say, the battle that they were fighting was mainly a turf battle. What was your impression of them and how they operated?

THEROS: Well, take Jon Howe, for example. Jon Howe had several characteristics: he was obsessed with minute detail.

Q: What was his background?

THEROS: He was a Navy admiral, two-star, I think. He was obsessed with detail, a smart man —good head on his shoulders; he understood the direction of American policy; very

much had his head screwed on right, but every now and then he would just go off on this tangent on detail. And the other salient characteristic of Jonathon Turnbull Howe is he apparently never slept. He would arrive at some ungodly hour in the morning and leave at well past midnight, every day, and pretty much expected his staff to do the same. He was tiring although a nice guy. He threw a couple of parties for the staff at his house and so forth, but very, very tiring. I remember once I came home at six o'clock in the afternoon on some afternoon and was greeted by my seven-year-old daughter at the door, whose first comment was, "Daddy, you're not supposed to be home in daylight."

He became obsessed with Lebanon. I came to PM in the summer of '83; the Israelis had invaded Lebanon in the summer of '82—that had rapidly turned into a big pile of horse manure. Everything that could possibly go wrong on both sides was going wrong; we had Sabra and Shatila, we had American forces in to help the Palestinians withdraw, and then the American forces came back. By the time I got there, the May 17th agreement—this was the peace treaty between Lebanon and Israel—had been signed and the Syrians had made it very clear that they were going to undermine that treaty. Working through their allies —I don't want to say their surrogates, but with their allies in Lebanon —they were doing a damn good job of undermining that treaty, certainly making the Israelis pay heavily. At this point we had gotten involved with shelling the Syrians and their allies in the sea. Howe, not to his discredit, had this tendency to send a message to my office two or three times a day wanting the exact number of rounds fired by every destroyer offshore, plus the locations of each ship and the range arcs covered by its guns when it fired into some nameless mountain in Lebanon. All I could think of was Joseph Conrad and the Heart of Darkness at that point. To his credit, Howe clearly understood what our limitations were and what we should be doing but could not swing the 7th floor and the White House towards sanity.

It was at the time, the National Security Council—and there are numerous books written about this —had set about trying to convert the Lebanon war into a Soviet-American war to be fought on our turf. Time and again it was very clear that everything was viewed through the Soviet Cold-War prism, and it was very clear that these men were trying to provoke a shooting war with the Soviets in the Eastern Mediterranean, because they had convinced themselves that the Soviets would be forced to come to the assistance of the Syrians and then we could have a shooting war there in which all the advantages would be on our side; the Soviets would be isolated and we might even be able to destroy the Soviet Mediterranean fleet, and pretty much inflict a great deal of damage on the Soviets without them being able to inflict much damage on us. The professional Foreign Service thought this was really criminally insane. Dick Clarke called them all sorts of names and especially noted that they had never heard of the Soviet ability to "horizontal escalation!"

Q: Yes.

THEROS: Nonetheless I recommend a book by a man named Raymond Tanter to give you an idea of their mentality.

Q: Who were these people?

THEROS: It was Ollie North; it was Howie Teicher; it was (John) Poindexter, to an extent—though I'm not sure how much Poindexter was just caught up in the enthusiasm; there were some others. They were all the equivalent of 0-1s they were just 14s and 15s, lieutenant colonels, colonels in the armed forces, all of whom were bound and determined to see us go to war. Jon Howe fought this but he didn't necessarily have all the time and the attention of the Secretary of State, because the Secretary of State himself was caught up in his anger at the Syrians for "having betrayed him on May 17th." I've never quite figured out how the Syrians, who had made it clear that they were against the agreement, had betrayed him.

Q: He got really very mad at (Robert P.) Bob Paganelli, who was our Ambassador in Syria, because Paganelli told him the Syrians won't go along with the agreement.

THEROS: Absolutely, because he allowed some of his friends to sway him.

Q: This was George Shultz. An odd incident.

THEROS: We spent an enormous amount of time conducting intelligence operations against the NSC and there were some souls there, in the NSC, whose influence was going out. Time and again—it was a very common practice among the NSC staffers—was to take an action memo from State, stick a summary on it for the President that distorted the memo alarmingly, covered it and sent the memo off with the summary. And there were a number of occasions when somebody would warn me or warn somebody else in the Bureau—it was usually me because it was my turf on this one —and go see Jon Howe and Howe would get a hold of somebody in the NSC staff or would call somebody at the Pentagon to help him, or a parallel in the State Department, and would then turn this off, get the memo pulled, get people called on the carpet.

I have to say the man had unbounded energy, and despite his obsession with details; in addition to the details he went after the big picture. He also tried not to exacerbate the turf fight that we were in with Near East Bureau, with NEA. It was a natural turf fight. We were in a position—my immediate boss was (Robert L.) Bob Gallucci, whom I met in Jordan and Georgetown, and Richard Clarke, who is now at the NSC, both of who were very formidable bureaucratic actors. Arnie Raphel was there as the Principal Deputy, another very formidable bureaucrat. I brought with me all the NEA experience. So in terms of turf, we were focused on Lebanon and we had made ourselves the elite on Lebanon while NEA, of course, was trying to cope with fifty different problems at the same time and wasn't able to do the turf. I tried very hard, and Jon Howe tried very hard, to prevent that turf battle from getting out of hand.

Jon Howe finally went off to a major naval command. Air Force General John Chain replaced him. Jon Howe tried to maintain a balance between regional issues and arms control. There were at least three offices—or four offices in PM, that did regional issues or either did arms control. When Chain came in, I became more important because he combined the other non-ARMS CONTROL offices under my leadership. I was Deputy

Director at first, and then Bob Gallucci left and I was made Director of the office—and all this under Chain. However, in consolidating my own turf, so to speak, he really meant to give greater importance to the arms control people who did missile and nuclear arms control. Chain was a stickler for procedure, a stickler for promptness. He had a morning staff meeting and the doors were closed at nine; if you weren't there by nine, you were not in the meeting. He was very abrupt. I got along with him fine but if you crossed him, he made your next five minutes terribly miserable. However, he didn't hold a grudge against you. We were off someplace—I forget where it was—on some trip with Chain and the DAS (Deputy Assistant Secretary) was along and we're all supposed to get in the cars to go off to the first meeting and the DAS was literally a minute-and-a-half late and he saw us getting in the cars and driving away. Chain didn't send somebody back for him.

He didn't do a lot of regional issues. When he did them, he did them reasonably well. When we went off on the first of the joint something or other political military group with the Israelis, JP&G, and the Israelis proved to be difficult, General Chain proved to be equally difficult. He made it very clear to the Israelis that he was a two-star general in the United States Air Force and he would do his job—secondarily he was also an Assistant Secretary of State, but that wasn't really his principal job, but that he wasn't about to … he saw no reason to be nice if people weren't cooperating. His working hours, fortunately, were more rational. He had a very precise approach to everything. Ten hours in a day; this is the way the day is divided up. You should have your work done; if you don't have your work done by the tenth hour, clearly you have some very significant flaw in your character or your mental makeup.

Lebanon by that time was beginning to fade into memory. The Marines had long since been blown away; the French had been blown away; we had stopped shelling things. Remember, we were no longer in Lebanon. I don't remember if it was he or John Howe who was there for the invasion of Grenada.

Q: The invasion of Grenada took place at almost exactly the same time that our Marines were blown up in Beirut.

THEROS: Okay, then Jon Howe was still the Assistant Secretary, I had forgotten.

It was interesting the way Washington resembles a pack of lemmings. Suddenly Grenada was the issue and everybody who could think of a role for himself in Grenada in the bureaucracy was running in that direction. I began to feel self-conscious. I'm still doing Lebanon. You know, should I be doing Grenada? And I went and saw Jon Howe and that was exactly my question. I said, "Sir, I continue to do Lebanon. I'm a little worried because everybody else in this Bureau —everybody else in this building, including the guards in the basement—are doing Grenada." He laughed and he said, "Patrick, just keep on doing what you're doing. We've got to have somebody working on Lebanon." [Laughs.] Grenada was a sort of Pirates of Penzance interval at the time.

Q: How about Chain? Had he run across the "make war with the Soviet Union" cabal in

the White House?

THEROS: Yes, but they had been pretty much dished up after Lebanon went bad. A couple of them were later charged criminally with Iran-Contra.

Q: But you're saying this group had kind of blotted its copybook.

THEROS: Rather badly. Some of them got involved in Iran-Contra; some of them should have gone to jail but didn't.

Once Lebanon was no longer on the middle of the table, we got involved in a great deal of arms transfer issues. Arms transfer and a little bit of base negotiations, but that wasn't the key issue. The second half of Chain's time there, and of Alan Holmes' time, was spent primarily on a thousand issues concerning whether we should sell BB guns to somebody or something more serious to somebody else.

Q: Was, at this point, from the PM point of view, Israel untouchable? I mean as far as arms control, as far as arms transfer; because they still have a fairly active arms trade.

THEROS: Virtually untouchable. The Israelis only crossed the line twice when I was there. The first time they crossed the line was—I don't remember the sequence, it was on two items. One issue that crossed the line was a businessman in California working on behalf of the Israelis had bought a device called a cyclotron—it ended in "tron," but it was something like that, and it was a device essential to the miniaturization of nuclear weapons. It had other uses as well. We did not export them to any country that did not have a supervised nuclear program in effect. An American businessman, or a group of men in California, sold Israel about six or seven hundred of these devices. The gentlemen in question were caught, ended up going to jail; we demanded the devices back from the Israelis and the Israelis returned about half the devices. They explained that the other half had been used up in tests of lasers, which was a theoretically legitimate use for these same devices.

The other incident is somebody decided to check on a container being exported from New York harbor, for Israel —I don't quite remember why —and it turned out that the Israelis had arranged to steal from the Watervliet Arsenal in New York all the technical documentation pertaining to the manufacture of a new tank main gun, too. And in addition it had stolen one of the tubes, and it was in the container. And that got several people in the Israeli military mission in New York, which is where the Israeli military mission is located, asked to go home politely. There was not the hoo-hah that there would have been with any other country doing this.

The perhaps most serious hoo-hah came during my time there was when it became fairly certain that the Israelis had sold the technology from their air-to-air missile, which they had acquired from us, to the People's Republic of China; and when I left that was still a very painful issue between us, and particularly in the Air Force you were getting objections now to the transfer of technology to Israel as a result. It's the first time I've

ever seen someone get up the nerve to defy the Israelis. The Air Force, after that, had to be pretty much bludgeoned every time by the White House into approving technology transfer, and frequently the White House would back off. As I said, the Air Force's biggest problem was that—the Air Force and the Navy, both, because it was transferred—that the technology in question didn't find itself into the hands of someone whom we might be fighting later.

The other big issue in arms control at the time concerned Blue Flag, there is a training system that we use in major American Air Force exercises, naval air exercises, which is a system of transponders in airplanes, computers on the ground enabling a very sophisticated tracking of planes engaged in dogfights. Now, it's a relatively inexpensive system; maybe twenty, thirty million dollars would buy it for you. All of the computers and the transponders and everything were off the shelf items. The only thing that was classified was the software in it. And India wanted to buy it for the training of its air force. It was interesting. The Air Force, which was trying to reduce the cost of its devices, was prepared to sell them; the Army didn't care; State, by and large, cared, but we had an open mind; and the Navy was adamantly opposed. The Navy explained their position as follows: the Indians have Soviet-made aircraft. If the Indians get a hold of this training device, they will discover that the Soviet-made aircraft are in fact a lot better than people think they are and will be able to use them more effectively, and this will ultimately leak back to the Soviet Union, which will then discover that its aircraft are more effective than they think they are; and therefore we don't want the technology to pass. But also the Navy regarded the Indians as a potential military adversary, which the Air Force and the Army didn't at the time. We spent a great deal of time with the Pakistanis and their nuclear bomb and the sixty fighters that we had frozen in the United States, not being able to go there. That was a fairly static issue. We went over and over the same issues every week and every month and nothing ever changed.

I had an interesting staff. I had an Air Force colonel, an Army colonel, a Marine colonel, and a Navy commander, and two FSOs on my staff. Plus, that was the senior people on my staff. And writing efficiency reports was very exciting because I had to write an efficiency report on every one of them. The Army colonel, when I had to write his efficiency report, sat me down and gave me a briefing, with slides, on how you write an Army efficiency report. The Air Force officer just tossed it at me and said, "Whatever you like. Here's the manual that goes with it." The Navy officer wrote it for me on the grounds that you don't understand the particular codes of the Navy and if you don't have these thirty-six buzzwords then I'm going to get passed over for promotion. And when I asked the Marine Corps officer for help in writing his efficiency report, he got mad at me. He took it as a personal insult and thought that I was being unprofessional and had never in his entire history in the Marine Corps been asked to contribute to his efficiency report. He thought it was dishonorable, and perhaps blasphemous, when I mentioned this, and, in fact, chewed me out for five minutes.

Q: [Laughs.] It's a good thing you didn't have a Coast Guard officer.

THEROS: Then Chain goes on and Alan Holmes comes in, first an FSO and Ambassador

—I forget where he had been.

Q: He'd been in Portugal at one point.

THEROS: Was it Portugal?

Q: It may be later, but I think maybe before. I'm not sure.

THEROS: He was a gentleman, a very, very, nice man; very, very professional. What he didn't realize, and I think a lot of us learned at that time, was by the time he came on, Arnie Raphel had moved on, others had moved on, two of the three DASes in PM were GS and most of the Office Directors were GS.

Q: These are Civil Service people.

THEROS: Yes. And what I was a little slow to realize—I don't think Alan realized it until it was too late—was that there was a great deal of hostility towards the Foreign Service among Civil Service, palpable hostility. It was well concealed in personal relationships, but you could see that it was a constant maneuvering to get the Civil Service people to change all the Senior Foreign Service positions to Civil Service positions, and this occurred to me right at the end of my time there—I think towards the middle of my third year.

Q: It was about '85 then.

THEROS: Eighty-six.

Q: Yes.

THEROS: I had gone off someplace—I think it was an exercise out to Fort Bragg—and I come back and Richard Clarke, who was the principal DAS at the time, invited me in. He wanted to explain that they had combined two Directorates, mine and another one; that the other Directorate Office Director, who was also an FSO, was moving on to another assignment, so they were promoting his deputy who was a GS to be Director of that office, and once the two offices would be combined I would be named Deputy Director of the combined office under the GS employee. He was a nice guy who was ten years junior to me. I got rather angry and suggested that my only alternative at that point was to resign. Otherwise, they would kill my career. Given the way Foreign Service promotions work—since we've turned all the efficiency reports into vanilla mush, the promotion boards look at the assignment pattern. They would see that I had been effectively demoted.

I was very angry and after a day or two I went and saw Alan Holmes and pointed out what had happened. Ambassador Holmes seemed to have been genuinely surprised at the consequence of this action. He had approved it without having thought through all the unintended consequences. So the next day he calls me back and he said that he couldn't

undo the change; however, and I was unaware of this at the time, there is a privilege awarded Assistant Secretaries—once a year they can designate an officer who must be promoted. They write a justification and the selection boards have to write why they do not agree. Otherwise they must promote. Generally the Secretary and the Assistant Secretary have first call on that. So he said I was going to be the officer in the position, and I was grateful for that because it balanced off what had happened before and this was my promotion to OC, my promotion to the Senior Foreign Service.

What is interesting is I had just gone from 2 to 1; my promotion from 2 to 1 had been delayed—this was just a little earlier. It provides an interesting insight into how the system works. I went down and read my personnel file and realized that two prior efficiency reports and two awards that I had gotten were not there. They finally discovered that the efficiency report had been put in some hold file by accident (somebody was supposed to put it in there and had just forgotten it) along with the two awards, and the only way to fix this was to file a grievance. Apparently the system was such—actually, I now understand why—that you couldn't just have them put it in there, because this wouldn't make up for the fact that I had been disadvantaged by previous promotion boards. So I had to file a grievance and then I had to have a suggested remedy. There were a number of remedies presented to me: a 2-step increase and whatnot; a 2-step pay increase upon promotion, if I got promoted in the next board, or a guaranteed promotion. So I requested in my grievance that if I got promoted in this board, I want the promotion retroactive one year. So essentially I spent one year in the 01 category. I spent two years because the records show two years, and you had to be two years in place to become a counselor, but the record showed that I was two years, whereas in fact I was an 01 for only one year. But at that point I was leaving PM. There was no way I was going to stay around for the same. So I got myself an assignment as a senior fellow at the National Defense University. But there was a hiatus for about three months and I was given the job, assigned overcomplement to PER for three months, of writing efficiency reports on officers on detail other agencies outside Washington. That was fun.

Q: I did one. It was terrible. I had to go all the way out to Hawaii to write on someone.

THEROS: I wasn't able to do that because they promoted the man to OC. [Laughs.]

Q: [Laughs.]

THEROS: But the funniest one was Portsmouth, New Hampshire. We had a Foreign Service officer detailed to the city manager's office in Portsmouth, New Hampshire. It appears that Portsmouth, New Hampshire being where, in 1905, the Russo-Japanese Treaty at Portsmouth was signed, the one that made Japan a world power, the Japanese had adopted Portsmouth and they built a town hall; they built a stadium. All this as a memorial to coming of age as a world power. There is a plaque at the house where the treaty was signed. They had converted it into a museum, and then once a year there was a fifteen-day Japanese festival in Portsmouth, New Hampshire. In the middle of the year they would invite city council notables in Portsmouth to come to Japan. The Japanese festival was particularly amusing because every restaurant in town got a Japanese cook.

Q: Oh boy.

THEROS: And other things. The Japanese, when they do this, they go whole hog. So the city fathers called the State Department and said, "Help! We don't know how to deal with this." So State assigned a Foreign Service officer who had been in Japan at some point or other, always on a terminal assignment. (This was the last assignment of his career.) He lived in a very nice house, right on the river, and enjoyed two years of Portsmouth, New Hampshire. , It was a lot of fun because, in fact, I was writing an efficiency report for an officer who had absolutely no intention of ever coming back to the Department of State. [Laughs.] And it really didn't matter what I wrote. And there were other officers; I did details on other officers.

Q: Well then you went to the National Defense University. This was '86 to '87?

THEROS: Right.

Q: What were you doing there?

THEROS: I was a senior Research Fellow; I was supposed to write a book. I wrote a book on our military posture in the Persian Gulf. I had lots of problems with the military posture in the Persian Gulf.

Q: Well at that point there wasn't much there except COMIDEASTFOR, was there?

THEROS: No, no. There was a lot by this time. This was '86.

Q: Oh yes.

THEROS: We were moving up a lot.

I thought at the time that the posture itself indicated a lack of understanding of the problem. For one, it was too unilateral; it did not make use of allies, the coalition. It failed to understand the regional issues, and was a force that was not configured for a deployment to the region. And I wrote my book, so to speak. I had trouble because I wrote eleven chapters but I couldn't tie them together as a book. I did all my research, I had the eleven chapters written, and was sitting with the advisors fumbling over how I was going to put it together—and I had clearly failed in that endeavor; eleven distinct essays was the best way of describing it. However, I got my assignment as DCM in Amman, Jordan. At that point it was a classic case of FIGMO. I wanted to go to now. I really wanted my own Embassy but I wanted out of Washington even more.

Jordan, 1987 to 1991

Q: [Laughs.] Okay, well, let's pick up. You were in Amman from when to when?

THEROS: I was in Amman from May of 1987 until July of 1991.

Q: Obviously you fit for it and all of that, but how did you get chosen to be DCM there?

THEROS: Basically Rocky Suddarth had been selected to be the Ambassador, even though he hadn't been confirmed yet, and they went to him and said: "Who would you like? Here's a list of potential candidates as DCM. Who would you like?" Even though I had never worked for him, I'd known him some in the past, so he picked me. I actually went out there about three months before he did.

Q: In '87 when you got out there, what was the situation in Jordan?

THEROS: A reasonably good relationship with the United States, a declining economy. That's about where we are now. The peace process consisted essentially of figuring out how to get the Jordanians to surrender on behalf of Palestinians. We were now at that stage in life where we didn't speak to Palestinians—where Palestinians didn't exist, where we depended upon the Jordanians to do all the negotiating for them, to take all the responsibility for them.

Q: Had the Jordanians, King Hussein, renounced?

THEROS: No, not yet. It happened in late '87. The first Intifada broke out in November of '87. The situation on the West Bank and in Gaza was deteriorating. The average Palestinian held no hope, somewhat similar to now, for any future progress. The Israeli occupation was fairly brutal. When you're living in Jordan and there is this constant tale of people coming across the river with one more story about the Israelis, and one more story about the Israelis … I remember the first week I was there, a man was the Hisham al-Shawa, which was one of the prominent families of Gaza, who had come back with a story. His family was, for want of a better term, quislings; they were close collaborators of the Israelis. At one point, one night, he was asleep in bed; there was a bang on the door, the door was knocked down and a group of Israeli soldiers and an officer walked in. They lined his whole family up, in their pajamas, in the living room, pushed them around a little bit—may have slapped somebody. But the man was shocked; he could not understand what this was all about. So he explained to the Israeli lieutenant in charge who he was and his relationship with the military government—the man clearly was collaborating with the Israelis—and the lieutenant's response was, "You think you're important, huh? Well let me tell you how important you are," and he took his pistol out and proceeded to break every piece of glass and china he could find in the living room and dining room, one at a time.

What Shawa most remembered was the story of his glass coffee table. The Israeli officer smashed the glass coffee table and made the whole family watch until he had smashed every piece of glass he could find, and he said, "That's just to teach you that you may think you're important, but you're not important." He said the next day he went to the senior Israelis with whom he dealt, they expressed a certain amount of sympathy, and that

was it. There was never any attempt to discipline the lieutenant. The lieutenant was a well-known person; he just was on a power trip. He wanted to prove just how important he was. And there were stories like this all the time, constant stories.

And finally in late November, early December, Intifada broke out. Something happened—I forget what it was—in Gaza that triggered rioting. The Israelis, as usual, overreacted. The rioting killed a bunch of people, and at that point it just went from bad to worse. This went on for some months. There was increasing pressure by the United States on the Jordanians to cut a deal with the Israelis, whatever that deal might be; it was never quite clear to me what we had in mind for a deal. It was certainly less than 242 and 338, the two Security Council resolutions.

There was nobody in East Jordan, other than the king, who still thought that Jordan had a role to play in the West Bank. I had, from my previous tour, some senior friends in the Jordanian armed forces and universally the comment was, "The Jordanian army is never going to cross the river again and the Jordanian army is never going to crack Palestinian heads again in order to protect Israel. That's an Israeli problem." Throughout the East Bank establishment, there was universal unanimous opinion that Jordan hadn't lost anything west of the Jordan River and it wasn't their business anymore. Finally the king decided he agreed with it and he renounced any claim to the West Bank and said essentially he was ready to make a deal with the Palestinians; he washed his hands of the issue, and walked away. Predictably, some Arabs called him a traitor. A little less predictably, the reaction in Washington was a reaction of great anger—great, great anger.

Within a week or so we had the benefit of a visit by Dennis Ross; he was the staff Middle East coordinator. The king found a reason to disappear. He didn't want to speak to him; he just went someplace else. And they met with the Jordanian Foreign Minister, Marwan Qasem. I know Marwan quite well, and Marwan, when he wants to, can be one of the most unpleasant people in the world. Well, apparently that day he wanted to be one of the most unpleasant people in the world. The meeting can only be described as horrible. Marwan unloaded on Ross, made it clear that there was never again going to be a Jordanian negotiating on behalf of the Palestinians; they're not going to be stepped on, and the Americans had created this mess and they had got to fix it. I saw the group when they came back from the meeting at lunchtime and Dennis Ross was still fuming. It was just us; just the Ambassador, myself, the political officer, and Dennis Ross and the group from Washington. He was just fuming. He said, "You don't understand. They will undo this." Ross banged his fists on the table and repeated, "They will undo this." And I said to Ross: "I gotta tell you, there's not anybody this side of the river that will undo this. The king would have to go against the unanimity in his population, and his military, and his politicians, and the Bedouin, and everybody else. Nobody wants to go back to representing the Palestinians." Well he said, "If they don't, then there is only one other choice that I'll negotiate with the Palestinians." He said, "Transfer." I said, "Transfer?" He said, "Yes, the Sharon solution: the transfer, which is just expel all the Palestinians to East Jordan." I said: "Dennis, this is the end of the twentieth century. I don't know if their people will stand for it; we certainly wouldn't. We certainly wouldn't accept it in the United States or in Europe." And then he said something to me that finished the

conversation because I didn't see how I could continue at that point. He said, "Once we explain the necessity of transfer, the American people will accept it."

Q: Well when we were talking about the result—correct me if I'm wrong —of the policy that Kissinger agreed to, to say, "If you do this, we will not negotiate with the Palestinians," we had someone to talk to. I mean there they were, the key to the whole thing, and at least until then we had the Jordanians to beat up a final demand, and it gave us the appearance of doing something. And all of a sudden there we were without anybody.

THEROS: The rationale for Kissinger's desire to increase in all sorts of aid to Israel, and to be fair to the Israeli side, give them all the security they needed; and to isolate the Palestinians. The expressed rationale was that the Israelis feared defeat, and if they are absolutely convinced the United States is on their side, then we'll protect them and we'll give them the confidence and then they'll be able to deal with the problem. I don't know if Henry Kissinger believed that. I don't think so. Nobody else in the region believed that by giving the Israelis everything they want they were going to get concessions. I frankly don't think Henry Kissinger believed it either. So, the Intifada dragged on.

Q: How was this playing in Jordan?

THEROS: It was very unpopular. It certainly did nothing to raise our relationship. Nothing dramatic happened in the next year except that the Intifada continued on and on and on. But nothing really dramatic happened that year. We were getting closer to the collapse of the Soviet Union and so forth, all of which was playing as background music. Then in November of '88 there were riots in the city of Ma'an south, which was the Hashemite stronghold.

Q: This was in Jordan?

THEROS: In Jordan. Ma'an is not really in Jordan; it's really just an extension of the Hejaz in Saudi Arabia. There were riots there over a truck tax. Ma'an was essentially in the trucking business; it owns most of the cross-country trucks in Jordan, I think.

Q: How do you spell that?

THEROS: Ma'an would be the acceptable transliteration.

The king was in the United States with the prime minister, Zaid Rifai, who was his best friend; he had been the prime minister for the previous four or five years. He was a very a clever but was generally regarded as a corrupt individual. Crown Prince Hassan was in Jordan as regent and he went to the south to try and calm things down; it didn't work really well. The king flew back and realized that he had done two things: he had neglected the economy—King Hussein's strength was never economics. He had sadly neglected the economy, neglected the disproportionate effect it was having on the south, in Jordan, and realized that his best friend—Zaid Rifai—that weren't true had told him a

thousand rosy things. So he fired Zaid Rifai. (I don't think King Hussein ever had a civil word with him until he died.) The King then decreed that they would hold elections. No elections had been held in Jordan for parliament since the '67 war, on the grounds that half the population of Jordan was now behind enemy lines and couldn't vote.

The king took the position; "…we divested ourselves from the West Bank, which annuls the union. Therefore we're going to have parliamentary elections for what's left." Again, the American reaction was incomprehensible to me. We got a rocket from the Department of State demanding that the Ambassador go to the king and persuade him to undo the elections.

Q: Good God.

THEROS: Not to have elections. And the argument that was put forward, that we would kind of draft it in the U.S. coordinator's office, was that the election would unduly complicate the peace process. Ambassador Suddarth refused to carry out the instructions and pretty much went back to the Department and said: "There's no way I'm going to do this. How am I supposed to be the American Ambassador? How am I supposed to be against elections?" There were a lot of hard feelings directed at Suddarth and I think, in a way, the fact that he never went on to another job after Embassy Amman reflected the hard feelings at the end of his tour.

Q: This is so basically un-American. It sounds like guys sitting back in Washington trying to play God and manipulate basically at a lower level. They don't see the big picture.

THEROS: High enough level.

Q: Who were these people?

THEROS: I'm fairly certain I know who drafted the message. How he got approval of the bureaucracy is one of the great mysteries to me.

Q: Yes. This is just unacceptable.

Did we see elections as being a destabilizing factor within Jordan?

THEROS: No. The campaign itself had called for rhetoric that was bound to be anti-Israeli and once there were elections, the parliament would probably object to the kinds of concessions that would be necessary on Jordan's part in order to have peace in the area.

Q: How were we, from your perspective at that time … I can see Jordan as playing two roles: One, it's as we have in a lot of countries, we say, My god, if this kingdom collapses, if the king is done away with, it just means chaos; so we've got to keep him in place. The other one was somehow or another this has got to be our guy doing something to keep the Palestinians in place.

THEROS: I don't think Washington ever resolved the dilemma. I don't think Washington recognized that it was in a quandary, that there were contradictions inherent to the actions they wanted the Jordanians to take.

The Jordanians wanted to buy fighter planes when I got there. They were evaluating French fighter planes, American fighter planes—the F-16, the Tornado, and the Russian MiG-29. By any cost-benefit analysis, the Russian MiG-29 was far and away the best airplane for them. The Tornado was ridiculously expensive. The Mirage 2000 was not expensive until we informed the Jordanians that we wouldn't sell them the F-16, and suddenly the Mirage became expensive. The MiG-29 was both relatively inexpensive; forty MiG-29s, twenty-two Mirage 2000s, and eight Tornados all cost the same amount of money. As a dog fighter, the MiG-29 was up there with the F-16 and the Mirage 2000. It had a lot of things going for it. But there were disadvantages—like maintenance was a problem—and they tended to crash more often because there was a very short mean time between the catastrophic failures of engines—you had to buy extra engines—but, nonetheless, forty MiG-29s cost the same as twenty-two Mirage 2000s and eight Tornados. When I first got there I was Chargé, and remember I was sent in to tell Marwan Qasem not to buy the MiG-29s. That's when Marwan reminded me that even though he and I were personal friends, he saw no reason to be nice to me.

We wouldn't give the Jordanians any assistance. In 1988 or '89—I forget which it was—the total amount of aid to Jordan had dropped to $10 million, on an annual basis. I remember the Ambassador was saying he just wanted to toss this through the transom and keep on going.

When the elections happened, the election system was basically flawed. It was proportional representation within districts and you got to vote for everybody, which meant smaller well-disciplined extremist parties had a disproportionate part of the vote. So although the Islamics got perhaps eighteen percent of the vote, they got forty-five percent of the parliament.

Q: You say "Islamics." Who do you mean?

THEROS: The Muslim Brotherhood and related groups. It was not the radicalism of Khomeini, but it was still fairly radical.

The other reason was that the Jordanian upper class didn't really think the elections were serious and they didn't vote. On Election Day I went to a club and the club was full of people from the crème de la crème of Jordanian society, none of who had voted. This gave the Islamics close to about half the parliament. In the lead-up to the elections, the Jordanian secret police went out and did the normal thing; they arrested everybody they didn't like. The king called in the secret police and said: "No, you don't understand. We're going to have free elections. And what do you do when you have free elections?" "Well we arrest everybody, sir." "No, you don't. Release everybody and everybody gets to vote. It's going to be really free and you can't put the false bottom on the ballot box

and all the things you guys used to do in the past." This left the intelligence service thoroughly confused because they did not comprehend an election in which they weren't supposed to do this. When they elections came, as Rocky said in a message, one of the biggest problems in a democracy is when the wrong men win. The king, however, reacted very, very smart to this. He said, "I'll give them most any ministry they want in government. They're half the government, so I'll give them four or five cabinet positions and I'll give them any ministry they want except defense and the intelligence service." So these men opted for social affairs, labor, education, and I forget what the fourth one was. But social affairs, labor, and education were the key ministries.

Q: Health maybe?

THEROS: Maybe health; I don't remember.

And they proceeded to make fools of themselves. It worked out very nicely for the king. Within weeks of coming into office, the minister of labor put out a decree that male hairdressers could not work on female customers, this in a country where unemployment was around twenty-two percent at the time. It was a big hoorah. Lots of people were upset. After three days the cabinet rescinded the decree and there was a cartoon in one of the more serious newspapers in town that showed the cabinet meeting; one man was in a crutch, the other man had his head bandaged—you know, bloody nose, black eye, arm in a sling, and so forth—and the caption was, "They forgot to tell their wives." So that was rescinded. And they did a couple of other dumb things like that, which eroded any credibility they might have had.

As a matter of fact—I'm skipping over some other event —just before we left, in June of '91, the minister of education, this time, decreed that fathers could not go to the graduations of their daughters from high school because there would be gymnastics and stuff like that and other girls would be there too, and you couldn't have anybody there except their own fathers. So fathers could not go to graduation exercises. The night before the graduation, there was a farewell dinner for us at the home of a Circassian friend of mind. You know the Circassians; they're a big element of the population. They're Caucasus people. The Russians had exiled them. They're neighbors of the Chechen. They're fairly brusque people, for want of a better term. It was a big dinner, maybe thirty to forty people there, or more, and the conversation at dinner was the decree. There were at six or seven people who had a daughter or a niece who was graduating. The flat statement at the table was that they were going to the graduation the next day and they were going to go armed. Some of their buddies and their uncles and their cousins were going to come with them to the graduation. They had invited them to the graduation the next day. And no (supply your expletive) minister of education is going to tell them he couldn't go to his daughter's graduation. It was pretty exciting, pretty heady stuff.

My wife and I go home and we turn on the television just for the midnight news, and serendipitously the chief of police for Amman was being interviewed by a reporter who says to him, "We've been hearing these stories all over town about fathers insisting they

are going to go to graduation despite the decree of the minister of education." The policeman shrugged his shoulders and said, "Well, the minister of education decreed this; it's up to the minister of education to enforce it. This is not a police matter."

Q: [Laughs.]

THEROS: In the next election, which was after we left, the Islamics took a really big hit. They looked like idiots.

Q: Let's go back to when you got there? In the first place, what was your evaluation, and maybe Rocky Suddarth, of the king? Was he at the top of his powers? Was he having problems? How did you see it?

THEROS: There was no viable opposition to the king. The king was—God rest his soul—an unbelievably charismatic figure. Scores of women that I knew, American and foreign, after meeting him would say to me, "Now I understand why he has so many girlfriends." He was just utterly charming. One day we were at a reception at the prime minister's house. He shook hands with 2,700 people, roughly. And we were about three-quarters of the way down the line, my wife and I, and we get up to there and he shakes hands with my wife and asks about my son's health; my son had hurt himself at school and a plastic surgeon had fixed his chin three days before. And it went on like this.

Secondly, there was no doubt that he carried weight internationally, far beyond his five foot two [inches], and far beyond any weight that Jordan carried. Even his fiercest enemies in Jordan had mellowed by this time. It wasn't '58 anymore. There was no longer anybody out there.

The standard East Bank Jordanian joke is if you want to be a minister, what you do is you stage a coup against the king and fail, and within three years you'll become minister. Ma'an Abu Nuwar, the man who led the '58 coup against him, was found guilty, sent to the death; the sentence was commuted; the sentence was then pardoned; he was left sitting at home for a little while and then was made ambassador to London; and then came back to be Lord Mayor of Amman. It's a little hard to build up a head of steam against the king that way. So by pure charisma, and the fact that he could, in effect, barge into any capitol city in the world and talk to any world leader that he wanted, and that people at least listened to him to a degree far beyond his worth of weight in Jordan, made him the indispensable man.

His weakness? That he didn't seem to focus on the economy. His idea of how to fix the economy was to ask the Americans or the English or somebody for more money. He had good people in the economic ministries—all of whom worked very hard to reinforce the begging, even though they knew that ultimately, in the long term, this was not good for the Jordanian economy. People did not begrudge him the fact that he lived high on the hog. Whenever somebody wanted to criticize the king, they criticized Queen Noor for having too much jewelry.

Q: The first part of the time you were there was when Reagan was President. Did you get any feel for the relationship between Reagan, Shultz, and company? Did you have Dennis Ross, who was kind of mad? But up above that? How did the chemistry work?

THEROS: A large part of the relationship was with the U.S. military, which came out more often than anybody else did. Then we got a lot of Congressmen visiting—and they were all charmed by the king. We would go to bat, usually with the Saudis and somebody else, to get more aid to Jordan.

We managed to take a bit of the edge off the relationship with the Israelis, though the Israelis were trying very hard to ruin it. I don't think they were trying very hard as a matter of state policy, it's just they had no control over their people and it's an ill-disciplined bunch. For example, once when I was there and Israeli patrol boat came out of Aqaba, circled the king's yacht—quite a big cabin cruiser—and machine gunned the water in front of it and fire tracer overhead, as a joke. It was this Israeli patrol boat commander's idea of a way to spend a nice, pleasant Friday afternoon. The Jordanians were outraged. We did really get angry at the Israelis—screamed and shouted at them in Washington and in Tel Aviv. They promised us that the officer in charge would be disciplined severely. He apparently was called up before his commanding officer and read the riot act and then was transferred from Aqaba to Haifa. There was no further action taken against him.

Q: I've heard reports about the Israeli defense force. Really, it's not a very well disciplined group, particularly when they are not facing opposition.

THEROS: My impression of the Israeli armed forces—and I've been around them a bit—is that the air force is really very good at what they do, the navy is reasonably well; there are a few elite units that are quite good, though they don't take casualties very well, and that most of the reserve infantry units are rabble. You wouldn't want to put them up against anybody serious. It's essentially an air force with a few army brigades attached. They will fight well for the defense of their country, as they fought well in the Golan and elsewhere, because the motivation was there. But on the offensive, against a determined defender, they don't do that well.

I was just rereading some books about Lebanon in '82 and generally they caught the Syrians on the ground with enormous air power; lots of tanks were knocked out—but there were several occasions where they ran into Syrian dug-in positions and did not press the attack. Once the lead units began to take casualties they would break off the engagement and not press the attack.

Q: Also I've heard reports that in Lebanon there was a tremendous amount of looting.

THEROS: Yes.

Q: Which is always a sign of poor discipline in the military. Once you allow looting, you're talking about not a fighting military force.

THEROS: [There is] an interesting story as a prelude to the Gulf War; I was there for that. Senator Metzenbaum, from Ohio, had been in Jordan a couple of times and he asked me to come visit him when I came back to Washington. So I did and it was an interesting meeting. He took me to lunch and asked me about the relationship with Jordan and Jordan's relationship with its neighbors. I told him that the Jordanians were becoming steadily more dependent on the Iraqis, that the Intifada was creating great anti-American resentment, and anti-Western resentment, in Jordan; that the Saudis and the Kuwaitis, and the Kuwaitis in particular, had treated the Jordanians very badly. The Saudis had not only cut off all aid, but they essentially cut off Jordanian exports going to the smaller Gulf countries. The Kuwaitis had actually publicly humiliated the king. At one point he had flown to Kuwait and when the plane was just outside Kuwaiti air space, the Kuwaitis turned it back and said, "We don't want to see you," together with a comment about, "We don't have any aid to give you right now, so there's no point in you coming here."

The Iraqis had stood up for the Jordanians in many fora. They stood up for the Jordanians. They had pressured, in the Arab League, at the Arab League summit in Jordan in '89 or early '90. The Iraqis had pressed very hard for other Arab countries to give aid to Jordan. They themselves had given aid to Jordan. More importantly, they had now become Jordan's principal customer for the manufacturing sector—light manufacturing. Other than the traditional exports of phosphates and chemicals, virtually all Jordanian exports were going to Iraq. I told Metzenbaum that Jordan was becoming a satellite. On top of that, with the relaxation of censorship, nobody had reacted, except the Iraqis, who had promptly moved in and bought all the editors. It was amazing how many newspaper editors were now driving around with new Mercedes cars. There were Iraqi fashion shows in Jordan; there were Iraqi this and Iraqi that. It was just tremendous economic and social penetration of Jordan. The Iraqis were working hard at pulling Jordan into their orbit, and at the popular level they were succeeding. Everybody liked the Iraqis, plus everybody disliked the Kuwaitis. This was May of 1990.

Q: Before we get to August of 1990, how was the collapse of the Soviet Union seen from Jordan? Did this make any difference, because you have both Iraq and Syria being the main beneficiaries of Soviet assistance and all? Did this ease things for Jordan?

THEROS: It eased them in the sense that Syria was truly a Soviet dependency in many ways, and the collapse of the Soviet Union reduced Syria's ability to do anything—to cause trouble or intimidate the Jordanians. Iraq was seen as a country that was no longer a client or a dependency to the Soviet Union. Iraq was now in a position where everybody was trying to get in to sell them things; where everybody wanted to be a part of the Iraqi market. But see, again, Iraq was no longer viewed as a threat, except by a few more hide-bound Jordanians. Iraq was now the savior and the leader. The relationship with Iraq was improving continuously, and that was the year in which our aid dropped to $10 million. We had no leverage left on the Jordanians. We had a $10-million aid program and the administration of the program cost more than $10 million.

Q: Was there any reflection of Iran in Jordan?

THEROS: Not terribly much. The Jordanians were very pro-Iraqi and had been very pro-Iraqi during the Iraq-Iran War, and very anti-Iranian. Occasionally, Khomeini, until he died, would send messages to the king, addressing him as his brother because Khomeini also believed that he was descended from Fatima.

Q: What about the Saudis?

THEROS: Outright reciprocated hostility.

Q: Was this a reflection of what had gone on way back when the Hashemites were kicked out of Arabia or was this a more recent vindictiveness?

THEROS: My theory, and I think I can defend it fairly well, is that the Hashemites represented a political, psychological threat to the Al Saud. The Al Saud have a legitimacy question. They are not legitimate kings. They are tribal leaders who have not yet made that transition into being real kings yet, or real princes, or real royalty. The Hashemites are legitimate. I believe it is a reflection of Saud lack of confidence in themselves. When you had powerful al Saud kings, like Abdulaziz and Faisal, this was not so much an issue; but after Faisal's assassination, when the first of the Sudairis and the seven full brothers, Khalid and Fahd, now came to power, these were people who personally lacked credibility. They were drunks, womanizers, and gamblers, corrupt. And add to that their lack of legitimacy, because their own perceived lack of legitimacy—they're not real kings; so much so that Fahd almost dropped the title of king and now calls himself only the custodian of the two holy mosques. It meant that there was this underlying hostility towards Jordan, towards the Hashemites, and sensitivity to see something hostile in everything the Jordanians do.

Sometime early in '90, somebody had written an article in a prominent Arab newspaper in London, speaking of the inherent right of the Jordanians to be the protectors of the holy mosques, the Hashemites. Out of this Al Saud constructed this whole story about Jordanian attempts to infiltrate and take the Hejaz back. The fact that the Al Saud treated their army very badly—they bought tons and tons of equipment and their men never trained on it; they never exercised on it, and so forth—caused the al Saud to be even more paranoid.

There's an underlying paranoia in the al Saud, particularly among the Sudairis, of everything Hashemite. They never lose an opportunity to hurt Jordan. I don't think it is terribly rational, but it's there and it's real. As I say, it is the history, but even more it is this sense that they lack legitimacy; they're not real kings. A bunch of country bumpkins came in and seized the power of the country. Lots of Arab kingdoms have the name of the ruling family in it. Saudi Arabia is the one in which the only name in it is that of the ruling family. Jordan is the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan.

Q: What about Egypt, at this point?

THEROS: Egypt just thinks it's the most important, most powerful, best looking, and best smelling country in the Arab world, and acts accordingly, and tries to slap down anybody who gives themselves airs as being anything other than third grade. Jordan was down, so the Jordanian relationship was one of the Jordanians being treated with contempt by the Egyptians, but I don't remember serious flashpoints in the relationship. It's just that the Egyptians generally treated the Jordanians with disdain.

Q: Was King Hussein able to take these disparate neighbors and play one against the other?

THEROS: To a degree.

Q: Or did he have much to play with?

THEROS: The only thing he had to play with was his great skills. He was a great con man in this way. And to a degree he did and he was able to play one off against the other. Particularly at Arab League meetings and stuff like that; again, he had the personality to grab center stage at all these meetings. And all Arab leaderships, he's still very personal.

Q: Yes, and he was dealing with people who were rather dour.

THEROS: Yes.

Q: Who was it? Assad was in Syria and Mubarak, and the Saudis. I mean these aren't very charismatic people.

THEROS: Assad is. Assad is charismatic in a Syrian way. It's a low-key.

Q: We think of him as being kind of a plotter.

THEROS: Not a plotter. Assad was not a talkative man, but he actually scares people. He scared people a lot. Assad was a presence in the room, but Assad was also terribly cautious in what he did.

Q: What about Saddam Hussein, at this point? Right now, as of today's date, we're getting ready to go to war with him, maybe. How was Saddam Hussein? He had killed a lot of people. He'd done a stupid war against Iran; he had poisoned a lot of his people. It wasn't a very benevolent group. How did the Jordanians view this?

THEROS: By and large, the Jordanians liked Saddam. They felt that with all his flaws he was still a real leader in the Arab world. He had turned Iraq into a budding world power. And I think their attitude towards what he had done with his own people was, "We can't make an omelet without breaking eggs." They didn't like the regime in Iraq, and they were not prepared to live under such a regime, and they had all sorts of stories about some relative who had had his legs dislocated, or killed, or something like that in Iraq. When that was said, Iraq was still a powerful Arab country perceived as defending Arab

interests with skill and with strength. Their attitude towards Iraq's attack on Iran in '80 was more of, "Gee, maybe he should have waited a little longer until he was somewhat stronger, and he should have planned it better." The worst anybody said was, "Well, let them keep on killing each other," and the best was, "This was a country that was defending the Arab world."

Q: But there was no feeling that here was a country that was getting bigger and bigger and bigger, and is ultimately going to be a threat to us?

THEROS: No worse a threat than any other Arab country. In the meantime, it was a country that could be looked upon as a protector.

Q: Was there anything going with Israel, other than just hate?

THEROS: The Department of State, and the various branches of the U.S. government, would keep going through these exercises, trying to improve the relationship between the two of them. It never got anywhere. There was one point where we said to the Israelis, "You've got to have more trade with Jordan; you have to take Jordanian exports because the Jordanian economy is badly in need." So after a lot of fiddle-faddle, a lot of pressure, which, by this time—it was the Bush I Administration—the Israelis said, "Well, we'd love to take more Jordanian products, but there's nothing the Jordanians can sell us that would be competitive." So somebody stepped into the breach and said, "Well, I'll tell you what, let's test that. Let's get a proper survey team together—get some management types, management consultants—and they'll come look at your markets and look at Jordanian products, and see if there is anything the Jordanians could sell to you." Well, they did. They came and they looked.

The Israelis realized they had been mouse trapped into agreeing to this. The thing about the Israelis is they have a relatively efficient administration, so once they've agreed to it, it's very hard for them to interfere with us. So the men go there, they do their survey, and they come back with this list of about eighty items that Jordan produced that would do very well, thank you, in the Israeli market.

What sticks most in my mind was beer. Jordan produces Amstel beer under license from Holland, and Amstel is decent beer. If you've ever had Maccabee, you would appreciate Amstel even more. Not only that, but Amstel was selling in restaurants in Jordan for less than the loading ramp price of Maccabee beer in Israel. They had rank ordered the products by most likely to succeed in the Israeli market and beer was at the front end. The Israelis finally realized that they had been had and said, "No, none of this can be sold because it can be used to smuggle in bad things. We cannot import anything from Jordan, for security reasons." Actually, it all had to do with protecting their domestic markets.

We kept going through these exercises all the time—and they were all exercises in futility. They certainly kept half a dozen people on the AID staff busy and they kept our economic officer busy. Confidence building measures on how to improve relations between Israel and Jordan always failed, always failed, always failed.

Q: Prior to the Iraqi war, Ambassador Harrison came out, didn't he?

THEROS: I was Chargé for three weeks prior to the Iraqi attack on Kuwait, and two weeks following it.

Q: This is probably a good place to stop. We'll pick this up next time with the invasion of Kuwait and all that stuff. ...

Patrick, you're DCM in Amman, Jordan. Was it 1990?

THEROS: It was 1990. Have we gotten to the war yet?

Q: Well I think that's where we were, what happened in the invasion of Kuwait. We may be repeating ourselves a bit, but as we were monitoring this—looking what Iraq was up to—what were our concerns, and your concerns, in Amman?

THEROS: Amman was in transition; Ambassador Suddarth had left; Roger Harrison, the new Ambassador, had not shown up, and I was Chargé at the time. I had been chargé for a week-and-a-half, two weeks, at that point. I was busy. Even though the Iraqi-Kuwaiti confrontation was in the papers, it wasn't on our screens. There was very little to indicate from Washington that anybody was very concerned. I certainly didn't have instructions for demarches to the Jordanians. I was too busy tending to housekeeping and preparing for the new Ambassador.

Q: Were the Jordanians in the same boat?

THEROS: I don't think there was any significant number of people, including the Iraqi military, who thought they were going to invade Kuwait. I think everybody thought they were going through a certain amount of posturing. The UAE, at the time, may have been a little bit more prescient than others in that, when the Iraqi propaganda campaign began to pick up, the UAE suddenly called us and asked for an unscheduled air exercise with the United States.

Q: It was a refueling exercise.

THEROS: It was a refueling exercise, yes.

Q: Which was sort of benign.

THEROS: But still, they wanted American presence. The Kuwaitis certainly didn't act as if they thought that an invasion was imminent. We were all prisoners of the tradition that Arab countries didn't invade each other, or at least not on a big-time basis. They would posture and then work things out, but you didn't really invade another Arab country. So, to my surprise, on the late afternoon or early evening of the first of August, I'm summoned over to the palace to see the king. I go into his reception room and find him

there in a blue funk, looking very unhappy and he proceeds to tell me that the Kuwaitis did something unbelievably stupid and that Saddam has lost it. "He really has lost it, mentally, psychologically. He's off foaming at the mouth and biting people." Two days before, there had been a conference in Jeddah, an attempt sponsored by the Saudis to get the Kuwaitis and the Iraqis to resolve some of the Iraqi complaints. I suppose the most important Iraqi complaint was that the Kuwaitis were now drilling into reserves, into a reservoir, that was primarily an Iraqi reservoir, in violation of rules. The Iraqis claimed (probably correctly) that the Kuwaitis drilling horizontally. The Iraqis also complained that Kuwait was exporting oil at a volume that was depressing OPEC prices. Furthermore, Kuwait was trying to collect on debt they were owed. Iraq felt it shouldn't have to pay because after all Iraq had just spent the last nine years defending the Arab world against the Persians. A conference was called in Jeddah under the auspices of the Saudis.

It was at the request of the Saudis; but essentially it was a bilateral Iraqi-Kuwaiti cause. They got fairly acrimonious and ended with the chief of the Kuwaiti delegate, apparently according to King Hussein, making a rude gesture with his finger and telling the Iraqi chief, who I think was the minister of energy, "tuz alayk," which means "up your ass." And that was the end of the meeting.

Q: King Hussein was there, at the meeting?

THEROS: No, he was not at the meeting. This was a bilateral event.

Q: I'm just wondering how to get this thing. Did you feel that this represented what happened, or "We hate the Kuwaitis and they're all stupid' type thing, or something like that?

THEROS: Well there was an underlying feeling like that; however, this behavior on the part of the Kuwaitis was consistent with their previous behavior. The Kuwaitis displayed an arrogance leading up to the war that was unbelievable, so much so that even after the war broke out, even among other Gulf Arabs, there was a certain amount of cheery, "Well, it served the SOBs right; maybe this will bring them down a peg." The Kuwaitis had pretty much made themselves personally unbearable to everybody in the region.

As I said, in this particular case—I've now heard this story from so many different knowledgeable people that I believe it—that in a moment of stupidity, or something, a Kuwaiti waved his middle figure at the Iraqi said something very rude and that was it. Apparently the Iraqi delegation was hesitant to tell Saddam this, according to the king, and it took them maybe a half-day before they did tell Saddam exactly what happened. And Saddam, at that point, lost it. He had spoken with the king; the king described the conversation as a conversation with somebody who was not rational and unable to control his anger. Something terrible was going to happen. He was about to do something really bad. The king did not specifically mention military action, but he was about to do something really bad.

Q: What was the date of this?

THEROS: This was the night before the invasion of Kuwait the evening of the first of August.

Q: So all the talk about the (senior Foreign Service member and Ambassador to Iraq) April Glaspie meeting and all this, actually this came afterwards?

THEROS: This came afterwards. Hussein went on at some length about how he had tried to get Saddam Hussein to listen and it failed because the man was off; and finally he said, "I've now lost contact with him."

I had the presence of mind as I was getting up to say to the king, "Your Majesty, you should tell Saddam Hussein that my government would find the use of force unacceptable." It was purely an inspirational accident, not an act of genius on my part. I had absolutely no instructions and I was now deeper and deeper into a subject about which I knew less and less. I had the presence of mind however to think of this. I go back to the Embassy and I start writing the cable —the king had talked to me for about an hour—and suddenly I realized I had too many notes to write in the cable so late at night with the balloon about to go up. Therefore, I wrote a very short message saying "this is a summary; full message follows." And then sent it out. Flash.

Q: Did you send it to the other embassies?

THEROS: No. You could only send FLASH to the Department and then the Department distributed to other embassies. So I sent the flash notice to the Department, summarized in about one paragraph what it was the king had told me and had the presence of mind to stick into the cable (and thereby save my career for the next ten years) that I had told the king to tell Saddam that my government would find the use of force unacceptable, waited until the communicator confirmed the message was gone closed down and started out the door. I was leaving the phone rang. I think it was David Mack, in which he said something along the lines of "Thanks for the message. The king has got to call him back and tell Hussein to calm down." So I tried to call the Palace at that point and got the runaround for about twenty minutes until I finally got someone who told me the king had taken a couple of sleeping pills and some antihistamines and gone to bed—this being past midnight.

At six o'clock in the morning, somebody from the NEA front office called me and said, "Get the king. Tell him to call Hussein to call it off," and I said, "Call what off?" "His friends invaded Kuwait." So I kept trying to reach the king and reached him at about ten o'clock in the morning. I was glad I reached him and I got to see him by ten o'clock in the morning. I found him with Arab and Western. I saw the king privately. He was very disturbed. He said he had been trying to call Saddam. He had gotten a phone call at five o'clock in the morning from the Saudis and was incoherent on the phone call because he was still on the antihistamines. They had been trying to call Saddam from that point on and couldn't get through to him; and had been passing messages to every Iraqi that they

could find that they have got to call this off and so forth. And at that point things went from bad to worse.

The king was on the phone with the Egyptians trying to organize some kind of meeting with the Saudis. This was personal diplomacy at its worst, in a sense, but everybody was calling everybody else. Sometime in the afternoon the next day the king leaves for Egypt. There is a conference—emergency Arab League summit—in Alexandria, literally something that everybody showed up for, in which the king insists that he was told, that he should go to Baghdad to try and talk Saddam out of it. The other Arab leaders promised that the Arab League would take no action until the king could report back. The king goes to Baghdad, has several conversations with Saddam, which he later described to me as "hopeful"—indicating that Saddam was beginning to calm down and might be persuaded to stop the attack. He didn't have actually something concrete. But after he finishes his day in Baghdad and he gets on the airplane. While he's in the air the Arab League Foreign Ministers meeting in Cairo pass a resolution, over the Jordanian vote, calling on Iraq to immediately withdraw from Kuwait without further ado. The king felt that he had been double-crossed because he had promised Saddam that there would be no action until they had a chance for his personal diplomacy to work. At the time, as well, the king believes that the Saudis and the Egyptians together were conspiring against him to bring him down a notch or two.

Q: Why?

THEROS: One—again, it's perfectly logical within the Arab context—the Saudis have always regarded the Hashemites (an Arabian clan within the larger Quraysh tribe) with a certain amount of fear and the Egyptians really don't like other Arab leaders who aspire to any sort of leadership role within the Arab world. Whether this is a guess or reality that is what happened.

Q: But it's part of the thinking.

THEROS: Yes, it's part of the thinking. It makes sense. It fits logically that they would do this. So we had a couple more days to and fro. There was one point at which it was clear that the Egyptian-Jordanian relationship was deteriorating rapidly. Egyptian-Saudi relations were also somewhat tenuous, but not in as bad shape that the Jordanian-Egyptian relationship. After about two days of this I receive another message from the Department, which said essentially that the king is a fool. It was phrased less than felicitously.

Q: The invasion took place what, on the first?

THEROS: The morning of the second of August.

Q: Between that time, what instructions were you getting? I mean all hell had broken loose.

THEROS: I had instructions to keep going to the king to get him to talk Saddam out of it.

Q: Even after he has gone in?

THEROS: Even after he's gone in.

Q: Was there the concern, which was floating around, that Saddam might pull back and sit on top of the Rumaila oil field, or at least the part they had claimed, and in effect A fait accompli, but just sort of sit there?

THEROS: There was still no discussion of an American role. On the third and fourth of August, the fifth of August, the possibility of an American role was still not being seriously discussed with posts.

Q: What did you personally feel? If Saddam is sitting on top of the whole oil fields of Kuwait, that something has to be done?

THEROS: It hadn't reached that point yet. I think there was a general belief in the area that Saddam had struck and was not going to stay in; that this thing was amenable to some sort of "Arab solution." I think we had all overestimated just how much of an Arab Saddam was. Normally, Arab leaders will, after a certain amount of bloodshed and a certain amount of nasty talk, find some way to resolve it and the Kuwaitis would be the worse off for it.

Q: Was there any sort of consultation between you and our people in Kuwait? Well Annette Howe, I guess, wasn't able to talk to anybody. Well, with Joe Wilson in Baghdad or Chas Freeman in Riyadh?

THEROS: Everything was going through. It was all messages. Clearly the few phone calls I got were just to reinforce the message.

Q: Did you get the feeling that in these early days that in many ways Jordan, being the smallest of the concerned countries in the Arab world, that we were trying to put all sorts of pressure there, almost out of frustration? I mean that we felt that "gee, he should be able to do something."

THEROS: I would certainly agree to that. I can't say it occurred to me that he needed encouragement. He was so eager for the role that you can't say he fought back. If we were pressing him, we were pressing a willing candidate.

Q: So the door was open. [Laughs.]

THEROS: [Laughs.] And he was not shrinking from the role. He was out there trying very hard to play the mediator.

Q: Were you getting any reaction from the court around him about the mood of the king?

THEROS: Frustration, but this was from the king on down. I wasn't getting anything from the court that would indicate that the king was beginning to falter. There was pretty much a unified Jordanian position of, "We've got to find a way out of this mess." There was a lot of bad blood developing, as I said, with Egypt in particular, and to a lesser extent, Saudi Arabia.

Q: It was not a "We're all in this together." I mean the Jordanians felt that they had loaded the play in Baghdad, and they were also annoyed as hell at the other Arabs.

THEROS: And at the Egyptians and the Saudis for not cracking.

Q: How about—and maybe it's the wrong word to use, but—the Arab street? I mean, to put it mildly, there's no great love affair between the Palestinians, particularly, but also the Jordanians and the Kuwaitis. What was happening at this point?

THEROS: The street wasn't an element at this point. The street was as stunned as everybody else was. There was a lot of talk about the Kuwaitis had it coming to them, and stuff like that, but my memory is of a general expectation that this thing was going to resolve itself in a few weeks.

Q: And an Arab solution.

THEROS: An Arab solution. Nobody that I spoke to thought that Saddam was going to stay there indefinitely. There was no precedent for it in inter-Arab politics.

Q: Well then what happened?

THEROS: Again, seeing this from the point of view of Jordan, one sees it only from how Jordan got itself sucked into a disaster. Three or four days into the crisis, before we had yet committed troops, a message comes out, which I delivered to the king, in which it essentially said to the king, in rather intemperate language, "You've been played for a fool." I was tired—I had been up almost every night—and I did not read the message carefully. And I delivered it immediately—that sort of thing—so I didn't even bother to type it; I just cut and pasted on the Xerox machine and took it down to the palace. It was for the king; it was personally for the king.

Q: Who do you think wrote it?

THEROS: I never found out who wrote it, but at the time I believed it was in the front office in NEA. I gave to Sharif Zeid, who was then the chief at Palace, who literally did this [demonstrates holding paper at length between two fingers]. "I'm not going to give it to him. Let's go talk to Crown Prince Hassan."

So we walk across the hall to Hassan's office and he says sarcastically, "Here's another good message. He's going to like this." At that point I was being tired and earnest, which

I suppose was a mistake on my part, but I said, "I was instructed to hand deliver it."

So there's a phone call and the king comes into the office. He looks at the message and reads it through and looks up at me, stands up to his full five foot two (inches), slams his fist down on the table so hard I thought it was going to break, and said, "Who wrote this?"

I said, "It's a communication from the Department of State." "I want to know who wrote it. I'm personally insulted. I want to know who wrote it." And he throws the paper down, looks at me like he's going to hit me, and stomps out of the room. Sharif Zaid was looking at his fingernails and Crown Prince Hassan was looking at a crack in the ceiling. [Laughs.]

Q: Can you go into a little more detail of what the message said?

THEROS: The message was about five lines and it said, "Your efforts have failed because you have permitted yourself to be fooled by Saddam Hussein."

Q: In retrospect, what good does this do?

THEROS: I have no idea. But I called the Department and told them the King wanted to know who wrote this message.

Q: I mean it sounds like somebody venting their … Coming back to the point I was making before, this is somebody who can kind of … the feeling in Washington is it's a small country, we can lean on them and get rid of our frustration.

THEROS: I think they had had higher expectations of the king's views, and I think at this point the Egyptians and the Saudis were both beginning to deliver dark messages about Jordanian conspiracies in Washington. So I called Washington on the secure phone and I get sort of a very strange, "What do you mean who wrote it?" I said, "The king wants to know who wrote it. I told him it was a message from the Department of State, but he really wants to know who wrote it and he is waiting for an answer. And I'll tell you I had never come so close to being declared PNG (persona non gratis) in my life."

Oddly enough, after I left the palace, just before I made the call to Washington, I walked into the Embassy and the phone is ringing, and it's the crown prince. He says to me, "Patrick, this is a really good example of how difficult it is to be a diplomat." The next day I get a message that says, "You may inform the king that the message represents the views of the United States government." I go back and tell the crown prince, who informs the king; but that was sort of the message I expected. I think by this time the king had calmed down. Well, another day passes and the intelligence coming down is that more and more Iraqi forces are piling into the country and so forth.

The morning of the day that (Secretary of State) Baker went to Saudi Arabia—before he actually arrived in Saudi Arabia—we received this enormous telegram; it must have been

three hundred paragraphs. It just went on and on—forty-five, fifty pages. I just had them run me another copy and cut the tops and bottoms off and it was a detailed description of everything we knew about the movements of the Iraqi army. And the bottom line was, "Please go tell the king that we believe the Iraqis have now positioned themselves for the stage of their plan, which is to attack Saudi Arabia, because this is the only explanation for the Iraqi deployments."

So I go back and see the king (he's now being nice to me again). I wrote a bit of a summary, which I gave him, and I said, essentially, putting aside the fact that I'm not the U.S. Army general staff, that this is what I think this says. Essentially the message said that we couldn't figure out any other rational reason for the nature of the Iraqi deployments and reinforcing their deployments other than for an imminent attack on Saudi Arabia. The king says, "Well, I'm going to call the Saudis. If they want help, I'm prepared to send two divisions—half my army … to the defense of Saudi Arabia." Later on that afternoon we did hear that alert orders had gone to the two mechanized divisions in the Jordanian army; they had received alert orders to march to Saudi Arabia.

I saw Sharif Zaid later that evening. The king had started calling the Saudis, wanting to know if the Saudis had seen this information. After a couple of hours the Saudis said they had seen the same information, they were going over it—Baker was expected and Baker arrived, and the Saudis were still mulling it over. The king makes his offer, but he says, "I really want to talk to somebody personally. This thing over the phone doesn't cut it." So first Saud al Faisal was supposed to come and then he doesn't come and somebody is going to come. Then they told him the minister of higher education is going to come to brief him.

The king wanted to talk to a member of the Saudi royal family who is in the leadership, but he finally agrees to see the minister of higher education. He flies in the late afternoon; and his message is that: "We have seen all this information. The king has ordered heavy patrolling in the direction of the Kuwaiti border. Our people are reporting back that the information is not accurate." The king repeats again his offer to send two divisions to Saudi Arabia and is told that it won't be necessary; the king of Saudi Arabia is confident that there is no risk of impending Iraqi assault.

The king tells the two divisions to stand down, has a pleasant few moments with the minister of higher education, and asks him to stay for dinner. The man very nervously, according to Sharif Zaid, looks at his watch and says, "No, I'm really expected back in Saudi Arabia. Thank you very much, Your Majesty. I fully appreciate it and all that. I'd love to take a rain check and so forth, but I got to go." And left in somewhat unseemly haste. As his airplane was going through its takeoff roll from the airport in Amman, the word came that the Saudis had accepted the American offer to deploy troops to Saudi Arabia. At this point the king really lost it. He got very, very upset. He felt that he had been deliberately misled and lied to, and that he was being trapped into appearing like an ally of Saddam's.

Q: In the first place, had President Bush's statement—that "this rogue shall not stand"—

permeated the system or not? Did you have any feel of what was going on and were you informed what Baker was after?

THEROS: After the fact; at least a day or two later.

Q: I think Baker went with (General Norman) Schwarzkopf (Jr.), didn't he?

THEROS: I think it was (Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Colin) Powell.

Q: I mean to explain what …

THEROS: The explanation that I later got as to why the Saudis behaved in this way was the Jordanian belief that the royal family was divided in Saudi Arabia. That Abdullah was being much more cautious and felt that we should give this thing a little bit more time to percolate, but that the Sudairis in particular—the king and sultan—had hit the panic button and were prepared to ask for American help immediately.

Q: Were the Jordanians getting any good military information on what was happening in Iraq and all?

THEROS: Some. I mean the Jordanians had excellent contacts in the Iraqi military, but I can't say it was anything extraordinary

Q: I was just wondering whether anything was getting passed to you about intentions or deployment or anything like that.

THEROS: No. We were getting some information from the Jordanians; I think they were sharing everything they had, but it wasn't terribly good stuff.

Q: This offer of two divisions is a major move. Was that rescinded?

THEROS: Well, when the Saudis told him that they didn't need any help because there was not going to be an invasion, he ordered the two divisions to stand down. And then immediately thereafter the Saudis accepted American help. And I think the king was extremely offended at the refusal of assistance from him.

Q: Did you get the feeling, back in Washington, that events are moving so quickly that nobody was really mean we had people who, god knows, knew Jordan and knew all the nuances of stuff there. I mean Jordan, no matter how you slice it, is a key component in anything in the Middle East. Was there anybody there to say, "Hey, let's keep Jordan informed," or "Don't forget Jordan," or something like that? Did you feel that there was, "Somebody was dropping the ball."

THEROS: My impression was that everything substantive going on was being centralized in the office of the Secretary of State. Other than normal Admin stuff, we weren't getting much in the way of a response to what we were saying back to Washington. The new

Ambassador, Roger Harris, arrived about the tenth of August—got in and presented credentials that same afternoon and turned around and left with the king to go to the United States.

Q: This was another period of time that when you talk about the Secretary of State handling this, this would mean that … Secretary Baker was renowned in the Foreign Service for having a very tight, very talented coterie around him, but their top person on Middle East affairs I guess would be Dennis Ross, and he was strictly a Palestinian-Israeli expert. Did you have the feeling that nobody really kind of new the Arab world?

THEROS: No, because the Assistant Secretary was John Kelly who was, in my opinion, a good friend personally but had little Middle East experience.

Q: This was not his particular field.

THEROS: The other senior official, the pDAS in NEA, Jock Covey. Jock e was a superb bureaucratic infighter who never intended to leave Washington again. He was out there constantly grabbing for control of issues and he could sense he could control the small issues; he spent all his time on controlling small issues.

Q: I realize that you're the acting Chargé in a relatively small country, but all of a sudden this is where everybody's attention was focused—that there wasn't anybody saying, "Hey, let's play the Jordanian situation carefully because this is going to be important to us."

THEROS: No. Egypt and Saudi Arabia had muscled themselves to the front of our table, so to speak.

Q: And obviously in your position you're not in a position to tell the Secretary of State to get with it.

THEROS: If there's one thing I've discovered about chargés is they don't quite have the clout of an Ambassador.

Q: Yes. When Roger Harrison—who I've interviewed—arrived, what were his marching orders, and what was he saying? Did he give you a better view of where things were going?

THEROS: He gave me a fairly decent view of how things were working in Washington, but essentially the relationship with Jordan was still one of urging, encouraging, and egging on the Jordanians to do something about Saddam. I think at that point we were ignoring the show that was going on behind the scenes between Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Jordan. That was getting more and more lethal. We were reporting it. We were reporting everything the king was saying, everything we had been told, but I don't think that struck anyone as important at the time.

Q: Did you by any chance—you said you found out later and I think it's important to know—telling the king he was a fool, in diplomatic terms it doesn't get you anywhere and it represents pique. In diplomacy you're always thinking one step ahead "Well, what is this going to do?" and to tell somebody, "You're stupid, you've got to figure out, well, what does that mean. I mean, are you going to fire the king? It sounds like almost the person … Did you find out who it was?

THEROS: I narrowed it down to two suspects. Both of them claimed the other promoted it.

Q: So when Harrison arrived, did he say what … I mean, this trip to the States was kind of a disaster.

THEROS: Yes, the Kennebunkport meeting.

Q: Did you prepare Harrison to understand the frustration and the mood of the king and what he'd been through, to get him ready for this?

THEROS: Yes. I wrote up as best I could—I put together the messages. I still believe that I had done a pretty thorough job of reporting back everything that I was being told. If you read my messages, no one in Washington knew any less than I did.

Q: Again, by this time was there any change in the Arab street or the court or the army?

THEROS: We were still, I think, several weeks away from Jordanian political meltdown. There was an undertone of sympathy for the Iraqis and dislike of the Kuwaitis, but it hadn't yet struck me that there was going to be a sea change in Jordanian attitudes. The full extent of Jordanian popular support for the Iraqis hadn't yet struck our consciousness.

Q: At this point, I'm assuming, what was happening in Israel and all was no longer of any moment or their reaction or anything like that. Or did it have any effect on us?

THEROS: Continuing casualties in the Intifada and stuff like that were having an effect, but what it did is it reinforced the Jordanian popular sentiment in favor of Iraq.

Q: What about your military attachés in the Embassy? What were they getting?

THEROS: At that time everybody was concentrating more on facts rather than nuance. What do we know about the deployment of the Iraqi army? Where are their Iraqi troops? With the deployment of the Jordanian army we asked the Jordanians for over-flight of Saudi Arabia, which they took up to Sharif Zaid, and which they gave us. We did not ask at first for basing. We put a few aircraft in for normal refueling and stuff like that, but not as a significant issue.

Q: Was there any concern that the Iraqi army might turn on Jordan on its way to Israel or anything like that?

THEROS: No. And actually, an Iraqi invasion of Jordan would be much more difficult geographically. The Jordanians would get weeks of warning, days of warning.

Q: There's a lot of desert between them.

THEROS: There's a lot of desert. And then when you get about seventy kilometers into Jordan, the place turns into an impassable wilderness for armor. Northeastern Jordan and southern Syria from the Golan, due east, are the remnants of an old volcano in which the ground is just covered with basalt rocks, which a few roads have been cut by pushing the rocks aside. But essentially you can't move armor through the basalt.

Q: And that's what you'd have to attack with?

THEROS: Yes, you can't move armor through the basalt fields. It was one of the reasons why the Israeli counterattacks on the Golan had such difficulty pushing very far, because they were channeled into the few areas that were tankable.

Q: You talk about your perspective of Harrison arriving. Had you known Harrison?

THEROS: We had met a couple times but I didn't really know him very well.

Q: Did you feel he was somebody who was coming with sort of the goods from Washington?

THEROS: It was a little hard to figure out what the goods from Washington were. Washington was not, in our opinion, being terribly forthcoming in information. We were getting a lot of the "crazy old uncle" talk—do this and do that—but we weren't getting a lot of nuanced political instruction out of Washington. The decision clearly had been made that we were going to build up military force to defend Saudi Arabia, and fairly clearly as well, that if the Iraqis didn't get out we were going to throw them out.

Q: Was that the feeling from early on?

THEROS: Yes, that was fairly early on. I don't think anyone thought that we were just there to defend Saudi Arabia.

Q: Because that's when we put in the Airborne …

THEROS: Yes. As a matter of fact, I do remember from the attachés this tremendous sense of worry that if the Iraqis chose to come down the road when it was only the 82nd Airborne, in Dhahran, that they would be in very serious trouble.

Q: Harrison arrives and the king goes immediately with him to Kennebunkport where the President was at that time. This would be about the twelfth or tenth of August?

THEROS: Yes.

Q: What did you get from that, both when Harrison came back and even before? What were you getting?

THEROS: Roger thought that before it was still King Hussein not listening to us. The king had felt very strongly that if the United States would listen to him, he had a way of selling this, and that the U.S. was now listening to the Egyptians, in particular, and to the Saudis to a lesser degree; and that his voice of reason and moderation, and the fact that he had a good relationship with Saddam would serve him well. In the end, as much as I liked the king, I have to say that I think Saddam could not have been shifted from his course.

Q: Yes.

THEROS: I think the king worked out of honesty.

Q: What did you get when Harrison came back and the king came back?

THEROS: Actually, it was odd. The king felt that the meeting had gone very badly, and he told Roger this on the airplane; Roger felt that it was not as bad as the king thought it was. In retrospect, he decided he made a mistake. But again, we were just getting the Jordanians to hang in there, but the Jordanians were becoming steadily less relevant.

Now someplace along here, and I think at this point it was September, the next big event took place.

Q: First, what were you getting that went wrong with the meeting with the President?

THEROS: That the king and the President were talking past each other. The President had a perception of what the king was doing and what it had been about, and the king had a perception of what he was trying to do. They were on different time warps.

Q: Okay, let's move to the next thing.

THEROS: The next thing that engulfed the Embassy for several weeks was the refugees, who materialized suddenly.

Q: Who were the refugees?

THEROS: These were the foreigners in Kuwait, plus some Kuwaitis, plus a large number of foreigners in Iraq—and the poor foreigners: the Somalis, the Filipinos, and the Egyptians and the Indians and the Pakistanis. And what began as sort of a trickle turned into a stream, turned into a river, turned into a torrent of people coming through.

The Jordanians reacted fairly efficiently for as long as they could and didn't actually make a point of it for the first week of the refugees coming in. And then the numbers

began to increase. Pretty soon the Jordanians were swamped and came to us formally for help in coping with the refugees. We refused. We didn't refuse that way, but we sort of gave them the UN's telephone number, and the International Organization for Migration. American NGOs began to send help, but the U.S. government did not.

Q: From the Embassy point of view, what were we doing—saying we really have to do something?

THEROS: Yes, very much. And the Ambassador uses the emergency authority—remember now that AID was down to lots of people and no money. Virtually the entire AID budget was being used up in maintaining the superstructure. So we didn't have money. We didn't have money to buy things. These guys needed water in particular, and in the end it was something between 700,000 to 800,000 people passed through Jordan, heading for Ababa. It was further complicated by the fact that by this time we had set up a blockade off Ababa and were searching all the ships, which was making it difficult finding ships; there were ferry boats and everything else being pressed into service. They Egyptians were allowing Egyptians to cross into Sinai, but not anybody else. Finally, the countries of the refugees themselves picked up a large part of the burden. We had to get water, we had to get medicine; there was dysentery on the road. Things were not going well for these people and the Jordanians were being really swamped. At this point this absorbed us.

Q: Normally we respond to refugee things. Why was this [different]?

THEROS: There were two reasons. One was that the man who made the decision for all this was Mr. Baker, and Mr. Baker was busy; and secondly is that I think there was an element in the upper-middle part of the bureaucracy in Washington that, "That's the Jordanians; they're not being as cooperative as we wanted them to be, so why should we give them any help?"

In the middle of this we got a request, for example, to start staging American transport aircraft through Jordan. It went through the head of the Jordanian air force first and his response was "Yeah, we can do this, but we have to have at least a fig leaf that they are here to help with the refugees. So some of the empty outgoing airplanes have got to take refugees." Washington refused and the request for basing was withdrawn.

Q: When you say, "basing," what were we trying to do?

THEROS: What we wanted to do was put some tankers and we wanted to be able to drop C-141s in for refueling and maintenance and stuff like that into one of the Jordanian airbases.

Q: And that was within the realm of possibility. Again, do you feel that this was —I hate to personalize this, but did you have the feeling that Jordan was not on our best books because somehow or another they weren't cooperating the way we wanted them to? That there was sort of the feeling in Washington that we weren't going to do any favors for the

Jordanians?

THEROS: Yes.

Q: Was it a feel within the Embassy that had the United States played its cards right, you could have probably had a modest airbase, at least for transport and stuff, in Jordan?

THEROS: At the beginning there was. Actually, there was a period of time that we felt the king had not committed himself to a pro-Iraqi policy and that, yes, there was a strong undercurrent—the street was certainly pro-Iraqi at this point, but the king had not yet committed himself to this policy. And this actually went on for quite a period of time. I'm jumping ahead now, but it wasn't until the Armitage visit, which took place after the bombing started.

Q: Talk about this period of time, Desert Shield, when we put our troops into Saudi Arabia in the buildup. Was anybody high up from Washington coming out to take a look and talk and see the king, or was he being bypassed?

THEROS: Some, but it was largely to tell the king that his policy was wrong; that this was the only way that we were going to get Saddam out. To me there was never any doubt after the first week of deployments that this was a deployment whose ultimate intention was to expel Saddam from Kuwait. I don't think anyone thought that we were there only to defend Saudi Arabia—that diplomacy was going to be allowed to play itself out.

Jordanian popular positions continued to harden and there were a variety of factors involved. First of all, nobody likes the Kuwaitis. Everybody who has ever worked in Kuwait hated them. Every Jordanian had a relative who worked in Kuwait. Secondly, the American assistance to Jordan had dropped to near zero just before the war, for purely budgetary reasons; we were just being chintzy. The last year before the war, American aid to Jordan for military assistance was ten million dollars and for economic assistance it was fifteen million dollars. It was embarrassing. Kuwaiti and Saudi aid to Jordan had almost entirely stopped. The king had twice gone to Kuwait to ask for more help. The second time the Kuwaitis turned him back while he was still in the air. The first time they made him wait for two hours before he saw the emir of Kuwait. By that time the king was feeling personally slighted, and then you had this corrosive effect of the Intifada.

Iraqis, on the other hand, Saddam had played this very smart. For example, Jordan had reduced censorship significantly by the year before and the Iraqis were the only ones who caught on to the opportunity this presented and promptly bought every newspaper editor in Jordan. And virtually every one of these people had a Mercedes in his garage now. The Iraqis just wined and dined the Jordanian press like mad. Saddam had used the March '90 Arab League summit in Jordan to try and intimate that he was not only the principal defender of Palestinian rights but also the defender of Jordan, and tried to intimidate other Arab states to give aid to Jordan.

The Jordanian economy was now heavily dependent on exports to Iraq. The Iraqis took most of the product as Jordanian light industry. That was the growing part of the Jordanian economy. The Jordanians had all the bright, young, entrepreneurial types on this industrial sector that was growing and their customers were Iraq. The Iraqis worked full-time. There was an Iraqi fashion show in Jordan in '89. That was one of the best fashion shows—really sophisticated. Good-looking models, women who would strut down the runway with very attractive clothes. ; it was choreographed obviously by an Italian. Educated, sophisticated Jordanians were beginning to see the growth of the Islamic parties in the Muslim brotherhood and saw the Iraqis as secular allies and secular support. People were so accustomed to autocratic rule in the Arab world they were prepared to overlook it, and their thought was that Kuwaiti treatment of foreigners in Kuwait wasn't much better than Iraqi treatment of everybody.

Q: Were you in contact with Chargé Joe Wilson in Baghdad in trying to help get Americans out?

THEROS: Yes.

Q: What was going on there?

THEROS: He was running a logistics operation. He was just trying to move people through the border, keep us informed. In the end we received his people. That was the sort of last part of it. A few people from the Embassy of Kuwait came out that way as well.

Q: How did it play when Saddam Hussein was taking Westerners hostage? It was one of those things where he tried to tousle the hair of a little British boy and all that? How did that play?

THEROS: As a sideshow; thinking Jordanians thought that the taking of hostages was pretty stupid. You know, what better way to provoke the Americans to attack? I don't think people regarded it as a very serious sort of policy, other than it showed that Saddam was afraid of an American attack.

Q: What were you getting as the Desert Storm operation went on, from your Jordanian contacts both civilian and military, about God, don't do it, or …

THEROS: It was, "God, don't do it," across the entire population. It was God, don't do it. I have a list of maybe six Jordanians who were not pro-Iraqi.

Q: [Laughs.] That gives you an idea.

Was there a feeling that Iraq is too powerful?

THEROS: No, it's that Iraq is too important.

Q: We're talking right now in early February of 2003 about invasion two of American troops into Iraq, and one of the major concerns is the falling apart of Iraq and what it will do to that area. Was this of concern at that time?

THEROS: Yes. The difference between now and then is that in 2003, in most Arabs' minds you have separated Saddam out from Iraq. In 1990 Saddam was Iraq, so an attack on Iraq was an attack on Saddam; an attack on Saddam was an attack on Iraq. However bad Saddam was towards his own people, until the invasion of Kuwait, what he had been doing was in the interests of the Arab world and the Arab world was—particularly a small country like Jordan, in the region —better off for Saddam's policies. Most Arabs did not believe that Saddam's attack on Iran was unjustified; it had been dumb but it wasn't unjustified. Support for the Palestinians is support for the Iraqis and it's a universal good. Even the attack on Kuwait was, in many circles, seen as an attack on a country that was too rich, too corrupt and too alien to the Arab mainstream; that Kuwait was not playing the game that an Arab state should.

Q: What was the feeling about the Iraqi military force?

THEROS: That they were very good. And at the end of the Iran-Iraq War they were very good. Some senior Jordanian military people had some worries that Saddam had decapitated the Iraqi military after the Iran-Iraq War.

Q: Gotten rid of the officers and …

THEROS: Oh, a few top generals had had accidents. So there was some worry there, but generally the Iraqi army had become very efficient at the last year of the Iran-Iraq War. It was actually a pretty impressive fighting force.

Q: During this time when we were building up our forces, were we getting delegations coming in or was Jordan pretty much on the side of Iraqis? I'm talking about military men coming in to explain what we were doing. I would have thought we would have sent somebody from Central Command to brief.

THEROS: There was a little bit of that going on. I can't say it was overwhelming, but we had a visitor a week. We had a lot of congressional people coming through. We had NGOs coming through. We had all sorts of odds and sods coming through as well. Pretty much we never had a visitor in that period of time whose function was to make a major effort with the Jordanians. The king made another trip, if I remember correctly, back to Washington in the interim, which was sort of inconclusive.

Q: As you're sitting there, obviously we've got our antennae out and all that, was there a point where all of a sudden you said My god, these people—the Jordanians—are really not with us? And the king is, by force major or something, on their side and this is no longer a friendly place?

THEROS: By November, end of November, I was being invited to lunch and dinner,

twice a day, so people could beat me up on American policy. It reached the point where my wife wasn't even going with me; she didn't want to go to these meals anymore. Everybody wanted to invite me and everybody wanted to tell me how bad our policy was. I found myself continuously in these discussions with the Jordanians.

Q: What were you saying?

THEROS: My standard answer was, "You know, in twenty-five years in the Foreign Service I have defended a lot of policies I don't believe in; this isn't one of them." You know: "The man is invading. Where are you? Where the man is invading another Arab country. The man is a menace to the Arab world. He's no friend of yours or a friend of Palestine. Your troops should be out there ahead of ours trying to expel him from Kuwait. You should be making it very clear that he needs to leave Kuwait. You can't say that it's all on."

The conversations were almost surreal. He had now become the new Salahadin (Saladin), the new man on the white horse, the hero. The street was certainly seeing him that way. There were more pictures of Saddam than there were of King Hussein.

Q: I was going to say, I can remember back in my era in Saudi Arabia going through the souk and seeing the pictures of Nasser on thermos bottles and things like this. I mean Saddam was …

THEROS: Yes, it's t-shirts nowadays.

Q: What about students or anything like this?

THEROS: Yes. I mean housewives; the American wives of Jordanians who had studied in the States; the American Women's Association. My wife stopped going to meetings. They were really … Some of our best friends had become vicious at home.

Q: In talking to Harrison—coming back to Jordan being kind of sitting out there as a small country, you could kind of beat up on the … he was saying how he would take a lot of communications and sort of ignore them.

THEROS: Yes.

Q: Were you part of this, I won't say, "plot," but …

THEROS: Yes. I regretted not having done that earlier in the crisis.

Q: Well it's pretty hard for a Chargé in a new situation, when you really haven't had a chance to think it through. But were you feeling this?

THEROS: Oh, absolutely. I don't know, in retrospect, how much difference it would have made, but at the time we certainly believed that if we could get the U.S. government

to behave somewhat differently, we would have a way of leveraging the Jordanians into a more forthcoming policy.

Q: Did you have the feeling at the time that King Hussein was reluctantly riding a tiger that was poor Iraqi, or enthusiastically riding? In other words, would any change have jeopardized his regime?

THEROS: I don't think the regime would have been jeopardized. I believe there were two factors: One is nobody, even autocrats, can oppose a population that is ninety-seven percent on one side, and enthusiastically on one side. The regime was not in danger, but the way the king would keep peace is, "Why are you demonstrating? I'm on your side."

Q: Yes.

THEROS: "Why do you want to make trouble?" This is the way he would prevent trouble from happening in Jordan. But also his anger at the Egyptians and the Saudis, and later what he saw as American betrayal, was so great that it affected his better judgment. There was a lot of emotion tied up in what the king was doing.

Q: What were the Egyptians and Saudis doing?

THEROS: Well we used to get these constant reports from the Egyptians and from the Saudis. The attachés spent half their time running down reports of deployed Iraqi troops in Jordan or the Jordanians having transferred a HAWK battalion to Iraq, or commander of the Jordanian HAWK batteries going to Iraq.

Q: These were antiaircraft missiles.

THEROS: Yes.

Q: Obsolescent ones.

THEROS: At the time not too obsolescent. At the time they were still—this was 1990, remember..

There were a lot [of reports] that the Jordanians were doing maintenance work for Iraqi equipment. And we just spent day upon day upon day responding to all this. There was finally one report that the Iraqis had moved SCUD missiles into Jordan, mixed in with the refugees. And now since we had people out on the border to the only motorable road, we knew this wasn't true, and we still had to go through the motions of denying it and going looking again. The Embassy was also being constantly tasked to follow up on these fake reports, all of which were coming out of the Egyptians and the Saudis.

Q: Did you feel that you had any friend in court back in Washington?

THEROS: Some—some of the older people in State; not so much in the Secretary's

office. In the military there was some. The problem was I don't think we had any defender who was any friend in court; what we had was people who were not as hostile to Jordan as others. But no one stood out in my mind and it was clear that with the secondary levels of the bureaucracy—the Deputy Assistant Secretaries and Office Directors and so forth—ganging up on Jordan was seen as sort of career enhancing.

Q: Well this is a real problem. I mean this is almost mob psychology. One had the feeling that Jordan was considered the designated beat-up person or something.

THEROS: Sure. As time went on there were fewer and fewer people. Richard Armitage was one of the few last real supporters of Jordan—to the bitter end—and then of course we lost him when he came out for a meeting with the king after the bombing had started. The king made two speeches; he made one speech that went down very badly in Washington. And then after the bombing had started—I got a little ahead of myself—Armitage had to come out and basically negotiated a deal with the king whereby the king would do certain specific things to try and lessen the feelings in the Jordanian population, to try and make and effort towards turning Jordanian public opinion, and allowing us a little bit of leeway in what we were doing. As it was, the Jordanians, even during the fighting, cooperated with us—the military did —to a degree.

Remember, Armitage and the Ambassador and I had a meeting after his meeting with the King.

Q: Armitage, again, his job was what?

THEROS: He was in Defense. He was the Assistant Secretary for International Relations and Political Studies.

I went with Armitage and the Ambassador to see the king. It was a good meeting. We come back, I call the Ambassador and I said, "It was a good meeting. Things look good." He says, "Yes." An hour later he calls me and says, "Turn on the television. Everything has just turned to s-h-i-t." It was early evening. The king was delivering this violently anti-American speech. We later discovered that the king had gone to bed after this meeting—it was in the afternoon—and was woken up by Queen Noor to watch the coverage on CNN (Cable News Network) of the bombing of Baghdad. And the coverage was accompanied by some real cowboy-type news commentary by CNN that was right out of the movies. The king—who, again, continued to suffer from this skin rash for which he was taking antihistamines, was groggy—got up to watch this for an hour (apparently he was egged on by Queen Noor) and then he goes to the TV station and delivers his tirade. That sort of killed any future.

Q: Well how did you feel about Queen Noor? She was an American by birth.

THEROS: I did not know a half-dozen Jordanian women who liked Queen Noor. Queen Noor had a small group of friends who liked her. She was very imperious. The Jordanians generally did not like her. During the Gulf War she became very anti-U.S., very pro-

Iraqi, very pro-Jordanian nationalist.

Q: Do you think she was trying a little too hard?

THEROS: You know, I don't know. I honestly don't know whether it was trying to prove a point or whether she really believed it, or was just being loyal to her man, so to speak.

Q: Before the attack came on—this was on January 18th or something like that—was there any other development we should cover?

THEROS: The saga of the draw down of the Embassy, which was sort of low humor.

Q: Okay.

THEROS: Nobody there wanted to leave, among dependents, and the Department had put us on voluntary departure. A few people had left. We had taken some hits at the American school—some teachers had left. The trigger mechanism for the teachers at the American school, which was the thing we were all concerned about, was that if the Department had forced an ordered departure, then all the teachers were entitled an airline ticket home; otherwise they weren't because, if it was a voluntary departure, they weren't entitled to the airline tickets. So the Embassy fought it for the longest time, saying, "Well, whatever else is going on, we are confident in the Department that the Jordanians will maintain order." There were some Jordanians mixed in with everything we were doing and so forth. Finally it became clear that there was going to be an ordered departure. And we all took different steps.

First of all, the Embassy wives all went out and bought t-shirts that said "Hell no, we won't go." This led by my wife and a couple other Embassy wives there. There were kids who did not want to leave. Those who wanted to leave had left during voluntary departure. The rest didn't want to leave. It finally became obvious a little before Christmas that we'd have to leave, and what the Department did, in a somewhat civilized fashion—they just didn't order it—they said, "We expect you to be out by the first of January. We expect you to be down to minimum staffing." So I went to Roger Harrison and said, "I'm going to take a vacation. We know that means that there's not going to be a war until after the fifth of January," or whatever the date was. So I took my entire family skiing in Austria and then they got on an airplane and headed west and I got on an airplane headed south.

The biggest crisis that the Embassy and larger community faced, assuming they allowed us to finish the school semester before an ordered departure, "where are the kids going to go to school? " These became an enormous problem. For example, I live in the District and I wasn't going to put my kids in D.C. public schools. In the end, I got my kids into parochial schools and the Department had to go to the archbishop in Washington to beg the parochial schools into taking these kids; they didn't want to take the kids. Not just my kids; I'd say half the Embassy in Amman ended up in parochial school in Washington. But as I say, it went on and on and on until finally, on the second of January, I was back

in Amman and my family was onward to Washington. We were down twenty-eight or twenty-nine people.

Q: Patrick, we're picking this up two weeks before what? What was the date?

THEROS: The seventeenth of January. When did the air war start? So about two weeks before that …

Q: So you're in Amman.

THEROS: I'm back in Amman, down to a skeleton staff; Roger Harrison is Ambassador, and we had about twenty-eight, twenty-nine people in the Embassy, a small military contingent at the airport just doing some logistics, and that's it.

Q: As you got yourself ready for this, what were you doing? Were you sort of scurrying around trying to build up support? So what were you up to?

THEROS: Primarily what we were up to was housekeeping in the Embassy: making sure we had destroyed files. We had moved people together, so we had two or three people living in a house together. We were making sure communications were working. We were down very, very low. We had two military guys: a military communicator and one State Department communicator in the Embassy.

My social life continued to consist of being invited to dinner with Jordanians so they could beat me up on American policy. I don't know if I mentioned this before; I remember once —and it really got pretty vicious, people attacking us—I ended up at a reception at the Japanese Embassy; Japanese National Day apparently came right in the middle of this, and I was talking to the Chief judge of the Sharia courts of the Kingdom. He and I got into a complicated argument in Arabic, unfortunately, about religion, Saddam Hussein, and Arabism, and all the rest, and it was sort of the inconclusive argument you always have but I thought I gave as good as I got. When it was all over he stomped off; a bunch of my Jordanian friends had been standing around saying, "Right on" and "Glad you told him that," and I said, "Yeah, why didn't you guys pitch in? It was getting pretty painful towards the end." They sort of looked at me shamefacedly.

There really wasn't much left to do. Jim Baker met Tariq Aziz in Geneva—I forget the exact date—and after that it was clear this was coming

Q: This is when he threw the letter over the table or something?

THEROS: Yes. It was over at that point. Until that point I entertained a small hope that we wouldn't go to war. After that it was just a question of when.

Sort of typical was the way we found out the war had started. I went to bed. My wife called me about four o'clock in the morning to say, "The war started. I can see it on CNN. They're bombing Iraq." No one told us, of course. So I got up and turned on the

radio. Sure enough, they were bombing Iraq. I called the Ambassador, woke him up; he was unaware that the war had started, and we all began to congregate and head toward the Embassy. We had a few people who had just moved into the Intercontinental Hotel just across the street from the chancery because they were living basically too far out and we felt it was safer if they were living at the hotel. So they came over as well. We got to the Embassy and got the communications open, still nothing—no notification of war, no communications. We were getting the military traffic; the military traffic was coming in in bales. "This airplane is taking off," "That airplane is taking off," and "[This] is doing [that]," but nothing from the Department. We kept trying to call the Department to tell them, "Would somebody please tell us what's going on?"

Q: For one thing, it's usually a courtesy to hand a note to the king saying …

THEROS: "We went to war a few hours ago."

Q: "We're going to war," or something.

THEROS: I had been at the Embassy about half an hour and I get a phone call from my brother-in-law in Washington who says, "When are you coming home?" I said, "What do you mean, 'When am I coming home?'" He said, "Well, television just announced that you've been evacuated." I said, "Well that's really interesting." Again, I start calling the Department and can't get through. And my wife calls again—again with the same news, "I understand you're being evacuated." "No, I'm not being evacuated. Call the Department." I said, "Call Ted Kattouf (NEA/ARN Country Director). Tell him we have not received a message, anything from the Department—just the military stuff." So she calls Ted, calls me back half an hour later and says, "I wasn't able to get a hold of Ted, but I got a hold of the Operations Center and they have confirmed you've been evacuated." I said, "Please call them again and tell them we haven't received a message."

Finally Ted Kattouf calls me and he said, "What are you complaining about? We've been sending you messages right and left." I said, "We have not received a single one, and not only that, but the Ops Center told my wife that we've been evacuated." He says, "That's impossible." He calls me back about ten minutes later, sort of crestfallen. Amman was on minimize, like the rest of the Middle East. People in the Department had gotten so excited and confused that they forgot to put the "minimize considered" at the end of the messages. Now that it's all computerized. If posts are on minimize, you have to put a tag line "minimize considered" on a message or it will not be transmitted. This was going on for about an hour.

I'll just jump ahead a few days: I finally got a hold of the Ops Center, who denied that anybody—they basically called my wife a liar—in the Ops Center had told her that we'd been evacuated. What had happened—finally we pieced it together and they were rather unhappy about having this pointed out to them—was my wife called and she got some frazzled officer who had been on the watch who had been watching CNN; CNN had announced that Amman had been evacuated, so therefore she assumed it was true and just wasn't in on the loop. What had happened was that CNN had seen the three men we had

in the Embassy coming down the elevator together in the hotel—the men in the hotel that was across the street—and they were carrying bags, because we told people bring bags to the chancery in case you have to spend several nights, and put two and two together and came up with five. [Laughs.]

Q: So much for the instant reporting of CNN, which carries more weight than any official communiqué.

THEROS: Yes.

Q: When the balloon went up, what was the expectation from the "Arab street" in Amman?

THEROS: First day it was just shock, not much. We didn't have much of an expectation. And then after that we had daily demonstrations. The Jordanian police were very good about it. The Jordanian argument to the mobs was, look, we're on your side—we, the government, are on your side.

Q: We were talking about …

THEROS: The outbreak of the war. So we were getting demonstrations all the time. My day consisted largely of getting the remnants of the Americans out, keeping the American press corps happy. I was doing a daily deep-background briefing; the definition was you know this because you dreamed it during the night; that's how you get the information, just dealing with the logistics with the Embassy, coping with security.

The Jordanians, as I said, were very good. The cops were out there. They would manage to disperse; they would keep most of the demonstrations at a distance. A couple, three times, I went out and took petitions from the demonstrators. The only demonstration that ever got inside the police perimeter, to the point where they actually threw things inside the Embassy compound—the walls of the Embassy, it was not a real compound—was the American Women's Society of Amman. These were American women married to Jordanians and they were particularly irate.

Q: They can be counted upon, the ones that have surprised the oppression of the Arab family, if they have adjusted to that.

THEROS: They're tough cookies.

Q: They're pretty tough cookies.

THEROS: Oh, and fighting with the Department.

Q: Well let's talk about the press corps. Essentially the press corps was reporting, what I gather relatively accurately, the mood in Amman, which was not something that in a way we really wanted to be overly displayed. They were opposed to American policy and they

were playing this up, and this just enraged Americans.

THEROS: I have a list of six Jordanians who were not pro-Iraqi. I mean toward the top.

Q: The Jordanians are Jordanians and they have their own pressures, but the American press corps generally arrives without much concept of anything, and the more demonstrations you have, the more fun it is because it looks good on camera and all of that.

THEROS: The demonstrations weren't terribly photogenic because the Jordanians did a first-class job of keeping them from turning violent. Except for the American Women's demonstration, during which they threw shoes and lipstick containers at us.

Q: Sounds pretty deadly.

THEROS: It was, particularly the spike heels. They threw old shoes over the wall. Actually, throughout the eastern Mediterranean old shoes are terms of insult. We never got all the lipstick off the walls. [Laughs.]

With the press corps, actually, we developed what I thought was a very good procedure. What we did was once a day, almost every day—maybe five days a week—I would have a deep background briefing for the press corps, in which I was quite forthcoming. I had kept them pretty thoroughly informed, both on what was going on in the war and what was going on locally. In fact, outside of people in the war zone, we were the only ones who were doing … they were probably getting as much from us as they were from anybody else, and I was very happy because never once during the entire war did the fact that the Embassy was conducting this briefing ever become a news item.

There were a couple of times when strange newsmen would show up and the regular press would tell me, "Don't be forthcoming because we don't know this guy. We don't trust him." We actually had a couple press briefings that were uninformative because the good journalists had told me to be uninformative. They didn't trust some of the people who had shown up at the briefings.

Q: Were you able to get across the story that one, the Jordanians are supporting Iraq for their own reasons, and that the king has no real choice but to go along with them? Because it was seen by many in the United States as betrayal …

THEROS: And the king himself felt that he had been betrayed. He really was. I'm trying to remember how much I went into this before, but in part there was a lead-up to this.

Q: Well there was the Kennebunkport meeting and all of that.

THEROS: Prior to that there had been a couple of years in which USAID in Jordan had stopped, for all practical purposes. The last year before the war we gave Jordan ten million dollars. It was almost embarrassing to pass that off. We had stopped lobbying the

other Arab states for assistance. The Intifada had been going on TV brutally for two years at that point. The Jordanian economy had gone to hell, badly. Unemployment was very high. The Iraqis had behaved very well towards the Jordanians. The Iraqis had tried to intimidate other Arabs to give help to the Jordanians. And the Iraqis, more cleverly, were the only ones who realized that the king had relaxed censorship, so they went and bought all the newspaper editors. So the Iraqis had been cultivating the Jordanian public while we and the other Arabs had been basically kicking the Jordanians around. And then the king was arguably convinced—and had got an argument to make—that both the Saudis and Egyptians had tried to do them in. So all of these things had come together; but from the American side, once the war started, it was "You're on my side or you're against me." There really wasn't much left.

In the middle of all this, while the bombing was still going on, Richard Armitage shows up and has a very good morning with the king, ending up at lunch, in which the king has agreed that he is going to try and at least steer public opinion—make some effort—to convince Jordanian public opinion, not to be anti-Iraqi, but at least to look at this in a more realistic way.

Q: Armitage's position at that point was?

THEROS: He was in Defense. He was the Undersecretary of Defense, the Assistant Secretary of Defense, or something like that. I forget.

We put Armitage on the plane, I went home, and the Ambassador went home. I took a nap and while I was taking a nap the phone rang. It was the Ambassador. He said, "It's all over. Turn on the TV." It was about six o'clock at night and the king was giving this absolutely impassioned speech attacking the United States. It was just unbelievable. He was wild-eyed, his hair was unkempt. He had clearly gotten very, very wound up, very angry. Later we found out what had happened is he had gone to bed. He had continued to take antihistamines; he had a bad skin sensitivity of some sort and gone to bed with the antihistamines. Queen Noor, his wife, wakes him up out of his afternoon sleep and they've got this huge monster TV in the bedroom tuned to CNN and CNN is broadcasting the reports of that night's air raid on Baghdad in a particularly cavalier and "Gee whiz," cowboy-like way. You know, it was like a football game in which the home team is winning. And it was being done in a particularly sort of enthusiastic sportscaster tone of voice, and on top of that lots of footage of buildings being blown away, including buildings that the king was quite familiar with. And he was in a bad mood; he had been woken up. His wife was apparently just beside herself, angry. And the king goes on Jordan television and gives a speech. He just lost it. At that point our relationship went really sour.

Q: Let's talk two sides. We'll talk about the Washington relationship in a minute, but right now the war itself. Everybody is watching CNN and it's pretty obvious that the Iraqi military, which had been played up as being ten-feet high and the biggest army in the whole area and all that, and was just above; I mean it just wasn't able to do anything. At a certain point I'm told Arabs like to be with winners. I think you were the one who told

me this. Was there a point where it was becoming apparent in Jordan that the Iraqis really were not a very effective military force?

THEROS: Not until the ground war started. As long as they owned the air war—the thirty-odd days of aerial bombardment …

Q: They weren't seeing what this meant?

THEROS: Yes. The thing was that our own reporting was showing buildings being destroyed, but it was not apparent. Because, in fact, we didn't destroy much of the Iraqi ground forces in the air war; what we did was we broke their morale. But actual damage to them, these men had been dug into ditches, dug into trenches, for six months prior to this, had not had any training, had not been out in the field, had not been out of their trenches and so forth. When we bombed them in their trenches we didn't do a lot of damage, but what was happening was that their command and control was coming apart and morale was going down, but until the ground forces launched, this was not apparent even to us.

Q: The ground war was about three days or something.

THEROS: About five.

Q: During this time were you seeing any change?

THEROS: Stunned. Not turning against him, but sort of stunned silence. The demonstrations stopped. I think what was happening was that the Iraqis were losing the willingness of the Arab population on the street in Amman to go out and demonstrate on their behalf. We weren't picking anything up because we were also, at that point, making it very clear we were angry with the Jordanians. The Jordanians were, if anything, now caught in a bind between the people they were championing who were disintegrating and the people that were their traditional allies had turned their backs on them. So it was more stunned shock than anything else.

Q: Was there concern on our part, from your perspective, that in the long run this is just another one of these humiliations that the Arabs have by a Western … I mean the Israelis had humiliated the Egyptians before and all of a sudden we're taking the largest, and supposedly most effective, army the Arabs could field and just whooping the bejesus out of them.

THEROS: I think it wasn't as bad politically because losing to the world—losing to the Americans and NATO and everybody and his brother who had come in there—was not as humiliating as the Egyptians being defeated by the Israelis. No one had realistically expected the Iraqis to win; they had obviously hoped that the Iraqis would do more damage to us, but no one had any hopes of an Iraqi victory.

Q: Well let's turn now to the relations with Washington. I've interviewed Roger

Harrison, who in essence had to deal with a Washington that was mad as hell and basically wanted to beat up on Jordan and the king when it really didn't make any sense. I mean here was a king who was caught in a bind anyway. But you get these powers in Washington and if there's somebody you can beat up who can't really hit you back, it's an easy target.

THEROS: The other thing was the State Department, in my view, at the bureaucratic level, made a major strategic error. Everybody in the State Department wanted to get into the war and nobody at the State Department wanted to spend time planning for the post-war. So there were lots of people trying to find a little niche where they could affect the war. Jock Covey, for example. I had a big fight with Jock.

Q: Who is he?

THEROS: Jock Covey was the Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary in NEA. Jock said, "You've got to get down to twenty-six people at the post." This was his obsession during the war. "You've got to reduce down to twenty-six people," and I said, "Why?" He said, "Because the airplane the military has assigned to take you out only has twenty-six seats." I said, "I can't get down to twenty-six people. Any way you slice it, I can't get down to twenty-six people." He said, "Well, send two of the Marines home." I said: "If I send two of the Marines home, I'm going to have the Marines on watch and watch. They'll be dead in a week. How long can they keep it up?" I mean I had five and it had been down to three with two watch standers, and the two watch standers spelling each other on a twenty-four. He didn't care. We had a big fight and finally he called Roger Harrison and Roger calls me and he says, "You gotta do it. We've been ordered to do it." I said, "Okay." I go back and I got the gunny, the NCOIC, and said to him, "Pick two men that are going to go home and tell them that they're alerted to go home. Cut orders for them. Tell them to pack and tell them they're going to be on the next available airplane out of here, and don't you dare let them move." And I went back and lied to Roger Harrison, and I lied to the Department that they had left. When the war was over, Roger asked me when I was going to get the two Marines back and I grinned at him and I said, "They never left." [Laughs.] But I wasn't going to send them home. But it was that sort of thing. I was reduced to testy little exchanges with the Department. Roger was down to testy big exchanges with the Department.

I had an argument with American officials who insisted: "Look, the role of Jordan is over. The future of the Arab world is in the peninsula, in the Gulf. The Palestinian issue will be settled; the Saudis and the Gulf Arabs will decide it. The Palestinians have ceased to be important. The Jordanians have ceased to be important. The Levant is no longer the center of weight of the Arab world, particularly Jordan, and the Palestinians are now completely out of it, and they're going to play no role in the future of Palestine." And I just kept saying, "That's fine now, but what's going to happen a week from now, a week after the war is over? We're going to get back to normal." But there was this sort of trying to isolate the Jordanians not only politically and economically, but isolate them in the mentality of the bureaucracy.

Q: It was pretty petulant, wasn't it?

THEROS: It was petulance.

Q: I mean this is something I've noticed. I think we're going through this right now—the Iraqi thing—with the Germans and the French.

THEROS: Yes. It was petulance. There was no policy. We've done this over and over again. No one in the State Department is planning for the post-war. It's so much fun to fight the war.

Q: This is the thing that people like Chas Freeman were saying, "What's going to be the endgame?" And nobody would answer. So you had Schwarzkopf go into that tent with basically no instructions and he just came up with a ceasefire, which as a military commander it wasn't his job.

THEROS: That's right. The Department of State was derelict in its failure to provide real policy guidance, and it continues to be. I think things are better now in that they do provide policy guidance; the problem now is the Defense Department is trying to dismantle America's role in the world. All we were getting were petulance and things that's going to happen, but there was no post-war planning.

Q: Did you see our Embassy in Jordan as acting as sort of a firewall between the petulant bureaucracy and … Obviously this thing was going to be over within a couple of weeks, essentially. So we're going to come back and Jordan had a big role in Palestine, Israel and all this. Did you see yourselves as the protectors of the future of diplomacy, in a way, in the area?

THEROS: In a way. I know we can sort of wrap ourselves in that flag, but at the moment it was really, when we were down in the weeds, "Let's just make it to tomorrow and keep the Department at bay." There was a great tendency on the part of the Department to shoot the messenger, at the time. And one of the things Roger told me was, "Let's be very careful in what we say to Washington." The other thing was we were simply flooded with messages. Everybody and his brother were sticking Amman down the info line. Every message going out to the world had Amman on the info line and we were getting 1,500 messages a day, about half of them military. I had one communicator, helped by one man—Special Forces—in the military. That was it.

Q: In a way did you see this as a certain salvation? In other words, you were so deluged that you could… Essentially, at this point, was there the realization that we don't want much communication with these guys back in Washington because they are completely off the beam as far as where we want to go and it's best just to keep quiet and do our own thing?

THEROS: I'll tell you, Roger had to restrain me from time to time. [Laughs.] I had this tendency to want to say something really terribly nasty to Washington and he had to

come sit on me a couple of times.

Q: Did anybody come out?

THEROS: Other than Armitage, no.

Q: It's interesting, isn't it? When the chips are downy

Did you have any feeling of who was calling the shots, vis-à-vis Jordan?

THEROS: Lesser people.

Q: That's what my guess would be. This was sort of the middle-level bureaucrats showing that they had balls.

THEROS: That's right. I had no impression at all that Baker or anybody like that was remotely interested. Maybe they were, but they certainly weren't …

Q: Well they had so many other things on their minds.

What about the other embassies in Amman? Were they giving you any support?

THEROS: The Egyptians and the Saudis were out trying to provoke an American attack on Jordan.

Q: [Laughs.] They've been trying for years.

THEROS: And they were really working on it full-time. We were simply inundated with intelligence reports from other Arabs on what the Iraqis were up to and what the Jordanians were up to, quoting from the Egyptian military attaché, or the Saudi military attaché, or the Saudi intelligence man. I would get briefing from Saudi intelligence or Egyptian intelligence saying that their attaché in Amman had noted that three hundred Jordanian air defense technicians had been assigned to man Iraqi hot batteries. Reports that the Iraqis had been bringing missiles into Jordan to hit Israel, and in trying to pinpoint all the missiles were now at the refinery posing as oil trucks. And just on and on and on, and we had to go running around.

Q: Early on did you sort of get their number?

THEROS: The Department never got their number. We did, but the Department reacted to each report as if it was brand-new. And somebody—and I said the Department; I don't even know where in Washington; they had an amorphous beast there—would then demand that we go and verify the report with eyeballs. And when we'd say, "Look, we've checked the refinery six times," it was, "Go look again," and so and so.

I interviewed the head of the HAWK battalion twice. I went out and they took one of the

attachés to the HAWK batteries to make sure there were still men there to prove they weren't doing it. We had reports of Iraqi troops at Amman airport in Marka.

Q: It's an interesting thing that shows that the Saudi animosity toward the Hashemites continued. And the Egyptians, what was that about?

THEROS: I think the Egyptians had decided they were going to cut the king down a peg or three; and they had also decided they were now on good terms with the Saudis and it benefited them to exploit that Saudi relationship.

Q: And Jordan was just a designated punching bag.

THEROS: That's right. But in part, the Egyptians saw the king as a competitor for leadership in the Arab world and this was their opportunity to take him out once and for all; reduce him to the status that he deserved.

Q: Roger, of course, had the job of trying to deal with the king. But on your part, was there any time for talking to people within the Jordanian government and saying, come on, let's come to reason. Iraq is not going to make it. They're going to lose this war. The United States is going to be here and it's a major power and it's best to stay on good terms.

THEROS: Crown Prince Hassan and Sharif Zaid bin Shaker both agreed with that view. They both felt that this was a very bad thing to be happening to Jordan, but they had thrown up their hands on the grounds that public opinion was now completely out of control. They were not amenable to the argument that the king could have swayed them.

Q: Was there concern that Jordanian public opinion could have overthrown the king?

THEROS: No. If the king had taken a very pro-American position, could they have overthrown the king? No, the army would have remained loyal. Certainly the internal situation would have gotten uglier. As it was, there was remarkable social and political solidarity inside Jordan.

Q: In a way the king was leading the mob.

THEROS: The king figured out which way the mob was going. I'll tell you, I'm not at all saying that when it was totally simply cynical on the part of the king. I think the king at some point, particularly after the run-ins with the Egyptians and the Saudis, watching the television, his own … This is a man who was raised as a Hashemite, very conscious of history and very conscious of his role in history, and as a Hashemite, a descendent of the prophet; (who grew up) as an Arab nationalist, someone supporting Arab solidarity.

Jordanian public schools taught that the existence of Jordan was only a stepping-stone on the way to the reconstitution in the Arab "umah," the Arab nation. The Hashemites in particular were imbued with that as a philosophy. So the idea of foreign forces on Arab

soil attacking another Arab state was simply more than he could cope with. It didn't matter if they were Russians or Americans; it just was something that he could not cope with. So I'm not sure that he was cynically leading them on. Because of his own personal issues he allowed the mob to get out of hand and then he had to deal with it.

Q: What about when the war of the scuds started? I mean going into Israel and all of that. They were flying over you, weren't they?

THEROS: They were. And there were moments when people were asking whether it was —once it became obvious, however, that the Iraqis were not using chemical warheads, then there was a cheer in the coffee houses every time they hit something in Tel Aviv. It was also a generic assumption that the Americans would not let the Israelis interfere, and two, they couldn't figure out what the Israelis could do that would be any worse. The Israelis would be sort of adding a little more sauce to the brew, but that would be about it.

Q: In many ways they didn't have the command and control ability. Their planes would be kind of in the way.

THEROS: Yes. Can you imagine thirty Israeli planes showing up in the middle of an American 500-plane raid?

Q: Yes.

THEROS: You know, we'd shoot them down.

Q: Yes.

THEROS: And as for the Israeli army crossing the border, the Jordanians deployed to prevent the Israeli army from crossing the border, but I don't think anyone ever seriously believed the Israelis would do so.

Q: As this thing came to an end, did you all say, God, we've got to put this thing back together again? Was that the …

THEROS: There was a general feeling, the first few days after the war was over, of, "I just want to go get some sleep"—across the whole country. They had just gone through this terrible emotional crisis.

Q: Had they been glued to CNN the way most of the world was?

THEROS: Yes. It was sort of frightening, the idea that most of the world was watching CNN, inaccurate and all.

Q: Some people at that point were saying, "Do we need embassies when we can rely on CNN?"

THEROS: Yes. When it was all over they had come down off this emotional high. We were exhausted, they were … I'd say the first week after the war was over was sort of, "I want to get some sleep."

Q: But was there concern in Jordan when the war was over and the Shia in southern Iraq were fighting, or at least restive? Was there concern that Iraq might fall apart?

THEROS: I think there was at the upper levels. I think at the popular level it never sunk in. It never sunk in below the upper levels. And the other thing that was happening was they perceived an American indicator that we did not want this to happen. The fact that we did not intervene on the side of the Shia and the Kurds was seen as a clear indication that the U.S., in deference to the Saudis and others in the area, were perfectly prepared to let the status quo continue in Iraq. The zonal thing got a little out of hand and we imposed the no-fly zones, but by and large …

Q: So what happened? I mean the war is over; you've had a week of R&R, of rest and recuperation, and all. And then what did you do?

THEROS: Tried to put things back together again. Washington wasn't speaking to us, except to say the occasional nasty remark. But they weren't paying any attention to us either. And then all of a sudden Jim Baker decided that we'd reinvigorate the peace process.

Q: When you say "peace process," what are you talking about?

THEROS: The Arab-Israeli peace process.

He rose to the occasion—came out; we had two Baker visits in the post-war period, one in which Baker insisted in crossing the bridge going from Amman to Jerusalem by land.

Q: The Allenby.

THEROS: The Allenby Bridge, yes. That was sort of a black comedy. The Pirates of Penzance and the Keystone Cops were all involved.

Q: In what way?

THEROS: Well, we had this huge motorcade and the airplane had landed and we posted the secretariat staff at the airport—they were being ignored anyway. Margaret Tutwiler made no secret of her contempt for the secretariat staff, so they were all at the airport fiddling. And while Baker was meeting with the king, Baker said, "I want to drive to Jerusalem. I want to cross the bridge."

Q: This was a spur of the moment thing?

THEROS: A spur of the moment thing. So he said, "Okay, I'll arrange it." The "I will

arrange it" fell to me and one Jordanian two-star, and in the process we misplaced the press bus and we were looking for them frantically. Meanwhile, Margaret Tutwiler was getting more and more nonplussed.

Q: She's a very focused person.

THEROS: Yes. And they were driving down to the bridge and the Jordanians have got everything in place. Embassy Tel Aviv has got everything in place on the Israeli side, except the Israelis neglected to tell their people on their side. So the Jordanians were talking to the Israelis and the Israeli military on the bridge were saying, "We don't have any instructions." We passed this to Baker. We stopped the car and I came out and talked to the Jordanian people about fifteen minutes short of the bridge. "The Israelis have no instructions and they are not going to let you across the bridge," they said. And he said an expletive and he said, "I'm going across the bridge." So apparently either the Israelis were bluffing or some local clown had decided he wasn't going to obey orders, or what have you, but Baker shows up, the Israelis show up, the Jordanians show up, and Baker starts walking across the bridge.

Embassy Tel Aviv in Jerusalem had put together a motorcade at the spur of the moment—you know, it was like taxis out of a taxi line, and they were still about two or three kilometers from the bridge, held up at a checkpoint there; and Baker starts coming across the bridge and the Jordanians and the Israelis are having a brief exchange and the exchange, which later I got from the Jordanians, was "You mean he's serious?" "Yes, he is serious." He says, "I don't know about you, but he's leaving and he told me he's not coming back unless he is shot." This was the sort of exchange. The motorcade showed up just as Baker was getting off the other end of the bridge and they all went off.

Q: Did you ever find the press bus?

THEROS: Yes, we found the press bus. They had a scary drive down to the valley trying to catch up to a motorcade that was moving …

Q: Yes, there's nothing worse than trying to do that.

Did you get any feel for the chemistry of Baker and the king at all?

THEROS: Baker was a hard man embarked on a mission he intended to accomplish. My impression of the king was he saw that this mission was in his interest and he was prepared to put bad feelings aside. Of course you couldn't say that to anybody on the American side because they felt that we were the aggrieved party, not the Jordanians. Baker did not belabor the point. I don't think at any point did Baker raise the subject of Jordan's position in the war with Iraq.

Q: What was the timing of this, after the end of the war?

THEROS: I'd say about March or April, probably a month or two.

Q: So it wasn't much. At any rate, were we operating under recriminations or almost "Let's forget our end. Let's not even go back over this thing?"

THEROS: There were no recriminations coming from the top of the U.S. government. The nastiness was coming from the mid-level. The Jordanians did not ask for anything. They didn't ask for assistance. They didn't ask for other things.

Clearly the Egyptians, who were now, of course, benefiting from the fact that they sent two divisions to the Gulf War, were insisting that Baker reinvigorate the peace process. I think Baker saw it in the national interest to do so. If you reinvigorated the peace process, the king was a player. Any way you did it the king was a major player in this. It didn't go very far, but the fact that you had to keep the king engaged meant that the upper levels were going to keep him engaged and the lower levels were just going to be allowed to fume and rant and rave a little bit, but not affect policy. What it did do was it affected Congress's willingness to give the Jordanians money for years.

Q: How about at your contact level? What was happening after the war?

THEROS: I got a lot of sort of shame-faced people who really treated me pretty badly and brutally during the war who were sort of, "Come back for dinner and we'll play classical music," or something like that. The contacts came back pretty quickly. There were very, very few people who wouldn't speak to me after the war—usually wives.

Q: Was it sort of let's put this all behind us and let's think ahead or did you find opposition?

THEROS: I think there was a period there of, "Let's see if we can just quiet things down and get this back." There wasn't an initiative on the Jordanian side for quite some time. I think it was more, "Let's just see if we can get the tone of voice down to something civilized and then we'll see where we can reestablish the relationship." And we were caught up with trying to bring life back to normal by getting the American school up and running again, people coming back, families that had been separated coming back. The Department hung on to the evacuation for far too long. My family didn't come back until just before I left in June.

Q: This is often the case.

What about the most important factor there, the American wives of Jordanians?

THEROS: That was really bad. The relationship between the American Women's Association and the Embassy wives had gotten lethal.

Q: I can imagine how it was.

THEROS: Very, very bad. The only wife who was still talking to both sides was mine,

and one other senior lady. Others, they just weren't talking to each other. The Embassy wives came back with this huge chip on their shoulder; the American Women's Association had this huge chip on their shoulder. It inhibited the American school getting back up and running. We almost had schisms in the four Protestant churches. There were people who really would not talk to each other for the longest time.

Q: What about Queen Noor? How would you see her role afterwards?

THEROS: She absented herself from social life with Americans, not that she'd had a lot before. I must say that Queen Noor was never very tight with Americans in the Embassy. When I was there Queen Noor had disliked the previous two American Ambassadors and their wives. She thought Boeker was okay but she didn't really like him that much. She disliked Rocky Suddarth and Michelle Suddarth intensely, for reasons that I've never understood. And Mrs. Harrison didn't show up until the war was over. She didn't come out with her husband to begin with. Queen Noor wouldn't talk to her either.

It was interesting. When I left, the crown prince had a lunch for me and the king came over and had lunch with us, but Noor wouldn't.

Q: Well when did you leave?

THEROS: I left in June; end of May, early June.

Q: So you were there in the early part, in the sort of cleaning up after this.

THEROS: It was very much, "Let's try and clean up the relationship." There was very little, other than the Baker trips for the peace process.

Q: What about the press? You said the Iraqis had bought up the press. Now where were they?

THEROS: They were still pro-Iraqi but they had lost a lot of credibility. People weren't paying much attention to them.

Q: Had they gone overboard, would you say, during the warm-up?

THEROS: They had very much gone overboard. Jordan television had gone overboard too.

Q: Was that also because of money or because of …

THEROS: No, I think it was just that at that point the entire country was caught up in the enthusiasm of the moment.

Q: What were the reflections you were getting when the Kuwaiti government resumed its authority?

THEROS: It was made clear that every Jordanian and Palestinian had to go home. So we had this huge influx of Palestinians and Jordanians; 400,000 people came back, including Palestinians who had never been in Jordan, other than just having the act of a Jordanian passport. The good news—and this cushioned the blow—was that Kuwaitis, for their own reasons, decided not to touch bank accounts. Few Palestinians, like Abdul, the head of the Kuwait National Bank, stayed on for the first couple years living in London and managing bank affairs, because they were just so important to him. But everybody else was booted out and told not to come back. But they were allowed to come back, pick up their stuff, ship it home—what was left; their bank accounts weren't touched. The Kuwaitis were nasty but correct, and therefore a huge amount of money came into Jordan at just about this time.

Q: What were you seeing, because we're trying to stick to the time period you were there? Was there concern that this was going to be an irreconcilable lump of people who hate the United States and hate Kuwait?

THEROS: No. They were generally less anti-American than the people who were home in Jordan. These were people who were just trying to get their lives together. And they had a fair amount of money. They actually had more money; as refugees they were better off financially than the average Jordanian was. So we had a mini-boom in construction at about that time which sort of sustained the country over the next six months.

Q: I realize you were there a relatively short time, but were you getting any reflection from the Jordanian military about, "Gee whiz, look at this new American Army and what it can do?"

THEROS: They were very familiar with us. The Jordanian military never had any doubts that we would win and their assessment of what went wrong for the Iraqis was that Saddam Hussein took a losing hand and turned it into a disaster. In other words, if the Iraqi army had a better strategy, was better managed at the top, the Jordanian view was that these men would have given a better account of themselves; they would have done more damage to the Americans, but they would have still lost. The Jordanians were extremely familiar with the American Army and they knew what the odds were. And as they watched the Iraqi army paralyze itself, even before the shooting started …

Q: It was the damnedest thing. People talked about what a magnificent strategy of the so-called N1, but anybody looking at that map knew that that was exactly what was going to happen.

THEROS: Yes. The fact that the Iraqi army, except for Khafji, never engaged in offensive operations is mind-boggling. They would have still lost, but in the desert everything is offense.

Q: How about while you were there during the war. Was there any concern that Syria might try messing around?

THEROS: No. Syria had a division in Saudi Arabia. The Syrians actually were doing the opposite. They were sort of trying to convince the Jordanians that their future lay in being the Syrian vassal. They were doing it very subtly.

Q: How did the Jordanians look at Assad and Syria and all that?

THEROS: Two things: Overall Syria, if you go back fifty years, if Syria had been a democratic country, Jordan would have been absorbed by Syria. There was a tremendous sort of affection for greater Syria in the northern parts of Jordan. Those areas would have been hived off. As I said, if Syria had been a democratic, free enterprise country, the attraction of falling under Syria's control would have been overwhelming to Jordan.

After that there was a realization that much as they liked the Syrians, much as they were like the Syrians, the regimes were going from bad to worse. Assad was at first respected for having brought stability to Syria and for being a very, very smart politician. He basically continued a regime that was unpalatable for Jordanians to live under. And then the realization that, despite the fact they were so much richer than Jordan, intrinsically, socialism was making Syria a poor country. So all those things played in. I think today the attraction of a union with Syria is very, very weak. Fifty years ago it would have been very strong.

Q: You left there in June?

THEROS: May or June.

Q: As you left how did you see the situation in Jordan?

THEROS: Sustainable for the time being. I was always confident that we would come back to the original policies of using Jordan for the peace process and this huge influx of money from Kuwait—the expellees from Kuwait—would probably sustain the Jordanian economy a year or two. And I felt that in a year or two, hell, this is the Middle East, [laughs.] something will work out.

POLAD CENTCOM, 1991 to 1993

Q; Patrick, Central Command '91 to '93. How did the job come about?

THEROS: General Hoar, whom had been the deputy commander-in-chief at Central Command some years prior, when I was in Jordan, liked me a lot. He and I saw eye to eye on a variety of subjects. A lot of my friends in the military knew that I had a long, good relationship with the military, and General Hoar was about to become CINC, commander-in-chief, looking for a POLAD (political advisor) because my predecessor Gordon Brown was due out at that time. I was looking at a variety of jobs in Washington, none of which really turned me on very much. Of course I had reached that stage of life

where all of us were looking for an Embassy and it wasn't materializing, and there were no good jobs overseas at that point; the jobs in Washington were jobs in Washington, but not any that I particularly cared for. So I understood the job was coming up; it was one of the things I had some interest in. I called Joe Hoar, wherever he was at the time. He was overjoyed at the prospect, so I figured if nothing else I'd get an interesting, a fair amount of travel, and working for a man who liked me and I liked him. So it worked out.

We got off to sort of a funny start in that my assignment date was the same day as the change of command. My predecessor wanted to be there for the change of command as POLAD; I wanted to be there for the change of command as POLAD. We ended up Central Command actually had two POLADs for one day.

Q: Standing there together holding hands.

THEROS: Exactly. Both of us could say we worked for General Schwarzkopf and he could say that he was there through the entire tour with General Schwarzkopf, who at the time was sort of this mythical figure that had just led us to victory.

From a practical point of view the job had good points and bad points in terms of what people should be doing in the Foreign Service. From the administrative management point of view, it is a miserable assignment because the Foreign Service does not know how to manage one person in the United States. All your overseas allowances drop off. Your expenses actually increase rather than decrease because now you've got to worry about schools—where you're going to put your kids and stuff like that—and for most of us public schools are inadequate. Tampa public schools are no better than public schools in Washington, D.C. … And there's no GSO, there's no Admin officer; there's nobody to take care of that variety of things that you expect to take care of.

From the military point of view, for a lot of purposes I was given a militarily equivalent rank and treated as such, which was essentially brigadier general, but from the administrative point of view I was a civilian employee of the Defense Department, lacking some of the regular things that a civilian employee of the Defense Department gets. So from the cost point of view, I have to tell you that that was probably the single most expensive assignment of my career. It cost me more money to live, and I got deeper into debt. Until my kids got to college, I'd never had to spend that much of my own money. The only way it compared to an overseas assignment was at least my house was being rented in Washington. But other than that, the amount of time that I and my wife had to put into doing the things that we were accustomed to having the GSO do, and were still necessary. We had to get furniture again; we had to get furniture out of storage; we hadn't had our own furniture for a long time; get my cars down there; do your own clearance of cars out of customs. There's no one to take care of it.

The amount of time that you wouldn't even have had to do if you were assigned to Washington, because in Washington there is an office that you can call and they call these men in Baltimore to clear your car and all you got to do is go pick up the car. In Washington, if you call them they don't know anybody in Tampa. They cleared the car

out but then I had to arrange to have the car shipped down. You know all the things that go with it, like putting the catalytic converter back on and stuff like that, were just simply not done. So from that point of view it was not a pleasant assignment and from my wife's point of view it was not a pleasant assignment, nor for my kids, because I was gone two weeks out of every month traveling with the CINC. That's the downside of the job

The upside of the job is suddenly I'm the most important man there. If you develop a good rapport with the military, it's amazing how much they hold you in awe and how valuable they regard your contribution. All of it of course depends on your personal relationship with the commander-in-chief, the CINC. If you and he are perceived as working closely together, the whole world opens up in terms of people really are nice to you, people go out of their way to include you. We can learn certain things about the military culture that we didn't have; things that are much different than the State Department culture. To me my big shock was the briefing. The briefing is "a briefing"—small letter "b"—in the State Department; in the military "a briefing" is a capital "B" with neon lights; it is a very strictly choreographed process. I did not understand how strictly choreographed the process was. So when the CINC is finally briefed, it is the final briefing. There is no commentary. Only the CINC makes comments about the briefing. Nobody else below him makes comments.

Well, I was new. Schwarzkopf did not include my predecessor in everything as much as Hoar included me. As a consequence I didn't understand—there was a briefing that was given to the CINC in which I was present and there were some holes in the briefing and I picked at them. What I didn't realize was I had thoroughly embarrassed all the deputies. I was lucky in that the chief of staff was a close friend of mine—Dan Larned; he had been the attaché in Amman when I was there and he was now the chief of staff—and he explained this. He says it was their fault because they knew I would be at the briefing since they knew that Hoar and I had a particular relationship. It was their fault for not having run the briefing past me. And I didn't know that I wasn't supposed to pick at the briefing while it was going on. And there were a number of other things, but that was the one that shows the sort of cultural relationships in the military that are different than our own.

Q: When you got there, was there a looking back at what went right and what went wrong with the Gulf War or was everybody focused on what's next?

THEROS: I'd say the historian's office was the only one that was looking back at the Gulf War. The rest of the command was focused on what's going on today. The only discussion I ever heard of the Gulf War was soldiers having a beer together and talking about it. The historian's office was the only one that was looking at it and when I was there, which was immediately after the Gulf War, it was still largely amassing a record rather than working on analysis and so forth. There was a technical analysis, but it was always analysis in terms of what was broken that we have to fix; it was not any analysis or discussion on the structure of the war or the way we did it; the grand picture. For example, the biggest post-war issue in the command at the time was that we had broken the tanker fleet and the transportation fleet.

Q: Is this the air transportation fleet?

THEROS: The air transportation fleet and the air tanker fleet. We had broken it. We had used them so much that we were down to fifty percent flyables, and lower. Guys would take planes up and they were worried about things falling off. This had a consequence in several places. For example, the deployment of Somalia, from a logistics point of view, went very badly. Our planes were breaking down continuously. We were lucky no planes crashed.

Q: Was there any discussion while you were there about how the Gulf War ended? Because since that time there has been a lot of talk about Schwarzkopf not getting very good instructions about what to do when he went in to set up the cease-fire and all that.

THEROS: There are two parts to that. When the war ended, the difference between Schwarzkopf and Washington was one day. Schwarzkopf wanted one more day to destroy another division, to prevent a division from escaping. Nobody in the command had voiced any objections to going no further. It was 100 percent an issue of one day.

I also never heard people complain very much about the instructions Schwarzkopf had. My impression is that you didn't give Schwarzkopf detailed instructions. Schwarzkopf's instructions weren't even, "Go take that hill;" they were "Go take that country and tell me how you did it afterwards." He did not suffer micromanagement very well.

Q: Did you sense a tension or letting down or something, particularly when you have a commander like Norman Schwarzkopf? He ran a brilliant war, didn't suffer fools gladly and all this—and another general takes over. He's got a problem.

THEROS: There were a lot of changes, and these were two generals who even though they were like night and day between them, the best comparison I ever had was Schwarzkopf was Patton and Hoar was Bradley. They were totally different personalities, but they were the appropriate personalities for the moment.

The United States was very well served by that transition. Patton did really well in fighting the war and Bradley did really well in putting it together; putting, in effect, our coalition together—maintaining it and maintaining good relations afterwards. I'll give you a good example. Our relationships with the French in the field were superb; they were much better than our relations with France, at the military level. Essentially what the French military told us is if what you are asking us to do is a political decision—for example, Paris says handle it on your own. If within our very, very broad discretion what you're asking us to do is a military action, it was how soon do you want it and where do you want it, and how much do you want. He maintained and cultivated this relationship with the French and he did it superbly and the French reciprocated.

We also had a good relationship with the British, but the British commanders were much more closely tied down. We had much less discretion from London. A simple way of

saying it is if the British did not have as big a mandate as the French commanders did. Within that mandate they cooperated, but their mandate was quite small for cooperation. When it got above that, the British government tended to respond more positively. The French were the other way around: within a very broad mandate the French military responded in an extremely positive fashion; the French government tended to respond less positively.

Q: When you got on there what did you see your task being?

THEROS: Two or three things. One was to be CENTCOM's advocate in the State Department, to be the interpreter of State Department requirements, instructions, and demands to Central Command, and to provide advice and counsel on a day-to-day basis on things being done with foreign countries. To a great degree, interpreting what the State Department wanted was perhaps half my job, being the advocate was about twenty percent of my job, and the advice and counsel was about thirty percent of my job.

Q: I would think that you were representing a very popular body with the State Department, at this point. CENTCOM had been sort of the stepchild for a long time, but after the Gulf War you were representing a winner.

THEROS: I don't think that was the view. The view was that the State Department, like Central Command, was focused on their issues. My job was to make sure that the focus was parallel and on the same issue, and to avoid fratricide. Ninety percent of the relationship was being conducted below the Assistant Secretary level. There were very, very few cases where Central Command and the Secretary of State or the other Secretary met and collided. It was not an issue. When it was an issue, it was usually resolved by a visit to Washington by the CINC.

Q: When you got there, the CINC travels a lot and I would think that, again, coming from a prestigious victory, this would have made the CINC's reception …

THEROS: It was quite good. The CINC'S reception was quite good everywhere with our allies. We flew out to the region once a month on average. We missed once in the summer and then we'd make a couple of other trips someplace else overseas. There was a certain pattern. The military quickly establishes a pattern. They've got choreographers. You arrive, you do this, you do that, you meet these people, and there's a pattern. Most of the business has been prepared in advance. I'd say our meeting intent was actually to broach a new subject or to try and fix something that was not resolvable or had not been resolved on other levels. Most of the meetings were to continue to develop a rapport between military leaders and to put an imprimatur on decisions that had been made at the lower level. As an example of something that couldn't be resolved at the lower level: The minister of defense in Kuwait was beginning to show signs of being nice to the Iranians. It was not an issue that could be managed below the CINC. Even the Embassy was having problems putting arms around it. General Hoar showed up and bit him in the ankle and hung on until the man said, "I give. I won't do it anymore."

A lot of time was also spent in the planning process. The military spends all its time fixing things that are broken and planning for the next problem. The US Government planning process has a weakness, from our point of view, which we just illustrated in a big way in the recent war. We don't really consult with our allies and coalition partners like we did in World War II. We decide ourselves what we want to do and then tell our allies and coalition partners what their role is. Sometimes the planning takes a step that we know that if we told the coalition partners what we expect them to do, they'd explode.

One of my jobs in the planning process, for example, was to tell the planners—before we share with our ally that we would abandon their country to the first attack and then retake it—that this would not go down really well. If that was the final decision, my job was to frame the way we put it to them. In some cases, frankly I would advise the Command, "Don't them about it at all. We'll worry about it when war comes."

The other large part of the time was taken up in exercises. Some countries want to exercise with us all the time; others don't want to exercise at all. The big issue at the political/military level at the time that concerned us, that took up a lot of our time, was the relationship with Saudi Arabia. Today's paper "this is the first of May" had a story that we finally agreed with the Saudis to pull out almost all the troops that we now have in the kingdom. This was the issue that cropped up almost every day in some great or minor form. How long can we keep these very large forces in Saudi Arabia, given the Saudi dilemma, the popular antipathy to our presence, and the political gasses being generated by our presence, as opposed to the perceived need to maintain a good relationship with the United States and the threat from Iraq and Iran. So it was always something that was balanced off.

My opinion of the Saudis is that the principal reason we continued to have our forces in the kingdom was the Saudi perception that we would get really upset if they threw us out. The Saudis had to calm their own population, which was unhappy—particularly everybody who didn't like the al Saud was using this to beat up the al Saud. I don't believe that the Saudi perception of a threat was ever as acute as we might have thought it might have been.

Q: In the first place, what did Central Command consist of? I mean as far as the geography.

THEROS: Okay, the area of responsibility, the AOR, was including Egypt, the Arabian Peninsula, the Sudan, East Africa down to and including Kenya, Iraq, Iran, Pakistan, and Afghanistan. The Pakistan-Indian line of control, or border, whatever have you, defined the line to the east. Egypt was included specifically. Jordan was included. Lebanon, Syria, and Israel were not included and were still part of European Command. The decision had been largely made because there was a fear that if we included Israel in Central Command, given the sensitivities on the idea of sharing things with the Israelis, that would have undercut our own credibility with the Arab states. Since we had no military relationship to speak of with the Lebanese and the Syrians, it didn't matter. So the excuse was, "Well they border on the Mediterranean; every country that borders on

the Mediterranean, except Egypt, belongs to European Command." The only reason we got Egypt was because Egypt was a nexus of the flow of supplies to the region.

There was considerable argument in the Defense Department system as to whether or not the Indian subcontinent should belong to Central Command or to the Pacific Command. That was largely a question of inertia. Pacific Command saw itself as a maritime command; it did not see Central Command as a maritime command because it was meant chopping—"chopping" is another military term, transferring control over—the Indian Ocean to Central Command, and Pacific Command didn't want to do that. And after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the newly independent states of the Soviet Union, there was an argument as to whether or not Central Asia should be given to Central Command. It is now but it wasn't at the time. And there it was the State Department—the Ambassadors there—that argued most vociferously that the "Stans" should not be given to Central Command.

Q: This probably represented the Soviet hands, which didn't want to give up anything.

THEROS: It was the old Soviet hands in the "Stans" who were so Euro-centric that they didn't want to fall under the responsibility of a non-European entity, like CENTCOM.

Q: How about Libya? I would have thought that for concern Libya would represent —I mean for leaders of course Libya was basically on the enemy's side, but I would have thought that Libya would fit more comfortably into a land command.

THEROS: Well it was more along the lines of European Command—again, one shore of the Mediterranean. We got Egypt primarily because it was the nexus of the Canal and overflight to the region. European Command, I have to say, of all the commands was the least nice to us. Virtually everything that became part of Central Command had been chopped out of European Command. Why European Command wanted to hang on to Africa was one of these great mysteries. They didn't do anything there.

Q: They were almost called upon over the Rwanda thing. In fact, our non-performance there became a matter of presidential apology later on.

THEROS: Again, I think it was purely bureaucratic; you know, "My map is bigger than your map." But I remember when I was leaving in Jordan to go to Tampa, via Washington, European Command—finding out that I was going to be a POLAD—sent this frantic message to Washington, saying, "Can Theros come through London for a couple of days and talk to the naval people there?" I received a very subtle lecture by the U.S. Navy saying that I have to understand that the power structure is such and that we have to keep Central Command under our thumb.

Q: I imagine one of the things you'd be doing would be watching the map and taking the temperature and saying, "God, we may have to go here or go there." Or was something already on the boil while you were there?

THEROS: Nothing was on the boil. As a matter of fact, virtually everything newsworthy and dramatic that we did in the two years that I was POLAD was in whole or in part a reaction to the press. "And we went to Somalia because CNN took us to Somalia."

Q: But the point being that you were looking at it, but there was nothing there that seemed to be getting ready for …

THEROS: We operated under the assumption that Iraq would ultimately seek revenge on Kuwait. It was an assumption that we did not question very much. It was a useful assumption because you have to make certain assumptions to do your planning. We saw Iran as a lesser threat. The internal stability of Egypt was terribly important to Central Command. Other than that we were concerned about how terrorism might affect the stability of the region. We saw our role very much as maintaining a benevolent status quo.

Q: During your time there I think there were two things in Iraq. One was the Kurdish problem and the other was the Shiite rebellion.

THEROS: The Shiite rebellion was pretty much over by the time I got to Central Command. We had just instituted the new rules that we were going to shoot down helicopters and do other stuff. Southern watch would periodically go blow things up just to keep the Iraqis at bay, but we were off the south. The Iraqis essentially controlled the south. There was nothing we could do about it. The degree of support we were prepared to give the Shia was not sufficient for the Shia to establish themselves in the south. However, the same degree of support was sufficient for the Kurds to establish themselves.

Q: I would imagine the Kurds would be more likely to fall under the European Command.

THEROS: It was interesting; every time a plane would fly out from Turkey it would chop to Central Command as it flew over the Iraqi border. The airplanes belonged to Central Command and it would chop to Central Command for those purposes; the controllers in Central Command controlled them. Transiting there and transiting back they would pass back and forth. It's a procedure that the armed forces had figured out reasonably well. It would stop them from shooting down one of our helicopters.

Q: How did you find, at that point, looking at it somewhat from the outside, the jointness of the command? You know, Army, Air Force, Navy.

THEROS: It was better than it had been when I was at the staff college in '74. There were still a lot of problems of interoperability, particularly on the communications side. And the Navy was always a problem. The Navy is the Navy is the Navy. All navies of the world always regard themselves as the senior service and as long as others kowtow, it's okay. Here's an example: The Navy was the only element that went and established its command post—its headquarters—in the Gulf.

Q: ComidEastFor.

THEROS: Yes, and then became Fifth Fleet. The ComidEastFor no longer exists. It was now the Fifth Fleet, headquartered in Bahrain. Ultimately we moved the admiral carefully from his command ship to a … Essentially we docked the command ship and we had to rotate it out for maintenance and left the admiral to shore and he just stayed ashore.

One of the issues that did consume us, and has continued to consume Central Command from the first day, is should the headquarters be in the region or should the headquarters be in Tampa? And there are enormous arguments on both sides and my understanding is they have not been resolved. And there is an oversimplified tradeoff: If you stay in Tampa you are so far away from the region that a lot of the resources in the command are spent going back and forth and you're less able to have the day-to-day effect on the region that you might have.

On the other hand, we had no formal treaty-based alliance with any country in the region, largely because official Washington did not want to have a treaty-based alliance with any country in the region, and being able to get dragged into events beyond our control.

Ready access to Washington was certainly very important to the CINC. They didn't want to be in Washington—Tampa was about the right distance. If they were in Washington, as the smallest of the commands they felt they would have been swamped and just end up being an appendage of the Joint Chiefs. But by being in Tampa they were sufficiently far away that they were able to assert their independence as a command, but close enough to go running up to Washington every time they needed something, and that was a very important issue to them. So there was always a tension. General Hoar tended to want to be in the region; General Schwarzkopf did not. General Pea did not. General Zinni did. I don't know how Tommy Franks feels.

Q: How did you analyze the relationship between the command and the Pentagon?

THEROS: Difficult is the wrong term. I was about to say difficult. The Pentagon—and this is where Rumsfeld may have even some points—there are essentially three or four elements whose relationship is not clearly defined. There is the civilian Pentagon. The civilian Pentagon is supposed to carry out policy, which it does or does not do, depending on the circumstances. In the time that I was there, the civilian Pentagon was assertive only vis-à-vis the Congress and so forth, was not terribly assertive towards the military. The CINC's report directly to the Secretary of Defense, not to the Joint Chiefs; but, in reality if it doesn't go through the Joint Chiefs to the Secretary of Defense, it's a little bit like an Ambassador who theoretically reports to the President but he better go through the Secretary of State if he knows what's good for him—well, there was that.

But the Joint Chiefs themselves had two hats. They were the masters of the military, but a lot of the operational authority had been taken away from them, and then each of them was also the head of the institutional service. Another jargon—the "institutional Navy,"

the "institutional Marine Corps." The chief of staff of the United States Army's responsibility is to raise and prepare the Army for war and to take care of all of the non-operational issues of the Army—and he provides the resources; he provides the divisions to Central Command; and then when they are no longer needed by Central Command, they come back to him or they go on to some other command or so forth. He is the fellow who trains, equips, feeds, and does all those things. So he has this responsibility in addition to being a member of the Joint Chiefs. It's a responsibility that, for example, as a member of the Joint Chiefs, he has gone along with the decision to invade upper Slabovia. As the commander of the chief of staff of the institutional Army, he does not particularly want to devote two divisions to the invasion of Slabovia—pull them out of training, pull equipment out of his warehouses. He would rather the Air Force sent more airplanes, or vice-versa. So there was always this tension.

The equipment that we needed, for example, the institutional Air Force had to decide who got how many airplanes, for what purpose, and who got even little things. There was a big argument that consumed us for two years. It was really handled at the colonel-major level but always annoyed the CINC and other people. The CINC had a command airplane; it was a converted KC-135 tanker. He had to go to Washington frequently. He wanted a small plane. These are in very small number and are husbanded very, very tightly. The Chairman wouldn't give him one. The institutional Air Force wouldn't give him a small airplane and the institutional Navy wouldn't give him a small airplane, because they didn't have a lot of them and they're VIP airplanes. So every time we went to Washington we either took the KC-135 or we flew commercial. I think we got the small airplane maybe twice in the two years I was there to fly to Washington. It was always made very clear to us: this airplane belongs to the Pentagon; it doesn't belong to Central Command. You see a lot of this stuff. But this was not stuff I got involved with too much.

The one thing that General Hoar made very clear was that I would run interference and I would work official Washington at every agency in the United States government, except the Defense Department. He generally would not even take me to meetings at the Defense Department. That was his direct responsibility. He didn't want it to appear that he had me along for a Defense Department meeting.

Q: Let's stop at this point and we'll pick this up the next time. We've already talked about the institutional framework of Central Command and we're going to pick this up the next time dealing with Somalia and any other issues. ...

Patrick, you were POLAD to Central Command from when to when?

THEROS: From about June of 1991 to about July of 1993.

Q: Somalia. How did this come up?

THEROS: CNN. The joke around Central Command was that Ted Turner saw himself as William Randolph Hurst.

Q: Could you explain Ted Turner and CNN?

THEROS: Ted Turner at the time owned, ran, and was the driving spirit behind CNN.

Q: Which was?

THEROS: The Cable News Network, which was the news network that had made its name during the Gulf War and had become the prototype of satellite and cable news around the world—and had also become very powerful and politically very influential. The reference to William Randolph Hurst is the case of the Maine in the Spanish-American War, who first bragged that he had started the Spanish-American War by hyping—I don't think that was the word Hurst used, but by exaggerating the political reasons for the blowing up of the Maine in Havana Harbor. So the joke around CENTCOM was that Ted Turner saw himself as William Randolph Hurst and was trying to start another war. It wasn't quite as big as the Spanish-American War, but it was the only one available. There was a lot of human misery in Somalia.

Q: Set the stage for when you were there. When you arrived was Somalia a word that was mentioned or did that develop while you were there?

THEROS: A little bit because we had interests in Djibouti, in the straits, and around Aden, in the straits entering the Red Sea, which are one of the choke points that were important to Central Command; and Somalia was disintegrating on the other side of the same straits. So there was a concern—not so much that someone would step in and threaten or control the choke points, but more that the collapse of civil order would lead to piracy, criminality, interference with shipping, which would then mean having to draw off resources from Central Command to keep the straits open. But the driving force behind the American intervention in Somalia, of course, was all the television images of starving children.

By way of background, Siad Barre had been president for life of Somalia for years and had successfully played off the Americans and the Soviets, all during the Cold War. At the end of the Cold War the Americans and the Soviets walked away and this precarious economy that he had created, dependent totally on the largess of the two superpowers, fell apart. He was ejected from office, died a short time later, and essentially local tribal chieftains turned into bandit warlords who began to fight over the country, and the country was disintegrating. I mean human misery in Somalia was on a par that we hadn't seen since the '20s.

There was a constant drumbeat in the press to do something about Somalia, whatever the "do something" was. At that point President Bush ordered a humanitarian intervention. The first humanitarian intervention was simply flying food into certain towns where there were airstrips and distributing it locally. We went into a couple of towns in the south. Essentially, the towns existed but the bandits controlled everything. So it became quickly obvious that even distributing the food was pointless because as soon as we'd leave the

bandits would come in and pick it up. There was a general pattern that between all the food being distributed by foreign governments, international aid agencies, and so forth, the bandits were taking ninety percent of the food and selling it in Kenya, and with it they were buying guns and they were buying qat, which is the sort of local mild narcotic. There was real starvation in Somalia.

Q: I can imagine if there's ever a time for a political advisor … this obviously is not your place either. Let's talk about what you were doing and what you were getting from people when this initially came up.

THEROS: When it initially came up it basically came as a bit of a bolt out of the blue. Our concern in Central Command is how do we contain Somalia from becoming an issue for other parts of the command, and our principal concerns were, as I said, the chokepoints at the Aden Straits. So the initial decision to intervene we talked about it a lot in the Command and initially decided together that the best thing to do was just to get food into a few of these towns and we could deliver the food by air. We did not fully understand what the internal situation was in Somalia. We did not pay any attention to that.

Q: On your part, where did you get your information? Whom were you talking to?

THEROS: Calling the desk. Calling African Affairs in the Department.

Somalia had only recently become an issue for the Department as well. So there had not been a lot of focus on it. Martin Chesses was then the Deputy Assistant Secretary for that part of Africa—a good friend of mine—and we'd talk about it a lot. No one in the bureaucracy really wanted to get involved in Somalia. So, as I say, I think it was in November of '91, we flew the first air shipments in; I went in with General Hoar to a couple of places to see what … We did not distribute the food. We just turned the food over to the NGOs that were in place, the idea being that the convoys were being taken by the bandits. The convoys would bring food from the coast. So if we could deliver it directly, we would avoid the dangers of convoys. The bandits adjusted quickly. They just started moving into the towns and taking the food from the NGOs at the distribution points in the warehouse.

Q: Were we at that point talking to NGOs quickly and putting them in the planning?

THEROS: They were there working and functioning. We were told to go support at that point.

Q: How did that work? I mean the liaison.

THEROS: Almost all the NGOs were headquartered in Nairobi. So we flew to Nairobi, we sat; we had meetings with the NGOs in Nairobi, working mostly through the Embassy and through the military liaison office in the Embassy in Nairobi.

Q: To point out, we did not have diplomatic relations with Somalia then.

THEROS: No. We had had that very spectacular rescue of Jim Bishop. Do you remember that?

Q: I've interviewed Jim. I have it on tape.

THEROS: Yes.

Q: So as far as we were concerned this was enemy country.

THEROS: It was terra incognita. It was the badlands. The hole-in-the-wall gang was out there someplace.

Q: I don't mean to interrupt, but do talk about the relationship early on and how it developed with the NGOs.

THEROS: The NGOs at this point were extremely happy to talk to us because we were promising to deliver food directly into the distribution centers. As I said, the principal problem was that food was coming in either by truck convoy from Kenya or from the Port of Mogadishu and most of it disappeared before it ever got to the distribution center. The bandits would come; they'd stop them. The bandits were actually taxing this. They figured ninety percent tax was about right. They weren't killing people; they weren't taking the vehicles away, except occasionally, because they knew that if they did too much damage to the NGOs then there would be no more food coming in. The international humanitarian supply was feeding the chaos. I don't even want to call it a civil war; it was just bandits run amuck throughout most of the country. But it was being fed and financed by the international humanitarian assistance, very little of which was getting to anybody beyond the bandits.

So again, I don't remember the dates right now, but just after the New Year President Bush, the elder, said we have to go in; the pressure is great. At that point there had been consultations between CENTCOM because we were beginning to acquire some knowledge of what was going on. I can't say that CENTCOM was terribly enthusiastic about getting involved, but it was a general agreement that the airlift had been a failure, that we had gotten the stuff in but that didn't do anybody any good—it was still being stolen—and that some form of security needed to be set up fairly quickly. The order that came down from—well, it's more complicated than this, but essentially it was, "Provide security for food supplies." Nothing more than that. "And do it now."

The Marines were the first ashore. Actually the French were the first. The French got in faster than anybody else did. They came out of Djibouti, airlifted a force in.

I need to go back. In the period between December and February, when we saw that the intervention was coming and that it would be an international intervention that would call for allied support, CENTCOM became a focus of coordination. Now keep in mind that

most of the people coming in that would be providing troops were not countries that were in the CENTCOM area of responsibility. There's the Europeans, I think the Australians; the Indians came in later; they didn't come in at that point. So what we were having was this constant stream of attachés coming down from Washington to Tampa to MacDill Air Force Base to talk about how intervention would be structured. It was interesting. We didn't have so much reluctance on the part of foreigners to come down, but rather a tremendous reluctance on the part of foreigners to be put under foreign command. It was an interesting byplay. The Greeks had a military medical team with security that they were prepared to give us, about 250 to 300 men. Initially we proposed to put them under the Italians; they absolutely refused, their argument being, "We beat them in 1940; we're not going to be under their command now." So then we took it one step further and we started talking about putting them under the Egyptians, and that was a non-starter. In the meantime the Greeks went and cut a deal with the French to become part of the French intervention force that would come into Somalia. And this happened for a lot of different countries as people were jockeying as to who was to do what.

And one fine day we decided that the intervention would occur. The first people on the ground were the French. The French got a legion unit into central Somalia—and the French stayed away from Mogadishu, by the way, the whole time they were there—but they went into some of the small towns and began to occupy some of the small towns. We came next; the Italians and the Brits fell in behind us, and then we began to get forces from other countries. What was interesting is that the forces from other countries that came in were not prepared to take any risks. They just kept piling up on Mogadishu airport. So Mogadishu airport had more troops per square foot than any place in the world for a time. But the Europeans mostly were scattered all through the country. The Belgians came. They were a formidable force.

The agreement was that we'd just divide the country up into sectors and everybody would guarantee the free flow of food supplies in their sector. It immediately changed the dynamics of the situation. What had been ninety percent stolen and ten percent getting through flipped, overnight. It became ten percent stolen and ninety percent getting through. The only stuff that was getting stolen was from a few of the NGOs that, for reasons of principal, refused military escorts—and they were being stolen.

There was one sort of macabre incident involving the Belgians. There was one group—I forget which of the NGOs it was—that had refused Belgian escort coming out of Kismayo in the south; so the Belgians followed both airplanes at a discreet distance and sure enough it got knocked over by a bandit group which stalked the NGOs, took all the food, and drove off into the savannah. They then ran into another bandit group who tried to take the food away from them—food now becoming somewhat scarce for the bandits. So the Belgians waited until the two groups were locked in combat and then swooped down on them and killed everybody. Literally decimated them. Chased them all the way to the Ethiopian border. And that made a big difference.

All of a sudden food was getting through and a tremendous change came about in Somalia, something that made the troops feel very good—made everybody feel very

good. The Somali civil society began to reemerge on its own. Cops would go and put on their uniforms and come outside directing traffic again. The mayors would come out and dust off their offices and open for business. The judges would set up. All the local administration would begin to pop up all over, especially in the small towns and villages. It was popping up very quickly. People went back to work immediately, as quickly as they could. We were very popular. I was with one Marine detachment going through a small town and we were stopped by a horde of women trying to give the troops fruits and vegetables, and these were people who had basically been starving a few weeks before.

This stage of the intervention was going reasonably well. The problem is that Washington felt uncomfortable that there was no political objective. The only objective was getting food through. And it was working. The food was coming through and outside of Mogadishu civil society was reasserting itself; the towns and villages were standing up, the police force was coming up, the bandits were dead or running. We were disarming people at the heavy weapons level. You can't collect small arms, but we were disarming people at that level right …

The Washington Establishment got involved in the idea of nation building. How do we restore a failed society? I was not part of the circle in Washington who was doing the designing of how to do it, but several factors were involved.

One was we had to do nation building, but we couldn't devote any resources to it. There was a tremendous political need to get American forces out of Somalia, early. It also became very clear that if American forces were to leave Somalia, everybody else would leave too. So we had to find some balance between an American presence that would keep others in, but no presence that would satisfy us politically. So we ended up that the American presence there would be a headquarters for administrative staff in Mogadishu, troops for self-defense, and a Marine and Special Forces unit sitting offshore in case the need would arise, and this would be cover enough for other foreign countries to begin contributing troops. India and Pakistan were prepared to contribute significant numbers of forces and it built up to about 30,000 to 35,000 troops, which would have been a nice handy number to keep this up.

At that point Washington made the decision, which I think was a mistake—the decision was that the whole political structure of the country had to be rebuilt. We had to call a conference of tribal leaders or something in Mogadishu, ignoring the fact that three-quarters of the country was reconstituting itself on its own without much help. The other decision that we acquiesced in CENTCOM—it was a mistake that we acquiesced—was that the political leadership for the political negotiation to be restructuring Somalia would be provided by the United States in the person of John Turnbull Howe, retired U.S. Navy admiral who had once been Assistant Secretary of State for Political-Military Affairs, who would be the UN's proconsul on the ground. Then we had to find somebody else to be the military commander. And since there were no U.S. combats troops on the ground the U.S. decided that need not be enough. We then set criteria in Central Command, which, as I said, later I had participated in this decision but it turned out to be a serious mistake.

We decided that the commander of the forces on the ground had to be a three-star general from a Muslim army that had a structure above corps level. The problem—only the following Muslim armies have a corps big enough to have a corps: Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Iran, Pakistan, Turkey and Indonesia. Egypt was unacceptable to the Somalis. They have a long, painful history, which I don't fully understand in which you mention Egyptians to a Somali and the eyes roll back and he starts frothing at the mouth. Indonesia was not interested. They made that very clear from the beginning. Pakistan was interested but since India was a major troop contributor the Pakistanis told us that under no circumstances would they permit an Indian commander and India would not permit a Pakistani troop commander. The United States found Syria, Iran, or Iraq unacceptable. And this left only Turkey as the commander. And this caused us problems, which directly led to the episode of Blackhawk Down.

One is the Turks had made only a minimal contribution of three hundred troops with instructions to keep them out of harm's way. The three hundred troops that they had given us were only at the Mogadishu airport. Secondly, the Turkish army is not structured for international command. It is a very much ordered again from the top, and goes down. If you tell the battalion commander in the Turkish army to go take a hill, there are only two acceptable answers; One is they've taken the hill, or two, the battalion commander is dead. There's no feedback. There's no dialogue from top to bottom in the Turkish army. And this was a man who was now command of multi-national forces, and the large multi-national force—the Pakistanis, the Italians, the French, the British; all sorts of people. Jonathon Howe was also a problem because John Howe was a detail man; and John Howe fixes upon an issue and then worries it to death. He's part bull terrier.

Our issue was that Mohamed Aidid was the problem. He was the problem interfering with the reconstitution of the government.

Q: Why don't you explain who he was?

THEROS: Mohamed Aidid was a tribal leader of the largest tribe in central Somalia, including Mogadishu. He felt that he should be head of new Somalia and we felt that this would not be a democratic approach to new Somalia and that he was unacceptable to other tribal leaders, but he was very powerful in Mogadishu.

Jonathon Howe fixed upon getting rid of Mohamed Aidid as the solution to all of the political problems. Jonathon Howe's, in my view, mistaken approach to fixing Somalia's political problems and General Bir, the Turkish commander's lack of backdrop for running a multinational force, sort of converged into a disaster. Bir would give instructions to the international forces and never really integrated the fact that the French commander and the Italian commander and the British commander would call Paris, Rome, or London if they thought there was anything dodgy about their instructions before executing them. This came to a head when a Pakistani unit got in trouble and started losing some troops. Instructions were given to the Italians to go support them—rather detailed instructions that the Italians didn't like because they would send them

through a route through which they might take casualties, fighting their way there. They went to Rome; Rome told them, "Exercise your best judgment." Italian best judgment was to go around the problem—around the obstacle and go pick up the Pakistanis—and in all this time, time elapsed and the Pakistanis took some heavy casualties. When the Italians finally showed up the Pakistanis were very upset, let me tell you. Everybody was mad at Bir. So the command structure—Bir's command of forces in Somalia—was beginning to fritter away.

Q: Well now Central Command

THEROS: Was no longer in the loop.

Q: I was going to say.

THEROS: We controlled the forces offshore.

Q: You were observing the Somalis.

THEROS: Yes, we controlled the forces offshore.

Q: Did you see the problem developing or did you understand that there was a problem at the time?

THEROS: We didn't understand how big a problem it would be. What we didn't understand was that Jonathon Howe would pursue Aidid with sort of this modem maniacal approach and that Bir didn't have control of his forces—and when we did understand it and began to tell Washington that this wasn't going to work, Washington's response was, "Well, see if you can reduce our commitment even further." General Montgomery was Bir's deputy, a fairly unhappy man sitting at headquarters in Mogadishu surrounded by a very small number of U.S. troops and lots of foreign troops. He provided the staff structure for Bir, but not the command structure for Bir. A lot of the foreign forces that were there were too small as units. They were not units; they worked together but couldn't coordinate properly with two or three big forces. The only big force in Mogadishu were the Pakistanis, because we kept the Indians elsewhere.

This may have been just about the time I was leaving, the debacle with Mohamed Aidid: Jonathon Howe kept trying to kill Mohamed Aidid. He decided this was the solution, to kill or capture. Everything that led to Blackhawk Down …

Q: You better explain what Blackhawk Down is.

THEROS: This was an operation, and later a movie, to kill or capture Mohamed Aidid and his top tribal leaders in the hopes that this would then cause the political situation in Somalia to settle down. It was to be executed by American Special Forces, or Delta unit—actually it wasn't Delta; it was an American Special Forces unit—that was to go in and take down this building, capture Mohamed Aidid, capture the other tribal leaders, and

extricate themselves quickly. Several things went wrong, all of which led finally to military disaster: One, that Aidid wasn't there. There was some evidence he was never there. Two, is we didn't achieve the necessary amount of shock among the Somalis to permit us to get in and grab the tribal leaders without resistance.

We underestimated the willingness of thousands of Somalis and thousands of Aidid's tribesmen in Mogadishu to grab their machine guns and run out and attack us. We also underestimated the resourcefulness of some of the Somalis. They had actually rigged anti-tank rockets so they could shoot down helicopters with them and they shot down three helicopters. At first we didn't ask for help from General Bir and the international force and when we did it was too late; Bir had problems communicating the rescue order to his Pakistanis, the Pakistanis didn't want to roll into the middle of what they saw as a trap without adequate intelligence, and overall when it was over we had eighteen American dead who were not forces under Bir's command—these were the offshore forces. Eighteen American dead, a large number wounded, several destroyed helicopters—and all of this on CNN, on television. At that point President Clinton took the decision to bail out of Somalia; followed, I must say, by the rest of the international forces about as fast as they could.

It was a good example of—how do I phrase this?—we don't do the coordination for the military in the diplomatic and the political very well anymore. We used to do this well through about World War II. I mean maybe we'd get in a bad cause—a lot of the interventions in Central America and the Caribbean and so forth, but at least we did it well. There was a chain of command; the Ambassador was in charge. The military came under his, if not a direct command, at least there was a clear line as to why the U.S. government was doing it, what the U.S. Ambassador wanted to accomplish, and what the military forces were at his disposal to accomplish the political objective. In Somalia we didn't have that.

Q: You were in Central Command there and you left before this…

THEROS: Just before it happened, yes.

Q: Was there developing a feeling within Central Command at that point of, "God, we just go into this sort of thing," or, "How can we do it better?"

THEROS: We were happy to be rid of it as a problem. It had been taken away from us as a problem. We had larger fish to fry, primarily in the Persian Gulf. The diversion of resources to Somalia—where resources that we wouldn't have been given if we didn't have Somalia, so they weren't being taken away from something else—and we pretty much solved the logistics problems.

Q: Well now let's look at the Central Command. Where were your trouble spots and potential trouble spots?

THEROS: Iraq, Iran.

Q: Well Iraq was what at this point?

THEROS: Iraq was still seen as a real threat. I'd say three-quarters of our planning concerned how do we stop Iraqi revanchism and one-quarter was how do we inhibit the Iranians from throwing their weight around. There was some other small stuff involved, but that was basically the two issues that consumed the Central Command.

Q: Was there the feeling that we had not finished the Gulf War in 1991?

THEROS: Not particularly. The feeling was that we accomplished our mission in 1991. Our mission was to evict the Iraqis from Kuwait. We had done that and we had done it very well and at very low cost. There had been mostly benefit that accrued to us, in terms of access in the region, from that. The only unhappy development of the Gulf War is that we were now firmly embedded in an ambivalent Saudi Arabia. We were firmly embedded in an ambivalent nature in ambivalent Saudi Arabia.

The Saudis really didn't know what to do with us. They didn't know if they wanted to keep us or if they wanted us to leave. And different signals kept going up all the time. The Saudis, for example, would permit almost any degree of air and naval activity but would permit no ground forces activity, nor would they permit the pre-positioning, the warehousing of ground forces equipment in Saudi Arabia. The Saudi air bases were very good from a strategic and tactical point of view. The presence in Saudi Arabia was very damaging to the U.S. Air Force.

I'll explain how the U.S. Air Force lives. The U.S. Air Force lives on bases. Bases are encapsulated structures where you have your family, you have your PX; you have everything that is needed to provide a decent standard of life for everybody in that base, including the pilots. When the airplanes go away in a time of peace, they go away for short times for a training period and then they come back again. It's like a two-week business trip. So all support—all the morale support, the physical support, and the family support—is encapsulated within established bases. Now, for the first time, the Air Force had to maintain significant forces in a place where they couldn't bring families for a long period of time, in a non-war situation. So they don't have the adrenalin of war; you don't have all the other things that keep morale high.

Three or four months in fairly isolated miserable conditions in Saudi Arabia was not what pilots had signed up for. When you go away for three or four months, the pilot comes back to the younger ones; you've got a problem with your wife, you've got a problem with your kids, things have gone bad at home. You've got full employment in the United States, and airlines are hiring pilots right and left. As a consequence, pilot retention rates were dropping. The U.S. Air Force was hemorrhaging pilots and the reason for this hemorrhaging of pilots was the deployment to Saudi Arabia. That probably consumed a great deal more. In fact, we worried and talked that issue much more than we ever discussed Somalia, for example.

We did a lot of planning on how do you defend Kuwait against Iraq, the assumption being that the Iraqis were going to come back, and we did a lot of planning on defending the Gulf States from Iraq. Beyond that, there weren't really any particularly serious issues on our plates. We spent a lot of time working with British and French relations. It was an interesting contrast between the two. The British were politically cooperative and militarily non-cooperative. The French were militarily cooperative and politically non-cooperative. What it boiled down to was that within the general parameters of the French officer's instructions, if we asked him for something he would give it to us and they would give it to us without a murmur; they would give it to us with enthusiasm. We had a ship break down some place on a particular watch in Iraq patrol. We asked both the British and the French if they could replace that ship temporarily; the British went through this long, complicated kabuki dance to get London's permission on whether it was permitted or not; the French sent a ship. That was their response rather than referring it to Paris.

At the political level, if it was something new Paris would generally either reject it or try and put some sort of condition on it that Washington would find unacceptable. Generally the British would tell their people to cooperate with us with some reservations. But the British military would always refer things back up to London before they would respond positively or negatively to a request. A large part of our time was spent talking to the French and the British about how we could cooperate in the region, since we all seemed to share the same objectives at the time.

Q: Here you are, an Arabist, and you've had your time dealing with the Saudis. What were you getting from our Embassy and your own contacts? What could you pass on?

THEROS: Of principal concern to the embassies throughout the region was that conduct of foreign policy in the region was being turned over to the military. It was being turned over to the military de facto. It was not a conscious political decision to do so, nor was the U.S. military conducting policy consciously. It typically was the U.S. military had a series of objectives in the region—base rights, pre-positioning, access, communications, and so forth—and nobody in the Department of State cared enough to look into it. We couldn't get people to volunteer to go out to do base rights negotiations. Generally it was turn it over to the Embassy and let the Embassy do it.

There was a feeling of a malaise in the Department—that the Department was uninterested in the region and was simply not issuing instructions to the embassies to take over—because the man who has an objective will always be stronger than the man who doesn't have an objective. So embassies were left to sort things out with their local military, and generally if you disagreed with your local military—let me say it in two tiers: Most of the time if you disagreed with your local military, they'd give in locally; they wouldn't push it. It was very rare that you'd have a situation where the military would insist on something, even if the Ambassador didn't want it to happen. And usually that happened when a personal animosity developed between the Ambassador and the senior military at the time. On those relatively few occasions, however, when the military and the Embassy escalated back to Washington to resolve a difference of opinion, the

Department of State would generally not weigh in. It was very rare that the Department of State would at the highest level tell the Department of Defense to back off. And it wasn't sort of that they would kill it; they simply didn't care. The general view you had is we didn't have care. Resources were dropping in the Gulf. Remember, this was at a period of time when—I blame Jim Baker for this—Baker agreed to open twenty-two new embassies and consulates while taking a cut in personnel and budget in the State Department. A lot of resources were sucked up from us and they erased embassies rapidly from places like Europe where theoretically we had a lot more people to suck them up from.

The embassies were grossly understaffed. My relationship with the Embassy was really good. In each case the Embassy saw me as somebody they could go to, somebody who could work with the military, and I had a good relationship with General Hoar and the staff. I would say with the embassies most of my time was spent making sure that both sides understood each other and that I gave good advice to the military, and the military generally would take it.

Q: During the time you were there, in the aftermath of the Gulf War, were we looking at Afghanistan and Pakistan and fundamentalism as being something that would really concern us, at that point?

THEROS: Islamic fundamentalist terrorism was not yet so much the issue as was the arguments between states. Iraq and Iran were bigger threats than the terrorists. Afghanistan was in our AOR, but "out of sight, out of mind." Our issues with Afghanistan were, again, containing it, preventing trouble from spilling over. We started a long debate with the European Bureau on where would the Stans belong militarily. We felt that the central Asian states should now belong to the CENTCOM area of responsibility, and take them away from that of the European area. I have to say we were the only people who felt that way. The embassies in those countries wanted to deal with Europe; they didn't want to be associated with us. Sometimes I had the impression that they were actually encouraging the local governments that they would rather deal through Europe.

Q: Well I think a lot of that is cultural. I mean within the State Department culture.

THEROS: Also, a lot of the Stans were still being run by ex-Soviets whose ties went back to Moscow. Of course all the roads ran to Moscow; all the telephone lines ran to Moscow.

Q: How about down in Africa, particularly the Congo, Rwanda, Burundi.

THEROS: None of those were in our area.

Q: That was European, wasn't it?

THEROS: The CENTCOM AOR was Kenya, Somalia, Djibouti, Sudan, Egypt, and

Eritrea.

Q: How was Djibouti being used at that time?

THEROS: It was exclusively French. We would drop in from time to time and get a good meal, really fine wines—have dinner with the French, lunch with the French—and we'd be gone. We would generally talk to the Djibouti defense ministry with the French present and it was usually a very pleasant meeting that would end up in dinner.

Q: Did India fall in your AOR?

THEROS: India was on the other side of the AOR. India was the Pacific Command. If you'd ask my opinion, which I offer even when people didn't ask my opinion, is we shouldn't have been looking into expanding the AOR into central Asia, we should have been looking at including the entire Indian Ocean basin in the CENTCOM AOR. That made sense. We actually tried a couple proposals and we suggested that we sort of divide Africa down the middle and split it from North to South; East Africa belongs to Central Command and then the entire littoral, all the way to Australia, belongs to Central Command. Pacific Command fought this, needless to say, tooth and nail. We were not prepared to take eastern Africa without the rest of the Indian Ocean AOR. I think the European Command would have been happy to give us that part of Africa they didn't concern themselves with too much—but having a single unified command, including naval forces. Remember, the only water at the time in Central Command's purview was the Red Sea in the Persian Gulf. So once it came out of the straits at Aden or at Hormuz, you were in the Pacific Command. All of the water that bordered us there belonged to Pacific Command. And Pacific Command's interests were not in the Indian Ocean. The Pacific Command's interests were in the Far East, particularly the northern part of the Pacific because they were still in the old Cold War mode.

Q: How did we view Iran during this period of time?

THEROS: Iran was a significant threat and the liberalization of Iran had not yet begun. Iran was still viewed as a country whose interests were very hostile to American interests. We generally agreed that linking Iran and Iraq as dual containment was a political mistake in Washington, but it was sacrosanct. We actually felt it would be easier to deal with the Iraqis than with the Iranians at that time. But Washington had locked itself into Iraq and Iran being two peas in the same pod. They're both the enemy; they will be treated equally bad. Policy towards Iraq is the same as the policy towards Iran. This was all dual containment. And they were not receptive to suggestions that maybe we ought to modify this. Again there came out a particular ideology developing out of Washington that this was a policy that we had arrived at, that a lot of bureaucratic blood had been spilled getting there, and no one is going to reopen that particular dossier.

Q: We'll stop at this point and we'll pick this up the next time in 1993 when you left Central Command. Is there anything else we should cover?

THEROS: Let me think. We had the issue of the AOR. A little bit of Pakistan.

Q: We'll talk about Pakistan and you also might say what did we see Iran as a threat as? And one other question I'd like to ask as an Arabist, there was an article in today's Washington Post saying that there has been a diminution in a number of Arabists because it has been given a bad name over the years, because they're too closely identified with Arab interests. I'd like you to comment on …

THEROS: That greatly understates the problem. I was just in Baghdad, by the way.

Q: Yes, talk about this within the Foreign Service and all.

THEROS: Okay.

Q: Patrick, you want to talk about a couple things. I guess Pakistan was one of the things. I've just finished reading a book on Pakistan. I must say it sounds like an absolutely dysfunctional state. How did you see it?

THEROS: As a state I'm not sure that it's really dysfunctional. It has a lot of internal problems. The military apparatus works quite well. As a matter of fact, it's probably the apparatus that works the best, and, in fact, there's a great deal of money in Pakistan. A lot of Pakistanis are very successful in business, there's a fair amount of Pakistani exports. Pakistan, as an economy, is poor. It just has a lot of problems, but the problems are the problems of the state, not of the country overall.

Q: You were looking at the military-to-military thing. I've heard that what we did in Afghanistan to use Pakistan as sort of our cat's paw, or filter, has compounded our problems with the mujahidin —the fundamentalists. We've pumped a lot of money in weapons, which is still floating around there, and greatly strengthened—and correct me if I'm wrong, but I think it's ISI which is their intelligence service, which has become almost an army within an army, with a very strong fundamentalist element to it. How did we view that at the time?

THEROS: Well, to begin with, Pakistanis have inherited a lot of the British view of the world. While the threat of Russia is across the Himalayas—across the Hindu Kush, the great game was still being played in Pakistan. Can you keep the Russians away from the borders of the subcontinent? So that issue tended to pervade Pakistan's thinking. Secondly, the Russians had cultivated the Indians; the Indians had cultivated the Russians, so the Russians were the allies of India, which was Pakistan's mortal enemy.

I shouldn't exaggerate this, but Afghanistan as a whole was very important to Pakistan's economy; it was access to central Asia. Border crossings were important. The border area was not controlled. There were goods coming across. So the Pathan and the Pashto peoples occupied both sides of the border—the majority in Afghanistan, or at least a plurality—and certainly a very significant part of the population in the northwest frontier of Pakistan. So Pakistan saw itself as having a lot of interest in Afghanistan and its

interests were directly threatened when the Soviets overran it. In part, as I said, because Afghanistan intrinsically was more important—the great game was still being played for the Pakistanis and India was the enemy, and the Soviet Union was the ally of India. If you look at the Indian armed forces, it's almost entirely Soviet equipment. At the time, New Delhi had very close political and military ties in the Soviet Union. So the Pakistanis would have probably tried on their own to make life for the Soviets uncomfortable in Afghanistan. I don't think we created a Pakistan … we didn't use Pakistan as a cat's paw. We were allies with Pakistan.

What the Pakistanis found was that in dealing with disparate Afghans, the only unifying force was Islam, and the Pakistanis themselves are sort of the Irish of Catholicism—say the Irish or the Italians of Catholicism; they take their Islam very seriously. The word Pakistan has a …

Q: Well it's the Islamic state of Pakistan.

THEROS: Yes. And, after all, it was religion that partitioned India, not ethnic origins or politics or economics. So the Pakistanis take their religion seriously. The Arabs looked at the Pakistanis slightly shocked at Pakistani piety. Arabs are divided into those who are jealous of the Pakistanis for being so pious and those who are horrified by the Pakistanis for being so pious. So it was easy for the Pakistanis to pursue the religious element in unifying the Afghans, who after all didn't really like each other very much—probably disliked each other only slightly less than they disliked the Soviets.

When we came in to help them, I don't think we set out … I think the Pakistanis were probably more the people who led us down that path than us. We went in there to support the resistance movement against the Soviets. The resistance movements that worked were the religiously based—the Islamic religious movements, not the ethnic ones. They also proved very useful in other ways because not only did you have Pakistani support going into Afghanistan, but a lot of other Muslim countries—the UAE, Saudi Arabia, and others—tossed a tremendous amount of assistance into Afghanistan. If they would not have done so, they wouldn't have gotten the volunteers; they wouldn't have gotten the money, if Afghanistan was not seen as a Muslim insurrection against the Soviet Union. It was the one unifying factor, so it was easy to fall into that trap.

Q: During the time when you were the POLAD the Soviets were out …

THEROS: Actually, by the time I was the POLAD the Soviets were gone.

Q: Yes, that's what I mean. So the Soviets were out but who controls Afghanistan was still up in the air. Were we looking at this, without using 20/20 hindsight, saying, "You know, we better watch out for these fundamentalists that we're supporting." Did we care?

THEROS: No, I don't think we cared very much. It was a tragedy in Afghanistan, but the tragedy was a mixed tragedy. For example, it was certainly making life unpleasant for the

Iranians, but that was a plus; the Pathans and the Pakistanis sort of had their border under control—mind you, there were three to four million Afghan refugees in Pakistan. It was no longer on the screen in Washington—and I keep going back to this: if it's not on the screen in Washington, then Washington doesn't care—and the people in the field are told not to care.

Q: Central Command was not looking at Afghanistan/Pakistan as being the next place to start worrying about?

THEROS: No. Our issues with Pakistan were India, Kashmir, the possibility of war, the Pakistani nuclear proliferation and their relationship with China, their relationship with Iran. Periodically someone kept trying to peddle the idea that the Pakistanis were developing a bomb so they could give it to the Iranians. It's a logical synapse.

Q: Okay. I was looking at you, incredulous. But that's the Middle East, so you get paranoid and illogical.

THEROS: Usually these ideas were being peddled around the think tanks in Washington inside the Beltway. The Pakistanis were building a nuclear weapon because the Indians had nuclear weapons.

Q: Were we looking at this realistically and saying, "Well the Paks are going to get a nuclear weapon and we can huff and we can puff but we really can't stop it?"

THEROS: There was still a determination to keep them from getting it. I don't think that at the conscious level anybody in the United States government had conceded that they were going to get one, no matter what we did. I think there were still enough people who honestly believed that we might be able to prevent them from getting a nuclear weapon.

If one is to criticize any part of this, it's that it was all stick and no carrot. I think the Pakistanis would have been willing to trade a nuclear capability for a sort of a menu of American favors; we tended to view the nonproliferation effort as entirely, "Let's punish the Pakistanis so they don't get a nuclear weapon."

Q: By this time were we looking at Pakistan as being a place to avoid over arming and military commitments?

THEROS: Well we didn't have much. Remember, we had stopped all military assistance to Pakistan. We were still holding—whatever the number it was, fifty—Pakistani F-16s, I think, which were still sitting some place rusting. The Pakistanis by this time were either producing indigenous weapons or buying them from the Chinese or the French or other people. Sanctions really don't work unless the country is on its knees before you impose the sanctions.

Q: Yes.

THEROS: Because the countries will always decide what's in their priority, and arming against India was always a first priority and it was not something that the Pakistani public rebelled against. And there were no carrots. No carrots in Kashmir. I'm not saying there should have been carrots, simply that if you approach the question of why the Pakistanis want the bomb, the Pakistanis wanted the bomb because the Indians have got the bomb and the Indians are militarily stronger. So they're looking at it, that this is an equalizer.

Q: In your position, were you sitting down and writing thought pieces, position papers, on Pakistan and our involvement there?

THEROS: Not as mine, per se. I didn't see it was my job in particular to be writing my paper for the CINC. My job was to be writing for the CINC what Washington thought or helping the CINC staff write their position papers.

Q: Was this a concern?

THEROS: Yes, but usually it became a concern just before we went to visit Pakistan, or if there was something happening that would affect us. There were no great Pakistan-Indian crises while I was in Central Command. The insurgency in Kashmir sort of sputtered on in its normal bloody fashion. The Afghan civil war was confined to Afghanistan. The Taliban first began to make their appearance when I was in Central Command and the impression that they were Pakistan's men didn't really bother anybody. It was sort of, "Let somebody win; it doesn't matter who it is, and if it happens to be the men who belong to Pakistan or the men who wanted to run, so much the better."

Q: Did we see Iran at that point, having suffered quite badly in the Iran-Iraq War, as a resurgent Iran, which was going to be a main concern, or not?

THEROS: In terms of an analysis of threat to U.S. interests, Iraq was seen as the more capable threat, Iran as the longer-lasting threat—largely because there were more Iranians, because their border was longer, because they could affect more things. The Iranians were still seen as exporters of Islamic revolution. The Iraqi threat was primarily, "Get up on your tanks, crank them up, and drive across the border" type of threat. Iraq was not seen as an exporter of revolution. Iraq was not seen, for example, by anybody that I remember at the time as associated with terrorism. Iran was. Iran was clearly a terrorist threat.

Q: You're looking at it sort of from the Foreign Service viewpoint. Were you seeing that Iran was still an unsettled revolution, that it was not a state that was settled on one course?

THEROS: Iran was seen paradoxically as the most democratic state in the Middle East. A limited democracy, but one in which its population had a greater say in the running of state—the running of the government—than anybody else did. There was a general consensus that the Iranian resistance, the Iranian opposition, didn't amount to a hill of beans. There was some small hope that the Iraqi opposition was important, but nobody

seriously regarded the mujahidin, as I recall, as anything other than a bunch of thugs running around killing people. They had been killing Americans before. So the Iranians had, in the view of most people in the region, something approaching a representative government. It was certainly a government that was responsive to its population.

Q: You were saying they, as a state, focused on anti-Americanism.

THEROS: That was sort of the unifying philosophy of the revolution. Iran was seen as a state that had a plan. The plan was the export of revolution, secondarily. Primarily it was the state that was intending to establish hegemony in the Gulf. It was more dangerous than others like Iraq because it actually had a plan—it had thought this through—and most of the tools at Iran's disposal were political and subversive, rather than military. We didn't much think that the Iranians would cross the border in large numbers and invade anybody, but we did see the Iranians as the ultimate fifth column.

Q: Did we have any feel that there might be a potential military-to-military connection? I'm not talking about a big revolution, but so many of the military have been trained in the United States, hoping to pick this up at some point, to get a more sane policy, or not?

THEROS: Two problems: The one is I don't think that the senior military were the men who had—most weren't left anymore; secondly, it was a military that had now been through the baptism of fire of the Iran-Iraq War. So it was a new military. There might have been some of the old men there. Third, we were seen by the Iranian military, in the latter years, as an ally of Iraq—and in many ways we were. American intelligence, assistance, and stuff like that had gone to the Iraqis and we had made no secret of it. We made no secret of regarding Iran as at least as big an enemy as they regarded us. So I don't think the average patriotic Iranian saw the United States as an alternative to the mullahs. "I may not like the mullahs," but that's different than, "I want the Americans now to get rid of them." I don't think anyone thought that.

Q: By the time you left, the Soviets were sort of no longer a factor, really?

THEROS: No, they were falling apart. When I left Central Command, the big issue, with regard to the former Soviet Union, was whether or not we could increase the boundaries of Central Command by incorporating the Stans. We thought it was a peachy-keen idea; the European Bureau did not and neither did the Ambassadors in the Stans.

Q: Well they, of course, all had come out of the Soviet Union. But from a Central Command point of view it made much more sense.

THEROS: Yes, and ultimately they ended up there; that's where they are now.

Counterterrorism

Q: Yes. Well then, you left in '93. Whither?

THEROS: I went to the Department and there were two deputy coordinators for counter-terrorism, myself and Barbara Bodine. Phil Wilcox was the coordinator. He left shortly thereafter. It was sort of funny because the Department neglected to tell which one of us, Barbara or myself, that we were there as acting. So we didn't actually come to blows over this, but we spent an on and off, certain amount of back and forth, over who was really in charge of this place. Barbara won most of the time, but she was older in the job as well.

Q: How long did that last?

THEROS: Two years. We got a new coordinator in and then he didn't come and it sort of went on and off. The "who was in charge at counter-terrorism" at the time was somewhat funny.

Q: Well that went on for two years?

THEROS: On and off. It was Wilcox, Wilcott, and somebody else was coordinator for a time. We even had one person in for a time but he was never formally put into that position.

Q: So this went from '93 to '95?

THEROS: Right.

Q: Other than trying to figure out who was on top, what were you all doing? What were your concerns?

THEROS: Several concerns. There was at the time, some place out there, a presidential directive that said that the Department of State was responsible for all U.S. counter-terrorist activities abroad, and the Department of Justice for all U.S. counter-terrorist activities in the United States. But we were the coordinators, not the bosses. So I would say probably half our time was spent on the bureaucratics of maintaining our position there. Others would say, "Well, you're supposed to coordinate, but you're not really in charge." We'd say, "Yes, we are in charge." The NSC would periodically try and get in charge but they didn't have the depth to be in charge. So there was a certain amount of that game that Washington plays all the time as to who was in charge of this. That was sort of the dumb side of our job, beating off contenders for the position.

The smart side of our job was that the Department of State had certain institutions in the apparatus to conduct counter-terrorism, and they varied, from the annual magazine that we put out, Patterns of Terrorism; we administered the ATAP, the anti-terrorism systems program; we had control of a budget for research into anti-terrorism related equipment, and we maintained the response team that was supposed to respond to terrorist action abroad, once directed by the President. We would practice the response a lot. I probably went on half a dozen missions to other countries where we would practice the response to a terrorist incident. Sometimes we would do it as a command post exercise in

Washington. I went to Belize; I went to Jordan. I never got to do it in Europe. That always used to bother me.

Q: These responses to terrorism, it sounds purely defensive.

THEROS: No, this was actually how to resolve a terrorist incident. I mean that idea was that an airplane gets hijacked with Americans on board. The Department, the Ambassador, or somebody else, persuades the host country to let us take over the incident. The U.S. military begins to move; the FBI and everybody else is supposed to go out there. The Department of State counter-terrorism response teams were set up to go out there and take charge of the American effort. All the people in the field would report to the Ambassador, but we were the Ambassador's advisors. We were the people who would basically tell the Ambassador what needs to be done and so forth. This was assuming that most Ambassadors didn't have experience.

Q: I think back to the '70s when you had American troops surrounded by Italian troops with the Achille Lauro hijackers sitting on a plane in the circle, and everybody was pointing guns at everybody else. Your idea, I assume, was to make sure this sort of thing didn't happen again.

THEROS: That's right. By and large, I must say, I was pretty happy with the system. It had its normal bureaucratic fumbles; it had its people arguing over who's going to promote so many resources, but by and large I had the impression that if the system was allowed to work properly, it would—that we had practiced it enough and with all the agencies of the U.S. government involved, that the only thing that could upset it would be either a totally unexpected event of massive proportions in the host country, like a war, or interference at the highest levels of the U.S. government by people who didn't know how the system worked.

We actually only had one live test in the two years that I was there, to go abroad. There was the kidnapping of an American in Yemen. Some tribesmen wanted a bridge built and they figured the best way to build it was to kidnap somebody in the Embassy. You know, there's logic there. The Embassy was trying to get him sprung; the failure was getting in the press. Finally, the National Security Council said this has gone far enough. We're going to have to take action ourselves. So the team was put together. I went home, kissed the wife and kids goodbye, got my luggage, and people were converging on Andrews Air Force base. Our airplane was there. All the different agents of the U.S. government were there. I was literally standing at the front door kissing the wife and kids goodbye and the phone rang and they had just released the hostage; we always felt it was the mere threat of sending Theros and his team out.

Q: [Laughs.] As you're looking at this whole response team, you went through, and are still going through it, quite an agonizing look at the system after the September 11, 2001 attack on the World Trade Center in New York; looking at how we're doing things and all that, and one of the things that came up was a sort of bureaucratic one—that there wasn't good sharing of information, not only between agencies, but within agencies.

Were you seeing this?

THEROS: Well, once the crisis started I felt it was pretty good. Whenever we had a crisis. And "crisis" of course covers a variety of … For example, the arrest of Ramzi Yousef (one of the main perpetrators of the 1993 World Trade Center bombing and that of Philippine Airlines Flight 434) in Pakistan was an accident basically. Somebody came in and told us, "I got a secret. Can I collect the reward?" The response to rolling him up, getting an airplane out there, and getting him into that airplane and home, back to the States, went really quite well. I mean there was a lot of screaming over the phone—you know, at midnight, "Why aren't you doing this?" Things like that—but assuming that we put this whole thing together in under thirty-six hours; I did most of it from my house, from a secure phone. Assuming that there's always going to be a certain amount of friction, this thing went very, very well and no one tried to stab anybody else in the back, no one was hiding stuff. We moved this thing quite well.

I think the problem comes in the routine. When there is a crisis people will share information because they understand that there are necks on the line. The problem comes in the routine daily gathering of information in its analysis and dissemination. In Washington information is power; you retain the information. You don't share it because you don't really think that—the matter of it is that no one really thinks that this information is important in the grander scheme of things, but it really important in the bureaucratic sense. So you hang onto it and you use it against the other agencies, the government, or even within the agencies, or often between the different offices. Because, again, information is power; information means I can do things; I can go on to meetings; I can wow the boss; I can take actions; I can do better things with budgets because I have the information. So why the hell should I share it with the guy who would stab me in the back at the first notice? And since the bureaucratic interplay is the most important thing in our lives in Washington, and, as I said, there is a general view that all these threats are theoretical; it's almost a view that they're really in the movies. There are very few people who wake up in the morning with a piece of information and are convinced that real things will happen. That information just exists to help the bureaucrats; it does not exist to do things.

In the lead up to September 11, I don't think there was a crisis. I don't believe anyone treated this like a crisis. A lot of information was held. I would venture the thought that the State Department-CIA relationship was a lot healthier than that between other agencies in the government—not perfect, but healthier. I would go so far as to say that the relationship within the DDO and State Department INR was better than the relationship between the DDO and DDI.

Q: DDO is?

THEROS: The Deputy Director for Operations. The guys who actually run the spies. The DDI is the Deputy Director for Intelligence. They're the ones who do the analysis.

The DDI felt that they should have a monopoly over analysis of information collected by

the DDO; the DDO preferred to give it to the INR generally.

Q: One of the complaints is that the State Department, particularly its consular section, took it in the neck for giving visas to people, and yet as a practical thing the visa operation only works if you've got good information pointing out who are the bad guys.

THEROS: And enough people.

Q: It looks like this didn't work very well. Was this something that was … I'm talking about the time you were there?

THEROS: We didn't focus that much on the consular operation and the visa operation. In part, I must say, if there is a generic failing across the U.S. government, that it couldn't happen here because the nature of American society was such that it wouldn't protect these guys; that the foreign communities in the United States, the immigrant communities in the United States, were so obsessed with having the good life that there was no water in the sea in which these fish could swim; and we generally accepted that.

Q: And to a fairly large extent it works that way.

THEROS: We would go through the visa lookout book. It had become a cash cow. The Department of State decided it was going to automate the visa lookout book, and it did. For about $140 million the system didn't work. It is because we went out and got some consultants and we told them to develop a system just for us. I remember at one point I was talking to a friend of mine who is in the business and when I described what we were looking for he said, "Well, there's off-the-shelf technology that can do it for about ten to twenty million dollars." But we had to do it just for us. And we're always starved for funds and this was when … I'll tell you, one of the worst things that was happening at the time was the aftermath of Jim Baker having announced that not only were we going to staff twenty extra posts, but we would accept a budget cut to play the game. Well at that point everything was broke. Computers were broke and they didn't work right. When I went to Doha, I brought my own computer and took it to the office. We would have a computer for the Ambassador. The official computers we had were a joke.

The idea was that we would make this sort of instantaneously responsive. Remember, the main purpose of the visa lookout book was not terrorists; it's everybody who was ever suspected of anything. When I was in counter-terrorism we wanted to get as many terrorists as possible in the book. Of course its Mohammad bin Abdullah bin Faisal; 14,000 people were named Mohammad bin Abdullah Faisal.

Q: Yes, the idea was Arabic names.

THEROS: Or virtually any other kind of name.

Q: I remember when I was a vice consul in Dhahran and having to deal with Yemeni visa applicants. I listened to where they came from because I felt that that was a lot easier,

and then I'd start going through the Mohammads from a particular part of Yemen.

THEROS: What we needed to make the system more effective was to at least double the number of people on our visa lines. I am a great believer of don't throw money at a problem; you throw people at a problem. When I was in Amman I had three consular officers and an early summer visa line that would stretch around us—a whole city block. That's ridiculous. There were three to five hundred people a day applying for visas and four kids. They were all visa applicants. I used to get mad at them because they would sort of refuse a visa to the obvious candidate—to the man who was no problem at all—and then give visas to people who didn't. But what do you expect?

Q: From the counter-terrorism office in the State Department, what was your view of the FBI? Because they're technically a domestic agency.

THEROS: I spent a lot of time cultivating the FBI in order to keep a bad situation from becoming terrible. The FBI leadership was determined to seize an important role abroad. They were putting people into embassies and they really fought us tooth and nail on the whole question of presidential authority—you know, the letter that goes to Ambassadors that says, "You're boss." The FBI fought us tooth and nail on that.

In one exercise I remember, I was talking to an FBI agent who was on the exercise and he said, "You know, we are not responsible to the President. We are responsible to the law." The way the situation began was he said something about what we were going to do on the exercise and I said, "Not if the Ambassador tells you you can't do it. You're in a foreign country; you're on his turf." "Well, you can't tell me; we'll arrest the Ambassador if he tries to tell us." And I said, "First of all, you're a foreigner in this country," and I said, "Secondly, he's got a presidential letter that says he's your boss as long as you're in the country." And he said, "The FBI doesn't answer to the President. We answer to the law." Whatever that is. There was a certain pervasiveness about this attitude in the FBI and it was sort of dangerous.

Q: How about the Defense Department? Was it DIA, Defense Intelligence Agency?

THEROS: DIA participated in all the meetings, and to be perfectly honest, I don't remember them making much in the way of a contribution.

Q: Of course, they were looking at how many tanks somebody had and that sort of thing, weren't they? Where is the battle?

THEROS: There was a certain security element they controlled. They would participate in our exercises, but the part of the Defense Department that I saw the most were the Special Operating Forces.

Q: These were sending out teams to go and storm a plane or something like that?

THEROS: That's right. Those were the people I saw a lot of. I'd go down to Fort Bragg

once every two months.

Q: How would they respond?

THEROS: They were very responsive.

Q: Well it was kind of fun for them. I mean professionally it's …

THEROS: They also had this sort of—which I had noticed when I was in Central Command —awe of seeing Foreign Service officers. It was like they really felt we knew something, which is always good for the ego.

Q: Yes.

THEROS: By and large, other than a few senior officers in Washington, the relationship with the military was really quite good.

Q: At that time did you have the feeling that the communication problem was pretty well fixed? We've heard about the Grenada thing, where you had to use the telephone to call North Carolina to talk. … Because an awful lot of these operations need pretty damn good communications between say the Ambassador's office in a country and what they're doing, and the whole thing.

THEROS: People were working around it on a small scale. If the Ambassador needed communications, we had, in our airplane, in our team, communications for the Ambassador. We would just go physically put our stuff into the Embassy, so that even if the Ambassador's ordinary communications wouldn't work, ours would. And basically we just gave him a communications package that he didn't have.

Q: Let's be honest about this: Ambassadors vary tremendously. We use the term "Ambassador;" if you have a terrorist situation on a Caribbean island; the chances are you'd have a polo playing political contributor to the Republican or Democratic Party who had no real experience in this sort of thing.

THEROS: I think one of the reasons for this team that would be sent out was that it would give the Ambassador someone on the ground who is senior and respected, with resources, and with direct communication back to Washington. So the assumption was that if you were a good Ambassador, you'd use this, and if you weren't a good Ambassador, you'd be intimidated. Therefore, you wouldn't muck with this man.

Q: In a way you say you never got to Europe, but I would imagine one of the things about Europe would be that the Europeans—I mean almost every country has got their own SWAT teams and all this—and as a practical thing, a bunch of American hotshots, no matter how well trained, are not going to be looked upon with any great relief. I mean, "We got our own guys who can take care of this."

THEROS: That's right, but that's hardly fair. I still want to have an exercise in Europe.

Q: But the thought really was that you're really looking at places that probably aren't well equipped to handle this sort of thing.

THEROS: No, the embassies are big and they have lots of their own communications and so forth, so there's a reason for not doing it there. Nuclear incidents would probably be the only place we might have been useful in the European setting, and we never did a nuclear incident exercise outside the United States.

Q: Did you have responsibility for within the United States? If it happened in the United States, did it cut out the State Department?

THEROS: It didn't cut us out, but we dropped to a subordinated position. The Justice Department was boss.

Q: Were we looking at the use of hijacked airplanes as bombs?

THEROS: No. At some point we thought about it but never followed up the train of thought. I just don't remember it ever being important to us.

Q: Well, of course it's always been around there. It's not something that no one has thought of.

THEROS: But I think a large part of the assumption was that we're pretty good at preventing the hijacking of 747s; you could always highjack a Piper Cub, but it's not going to make a lot of difference. I think where we really fooled ourselves was in the belief that the security was good enough to prevent major airliners from being hijacked.

Logan Airport, I remember, was a constant source of friction. As a matter of fact, when 9/11 took place and I realized that three of the four airplanes were hijacked from Logan, it suddenly dawned on me what the problems at Logan were. Logan was the airport that caused us the most problems with foreigners. They were a bunch of cowboys who roughed people up who would cause …

Q: You're talking about the Immigration …

THEROS: The Immigration, Customs, and Security. It was a really terrible airport. It's true that whenever you have lots of incidents like that, it means that it's a badly run institution and these guys are covering up their incompetence by being tough guys, by being cowboys. So it came as no surprise that the hijackers had used Logan Airport as the way they went most of the time.

After I retired but before 9/11 I went through Logan Airport on a chartered private airplane with the Qatari Ambassador. Normally, no security screens these private airplanes on the not unreasonable assumption the person chartering knows everyone. At

Logan, the security came, stopped us from getting on the airplane and then had dogs paw the Ambassador and lick his briefcase. And they only did this to the Ambassador, not to me! This was clearly an attempt by the clowns who ran Logan to put this "raghead" Ambassador in his place. Of course, this is the perfect storm: incompetent blowhard security is always too stupid to realize what is going on. I really got upset then and I am still angry.

Q: With your Middle Eastern experience, were you taking a look at sort of the breeding grounds for terrorists? You know, the Madrassa, Saudi school, and Pakistan and elsewhere. Was this a matter of concern?

THEROS: No. We were not focused upon Saudi Arabia at all. We were focused on Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Iran, and Sudan. This was the focus. The state sponsors, plus Egypt. This was where the focus was. This is where we believed that most of the terrorists would come from, and if there were terrorists from other countries, they would work through those areas. Osama bin Laden, for example, was a Sudanese problem initially. There was one point in there where we did go and start talking to the Saudis about their problem with the private financing of terrorists and the Saudis were completely uncooperative.

Q: At the time you were doing this, I guess there were countries like Sudan, and obviously Iran and Iraq—and you mentioned Saudi Arabia—just didn't feel any particular incentive to deal with us or they did not want anyone to know what they were doing. In any event, we didn't have good relations with them.

THEROS: I'll give you an example. This is sort of the whole story of putting Sudan on the terrorism list as a good example of how we really didn't have our act together. The Sudanese had been providing succor to some bad guys. The Sudanese religious leader, Hassan al-Turabi, had decided that no Muslim could be refused entry to the Sudan and lots of people were now in Sudan; and we were pressuring the Sudanese to cut this out. We had a lot of information that, really, men who had done bad things elsewhere had now taken refuge in the Sudan. We had less information that people in the Sudan were going out and doing things, but there were still some indications. But it particularly was now a place of refuge, a place of rest; Sudan had become the terrorist rest camp. And we kept pushing the Sudanese to stop this. We must have tried for a year—two years; when I got there we were halfway through the process of beating up on the Sudanese to stop this, to stop this.

The problem, again, was we had a stick and no carrots. The Sudanese had a civil war going in the south; their economy was in shambles; they were on bad terms with the Egyptians—they wanted help with the Egyptians; they were on bad terms with the Ethiopians. We weren't prepared to even engage on any of those subjects, but what we were prepared to do was put them on the terrorism list—the list of sponsors of terrorism—if they didn't close down their borders and throw these men out. And this man would not do so. What he was doing was stupid, but what we were doing was too limited, which was essentially we were promising that we wouldn't punish them but we wouldn't

help them. We really didn't engage with the Sudanese other than to scream at them.

And then, the Washington bureaucracy made it even more difficult.

Q: A country that you haven't mentioned is Libya.

THEROS: With Libya it was entirely a legal issue. The Libyans had long since stopped all support to terrorism. We knew for a fact that they actually killed a lot of people who were associated with terrorism. I spent a lot of time on Pan Am 103, and therefore on Libya. But it was a Pan Am 103 issue.

Q: The feeling was that Qaddafi had lost his taste for this and was trying to back away from this whole thing.

THEROS: That he had backed away.

Q: That it just wasn't worth the candle?

THEROS: But Pan Am 103 was a domestic American political issue. It got to the point where Barbara (Bodine) used say, "I'm not going to do it anymore; you do it," when it would be dealing with the families of the Pan Am 103. They'd vary from the obnoxious to the really difficult. Granted, they had lost people, but for a lot of them this had become a way of life now, being in these organizations. They had annual conventions.

Q: And they would go beat up on the State Department because they couldn't beat up on anyone else.

THEROS: Yes, that's right. And they had a point. I mean I can't argue with them that they didn't have a point, but it was sort of … again, the one thing we had done to the Libyans was bomb them once, and that didn't work.

Sanctions didn't work because the Europeans felt that we dragged this out too far. The Italians, in particular, had made sanctions not quite a joke, but getting there. So as a result we had reached a standoff, that the Libyan economy was hurting, but not destroyed; Qaddafi was becoming isolated but he was still popular in many ways; Libya is a very small country in terms of population, as opposed to its oil production. We had posed some UN sanctions, but not enough to bring the country to its knees and as a result we just had this long-term standoff which was solved a few years ago because we gave the Libyans the one thing they wanted, which was whatever the trial showed, it showed, but we wouldn't use the trial to pursue Qaddafi.

Q: But as you say, by the time you were there, Libya was no longer a player in the terrorist thing.

THEROS: No. One of my principal jobs was once a year editing this Patterns of Global Terrorism, in which the practice was that we had to write a new page for each of the

seven countries that were on the global terrorism list. The Cuban page, of course, was a joke. We would sit around and get drunk trying to think of something to say about the Cubans; because there was nothing to say about the Cubans. We had to find a new way each year of saying that Cuba continues to support terrorism because there are fifteen men that are over the age of seventy living in Cuba who were once terrorists. You can only say that in so many ways.

Q: You talk about political. I mean this was for the Miami Cubans.

THEROS: Yes. It had become a joke, writing about Cuba. Libya we had to reach a bit, but essentially we had linked Libya to Pan Am 103, and as long as Libya is not being cooperative on Pan Am 103 it is still a terrorist sponsor.

Q: Was the demise of the Soviet Union a boom to the anti-terrorist thing or had they, even when it was the Soviet Union, stopped being a training ground for some of it?

THEROS: The Soviet Union wasn't that big a training ground. The training ground was the East Germans and the Bulgarians, primarily, and the Czechs to a degree. The collapse of the Warsaw Pact actually complicated our work because the Stasi was no longer in the game; the remains of the Bulgars and the Czechs were no longer in the game. It was a lot easier to cope with state sponsors who come out of a defunct organized and regimented society who know they've got their own rules and abide by them, and they're very professional; the men they turn out are very good at killing people, but they don't normally get told about the people killed. With the collapse of the Warsaw Pact two things happened. I think some of the trainers were picked up on part-time jobs by different people around, but the central direction began to fritter away, which made tracking people more difficult.

Earlier on—and I really didn't emphasize this enough—our great failing was intelligence and it began with we didn't have enough of it. It wasn't just coordination. We did not have enough people to go out and learn secrets and we didn't have enough people to interpret secrets that we learned. I thought INR's analysis was the only really good analysis in Washington. Too much of the rest was done amateurishly; too much of the rest was done because it would satisfy their bosses in their respective agencies of the U.S. government. And because the volume wasn't there, because you didn't have the volume high enough, you didn't get people's attention.

Q: There are two major ways of getting intelligence—maybe there are more—but one is through the intercept capabilities, but this takes tremendous amounts—of particularly Arabic, but maybe Chechen speakers and all of this—to understand what the hell they're talking about, and the other one is to insert agents into this. By this time they were almost agent-proof, weren't they?

THEROS: I don't think they were agent-proof, but they were certainly more difficult to infiltrate than big state-run organizations. But we didn't have enough people. We really did not have enough people. Languages were missing. Well, you don't have enough of

those people. The Agency was stretched very thin and on top of that official Washington never let go of the Cold War. Too many people spent too much time worrying about the former Soviet Union, whereas the bulk of the problem in terrorism was no longer in the Cold War countries. It was no longer in Eastern Europe.

Q: Would you ascribe this to the fact that if you learned about the Soviet Union and all of a sudden the Soviet Union is gone, there goes your job?

THEROS: Yes. A classic example in this Administration—pardon my politicking—is Condoleezza Rice who is a Russian expert, and she is now dealing with the Middle East as a Russian expert; and it shows.

Q: You mentioned that State Department funds had gone way down. Was this pretty obvious in your work?

THEROS: Yes. Traveling was a problem. We cancelled events. We had $50,000 a year for anti-terrorism assistance program training and we made it go pretty far, but there's a limit to how far you can take it. The national perceptions were still very strange. I'll tell you, I was invited to Nebraska to give a talk at Hastings College in Nebraska (200+ miles west of Omaha). It's a small, private college that has a lot of prestigious graduates. I spent the first night in Omaha and the Foreign Affairs Council of Omaha invited me to dinner and I had to sing for it; so I gave a speech on counter-terrorism and the anti-terrorism assistance program. I got blindsided by the fact that the principal issue on everybody's mind was—brace yourself—American support for the provisional IRA. I literally could not get my mind around the issue for the first five minutes. I was sort of stumbling around.

Q: Was the IRA an issue? Was it EUR?

THEROS: It was a political issue. The Brits didn't want us involved in it. The Brits were doing, by their own standards, pretty well. We had pretty much cut off the flow of funds from the United States to the IRA, or at least reduced it to some irreversible minimum. So the IRA was so far off our screen as to be not there. And I go to Omaha—and this was sort of a distinguished elderly crowd—and sort of out of left field I am suddenly inundated with these accusatory attacks—you know, when did you stop beating your wife so badly—about the Administration's support for the IRA. And when they finally came to the end of that, sort of having exhausted themselves on that one, then there was an attack on the amount of foreign aid. I remember one question was, "Why do we spend money on training foreign police forces?" To which my response was, "Well one of these days you're going to get on an airplane—this looks like a relatively, as I said, wealthy group of people—and someone is going to get on an airplane some place in a foreign country and wouldn't it be nice to know that the people doing the security on their airplane had been trained by the United States?"

And then somebody else thought we were spending too much money on foreign aid, which was causing the United States serious economic damage. So one of the few

amusing parts of the evening was I said, "Let me ask you a question. Does anybody in this room know what percent of the federal budget is spent on foreign aid?" So I got answers from thirteen percent to seven. The science professor who was my host guessed four. Of course the figure at the time was 0.6 percent of the federal budget. After the dinner the professor came up to me and said, "You know, I was going to guess ten,"—this was the professor—"but when I saw the expression on your face, I dropped it to four."

Q: [Laughs.] Within the State Department, the very fact that you didn't have a boss, and sort of undetermined leadership, I take it that you weren't exactly sitting at the knee of the Secretary of State every day and reporting on the state of ...

THEROS: No. I think I saw the Secretary of State on business three times in the two years that I was there. It was Warren Christopher, whom I liked. Once I had to go up—I'm trying to remember who the legal advisor was—and there was a question of real split in the Department between the legal advisor and us. Actually, half the Department was on the legal advisor's side, half of it was on mine. I forget the issue. And Warren Christopher asked the two of us up and we made our presentation, and at the end Warren Christopher cogitated and said, "Look, I'm sorry, but I think I'm going to have to go with the legal advisor." I still think he was wrong.

There was a problem as to which undersecretary I was supposed to report to. The Assistant Secretary, (Robert S.) Bob Gelbard, the bureau of narcs, thugs and crooks, thought I was supposed to report to him. I pointed out that no matter what I was still technically speaking to the equivalent of an Assistant Secretary or Acting Assistant Secretary. So I ended up reporting to Timothy Wirth, who was the Global Undersecretary.

He had all the environmental stuff like that in there and he also had me that he couldn't figure out what to do with.

Q: So obviously you were not very high on his list.

THEROS: But on the other hand I was important to his meetings because I provided a certain amount of comic relief. He had never seen earnest people until you get all the environmentalists and try to herd them in a room.

Q: We're talking about '95, I guess, aren't we?

THEROS: Yes, '93 to '95.

Q: Did you see a bettering of the situation or did you feel that you were sort of all on hold?

THEROS: I thought I saw a little bit of a bettering of the inter-agency relationship. What I fear happened is that a lot of it was personality driven. The man who was in charge of

the FBI program, John Conlon, who was killed in September 11th in New York, was a difficult fellow, but straight; and once you figured out who he was you could deal with him pretty well. His deputy, Bob Wortzer, was a really good guy. The relationship with the Special Operations Command and the others in the military was quite good. The relationship between State and the CIA was excellent and Dick Clarke had gone over to the NSC and Dick Clarke—again, one of the more difficult people in the world, but a true bureaucratic infighter. He's a friend of mine.

Q: Dick Clarke comes from where? What's his background?

THEROS: Dick Clarke was a think-tank type who came in in the early Reagan Administration. What he really is, is a professional bureaucrat, but a professional political bureaucrat, and very good at it, with monastic vows in government in important jobs. At one point, because he always tended to go off the edge, or push the envelope a lot, got fired from the State Department and was offered a six-figure job at Rand and turned it down to go take a demotion and work in the NSC, which is Dick Clarke. He's a very, very qualified and very capable bureaucrat.

When I left there was a pretty good relationship going on between the principal agents involved in counter-terrorism with (Jamie S.) Gorelick was the deputy attorney general who, again, liked our office; she liked her own staff. But what I suppose I knew, but didn't want to admit to myself, was that the good relations were all personality driven, not institutional. We got along with each other, we worked hard at getting along with each other, but there was nothing in the institution that would replace the personality.

Q: In '95, whither?

THEROS: Where? In '94 I began to say I really got to get a transition job out or get an Embassy; but one of the two. So I began to campaign for an Embassy. I figured I'd been in for thirty-odd years. I was getting old and fat. The time had come to get an Embassy. I felt that I deserved it, like we all do, and worked and worked and worked, and wasn't getting very far. There were a whole bunch of jobs I got turned down on. People told me there were a couple of old people in the Department who didn't like me; I never figured out who they were, but I was working on it. And then I was campaigning to be Ambassador to the UAE and Bob Pelletreau, at the time, was Assistant Secretary. Bob Pelletreau is a friend and I was working on him. I knew people in the D committee. And I was doing what everybody else was doing—I hadn't yet graduated to selected assassination, but I would pray that some of my colleagues would have a fatal heart attack. [Laughs.]

One day I went up to see Bob, having heard that I was going to be offered Beirut, and my wife was having a cow over the subject; so I went up to see Bob to say that I hoped I wasn't being offered Beirut. He said: "No, you're not being offered Beirut. You're not going to Abu Dhabi either. You're going to Doha as Ambassador." I later learned why I was going to Doha as Ambassador. Bob had been told that there would be a political appointee. He had to find a political appointee who would be Jewish. They had to have a

Jewish officer go to Abu Dhabi, so he preferred to have a Jewish officer from within the Service go to Abu Dhabi rather than have a political appointee; so my name got dropped from Abu Dhabi and I went to Doha. Having served in Abu Dhabi, which I had liked a lot, I had imbibed all the stories about what terrible people the Qataris were, so when I came back home and told my wife that we were going to Doha, she started crying. It turned out we were both wrong. It was an excellent assignment.

Q: Yes, you'll always suffer from "localitis." I spent five years in Belgrade and anybody from Zagreb was beyond the pale.

THEROS: So around March 8th I started getting optimistic. I knew I was going to Doha and I was beginning to edge out of the job in counter-terrorism. So the big coup of my time was the capture of Ramzi Ahmed Yousef, which by the way, it doesn't matter what anybody tells you, that was a DS (Bureau of Diplomatic Security) coup.

Q: Tell me about that.

THEROS: Basically Ramzi Ahmed Yousef was operating in the Philippines with schemes to blow up airplanes. There was a fire in an apartment building; the Filipino fire department went in and found this place full of chemicals and computers and stuff like that, called the cops, and they got in there and realized what they had. They had the men who had just carried out this attempt to blow up airliners. Unfortunately the men in the apartment saw the fire too and split. But now there was a lot of information. Well Ramzi Ahmed Yousef fled from the Philippines, going someplace—I forget where, Southeast Asia—and with him a trusted confidante. And the way the story was pieced together later is that while they were on the airplane he said to the trusted confidante, "Well now you're like me." You know, a glorious fugitive. And the confidante says, "What do you mean?" He says: "Well, your name will be on the hard discs of the computers that the Filipinos have cracked. So presume that the Americans will have it. So now we're in this together, brother to brother. We're fugitives together." And the man went home and told his wife and she said, "Say what?" [Laughs.] "You're going to be a fugitive for the rest of your life?" So he thought about it and had one of the matchbooks that offered a $5 million reward, so he went into the Embassy in Pakistan, in Islamabad, and talked to the DS guys; and he said to them, "I understand there's $5 million for Ramzi Ahmed Yousef." And the answer was, "Yes." He said, "Well, if you're really serious about the $5 million, give me some sort of guarantee that help is coming, plus another identity in another part of the world, and safety, and I can tell you what hotel room he's going to be checking into tomorrow."

So the deal went down. The various minions in the United States government began to move towards Islamabad, because everybody wanted to be there to take credit for the operation when it happened. Essentially the Embassy went to the Pakistanis; the Pakistanis took down the motel; the DS guys were the ones who did the whole thing; the FBI showed up at the eleventh hour and tried to take credit for the whole thing. We coordinated an airplane to go out. There was a couple of unseemly scenes at the airport in which the DS guys tried to hand Ramzi Ahmed Yousef over to the FBI because the

Pakistanis had given him to the DS guys, and the FBI refused because the DS guys weren't real police—they were rent-a-cops; they had to take them from the Pakistanis. It was one of these events. I understand they wrapped up Ramzi Ahmed Yousef in bubble wrap and then we stuck him on this airplane and sent him back. Most of my work during the night was getting flight clearances from countries for this flight without telling them what it was all about.

Q: Were countries pretty cooperative when we said, "We want to get something through and we can't tell you why?"

THEROS: Most countries were. Where we had resistance it wasn't, "We can't tell you why, therefore we're not going to let you;" it is, "Well, we always take three days to give you permission. We don't do twelve-hour permissions." But they would finally cooperate. We didn't have a real problem with anybody.

Doha and Retirement

Q: Okay, well we'll talk about getting to Doha.

THEROS: Actually, my favorite story is getting to Doha. Doesn't everybody have a Jesse Helms story?

Q: Well, we'll talk about Jesse Helms. Then you were in Qatar from when to when?

THEROS: From November of '95 to November of '98.

Q: We'll do that and I'll repeat what I said before, but I think at the end of this I'd like to talk about the plight—and I'm not sure that's the right term—of the Arabist in the State Department and how you see it at this time. And also, you retired after Doha?

THEROS: Immediately after.

Q: We'll pick up what you've been doing since, including some experience in Baghdad.

THEROS: Okay, we're off. I'm in counter-terrorism in a funny situation because I'm the acting coordinator; I'm the deputy coordinator; there's two deputy coordinators —the other is Barbara Bodine —and we keep fighting over who is the acting coordinator on any particular day because the Department neglected to put either one of us in charge. But we got through that.

About this time I'm of course deciding whether or not I want to retire if I don't get an Embassy. I'd like an Embassy; I've been in the Foreign Service thirty-two years. And I went and saw Bob Pelletreau because a rumor started that I was going to go to Beirut as Ambassador, and I wasn't terribly happy about that because my family would not have gone and I was at that stage of life where I didn't want to spend a couple years apart from

my family. I went to see Bob, who was then the Assistant Secretary, and Bob said, "Don't worry, you're not going to Beirut; you're going to Doha," which left me a little bit surprised. Doha was not on my screen anywhere, but fine, an Embassy is an Embassy for most of us. I went through the normal process, which is of course an insane process nowadays. I got through the D committee; the D committee sent me to the White House; the White House didn't have an appropriate political appointee for the job; all came back; security clearances were done; then I did the ethics clearance and ran head-on into the insanity of the system.

I never had a maid in Washington because with lots of aunts and other relatives we had many substitutes as maids and nannies and babysitters and I never had to worry about that. But we had hired a lady for two days running to help us move into the house when we moved back to Washington from Tampa some years before. This lady was a legal immigrant, in fact, from Guatemala, and I paid her by check. I was asked did I ever have a maid and I said, "No, this is the only time I ever did this, and as a matter of fact, it was two or three hundred dollars we paid her for the job of helping us move into the house." They said, "Did you pay Social Security?" I said, "No, I didn't pay Social Security because she was casual labor and the law specifically says that you don't pay Social Security for casual labor." You know, hired once, not hired again. All right, wonderful. The lawyer in the White House then calls me back and said, "You know, we would rather you had paid Social Security because we don't want you to do anything that might embarrass the President." This was, of course, the Clinton Administration and the idea of embarrassing the President at this moment—it was right in the middle of the Monica Lewinsky scandal—struck me as a little bit of a reach, but in any event …

So after we argued it for a little while and it was clear that my nomination was not going to move forward without this, I decided that I was going to pay the Social Security tax. First of all, I had to get an Employer Identification Number and to do that I finally went to a bookkeeper. A friend of mine runs a very large accounting firm—a classmate of mine from high school—and he got me the number without me paying any fees at all; in those days it was much more difficult to get the Employer Identification Number. I sent the payment in and notified the payment to the White House, which was happy to process it.

Three months later I got a letter from the IRS saying that I owed them a penalty. The payment was ten dollars; I owed them a penalty of another nineteen dollars for having submitted it late, and the interest due. My argument that I didn't even owe this and I had done it voluntarily finally got a response. Five years later I got a check back from the Internal Revenue for nineteen dollars.

Q: [Laughs.]

THEROS: So all the papers are ready; they're put together; they are sent to the Senate, and then nothing happens and I thought that was just being held up as normal. Then I discovered that a young person on the White House appointment staff had about ten file folders of people going over and she had dropped them and she was in a hurry so that

people wouldn't notice that she dropped them, so that when she put the papers back in, she put the papers all in the wrong file folders. So it had to come back from the Senate. Of course no one over at the White House was admitting it because this is their story and they're sticking to it. And then it went back up to the Senate and Senator Helms decided to put a hold on twenty-nine appointments—mostly Ambassadors and a couple of judges—because he was mad at the White House about something. I forget what it was, but it was something he wanted done and he wasn't going to lift the hold.

I got my hearing and it went swimmingly. One senator who knows me quite well, Senator (Paul) Sarbanes, showed up and embarrassed me with a twenty-minute soliloquy on how I was the greatest thing in the history of the Foreign Service. I got no substantive questions. Most of my questions, which is a question that has dogged me for years since, were about "How do you pronounce the name of the country?"

Q: Yes.

THEROS: This question continues to dog me ten years later.

Q: "Cutter?"

THEROS: "Cutter," like a Coast Guard cutter.

And then it just sat there and I discovered there was a hold. I would talk to the appointment staff and so forth and they were always saying, "Look, it's not working. It's not working." By summer my replacement had arrived for my job in counter-terrorism, so I went home, of course on full salary. It wasn't bad. I repainted the back of the house; I repaired the concrete staircase going down the back of the house. You know, it was fairly useful. I kept reading about what little there was to read about Qatar. I had pretty much read the entire literature available in the United States on Qatar. I, of course, wasn't supposed to talk to anybody because the Senate still hadn't acted. It wasn't being reported out of committee. By the middle of October the appointment staff was telling me that I had best prepare to be after Christmas before Senator Helms would release me, or the other twenty-eight Ambassadors. And one morning in early October I get up and I read the Washington Post, and it announces that the Senate in had cleared five Ambassadors a deal worked out between Senator Helms and Senator Sarbanes, and my name was one of the five. I had absolutely no idea that this deal had been concocted sometime in the middle of the night and an hour later the appointment staff called me to tell me that I was now approved.

Then we had the normal flurry and at the last minute I picked up my letters of accreditation. Because we had kids running around the house, because we were moving and there's all sorts of chaos, a very nice lady on the appointment staff said, "Look, just don't open your letters of accreditation until you get on the airplane because you don't want them to get dirty or messed up." So I did what she told me. I kept them sealed in the envelope, got on the airplane, and about an hour out of Dulles opened them—and realized that the letters of accreditation had been written in May of 1995 when the ruler of Qatar

was still Sheikh Khalifa bin Hamad Al-Thani, who was deposed in June by his son. I had letters of accreditation to the old emir! I got to Paris, which was the first leg of the trip—we were going to consult with the French since they were the most influential people in Qatar at the time—and suddenly my stay in Paris got a little bit longer. There was a frantic phone call back to Washington to point out the mistake and Washington apparently hadn't updated all their records either. The appointments staff, in the first conversations I had with them insisted "But that's the name of the emir, Sheikh Khalifa." I said: "That's the name of the former emir. As a matter of fact, he's here in Paris right now, in exile. I could probably deliver them to him but I don't think that's exactly what you have in mind."

So I stuck around Paris for four or five days. While it's easy to stick around Paris for four or five days, justifying it on per diem was getting a little bit tight. I had to say, "I don't have the letters back." So the letters didn't actually get to Doha until about four days after I did, and I was being pressured by the foreign ministry to have that first meeting with the foreign minister so I could hand him a copy of my letters of accreditation. And I developed a "diplomatic flu" until the letters finally showed up and then we went ahead with the presentation. I got a copy to the foreign minister and then it moved very quickly. The Qataris were in a hurry to get me formally accredited. They had the ceremony for the accreditation very quickly, within two weeks after I showed up, which, considering how the U.S. government operates, is light speed. And I settled into my Embassy. "Settling" is probably the wrong term. It was at the time a very small Embassy. I had eight people in the Embassy.

Q: You're talking about eight Americans.

THEROS: Nine Americans. Including the Ambassador it was nine Americans. The collective age of the next two ranking members of the staff was the same as mine. The DCM and the consular officer, together, were younger than me.

Q: Their ages together?

THEROS: Their age together was less than mine and I wasn't that old; I was in my fifties. But it was a very, very junior Embassy. Actually, the next oldest person down was a forty-year-old—my communicator. I had one communicator. I had a theoretical DCM, who was an extremely junior economic officer, who was also the economic officer. I had a consular officer; I had an Admin officer; I had a secretary; I had a political officer; I had one military officer assigned there, and nineteen locals, nineteen FSNs.

Q: Tell me, can you talk a bit about Qatar and how it was when you got there. You got there in what year?

THEROS: I got there in November of '95.

Q: Can you talk a bit about Qatar, the government, and the state of relations—not only with it, but also around the area?

THEROS: The emir of Qatar had just deposed his father in June. It was more or less a constitutional process. Essentially, the father, some three years earlier, had gone on an extended vacation—in '92. One day he walked in on his son and said, "I'm going to Cannes; you're in charge. I'll call you when I get back." And just left.

Q: This was Cannes, France?

THEROS: Cannes, France. Yes.

He left his son with all the responsibility and not much authority and he said, "You're in charge." The son, then crown prince Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa, was a person who clearly, unlike most of his fellow rulers in the Gulf area, understood that the Gulf has changed and the time had come to change with it. The father was an amiable sort, very friendly, and nice to people. People came to remember him with a great deal of personal affection. He was just an eighteenth-century monarch. He actually took Qatar back. When Sheikh Khalifa took over in '72, Qatar was the most progressive state in the Gulf in social and political terms, and educational terms. But it just sat there under his rule and everybody else in the Gulf marched past it. He reverted to a very old style of finances; the oil companies paid him everything and then he doled out money to the central bank and the Ministry of Finance, as they needed it. And the doling out of money was haphazard and fickle. He was just as likely to give the central bank $10 million to pay a bill as he was to give somebody a half million dollars to throw a wedding for his daughter and so forth. So he was fickle. The people remember him personally rather well. He didn't interfere much in people's lives, but then again he didn't do anything for the country either.

What he also did is permit all his friends to eat at the public troth. When Sheikh Hamad took over as the de facto head of government, while his father was absent, he didn't have the authority to fire anybody; so he hired younger al-Thanis—al-Thani being the ruling family—and other competent young people that he knew well and placed them into different government jobs, so thereby marginalizing the old cronies from the work and turning the work over to newer people, trying to modernize the functions of the government. And he was doing a fairly decent job of it. The only problem was that his father's cronies began to see their income dry up since they were mostly dependent on skimming off-the-top-of-the-government contracts. That income all dried up. A bunch of them went to Cannes to tell the old man, "Your son is costing us our livelihoods." So the old man tried to help them; he had some apparently aborted telephone conversations with his son and finally he came back, not to take over power, but merely to demand that his son reinstate his cronies to their old positions of skimming wealth off the top of the economy.

The son refused. There was apparently a confrontation, a shouting match, and the old man stomped out and decided to leave on a trip. Sheikh Hamad then called a family council meeting the day after the old man had left, went in and presented the family council with—"My father is no longer competent to rule, he needs to be set aside."—The

family agreed. He had the support of his one powerful uncle, one of Sheikh Khalifa's brothers. The family agreed not to depose Sheikh Khalifa but effectively make Sheikh Hamad co-Emir with all executive powers. They didn't take the old title away; Sheikh Khalifa became, in effect, emir emeritus. That left him with dignity but without power. Much of his first year Sheikh Hamad spent of that time was spent with affairs of the father.

First thing, they did make a tactical error. The father held all the money belonging to the state in personal checking accounts and, needless to say, he took the checkbook with him when he left. So the state's foreign exchange reserve suddenly went to zero, leaving them on a very, very thin shoestring. So they began to try to recover the money from the father. In the meantime the father was plotting to overthrow his son. The first couple of attempts were amateurish Pirates of Penzance-type coups. Some mercenary would sell the old man's entourage the idea that he could do it. It was either a scam or it didn't work. One Texas oil man showed up at the State Department once to sell the idea that if the U.S. government would help him overthrow the emir and bring the old emir back, that we would get significant oil concessions. State pointed out to him that a) American companies already had significant oil concessions, and b) what he was doing was illegal. If he would promptly go away, they would forget about his visit. There were a couple of other attempted coups. There were some mercenaries recruiting in South Africa and somebody found out about it. There were some French mercenaries that showed up in the Emirates and the French called them aside and said, "Look, we're going to cut off your supply of foie gras if you do this," so the mercenaries disbanded.

However, by January there was a new plot going on. This one actually had more chance of success. There is a gentleman now in jail in Qatar named Hamad bin Jassim bin Hamad, who was former minister of the interior—the former head of the police force—who had left into exile with Sheikh Khalifa. He had devised a plot that essentially consisted of arming six or seven hundred Bedouin from a Qatari tribe that was on the border with Saudi Arabia that had good ties with the old emir. And these fellows would infiltrate Qatar—weapons would be provided them—and on the signal they would rise and essentially, in addition to seizing the radio station, they would assassinate the new emir, his other two brothers who were there, the foreign minister, and two or three other people. The idea being that the average Qatari was not going to get involved in intra-al Thani family politics. Whom the al Thanis selected to rule the country was an al Thani problem. The other Qataris would stay out, which meant that you couldn't have an army coup because the army had no intention of getting involved in overthrowing the Emir; this is an internal al-Thani family problem. The chief of staff of the armed forces was also one of the people close to Sheikh Hamad, the new Emir. Essentially the coup plotters and their foreign supporters did not expect any great popular swelling of support to overthrow the new emir. What they did have, however, was the expectation that they could assassinate the new emir and fly in the old emir immediately thereafter and that the rest of the country would simply go along with it. So that was the plot.

Q: By the way, when this was happening were you in place?

THEROS: I was in place. I had arrived at the beginning of November and this was, by this time, December or January. We didn't have an inkling of this. However, like all coups that depend on the Bedouin, it had a fatal flaw. It's a lesson the Saudis keep learning every year in Yemen. Bedouin don't stay bought. You can buy them until somebody else shows up with a bag of money. This coup essentially failed because one of the Bedouin who had been part of the conspiracy, and was bought, showed up on the emir's doorstep at some family event and said, "I have a secret I'd like to sell you"—which he did. It was the last day of Ramadan and they issued orders to arrest maybe a dozen people in the police and the army who were involved in the coup. What they didn't realize is that one of the people sent to arrest them was also in the coup—the deputy director of the intelligence service. The director of the intelligence service was an amiable member of the family—a young man. He was not terribly competent. The deputy director was involved; he fled and warned his buddies. The internal leadership fled. They rolled up all the six hundred Bedouin, who were basically the rank and file. There were several days in which they went to general mobilization. There were several days there in which it also became apparent that the neighboring countries were supporting the coup to varying degrees.

Q: Are we talking about Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and the Emirates?

THEROS: Yes. I would not want to say categorically to what degree they were supporting the coup, because even now I'm not 100 percent sure, but there was enough smoke out there that everybody assumed fire.

One of my first acts, after being briefed about the coup at four o'clock in the morning, I tried to call Washington and discovered I could not make an international call nor would our normal State communications go through. I called the foreign minister and I said, "Why did you shut the phones down?" He said, "I didn't shut the phones down." I said, "Well try making an outside call."

We soon realized it was the first morning of Eid al-Fitr, the first day of the holiday after the fast of Ramadan. Each year, on the first day of the holiday, overseas calls were free. Five hundred thousand foreign workers tried to call home and the entire system went down. We couldn't call out because our barebones telecommunication system in the Embassy went through the local phone system. I finally got through to Washington and the next day sent a message to State saying we need to show the Qataris that we support the current government. To my great surprise, State sent a message twenty-four hours later to all the countries in the GCC, telling them not to interfere in the internal affairs of other countries, a message clearly showing support for Qatar. The Qataris were elated and their neighbors were clearly upset. Clearly Washington has spoken. I had now become a hero to the Qataris. I later found out that the only reason State got out the message is I had drafted cleared without any significant change was that the one person who could have turned it off, the Saudi ambassador, was on vacation.

Q: Sultan, yes.

THEROS: Not Sultan, Bandar. Bandar bin Sultan was skiing and there was nobody in his Embassy who had the authority to either interrupt the vacation or do anything about this.

Q: It's really right after you arrived, but what had happened to cause the surrounding countries—and there aren't many; there's Saudi Arabia—because Qatar is the thumb that sticks out; you've got Bahrain and then you've got the United Emirates.

THEROS: Very quickly there were three things that happened. Until 1990, under the old emir, Qatar essentially had no foreign or security policy. The old emir tucked his country under the Saudi umbrella. It was almost a feudal relationship with a sovereign vassal. The British foreign office, for example, didn't even have a Qatar desk officer. It was just an extra job for the Saudi desk officer. Come 1990, Iraq invades Kuwait and suddenly the Qataris realize that the Saudis not only cannot defend them, they can't defend themselves, and that the only function the Saudis serve, in a security sense, is to call the Americans. Well, they can call the Americans too.

So at that point the Qataris began to sever their security relationship. The old man was just as much in this as the son. At which point their relationship with Saudi Arabia went south big time. The Saudis began to revive old border claims. There were clashes on the border where Qatari policemen were killed. The Saudis renewed their support of Bahraini claims to the al-Hawar islands. I think that throughout the region elderly rulers did not like the idea that a younger son could depose his father. You know, they all began to look askance at their sons.

Q: [Laughs.] Really, we're talking about a tremendous generational change. The sons were mostly educated in the west.

THEROS: This was the first ruler in a Gulf country who was born after the discovery of oil, and that's essentially the difference.

And then finally there was unfortunately a very bad diplomatic incident. In December there was a meeting of the GCC summit.

Q: GCC?

THEROS: The Gulf Cooperation Council Summit, in Muscat. The Qataris went to the summit believing that they had arranged that a Qatari would become secretary general of the GCC. When they got to the summit they were blindsided by the Saudis, who had done a much better job of preparing for it. Their man was not considered despite a Saudi promise to support him and a Saudi became secretary general of the Gulf Cooperation Council. Sheikh Hamad got very angry because he had been blindsided by some of his fellow rulers. Words were exchanged, which then made the relationship personally toxic.

So all these things had come together. The Saudis were now very angry at the Qataris in general for having severed the security relationship and rejected Saudi Arabia as the overlord. To make it worse the Qataris were assiduously cultivating a relationship with

the United States because they saw this as the best guarantee for their future.

Q: What had been the role of Qatar during the Gulf War? Had that sort of changed things? I'm not talking diplomatically, but sort of just within the Gulf.

THEROS: It's an interesting situation. Qatar still had, and still has, in human terms, the best army in the Gulf. They are the only people in the Gulf who really train. The Omanis train, but the Qataris train even more because they are a very small army. The rest have a lot of equipment but don't train anywhere near as much as the Qataris do. So when Iraq invaded Kuwait all the Gulf States pledged to come to the support of Kuwait. But the only ones who physically were able to do so were the Qataris. The Qataris packed up a regimental combat team, about 1,700 men, a dozen tanks and so forth, and road marched it to the Kuwaiti border and got there and attacked. When I served at Central Command, I remember somebody telling me, that the reason Third World armies are ineffective is not that they're not brave and they can't fight, it's they can't get to the war. They don't have the logistics and the organization and the mentality to get to the war.

No other GCC Army could get effectively to the front or sustain battle. The only Gulf forces that actually got were the Saudi National Guard, which is more like a well-armed gendarmerie, and the Qatari army combat battalion team. They were the only GCC forces that actually got to the front lines. During the war the Qataris fought quite well. They stopped the Iraqis at Khafji and held them until the U.S. Marine Corps could destroy the Iraqis from the air. They acquitted themselves well at the battle suffering almost two hundred casualties. After the war they decided they were going to become America's best friend in the Gulf and they began the construction of this monstrous air base, on the assumption that if they built a big enough base, that the Americans would move there.

Q: Which, of course, they have.

THEROS: It took longer than planned, but …

Q: But essentially we were running the second Iraq war out of Qatar.

THEROS: Though not out of that air base. We were running it out of another facility out of Qatar. We have now taken over the air base, after the war.

Q: When you went there, were we looking north and saying, "You know, we're going to have to do something about Iraq again." Was this in the minds of people back in Washington?

THEROS: One didn't have that feeling. The question was we have a policy—it's called dual containment—and is it working? The Clinton Administration's view was dual containment is fine.

Q: Dual containment meaning?

THEROS: The containment of Iraq and Iran. It's fine. It works. Both countries stay as a threat. Let's leave sleeping dogs lie. The enforcement of the blockade, the enforcement of sanctions, this was the centerpiece. The driving elements of American policy towards Iran or Iraq were sanctions and blockade and other economic measures to isolate both Iran and Iraq. We were doing better with Iraq than we did with Iran, of course, in terms of isolation, but even though there were large numbers of people in the United States who were urging the Administration to review that policy, the Administration was not going to review it. As far as they were concerned, they weren't prepared to do the intellectual heavy lifting that would be necessary in the American bureaucracy to change the policy.

Q: What essentially were you up to? I mean what did you do?

THEROS: When I got there, essentially, insofar as anybody in Washington was thinking about Qatar, it was economic. I saw my charge as increasing American involvement in the Qatar economy, particularly in the gas field.

That was my mission. In terms of politics, the general idea in Washington was, "Yes, we'd like to be closer to the Qataris, but discourage them from expecting too much." There wasn't much else from Washington's point of view. It clearly states that because we didn't have that many people that served there, we didn't have a collection, for example, of old Qatar hands. The hardest thing about being charge in Jordan was that the American Foreign Service is chock full of people who have served in Jordan. We'd have to rent half of JFK (John F. Kennedy) Stadium for an annual convention of anybody who has ever served in Jordan. Therefore, everybody has got a view of how we should deal with Jordan, and any number of significant people in Washington have a view of how we should deal in Jordan. The vast majority of the American Foreign Service doesn't even know how to pronounce the name of the country, let alone anything about it—physical location. So as a consequence I had pretty much a free hand. I decided that my basic instructions, which were to increase the American economic and financial presence, was probably a full-time job given the staff I had; the Qataris were not interested in large scale arms purchases and I wasn't interested in creating a market. Obviously, if the Qataris came out and looked for things to buy I would flog American products, but I had decided I was concentrate on the development of gas fields. As usual, we always talked about democracy and stuff like that, but no one in Washington was really interested in my making a thing about that. Stability in economic activity was my mission.

The Qataris were trying to build a political relationship and a security relationship with us, which I thought was a good idea, and insofar as I could, I did what I could to help the Qataris build that relationship. That said, at the beginning we didn't make much headway with Washington. Washington was clearly not interested. The big issue was how much more can we stuff into Bahrain and what were we going to do with the forces in Saudi Arabia. Qatar was an afterthought. We had signed an agreement for pre-positioning in Qatar and that was to be the U.S. Army's largest pre-positioning site outside the United States. But it was essentially seen as a warehousing function. It had a permanent staff of maybe 250 people to look after the equipment. It was not an operational deployment at all. And every now and then we would do an exercise with the Qataris.

The Qataris, of course, were determined to change that, but the one way they could have done that was the one way they didn't want to do it, which was to make major arms purchases. Because to get American attention, like the UAE does, is to show up and say, "I want to buy eighty F-16s." And the emir didn't think buying twenty F-16s was worth it. He had already bought twelve French airplanes and as far as he was concerned, that was the end of it; he wasn't interested in anything else.

Q: Did you find that Prince Bandar of Saudi Arabia—our ambassador of Saudi Arabia in Washington —but other GCC representatives. Were they trying to screw things up?

THEROS: Only the Saudis. The others really didn't try very hard. The others were unhappy with the Qataris, but they didn't try very hard to … The Saudis were the only ones that were hell-bent. The Bahrainis depended on the Saudis to do this and the others didn't care very much.

Q: Let's stop here. We're now into your time in Qatar and [there are] a couple questions I'd like to ask you. One would be about developments regarding democracy. Students going to the United States—influence there, your relationship with the emir and how this was helped by our support at the time because there was this attempt to knock him off and all, and concern, or lack thereof, of the menace from Iran or from Iraq, and any sort of pressure you were getting from our American military. You know, buying equipment or basing, or anything else. Did this come up? And then there may be other elements that … Do you want to put anything else in there?

THEROS: That's actually a whole session.

Q: That's what I mean. But I just wanted to put it in.

THEROS: The only other thing would be the major project of bringing American universities to Qatar, which I think is well worth exploring.

Most of this developed after I retired, but began during my tenure. In our very first meeting, the Emir Sheikh Hamad told me that he wanted to be remembered as the "Education Emir." He had a project to bring an American university to Qatar as an incentive to reform Qatar University and make Qatar, once again, a mecca for education in the region. (In the 1950's Qatar had the only secondary school on the lower Gulf, an institution that educated the vast majority of lower Gulf political leaders of that generation.) It became the centerpiece of what I was doing.

At first we tried to find a single University to set up a branch campus in Qatar. My first choice was Ohio State. (I was also thinking of a Big Ten football power!) At this point, I got my first lesson in university politics. University of Virginia hired a high-powered well-known woman to lobby Sheikha Moza, the Emir's wife, to convince her that Ohio State was not up to her standards. We also tried several other universities but to no avail. Finally, Sheikha Moza figured out why looking for a single university did not work after

all the well-paid consultants could not explain it.

The Qataris had only one basic condition: the university would have complete freedom to teach however and whatever it wanted but it would issue a transcript and degree from the home school, not from the Doha campus. This required a high-quality university to protect its degree by having the same teaching staff, including tenured faculty. Tenured faculty are a funny lot, incentives that history department tenured faculty have no appeal for engineering tenured faculty, and so forth. You could not write a one-size-fits-all contract with a single university. Therefore, Sheikha Moza decided that we would go after single faculty per university. Texas A&M provided the engineering school; Georgetown its School of Foreign Service; Cornell-Weill, the medical school; Carnegie-Mellon an IT faculty; Northwestern its journalism faculty, and Virginia Commonwealth a school of design art. Each of these universities is a leader if not the best in its field.

I was asked to recruit Texas A&M and Georgetown. Texas A&M had rejected a previous recruitment attempt because the person sent out tried to get money from them, I discovered. Once convinced that I was not in this for a commission they came along. Georgetown (my alma mater) was also difficult, but I take pride in helping both schools set up in Doha. They are now the very best and most successful American campuses in Qatar and in the Middle East.

And ultimately how the military relationship did develop. And al Jazeera.

Q: I was going to say, al Jazeera.

THEROS: Al Jazeera is an important issue.

Q: It was an important issue during your time there.

Patrick, again the dates you were in Qatar?

THEROS: I arrived in early November of 1995 and left in the middle of November 1998.

Q: Can you talk first about your relationship with the ruler? What was his title?

THEROS: He was the emir. The prince.

Q: Things must have been a bit dicey for everybody when you just arrived with this attempted coup and all.

THEROS: I arrived well before the attempted coup. The attempted coup was in February. There had been a couple of other very amateurish attempts to overthrow him prior to my arrival, but they had been extremely amateurish. They didn't even count. The emir had deposed his father in June and then there was this hiatus with Todd Schwarz as Chargé because the previous Ambassador had left shortly after the change of government—it was Kenton Keith—and there was a hiatus as the Chargé, and that was Todd … and then I

arrived in early November. We got through this hysterical thing about the presentation of credentials to the wrong emir.

The first day I arrived, (Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak) Rabin was assassinated and this became a major issue because Washington took it into its head that the country should send somebody like the emir to the funeral. So they invite the emir to the funeral; the Qataris thought this was completely ridiculous. I technically had not presented credentials. As a matter of fact, I hadn't even presented a copy of my credentials yet to the foreign minister. So, keeping with the niceties of diplomacy, I would sit in the room with the Chargé while he would speak to the Qataris. Washington, for reasons I still do not understand, got terribly snooty about why the emir or the foreign minister wouldn't go to the funeral of Rabin. In the end the Qataris sent a minister. They sent the minister of information, one of the few Arab states, other than Jordan and Egypt, to do so.

Q: Were we pressing on, saying "Go," and that sort of thing?

THEROS: We were trying very hard to get the Qataris to go at the highest level.

Q: Had they recognized it?

THEROS: The amount of modern international law would be considered the de facto recognition. They didn't have formal diplomatic relations, but Rabin had been to Qatar and a number of other Israelis had been to Qatar, and the Qataris had made the decision to allow—though it had not yet been implemented—the Israelis to open a trade mission, and they themselves had a diplomatic representative sitting on the West Bank of Gaza. They had just lifted the primary boycott; they had stopped the blocking of phone calls to Israel; and they had taken a lot of other actions to begin normalization. So Washington took it into its head that Qatar should send the chief of state and I kept getting irate phone calls from Washington, and the Qataris were sort of politely turning to the side. Actually, towards the end the Qataris got very testy at the insistence from Washington.

Q: Who was insisting?

THEROS: It was coming out of the Seventh Floor. I would be wrong if I told you exactly who was doing the calling, but it was clear it was coming from the Seventh Floor, the Secretary's office.

Shortly after, I presented credentials and it was received very, very warmly. Unlike other Ambassadors, I got to present my credentials on a day by myself, and after the presentation of credentials I got about a forty-five minute conversation with the emir privately in his office, and shortly thereafter the emir invited me to lunch, with my wife. It was with he and his wife and the minister of petroleum, who was also the minister of energy, was also there Abdullah bin Hamad al-Attiyah. It was an interesting lunch because it indicated how poorly the processes of the American government are understood.

The emir began the lunch by saying how happy they had been when they received the request for agrément, which included my biography; and my biography is the biography of a fairly senior, very experienced officer who had done a lot and had a good record, a good reputation, and had been a lot of places and had done a lot of things. The Qataris took this as a calculated indication of the seriousness with which the United States government was approaching the relationship and so were impervious to the suggestion the U.S. government appoints Ambassadors in slap-dash fashion, which no one seems to know why we do it. They thought that this was a signal from the United States government and I didn't see any reason as to why I should …

Q: I have to say that I was in both Yugoslavia and in Greece, where both governments took the Ambassadors—who they were, their personality and all—much more seriously, as far as what they were signaling, rather than this was a relatively routine assignment.

THEROS: So the Qataris took this very seriously. As a matter of fact, there was a gentleman who prior to the three-year tours had been a political Ambassador and the emir said, "We got this signal that the United States wants a close relationship with Qatar. We still haven't figured out what signal they were sending us when they sent us a political Ambassador." Again, it was all very much of this. They were intrigued by the difficulties of my nomination and approval, by the Senate. The minister of energy, a gentleman who had spent some time in the United States, gave us, which I must say was a very accurate, sort of loaded dissertation on his understanding of checks and balances and democracy in the United States.

They made it very clear from the beginning that they were looking to be America's best friend in the Gulf. From beginning to end, they wanted to do it in a dignified fashion; they didn't want to be obsequious. But they had made a conscious decision, having broken with the Saudis and having watched the U.S. rescue Kuwait, that the most prudent course of action was to develop a relationship as close as possible to the United States, and they were approaching it in a multifaceted way. Whether it was on the American side, leaning towards American companies to develop a natural gas field, or encouraging the U.S. military to be active there, a constant question I would get from the emir every time I would see him would be, "How many American citizens are living in Qatar right now?" He was constantly disappointed that the number was not climbing faster than it was. When I arrived there were about two thousand American citizens living in Qatar; by the time I left it was about five thousand. The lobby had concluded that I had somehow failed in my mission.

Q: My experience, of course, is an example of somewhat different times. I'm thinking of fifty-eight or something like that. You know, a hundred would have swamped the system.

THEROS: Well I was through there as late as '91 and we happened to be there more or less on President's Day, when the Ambassador would hold a reception for the American community. The entire American community fit in the Residence at the time. I imagine there were 120 people there.

Q: In the first place, was there an acceptance of this increasing relationship, from the Washington area, and were you feeling, from Washington or sort of Embassy to Embassy, that our Embassy in Riyadh was weighing in and saying, "Stop messing around with these people?"

THEROS: Washington clearly, at least on a superficial level, wanted a better relationship. It very rarely led to concrete actions. Washington tended to remember that Qatar was there when something popped up on the screen, and then it would forget that Qatar was there. The Saudis were constantly whining about the Qatari's interest in the U.S. and it went on and on and on, and the Kuwaitis to a lesser extent, the Bahrainis to a certain extent, were constantly complaining about the Qataris.

Q: What were the complaints?

THEROS: They were about anything you could think of, from the scent of their cologne to their pro-terrorist policies, to anything you want. There was this constant drumbeat of complaint in Washington.

Q: Was Qatar sort of seen as the ex-bad boy within the Gentlemen's Club of the Gulf States, including Saudi Arabia?

THEROS: Very much so. The Qataris, one, seemed to like the role, which didn't help matters any. [Laughs.] But, two, the Qataris have always been somewhat on the outside of the club, even from the beginning. Even from way before this they've always been somewhat on the outside of the club. And then the emir's moving to include liberalization; moving away from a close security relationship with Saudi Arabia, and the border dispute that followed; Qatari assertion of a more important role in the GCC; and finally the move towards modernization and liberalization as a society and economy, all went down very badly with the neighbors, and in particular the Saudis.

Q: What subject would you like to talk about?

THEROS: Even though the most important part of the relationship in the beginning was the hydrocarbon gas and oil relationship, it's also the easiest to deal with. The Qataris had known of the North Dome gas field, which is now generally agreed to be the single largest deposit of natural gas in the world, bar none. The latest count I saw was about 900 trillion cubic meters of natural gas. The field itself sits about three-quarters in Qatar and one-quarter in the Iranian economic zone.

Qatar is the only country in the Gulf that has formally, by treaty, demarcated the economic zones and territorial waters between itself and Iran. However, they had not developed the gas field. They had known about the field since the mid '70s. Why they hadn't developed it is one of these mysteries that I suppose will be answered at some point in the future, but still is not clear to me. At the time they developed the field, the concession was held by British Petroleum and the German firm Wintershall. Wintershall also held some other concessions; it gradually began to turn those concessions over, or to

share those concessions, with a couple of American companies like Occidental, to develop the oil fields. But the gas fields were not being developed until the Qatari decision was finally made in ‘92.

Q: Doesn’t LPG require a certain amount of infrastructure?

THEROS: LNG in this case. It requires enormous infrastructure.

Q: I was going to say. You’ve got to take it out of the ground and put it through a process right there. That’s a big job.

THEROS: Yes. But there are lots of companies that want to do it.

They actually had an agreement with Total (S.A.). They formed a company called Qatar Gas, which was thirty-five percent French, sixty-five percent Qatari. Total was the first company that actually had an agreement. BP had—and this is a classic example of shortsightedness—pulled out some years earlier. Qatar had taken over the concession. The Qataris were a combination of they had some doubts about Total’s ability to develop and exploit the field properly; and secondly, a desire to develop the relationship with the United States. They weren’t doing real well at getting American takers—and this is a classic example of the importance of personality—until Lucius Noto, who was then the chairman of Mobil Oil, decided this was the future of Mobil and carried through a very good personal relationship with the emir, and carried through what I can only describe as a very aggressive but innovative initiative to persuade the emir to give Mobil Oil a large chunk of … In fact, what Mobil Oil did is they reduced Total’s share to ten percent and put Mobil Oil at twenty percent of the first concession, which is Qatar Gas, and allowed Mobil to come in. Lou Noto had tremendous problems convincing his own board of directors that they should go ahead and put some of their eggs in the Qatari basket.

Q: There must have been an awful lot of these people that Washington is replete with—and I suppose you’re a part of that—complex, risk analysis-type people who are usually ex-Foreign Service types or something, to go out and look and tell a company basically is the government going to collapse or not.

THEROS: I think that once you get such an investment on the ground, even if there is a change of government it can no matter afford to change radically the agreement than you can, as a company.

Q: So it’s not as dicey a situation as one might think.

THEROS: No. The biggest worries there are external factors, external threats—whether it’s Iran or somebody else.

But there just was great reluctance on the part of Mobil because for Mobil—its board of directors—this meant sort of putting the biggest possible percentage of their total investment funds into one project. That project had enormous potential for payoff over a

period of time in the future. It actually did not turn out well for Mobil because Mobil's project was developing just as energy prices began to drop. So even though this was a project with a tremendous future, with low energy prices Mobil, in the end, was forced to merge with Exxon and then energy prices went on. This just goes to prove that God likes Exxon and not Mobil. But it was an interesting sequence.

At the same time we had Enron show up. That was an interesting event.

Q: Today Enron is a dirty word.

THEROS: Yes. Well, it became a dirty word in Qatar a lot earlier than it did in the United States. Enron basically hatched an idea at the Middle East/North Africa economic summit in Oman in 1994 or '95. In 1994 they hatched this idea and it was an interesting one. Enron was building a power plant in South India, in the Maharishi Strait, and it's now called Bilbo. This has now become a central figure in the Enron scandal. The Bilbo plant, by itself, would take about a million-and-a-half to two-million metric tons a year of natural gas to run. Enron wanted to get into the gas field in Qatar—and not just buy the gas from Exxon-Mobil, but to actually develop a field on its own. The Bilbo plant by itself would not consume a sufficient quantity of gas to justify the investment, to justify going after Qatari concession.

So at the November 1994 economic summit, Enron conceived the idea of building a peace plant, so to speak, in Aqaba. It was a plant that would be situated more or less directly on the Jordanian-Israeli border in Aqaba; it would take gas from Qatar and transmit it to both Jordan and Israel and be an important element of a cooperative venture, which they sold to the United States government. The U.S. government sold it to the foreign minister at the conference and then to other Qataris, and it became the subject of a tremendous battle inside the Qatari government and between Mobil, the U.S. government, and the Qatari government and Enron. The original agreement between Qatar and Mobil gave Mobil exclusive rights to the gas field until they reached a certain level of production. Now Enron proposed to give its own rights to that gas field before Mobil reached that level of production. The U.S. government muscled its way into this on the grounds that this was a good way to advance the peace process. And ultimately the U.S. government muscled both Mobil and the Qatari government to carve out the concession agreement for Enron.

Q: You were a part of this?

THEROS: No. This all transpired in the period of time between November 1994 and about August/September 1995.

Q: Prior to your…

THEROS: Just prior to my … The contracts were all signed before I got there, for which I was exceedingly happy, but it left a bad taste in everyone's mouths and a really bad attitude towards each other. And then, to make a long story short, Enron failed to deliver.

Enron kept trying to renegotiate the terms of the concession and Enron engaged in practices that can only be described as shady.

Q: What are we talking about, bribes?

THEROS: Not so much even bribes, but the way they approached things, the way they tried to make friends. Some of it was, I think, attempting to bribe people. A lot of it had to do with simply the way of doing business with Rebecca Mark, who was the Enron president for international development. She was a physically very attractive woman with an enormous bad temper, which she would take out on her employees and everybody else around her, except the customer. She was aggressive to the point where she alienated a lot of people in the Qatari hierarchy, and at the same time they tried several games of bait and switch with the Qataris, "Oh, we're going to the Omanis … [doing this, doing that.]" The objective was to get the price down, to get the Qataris to renegotiate the contract so that it would be more favorable to them than the original concession agreement, which was more or less equal to the Mobil concession agreement. So by, I'd say, '97 or '98, the Qataris were at the end of their tether and no longer wanted to deal with Enron and then they kind of broke it off with Enron for, in their view, nonperformance; they were still squabbling with Enron when the scandal broke, and then all of a sudden Enron's problems in the Indian Ocean suddenly became insignificant compared to Enron's overall problems.

Q: Well, how was the gas to be delivered?

THEROS: By tanker.

Q: There was no idea of running a pipeline through Saudi Arabia?

THEROS: Well, I think we actually suggested it to the Saudis once and barely got out of the door with our lives. [Laughs.]

Q: How did we feel about Qatar making, from what you were saying, a sound deal with the Iranians? In other words, rather than getting into squabbles and all, they seemed to have reached an agreement that allowed them to get on with the business and not be squabbling all the time.

THEROS: The agreement had predated the improvement of relations by almost a decade. So it was history. It was just a fact of life. As a matter of fact, the agreement would be signed by the Shah's government. What it did was change the strategic picture. The Qataris have always regarded the Iranians as more of a potential threat than they did the Iraqis. Iraq was distant; Iran was next door. Iran had a history of interference in the internal affairs of many of the lower Gulf States.

Q: The Bahrainis, too, are very touchy about Iran.

THEROS: Yes. So they didn't share Kuwait's paranoia about Iraq because they tended to

view Iraq as a country that was a counterweight to Iran. Not necessarily a beneficent counterweight, but one that was still better with Iraq than without it, which I think was the Qatari view of things. And the fact that they had a formal agreement with Iran made things easier for them, and they also dealt with the Iranians in a very polite and diplomatic fashion. There was an eight-hundred-pound gorilla sitting across the Gulf from them and, unlike others who threw a banana from time to time, the Qataris would throw a whole bushel of bananas at it. But nothing ever happened. For example, there was an agreement, in principle, for construction of a water pipe line from Iran to Qatar to provide Qatar's water needs; they negotiated that into oblivion. They never said they wouldn't do it; they just never quite got to closer on the agreement.

From time to time they would do things diplomatically, to make things nice with the Iranians. Once they allowed two Iranian warships to come at a formal port visit to Doha port. Washington was very upset and I was sent in to tell them to cease, desist, and stop doing this and throw the Iranians out. I was pretty much thrown out of the foreign ministry on the grounds of: "Look, you've got your problems; we take care of our problems. You're our best friends. We do everything you want. Just butt out. We have to make nice to our neighbors."

With Iraq there was a constant Qatari view that we were overplaying our hand. One of the Qatari comments that you would hear from time to time was that we were teaching the Iraqis to hate us—"us" being the Gulf States—because the Iraqis are inevitably going to blame the Gulf States for the misery they were going through with the UN sanctions. I'd say they were not like every other Arab I know, not terribly affectionate towards the Kuwaitis.

Q: What about internal matters—democratization and all that?

THEROS: From the Qatari side it started slow, with the emir beginning to make statements; and he continued to make statements for years until one day he didn't—until one day, for example, he talked it up in municipal elections, and how to prepare for it. But he talked about it and talked about it and moved things forward a little bit in terms of discussing the law that it would affect and so forth, but nothing ever happened. Finally it reached the point where nobody outside Qatar believed that he was serious. His tactic was, "I can't push this any faster than the system will bear. But if I talk about it and talk about it, pretty soon people are going to accept it just to get me to shut up." "All right; if you want municipal elections, we'll have municipal elections." The United States government spent a lot of time telling the Qataris that they ought to democratize and then they would constantly rewrite my human rights report to make the Qataris look bad—this was the human rights clique in the State Department. I think they got points for how many countries they could make look bad.

Q: Could you talk a little about your feeling about this?

THEROS: The human rights report is written in Washington, sent to the post for commentary, and then negotiated between the post and Washington. The post is never

left in doubt that commentary is welcome but that Washington is under no obligation to take it. Now, you had the ordinary part of the bureaucracy where, if the post screams loud enough that something isn't egregious enough, the Washington bureaucracy will back off. People who were determined to make every country in the world a human rights violator always wrote the human rights report. We spent three years—the Qataris weren't perfect, but they had made significant progress—and there was only grudging acceptance in the report that the Qataris had made progress. The report was mostly not inaccurate. But it was always written in a tone of voice like the Qataris had recently just stopped beating their wives. This was the tone of voice. Then each year we never got to comment on the Executive Summary of the report; the thing that goes up front. And that was always much worse—it was like newspaper headlines—than the full body of the report itself.

A lot of this simply was that the people who write the report were marching to their own drummer. You know, we accuse this Administration, correctly, of being ideological and occasionally of failing to understand reality. There are other ideologies and other agendas in other Administrations. The Clinton Administration's biggest problem was that, if you're a human rights activist, you have to have enemies. You have to have people you can activate against. In this case the human rights issue was paramount and you couldn't write a favorable human rights report on a country. There always had to be a problem out there.

Probably the only sour note in the entire three years that I was there was every time this human rights report would surface and the Qataris would point out the fifteen points where they no longer did beat their wives. And the way the report was written—certainly in the Executive Summary—you were left with the conclusion that they did. For example, the Qataris had abolished military courts for security crimes. The human rights report said, "Well, in recent years we have no reports of anyone being tried in military courts." There is a subtle difference.

Q: This brings me up to the question of communications. Were you there during the rise of e-mail and that type of thing?

THEROS: We were so far behind the technological curve in that Embassy that it was ridiculous.

Q: We're still talking quill, pen, and one-time pads.

THEROS: Close. We had at least gotten rid of the one-time pads. [Laughs.]

Q: So this communications thing, which was—I talked to somebody who was in Paris at this time who was talking about how there was intense negotiation back and forth over the time before any final reports went out.

THEROS: We were still typing things down. We got rid of the …

Q: The Selectric?

THEROS: Not the Selectric. We were still using the Selectric. We got rid of the big machine. What was it called? The AJ-47, or something like that. We still had one of them at post. We weren't using them for tapes any more—everything was on a computer—but, for example, we didn't have direct communication with Washington. Finally, we rented a 64-kilobyte broadband line from QTel—Qatar Telecommunications Company, which was the first one they had ever installed. If you want to see a good example of why Washington costs too much, you should have watched that one. QTel was finally in a position where they were able to put a 64-kilobyte line to the Embassy, which would then link to Bahrain where there would be a satellite uplink back to Washington. A company in the United States, whose name I now unfortunately forget, won the contract to install it. The company, as close as I could tell, was in Winchester, Virginia and it was owned and staffed by the wife and daughter of one ex-State Department communicator. They had no capability whatsoever, but they did know how to write an RFP and how to answer contract officers who got too nosy. They had won this contract.

The contract consisted of linking the Bahrain telephone company with QTel and putting the sixty-foot KB line in and then running the line to the Embassy and doing all the testing. It was not a huge contract, but they had clearly underbid the contract; they were the cheapest ones bidding and they got it. And then they proceeded to try to get Batelco and QTel to do this all by phone calls, fax, and e-mail. The American company never sent anybody out.

One day I was talking to my lone communicator and he was saying just how overworked he was—just exhausted—and I felt that he was looking exhausted and frustrated. I told him he wasn't looking too well. He said, "Yes, I've been working all these extra hours with putting in the broadband line." So he explained how he was trying to help the company that was going to put in the broadband line. And it turned out he was doing all the work. They were sending him messages demanding he do this, demanding he do that, and of course he was doing everything and more. It dawned on me at that point that he was doing all the work for which they were being paid. I told him to stop. I told him to tell these people if they want to install this and they want to do this properly, they need to send somebody out. And he was saying: "But they can't. They don't have enough staff. They don't have anybody to send out. They don't have enough money in the contract to pay for somebody to come out." Then I really got upset and I sent a message back to the Department saying I just told my man to stop cooperating with these people because they're trying to get him to do the work for which the U.S. government is paying. I would not say it was well received in Washington, especially by the telecom people, but in the end we got our line.

Q: On the democracy side, what we were pushing and what was happening?

THEROS: We were pushing things generically; we didn't push anything specific, and some things, I can say, we didn't push at all. The first thing was that the emir was pushing for the election of a municipal council. Every now and then some leader from

Washington would say nice words about it and two of the democratic—there are two institutes in Washington.

Q: The Republican and Democratic.

THEROS: So we usually would send a letter out, or a fax, and someone would show up for a day or two, talk to them, and then they would offer them a course in Washington democracy —which the Qataris would pay for. But there was no particularly enthusiastic expenditure, either in money or effort, on the part of the Department of State of the United States government in favor of the actual nuts and bolts of democratization.

The emir was just moving steadily, but very, very deliberately and slowly, towards going through the so-called Majlis al-Shura—the advisory council. He gave the advisory council a draft law—the municipal council—and the advisory council, figuring he was the emir, rubberstamped it and gave it back to him. He said: "No, you haven't understood. This is the opening gun on democracy. I want you to discuss the law; I want you to look at; I want you to give me your opinion; and if I don't like your opinion, I'll send it back to you, but I really want to get your opinion." So they took it back, took one look at it, rubberstamped it, and sent it back to him again. And this took several iterations before it finally dawned on the advisory council that he was serious, that he wanted to discuss it. He just went on and on in a back-and-forth discussion, because they really didn't know how to cope with this. At each year's opening of the advisory council he'd give some version of the same speech and each year the two salient items that I remember from the speech …

The first point was that I'm going to have democracy and this is the route down which it will go; and the first part about the advisory is the municipal council, and then we're going to move on to other elements of democracy. The second thing he would say in his speech, which would send all the Arab diplomats scurrying for their notebooks, is the Arab world has never been in a position of greater weakness and disgrace than it has been today, and the principal reason for that is that we have denied the Arab people their ability to express opinions and to develop their full potential. And that this is generic throughout the Arab world. That was his theme every year.

Q: Now it's become a major thing, but then this was…

THEROS: For 1996, '97, this was revolutionary.

Q: We're talking about the Arab world, not just Qatar.

THEROS: Throughout the Arab world. I mean this really was revolutionary. Again, I don't remember any particularly articulate or inspired response from Washington to these things. I would report it and it would disappear in the mob of reporting from Washington. I'd go out of my way a little bit and try to get people to pay attention to it, to send them messages, and it was like extracting teeth without anesthetic.

The first real test of American commitment to democracy took place in late ‘95, early ‘96, when the BBC Arabic service was running on a Saudi orbit satellite channel and they went on BBC on Saudi satellite and the Saudis had given them, for prestige reasons, a really cheap deal on going to orbit. The BBC being the BBC, and especially its Arabic service, would from time to time air interviews with Saudi dissidents—people whom the Saudi government did not like—and the Saudis made it very clear that they did not like these people nor the fact that BBC was giving them interviews. And at some stage the Saudis essentially gave BBC an ultimatum: Stop interviewing these people or we’ll knock you off the air. The BBC couldn’t and didn’t and wouldn’t, so the Saudis took them off the orbit channel and just shut them down entirely. The problem there was that the BBC had no budget to go someplace else. Orbit would have been given to them at a nominal price and they had no budget to go somewhere else, so in a moment of almost Macabre-like miserliness they shut down the BBC Arabic service entirely. It was something that was no longer needed or necessary.

A bunch of Qatari sheiks thought that this was a brilliant opportunity to put Qatar on the map. Putting Qatar on the map, by the way, is in large part the national Qatari egos, from top to bottom. They decided they would buy the BBC Arabic service, lock, stock and barrel, set it up in Qatar, get on their own satellite, wherever they could, and broadcast BBC Arabic service, now known as al Jazeera. And I remember being invited to the founding dinner, a somewhat formal affair, but everybody was talking about how this was going to be a wonderful innovation in the Arab world—the first completely uncensored Arab news channel. The programming would be on Al-Jazeera. There would be no censorship. There were assurances to the emir that there would be no censorship, no interference; they were entirely free to report what they wanted.

Well, the first thought that occurred to me was that one of two things was happening: either this is all really interesting and they’re not going to do it—the first day that al Jazeera crosses some very narrow imaginary line they’re going to shut down the guys who crossed it. Or this is going to be the biggest headache of my next two-and-a-half years at post. I was right. It did become the biggest headache of the next two-and-a-half years at post. Within a very short time al Jazeera, with stock and trade actually—it was not a very well done program; it was all interviews and interview programs and call-in programs and news programs. There was virtually nothing else on it. And they would talk with anybody controversial. Every time they would talk to somebody who was controversial in a neighboring country, the neighboring country would lose it. And I kept getting sort of these warning notices out of Washington: Tell the Qataris that they’ve sort of gone a little bit too far. But it wasn’t terribly aggressive yet from Washington, just people commenting about how al Jazeera was causing trouble for the Qataris and indirectly for us because we’re associated with freedom of the press. We didn’t think it was a good thing to be associated with Arab freedom of the press. That’s almost an oxymoron.

Finally one day the Qataris did an interview, with call-ins, with a Kuwaiti minister who managed to fully disgrace himself on the program, live. He lost his temper; he raved and ranted; he attacked the callers—Kuwaitis mostly—calling in and saying the minister

himself was some sort of clown, and the man did lose it. Well, finally they stop the program and the minister goes back to Kuwait and the next day the Kuwaiti foreign minister calls in the American Ambassador and beats him about head and shoulders for a couple of hours about the way the Qataris were destabilizing the Middle East. That encouraged every other neighboring post to note that they, too, had been called in at one point or another by their foreign ministry to complain about al Jazeera and to complain about the Qataris and all the trouble this was causing us. It really was bad form. Most of my diplomatic colleagues felt to let the Qataris continue to have an uncensored TV program was dangerous for the U.S.

I got a rather sharp message from Washington that said in effect, Go tell the Qataris to either cut it out or shut it down. I thought about it. I waited a couple days, didn't respond, and then sent a message back. I forget exactly how I phrased it, but the sum of the message was: The last time I looked I was the American Ambassador and did Washington really want to send an instruction to the American Ambassador telling a country to shut down its first experiment with the free press. And then there was silence after that. I got a couple of other messages later demanding that the Qataris shut down al Jazeera, but they were never quite delivered with the same clarity of purpose as that first one.

I've got to say that al Jazeera is not without either flaws nor mistakes; it tends to be a little bit like FOX. It's prejudiced, biased; it's sensationalist. Even though it was the BBC Arabic service, it was only the Arabic service. They didn't have the structure of the BBC around it to provide a certain amount of adult guidance in the early days. The Qataris themselves seemed to have intimidated themselves with the question of a free press. They didn't always understand that the journalist was now running amok and it caused several problems—one of them being that the Saudis said that any company that advertises on al Jazeera would never do business in Saudi Arabia again. So al Jazeera is not a paying business operation, even though it would be an advertiser's dream. It's probably that sixty to seventy percent, at one point; the viewership of satellite TV in the Middle East was al Jazeera's. Even now, even though people criticize al Jazeera, it certainly opened the door to an uncensored Arabic press. For that contribution alone the Qataris can pat themselves on the back until the sun goes down.

Q: What were your contacts with al Jazeera?

THEROS: Not a lot. I mean I knew the people in charge of it and I'd go talk to them from time to time, and I did a couple of interviews on al Jazeera, but I really didn't want to get into the question of programming. I felt that, as Ambassador, if al Jazeera said something that was too bad, I should go protest, but in the early days al Jazeera never said anything; they just interviewed people who said things. These were people saying their own views, and again, I couldn't think of a rational way of protesting those. Once or twice I was asked to give a rebuttal and I declined on the grounds that I thought what the man had said was pretty ridiculous and if I gave a rebuttal it was give him a certain amount of seriousness.

Q: Well back to sort of the politics—I'm not sure if you covered this before—but was there a ruling family and did they have sort of the power of Saudi Arabia? Or were there clans? When they're trying to move towards democracy, how do these elements play? I was asking about the dynamics of Qatar and its move towards democratization.

THEROS: Domestically he was on the head of his population. His vision of the future was: "Look, down the road someplace, probably a little further away in Qatar than elsewhere, there is this wave coming and I've got really two choices: I can play King Canute or I can surf it. If I surf it"—and this he said to me—"twenty-five years from now I'm going to retire and my son can take over the throne of Qatar in some civilized fashion and we'll have a participatory form of government in which I and the al Thanis are still the ruling family, but we're not quite as strong and powerful; and I've got a lot of people taking responsibility for their own country. Or I can stand here and hope to repress it, and I can probably repress it as long as my neighbors can repress it, but if any of them cracks, them I'm toast. So it's better to start surfing right now." He has a sense of urgency that his population is only beginning to pick up.

Q: How about the family?

THEROS: The family is not a family except by accident. They're the second biggest family in the whole country; they've broken up into five clans that dislike each other rather intensely—not all of them, of course—and what the emir managed to do in the course of deposing his father, and the run-up to the deposition of his father, is he managed to convert the squabbles inside the family from squabbles between clans to a generational squabble. He managed to recruit the smarter, brighter, younger al Thanis to his cause, across clan lines—which earned him the hostility of the older al Thanis who still felt that clan lines were more important than generational lines. Right now I would say, for example, that the founder of al Jazeera, Sheikh Mohammad bin Thamer is the most enthusiastic exponent of the free press I've heard anywhere outside the United States and Britain and France. He is so far out ahead of his contemporaries that …

Q: You were talking about the head of al Jazeera, Sheikh Mohammad bin Thamer who was par ahead of everyone else. What about in other fields? Was there a women's movement?

THEROS: The women's movement was more interesting. Qatari women are a very impressive lot. They get college educations at a rate of four to one to Qatari men. When my daughter went to the American School in Qatar for a year, her comment was that the most inspired students in the school—the most determined students in the school—were the Qatari girls, and the least were the Qatari boys. And the ex-pats were all in between. Qatari girls, having a limited number of things that they can do in life, had thrown themselves into education with a vengeance. Four-fifths of college graduates in Qatar today are women. And they're a tough bunch. It's fascinating that my wife made more friends in Qatar among Qatari women in three months than she made in three years in Abu Dhabi. She still has Qatari women who call her and ask about her. No Abu Dhabi woman calls and asks about her. We got along perfectly well in the UAE, as we did in

Qatar.

Sheikha Moza is—I don't want to use the word scary, but she is a woman who knows her own mind and she is a very determined sort of woman. She is a woman who knows what she wants; she doesn't always have the details right, but she knows the end game.

Q: She is what?

THEROS: She is the emir's wife; his second wife—the second of three. Aside from being a physically very, very attractive woman—a very striking woman, she is also smart and very hard. The emir shows great respect for her opinions and so forth. He treats her better than like my wife reminds me I treat her opinions from time to time. It is almost a given—it was not even a subject of discussion—that is modernization and democracy comes to Qatar, it will come equally to both genders. I never had a sense of anyone who had the courage among Qataris to say that my wife and daughter are not going to share in democracy with me.

Q: How about the mullahs?

THEROS: They were an intimidating bunch. The Qataris are funny. Their definition of religion, they're Wahhabis, but they're not the Wahhabi of lore. The minister of religious affairs (Awqaf) was sort of a wild-eyed fellow in a short thob (long beard type) who met all the stereotypes of Wahhabi Islam in terms of the movies and what he looks like and stuff like that. The minister engaged me in a conversation once about religion, in which he basically said the Saudis had given a bad name to Wahhabism. And went on into this exposition of the Qatari view of Islam that is most un-Wahhabi among things, like these laws banning alcohol and banning this and banning that are stupid because they don't guarantee anything. If you don't drink because you're afraid of the cops, there's no virtue. The virtue comes because you don't drink because it's wrong to drink. "So why do you have all these laws?" I asked, and he said, very simply: "For two reasons. One is we're afraid of the Saudis. We're right next door to the Saudis and they get really upset with us whenever we walk the laws back; and secondly, these people are uncomfortable without the laws. They think we should have them. They would rather disobey the law than see the state abolish the law."

And they have sort of a house fundamentalist. There is an Egyptian cleric by the name of Sheikh Yousef Kardawi who was a very, very smart man who left Egypt politically and he was a fundamentalist, in the occasionally unpleasant way, but he always managed to haul in the feudal fundamentalist line that is just inside the law, just inside civilized milieu. He's sort of a house fundamentalist, for want of a better term. He appears regularly on al Jazeera and he says things. But he is always just inside the line of Qatari policy.

Q: Were we doing anything there or were things just taking on their own course?

THEROS: If anything, the neighbors wanted us to put a break on the Qataris and we

never stood up for them.

Q: You mean we …

THEROS: The United States government. The neighboring states all were very unhappy with what the Qataris were doing.

Q: Did you find yourself, in a way, having to kind of keep the United States off the backs of the Qataris?

THEROS: It was more carping. Other than these two or three attempts to close down al Jazeera, it was more Washington carping rather than Washington telling me not to do things.

Q: Correct me if I'm wrong, but I recall that the sultan of Oman was on somewhat of the same course, wasn't he?

THEROS: Never. He was on the course at the time of improving his communications with the government so he could improve their lives. No one in the Gulf, until recently the Bahrainis and the Kuwaitis, who had gone forward and back again, has ever come close to setting out a course that means ultimately changing the basic relationship to governing.

Q: What about the 800-pound gorilla to the northeast, Iran? You had this dual government. You had a strong democratic government in Iran and you also had a very strong theocratic over lordship. Did that play out at all?

THEROS: Iran, to the Qataris, was a monolith. Once, for example, after (Iranian President Mohammad) Khatami's election, the foreign minister was asked at a meeting at the Council for Foreign Relations, about what he felt about Khatami and democracy and the mullahs and the theocracy. His response was, "Look, in the end they're all Iranians and they're all mullahs." And his problem was how to deal with Iran, the monolith, not Iran the … They believed that Iran has got a permanent, unified, nationalistic hegemonistic foreign policy in the Gulf; and it doesn't matter what form of government Iran has, Qataris are still going to wake up every morning with an Iran that has hegemonistic designs.

Q: Was there an Iranian subculture in Qatar?

THEROS: In the food; they had a lot of Iranian dishes. There is an Iranian subculture in the sense that probably half the Qatari Sunni Arabs have family ties in Iran. Most of the business is in their hands. A good chunk of the businesses are in the hands of these families. There are very few pure Iranians. Most of them are very well off and very, very much strong supporters of the emir, because that's about five clans and that's the only way to go for them.

Q: Where do the Qataris fit with the Emirates? Because I think of Abu Dhabi as being sort of the Gulf State par excellence for being traders.

THEROS: Dubai is much more commercial than Abu Dhabi. By comparison to Dubai neither city is good t trading. They're not good traders. They're risk averse. They're not, by nature, the kind of businessman who will go out there slogging, trying to get business.

Q: Any ties to Pakistan?

THEROS: Some. There are an enormous number of Indians and Pakistanis working in Qatar. South Asians are perhaps sixty percent of the resident population of the lower Gulf, maybe more. [There is] a tendency to prefer Pakistanis and Indians and South Asians to Arabs as ex-pat workers.

Q: Less likely to settle, is that it?

THEROS: Yes, and less likely to bring their problems from their home country with them.

Q: Was there a policy of bringing them in to work and then getting them out after a while?

THEROS: Yes, but it was not terribly well executed. Now they have decided there are just too many Indians and Pakistanis. One of the measures of national strength is the number of military-aged men; that's the number of men between the ages of eighteen and fifty, for example. There are approximately fifteen times as many South Asian men of military age in the country—maybe twenty times as many—as there are Qatari men. So lately they've decided they're going to break it up more and it's becoming increasingly more difficult for South Asians to come to Qatar. For example, now there is an emphasis on getting Eastern Europeans in.

Q: Do you want to talk about American military there?

THEROS: Well, when I was there the Qataris still had inherited the French military. Their equipment was largely French; their training and military philosophy belonged to the French. They were trying harder and harder to get in with the Americans. The American military, at the operational level, was perfectly happy to accommodate them, but at the national military security policy we weren't doing so well. They weren't constantly on our screen. For example, on the positive side, every time some ship would come by, the Qataris would run out there and ask for an exercise. You couldn't get within three hundred miles of Qatar and some Qatari wouldn't show up asking for an exercise. They wanted to do this all the time. Unscheduled exercises, scheduled exercises—all the time they just wanted to exercise with us and the U.S. military loved that. The quality of their troops, the quality of seamanship at sea was superb.

Q: You mentioned how they were the most professional.

THEROS: Yes, not the best equipped, but the most professional. The most skilled at what they do.

During the time I was there, the Qataris continued to work towards the completion of Al-Udeid and tried to persuade us to use Al-Udeid. We were still locked up in Saudi Arabia and Al-Udeid was viewed as sort of some place we can go to if necessary, but was very low down on our list of priorities. More importantly, we would have liked to be able to use Qatari facilities for shore leave. The problem was Doha port would not take carriers alongside and there are only a couple places in the Gulf you can take a carrier alongside.

Q: And you're talking about five thousand men.

THEROS: Dubai used to do it all the time. The Qataris had a fairly sophisticated and nuanced approach towards the Status of Forces. Politically the Status of Forces Agreement with us they didn't like any more than anybody else in the Gulf, which is an American soldier arrested for anything will be tried in American court martial. In Dubai this proved to be a very serious problem in the early '90s—a very, very serious problem. The question there is once you get it into the Shari'a court, it's extremely difficult something from Shari'a. Again, the way the Qataris approached it was very subtle and sophisticated. Qatari policemen had standing instructions that if any American military member was arrested for anything, he would be treated as if he were a Qatari soldier, which meant that he would be immediately surrendered by the civil police to the Qatari military police and then, in the case of an American, it was very easy for the Qatari military police to turn them over to us because it meant that, regardless of the offense, you didn't go through the court system.

Q: Was there a feeling, when you were there, that are days in Saudi Arabia, military-wise, were numbered?

THEROS: The military didn't discuss it at the level that I … When I was in Central Command that was a very important issue. In the operational level of the military, it was a subject that they stayed away from. They only had to worry about next week. Occasionally when senior generals from Central Command would come through, the issue would come up. Saudi Arabia had become so useful and convenient, and the thought of going someplace else was so difficult to reason through, that most everybody was hoping that we would just stay in Saudi Arabia. And there were people saying, "Look, there are certain things wrong with staying in Saudi Arabia." But as long as Iraq existed—as long as we had that—then fine.

Q: Was there any problem with Qatar and our Iraqi policy? I think at one point we had a rather serious set of attacks; we were flying and attacking on a daily basis.

THEROS: The Qataris never interfered with the operational part of our relationship and made it very clear.

There were two major diplomatic incidents that we had with the Qataris in which the Qataris tried to do the right thing and it ran afoul of American perceptions.

Q: Okay. I think this is a good place to stop. So we're talking about the Iraqi-American-Qatari relationship and you were saying there were two major diplomatic incidents where things got entangled. I would also like to ask you about diplomatic life in Qatar and who were some of the other players —French, British, Iranians, Russians, what-have-you. I'm sure there are other subjects that you'd like to bring up.

THEROS: Major diplomatic dustups between the United States and the state of Qatar regarding Iraq policy: The first one occurred in May or June of 1997. By way of background, the emir of Qatar was making his first working visit to the United States, and virtually his first visit to the United States ever. I think he had only made one trip prior to that. But it was his first official visit to the United States.

The program was to start in Washington on Tuesday. Monday we had arranged a program for him in New York, the centerpiece of which was a speech at the Council on Foreign Relations—very well attended—and lunch. The speech was a nice speech. There was not anything that people would remember as very breathless prose, but in the middle of the speech the emir made a following statement: "Your policy of dual containment is unrealistic and has essentially failed." This referred to the dual containment of Iraq and Iran. "You need to review that policy and think of something new." Period. There were a couple of people from the Department, fairly high-ranking, at the lunch and they saw me after lunch and they were outraged that the emir had said that, particularly since he was going to see the President the next day; they said this was going to go down very badly in Washington. I said it was an offhand statement about something everybody knows is true; it's in the middle of a speech that is otherwise unexceptionable. I had clearly misunderstood Washington's ability to get fairly upset over what appears to be a fairly innocuous statement.

The next day we arrived in Washington—it got reported in the press; somebody reported it—and my colleagues in the Department were calling the Ambassador who was accompanying the emir and saying, "Boy, everybody here is really upset." They were using stronger language than that. And I forewarned the Qataris that there was a reaction to this; they were perplexed. They didn't think that that was a terribly important statement, and after all, friends ought to be able to say to friends that they've made a mistake. The first meeting was at the Defense Department, where the only item on the table was this statement, though I must say the Defense Department, under Secretary Cohen at the time, put it in very polite terms. So everything else got pushed off the agenda in the hour-and-a-half we spent at the Defense Department. Then we had the very formal ceremonies outside—reviewing of the guard, posting colors, and so forth—and, amusingly enough, this was when General Ralston, if you remember, was having his marital problems. So even though we had had our major blowup inside the meeting over the emir's comment about dual containment, the only thing the press was interested in was asking Secretary Cohen about General Ralston's marital problems, which left the Qataris even more confused [laughs] and they had been where this began. So when we

left the Defense Department everyone was in fairly good humor because they thought it was very funny that General Ralston's marital problems were the only subject of discussion for the press and had pretty much forgotten the polite unpleasantness over the speech.

We got to the White House and there it was somewhat less polite. Let me be precise. The President was there; the Vice President was there; the Secretary of State was there; (National Security Advisor) Sandy Berger was there; and other luminaries were all there. After the initial pleasantries the Vice President expressed his very strong opinion that the Qataris had no idea what they were talking about and should not have said what they said because they were completely, totally, and unequivocally wrong. It was put about like that. The Qatari foreign minister, with the emir's permission, responded and did a very, very good job of dissecting the American position and had clearly come much better prepared and much more knowledgeable about the subject than any American in the room, leaving the Vice President to hold the bag as it was torn apart in front of him. The President was clearly very amused at this course of events. So for the rest of the visit we kept getting … The State Department didn't bring up very much. The dregs of this thing kept on. So this was the first time.

Q: What was the dual containment policy and what was wrong with it?

THEROS: It was a policy that put Iraq and Iran in the same box and the United States would do its utmost to isolate them economically, politically, and militarily. Whether it was UN sanctions or U.S. sanctions or Iraq was actually blockading attempts to prevent Iran from buying potential military goods abroad. It was a major diplomatic campaign, all of this intent on isolating Iraq and Iran from the outside world and doing as much damage as possible to their economies. The essential flaw was that these were two hostile countries that didn't like each other very much and we were pushing them into each other's arms. It also meant that it was an ineffective policy in many ways because the rest of the world had joined us in the isolation of Iraq; the rest of the world had not joined us in the isolation of Iran at all. I must say that most of the discussion in the White House that day, in the Oval Office, was a discussion of the isolation of Iran and the futility of what we were doing failing to engage the Iranians, because the Qataris felt very strongly that there was more than a little bit of leg room to engage the Iranians.

Q: In both these meetings the real issue before us was much more, with the Qataris, military, wasn't it? What should we have been talking about?

THEROS: The Qataris wanted to discuss, in the Defense Department, where they fit in national strategy. That was their objective on this trip: Where did they fit in the American national strategy. How could they influence it? What role did they play? What did the Americans expect of them? And from that point of view the trip was a complete failure. They never engaged us on that subject. Mind you, most non-European countries failed to engage us on that subject. It has now become customary in the Gulf—it had become by then—for virtually every ally, partner, or whatever you want to call them, in the Gulf to either accept or reject the role we told them to play, or some part of it; but there was

never a dialogue. At no point in my tenure was there ever a dialogue with the Gulf countries over how to formulate American national security policy in the Gulf. It was the Americans decided what it is they wanted to do and it was up to the Gulf country to decide whether they wanted to go along with it or not go along with it. Generally, we wanted them to do so many different things that it was possible to do six and reject three and still get away with it. The underlying strategic dialogue never took place. The Qataris were trying to engage us in the underlying strategic dialogue and got nowhere.

Q: Was there a strategic view, do you think?

THEROS: In the United States? Yes. In my view it was sterile. No imagination was being applied to it, and the principal reason why the United States government did not want to back away from dual containment, in my view, was very simple: because the mental heavy lifting that would have been required was too heavy for anybody in Washington to do it. And we all know that the Department of State and the Department of Defense are so overwhelmed—the bureaucrats in all these places are so overwhelmed—unless you get a political leadership that is dedicated to doing something, like say the Bush Administration was dedicated to changing our policy in Iraq; unless they had this clear direction, this clear, informed, enthusiastic, "Do it or I'll have your [blank]" direction from above, it is simply too hard to change American policy, and therefore the bureaucracy doesn't try to change it. And we have no mechanisms for changing it, other than direction from above.

The Policy Planning staff in the Department of State is essentially a glorified speechwriters' office. There is no policy planning. There is no policy planning in the U.S. government. There is at a certain rarified level, but it doesn't come up from below. There's no dialogue from below. There's no input from below. Generally I exaggerate a little bit, but by and large if above says we want to change the policy or we don't want to change the policy, and below responds. Above didn't tell the Departments of State and Defense and others that we wanted to change the policy towards Iraq, so therefore, despite tremendous turmoil in the foreign affairs intellectual community at the time by people who wanted to change the policy—CFR (the Committee on Foreign Relations) was issuing paper after paper and all sorts of things were going on—the Administration was impervious to change because it simply was not interested in it because it was too hard to do. Now, at the risk of sounding a little bit peevish, Madeleine Albright's principal foreign policy objective seemed to be to make the Foreign Service more diverse and reflect her social agenda. If she had a foreign policy objective that was discernible, that was thought out in advance, it was never visible to me.

The other problem was in the lead up to an operation called Desert Fox. A little bit of background: When the attempt was made to assassinate former President Bush in Kuwait, President Clinton ordered air attacks and cruise missile attacks on Iraq. The Qataris were somewhat bent out of shape that they first heard about it from Saudi television. So this factored into their calculations. At the end of '97, beginning of '98, we were gearing up to doing something bad to the Iraqis. We were doing all the military stuff, but we telegraphed our punch. Everybody saw it was coming. So there was a tremendous

political reaction throughout the Arab world, even elsewhere, and we very belatedly came to the conclusion that we had to conduct a public relations campaign; we had to do the PR piece, the public diplomacy part of this, and it was too little, too late, and too unenthusiastic. We went through the motions.

The Qataris were seeing this as not a good thing in their interest, to have the United States conduct a major military operation against the Iraqis at a time when there was no evidence that we could justify it. It was causing the Qataris all sorts of heartburn. So the emir decides to send the foreign minister to Iraq. The foreign minister flies to Iraq; I unfortunately heard about it about two hours after his plane took off and told Washington. I got a call back that evening from an irate Department of State that Sheikh Hamad bin Jassim, the foreign minister, should come back.

The minister of state explained to me very patiently that they had to send the foreign minister to Iraq to advance the American agenda. The American agenda, I think it had to do with something at the time with inspections for weapons. And essentially the foreign minister had gone to Iraq to tell the Iraqis—tell Saddam—that if they didn't play ball with the Americans, the Americans were going to hit. This message fell on deaf ears in Washington. Washington was very bent out of shape with him.

Very late at night one night—late Doha time—I was at somebody's house for dinner and I just kept walking out in the middle of the yard to take the cell phone calls from Washington. The tone of voice was getting angrier and angrier. Finally I get a message saying, "Well if you can't do it, the Secretary of State is going to do it and she'd like to speak to the emir." I called the minister and I tried to tell everybody I thought this was not a good idea. I called the minister of state and repeated the request; the minister of state told me it wasn't a very good idea and I said: "I've already told them that. There's not much chance of my turning them off. They seem determined." Two hours later the minister of state calls me back and tells me that his highness would prefer if the Secretary of State call the foreign minister when he gets back, and he's decided to extend his trip by another day, in Iraq. It was sort of made very clear that the reason he had extended his trip to another day was because of these irate messages coming out of Washington.

I called, I think it was the Assistant Secretary, and passed that message on. He asked me if I wanted to call the Secretary's office and tell him and I said, "No, I would rather you call the Secretary's office and tell him." [Laughs.] It was kind of something like, "Thanks a lot, guy." I didn't hear anything more about that.

What was interesting, when the foreign minister came back, is that at both Baghdad Airport and Doha Airport had made statements to the press that in fact were a very blunt reiteration of the American position: That the Iraqis had to play ball or if they didn't play ball the Americans had every right to come and hit them under international rules and laws, and Qatar would support them when the time came because Qatar had an obligation to the United States and would execute UN Security Council resolutions. That's a bit of a reach in both cases, but the Qatari position was very much pro-American. Washington was not amused. Washington was not mollified at all.

Q: What was the problem?

THEROS: That Hamad bin Jassim, the foreign minister, didn't listen to Madeleine Albright when she told him to butt out. It was about like that. It was personal. At that point the personal relationship between the two went steadily downhill.

The Qataris always believed that if they supported us in fact and in substance, they could tell us what they could talk the truth to us; this is a mistake that a lot of countries make. In my opinion it is better to stiff the Americans in substance and to talk nice, than vice-versa.

Q: Do you think a factor in both these incidents was that—I recall sort of the mid-level or staff assistants, others, sort of working to a huff because somebody is treading on what they conceive is their territory and then they pass this on up the line rather than being something that's initiated …

THEROS: Normally I would take that position. I think in the last couple of Administrations, we now have Secretaries of State with egos that are so big—specifically Mrs. Albright and Ms. Rice—that they don't need any egging on from below. It is entirely possible that somebody dropped a piece of paper on Mrs. Albright's desk that provoked her, but it didn't take much provoking. It was very clear that the people I was dealing with, which was the Assistant Secretary and the DASes, were not pushing this very hard. They were extremely unhappy at the way this was developing.

Q: Well then what happens to you? You're caught in the middle.

THEROS: The fact that I was amused at the way this had gone down probably did not go down real well in Washington. I have the opinion that this didn't help me career-wise, but then again I had been in the Foreign Service for thirty-four or thirty-five years at that point and it really didn't make a whole heck of a lot of difference. By and large I felt that this was something that didn't affect my credibility very much; it affected what people thought of me at the very top of the Department in terms of, "Why hasn't he gone in there and thrown himself on a sword and made a fool of himself on my behalf?" But I don't think anyone thought that I had guessed wrong or misinformed them.

There had been one other incident earlier on between Mrs. Albright and the Qataris that has maybe poisoned the well a little bit on both sides. The Qataris, in November of 1997 —I don't remember if I mentioned this …

Q: Go ahead anyway.

THEROS: The Middle East/North Africa economic conference. This was the economic conference that was first dreamed up in '95, that was supposed to call on everybody to see how we could do a major economic activity that would propel the peace process in the Middle East forward. The first conference was held in Cairo or Amman. It was in a

number of places. By the time of the fourth conference, it was clear that even before the Second Intifada broke out, the peace process wasn't going anywhere. Everybody was getting less and less enthusiastic about holding the conference. At the Amman conference of '95 the Qataris volunteered to hold it in Doha in '97. They tried to get '96, but Cairo had already grabbed '96. By the end of the '96 conference it was obvious that people were unenthusiastic about this. The Arabs were trying to call it off but the Qataris agreed to go ahead with it because they figured we really wanted it. They even spent $70 million building convention facilities in nine months. I remember they would drop blocks of ice into the concrete mix in the heat of summer to keep the concrete strong. They took an enormous amount of flak. They did their utmost to hold this conference on our behalf at our request.

In fact, I became the first post World War II American Ambassador to actually have US combat troops under his authority; a practice more common to the 19th century and in Central America and the Caribbean before that war. The Qataris were scrambling to provide accommodations for the 4,000 plus officials and businessmen expected to participate. They settled on leasing several small cruise ships from a Greek company and berthing them in Doha Harbor. At that point, the Qatar security services military concluded that their already overstretched forces lacked both the resources and the skill set to provide offshore and harbor security for the cruise ships. They came to the Embassy for help. This request coincided with a Qatari request to cancel and field exercise between the Qatar military and a Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU) scheduled much earlier for the same week precisely because the Qatar military had its hands full with the Conference. I had the bright idea of asking the MEU commander if his forces could provide the needed assistance. With a cancelled exercise he had nothing else to do then run his ships in circles in the Gulf. He jumped at the chance and within a day I had a liaison team setting up shop in the garden and spare bedroom of the Residence.

A couple of days later, we realized we had broken almost every rule in the book. I got an angry message from State demanding to know by what authority I had asked for the Marines and forwarding an invoice from DoD for a several million dollars a day rent for the MEU. The State cable virtually told me it was my personal bill not theirs. The MEU commander also got a rocket from high up in DoD. Before we could figure out what to answer, the most unlikely Savior rescued us: Dick Clarke!

By now Dick was at the NSC, having recovered from his previous fall from grace. A superb bureaucratic operator he saw this as an opportunity to grab authority and persuaded the President to sign an order declaring this to be a Counterterrorism exercise under the authority of the State Department and assigned the MEU to my command as head of the task force! Dick and I have not always gotten along but he came in with a bang! I forgave him all his past transgressions. So for the next week or ten days I had tactical command of 1,700 Marines and four major warships!

Fairly soon it became obvious that the Arab states were going to boycott the conference. Very few Arab states actually sent delegates to the conference. To make it worse, the Egyptians and the Saudis campaigned very hard to get the Qataris to cancel the

conference. The Qataris had a diplomatic exchange with the Egyptians and the Saudis that actually descended to name-calling. It got very ugly between the Qataris on one hand and the Saudis and the Egyptians on the other hand. This was when (Egyptian President Hosni) Mubarak made a statement in public that this was an insignificant country whose entire population could be housed in a good sized hotel in Cairo, and other such exchanges. Well, for all this, this was being done at our behest; money was being expended. It was a significant political security threat to the Qataris. A lot of effort was being made for the Qataris. But [there were] a lot of important people coming, like the Secretary General of the United Nations. No heads of state were coming, but foreign ministers were now coming from most European countries and so forth. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright was also supposed to come.

At this point, the Secretary's staff almost sabotaged the Conference on their own. The staff decided that the Economic Conference no longer rated top billing and that there was more glory to be gained by leaving early and going to Bahrain and then Kuwait where another dustup with the Iraqis was on the menu.

The schedule called for a plenary session followed by a working lunch and a more gala dinner. The Secretary's scheduled called for an early arrival, attendance at the events, an overnight stay and departure the following day. In the very early morning hours of the appointed day, the Secretary's plane sent a message indicating that she would arrive as scheduled, give her keynote speech and then depart immediately for Bahrain "where the action was." . I argued with the Department, "Look, these guys are holding it on our behalf. They're taking enormous risks on our behalf and we are pulling out?" I told them that I did not want to take such an insult to the Qataris. Her staff got petty and told the Department that if I felt that way they would cancel her appearance at the Summit and go straight to Bahrain. My responses got hysterical. It became obvious to the adults in Washington that canceling the appearance would be a serious mistake. So she shows up, gets off the airplane, and her staff promptly informs me that she is leaving as soon as the speech is over. She's not even going to stay for the lunch. I told the foreign minister; he took me in with the emir and we told him. They both were extremely upset. At this point, I was trying to avoid a "shoot the messenger" scenario.

The Qataris proved they do have a sense of humor. They told me they would handle it and not to worry. Secretary Albright appeared at the Plenary and at the appointed time gets up and delivers her keynote speech to an audience of four thousand people. Before she could leave the podium, the Emir walks up close behind her and both thank everyone. The Emir then embraces the Secretary and literally lifts her off her feet and carries her back to her seat on the dais between the Emir and Shimon Peres!! Keep in mind that Madeleine Albright is about 5 foot 2 inches and the emir is about 6 foot 7 inches and is a very large man. She stays seated and the next speaker comes on, I think it was Peres. Her staff was speechless with anger. The lady who ran her staff comes to me and says, "We have to leave. We're supposed to go to Bahrain." I said, "Why? What is it?"

First of all, the staff was not professional. There was one Foreign Service officer on her staff who absented himself from this entire discussion, and everyone else consisted of a

bunch of young ladies—very, very young ladies—plus the slightly older woman who directed the office. The best I can say about them was that they were earnest but thoroughly non-professional. This was not the Foreign Service.

Q: These are sort of academic grad students, aren't they?

THEROS: Yes, I think some of the girls were undergrads. The office director had lost it. She insisted that had to leave immediately. I asked "why/"

"We've got a meeting in Bahrain." That's the only hole in the Bahraini schedule; the foreign minister of Malaysia is coming in later and they won't receive us."

I told her that given the Bahrainis would let the Malaysian Foreign Minister circle in the air until he ran out of fuel rather than stiff the Secretary of State of the United States. That got me nowhere. I went through my whole litany about how the Qataris had done so much for us and she said, "Well going to Bahrain is more important."

I said: "You're going to undercut the whole conference. You're going to humiliate the Qataris by pulling out and going to Bahrain just chasing publicity." Nothing. She was going to get her boss to Bahrain. It had become a personal obsession.

And then she turns to me and she says, "I want you to go out there and get her."

I said, "What?"

"I want you to go out there and get her. I want you to go out and get the Secretary and bring her back here so we can leave."

I said, "You want me to walk out onto the stage that's being televised internationally, in front of four thousand delegates in the room, and get the Secretary of State to leave, now?" She says, "Yes!"

I replied "In a pig's eye," and walked off.

That may have done more damage to my career than any other thing that I did in the course of that career. She then sent one of the girls out—and I say "girls" advisedly; this is no sexist statement, this was a young lady who couldn't have been more than twenty or twenty-one—to stand in front of the dais and make hand signals to the Secretary of State, telling her that they had to leave. You could see her on the huge screen behind the dais waving her hands. The Secretary did not see her, I believe because of the lights, or I would hope just chose to ignore her.

At that point speeches were over and lunch was announced. The emir again virtually enveloped the Secretary of State and walked her the couple hundred meters to where lunch was. I noticed Emiri protocol staff ran interference keeping her staff away from her until she sat down. She had a wonderful lunch, clearly enjoyed the company and at the

end two hours later got up, thanked her hosts and left.

I got in the car with her—as is customary for the Ambassador—to go back to the airport. I had mentally prepared myself to slit my throat and my wrists at that point. She was totally unconcerned. She made no mention of being late for Bahrain, talked about how much she enjoyed the event and while we were in the car she actually gave me my cufflinks—you know, the ones you always get when the Secretary of State comes around. I got out of the car, got to the airplane, and her staff was looking daggers at me. I still can't figure out if she was even aware that her staff had decided that they were going to take her out of there and fly her to Bahrain.

Q: Sometimes you do get this thing, and it's an important thing when anybody looks at diplomacy, and that is the role of staffs. It depends on if the Secretary or somebody lets the staff take over, but you often get that they're going to show power. Usually it's a group that has no feeling for what they're doing. It's just a power trip for them.

We had one other dramatic event during the November 1997 Economic Summit. Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the Emirates continued their campaign against Qatar's holding the summit. The campaign was carried largely on the airwaves with a great deal of personal invective being tossed at the Qataris. At one point, Egypt's President Mubarak told the press that he did not worry about a country whose entire population would not fill one decent-sized two star hotel in Cairo. On the last day of the Summit Qatar's Foreign Minister went on TV with a slashing counter-attack that left us all slack jawed at its vehemence. Some visiting American scholars had warned me that this was about to happen and I called HJBJ to caution him against overreacting. He did not pick up my calls to his cell phone. After his speech, however, he called me back and asked if I had been calling to persuade him not make such a speech?

Q: In Qatar did other embassies play much of a role?

THEROS: Yes, there were thirty-five embassies in Qatar. One of the principal objectives of Qatari foreign policy was to get as many other countries to open embassies in Qatar because what they most disliked was having ambassadors accredited to them who were living in other Gulf countries. This bothered them no end.

The Qataris paid attention to a few embassies—the British and the French after us; the Saudis, to a degree the other Gulf embassies and the Egyptians.

The relationship with Egypt had gotten so toxic that the Egyptian Ambassador was rarely in country. However, ordinary Egyptians working in Qatar paid for Mubarak's attacks by not having their contracts renewed. In the end, it became quite clear to us as well that Mubarak had picked on Qatar top ensure continued financial assistance from Riyadh. (Much the same has happened after General Sisi took power in 2014, As in 1997 – 98, the situation quickly escalated beyond control.)

Q: Were the Iranians there?

THEROS: The Iranians were in sort of a special position. They had the largest embassy in Doha. Physically the largest building, and in terms of staff the largest diplomatic list. They were clearly an important embassy but they were not part of the diplomatic life. They had absented themselves from the diplomatic life but came to the stuff you had to attend. The Iranian ambassador was civil to me. The Iraqi ambassador was embarrassingly friendly to me, but the Iranian ambassador was sort of diplomatically civil. But I never got much of a feel for his relationship with the Qataris. The American Ambassador was clearly the most important ambassador in town. The French and the British were also of considerable importance. The Japanese ambassador was consumed entirely by LNG, Liquid Natural Gas. The Russian ambassador was there largely for symbolism.

The first week I was there, at a reception, I was talking to this jovial gentleman with a big mustache and a big bell. After about ten minutes I asked him what he did and he said he was the Iraqi ambassador. I said, "Oh! I'm the American Ambassador." He said, "Yes, I've known that." [Laughs.]

The Iraqi ambassador was the dean of the corps, which was a little embarrassing. So the Qatari foreign ministry had worked out a procedure whereby the Omani ambassador handed the duties of the dean of the corps in regard to countries that did not have diplomatic relations with Iraq.

Q: We didn't have relations at that time, did we?

THEROS: No. From '95, when I got there, there were no relations.

Q: Did you ever find yourself at odds—not "you," our policy, but you were representing it—with particularly the French or the Germans who were more interested in pursuing commercial interests?

THEROS: With the French I did, but it never got unpleasant. The Qataris, in their minds, had sort of divvied the world up. With regard to natural gas and oil, the Americans were the senior partners and the French were a big player, and everybody else was out of it. With regard to military procurement, the French were the senior partner and we had no market. With regard to military activities, the Americans were the senior partners. So the Qataris did a pretty good job of keeping us apart and reconciled. And I have to say that in terms of activities, training, exercises—anything that didn't involve actually selling hardware—the French were remarkably cooperative. They, in fact, were more cooperative than the British were. They did not sell anything to the Qataris after a deal for equipment for the Emiri Guards in 1995.

The emir made it very clear that this was a country that was not interested in pursuing major military procurement. He would do just the minimum necessary for a very small, well disciplined, well trained military force and he wasn't going to spend a lot of money on defense. I decided early on that my priorities were to advance American commercial

interests in the hydrocarbon area sector—oil and gas—and I wasn't going to waste a lot of markers or time trying to sell twelve airplanes, which was what the maximum number … During the time I was there, the Qataris were in the market for twelve helicopters, which Boeing and no one noticed, and thirty-six tanks which were of no interest virtually to … My military activities were very extensive, but they concerned more the support for the pre-positioning facility there. The U.S. Army was building the biggest pre-positioning facility in the world in Qatar and getting that done was my military activity. And after that my job was to support the oil companies as they strengthened their position in the Qatari …

Q: I take it there wasn't really much of a market for American goods there.

THEROS: There was but it was primarily in heavy industrial stuff for the oil sector. We were their biggest trading partners, but ninety percent of their goods that were coming in, the biggest source of exports.

Q: These would be tied, pretty much, to the major exploiting companies.

THEROS: Yes, exactly.

Q: In other words, if Gulf Oil or whenever Texaco or somebody is coming in, they know what they want.

THEROS: On the margins there were. I'll tell you where it was important; there were subsidiary contracts that could go to anybody and I worked very hard to support U.S. companies to get those lesser contracts, since in each case they were joint ventures between American companies and Qatar Petroleum—it was then Qatar General Petroleum Corporation (QGPC), which changed its name to Qatar Petroleum (QP). That was there. So let's say there was a plant that was going to take downstream chemical products and produce PVC bags and they'd let a tender for who was going to come and build the plant and operate it. There were a couple of instances where I went to bat very heavily for American companies and lost to either Germans or Norwegians or something like that. A couple of them actually became rather unpleasant. I'd say my commercial efforts were there primarily and that took up a fair amount of my time.

Q: There were a lot of Americans going there and around the area. Did you run across people getting in jail? Did you have the sort of problems that one has in Saudi Arabia?

THEROS: Very minor.

Q: The Saudi system is such that it almost asks for diplomatic problems because of arrests.

THEROS: I did not have a long-term prisoner while I was there. I had a couple of men arrested for drunken driving. The only one that caused me a problem was the Muslim American because he unfortunately ended up under Shari'a and drunken driving is a

misdemeanor, but being drunk for a Muslim is a felony. It took a little bit of effort to get him back out of the Shari'a, into the civil court system. There was a heavy fine and he was expelled after a week to ten days in jail.

With the military I had a very good relationship. Essentially the Qatari military had decided the way they would deal with the subject of Status of Forces was the word was passed that if an American soldier was arrested he had to be kept out of the hands of the Shari'a court. So the way the Qatari police had been instructed to handle it was that American military members would be treated as if they were Qatari soldiers, which meant that the civil police would immediately turn them over to the military police; and once we got them into the hands of the military police, then we could manage the process very well.

I had the odds and ends of death cases and stuff like that, but nothing all that serious. I was very lucky that I did not have a serious case involving child custody.

Q: Now this was often the case in Saudi Arabia back in the '50s when I was doing this. You had Saudi students go to the United States, marry a nice girl, bring them back to meet the family and then she has babies and then she says, "The hell with this," and then she can't take the babies with her. This is going on today.

THEROS: Yes. I was very lucky. I had no such case.

There were a couple of divorces, but by and large they were fairly amicable.

Q: There is something that has been occurring for some time, and that is the cultural divide between the Muslim world and the Western world, particularly in the United States—being the forefront. One of the things that were becoming in the United States, and actually in Europe too, is that we're the biggest producers of films and TV and everything else. Were you running into a problem of the growing permissiveness of our society? I'm talking about sex between homosexual, heterosexual, explicitness, the role of children and all. All beautifully displayed in full color on screens.

THEROS: This didn't bounce up that much. I was rather surprised that it didn't. The Americans who were there were essentially the employees of four oil companies and the oil companies made it very clear to their employees that, "If you misbehave you're out of here." None of the oil companies were going to risk their employees getting in trouble, and their employees, on the rare occasion that somebody did misbehave, he got in worse trouble with his bosses than he did with … So that was part of it. The Qataris didn't see Americans acting that way.

Q: Were they seeing American commercial films, TV shows?

THEROS: Yes. They had cable television.

Q: This sort of thing, was this …

THEROS: It was odd. They saw a bit of it. They didn't like it very much. There was censorship on the TV. The censorship got somewhat more sophisticated as I got there. Initially it was a five- or ten-second delay, so the censor could freeze frame the shot and then they got into more sophisticated ways of doing it. There was one very funny sort of B-grade American movie with Jacqueline Bisset—I forget who the others were—and it was taking place on a Greek island and at one stage—the movie is fairly risqué; it's sort of a semi-X; it's heavy R, so to speak.

I was at somebody's house once and, like all Qataris, they always have the TV on, which is annoying; your eye is always attracted to the TV. Well this movie was playing, and this was a very sophisticated Qatari family—a European wife and so forth—and the kids were watching the TV. I'm looking at it out of the corner of my eye because I'm always attracted by the television when it's on, and they're showing this and it appeared that the censor was dozing because there is one scene where this British girl walks out of a house and opens her dress up, so it's a full frontal nudity. The man saw it coming up with the delay and froze the screen. Unfortunately he was late and he froze the screen so we had ten seconds of the girl standing still in full frontal nudity. [Laughs.]

Q: [Laughs.] Were you getting any reflections of people saying, "We admire the United States, or [this and that], but we don't like your culture [or what you're doing]"?

THEROS: Particularly from some of the educated countries, I got a more sophisticated view of this. One conversation I had with a Qatari, I remember; it still stays in my mind: "Yes, we are importing this education. We are importing modernization. We have to modernize. We have to go to democracy. We have to do all these things. We have to free up the country. And yet how to we avoid getting the bad aspects of Western civilization?" And my response to that was: "You can't. It comes with the package. It's a package deal. But the most important thing you can do is to make sure that you have a sufficiently educated population that they can make intelligent choices about what they can pick and choose out of this package that comes to them. But you can't shut out the package."

Q: I was wondering, but there must have been quite a little underground of risqué or pornographic movies, because in my time, back in the late '50s, I heard—I never saw them but I heard that there were a whole series of—at this time it was three reel movies, 16 millimeter, was making a whole circuit of the Gulf, being passed from one country to another; European movies mainly.

THEROS: They were there and I can't say that … The Qataris were very discreet and as long as you didn't throw it in their faces, they were perfectly prepared to look the other way. The only time that people ever got intimidated on religion was some poor South Asian Christian worker, or some Filipino Christian worker, might get intimidated. The Qataris are a very tolerant lot.

One of my big projects was to bring churches to Qatar, in which I actually succeeded. That's probably the one of two legacies that will remain behind me in Qatar, that I

brought churches there. None of them were established before I left, but they're being established now. I kick started the process.

At one point we had one Catholic priest in Qatar who was a teacher at the American school. He had been brought there about seven years earlier by one of my predecessors and he was working out of the American school as a teacher for free. We weren't paying his salary or anything, but he was on the American Embassy's list of the teaching school. Probably some purist might draw the line at the time. I was a little concerned about that but I said I couldn't imagine anybody in the United States attacking me for that. It was a practice that both my predecessors had done, so I continued it. He was sort of a strange Catholic priest. He actually went to the same high school as my wife did at about the same time she did. He was a very strange person but a nice man—Father John was an exceedingly nice man.

But Easter was coming up and I couldn't get out of Doha for Easter. Greek Orthodox Easter occurs on a different date than in the West. I went to the foreign minister and said, "I want to bring the priest for Easter here and I would like to bring a priest down from Jerusalem." He said, "Sure. Why are you asking?" I said, "Well, I just wanted to make sure I didn't have a problem." He said, "When he comes down, have him come and meet me and the emir." So I made arrangements for the priest to come from Jerusalem—he was actually a Archimandrite monk, a very distinguished, very intelligent man, Greek, and very well educated in theology—and he comes down in civilian clothes and we did the services in the Residence and got people in the back yard—some other Orthodox businessman set a tent up —and we did the services for a week. (He is now the current Patriarch of Jerusalem.)

Well, while he was there, the Patriarch sent down gifts for the emir, the foreign minister, and the prime minister. The foreign minister was out of town that week. I took him around to see the prime minister. The prime minister was mildly amused at the visit, but it was a very pleasant visit. And then I took him to see the emir. He walked in with me for the emir. The emir had two comments to make. First of all, the man had a very wild beard and the emir says to him, "You know, you look like one of our fundamentalists." And the other thing he said to me was, "Why is he wearing civilian clothes and he's not in his robes?" I didn't really have an answer for that one. And then the two of them sat down and had a theological discussion. It was a friendly, comparative theology-type discussion in which the emir laid out Sufism and how all these things worked out in the Qatari version of Islam. What was supposed to be a twenty-minute courtesy call turned into a two-hour dialogue between the two of them. Actually, they had graduated above my theological experience at that point. Three or four days later, after he'd left, the fellow who was the political advisor to the emir—a senior Qatari sheik—said to me, "Patrick, we really admire you for what you've done." I said, "For what?" He said: "For bringing the priest. It shows you're a man of religion. It shows you're a man who believes in his faith and wanted your priest. We think that's one of the best things you've ever done. You don't know how impressed people are with you." But that pretty much set the tone.

Q: Patrick, is there anything we should cover that we haven't covered so far?

THEROS: On August 7, 1998, terrorists attacked our Embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam with devastating effect, killing hundreds and wounding thousands, including many Americans. The press at the time noted that Ambassador Prudence Bushnell had repeatedly warned the Department of the exposed location and condition of Embassy Nairobi. The weaknesses of Embassy Nairobi had been callously ignored on the upper floors of the Department. They preferred to spend available security funds on spectacularly grand new projects at posts that faced nowhere near the same level of threat. As in politics our bureaucratic barons gain far more glory inaugurating flashy (and very expensive) projects rather than beefing up security in some dusty, out-of-the-way, place. Well, that bird came home to roost in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam!

At that point the powers-that-be in DS and Management started scrambling to look like they were actually doing something. Emergency funds were available and there was no dearth of posts that needed them. Doha ranked at the top of the list of posts that had known threats as well as badly exposed facilities. Embassy Doha sat at a busy corner less than ten meters from one road and twenty meters from the other road, far less standoff distance than what would protect against an even small truck bomb. To make matters worse, we had set up in the space between the chancery and the side road a flimsy prefab that housed our General Services office and our bookkeepers. Not that the chancery itself was any stronger. The building was built from disintegrating concrete blocks encased in a reinforced concrete structure that was essentially unsound. The three-decades-old concrete contained saline local sand as aggregate and the reinforcing bars had begun to corrode, losing integrity. To illustrate: We had had to add an internal steel column because the weight of the vault on the second floor had caused the floor to sag almost a foot in the center. Like Pru Bushnell's Nairobi, we had reported for years about the inherent dangers in our set-up.

In September the Department informed us that a survey team, with a two-million-dollar budget, would visit Doha to examine how we could improve our physical security. A team of five duly arrived and spent three days poking around everything. On their last day, I invited them to the residence for their debrief. They shocked me when they informed me that (a) Embassy Doha was, as described, hopelessly exposed; (b) they had only two million dollars for improvements which would not raise Embassy Doha's security to the new requirements (a 50-meter standoff, heavily-reinforced concrete, etc.), and so (c) they would do nothing except take the money elsewhere!

I argued that I could think of numerous improvements that would mitigate the threat if not eliminate it. They answered that their instructions were to raise the building to the highest standard or to do nothing. I raised my voice (a lot) and finally the team leader interjected with (and I quote), "Mr. Ambassador, I wouldn't worry about this. You have left a paper trail so thorough that no one will blame you if something happens!" I told him that no one was going to die at my post because I had not done the maximum possible. The meeting ended unpleasantly. I called to complain to the then Assistant Secretary for DS and he told me to stop whining! I knew that I was approaching the end of my career and did not much care to play the bureaucratic game any longer

Q: You left the Embassy when?

THEROS: I left in November of 1998.

Q: When you came back did you feel that your run-in with Madeleine Albright's staff and all had sort of made you less than persona grata?

THEROS: Oh, fairly, but that was long before I left. It was very obvious to me at that point that one should not speak ill of people who are still alive and in the Foreign Service, but the gentleman who was in charge of all assignments at the time and I did not get along with each other at all. He made it very clear that insofar as it was within his power I was not ever going to get another assignment. He sent me a message reminding me that if an Ambassador is not reassigned within ninety days, he's out and phone calls telling me that he meant to apply them. Then he realized he had gone a little bit too far so he said, "Well we've got a job for you as Ambassador-in-Residence in Poughkeepsie or Altoona or something like that," and I told him that I didn't want to do that. I told him that I wanted another Embassy or a similar job. We were having an exchange that was bordering on the acrimonious.

Q: Well normally when you've been Ambassador and just plain been around as long as you've been, your home was certainly in the Near Eastern Bureau and the head of personnel at that point—I won't say it becomes superfluous, but he or she is often taken over by the Bureau.

THEROS: At that time I had already made up my mind to leave the Foreign Service. My current employers, good friends, had come around, and had said to me, "Patrick, when you leave the Foreign Service, why don't you go get an adult job, rather than what you're doing now?" I had pretty much made up my mind I was going to leave anyway at that point.

Then Martin Indyk, the Assistant Secretary, called me and said, "Patrick, I have a great job for you." He went on describing how great this job was for about two or three or five sentences without telling me, of course, what the job was. That's a lead on in the Foreign Service if there ever was one. [Laughs.] You're going to get face time with the President; it's important issues and so forth. And I said finally, "Martin, what's the job?" He said, "We want you to be the coordinator for the Iraqi opposition." I said, "That's flattering." Then he went on to describe it and I said: "I'm not going to do it. I'm not going to do it for two reasons. Reason number one is that I don't want to take a job that is guaranteed to fail; and two, I don't want to take the job whose primary objective is to give $100 million of the American taxpayers' money to a guy that I personally know is a crook."

Q: Who was this?

THEROS: Ahmed Chalabi. "But thank you anyway for considering me." I was very flattered until I discovered I was the eighth person he had called [laughs] and had turned

him down.

Thirty-six years is a long time and I really felt that getting into an ugly shouting match with the director general was not the way I wanted to leave the Foreign Service.

Q: You're talking about Skip Gnehm?

THEROS: Skip Gnehm, yes. That was not really the way I wanted to leave the Foreign Service. So I took a couple weeks vacation in Europe with my wife, got home, walked into the Department on a Monday morning and said, "I quit." They said, "Well when do you want to quit?" I said, "Now." They processed my papers that week, which is pretty fast. I had to pay about $5,000 back to the Department over the advance I had gotten because if you resign or retire within ninety days, you don't get any of the extras that you get for moving home. So I had to give that back, which I had not expected. But the difference in salary between staying on for ninety days and what I would have gotten by quitting more than balanced it. That was when I was reminded of what Ed Djerejian had told me some years before. He retired and realized that he was working for $30,000 a year, which was the difference between his salary and his pension. I was working at that point for about $40,000 a year. So there was really no incentive to stay on. I would have stayed on only if somebody had given me a decent Embassy.

Q: What did you do then?

THEROS: I came to work for a company called Capitol Investment Management Corporation, whose job is basically—you're sitting in their building right now—we are a company that attracts foreign investment into real estate in the United States, and also do a bit of consulting. I've been with the company now for four years. My second job is to run the U.S.-Qatar Business Council, which I took over about a year later, which is a not-for-profit trade association, whose function is to enhance the relationship—not a lobbying organization per se—between the United States and Qatar.

Q: Do we have time to just quickly talk about—you got involved somewhat in the Iraqi business. Why don't we talk about that now?

If you would then, sort of to conclude—but I don't want to rush it—talk about your experiences. We're right now in the midst of the war and basically the aftermath of Iraq. You got sucked back into it, didn't you?

THEROS: "Sucking" implied that I fought it. I have an old relationship with some Iraqis who have been outside of Iraq for years and they have asked me to help. A couple had been here and we talked about the changes in Iraq, how things were changing so much with the invasion, the liberation, and the deposing of Saddam.

There was one particular exiled Iraqi politician named Ayad Allawi, a gentleman who had been a member of the Baath Party and fled Iraq in the early mid-70s and had been the subject of an almost successful assassination attempt by Saddam. He had put together

what appeared to me and to them to be the best of the exiled political groups, philosophically and ideologically—moderate, secular, trying to transition from the current government to a democratic government. A man committed to the democracy, committed to free enterprise, but also a very reasonable man. And when they came here—the businessmen, that is—I introduced him to how the American lobbying system works … you know, how do you do politics in the United States—and they became very interested, so they asked me to manage their financing the lobbying in behalf of Doctor Ayad Allawi in the United States. I've been doing it very recently, only a couple, three months now. It's been interesting.

I put together a team, ad hoc. I split myself off as a separate organization to do this, through the necessary registration and so forth. I got a public relations company working, got a law firm working for us. Good people. I can give them a plug. A public relations company—a New York based company called Brown-Lloyd-James, which is really quite good. The law firm in this city, in Washington, is called Preston Gates & Ellis. They are adult Republicans and they are really very, very, good at what they do as well.

The biggest problem has been lobbying Doctor Allawi to understand what he needs to do in the United States and what benefits he can get from it. He's very much oriented towards Britain, which Britain he understands perfectly well. Our campaign objective is to persuade American policymakers that Doctor Allawi's vision of how to get to the future in Iraq is the most practical one; essentially it is a vision that says in a steady, deliberate, but not slow, fashion you empower Iraqis to run their own country again. You make the process faster than was envisioned, but you don't set it to a rigid timetable. You do set it to milestones. The essential milestones are: You stand up as much as the Iraqi ministries as possible; you stand up the old Iraqi army to the best extent possible; you turn the running of Iraq over to Iraqis; and, in fact, the Iraqi institutions of doing it. They're capable people; they need help; they need money; they need technical advice and so forth, but essentially we should not have American soldiers enforcing law and order on the streets of Baghdad. That should be a job for Iraqi institutions. The American troops should be out in the desert providing the strategic reserve. And it's cheaper. If you paid the salary of every Iraqi that worked for the Iraqi government, it would be about $200 million a month and $200 million a month is $2.5 billion a year, and if you consider it takes $4 billion to keep the American Army in Iraq, that's a wonderful savings.

And we've done the standard things that people do here, but the greatest problem, as I say, has been educating Allawi as to not only just how to lobby in the United States, but what he gets from it. Like most Arabs, Doctor Allawi has the impression that the United States is a single monolithic organization that makes its decisions in a rational, well-thought-out fashion, and when the President or the Secretary of State says something, that's it. It's a perception that almost any Arab I've ever dealt with labors under and they refuse to believe that we are as chaotic and confused in our foreign policy decision-making process as we really are. It is tragic that they think that, but that's the way things are.

Q: You had alluded to when you were offered, being the ninth man on the list, about this

Iraqi Revolutionary Council, or whatever.

THEROS: No, it was the Coordinator for the Iraqi opposition.

Q: You said that the head of this you knew as a person to be a crook. At that time, what were you getting from your colleagues? Because there's a lot of stuff about this particular group sort of having won the hearts and minds of the Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz and other so-called hawks, about Iraq.

THEROS: Ahmed Chalabi is one of the smartest people I have ever met in my life. To call him a genius, politically and financially, would be to raise other people to levels that they don't deserve. He is very, very smart. He is also totally amoral. He is one of the sleaziest people I ever met in my life. In fact, when I was in Jordan I actually had dinner with him two nights before he fled Jordan when the bank he was at discovered the third set of books he had in the Petra Bank in Jordan. He bankrupted Petra Bank and probably, according to the Jordanians, absconded with about $70 million. He's a real crook. He got to London and convinced Admiral (William J.) Crowe at the time—this was the Clinton Administration—that he was God's answer to our problems with Iraq; and then he set about systematically making himself a hero on the Hill (Capitol Hill). He concocted this horrible story that the reason he fled Jordan was that King Hussein was about to turn him over to Saddam Hussein. It was a cock and bull story. But he does it in such a way that it's very convincing.

I've met innumerable people, in Washington and elsewhere, who think that this man is the answer to our prayers in Iraq. What he does very well—enormously skillful—is he picked an American political group, figured out what it was they wanted to hear, and told them it, and told them it in a very convincing and encouraging fashion. He ingratiated himself with a large part of the Senate—not just the far Right, he ingratiated himself with the Administration—the Clinton Administration first of all, and then he made the transition to the Bush Administration seamlessly. I'd say probably four-fifths of what he told us in the United States in the run up to the war was a lie, but it was a lie that the people who wanted the war wanted to hear. He couched it in terms that made it even more believable. You know, sugar makes the medicine go down very nicely. He painted a picture of the future of Iraq that had no relationship to reality and how things would work out when we invaded. He played the neo-cons and the Administration and their friends in the Senate and the Congress played right into his hands. I mean the man is truly masterful.

Q: Right now he is on the same committee that your man is on, isn't he?

THEROS: Yes. Chalabi has no support in Iraq; virtually no support. Every Iraqi I've ever talked to generally despises him. He does, however, have an enormous amount of money, both ill gotten and spottily gotten, which he is throwing around like mad. In Iraq what he is doing is he is trying to buy the allegiance of tribal sheiks. Tribal sheiks are buyable. Now, the good news is they don't stay bought, or the next man can buy them if he raises the ante a little bit. He is trying to build up a political organization in Iraq with the tribal

sheiks. The other thing he's done a bit sleazier is he has a good organization outside; his lobbyists here in Washington are superb and he knows how to use them properly. (I believe that Rumsfeld's Department of Defense actually funds Chalabi's lobby group.) He is billing himself to the business world as the only man that can make a deal for you in Iraq, and he's doing this with remarkable skill. In particular, I discovered he has a person going around to the Coalition of the Unwilling—the old Europe coalition—and saying, "Well if the Americans won't let you into Iraq, you can play ball with me."

Q: You're talking about the French, the Germans, the Russians, and the Belgians.

THEROS: And others, yes. "You play ball with me and I'll get you into the future of Iraq." He invited himself to the OPEC conference in Vienna this year. It was the first conference in which the Iraqi oil minister—the new one—attended, and in the hallways he sold himself as the man who could get them—if anybody wanted to get an oil contract or anything related to oil contracts in Iraq—as the man to do it. He seems to be trying to position himself as sort of a (Prime Minister) Rafic Hariri, the Lebanese strongman, who essentially had done it through money. If you're rich enough you become indispensable to other people in the country. This is, I think, his game plan. At the same time he has carefully cultivated his remaining allies in Washington and I think it's along the lines of, "If we don't all hang together, we're going to get hung separately," to paraphrase Benjamin Franklin.

Q: Well [I have] one last question. Would you care to comment on being an Arabist and the pleasures and the problems of being an Arabist?

THEROS: Well, you put on weight when you're an Arabist. You eat well. It is probably the best fed part of the career Foreign Service. The average Arab confronted with guests will hold them down and stuff them like a Strasburg goose. And the food is good.

If you like the culture, it is an exceedingly pleasant culture in which to live. It is polite; it is loquacious; it is fun to be with, and so forth. The politics of the Arab world were very interesting when I was a junior officer and had become depressing as I became more senior, as I realized that politically the Arabs weren't going anywhere. They've got themselves locked in the despotic governments' net. Towards the end of my career it made me rather depressed the thought that I wasn't going anywhere. Like all Arabists, we got caught up in the Arab-Israeli-Palestinian problem. There was one brief moment there, in '94, when I thought I got my hopes up and now we're back to normal. So that's been another major disappointment.

Having served in Qatar at the end of my tour, as an Arabist, was a tremendous boost because here suddenly I was in a country that was actually moving, that was actually trying to change the dynamic of the Arab world. Unfortunately, the only government in the Arab world that's trying to change things is the Qatari government, but one has the impression that other governments are beginning to realize that their population has been infected. So maybe there is some hope. In the United States, I found Robert Kaplan's book on the Arabists frankly one of the most disgusting pieces of literature I've ever read,

of character assassination that I've ever seen in my life. He libels viciously some of the most patriotic Americans I know.

Q: What was this?

THEROS: Kaplan wrote a book about Arabists, Arabists: The Romance of an American Elite. It was a first-class character assassination of some people that I felt were really remarkable.

Even in 1974, we did an analysis of which languages get you ahead in the Foreign Service and which ones don't, and the analysis was particularly of the hard languages—the world hard languages, leaving aside the ones, like Hungarian, that they only have two positions for. You look at Chinese, Japanese, Swahili, Russian, the Slavic languages, and Arabic. Swahili did really well. You could get ahead like mad if you learned Swahili, according to our analysis of promotion rates—until we realized this was the promotion of Tom Pickering [laughs], who had to learn it so fast that when you took Tom Pickering out of the … As long as it was a double-blind test, as long as it was anonymous, the promotion rates for Swahili speakers were unbelievable. And that was the individual accomplishments of Tom Pickering, who got promoted so fast it skewed the charts. [Laughs.]

Slavic speakers did quite well. Japanese speakers did reasonably well. Chinese speakers did not do so well, at the time, '74, and Arabic speakers—and you were always being compared to French and Spanish speakers—did a little bit worse than people who didn't speak Arabic, in terms of promotion. Part of that was the twenty-one months that you had to spend in language school just took you out of the promotion process. There was no specific reward other than a step increase.

Q: And there had been the '67 to '73 war, which had put things on hold for a while too.

THEROS: The '73 War revived interest. However, I had taken Arabic after the '67 war when there were very few State Department people at Arabic language school at FSI. But in the last ten years of my career in the Foreign Service, the very insidious attack on Arabists as anti-Semites began to gather force.

Q: Did you feel this was a disinformation operation on the part of the Israeli apparatus or AIPAC, or was this endemic?

THEROS: I knew anti-Semites in the Foreign Service. I don't believe that the proportion number of anti-Semites in the corps of Arabists in the Foreign Service exceeds the anti-Semites in the general population.

One of the things, as I said earlier, is living in the Arab world is unbelievably pleasant. The best way to make someone pro-Arab is let them go live for a few months in the Arab world. The Arabs, in their milieu, in their own societies, are unbelievably persuasive, unbelievably enticing, and could make a very good case. To make it very clear, I think

after 1982 when Reagan read the speech that criticized the Israelis for the invasion of south Lebanon and it was clear that speech had been written by Arabists in the Foreign Service—Ned Walker and others, who was then in the White House—that the Israelis and their friends had decided that time had come to remove this group of people who were seen as anti-Israeli and pro-Arab. And I think they had systematically destroyed the corps. At the moment the number of people in the Foreign Service who speak Arabic who had made a career of the Foreign Service has been drastically reduced and the remainder have been intimidated.

Q: Did you have the feeling that Martin Indyk, who hadn't really been an American citizen for most of his life, but also who had a Jewish hand in AIPAC, which was the foremost lobby for the Israelis, became Ambassador to Israel, but more importantly, the head of Near Eastern Affairs. Do you feel he played any role in this?

THEROS: Exactly the opposite. Martin Indyk was the one who really got it to stop. Martin Indyk had views of Israel—has views of Israel—and is, I think, extremely sympathetic towards Israel, but he's sympathetic towards Israel in a very realistic sense. His view of Israel is much more a view of an Israel that has to figure out a way to live in the Middle East and what can we do to help them do that. I think the world of him and I think he was one of the few that in fact had such a realistic view of the region. I never felt that he was part of any sort of plot against the Arabists.

End of interview