

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

AMBASSADOR LEONARD UNGER

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INTERVIEW

Q: Mr. Ambassador, how did you become interested in foreign affairs?

UNGER: I started my career in Washington as a geographer and with emphasis on problems in the United States, at an organization then going called the National Resources Planning Board.

Q: This is when?

UNGER: I came down to Washington directly from college. Graduated in the spring of 1939 from Harvard. I was a geography concentrator, a rather unusual field, at least for Harvard it was. But I was sent down to a geographer who was working at the National Resources Planning Board, as well as to some people in the Department of Agriculture who were working in similar fields. The geographer was Gilbert White who was working closely also with a political scientist named John Miller in the National Resources Planning Board. They were working on development problems all focused on the United States.

This was an era of national planning, national resources planning, industrial planning, planning for agricultural development, that kind of thing. But it initially focused on the

United States. I was in this work for a period of years. This agency I'm speaking about was the National Resources Planning Board.

Q: Which came under whom?

UNGER: It was directly under the President. It was the President's uncle, Frederick Delano who was Chairman of the Board, and Charles Eliot, who was the active head of the organization and the head of the Board of overseeing governors that included a number of prestigious people.

In those days, before World War II, planning initially meant something derived from city planning and landscape planning. They had only begun to deal with planning in the broader sense that it took on with the National Resources Planning Board and with some other U.S. Government agencies. This was one of the high moments of the New Deal, you know, when this kind of thing was new and developing.

It, of course, was cut short as World War II began and as U.S. involvement in the war grew. So a lot of that activity was curtailed and eventually terminated. Many of the people involved in it, myself included, were moved into the international field. I was asked to come over to the State Department to work in the Office of the Geographer.

The Officer of the Geographer, at that time, was working out a whole series of essentially post-war plans for use by the people who would ultimately be attending a peace conference and working out a post-war peace arrangement.

At this point, the United States was not even in the war.

Q: What were we thinking about? How did we view the war? I mean this was before we came into it. Were we looking toward an ultimate Allied victory?

UNGER: Yes. There had been lend lease and there had been the transfer of destroyers to the British. There was no question where Franklin Roosevelt stood and his Administration, namely, totally sympathetic with the Allied war against the Axis. Of course, this was a hundred times magnified when the United States itself became involved immediately after Pearl Harbor. So a lot of this planning was taking place. Thinking back to post-World War I, and the studies that were developed by a very well known Johns Hopkins professor, who was a geography professor and later became President of Johns Hopkins. (Ambassador Unger later identified this man as Isaiah Bowman). Anyway, the State Department had the records of the studies made at that time, and the plans that were made for the Treaty of Versailles and all of the various economic and territorial provisions of that sort. So prior to the United States becoming involved in the war directly, this kind of planning was moving ahead and studies were being brought up to date. Then, of course, it took on a much more specific and much more immediate aspect once the United States was involved.

I was sent over to the old State Department building. A group of us were involved in this activity. We were asked to be excused from direct military service because it was felt that this was something that was required to be done. Those of us who had been involved in it, by that time for quite a number of months, should continue and get this done against the day when the war was won and people would be sitting down for peace negotiations.

So I was involved in that. The first meetings of the Foreign Ministers took place, first in London and then in Paris, and led in the summer of 1946 to the negotiations for the Treaty of Paris. I was at each one of the negotiations there.

Q: What were your particular responsibilities?

UNGER: I was pretty much low man on the totem pole. I was doing research on boundary problems, on economic functioning. In other words, if a new boundary was to be drawn, as it was drawn between Yugoslavia and Italy, between Italy and France, between Italy and Austria--those happened to be the areas that I was most involved in, as well as some of the Balkan situations--the question was, what kind of a boundary could be drawn that would do least violence to ethnic situations but at the same time also not be an economic nonsense?

Q: Did you have any sort of imperatives that were working there? At your level, people say, "Well, never again will we do this. We saw the mistakes." Were there certain things that, at least, in your thinking, that we've really got to avoid this or that?

UNGER: Oh, yes. There was a great deal of feeling on the part of people who had studied the Treaty of Versailles and all the related treaties that some very grievous errors that had been committed. Of course, one such case was the economic burden put on Germany, but also some of the territorial decisions were considered mistakes. For example, whatever any American may have felt, the Yugoslavs obviously felt bitter that the head of the Adriatic had been lost--the two good outlets to the sea, namely, Trieste and Fiume, which had been taken over (illegally, in the case of Fiume) after World War I, taken over by Italy. The Yugoslavs felt that this was territory, including the territory going north all the way up into the Alps, that was inhabited by Yugoslav people and it should be ceded to Yugoslavia. They felt the Port of Trieste was a natural for them and that it should be ceded to them as their major outlet. Also, they felt that the population in Trieste was either Yugoslav, or Yugoslav converted to Italian after World War I. So these were all the kinds of issues.

Q: How about the German-speaking people up at the Italian-Austrian border?

UNGER: Right, like the Alto Adige, "Trento e Trieste and all of that.

Well, to jump ahead a little bit, when the war in Europe had come to an end, a Four-Power Commission was established (in 1945 or early 1946), British, French, American and Russian to visit, in anticipation of a peace conference, the Italian-Yugoslav and

Austrian border areas. The task was to consult the population and come to a conclusion as to where the new boundary should be drawn. When everybody on that Commission got to London and then subsequently moved over to Paris for the Peace Conference, needless to say, the Russians drew a line far to the west, practically out on the Venetian plain. The Americans, on the other extreme, drew a line that was only a little bit west of what had been the post-World War I boundary. The French were closer to the Russians. The British were closer to the Americans. But there were four lines.

Ultimately, after a great deal of negotiation in Paris, and sending further groups out to investigate specific situations, the decision was made--as you can read it in the Italian Peace Treaty--to set up a Free Territory of Trieste which would be an independent entity, neither under Yugoslavia nor under Italy.

I'm trying to remember precisely why that solution was never realized. It was to go ahead and a governor was to be appointed, but with the 1948 elections impending in Italy it became a very sensitive political issue. It was the conviction that these were crucial elections that could spell the difference between Italy remaining essentially western-oriented and eventually not only a part of the Marshall Plan, but a part of NATO, et cetera; or Italy might go Communist and become essentially a part of the Eastern bloc.

The elections were crucial. One of the political steps taken, in anticipation of the election, was the Tripartite Declaration by United States, France and Britain of March 20, 1948, saying that Trieste (without being too specific as to area, etc.) should be returned to Italy; it was said to be basically Italian. In spite of what was provided in the Peace Treaty, namely setting up a Free Territory Trieste, this Italian city "should be returned to Italy." The presumption is that this declaration had considerable impact on the voters in Italy, reduced the pro-Communist vote, and Italy stayed with the west and eventually joined NATO, et cetera.

Q: Well, it was a very practical, almost a tactical, decision because of the immediate situation, the concern that Italy always has had a very strong Communist party. But in 1948, there seemed to be the possibility that it would join the Eastern bloc.

UNGER: The conviction was that, once this had taken place, if it did, there was no turning back. The Soviet Union would make very sure that it would remain securely Communist. Now, of course, with all the things that subsequently have happened, starting with Yugoslavia, and now much more broadly, none of that took place.

Q: You became Assistant Chief of Southeast European Affairs in the State Department.

UNGER: As time went on, yes. But in the immediate peace negotiation situation in 1946, I was in London as part of that delegation, having been on delegations that actually visited the area in order "to consult the population." I was on two commissions. One was the commission that was sent prior to the peace treaty negotiations in Paris in the summer. Then, once the decision was made for the Peace Treaty with Italy to set up the

Free Territory of Trieste, it was recognized that Trieste would be a kind of economic monstrosity. Therefore, a Four-Power Economic Commission was set up to go to Trieste and analyze the whole area, analyze the economic situation, and see what could be done and what kind of outside assistance was going to be required, particularly during an initial period, to get the new FTT on its feet.

I was the U.S. Commissioner on that Four-Power Commission. That was in January, or perhaps early February of '47.

Q: Did you have any sort of marching orders when you went out there? Was the American attitude, at that particular time, to see what's fair?

UNGER: There were general marching orders, yes. One I've already mentioned. Namely, that as far as the United States was concerned, for very broad political reasons, Italy must be kept in the western orbit. Trieste was a crucial factor in this. If Trieste were lost to Italy and awarded to Yugoslavia, this would be an impossible situation. The Communist party in Italy would be able to exploit any such decision so that Italy might well join the Eastern bloc. Now, specifically--I'm jumping around a little bit--but on that point, a declaration was made in anticipation of the crucial Italian election--this was the Tripartite Declaration (already mentioned) that stated that Trieste should be returned to Italy and, therefore, there would be no "Free Territory of Trieste."

But in the meantime there was the possibility that the Free Territory would be set up and would face serious economic problems. So there was appointed an Economic Commission to try to decide what kind of help a Free Territory would need, once it was set up. I was the International Secretary of that Commission that went out in February of '47.

Then, on March 20 of 1948, at the time of the crucial Italian election, a declaration was made recommending the return of Trieste to Italy. Once the declaration was made, it was perfectly clear that, whatever happened, a Free Territory of Trieste, as provided for in the Italian Peace Treaty, was not going to be realized. Therefore, the economic study that had been made was more or less irrelevant. But it was, of course, not until many years later, namely in the fall of 1954, that the thing was finally settled and the City of Trieste was in fact reincorporated into Italy. Much of the remainder of the Free Territory was incorporated into Yugoslavia. That was as a result of secret negotiations in London from February to October in 1954, where I took part as assistant to the U.S. negotiator, Ambassador Llewellyn Thompson.

Q: To go back to this time when you were out there. When you say you consulted the people, can you give a little idea of how you went about it? After these consultations--obviously, we had political reasons for doing this, thus and so--but how did you personally feel? What was your personal judgment and the members of your Commission?

UNGER: There was definitely a mixed feeling. As I said, Professor Philip Mosley of Columbia Univ. was the leader; I'm talking now about the 1946 Boundary Commission. This was, for me, a new part of the world, in the sense that although I had become familiar with it in Washington, from all the documents and talking to people, et cetera, I had never been out there. So when we went out there, certainly objective number one was to learn as much as possible, to get as objective a view as we could of--in the first place--the ethnic situation.

We knew, for example, that once Mussolini had taken over in Italy any kind of study, ethnic survey, census or whatever, would certainly be distorted to suit his purposes. So we had to discount that kind of thing.

We knew at the same time, that, with anything that had been done post-World War II in the area occupied by Yugoslavia, which was most of the area in real terms if not population, the inhabitants would be told pretty well what they were supposed to say in response to any kind of a census. So we had a difficult task. We had a lot of statistics that we had to evaluate, looking wherever possible for legitimate and valid indications of the sentiment of the people in the area. We had all kinds of linguistic and ethnic information which we had to evaluate it as to how valid it was. The idea was to draw a line--I think that was the instructions of the Boundary Commission--to draw a line leaving the minimum of the other nationality on the "wrong" side of the boundary.

I think this was an education for me in "real politic." It became clear, certainly, that given British, French and American objectives with reference to Italy, namely, to keep Italian politics from going over in the Communist direction, that we were certainly going to be working for a settlement that would be at least acceptable in Italy, and not be exploited by the Communist party in Italy to win a lot of votes for its side.

At the same time, as the Boundary Commission put under way in '46, Yugoslavia was an ally and Italy was the defeated enemy. And so there were definite limits as to how much and how far our Commission could go. I don't know how familiar you are with boundary problems and population problems and ethnic distributions and so on.

Q: I lived for five years in Yugoslavia so I know about the ethnic overlap in that area.

UNGER: Yes. It's almost impossible to draw a fair boundary.

Q: There is no way you can draw a fair boundary.

UNGER: That's right, because among other things, urban areas are predominantly Italian. Even though you know the names of people who profess to be stoutly Italian, you know that in many cases they have to have had Yugoslav origins, remotely, somewhere and sometime.

(Well, I'm glad you were in Yugoslavia because you know what kind of a situation this was!)

Anyway, the Peace Treaty ultimately set up the Free Territory of Trieste as a compromise measure. Initially, pending the time when the provisions setting up the Free Territory would come into force, the Allied military government continued to govern in the northern part, including the city. The Yugoslav military government continued to govern in the south.

Q: The British put troops in very quickly because of the dispute there.

UNGER: There was a very, very tense moment right at the very end of the war, well before the Peace Treaty. There had been no decision as to what would be the ultimate fate of this area. As far as the Yugoslavs were concerned, it was going to be part of Yugoslavia. And Tito moved his troops very rapidly, a contingent of them, to arrive in Trieste before the Allied Forces got there. The Allied Forces were working their way up the Italian Adriatic Coast, to Venice and beyond, and eventually they arrived at Trieste. There was a confrontation which, fortunately, never turned into an active battle. But it was a very tense period and initially Trieste was occupied by both Yugoslav and Allied Forces, but the Yugoslavs ultimately agreed to withdraw from the center of the city.

When I went to the Trieste area with the Boundary Commission (sent by the Council of Foreign Ministers) in '46, the Yugoslavs were still all over the place, and certainly in force up on the Carso, the high plateau behind the city (the Karst is the way the Yugoslavs would refer to it). So it was still very tense and the Yugoslavs were still determined to remain physically present to support their claim. Of course, where the boundary was ultimately drawn, all of Zone B, the southern part of what had been intended to be the Free Territory of Trieste, was in fact handed over to Yugoslavia.

Q: We'll come back to Trieste a little later for the final settlement which was in the mid-50s, I guess.

UNGER: Yes, 1954.

Q: After that work, you came back and were dealing with Southeast Europe?

UNGER: Yes. I was the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Europe, under Livingston Merchant. The head of the Office of Southern European Affairs was Walworth Barbour and his immediate deputy was Walter Dowling. I was sort of a second deputy with responsibility for the Trieste problem and the Balkans. The Southern European Division at that time included Italy and the Balkans.

Q: Two questions: How did we view the Balkans at that particular time, this is '48, '49. It's not in our area and we're sort of mildly interested, but that's a Soviet problem?

UNGER: I think that point of view eventually and reluctantly was adopted, but not initially. In each of the defeated countries, in Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria, there was something called Allied Control Commission, just as there was also such a Commission in Italy, (and I guess later in Germany and Austria).

The Allied Control Commissions were, quadripartite: Soviet, American, British and French; each nation was represented by a commissioner. In Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria, I'm sure the chairman was Soviet; in Italy, it was probably an American. The idea was that these were charged with the faithful execution of the Treaties of Peace, although, they had already been established, on a more strictly military basis, prior to the coming into force of the Peace Treaty.

Q: From your level, did the people around you see any leverage or working?

UNGER: Oh, yes, we worked a lot on that. I'd cite Hungary in particular; in Hungary, there were very prominent figures who were anxious to work with the British, French, Americans and in general, with the West. They were realistic about the fact that the Soviets were in charge, but they wanted to keep channels open. I'm sure those names are familiar: Nagy, and others in Hungary, who at very considerable risk to their person, took positions insisting on a continued British, American and French presence in the Allied Control Commission.

In due course, those Commissions came to an end; their job was over. And little by little, in each one of the three countries mentioned, the Western Allied role became more and more circumscribed. There always was the possibility of doing something intended to protect the individuals who wanted to speak out for more than just total Soviet domination. But those people often didn't last very long and there wasn't a great deal of protection that could be provided.

The Soviet contention was that precisely the reverse was true in Italy. But I think it's fair to say it wasn't; there was an active, flourishing Communist party in Italy.

Q: Did you feel at the time--we're talking about the '48, '49 period--whether the State Department could work with the Soviet Union?

UNGER: We thought so initially, yes. This was the whole idea: we were allies. Obviously, we had a different form of government from theirs, but we had all been very much opposed to the Nazis and the Fascists and the Japanese. We were all working for a different kind of world order. There was--I'm sure you know this from your own reading, although I don't know how far back your recollections go--there was an era, shall we say an "era of good feeling", of a lot of illusion in the United States about the Soviet Union and about the possibility of working with them, and so on. Particularly, of course, when this was put up against attitudes about the Nazis, the Fascists and the Japanese.

The change of attitude came only through the experience, for example, of these Allied Control Commissions, i.e. the activities of the Italian Communist Party, and so on. And in the Central European situation there was again a quadripartite government and a Russian role in that: the Russian role, in their sector of Germany and their sector of Austria. The fact was that these Soviet-administered areas were essentially forbidden territories for Allied officials, whereas the Russians were quite free to come and go on the other side.

What had been a wartime alliance and an era of good feeling obviously deteriorated fairly rapidly under these circumstances and tensions rose. Ultimately, of course, this new situation was reflected in the creation of NATO. In the earlier situation and prior to NATO there was the Marshall Plan. (I don't know if you know, but at one point Czechoslovakia was going to be included in the Marshall Plan but was excluded, presumably on Russian insistence). Then the security and military threat to Western Europe developed and it became more and more sharply recognized. That's of course, when people began to talk about military cooperation, and NATO was the result. I was very much involved in that; I was one of the ushers for the first NATO session down on the Mall in Washington!

Q: When was this?

UNGER: This is a little hard to be precise; I would guess the spring of '47. I think that's when NATO was first brought into existence but I'm not sure of my dates.

Q: This is again because you were dealing with Europe in the State Department?

UNGER: Yes. I was, by that time, totally out of the Geographer's Office and was in the European Bureau in something called European Regional Affairs (no longer working on Southern Europe alone. Lane Timmons was my boss at one time and Livingston Merchant was the Assistant Secretary. The European Regional Affairs Office was unlike all of the other offices which were related to a particular area, whether it was Eastern Europe or Southern Europe or Western Europe. In Regional Affairs we had an overall mandate for a number of special problems, which included the Marshall Plan and NATO, and various politico-military agreements.

For example, I'm not sure of my year, but it probably was '49, I was sent to Rome as head of a group that was to discuss, with the Italian government, the military aid program and to work out a bilateral agreement on that subject. There were several outstanding problems that needed to be ironed out. It was not until 1950 that I was sent to Trieste as Political Adviser to the (British) Commanding General.

Q: I'd like to get a little of your experience. You were with the area that was dealing with Italy, among other things, in the '48 election. Was this, in a way, a bad experience? If we wanted to we could pull out all stops to support a country. In the first place, how were you involved? How did you see it at the time? In retrospect, was this a bad lesson for us?

UNGER: I guess not--I would say "no". We sought a good answer among some very stark alternatives. Remember, this was an era when, after our wartime alliance with the Soviet Union, we became persuaded the Soviet Union was out to get all it could get in Europe, to dominate the European scene and move beyond the areas where it was initially established. Of course, Italy was a prime target. A lot of us had been enthusiastic comrades of the Russians in the wartime period. When we went to Paris to begin to negotiate the peace treaties and, prior to that, in fact, in the operation of some of these Boundary Commissions I was involved in, we were pals with our Russian counterparts. We had fought the war together; we had defeated the Axis; so then we were in an era of good feeling and peace.

Then we began to find out how they functioned internationally, and that to them objective facts were a matter of total indifference. [Laughter] And, of course, it was particularly disturbing because some of the people that they sent--they obviously had to be chosen at random, often including people who had very little experience abroad--were perfectly decent, honest types. They knew what they were saying was a lot of "baloney"! But their orders, of course, were very strict. Every once in a while, over quite a number of vodkas in a hotel bar somewhere, one of these guys would take his hair down and even cry. They were realizing what it was they were being ordered to do, and we were realizing the true nature of the Soviet government, in terms of its international functioning and its policies and objectives.

This, as I say, came as a gross disappointment. But, of course, once the pattern was set, it was only many, many years later that those of us who had been through this experience were ready to begin to think about a more reasonable and constructive relationship with the Soviet Union.

Q: I'm not using this in pejorative terms but a real true hard experience, a real mindset had been developed by people who went in with relatively goodwill and realizing what they were up against. I mean maybe this is the wrong term but the "Cold Warrior" mentality was based on experience.

UNGER: Oh, absolutely. It was not a point of view that any of us wanted to adopt. Even once it was adopted there were some of the practitioners, who as far as I and many of my colleagues were concerned, were going much too far. But we all had to become realistic about what the Soviet system was, what their objectives seemed to be, how they were prepared to try to implement them, what their plan was for Eastern Europe and as much of Western Europe as they could gobble up. The pressure points are perfectly well known, and Trieste was one of them; Greece and Turkey, to some extent were; Austria certainly was--also Berlin.

And then, of course, this began to have its expressions in the Far East. But I didn't get to the Far East until my assignment to Bangkok in 1958.

Q: You went to Trieste as a political adviser which was in 1950?

UNGER: Yes. This, of course, was after the Peace Treaty had been settled.

Q: What were you doing as a POLAD, which is a political adviser?

UNGER: These weren't the first POLADs. There had been a POLAD to the various military commanders. Bob Murphy, for example, was a POLAD in North Africa when the Allied invasion took place there. Then I think he, and others following him, were POLADs in Rome, when we still had a Military government in Italy. There was a POLAD in Germany. Doug MacArthur--not the General, his nephew--was a POLAD at SHAPE. I was Doug's counterpart after I moved from my POLAD activities in Trieste to my POLAD activities in Naples, which were of a totally different order. But again, I was Political Adviser because at that time--and I think it still is true--where we had a military government or a NATO Command, we usually had attached to them a political adviser.

Q: There's a political POLAD still in Naples.

UNGER: Is there still?

Q: Oh, yes. My last post overseas was Consul General in Naples. What were you doing in Trieste as POLAD?

UNGER: In the first place, I was the channel for relaying State Department opinions and instructions. Also, I was the channel for keeping the State Department informed of what was taking place in Trieste. I was a Political Adviser, in that case, to a British Commanding General. He had an American deputy. He also had an American general who was in charge of civil affairs. This was all under Allied military government. I served as a POLAD, in effect, to all of them; I was the person who was supposed to convey to them State Department instructions. To be sure, they weren't being instructed by the State Department so my instructions were to tell them our point of view, to discuss with them steps that we felt should be taken, or changes that should be made in some of their decisions, or the way they were administrating the area.

I also had responsibility for being in touch with as many good sources as possible, to gain a feeling for the local political and economic situations. Were there crises building up? How was the Military government accepted and seen by the local leaders and people? What was it doing that was damaging to our collective U.S. and British policies? Also, by this time, the American commitment to the eventual return of Trieste to Italy was well established. The British tended to be a little bit more on the fence on that one; they had a very sharp eye on Yugoslavia at that time and wished to be conciliatory with Tito. So these things had to be resolved in our working out what kinds of decisions we would make; this meant civilian-military compromises and American-British compromises.

Q: You were saying you were not acting as a professor, that you were having to deal with real problems that had to be resolved. How did you find the Military responded to you?

UNGER: It depended a great deal on the individual situation. There were definite British and American differences, to say nothing of differences with the French, the Yugoslavs, and the Italians when we had to deal with them, which we did from time to time.

The British were old, experienced hands at this kind of arrangement. To have a British General administering was a situation that they had had a lot of experience with before. Also, the British Political Adviser, who was from the British Foreign Office, had a very clear and well understood relationship with his superior.

The American General, who was deputy to the British Commanding General--and, of course, I worked with both generals--the American General was a hearty military man who was very sharp and very perceptive, but sometimes quite impatient of some of the political considerations that I felt I had to bring to his attention. He saw it more as an exclusively military task. I believe that I had a very good relationship with the British commander as well.

Q: Who was that, do you know?

UNGER: Terence Airey was the first one. He was really out of British Intelligence and had served in Switzerland some of the time during World War II. He was followed by a totally different individual, General John Winterton, who was a bluff British military type--a combat soldier. We got along famously, but he had a totally different approach to everything from Airey. Airey was extremely adept and he really didn't need political advisers; he was his own political adviser! Winterton badly needed political advisers, and, by and large, he was responsive to our advice. They were two very different people.

My next "political adviser" job was in Naples.

Q: What did that involve?

UNGER: That is the headquarters of the Southern command of NATO.

Q: That was 1952 to 1953?

UNGER: I guess that's right, yes. NATO had, of course, not very long since been set up and had started functioning with its first headquarters in Paris. Then three regional NATO headquarters were established: one for Northern Europe, somewhere in Scandinavia, one for Central Europe and one for Southern Europe, in Naples. The commander--I don't think he was the first, I think it had already been set up for a while--the second commander was Admiral Carney.

Q: There's always been an admiral there.

UNGER: In the Southern Command, that's right.

Q: Admiral Forrest Sherman was the first.

UNGER: I think you're right--he was the first and he either came from, or then went on to Spain; I'm quite sure he didn't have a political adviser. But then Admiral Carney came; Carney was a very political type and had very good feelings for the political situation. He realized that his command was going to be involved willy-nilly in a number of circumstances, all the way from the Middle East, then particularly Greece and Turkey, Italy and Yugoslavia, Spain, Portugal, Gibraltar, et cetera. Even North Africa. He felt that he needed, if nothing else, information and, perhaps on occasion, political advice.

So I was assigned to the embassy in Rome but to be resident in Naples, as adviser to him. I got, from Rome, telegraphic material and dispatches and a variety of reporting from many sources, which I sorted, referenced, organized and passed on to him, to keep him informed as to what was going on in his region. When he would have visitors from around that region, political leaders and military leaders from all the various Mediterranean countries, he would usually have me come for lunch and/or a meeting. I traveled with him to Athens and Istanbul and once to Spain. He was very conscious of the political factors and very anxious to be as fully informed as possible. He obviously enjoyed the political side. So that was my job with him, and he was Commander all the time that I was there.

Q: What was the view of Turkey and Greece? Were they both with NATO at that time?

UNGER: Yes.

Q: Because I know much later that was certainly a thorn in the side of the NATO commander, the relationship. How was it at your time?

UNGER: It was just developing. In both cases, there were some tricky problems. But the sharp tensions between the two countries hadn't yet developed. Everybody knew that there were problems and there were territorial disputes, et cetera. Cyprus was, I think, still administered by the British. So the differences were not all that acute. Turkey was just beginning to get used to being a part of the European world, the Mediterranean world. They had people at the command and they had a great deal to learn. But they were anxious to learn.

For example, we went to Ankara; there, of course, my first contact was with the American Embassy to get a good reading on the situation. Then I went with Carney to call on the various political figures in the Turkish government. Then we went to Istanbul and similarly talked to people. He went, at one point, I think, to Izmir. I never did; Izmir was a NATO subcommand, just being set up.

As I say, I often went with him to Rome. He, in fact, also had a POLAD seconded to him by the Italian government, who was half of the time in Rome and half of the time in Naples. I worked very closely with him.

I'm trying to think if there were any other POLADs--I don't think so. There may have been some later on but I don't think there were any others at that time.

Q: I wonder if you could maybe skip ahead to your involvement in the final Trieste negotiations. What were you doing? What were the problems that you saw at the time? This was in 1956, I think.

UNGER: No, 1954; we settled the problem on October 8th, 1954, I think. I have recently been into those files at the Archives; as a matter of fact--I don't know whether I brought it--I've just written a study on that subject which is going to be published. It's one of a series at Johns Hopkins, SAIS, they're doing on negotiating histories.

Q: One can refer to that for the details. What was your viewpoint of this and how were you involved?

UNGER: I was asked by Ambassador Thompson, who was then our Ambassador in Austria and who had been assigned, as a secret mission, the task of representing the U.S. in a negotiation to resolve the Trieste problem.

Q: Thompson?

UNGER: Llewellyn Thompson. He was our Ambassador in Vienna. He had previously been Counselor of the Embassy in Rome, so he knew the Trieste situation. These were secret negotiations in London that began in February of '54.

Q: With whom?

UNGER: First, with the Yugoslavs, and then with the Italians; we were working jointly with the British. In other words, the first meetings took place when Thompson and Geoffrey Harrison, his British Foreign Office counterpart, met with Vladko Velebit, the Yugoslav Ambassador to London. Then, after extended discussions, they met with Manlio Brosio, the Italian Ambassador. Those individual discussions went on for a while; then it became a matter of moving back and forth, trying to narrow the differences. Eventually, the four parties did arrive at an agreed solution, which was announced on October 8th, 1954. And that was the settlement of the Trieste problem, which represented, essentially, a compromise division in which the city of Trieste was returned to Italy, after all those years, and most of the remainder of the territory was ceded to Yugoslavia.

Q: In the first place, your role must have been "Mr. Trieste" through that period. You spent a great amount of your Foreign Service life dealing with Trieste.

UNGER: Of course I had, at one point, branched out to the whole southern European and Mediterranean scene, particularly when I was in Naples as Political Adviser to the NATO Commander and had to be conversant with the situation in that entire region. Then I had gone back to Washington and became much more involved in the whole European picture. Specifically, NATO and the Marshall Plan. That's when I was with the European Regional Bureau which had responsibility for these regional activities.

Then, because of my past association--Tommy Thompson knew me when we had been together when he was Counselor at the Embassy in Rome and he knew of my having been on the Trieste Commission--so when he was selecting his group to go and work on the negotiations in London, he asked me, or asked my superiors to release me, to go with him to London, which I did.

Q: What was in it for the Yugoslavs? Apparently, in the public's awareness, it seemed they made the biggest concession.

UNGER: Well, the Yugoslavs, at that point, had fallen out with the Russians; this had happened only a little while before. Although they certainly had never said so in so many words, except in very confidential circumstances, they were looking for help from the West. They figured the time had come to make their peace with the United States and with the Western Europeans, and specifically with the Italians.

At that time, there was a lot of talk about an Italian-Greek-Turkish Alliance. This, of course, was when the Soviet Union and its Allies in Eastern Europe were considered an active threat. The Yugoslavs, having broken away from Stalin and Tito having taken his independent stand, led some to think that this three-power arrangement might be expanded to a Four-Power Association of some sort, including Yugoslavia. In any event, Yugoslavia was clearly intent on getting rid of any problems and situations troubling its relations with the West, particularly with the British and Americans, and also with the Italians.

Trieste was still the outstanding bone of contention; there was always trouble there. Even when I was there as Political Adviser there were frequent demonstrations and occasional riots, even though things had calmed down a good deal. The conviction was that, if there was to be a constructive relationship between Yugoslavia and Italy, this problem just had to be put out of the way.

Q: You mentioned Ambassador Thompson conducted the secret negotiations. Why is it, that in the popular mind, Clare Boothe Luce, our Ambassador to Italy, had sort of been given the public credit for this?

UNGER: That's the way she wanted it. She was a very articulate and vocal person. She knew how to get to the press. Tommy was not out for publicity. I wouldn't say he was a retiring person, but, in a sense, he didn't give a damn. His objective was to get settled

what had been a very troublesome and potentially very explosive issue. He knew that the people he wanted to impress knew what he had done. I mean, Mrs. Luce was helpful, as was Jimmy Riddleberger, our Ambassador in Yugoslavia. He had to do everything he could to put the Yugoslavs in a frame of mind where they would accept a compromise settlement. So she had to do that at the Rome end and she worked quite hard for that.

But the real genius in this thing was Tommy, without any question.

Q: He was also the great negotiator for Austria, too. Really looking at the art of diplomacy, as one thinks of it. Really sitting down with people and doing it. His finger was in two major pies.

UNGER: Absolutely. Well, then, of course, he had a lot of other negotiations that he had a certain amount, if not a major responsibility for; for example when he was ambassador in the Soviet Union. He was involved in quite a number of things there, as he was also when he was in Washington.

Q: Working with him, what was your impression of his method of operation?

UNGER: Well, it was a very personal method. He was leery of institutional approaches. He was a diplomat of the old school, but thoroughly alert and aware of the modern age. It wasn't that he didn't understand how things happened in 1954--at that time, and all the years afterward, as long as he lived. He was very much alive to how things had to be done. But he had strong convictions about the personal role.

A big splash in the newspapers, and all of that, was something he didn't want to have any part in. And, in fact, as I say, I think the Trieste negotiation, because of the way he conducted it--and the British went along with it--and because of the very special relationship he had with the newspaper people--in other words, he didn't ignore the newspapers--he knew how to work with them. He knew how to get their loyalty, how to persuade them how to handle with a given story. If it were to break, it would make it impossible to get any kind of constructive solution on the problem that he was working on. The press accepted that.

We began talking early in February. It was June before any press leak that had any real validity came out. And, of course, it wasn't until October that the solution was announced publicly. The press were willing to be circumspect about it and not "spill the beans".

Q: This was probably an attitude that would be impossible to maintain in today's world.

UNGER: I suspect so. You may find the occasional old newspaper type who understands these things. He, on his own, might go along. But he would probably be scared to death that headquarters would fire him if they knew that he was sitting on a story. So it's extremely difficult today to do this kind of thing.

But it was, I think, even in retrospect, indispensable to the process; if the word had come out, both countries would have had to take very inflexible positions and the compromises that were worked out never could have been reached.

Q: Skipping over your time in the War College, we'll move to your assignment to Thailand as Deputy Chief of Mission, DCM, 1958. How did this assignment come about?

UNGER: I imagine the principal factor was that there was a new appointment as Ambassador to Thailand, namely Alexis Johnson, succeeding Max Bishop. Johnson was appointed early in '58. He was looking for a DCM. He didn't propose to keep on the man who had been Bishop's DCM. He had been asking around and, I think, it was probably Marshall Green who had mentioned my name to him. Marshall and I had been working on this worldwide survey of overseas deployments and bases, for which Marshall had been the East Asian man. When we traveled to East Asia, I was on all of the trips. Marshall and I got acquainted and hit it off very well. I think he mentioned my name to Alexis Johnson.

So I was in the middle of my War College year that Johnson was getting ready to go. He suggested we get together and I invited him down to Fort McNair for lunch. We talked and he told me what he had in mind. I was very pleased because, of course, at the end of my War College year, I would be looking for a new assignment. I had expressed an interest previously in serving in some different part of the world. All of my experience, up to that time, had been European. I said I would like to go out to this area Thailand, he was looking for a DCM and so that was it!

Q: He was willing to take somebody who had not served in the Far East? I mean was this a detractor? Did he feel that this was necessary?

UNGER: He knew that I had accumulated a certain amount of background on that region by virtue of my participation in this worldwide bases survey, when I had worked with Marshall. Of course, at the War College, we had obviously picked up a number of the outstanding East Asian problems at the time, and had studied them. But I had not served out there. He apparently decided, nevertheless, that somewhere along the way, I would learn enough to be able to be a useful assistant to him. He, obviously, was the experienced person in that part of the world and he was going to be calling the shots.

Q: Well, how did he use you? Some ambassadors use DCM's in different ways.

UNGER: I would say that he identified a certain number of sectors in which he expected me to take responsibility. If I had to make some kind of a distinction, I would say that the political aspects of the job, and particularly the more sensitive political ones, he very definitely kept to himself. But some of the less complicated political things, and a lot of the economic things, he was ready to have me take over, always under his supervision. I was the first to recognize that this was, for me, a new part of the world and I had an awful

lot to learn. Until I had an opportunity to get some of that behind me, I obviously would have to move a little slowly and cautiously.

But there was a great deal going on at that time in Thailand, the Thai-U.S. relations. They were becoming more and more significant as time went on. We, the Thai, the Philippines and Pakistan, which at that time, of course, still had its Eastern Branch, we were all in SEATO. At that time SEATO had a certain role and reputation. It didn't last very much longer but at that time it was active.

Q: Did you feel SEATO, at that point, was something other than a paper treaty?

UNGER: We doubted that it was ever going to be a close treaty in the same sense, for example, as NATO, identifying committed forces, setting up joint commands, assigning forces to an identified SEATO commander, etc. SEATO never went that far, and I think it probably was not intended that it would.

I had worked a lot on NATO and it was much more a matter of a difference than a similarity. I think SEATO was seen as primarily political, a means of providing some reassurance to the Filipinos, and particularly to the Thai, who at that time were living in an atmosphere where there was a fair amount of hostility and uncertainty in the region. The French Indochina period was not very far in the past. China, of course, was a distinctly hostile power.

In Malaysia for example, at that time (it was British Malaysia still) there was essentially a Communist insurgency. Indonesia was, certainly in the Sukarno days, in a good deal of trouble. The Philippines had the Huks problem. And, of course, in Vietnam, there was the North/South conflict, which was hotter or cooler, depending on the time, but always potentially a very active military situation.

So SEATO was seen as not so much an active instrument, but as a means of reassurance, particularly to the Thai and the Filipinos, to reassure them that their links with the United States and with some other Western countries was not going to be a serious endangerment to them. That if they were in trouble, their friends from outside were prepared to come and lend a hand, give them support.

Q: What were American interests in Thailand at that time?

UNGER: That's a tough one. I would say that, approaching it negatively, the United States felt that it would be dangerous if, one by one, the countries of that area were either taken over by Communist powers or fell so much under Communist influence that they were responsive only to orders out of Moscow and perhaps, to some extent, out of Beijing. Little by little, many significant interests of the United States in the region would be threatened.

One of the most serious questions, of course, was the Straits. The Straits of Malacca, where Singapore sits and across the way, Sumatra; and the Sunda Strait in Indonesia. The absolutely critical nature of those two straits was clear for all sea communications between East Asia and the Indian Ocean and, beyond, i.e. the Mediterranean and Europe. The feeling was that if things began to fall apart in Southeast Asia, in due course, Communist power would be established in Malaysia and then in Singapore and perhaps Indonesia. In fact, each one of those countries already had its own internal subversion problems.

When the British were still there, in what was still called Malaya, there was a serious Communist problem and there was a very active Communist movement in Singapore itself. There was not such in Thailand, but there certainly was in Vietnam, in Laos and Cambodia, too. Those situations were somewhat chancy.

So there was a feeling, that we now look back on and don't particularly approve of, or agree with, that saw all these issues as black and white: "they're either for us or they're against us!" And a fear that both the Philippines and Thailand might be engulfed and lost. These indispensable sea routes, indispensable to countries like Japan and Korea, between Europe and East Asia, would be cut off and all the resources of the area would be cut off and all the population. This would make India dubious about any kind of connections with the United States; even Australia might feel an obligation to change its policies. In effect, that part of the world would be completely under direct or indirect Communist rule. The balance would be a dangerous one for the United States, Western Europe and Japan.

Q: How did the Thai see the situation at that time?

UNGER: Well, the Thai governments were by and large Western and U.S.-oriented. They certainly were anti-Communist. There was a new young King and series of dictators who were the real bosses. Sarit, for example, had taken charge in Thailand about six months before I came there. He had taken charge about the time that Alexis Johnson got out there, or shortly before. We developed a very close relationship with him. He was looking for American support and assistance, including economic assistance and military assistance. He argued for this on the basis that he was a friend of the United States and of the West and that he was an enemy of Communism. He would be doing what he could do to see that the Communists didn't have any further successes in his region.

This was kind of a black and white era-"you're for us or you're agin' us!" There were rulers in the Philippines, at that time, who were taking a similar line. In the Philippines, of course, the United States had a much more direct stake because of what are now two bases, Clark Air Base and Subic Bay, but then were proliferated far beyond that. There were, I don't know how many, American installations of one kind or another, which were considered vital to our position in the western Pacific. And there was a feeling that Japan, and its friendly orientation, was dependent on keeping those sea lanes open and preserving a reasonably secure situation in East Asia.

There was also a feeling that it was important to hold on to this last little friendly Chinese foothold, namely Taiwan. And there was a very definite apprehension that mainland China might try to move against Taiwan. It was at that point that it was announced that the American Seventh Fleet would be regularly circulating through those waters in order to inhibit any intention of the Chinese to make a move of that sort. This is, of course, also the period of the Korean War and subsequent years.

Q: But the aftermath is still lingering on.

UNGER: Yes. There certainly had been a sharp division in our American official thinking about China. But the Korean War, of course, had been one of the circumstances responsible for setting U.S. policies for East Asia.

Q: How did we look toward the People's Republic of China at that time?

UNGER: With tremendous misgivings and distrust. The feeling that they were hand-in-glove with the Soviets and they were even less amenable to reason. They had taken recently over in China and Chiang Kai-shek had moved across the Straits to Taiwan. We had interposed the Seventh Fleet to protect Chiang Kai-shek who was our man in those days. We were intent on preserving what there was left of what we called "Free China". And we were intent on preserving South Korea with the kind of government it had, having fought off the North's attempt to take over the South.

All of those events were not very many years in the past. I went out to East Asia in '58. The Korean War was a little bit in the past; it began in '50 but it was only finally over about '53. And the Taiwan Straits crisis was '54. So these were all live issues.

Q: And Vietnam was in '54 or '55, that the division came.

UNGER: Yes. Vietnam was kind of on and off; the South was holding its own at that time, but the pressures from the North were beginning to be felt more and more. A grave defeat had already been suffered at Dien Bien Phu.

In 1962, there was a new accord on Laos. There was an apprehension that Laos also was about to be swallowed up by the Communists. So there was a conference called with the British, the Russians, the Chinese, the French and ourselves. A new accord was worked out in 1962. Once that was worked out, the new neutral, tripartite Regime was set up, in which you had representation from the Far Left, the Far Right, and Souvanna Phouma in the center. At that point it was deemed important to start over with a "clean slate." I was sent from Bangkok, where I was DCM, directly to Laos, having been sworn-in in Bangkok, as Ambassador to Laos. (Almost always a new Ambassador is sworn-in in Washington where he gets his instructions before taking up a new assignment.)

Q: In the first place, when you were in Thailand when the Kennedy Administration came in 1961, did you feel, just from your position as a Foreign Service officer there, a change in mood toward the area or not?

UNGER: Yes, I think so. There was less of a disposition to accept some of the attitudes that had been established and running by then for a fairly long period. The sort of black and white attitude of John Foster Dulles about how you can't have anything to do with the Communists; their intentions are invariably evil and aggressive. The only thing to do is to build up secure defenses and military arrangements, and work with the countries that are friendly to gear them to share the same anti-Communist attitude. (Some people referred to this as "pactitis.") In that particular area, the SEATO pact and ANZUS, and perhaps several others, were already in force.

This situation I think, in a way, was what led to the Laos settlement of 1962, which was intended to substitute a neutral solution for the dangerous East-West hostility which otherwise prevailed. Presumably, some of the initial discussions on this were between Khrushchev and Kennedy. When the new arrangement was worked out to provide for a neutral Laos, the idea was to wipe the slate clean, send in a new ambassador who was going to be there to work with not only his British and French, but also his Russian colleagues. (We Americans couldn't work with the Chinese because they wouldn't talk with us!) But we meant to try to make a success of this neutral solution, with the idea that Laos might lie as a buffer between western-oriented Thailand and Communist-oriented North Vietnam. It was also intended that a neutral Laos would not be used by North Vietnam to infiltrate troops into South Vietnam.

In Cambodia, you had kind of a neutral position of Sihanouk. If you could have a similar neutral position in Laos, perhaps you could isolate and insulate the Communists who were in charge in North Vietnam, and also the Chinese, particularly from Thailand. And Thailand could continue its existing western orientation.

Q: Did the nomination come as a surprise to you? Had anybody talked to you before about it or prepared you for it?

UNGER: I knew it might be in prospect because I knew about the Geneva Conference; I knew it was going to be necessary to appoint somebody to Laos. And several of the people who had come through Bangkok, had been working in Geneva with Harriman, who was our principle negotiator there.

Q: He was then Assistant Secretary for the Far East.

UNGER: Yes, which was an interesting job for him to accept because with his standing he could have aspired to be Secretary of State.

Q: Or President.

UNGER: Or President. He was so interested, and so determined, to work something out on Southeast Asia. He was very much opposed to the Dulles policies. He totally disapproved of them and felt that we had made a lot of mistakes. And I suppose he was sure he could work out a better solution, partly because of his experience in the Soviet Union, his contacts with the Russians, and his considerable exposure to the European point of view, the British, but others as well. For example, he was our first Marshall Plan administrator. He had a feeling that Dulles had made a botch of our whole East Asian policy, including Laos. He was not very sympathetic to the Thai but he knew that they were Allies and he had to work with them. But he was especially intent on making this compromise on Laos work.

I don't know who it was that had mentioned my name to him--it may have been Bill Sullivan who was working very closely with him at the time. (I had known Bill when he was my assistant in Naples.) It may have been Bill, knowing that I knew the story out there reasonably well, from the experience I already had had in Bangkok. There were two people--we used to call them the "Gold Dust Twins"--Bill Sullivan and Michael Forrestal, James Forrestal's son--both of whom were working to find solutions for the critical problems in this part of the world. Both of them were very much trusted lieutenants of Harriman, and I'm sure that they gave him advice about ambassadorial appointments and all kinds of other things as well. It may have been that they had something to do with that appointment.

Q: Did you get any instructions before going? Did Harriman take you to one side and tell you what he wanted?

UNGER: Oh, absolutely. He couldn't do it in Washington until several months had gone by. I didn't get back to Washington initially, and as I said, I was sworn in out there in Bangkok which was quite unusual. But the idea was to get me on the ground right away. The idea was also for me to get acquainted with my Russian opposite number and establish an effective working relationship with him. There was no pretense that we would agree on everything, by any means, but at least we should talk and look for a way to live together. Everything I did should be very loyally in support of this compromise solution for Laos, with a government that was made up of representatives from Far Right, Far Left and Center, with Souvanna Phouma in charge and coming from the Center.

My job was to do everything that I could to make Souvanna Phouma's Administration a success and constructive, also from a U.S. point of view.

Q: Who was the Russian ambassador at that time?

UNGER: Oh, boy. [Laughter]

Q: Well, how did you get along with him?

UNGER: Quite well. We saw a fair amount of each other and we talked pretty frankly. Actually, I was introduced to him in Geneva when all of these arrangements were still being worked out. (You know, there was the Conference in Geneva, the Second Geneva Conference, in '62). While I was still stationed in Bangkok I returned for a consultation in Washington; at that time I was DCM to Kenneth Young, who had taken over as Ambassador from Alex Johnson.

Harriman asked me to come to Geneva where the Second Geneva Accords were still being negotiated. He introduced me at that time to Souvanna Phouma and various other people from Laos. And one day, when we were there in Geneva, he and his Russian counterpart (Pushkin, I believe) got together; Pushkin pulled an individual over, who up to that point was unknown to me, and Harriman pulled me over and put the two of us together to shake hands. He was going to be my Russian colleague in Vientiane when I took over as ambassador.

The idea was that, however we had to do it, we were going to make the accords that were then being worked on in Geneva--and were almost ready to be signed--function successfully; those were the accords that were going to neutralize Laos. They were going to provide for the withdrawal of all foreign forces. They would (I think, in the accords themselves) develop this idea of installing a coalition government which would represent all shades of Lao opinion, all the way from the Far Right to the Far Left. They would establish an ICC, International Control Commission, with an Indian chairman and a Canadian and a Polish associate. The ICC would be there to be sure that the Geneva accords were properly carried out. That neither we, nor the Russians, nor the Thai, nor the Vietnamese nor anybody else, would trespass on the provisions of the Accord.

Q: What control did the Soviet man have over the Vietnamese, the North Vietnamese, for example?

UNGER: Considerable control. I'm not sure my memory will tell me exactly to what extent the North Vietnamese, at that point, were dependent on Soviet aid, but probably to a considerable degree. I'm sure the Chinese were involved in it as well, but the Chinese didn't have a great deal of resources to spare at that point. In other words, roughly speaking, the Soviet role in North Vietnam was like the American role in South Vietnam.

When I got to Laos, and when I was able to assess the situation and learn more directly what was going on, I discovered what the whole world has known about ever since, that the North Vietnamese, who were not able to penetrate South Vietnam directly, were using Laos as a route of passage for men and material. The idea was to try to prevent that from taking place. In other words, there were caravans moving across into Laos, from North Vietnam, traveling down the eastern edge of Laos, and then moving back into areas in South Vietnam that the Communists controlled. This, of course, was the central issue. It meant that the neutralization of Laos--which Western countries including the United States, and Thailand also, had all favored in the expectation that it would cut the North

Vietnamese supply route off from supplying their forces attacking South Vietnam-- obviously was not being achieved.

Q: We'll come back to that. How did you deal with the government of Laos? Was it really you and the Soviets talking things over with the three Princes? How did this work?

UNGER: We dealt almost always directly and officially with Souvanna Phouma. The Soviets were in very close touch, as were the North Vietnamese, with the left wing of the coalition government, Prince Souphanouvong, a half brother of Prince Souvanna Phouma, was the leader of that wing. Actually Souphanouvong was the front man for the left wing; the real figures were just the same people that we keep hearing about who are now heading the government in Laos, Nouhak and Kaysone. But at that time, they were in Hanoi or Sam Neua province of Laos (on the Vietnam border) most of the time and were not visible in Vientiane.

Their instruments were available in the government in various roles. E.g., Phoumi Vongvichit and various other people, who were associated with Prince Souphanouvong and the left wing, were in ministerial and other positions.

The right-wing certainly had definite ties with the Thais and with us; Phoumi Nosavan was the most active figure there, but the nominal head of the right-wing was Prince Boun Oum.

So you had three princes: Boun Oum on the right, Prince Souphanouvong on the left and Prince Souvanna Phouma in the middle.

Souvanna Phouma and Souphanouvong were half brothers; I believe they both had the same father.

Q: With Souvanna Phouma, did you have much to do with him?

UNGER: Oh, sure; he was my principal contact.

Q: How was he to deal with?

UNGER: He was, by and large satisfactory, but he had a very tough row to hoe. There were all kinds of things that were happening in Laos that were not pleasing to Western powers, to the Thai, to the U.S. Government, et cetera. But I had to recognize what a difficult task he had, and I had to recognize that, above all, we wanted to preserve this tripartite, neutral government. This was our policy and we believed this was our best hope of getting Laos through a very difficult situation and preserve it as a neutral country. So there were many things, including many things that Washington wanted me to do, that I didn't feel I could do or that Souvanna Phouma would say, "No, I can't" or "you shouldn't." I was on the telephone with Bill Bundy, sometimes almost everyday (usually in the middle of the night in Laos), just trying to work out all kinds of critical issues.

The Thai were very impatient with Souvanna Phouma--their man was Boun Oum--because they felt that Souvanna Phouma was playing into the hands of the Communists and not doing the things that they considered important, or right.

Q: Were you directing or being involved with American Military or CIA operations? Again, this is an unclassified interview. But a lot of time has gone and a lot has been published.

UNGER: Basically, I was in a role which relatively few ambassadors are put in, and most of them don't want. But we couldn't have any military people in Laos under the neutral solution, so whatever happened there I had to, in effect, supervise.

One of the kinds of things we felt we had to do was to continue to keep alive and protect various highland tribal groups. You've undoubtedly heard about the Meo, more recently referred to as the Hmong (but they're the same people). Those were people who were strongly anti-Communist and anti-Vietnamese and who had been very much committed to the United States and to the Thai and to the earlier governments in Laos, governments that were very friendly to us. The Meo had, you might say, stuck their neck out very far and they were well known enemies as far as the Communists were concerned.

Souvanna Phouma tried to handle it in a very fair and dispassionate way. But as far as the Communists were concerned, these (i.e., the highlanders such as the Meo) were people to be eliminated. Of course, the Vietnamese, in particular the North Vietnamese, hated their guts; they would do anything they could to cut these people off from supplies and take any action just to get rid of them.

We had a supply route which, of course, couldn't go through Vientiane. It was pretty much an air supply route that fed essential food stuffs and ammunition, and so on, up into that highland area. On a few occasions, I went up there to talk to General Vang Pao, who was the leader of the Meo, about what our position was, what we were prepared to do, etc. We definitely told him that we would not put up with any activity, on his part, that was prejudicial or hostile to Souvanna Phouma. We insisted that the neutral solution was our solution, too, that Souvanna Phouma was the man in charge and that he was to do nothing to undercut Souvanna Phouma's position or anything that was hostile to Souvanna Phouma. That wasn't always easy to enforce.

Q: What did he want to do? Did he want to put a more Rightist government in?

UNGER: The Rightist government that had been in office up until the time of the second Geneva accords, had been friendly to Vang Pao and supported him. He was very, strongly anti-Communist and he felt that the center in Laos, the neutralists, were really playing into the hands of the Communists. He said, "No, I understand they're not Communists but the Communists are just going to use them and our whole country will go Communist as

a result. Therefore, it is I, Vang Pao and my people, who certainly have to keep the Vietnamese from moving into and taking over our country."

He acknowledged that he had to support the neutral, Geneva solution, but he was obviously dubious about various aspects of it.

Q: This is an area where the CIA was very active. How much did you work with them or were they working with you but not with you? What sort of control did you have?

UNGER: Well, I insisted (and, in this case, Harriman was, of course, my supporter) on knowing essentially everything that was going on, and having a veto power, at least. I think that for the time that I was there that was pretty effective. I had a very different kind of CIA Station Chief from the people who had been there before. The ones who had been there before were great activists who had practically picked up their rifles and joined in on the fray.

My CIA man was very circumspect and moderate. He knew the situation very well but understood that he had to work with me. My own opinion--I've never had any evidence to the contrary--was that he did work very loyally with me. Although things changed as time went on, for the time I was there that was pretty much the situation.

Q: You were there from '62 to '65.

UNGER: To the very end of '64.

Q: Was this a time when we were doing much to interdict the Ho Chi Minh Trail in Laos?

UNGER: More and more as time went on. Initially, we were not doing a great deal. Souvanna Phouma was very, shall we say "allergic", to any action we might be taking in that regard. He felt that this was going to immediately undermine the neutral solution and Laos would be right back in the same old mess.

But we were quite convinced and, little by little, the evidence became quite concrete, that the North Vietnamese were doing exactly what we thought they were doing. On occasion I would take photographs and show Souvanna Phouma a truck convoy moving by road, out of North Vietnam into Laos, to go down whatever kind of routes they could find to feed eventually back into South Vietnam. Of course, the roads were atrocious, but there were routes that could be used. To be sure, sometimes things had to be carried by porters down the Ho Chi Minh Trail. But it was my task to demonstrate to Souvanna that the Ho Chi Minh Trail was not interdicted, was in active use, and that it obviously was a means by which the North Vietnamese were putting military pressure on the South.

Q: Were we doing anything? During your watch in Laos, were we doing anything regarding interdiction?

UNGER: Yes, as time went on.

Q: The reason I ask is someone I know, who is a historian at the Army Historical Center here, is working on MAGV. That's the Military Assistance Group Vietnam. He asked me to ask you what were your relations with MAGV. He mentioned two things. I'm not sure whether these were during your time or not. One was an operation called Barrel Roll. Then there was Steel Tiger.

UNGER: Yes. I remember both of those.

Q: I wonder if you could comment on that.

UNGER: Well, needless to say, the U.S. military who had the responsibility they had in South Vietnam, believed they were aware of what was taking place. And I think they were undoubtedly right; the task of protecting South Vietnam against the pressures, actual military pressures, from the North was very considerably complicated by the moving of supplies down the Ho Chi Minh Trail to North Vietnamese forces, whether on the Laos side, or as you got farther south on the Cambodian side, and eventually back over into South Vietnamese territory. (Whichever place I can show you on the map here).

Q: We're pointing to a map of Vietnam down toward the bottom of Laos.

UNGER: Anyway, the route the Ho Chi Minh Trail took, through Laos, was fed by convoys that came over the mountains out of North Vietnam, by a number of different routes. Then it turned south in Lao territory, just to the west of Vietnam, and then moved back into South Vietnam from Laos. Sometimes it stayed in Lao territory all the way down to the northern boundary of Cambodia, and then moved into Vietnam from there. But there was a whole string of routes and feeders into Vietnam.

Q: What were we doing about it? Let's take the Barrel Roll business. What did that consist of?

UNGER: We wanted very much, as I've said several times, to keep alive the neutral solution in Laos. On the other hand, the U.S. Military were very insistent, and the South Vietnamese were very insistent. It was, of course, quite understandable, that they insisted that Laos not be used as a route of passage to support the Communist pressures against Vietnam.

As time went on, I found myself in the position of informing Souvanna Phouma and asking him, in effect, to acquiesce in our bombing of the Ho Chi Minh Trail, in those areas where we knew the Vietnamese were crossing over into Laos, where we knew that there was a supply line functioning, in order to inhibit the movement of those supplies to the South.

Q: What was his reaction?

UNGER: Well, at first, of course, he hoped very much that somehow Laos could be kept pure and pristine and out of this conflict, and that the Geneva accords would continue to prevail. As time went on, evidence was presented to him by me. And, of course, it wasn't only what I showed him in the way of aerial photographs, and so on, but he also had reports that came from some of his own people up in the Plain of Jars and elsewhere (some of this came via General Vang Pao and his people). Although Souvanna didn't always trust those reports, some came from people he knew he had to believe.

As time went on, he, of course, became more and more outspoken in opposition to this abuse. He would call together his top council and send Prince Souphanouvong over to Hanoi to tell those people to stop doing what they were doing. Whatever Prince Souphanouvong told them, I don't know, but it certainly never worked. [Laughter] Nobody really expected it was going to.

Q: Would you call up MAGV and say, "All right, bomb such and such." Or would they say, "We're going to bomb." Or would they say, "Can we bomb?" How did that work?

UNGER: As long as I was there, there was no bombing carried out, unless they had explained to me what they intended to do. Certainly, initially, it was a case by case review. I had to be satisfied that it was not, in a serious way, going to interfere with things in Laos, with Lao population, even though it was Lao territory. In any case it was Laos territory not under the government's jurisdiction, but under Communist administration.

Basically, the idea was to be sure that things didn't go to the point where the Geneva Accords were going to be seriously jeopardized. Even though we knew this Vietnamese infiltration was taking place, the idea was to try to keep Laos as a country, and most of its territory, out of this Vietnam situation. On these matters I used to be in regular communication, mostly with Bill Bundy in Washington; he was then Assistant Secretary for East Asia and the Pacific.

Q: But there was MAGV headquarters. Would they send somebody over or were these bombing things called out of CINCPAC in Honolulu? Where would this come from and whom would you talk to?

UNGER: A lot of it came directly out of Washington. My communication was often with Washington. Now and then, I would go down to Saigon when there was a pertinent meeting taking place there; I remember one time, for example, when I went down because Dean Rusk was there. This is just one of those anecdotes but it's interesting as it relates to what was taking place: I flew down there because there was a meeting down there and there because there were so many things to talk over with Rusk as to how far to go and what could be condoned and what should be reported, what should be my position with Souvanna Phouma, with Souphanouvong, with Boun Oum, et cetera. I mean there were just all kinds of outstanding issues and I really needed to talk with the Secretary.

So I flew down and I had some time to talk with him; then I had to get back promptly. I got into a plane and they flew me up to Vientiane. When I got to Vientiane, I couldn't land. General Kouprasith, who was one of the right-wing generals, was pulling a coup! He was going to take over and throw out the Tripartite Government and put in a right-wing government and go on from there.

My deputy, Phil Chadbourn, was well aware of this and telegraphed, or telephoned me, in Saigon just as I was about to leave. Of course, there had to be clearance for my plane to land in Vientiane. They wouldn't give clearance because they were afraid of what I was going to do to undo Kouprasith's actions, if I got on the ground! Chadbourn fought them to a standstill and eventually got permission for the plane to land. At that point, Kouprasith had called together the National Assembly and was about to announce the fact that the Geneva Accords were a dead letter and that the right-wing was taking over the government. At the airport Phil told me what was taking place.

So I went immediately to the Assembly. First I got together with my fellow ambassadors in our little balcony seating area to get their assessment of the situation. The most pertinent of my colleagues, were the Thai, British, French and Indian ambassadors. (The Indians, with the Poles and the Canadians, were on the International Control Commission). All of these people were there, as well as a few others and they overheard. At the same time I asked somebody to send a message to Kouprasith saying that I must see him. When he came out of the Assembly session I met him in the corridor and told him that if he carried through his plans, that there was going to be no U.S. support for Laos and he was going to be in deep trouble.

In due course Kouprasith backed down and didn't declare an end to the Geneva accords or dissolve the coalition government. So we went on for a while, continuing to try to make them work.

Kouprasith, incidentally, also had arrested Souvanna Phouma and on that occasion had put him under house arrest. It was essential that Souvanna Phouma know what had taken place because there were good indications that this was kind of a last straw, as far as he was concerned; if Kouprasith were successful in pulling this coup and installing a right-wing government, Souvanna Phouma was going to get on a plane and get the hell out of Laos!

So I had to get to Souvanna Phouma to tell him what had happened. As I say, he was under house arrest, so I drove over to his house and I tried to drive up his driveway, but Kouprasith's soldiers wouldn't let me. Souvanna's house was set well back from the road and I noticed that the next-door driveway, immediately parallel to Souvanna's, with only a fence in between, was not guarded. So I had my driver just move over one and drive up that driveway. I got up more or less abreast of Souvanna Phouma's house, and by that time, he began to know what was going on. He came out on his balcony and I stood there at the fence and shouted to him, you know, "don't give up, don't resign." [Laughter] "We're with you and stay with it." So he did.

Of course, by that time, my diplomatic colleagues were all there, and a large press contingent as well. And the French ambassador provided the "bon mot," saying, "Mmhm-ala, la diplomatie, à la Romeo et Juliette." [Laughter]

So the Souvanna Phouma government survived and went on for sometime. But, of course, it ultimately folded.

Q: I'd like to go back and talk about your relations with the American Military in Vietnam. MAGV, the Military Assistance Command Headquarters. You were there during the period when the big build up began. You were in Laos in about '64, when we started to really insert troops in and play a more active role. Did you find yourself under any pressure from the American Military in MAGV to call for more air strikes, to do more. Did you find yourself trying to find other solutions while they were pressing for bigger and better strikes of the Ho Chi Minh Trail?

UNGER: Yes. Our objective was to preserve the 1962 solution for Laos and to keep Laos out of the struggle. Of course, we had to acknowledge that Lao territory was being used to move men and materiel from North Vietnam South, but we were initially very hesitant to have any bombing. But, as I say, at one time, I showed Souvanna Phouma this photograph of a Vietnamese truck convoy moving into northern Laos. Souvanna made it perfectly clear; he didn't say yes or no and I didn't expect him to, but I felt that he undoubtedly understood what the issues were and why we were doing what we were doing. Given the situation in Vietnam, there didn't seem to be much escape from trying to interdict the supply route. Nevertheless it never was effectively interdicted in spite of the large numbers of men and the carpet bombing used in the effort.

There were all kinds of other solutions that people put forward. For example, there were those who felt that the United States should move militarily from Thailand, right across the waist of Laos to Tchepone near the Vietnamese border. Then push right on in and seal off South Vietnam from the North. My task was to do what I could to preserve a neutral Laos and keep it from becoming embroiled in the struggle. But, of course, that became, as time went on, more and more difficult.

Q: How would it play out if the American Air Force wanted to put in a series of strikes on the Ho Chi Minh Trail and you felt it would be too much. This would be upsetting as very precarious neutrality. The Air Force insists, you say no, would this go up to the Joint Chiefs of Staff or to The White House?

UNGER: Well, sometimes to The White House. Kennedy was President at the time and he was committed to the neutral solution in Laos. Of course, Harriman was his principle instrument in that regard.

I remember, when I would come back to Washington, I would not only check in and talk to the Secretary and, on a few occasions also to the President, but also the Chiefs (Joint

Chiefs of Staff) would ask me to come and sit down in their room to talk about the situation as I saw it in Laos. I got into some pretty good arguments with Curtis Le May who wanted to bomb the hell out of everybody. [Laughter]

Q: He's still the man that talked about "bombing the enemy back to the Stone Age". Were you also saying, look this isn't working very well, the bombing. Were you getting reports?

UNGER: It was very hard to get a reading. In other words, the bombing would take place, but we had very limited possibilities of seeing to what extent it was inhibiting the use of the Ho Chi Minh Trail. As you know, that debate went on for years, long after I left Laos.

Clearly, there was no highway and exactly how things were moving was kind of a mystery. We had different sorts of intelligence reports and there were innumerable solutions proposed as to how we might interdict the Trail.

Q: There was something called SOGS, Study and Operations Groups or something? We would put down teams to put down sensors. Were they doing that at your time, too?

UNGER: Yes. That was beginning at that time, yes. To try to get a much more precise feel for what kind of traffic there was and how much there was and where it was going, and so on. We did drop a lot of sensors in the zone of the Ho Chi Minh Trail.

Q: You mentioned Kennedy. But Johnson came in late '63 obviously. Was there any change in attitude or your point of view of a neutral Laos or the situation there with Johnson in instead of Kennedy? Or was it about the same?

UNGER: I'd say, as far as that area goes, it was more of the same. The people around Johnson, of course, were very different from the people around Kennedy. You didn't have any people like Arthur Schlesinger, for example. Or if they were there, Johnson wasn't listening to them. Johnson was, as time went on, certainly more intent in taking a strong stand.

I'm trying to remember. Let's see. I was there from July of '62 to spring of '64.

Q: Excuse me, '65.

UNGER: '65? Maybe so. I don't know why I find this very hard to reconstruct. [Laughter]

Q: I'm looking it up in my handy-dandy little book here. It has you presenting your credentials in July 1962. You left the post in December 1964.

UNGER: That's right. I had to report, in Washington, in January '65, as one of Bill Bundy's deputies.

Q: During the time you were in Laos, did you have any direct dealings with Johnson or Kennedy?

UNGER: Oh, yes. For example, at one point, after I went to Laos in July of '62, a delegation of Lao leaders--Souvanna, Ngon Sananikone, Qunim Pholsena, et al--and I were received by President Kennedy in the White House. Then in the mid-winter of '63-- Kennedy had already been assassinated--Souvanna Phouma with a group of his ministers, including some of the Communist ministers, came back to Washington. I accompanied them and I remember that we were in the White House calling on President Johnson. The obvious objective of all of this was to strengthen Souvanna Phouma's hand, to make him feel that the United States was still behind him and the neutral solution for Laos.

I did see Kennedy but I guess that must have been earlier, but after I had been appointed to Laos. I was in Washington at some point and, in effect, the President and Bobby, who was always around, told me what they expected was going to be achieved; Harriman, of course, was there too; the objective was to remove Laos from the list of U.S.-Soviet differences.

When I brought Souvanna Phouma to call on Kennedy, that may have been when I was already appointed but hadn't yet gone to Laos and Souvanna Phouma was in Washington before he went over to the Geneva meeting that I referred to earlier. Then he went back to Laos and when he went back to Laos, I went up to Laos directly from Bangkok. It was on the earlier occasion that there had been a meeting in The White House with Souvanna Phouma and Jack Kennedy and Bobby and Harriman were there as well.

Q: Kennedy was quite conversant with the problems of Laos. I remember his giving a television talk. He got himself much farther into an obscure area.

UNGER: Yes, February of '63 I think that was. Nobody in the United States had given two thoughts to Laos; they mostly didn't know where it was or if it was. [Laughter]

Q: Were you told that he was going to give a speech?

UNGER: Yes.

Q: Did this have any repercussions on what you were doing?

UNGER: Not specifically and directly. But it meant that Americans were alerted to the fact that the President considered this an important issue. They were made familiar with what our approach to the problem was. I think I was still in Thailand when that took place.

Q: That might have been just before the Geneva Accords. How about in Vientiane? How did you find your staff? Was it an active staff, knowledgeable, not so knowledgeable? Or was it some of the backwater type staff?

UNGER: It was a pretty good staff. It was essentially a clean sweep from the staff that had been there before. As I say, Winthrop Brown had been my predecessor; he was a very fine, very competent ambassador. But it was thought that with the whole new situation, the new Geneva Accords, etc., that there ought to be a change in ambassadors.

My DCM was Philip Chadbourn. I think Phil had been there with Win Brown for at least a while, and then stayed on with me. He went through much of my time, and was succeeded by Coby Swank. My political counselor most of the time in Laos was a fellow who is living in Arlington now, Bill Hamilton.

Q: You thought you had a good solid team there?

UNGER: Very good, yes. Phil was a very realistic fellow, an activist, who was prepared to do essentially whatever he had to do in implementing U.S. policy. For example, I mentioned the fact that I had had that airport-landing problem after meeting with Rusk in Saigon. When I flew back to Vientiane, the authorities didn't want me to land. But Phil went out to the airport and made it very clear in no uncertain terms that they were to let that plane land! [Laughter]

Q: What was your impression, as far as Laos was concerned, of Dean Rusk's interest in that area?

UNGER: He was very much interested. His associations, before he became Secretary, had been with that part of the world--with East Asia. I think he felt that the United States had a great deal at stake in this whole Southeast Asian situation, including the idea of setting up a neutral Laos and taking Laos out of the East-West struggle, if it could be done. Of course, he had been very much in support of the program in Vietnam. As I said, he was in Saigon to chair a meeting of the U.S. Chiefs of Mission of the region. At this point, the situation in Vietnam was becoming more and more difficult. He was discussing and supporting with the U.S. Chiefs of Mission and other American officials the various measures that were being formulated and initiated in Washington.

On the other hand, he was very strong for the kind of solution we were trying to make work in Laos, which was very different from our approach in Vietnam. We were trying to take Laos out of the East-West struggle. I don't think he and Harriman were particularly congenial; they obviously had to work together a fair amount, but I don't think that they were soulmates. But to the extent that they had to work together, they did.

Harriman probably aspired to be, and thought he should be Secretary of State; it was his conviction that this Southeast Asian problem was a serious one and needed to be worked out but in a peaceful fashion, removing it from the list of U.S.-Soviet issues. He was prepared to take the job under Rusk as Assistant Secretary to do just that, to work on that problem.

Q: At the time you were leaving in December of '64 from Laos, how did you think the situation in that country would work out? Were you optimistic, pessimistic? How did you feel about that?

UNGER: I thought that it coming to depend more and more on what took place in Vietnam. If we could stabilize the situation in Vietnam, so that the North Vietnamese realized that using the Ho Chi Minh Trail was a losing game for them, then they would probably be prepared to leave Laos alone. They would have their influence there, but we were never opposing that. In other words, there was agreement on a Tripartite Government with a left-wing component, which obviously was very responsive to Vietnam. That was okay, but we felt that only if they gave up in South Vietnam, and stopped trying to use Lao and Cambodian territory to take over South Vietnam, only then could the Laos solution work. If it did, that would be to everybody's benefit, not only to the Lao, but the Thai would have an insulation from an aggressive North Vietnam, and also from an aggressive China (as we saw it then). And we believed that then the situation in Southeast Asia would have a much better chance of being stabilized. But, of course, the Vietnamese didn't see it that way. So the situation became more and more acute as time went on.

I went from Vientiane back to Washington where I became, as I said earlier, Bill Bundy's deputy for Southeast Asia. Then I went back to Thailand in August of 1967.

Q: We've now reached the point where it's 1965 and you have become a Deputy Assistant Secretary dealing with Far Eastern affairs in Washington. What were your responsibilities?

UNGER: I'm trying to reconstruct the situation in Washington, i.e. who was where and doing what at that point.

Bill Bundy was the Assistant Secretary for East Asia and the Pacific. At least that's what we call it now. I was his deputy for Southeast Asia. That meant that I had pretty much direct supervision over the pertinent desk officers and for the work of the Economic Deputy Assistant Secretary which related to that area.

This was a period of considerable turmoil in Southeast Asia. I'm trying to establish the setting as of that particular moment. The situation in South Vietnam was beginning to become more and more active in a military sense as the struggle with the North became more and more acute.

In Cambodia the government was becoming more and more disturbed about the use of Cambodian territory by both of the factions in Vietnam. The South occasionally trespassed on Cambodian territory and, of course, the North by this time had established its infiltration route; northeastern Cambodia was being very heavily used for that.

The Thai and the Cambodians had long-standing differences, including differences over small, but to both of them, important, geography along their boundary.

The Thai and the Burmese were having occasional little dust-ups, sometimes with relation to the situation in the Shan States, Burmese territory just north of Thailand and northeast of central Burma. Sometimes there were problems with reference to some of the frontier areas down south in the Malay Peninsula, the area of the Kra Isthmus and so on.

It was a period of constantly deepening crisis, with its focus principally on Vietnam, but with repercussions and expressions all over the Southeast Asian area. It was an era when U.S. relations with the People's Republic of China were very strained, and when there was constant tension in the Taiwan Straits. And a period when Sukarno had just been ousted in Indonesia, which had been a critical moment there. This is an era when the Southeast Asian Treaty Organization was still functioning, but it had lost a good deal of its credibility and importance. Pakistan had, I believe by that time, been separated from India, and Bangladesh had been separated off.

Q: Bangladesh was Henry Kissinger's time. We're talking about '65 to '67. So Bangladesh was still part of Pakistan. Did you have prime responsibility through Bundy for Vietnam or were you really dealing more with the other parts of Southeast Asia?

UNGER: Well, at that time, and increasingly from that time on, Vietnam became not just the responsibility of a desk officer or of a Deputy Assistant Secretary or of an Assistant Secretary. It moved right up to the very top echelons in the Department because it was becoming a more and more serious matter. The United States involvement, including the military involvement, was constantly increasing.

So I guess you could say that my position, as far as Vietnam goes, was for a time the desk officer for it. I had a fairly large staff, including a number of young FSO's, some of whom had served out there. We were trying to handle the problems relating to Vietnam without letting them become prime international issues.

But there was a high level of interest right up to the top, including the President. So what would have been a usual country desk officer kind of responsibility had changed into a very special operation, in which much higher-level interest was constantly involved.

Q: What was your attitude at the time? How did you see the Vietnam thing? We had just started the build-up, starting really inserting combat troops for the first time. How did you see what we were doing there at the time?

UNGER: I would say that I was apprehensive about our turning this into a major military contest. I think that was the concern that I know I felt, and I think that some of our people in Vietnam and, certainly many of the people working in Southeast Asia, either in the field or in Washington, felt. It would be a mistake to try to turn what was essentially a political problem into an essentially military problem. There was a feeling that if the

government in South Vietnam could pull itself together, operate more effectively, take more account of the kinds of internal measures that needed to be taken, that there was a much better chance of getting some stability in the South and frustrating any efforts of the North to move in and take the country over.

But there was, as you know, a succession of Vietnamese governments, with one leader after another. First, the unhappy history of Diem. And then finally Ky. There didn't seem to be a capacity on the part of the government in Vietnam to recognize what we saw as the central problems. Or, if they did, to organize the government resources and the bureaucracy to deal effectively with these problems, in order to enlist a much fuller support from the population.

The debate raged as to how much the Vietnam War was, in a sense, a conventional war, with the North simply being an invader with perhaps a number of superior arms and no inhibitions. Or the extent to which it was a situation in the South, in which government was steadily losing support, in which it was not effective in many areas of the country, and in which either direct military pressure from the North, or all the subversive activities engineered and carried out by the North constantly weakened the South, until it finally was clearly unable to protect itself.

The debate raged also over what the U.S. role should be. A military commander like Westmoreland was devoted to what we thought of as generally conventional ideas of warfare. Whereas many of the people who had served out there (including quite a number of Foreign Service officers who had been stationed in a lot of the outlying areas of the country, and who had had a pretty good chance to get a feel for the positions and the political problems in the villages and out in the countryside, as well as in Saigon) considered that the problem was one of poverty and of their government's lack of attention to improving their situation. Also there were the problems of corruption in government, not only at the center in Saigon, but throughout the country and, there was the view that for these reasons as well, the South Vietnamese military were not effective. The North was able to infiltrate into many areas and destroy the stability that the country needed.

Q: Were you able to get these officers talking to William Bundy and move their thoughts up the line? Was there a good flow of communication of, you might say, the ones who saw this as political rather than Military?

UNGER: Yes. I think, certainly as far as Bill Bundy was concerned, there is no question but that he interested himself and became involved. There were many sessions in which he had a pretty good opportunity to hear what these people had to say.

One of the people who began to show up in the scene in those years was a professor from Harvard who came down and was fairly well acquainted in certain circles in Washington and was sent out to the field, in Vietnam, at the time that I was concerned on the desk with that country. He usually spent several weeks out there and he was already well

acquainted with a group of French political scientists who knew the area from an earlier time, and who had some perspectives on it worth listening to, even though one couldn't, by any means buy the whole analysis that they presented. This fellow was named Henry Kissinger and I found, when he went out to the area and saw a number of contacts he had in South Vietnam, and occasionally some others in the area although mostly right in South Vietnam, that he usually had a very perceptive and useful analysis to pass along to us. He had suggestions that were definitely worth listening to about our programs in Vietnam and how they might be altered to make them more effective.

At that time Kissinger was still teaching at Harvard and he would make these occasional visits to Washington when he came by and we talked. I tried to give him a thorough briefing of the situation, as it had changed from the last time he had been out there, always on the understanding that when he came back, we would debrief him and get his judgment on the situation. I would say this probably happened about three times in the course of my dealing with Vietnam.

Q: What was his message that he was bringing back? Was it a political, rather than a military war?

UNGER: I wish I could reconstruct with any reliability. I'm sure that there are places where this sort of thing is on the record. But he certainly tended to emphasize the political, as opposed to the strictly military approach, but not to the extent that some of the officers in the embassy in Saigon were doing. In other words, as I recall, he felt there had to be some military strength to back up the political program when it was necessary. There was no question that the North Vietnamese, either directly on the frontier, i.e. the 17th Parallel, or pushing in and probing from Southern Laos or Cambodia, were using military means. They also had an extremely widely proliferated network of operatives, intelligence and people who were working for them clandestinely throughout South Vietnam.

Q: Did you feel that there was a solid debate going on between you and what the others on the desk at the Bureau were saying about yes, it's military, but mainly political? Those in the Pentagon were saying just give us more forces and we can take care of this problem.

UNGER: You're asking if I felt there was a debate going on?

Q: A debate between the defense side and the state side?

UNGER: Yes, there was no question that these were issues that were being debated and argued passionately and quite continuously, as I recall it, through this period. This is the period when people talked about "the hearts and minds", a phrase that recalls the U.S. Colonel Ed Lansdale, who developed programs for Vietnam and who had earlier worked very effectively with President Magsaysay in the Philippines. When the State Department people, who had been sent out there and had served in the various provinces, put their

emphasis on the economic and the political. There were very few that denied there was a military aspect to it, but I guess you could say they felt the South Vietnamese forces could handle the North Vietnamese with the pressures that were being exerted, if the situation within the country in South Vietnam were a stable and a secure one.

But that wasn't the case; this was primarily because of the actions and the policies of the government in South Vietnam, which never figured out an effective program to assure the loyalties of the population, particularly in rural areas, of the country. (This is an awfully big subject. It's one where I would like to refresh myself on some of the communications at that time).

Q: As a matter of fact, we are hoping to get an oral history program concentrated on the Foreign Services role in Vietnam. Hence, I'm going to just touch this one lightly because it is big and it is major. So at this point I think we might move on.

How did you see William Bundy? How did he operate?

UNGER: He operated effectively at upper levels. In addition to his own considerable reputation and valuable connections, he also obviously had a very close relationship with somebody who was right there in The White House, namely his brother Mac. The communication between Bill and Mac was practically continuous; I can remember innumerable occasions when I would walk into his office and he was on the phone with Mac.

So I guess going back to the Kennedy days, and certainly also into the Johnson period, there was a very close and immediate connection with The White House. Those of us who were working in concentrated fashion on Vietnam, although we were in State--and I guess Dean Rusk was Secretary at that time--we were frequently called over for meetings and discussions at the White House.

When Johnson was President, meetings were held in his office on a number of occasions. He was very deeply concerned and distressed about the situation. He wanted to be briefed and took a very direct personal role in many of the decisions that were being made. (I'm trying to reconstruct the period and relate it to the events that precede it. When I was first back in Washington, Kennedy was President, and then Johnson, following Kennedy's assassination).

Q: In '65 when you went there, of course, Johnson had been President for more than a year at that point.

UNGER: Yes. Kennedy was killed in the fall of '63.

Q: And you were ambassador in Laos from '62 to '65.

UNGER: I finished up in Laos, I think, in December of '64 and came back to Washington. I hadn't been there more than about ten days or two weeks, when one of the kinds of trips that became fairly routine was getting organized, involving Robert McNamara (Secretary of Defense), Mac Bundy, Bill Bundy and several others of us who flew out in McNamara's plane; it was non-stop from Washington to Saigon. We spent about three or four, maybe five days at most, in Vietnam; went up to Pleiku, which about a week or ten days before, had just had a very disastrous incident in which the Viet Cong had moved in and assaulted what had been regarded as a rather secure post. They killed a lot of people, including some American military, and generally terrorized the population. It was a typical action of the Communists, just to demonstrate how insecure the country was and how uncertain was the hold of the government.

Q: Was this the action that a number of Americans were killed too?

UNGER: Yes.

Q: And this was really, in a way, what triggered our response almost from that point on.

UNGER: When we came back to Washington, the debate began as to what should be the U.S. role. Should we continue as we had been in the past, with a lot of advisers, a tremendous amount of military and economic assistance, but without any U.S. forces, or at least any considerable number of American personnel, beyond advisory groups. That debate led--and this is a matter on which I'm not too sure of my recollection--to a decision made, probably in March, to send about 10,000 American military to Vietnam--and the following summer, a very much larger number. This was Lyndon Johnson reluctantly going ahead with something I think he very definitely had not expected, or wanted to do, i.e. to authorize such a degree of American military involvement in Vietnam.

He was looking for advice from every corner that he could get it. He was dependent on Mac and on McNamara. I'm trying to remember to what extent Henry Kissinger was involved at that time.

Q: Probably only at the peripheral of things.

UNGER: I think so. I don't remember his being central at that point. He was certainly becoming a State Department central figure. But I would say, that although he was always there, always had something to say, he was not much of an activist, not as far as McNamara. And always somewhat cautious as to what he felt should be done. But on the other hand, not ever, that I can recall, taking a very strong and determined position in opposition. I think whatever his own personal thinking may have been, the impression one got was that at that time he was unprepared to be the President's informant and adviser.

Q: How did you feel about the embassy? There you were on the desk; did you feel that you were getting good information? Did you feel that you had a strong embassy there or was there a concern?

UNGER: Earlier there certainly had been a concern; I'm talking about back when I was in Washington before my assignment to Laos. And also we felt more confident of our judgments by the time we had got this whole company--I don't remember how many there would have been; 20, 25--young Foreign Service officers who were trained in the language and were sent out to work in the provinces in Vietnam in order to give us good reporting directly from the field. By that time, I felt that we were getting a pretty reliable picture.

There was, of course, tremendous competition on the Washington scene for getting nearer to the President to press various proposals, positions and points of view, various courses of action. There were groups like Ed Lansdale's, in Saigon; his group included some Foreign Service officers but was a special, "hearts and minds" group. They had their ideas about countering insurgency, which Lansdale developed from his experience in the Philippines.

Q: That's the understanding.

UNGER: And he was thinking of applying in Vietnam some of the kinds of concepts, programs and approaches that he felt had been successful there. I think he introduced some ideas that were adaptable to Vietnam and useful, but by and large I don't think he had a major impact. I think what happened, was that the military were more and more in control of the situation, and by the time this was happening I was on my way out of Washington and going on out to Bangkok. In the "grass roots" situations, in the small towns and rural areas these groups of young Foreign Service officers were sent in order to provide Saigon and Washington with an informed judgment of what were the problems in this country; they tried to identify what were the kinds of programs that were effective; what ought we to be doing? Obviously, what was being done was not succeeding.

Those people, more and more, got caught up into the kind of military network. Also, given the rapidly expanding numbers of military in the country and the various roles they were to play, they were inevitably a major source to whom the President and Defense, and to some extent State, had to look for information about local situations; as time went on they were more and more the qualified Americans, on the spot, more than anybody from the Foreign Service.

They were good and bad and indifferent. Some of the reporting that came from those young military figures was first class, and some was very unreliable.

Q: How about the CIA? Were you in competition with the CIA? Or did you feel the CIA had their own point of view? How did you feel about it? We're talking about the '65 to '67 period.

UNGER: Looking at it from a Washington point of view, I would say the relationship was reasonably good. I remember Bill Colby and George Carver and others in the CIA with whom we were in close touch. The feeling was that the CIA and the State Department were not very far apart in terms of analyzing what needed to be done, and in putting less of an emphasis on military actions than did the U.S. Military. To be sure, there were those in the Military who also saw it as a problem with a very heavy civilian aspect, as something that could not be handled or solved on a purely military basis.

The CIA people had much more in the way of resources and flexibility to work with. They had a lot of people who had had experience living in villages and so on, or they had access to such people. But my recollection is of a fairly good, cooperative feeling with the CIA. We in the Foreign Service had to depend on their resources in some areas and when it came to the Embassy in Saigon, they would depend on our resources. There were certainly some areas where there was keen competition, for example, some of the places where we had consuls. I think we had a consul in Da Nang and Nha Trang and probably in Da Lat.

My recollection is that even though there were differences in interpretation, and differences in opinion, by and large the cooperation was pretty good. They both had, of course, a much more political element in their analysis, political and economic, than did the Military who tended to see it as either a large scale military operation or a military subversive and local village problem, but always with a military emphasis.

Q: I'd like to move on now to your assignment to Thailand as ambassador. How did this come about?

UNGER: I suppose one of the reasons they asked me to go out to Bangkok in the fall of 1967 was because of my earlier experience there and in Laos. Let's see, did I follow Ken Young?

Q: It was Graham Martin.

UNGER: Excuse me, Graham Martin. Yes, that's right.

Q: You presented your credentials in October of 1967.

UNGER: I think I arrived at the very end of August and presented my credentials in October. Again, I think my name probably got thrown in the hopper by a number of people, including again, Bill Bundy. I think Bill was still Assistant Secretary for East Asia and the Pacific. Could that be correct?

Q: Yes. He was there until 1969.

UNGER: Right. This was a period when the United States had a rapidly mounting number of Americans in Thailand. The predominant group was the U.S. Military. There were five or six air bases in country, which were being used to support the allied forces in Indochina. There was a major logistics base at Sattahip, in southeastern Thailand. That was the base that had been developed to facilitate the movement of supplies in country, from abroad, for two or three purposes: one was moving supplies up country to support the then five, or maybe six, Thai air bases where the United States had substantial forces.

Also, to supply what we were taking into Laos and, to a minor extent, Cambodia, as well as what was still being provided for Vietnam. Obviously, most of that last was moving via other routes, but the port at Sattahip, which was initially a Thai Naval Base, became a very important supply base also for the United States forces through that whole area, in Thailand and Indochina.

Under those circumstances, a large share of my responsibilities related to the situation in Indochina. There were several situations: the most time consuming, the most troublesome, the most difficult, of course, was Vietnam. The Thai were very much committed to joint action with the United States, Korea, Australia, et al. The Thai sent ground forces to South Vietnam to support the government in Saigon and they were engaged in the land war especially in the northern coast area. I don't remember precisely which places, maybe around Da Nang and north of there.

Moreover, the military effort in Vietnam was very substantially supported on the supply side through the Port at Sattahip. As for the U.S. air activity which was principally over North Vietnam (the bombing of Hanoi and all of that) and also along the Ho Chi Minh trail, most of that was based in Thailand, utilizing bases like the ones I mentioned in the northeast, mostly, but also Thakli.

This meant that the United States had, in five or six locations in Thailand, substantial numbers of Americans in residence. Most of them were Military. There were all the local community relations situations that come out of such a situation. By and large, our presence in Thailand was free of critical tensions but every once in a while there would develop an unhappy jurisdiction situation, or the U.S. Air Force would feel it had to acquire some real estate. This might impinge on a lot of agricultural or other important land uses. By and large, the relationship was smooth; nevertheless a great deal of my time, in that early period, was taken up with trying to resolve a multitude of problems of that sort.

If I remember my chronology correctly, it was only about five or six months, or even less, after I got there, namely late October or November, that . . .

Q: You presented your credentials in October of '67. So this would be the spring of '68 or so?

UNGER: What I'm trying to recapture is the year; I seem to remember that it was October or November. It was when Thanin Praphas were eased out and the government was taken over, first by a caretaker, and then Seni Pramoj, and then Kukrit Pramoj and others.

Q: There was a coup by Premier Kittikachorn in November of '71. Or maybe it was '70?

UNGER: A coup by Thanom?

Q: I mean his forces. I have a note here. He was the Premier, but apparently his group took over. I'm not sure exactly about this.

UNGER: He was the Prime Minister who took over from Sarit when Sarit died. It was a coup against Thanom that I was thinking about, but that was in October or November, 1973.

Q: We are now restarting. We've just gone and done a little research. Mr. Ambassador, let me ask you first, how did you deal, when you first arrived, at the end of 1967--and you were there for almost five years--how did you deal with the Thai government. Whom would you see and who were the major players that you dealt with? And, could you spell the names.

UNGER: When I returned to Thailand as Ambassador, in the fall of '67 (having been out there earlier as Alex Johnson's and then Ken Young's deputy), Sarit had died and Thanom had succeeded him as Prime Minister. I had known Thanom from that earlier time when he was Deputy to Sarit. We had what seemed to me and, I believe, seemed to him likewise, a good relationship. It was easy for us to communicate. He was available to receive me if there wasn't something critical going on; I could go in and see him and talk to him quite informally. He accepted that I was able to bring him reliable word of U.S. Government opinions and policies.

I think it is fair to say, that I had perhaps a better understanding of his country than some other American ambassadors, if for no other reason than that I had already served there for a number of years, and that I had learned their language, which wasn't true of very many American ambassadors out there. Also, I had served elsewhere in the region, namely Laos, specifically. Also I had been working in Washington on the region before I came out there. I had been with Bill Bundy in the East Asian Bureau as his Southeast Asian deputy. Earlier I had been very much involved in the activities of SEATO, even though SEATO was by this time on its way out. But nevertheless, I was familiar with the history of that and other important earlier situations.

Also I spoke Thai. For example, with Thanom's wife, both Mrs. Unger and I could communicate with her only in Thai; she didn't speak any English. Thanom's English was limited. I wouldn't have pretended to do business in Thai, except when I had to, particularly if I were traveling around the country in more remote areas. But nevertheless, Thanom knew that I knew it.

So I think we had developed a pretty good relationship. At that time, in Thailand, there were really two powerful people. Thanom was out front: he, himself, plus his wife, plus various people closely associated with him, were one sort of power center.

But a much more adept and much more skillful operator was his Deputy and Minister of Interior, General Praphas. Praphas was more than Thanom in the old line of Thai General-politicians, people who came up through the Military ranks but who, in the process, had accumulated to themselves a very considerable body of supporters, and they had brought those supporters along with them into relatively high places. Whether in the Military or in the Ministry of Interior or in other important places, there were key people who were "Praphas men," and they were ready to support him. I think they expected that Thanom, as sort of a genial and kindly father figure, would in due course be prepared to move aside and that Praphas, who was younger, would move into the top position. This whole hierarchy of Praphas supporters would then benefit from his being in the number one position.

This was pretty much the expectation. I don't think it was Thanom's expectation, but it certainly was that of many people in political positions, including many of the Military, many of whom were Praphas's men. He was not only an important figure in the Thai Army but he was also the Minister of Interior; therefore, the police were very much a part of his group as well.

This was the power scene as it had developed following the death of Sarit some years before. Thanom and Praphas had moved in as a kind of team. I think one of Thanom's sons or daughters was married to one of Praphas's daughters or sons, or something like that. [Laughter] It was an alliance, and an effective one. But it ran into growing opposition. Sometimes for special reasons, but sometimes just because I think it's in the nature of such things: as people in power "overstay their welcome" and other people who want power are anxious to move in.

Anyway, little by little, their situation became more tenuous. There began to develop, in Thailand, a much wider political participation and involvement of various groups, particularly the students. There was resentment over the machine that was primarily under Praphas's direction, but from which Thanom benefitted too, in which very substantial amounts of funds were diverted to personal bank accounts; that very familiar pattern that has happened many places in the world!

It had been true in Thailand, certainly of Sarit. But Sarit had been a very determined and effective leader and, perhaps also, had chosen to die at an appropriate moment, before some of these things caught up with him!

Furthermore, Thanom was less effective than Sarit and Praphas was perhaps a little more outrageous than some, in terms of the kinds of deals that he was engineering and the amounts of money he was diverting!

Also, this was a time of some stress with the war in Vietnam, not far away, and something like 50,000 foreign, albeit allied, forces in country. There was growing uncertainty as to what was going to be the outcome in Indochina. (That situation in Indochina, particularly as it might directly affect Laos and Cambodia as well as Vietnam, was always a very central concern for the Thai).

At a certain moment, the unhappiness with Thanom and Praphas boiled over. There was a student demonstration; in the past these had usually been quite effectively controlled and never had represented any kind of a serious political problem. But in this atmosphere that I've been describing, the demonstration did get out of hand and in October of '73, both Praphas and Thanom were ousted and I guess they both flew to the United States, fairly directly. The King appointed, not on a permanent basis, but essentially as a caretaker leader of government, a very much respected Chief Judge of the equivalent of our Supreme Court, Judge Sanya Thammasakdi.

Judge Sanya was someone I knew well. Given what had happened, he asked me (even though at that time I was just about to leave) to stay on for some additional time, over the transition, as he was beginning to get things in place for a new government. Washington agreed to let me do that. So I stayed, as I recall, about another month beyond what I had planned to do.

Q: Did we play any role in the change of government there?

UNGER: We, the United States, in any official sense?

Q: Yes.

UNGER: No, I don't believe so. I think that from top to bottom, both on the U.S. side and on the Thai side, contacts were extremely numerous and very frank. Many of them of long duration. People talked to each other and compared notes and passed on opinions and had numerous discussions of situations. I'm sure that it was clear, particularly, that the kind of graft and corruption that Praphas represented was something the United States felt was a real disadvantage to the Thai. And it was something that was inevitably going to cause them problems. While they had had a pretty stable internal situation and relatively little in the way of political dissent, that kind of leadership was going to breed the kind of opposition they hadn't had before.

The stability of the country and the stability even of the monarchy could come into question, if that were to take place. I think there were many Thai, including people in responsible positions, who, as time went on, became more and more disturbed particularly with Praphas. They realized that Thanom was not a strong figure and that even if they removed Thanom and Praphas remained in place, they wouldn't have accomplished very much. The important thing was to get them both out and to bring in a

more democratically organized and a more responsible kind of government that would be better able to start handling some of the problems in Thailand that needed to be solved.

All of that might suggest to some people that the United States played some kind of a role in the change, which was not the case. In fact, there were many official Americans, and I would say particularly Americans in the military, who were very apprehensive about the kinds of changes that took place. They feared that this might bring an end to the kind of position and privileges that the United States military had in country.

And, of course, account had also been taken of American people in the Thai business world, although the American business presence in Thailand was not all that great at that time. But they were afraid of a revolutionary spirit and instability that they believed might follow.

When Judge Sanya took over, he was a respected but certainly a conservative figure. The general disposition of His Majesty the King was also well known; it certainly didn't suggest any desire to move in any radical direction. It was anticipated that there would be a transition to a more responsive government and that, hopefully, there would be less corruption. Clearly it was not going to be a government that was going to bring any kind of radical overturning, either on the political or the economic scene. And this is, in fact, the way it turned out.

While I can't speak out of direct experience with the subsequent situation, since I left Bangkok at just about the end of '73, I certainly tried to keep track of it. I was back in Washington and was, of course, closely in touch with what was taking place at that time. As anticipated, there were some rough times in Thailand as time went on with the Pramroj brothers and their governments, followed by Thanom. Nevertheless, fundamentally it was a stable situation as it has continued to be and remains so today.

Q: You were saying you had the 50,000 Americans. When we have large bases, we tend to insist and have what amount to extraterritorial rights. Were you concerned about this being a destabilizing factor? Not only because of the servicemen, but also the money that you bring in. This could not help a country by doing this.

UNGER: We were very much concerned about it. When it became clear that there was going to be this much larger deployment to Thailand, a lot of measures were undertaken to find a way to handle problems as they arose and even anticipate problems, and to try to avoid the development of any kind of critical stress or strain.

Of course, I was not yet there when this big deployment took place. That was, I think, primarily during Graham Martin's time. But when I got there, I had a good basis for judgment given my past familiarity with the situation. I had talked to all of my Thai friends, including people in the government, including some discussion with His Majesty to learn how he saw the situation. I reviewed the situation with people in the Thai Government and a lot of people that I knew, who had perhaps been in government, or

people who were not directly concerned with this issue, but whom I knew to be perceptive, sensitive people. While I knew most of them to be friendly to the United States, They also would be very ready--if they felt our actions had been high-handed or improper or incomplete or whatever--to give me a frank opinion. So when I went out there, in the early fall of '67, it was very important to reestablish contacts and try to get a feel for how the Thais perceived the situation. By and large, in the Thailand of that day, the U.S. presence was not resented. Most of the Thai in leadership positions--I'm not saying this was necessarily true of the Thai body politic as a whole--were themselves concerned about the situation in Vietnam. The fact that the United States was concerned, and involved, and intended to defend South Vietnam, fitted with their policy as well. This is what they wished to see. They were afraid that a North Vietnam, moving into a dominant position in Indochina, taking over the South and exerting control over Laos and Cambodia, meant trouble for them. They felt there was hostility there that would mean pressures on Thailand and make life difficult for them.

Of course, in the light of what's happened in the last year or so, we know that the Thai have adjusted well to the situation at the same time that Vietnam itself has been adjusting. But that's modern history and things looked somewhat different then.

Q: You were there during the critical period when our relations with the People's Republic of China went through a very dramatic turn from being absolutely opposed to establishing a form of relationship there. How did the Thai view this?

UNGER: Remember, of course,--as would be true in the United States too--there are Thai and there are Thai! [Laughter] And, certainly, there were university people; and there were some business people, who for rather special reasons, regarded this PRC-U.S. rapprochement favorably and anticipated Thailand's following suit somewhere along the way.

There were those who were ideologues (and this included quite a number of people in top government positions), who were dubious about this. They felt the United States was mistaken in its perception of China and that a country that they saw, by all odds, as the principal menace to Thailand's independence, was perhaps going to be given a free hand to operate as it wished in Southeast Asia: this would be very dangerous from a Thai point of view. Now, of course, we know that none of that happened the way they anticipated, but that was the kind of thing that they were worried about.

Remember one thing, and this is very important anytime you talk about China and Thailand: Thailand has one of the largest Chinese minorities in all of Southeast Asia or anywhere else. There are some countries in Southeast Asia like Singapore where the Chinese are not a minority; they are a majority--three quarters of the whole population. But in Thailand, they are a very significant minority and a minority that has an extremely important position, particularly on the business and economic side.

But unlike Malaysia, where the Chinese element is often in almost a hostile relationship with the Malay Muslim population, in Thailand the Chinese have adjusted and assimilated in remarkable fashion. The Chinese minority is nothing like the problem that it is in the Philippines, in Malaysia, in Indonesia and many other areas.

The usual pattern is that the first generation dresses as Chinese and lives in the Chinese part of Bangkok or maybe in one of the other big cities. Maybe even in the next generation somebody will go out and become a rice miller in a relatively small town or be in business in Bangkok with children with Thai names. Possibly they will change their own name and take a Thai name; and the next generation, to all intents and purposes, is Thai.

One of the most interesting cases that I always have cited is a family that I knew pretty well--I think there were something like a dozen children. The oldest was a very respected gentleman who still had his Chinese name and perhaps dressed Chinese. He came from China when he was a young man and he was the head of one of the most important Chinese societies in Thailand. He was a very wealthy businessman and was respected as such by the Thai. But there was no question that he was a representative of the Chinese community, an immigrant community. It was a big family and his youngest brother--who was quite young when he was brought to Thailand--had a Thai name. In due course he was also given a Thai title--Phya--when he became a very close adviser to the King. He was thought of by everybody as a Thai; he married a Thai woman; he had the name Phya Srivisarn which was a good Thai name. And so in the course of just one generation, however many years that entailed, they went from the old pattern of identity as Chinese immigrants to a new pattern of essentially total assimilation as Thais!

Q: One last question before we move on to your next assignment. How much did narcotics play a role in your work as Ambassador at that time?

UNGER: The second time I was in Thailand, it was an extremely important aspect of the work. For one thing, we had begun to have a problem in the United States. I can't remember exactly the status in America at that time, but certainly drugs had been recognized as a growing problem in the States. And Southeast Asia was perhaps the principle source of opium and its derivatives, morphine and heroin; this came primarily from the "Golden Triangle." Territorially speaking, this meant primarily Burma and Laos, but with some production in northernmost Thailand. Thailand, however, provided the principal route of exit for these substances.

That wasn't always true. For example, even in the days that I was still in Laos, it was frequently reported there were French or other free-lance pilots who knew the wild areas of Laos and knew where they could land and take off unapprehended. They were operating mostly in the northwestern corner of Laos where they loaded up heavily with opium (or perhaps heroin which had been refined in one of the Burmese refineries) and flew over Thai territory, high enough so that they weren't intercepted and then dropped

their cargo to a ship at sea in the Gulf of Thailand. This was one of the ways to get the heroin out without being interfered with and thus engage in a very lucrative trade!

But at the same time, it was known that there also were overland channels through Thailand (as well as through Indochina and Burma) that probably came down the western side of Thailand, in relatively remote, mountainous areas. They delivered their product to rendezvous along the Thai coast; again, that was primarily heroin.

Going back to our discussion about Thanom and Praphas, there were recurrent rumors that Praphas who, as Minister of Interior, was responsible for the police, but also had a military position, and was the person we had to talk to and work with, principally, to try to get the narcotics problem under control. At the same time we were talking to him, we were from time to time receiving reports that he was carrying on his own narcotics operation! So it was a somewhat discouraging picture. I never had any reason to think Thanom was personally involved, but we definitely thought that Praphas was.

Q: I'd like to come now to your appointment as Ambassador to Nationalist China, Taiwan, around the spring of '74.

UNGER: The appointment was perhaps made in March and I went out in May.

Q: How did this come about and how did you view this assignment?

UNGER: I think, at that point Kissinger was Secretary of State. Are my dates right?

Q: I think about that time.

UNGER: Where was Al Haig at this point?

Q: Kissinger was Secretary of State from 1973 until 1977.

UNGER: So he was Secretary of State at that point. Kissinger was determined to switch our relationship with China so that we would have diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China, where we already had some kind of less-than-formal representation. We would terminate our Embassy in Taiwan and follow it up with whatever less formal arrangement we could mutually work out with them. So I believe that at the time I was appointed to Taiwan there was pretty much of a conviction, you might say almost a commitment, in many quarters in Washington, to work toward this change, whenever and however it could be most effectively be brought about.

There were many people in Washington, in the Congress, in the State Department, and for that matter, elsewhere in the Executive Branch, people who definitely were not in favor of this move. They were very loyal supporters of Chiang Kai-shek and his government on Taiwan as representing the continuing Republic of China recognized by the U.S. as the government of China.

Anyway, I was appointed and succeeded Walter McConaughy, who had been U.S. Ambassador in Taipei for several years. I was not sure whether or not I was going to be the last ambassador, but recognized that there was a pretty good chance I would be. In some fashion or other, we would be working out a new relationship with Beijing which would oblige us to reduce our representation in Taipei.

I think by that time we had a liaison mission in Beijing. There was George Bush in charge there at that point or soon thereafter. It was the spring of 1974 when I went out; I don't think he was yet in Beijing at that time, but he took over not too long thereafter.

Q: Yes, Bush. It was David Bruce until September of '74. Bush came in October of '74.

UNGER: Yes. So less than six months after I took over in Taipei, he took over in Beijing. Now we're in the Nixon Administration. There was still a commitment--whatever people may have had in the back of their mind for the future--there was still a commitment to Taipei.

Was it Leonard Woodcock who was prior to Bush?

Q: No, it was David Bruce.

UNGER: Yes, David Bruce. You just said it was. That's funny, I can't see David Bruce in Beijing.

Q: He was there a relatively short time. He was there from March of '73 until September '74. Then Bush, then Gates, then Woodcock.

UNGER: In any event, I think my communication with David Bruce was minimal; I was still getting myself installed. I had never, prior to that time, been in China. I don't think I had ever been in Taiwan, except on brief business visits, to say nothing of the mainland.

I don't think anybody knew when I went there just how long I would be there. How long it would be until they felt it was politically acceptable to switch our representation to Beijing--how long before the Administration would want to make that kind of change.

So I became involved with what for many years had been a very special political phenomenon on the American scene, namely, the group that was very loyally devoted to Chiang Kai-shek.

UNGER: Anyway this was, of course, already a considerable political issue in the United States. By that time, many important people, including people of a generally conservative identification, were feeling that trying to maintain an embassy in Taipei and not give credence to the existence of the PRC was no longer acceptable; they came to believe that the U.S. should appoint some prestigious individual to be present in the PRC and be able

to deal with the government in Beijing. It was pretty clear that, barring some international crisis, in which we and the PRC might be at odds with each other, in due course we were going to have an Embassy in Beijing and we would be obliged to close down our Embassy in Taiwan. How we would do it; what kind of continuing representation we would have in Taiwan; what the PRC would insist on in the way of our future relations with Taiwan, if we wished to establish relations in Beijing; all of these were questions that people were working on in Washington.

Q: You had not particular instructions on this. Everybody knew this was in the cards?

UNGER: That's right. No, I was instructed that my job was to go and continue the U.S. relations with the Republic of China and Taipei. Of course, inevitably, I had to take into account their attitude about the mainland, but obviously, in no way seeming to agree with it or support it. But nevertheless, I realized that it was a fact of life and that whatever I did, however I managed my mission in Taipei, I had to take account of how they felt about the mainland. Of course, at that time, it was totally negative. It causes me to look with some considerable interest, and some amazement, at the lady who's just gone to Beijing, whom I knew in Taipei.

Q: She's the head of the Trade Delegation?

UNGER: Yes, I think that is what it was: trade and/or finance. There was a big international meeting-the A.D.B., I believe-to be held in Beijing. She went in a kind of special category; she took part in some things and didn't in others. Shirley Kuo is the person I'm talking about.

Shirley Kuo I knew as a fairly high-ranking person in the economic, financial field in Taipei. Someone exceptionally attractive and talented. So I have to say that I'm very pleased that she's still in that position, and that she was chosen to carry out this mission.

Her husband was, as I recall, the head of the Elected Parliament; I don't know whether he still is; she was a good deal younger.

Q: Did you find, within the State Department, and really almost within the Foreign Service, a group of officers dealing with China who felt we should get on with it and in a way, jump completely into relations with the PRC and to hell with Taiwan? And other groups that were saying no? Could you talk a little about this relationship within the professional ranks.

UNGER: It might be that such a view was increasingly held, as we were moving into the last chapter in what had been a very divisive issue in the United States as a whole and particularly in the Foreign Service. This issue was posed in sharpest fashion once the Communists had taken over on the mainland in 1949 and Chiang Kai-shek had fled to Taiwan.

Of course, for many, many years, the United States Government had no intention whatsoever of any relationship, any official relationship with the government in Beijing, and it very loyally kept up its connection with Taiwan. By the time I was sent to Taiwan, however, I think we already had our liaison mission in Beijing with David Bruce then Leonard Woodcock, and then George Bush. This was seen by many as sort of the beginning of the end of the old pattern and that there was going to have to be a readjustment.

The opposition to that, in the U.S. Congress, and in the Foreign Affairs community was still very strong. I'm not sure I can relate these things precisely, but the mainland had just gone through some pretty unhappy periods of cultural revolution and that kind of thing. So anybody who was taking the earlier line about how Taiwan was a dictatorship, and how the mainland was a model democracy, obviously was being laughed at at that point. [Laughter]

Nevertheless, one had to acknowledge that the real China, was the China with its capital in Beijing. And that important as Taiwan and Taipei was, particularly in a number of special ways, it couldn't any longer represent China as a whole.

So there was certainly an expectation in many quarters that a change in "China policy", change in representation, was going to be coming before too many more years went by. Nobody knew exactly when. Nobody knew what political situation in the United States would permit it. Nobody knew when the discussions with the government in Beijing would reach a point where some of the issues that were very difficult for the United States to face, would begin to be resolved. And also nobody knew when the opposition in the U.S. Congress and in fairly important political circles in the United States, would reach a point where the switch could take place.

Q: Where was the greatest opposition? You're saying important political circles. Can you name any people or areas?

UNGER: Taiwan then, as it has continued to be, was a remarkable locus for American business in numbers of firms and dollars invested and business done and so on. Remarkable particularly when one considers how small an island it is. And yet it's one of the top several--I'm not going to remember precise figures, but I think it was number six--in trade carried on with the United States in recent years. And this was a time, remember, when the mainland presented a very sorry picture of repeated upheavals and cultural revolutions and uncertainties about the future...and certainly of sharp hostility toward the United States.

Also China had had a very close relationship with the Soviet Union; I can't remember exactly when that went on the rocks.

Q: Right now, I think they're having a summit today in Peking and this is the first one since something like '53 or '54, '57 maybe. I'm not sure. But we are talking about 30 odd years.

UNGER: Anyway, there was growing sentiment in the United States that whatever we thought of the PRC, it was just too important a factor in the world for us not to have representation there, not to be in some kind of effective communication. And, of course, this had already had its expression in the setting up the liaison mission. Needless to say, Chiang Kai-shek had thought that decision it was shocking and disloyal to our relationship with him. But we were still not on the verge of the switch that did not take place until December 31st, 1978.

Q: Was Chiang Kai-shek still the leader at that time?

UNGER: Chiang Kai-shek was the leader in my first year in Taipei but he was in very, very poor health, and in April, 1975, he died. By that time, his son, Chiang Ching-kuo was in charge, with Madame Chiang Kai-shek's efforts at very close supervision; Ching-Kuo had pretty much moved into the position of leadership, not in name, but in fact. When I first went to Taipei, Chiang Kai-shek was still nominally President. And the Parliament, which by now has become a body of real political significance, was still made up very largely of people who had come across from the mainland, with very little Taiwan representation. They were mostly superannuated individuals who had come over in '49 and who held onto their positions, but were certainly out of the picture.

And there was still a very marked hostility to the Communist government on the mainland. There was also marked hostility to any other government that had recognized and chosen to establish relations with the mainland government, as opposed to Taiwan. There were still, I would guess, 30, maybe even 40 governments that still had relations with Taiwan, that had not switched. The number now is something like a dozen (although a few small nations have recently opted for Taipei). And everything that took place on Taiwan, except the most strictly internal matters, anything in the international field, anything in relations with the United States, was heavily colored by this concern about maintaining the position of the Republic of China as the only government of China recognized by the United States.

Q: Did you have any feeling that the knowledgeable people in Taiwan were sort of preparing, even within the government, for the time when we would have full representation? Or, were they sort of shutting their eyes to the inevitability of this?

UNGER: I'm sure that individuals who were reasonably perceptive and honest with themselves and well informed were certainly thinking about this eventuality. I think that even among those who were reasonably realistic, given the position of the United States for so many decades as well as that of some other major countries, there were those who had the feeling that somehow or other they would be able to hang on, that their government would continue to be recognized as the government of China by many

countries. And that given all the internal conflicts and instability on the mainland, their day and their opportunity would come when, God knows, maybe they thought they might even be invited back. I don't think very many of them any longer thought in terms of military action to retake the mainland, but they felt there might develop a chaotic situation there, in which it would be possible for them to move back in and reassume charge.

Of course, as time went on, and as the mainland began to pull itself together and overcome some of its internal difficulties, these dreams faded. Prospects grew steadily dimmer as countries that had maintained relations with Taipei, little by little severed them, and were willing to send a consul or somebody to Taiwan but were not willing to have their regular diplomatic relationship with China any longer in Taipei--they were moving over to Beijing. As this went on, of course, it became clear that eventually Taiwan and the Republic of China would be recognized and accepted as China by very few nations.

The disposition of the Government of the United States at that time was such that they were fairly confident that the United States would continue its relationship for some time.

Q: You had left by this time?

UNGER: No, I left . . .

Q: In 1976.

UNGER: Let's see. I went there in the spring of '74.

Q: No, excuse me. You had left the post in January 1979. You came in 1974 and left in 1979.

UNGER: December 31st, 1978 was the last date we recognized Taiwan. And January 1st, '79 was the first day we recognized Beijing. And so, obviously, my official status came to an end on December 31st. I didn't leave for several days thereafter, although I was under very strict orders to leave immediately. All of this had happened very quickly and I was determined, as far as possible, to remain in Taipei long enough to help the government on Taiwan adjust to the new situation and establish what was going to be the new type of Taiwan-U.S. relationship from that point forward. (We are still there, of course, essentially in that capacity, with our liaison mission).

But the word from Washington became sterner and sterner. I did, in fact, leave something like the 13th of January. I wasn't in Taipei all of the time from the 1st of January to the 13th. I went to a meeting in--I can't remember whether it was Bangkok, but I think it may have been. That was a kind of Chiefs of Mission meeting that I attended. I attended it partly because this whole development had just taken place and everybody wanted to

know what had happened, and what was foreseen for the future, and what was going to be the impact of this on Taiwan?

So I went to the meeting with that in mind. Then I returned to Taipei by about the 13th or 14th and left Taiwan for good soon thereafter, leaving in charge Bill Brown, who had been my deputy. He was there in a sort of special capacity and I think he remained until about April or May, by which time the Taiwan Relations Act had been passed by the Congress. This relieved some of the most acute apprehensions of the people on Taiwan as to what would be the future relationship with the United States. And Brown did a splendid job in that interim period when, as you can imagine, feelings ran very high in Taiwan.

The Taiwan Relations Act went a good deal farther toward meeting the concerns of Taiwan than many people in the Carter Administration wished. But it did go through the Congress and was incorporated in law and is now the law. It made it possible for the United States to continue a quasi official relation with Taiwan, and one that Beijing has not worried about unduly.

So this new pattern was developed, essentially in that period, between our very precipitate action in November '78 and the spring.

Q: Did you feel you had much input into the change of relations or was this something that was being called from Washington? This was, of course, the Carter Administration. You were just off to one side on this?

UNGER: No, not entirely. Anybody who knew the temper of the U.S. Administration, in regard to China, knew that there definitely was a desire to make the change. It was, of course, also clear to anybody who had a feel for American internal politics. It was equally clear that this was a move that was going to raise a lot of eyebrows and a lot of opposition; it was going to be a politically difficult move in some respects, but nevertheless, one that I think Jimmy Carter and Secretary Vance were determined to carry through.

I was back in Washington in the early fall of 1978; I had a fair amount of discussion with Secretary Vance about what would be the new kind of relationship that could be worked out. He had his staff working on this; Dick Holbrooke was Assistant Secretary at that time and Roger Sullivan was also involved in the problem. They were at work on a whole set of new charters and relationships that would be put into effect at the time.

There was, however, no discussion of when this was going to take place. The impression was that it was still fairly far down the road, since a lot of planning had to be worked out. It was going to be carried out in a rather gradual way. In this way the impact, to say nothing of the political problems that Cy Vance would have to face in the Congress, would be minimized.

But, in fact, it moved much more rapidly than that. I guess a public statement on the matter was made about the 13th or 16th (or thereabouts) of December, 1978. As soon as that statement was made and I broke the news to President Chiang and opened the discussion of what was to follow, a mission was put together in Washington to come out to Taipei, to work out with the government in Taiwan what would be the new relationship with the United States.

Warren Christopher came out and Dick Holbrooke and a number of other Far Eastern types from the Bureau East Asian came out with him, with a blueprint of a new U.S. relationship to be worked out with Taiwan. There were a lot of questions that were inevitably going to be raised not only by the Chinese government there, but also the U.S. business community and others.

There was a massive demonstration on Christopher's arrival at the Taipei Airport. On leaving the airport he and I found ourselves in our limousine caught right in the middle of a wild protest demonstration. We'll probably never know exactly how and by whom this was engineered. By that time our coming change in relations and all the rest was public property; it was known that it was going to take place although at that time, I don't know that we had a specific date. Washington was the culprit and Christopher came out representing Washington. As we left the airport building, it was clear that we were moving into a demonstrating crowd and obviously not very friendly. I wanted to take a particular route which I knew would get us out of the airport by a back road and then get up to my place up on the hill behind Taipei and thus get away from demonstrations. But the driver was instructed by someone from the local government as to how he was to go. At first I didn't have any reason to be concerned about it; I just felt the other route would be more direct and away from crowds and thus easier to move right along and get to my home.

But what we were directed into was a real mob scene. We were preceded by a truck that had a TV camera on its roof and the TV camera was pointed at our procession. We were the lead car and then, of course, there were several other cars following. As we moved along, and got into the middle of this crowd of demonstrators, the truck stopped so that we couldn't move. There was no way to go back; there was no way to go ahead. It was just a narrow little road and it was lined by a mob of demonstrators on both sides shouting anti-American and other slogans.

We, of course, talked to the driver and asked him whether he couldn't get the TV truck to get on the way and let us move on. But he couldn't and as time went on, he was not even willing to leave the car. Not only was the crowd demonstrating but they began pushing their sticks through the windows of our limousine, and broke our windows if they were closed. Christopher and I didn't really know when this was going to end and what the consequences were going to be.

About at the point when things were beginning to be a little big chancy, and when both of us had been bloodied--not in any serious way, but a little bit--at that point the TV truck

began to move. As soon as we got out of that little impasse, I directed the driver, by a back route that I knew, up to our place up in Yang Ming Shan, in the high area behind the City.

We didn't really know that anything serious had happened to us; we didn't feel physically hurt at all. But when my wife saw us, she gasped. Apparently, we were bleeding profusely without knowing it, but only from superficial cuts. That was the end of the demonstration. I will probably never know just exactly how this was engineered. I think I know at least one individual who was ultimately responsible, namely the Foreign Minister, Shen Chang Hwan.

Q: After seeing Vance in the fall of '78, when you said you anticipated this would probably be a fairly gradual process, had you come back and sort of conveyed this in some way to the Nationalist government and then, of course, you were caught to?

UNGER: I couldn't convey it to them in any concrete way; any discussion of the subject was immediately a matter of very acute unhappiness. I was not in a position to say just this or that is what the United States government was going to do. I told them my reading of the sentiment in Washington and of the Carter Administration, i.e. that over time, in Washington they would be looking for a way of establishing relations with Beijing.

I couldn't say, because I didn't really know for sure, (although I strongly suspected this was so) that this would mean an end to diplomatic relations with Taiwan. When I had been in Washington early in the fall, and just prior to that, when Vance actually paid a visit out to the region (I think in August) and visited Taipei, he wasn't in any position to be at all specific as to what could or would be worked out.

What did happen, of course, was that once the announcement was made on December 16th (something like that) the group then came out from Washington, headed by Christopher. We Americans sat down with the people from the government in Taiwan to develop a new pattern of U.S.-Republic of China relationships. It was naturally a traumatic situation; the Chinese on Taiwan were deeply distressed and not much disposed to talk about it, yet they knew they had to in order to avoid a chaotic situation once regular diplomatic relations with the U.S. were broken. It was clear the United States was going to take that action, and it had already become public knowledge. So they had no choice but to work something out with us, angry and distressed as they were.

What we worked out was the set of arrangements and mechanisms that are now operating and have been successfully functioning for quite a while. Leaving aside the political distress they felt in Taiwan, from every other point of view it has worked out quite well.

Q: Earlier on, George Bush, who has now just become our President, was the Liaison Officer in Peking. Did you have any dealings of him and what was your evaluation of him at that time?

UNGER: I didn't have a lot of dealings. I saw his telegrams and he saw my telegrams. I did have a very specific dealing with him at one time at his initiative, which I welcomed. At one point, after he had been appointed and was in Beijing--I don't remember how long he had been there--I had been in Taipei for sometime. We were both scheduled to go to Honolulu where we were having a U.S. Chiefs of Mission meeting. Honolulu was where those meetings were often held, at the Military Headquarters, CINCPAC. People came out from Washington and all of the Ambassadors and Chiefs of Mission, in the East Asian area attended. We all went to Honolulu, and we had two or three or four days of discussion.

We were both going to attend that meeting, George Bush and I. I got a telegram from him mentioning that we were both going to be going to Honolulu, and given the fact that we were both in China, and obviously had common problems and situations to face, he asked what I would think of our meeting and flying together at least part of the way so that we would have a good chance to have some discussion. I said I thought that was a great idea.

We agreed to meet in Tokyo, which we did, and then flew the rest of the way together and talked, talked, talked, all the way from Tokyo to Honolulu. Then, of course, we both attended the Chiefs of Mission meeting. But all of that gave us a very good chance to talk about our respective situations, all in the context of the pertinent American policies. It meant that we had a very good chance to compare notes and for each of us to learn what was the other's assessment of the situation.

From that point forward, we kept in pretty close touch. I don't think we ever actually talked to each other again directly until I came back from Taipei in '79. Then, when he became Vice President and I was back in the States, he asked me to come around and meet with him and I did so. I had been teaching at the Fletcher School in Boston; he, by that time had been in office at least six months, maybe more. So we had a further talk because he was interested in carrying through on the Taiwan/China situation, up to the time I left. He was also interested in various situations and programs with relation to Southeast Asia, where I had spent a lot of time. So we did have that additional contact.

Q: Did he seem knowledgeable and knew the right questions?

UNGER: Yes. All of us in the Foreign Service business, at one time or another, have been thrown together with political appointees. I would say we always talk about whether "somebody has done his homework". I would say George Bush gave evidence of having done his homework a good deal more than many. Certainly, more than Ronald Reagan, "who didn't know from nothing." I mean, he had all kinds of opinions and convictions, but he certainly didn't have much knowledge.

I saw Reagan when he and Nancy came to pay a visit to Taiwan when I was Ambassador there. He was Governor of California at the time. He was 150 percent pro-Taiwan and terribly accusing and negative about those terrible people across the Straits.

Jimmy Carter, on the other hand, seemed to me serious about his responsibilities. I did have an opportunity to talk with him and brief him. I can't remember exactly when; I guess when I came back to Washington once, I found him with a very responsible attitude, even if not terribly well-informed.

Nixon, of course, considered himself a real expert on that part of the world, and very much interested in it. So I had a number of occasions when I talked to him, and he was well-informed. He had a lot of strong opinions, some of which I didn't agree with. But he at least had made it his business to know what was going on in that part of the world. When I was Ambassador of Thailand he had come out there on a visit.

Q: I hope we'll talk more about Vietnam and China in a different series of interviews which will be concentrated on those two subjects. So at this point, I'd like to thank you very much. We'll be getting back then.

UNGER: I think it's perfectly clear that it's a process that I'm very much interested in, too. I regret to have to say what I think becomes evident in this kind of an exercise, i.e., that a memory on which I once prided myself is in rather bad shape! Reconstructing some of these things and relating them properly to other events and so on, doesn't come as easily as it once did.

Q: We can reconstruct this and build a timeline at some point. So you can edit this thing any way you want. Thank you very much.

End of interview