The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training
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E. WAYNE MERRY

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INTERVIEW

Q: Today is the 19th of February 2010, with E. Wayne Merry. What does the 'E' stand for?

MERRY: Edward.

Q: But you go by Wayne?

MERRY: In my family, there is something of a tradition that males go by their middle name, which is an incredible nuisance, because in the computer age there is an assumption that it's two different people. You should never go by your middle name.

Q: I do.

MERRY: I know. It's a pain.

Q: Yes, having to explain. Except I find one of the handy things is when somebody comes up to me and says Charles, or Charlie, I know I don't know them. They're trying to be intimate and that immediately sets me off.

Well, Wayne, let's start at the beginning. When and where were you born?

MERRY: I was born in Tulsa, Oklahoma, on the 3rd of October 1948.

Q: Let's take on your father's side. What do you know about the Merrys?

MERRY: My father's side of the family were, so far as I can tell, of Welsh and Dutch extraction. Merry is a name that shows up a good deal in Wales and southwestern Scotland.

Q: It's usually spelled Merry, as we spell it?

MERRY: It's spelled different ways. I am pretty much persuaded that it's the same as the Irish "Murray", but just spelled and pronounced a little differently in Wales and Scotland. I think it's the same name that shows up in different spellings.

Q: How far back do you know, on your father's side, what people were doing?

MERRY: I know very little. This is not something my father, who recently died at the age of 98, talked about very much. Clearly, the family had moved a good deal over the generations. They ended up in northeastern Oklahoma in the early part of the 20th Century, when that was still almost frontier.

Q: Were they real Sooners?

MERRY: No, they were not real Sooners. The town where I grew up, Enid, was populated by some people who were really Sooners. But Tulsa was essentially an oil city in the 1920s and '30s. It was, in some ways, the Kuwait or the Dubai of that period. It was the center of an area of petroleum industry, in which my family was not directly involved. But there was a lot of money, and that's why the city grew, and why Tulsa—which I only lived in in infancy, but knew quite well—acquired a very considerable

urban character. Oil men in the 1920s built very elegant houses and churches and public buildings. Among other things, Tulsa has the one of the largest number of Art Deco buildings in the United States.

Q: OK, how about the Merrys?

MERRY: My father's family had moved into northeastern Oklahoma from eastern Arkansas. His own timing in coming of age was bad, because he graduated from high school simultaneously with the onset of the Great Depression, in '29. During the 1930s, even though he had come from a family of professional printers who were—as he always called them—"union printers," with the onset of the Depression there were no new union cards to be had and no permanent jobs. So my father worked in printing jobs on a catch-as-catch-can basis, and did a variety of other things as well. My sense is that he was pretty much always employed during the Depression. He was able to buy a car—probably secondhand, but nonetheless a car—fairly early. The 1930s there were a difficult time for just about everybody, so his situation was nothing out of the ordinary.

Q: There was a group, in The Grapes of Wrath, the Arkies and the Okies.

MERRY: Yes, well, that had nothing to do with my family at all.

Q: They were tenant farmers.

MERRY: And that was from a very different part of Oklahoma.

Q: Your father: what sort of education did he have?

MERRY: He had a high school education. In those days, completing high school was essentially the equivalent of completing an undergraduate education today. Both of my parents, in fact, and all their siblings, completed high school. My father must have been fairly popular, because he was a class officer in his senior year. In looking at my father's high school yearbook, the main high school in Tulsa in the 1920s was a very substantial place. It had two full indoor swimming pools; it had a theater; it had all kinds of facilities and activities. One might think that a high school in Tulsa, Oklahoma in the 1920s would be kind of primitive, but in fact this one, as near as I could see, had all the trimmings.

Q: Nothing like oil money.

MERRY: Nothing like oil money.

Q: On your mother's side, what do you know about her side?

MERRY: That side of the family was a mixture of German and Scots. The German side was named Clinite, which was a deformation of the original Kleinknecht. The Scots, her father's side, were named Edmister, which was a slight deformation of Edminster. I know more about her family because some old family papers indicate the times when they came

to the United States. The Scots side were sent to the Virginia colony by Cromwell in the 1650s because they were on the wrong side, the losing side, of one of his Scottish wars. So that part of my ancestry actually started its American experience as slave labor. Not as indentured servants, but actually POW slave labor.

The other side of her family were from Baden, in southwestern Germany. They emigrated in the early 1830s. There's a letter that indicates they were on a sailing ship from Hamburg to Philadelphia, which took seven weeks. With time, the two families combined in Iowa, in farming, which some of my more distant relatives still are. Then part of the family moved, as my father's did, to Tulsa, where my maternal grandfather was a lawyer who became a judge after the Second World War. In the 1930s, being a lawyer didn't mean you had a particularly fancy lifestyle. Their house was, by our standards today, fairly modest and was in part built by my grandfather himself.

My mother was the youngest of four. Only her eldest brother went to college; he became an academic chemical engineer, a rather prominent one. But in the rest of the family, the farthest anybody got in education was completing high school, which they all did.

Q: Where did your mother and father, and how, did they meet?

MERRY: I believe they didn't meet until after the War. My father had been married and divorced before the War, but with no children. He was conscripted in the famous first peacetime conscription in American history in 1941. He was drafted six months before Pearl Harbor and within only a few weeks of his 30th birthday, when he would have been exempt. So, not only was he drafted before the United States was even at war, but he was a fairly old guy for the Army as he was 30 when he entered the service. He then—in the way the Army did things—was one of 50 enlisted soldiers chosen alphabetically who were sent to the medical corps to be trained as x-ray technicians, which was done at the general hospital in Denver. Then, also in the curious ways of the U.S. military, after having been given all of his basic training and some advanced medical training, he was simply discharged because he was over 30 years of age. This happened only two days before the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. He didn't get to stay out very long. The Army pulled him back in for the duration real quick.

Because he was already fully trained, my father was among the very first uniformed personnel to be deployed overseas, which meant, in his case, to the South Pacific, where he was with an Army hospital unit. This was a very large, thousand-bed field hospital. Initially, he spent some months in New Zealand, and then they were deployed to Fiji. This was to support the campaign in the Solomons including Guadalcanal, and then MacArthur's campaign in New Guinea. He spent much of the war on Fiji, where, once the war moved away toward the central Pacific, evidently there wasn't an enormous amount of work for this very large hospital unit to do. If you were to believe my father, which in this case I did not, he spent much of the war playing tennis. In any case, later his hospital unit was redeployed to Calcutta, in India, where it supported the U.S. Army Air Corps operations over the Himalayas, supporting Nationalist China, and the Allied operations in Burma. He spent about the last year of the war in Calcutta and saw real

poverty of the most basic kind.

My mother spent the War in Washington as one of the ubiquitous "government girls", working for the War Department. Initially, she worked in the old Munitions Building, that no longer exists, on Constitution Avenue, and was then moved over to the Pentagon, when it was still under construction. She worked, among other things, on the various paperwork involved with the Lend-Lease program and the Lend-Lease convoys to the Soviet Union.

After the war, both of my parents returned to Tulsa, which was their hometown, though my father was a long time getting discharged because he'd picked up a skin infection on one leg somewhere in the South Pacific that nobody could diagnose. They kept him for several months in a tropical disease hospital trying to figure out what this was, which they never did, but they eventually decided it was not dangerous or contagious. It just looked terrible. He had it for most of the rest of his life. In any case, my parents met in Tulsa at a dance. Both of my parents were good dancers; my father especially was very adept as a dancer until fairly late in life. In those days, dancing was a primary means by which boy met girl. This was the "swing" era, when jazz and dancing were tightly linked. Both of my parents were getting on in years in terms of marriage because of the War. They married in early 1946. My elder brother came along at the end of '46, and then I came along in the fall of '48.

Q: You say you moved out of Tulsa fairly soon. What was your father doing and where did you go?

MERRY: When my father returned from the War, he expected to return to his old profession, that of a printer, but he found that in the immediate post-war environment, there were no jobs for printers. There were jobs for x-ray technicians, which became his new occupation. He was working in St. John's Hospital in Tulsa, where I was born. Then he got an offer to be the head of the x-ray department in the general hospital in a town called Enid, which is in north central Oklahoma and completely different from Tulsa. The Tulsa area is fairly well-watered and hilly, with lots of trees, in a setting like the Ozarks. Enid is in wheat country, which is flat as a pancake, with very little other vegetation and not much water. But this was a town where there was a job, which, in those days, was a very strong motivating factor. He took the position and we moved to Enid when I was only two months old, where he would be the head of this x-ray department for almost the next 30 years.

Enid, during the time I was growing up, was a town of about 45,000 people. Very much the center of an agricultural region: wheat and cattle. At that time, it also had a modest oil refinery. It had and still has an Air Force base, Vance Air Force Base, which was a major Air Force flight training facility, where my mother later worked as a legal secretary, following on the work she had done during the War in Washington. Enid, where I spent my first 17 years, was a medium-sized Midwestern county seat and agricultural center. The real landmarks of the town were its enormous grain storage elevators, one of which was for some time the largest in the world. You could see the Union Equity elevator from

fifteen or so miles away, it was so huge, and it was not alone. I recently read that Enid still has the largest grain storage capacity in the United States. So, you can see what kind of economy the town had.

Q: As a kid, when you first started getting out, what was your neighborhood like?

MERRY: We lived in two neighborhoods. First, in a rather small house, which we lived in when I was very young. Then, when I was about 10, my parents built another house, a larger house. This was a classic 1950s American house with a front yard and an enclosed back yard and a front porch and driveway, one story high. There was no need, in that part of the world, to build more than one story because there's plenty of land. It was surrounded in the neighborhood with similar houses, and was within easy walking distance of an elementary school, which was a classic post-war American elementary school, on one level with a big playground and classrooms for the six classes. Every kid walked or bicycled to school. A kid even in the first or second grade could walk to school on their own. An interesting point is that my very first memory of first grade was tornado practice drill. We were in the heart of what is called "tornado alley", so the first thing we learned in school was what to do in case of a tornado alert. The other thing I recall was being among the very first group to get polio shots. That scared the daylights out of us as little kids; I can still remember what a traumatic experience it was, but I also recall that adults spoke about polio in terms that let me know it was something very bad.

Q: Before we move to school, how about being a kid? One of the terms I use so that I can go back to my childhood—we were kind of feral. You'd come home and you would be told be home by six, we'll have dinner. You'd get out of the house and go out and play. What would you…

MERRY: Feral might overstate things, but not by much. This was the post-War baby boom. I was born at the very peak of the baby boom, which was late 1948. So there were a lot of kids around. This was a town in which, as far as I knew at the time, every family was a nuclear family: a father, a mother and the kids. I actually didn't know what divorce was until I was about 11 or 12. There was one little girl in my elementary school class who I knew was living only with her mother, and I knew that the father was alive but not living with them, but he wasn't in the military, and for years I couldn't figure it out. Of course, they were divorced. I had no idea what divorce was as a kid because, for practical purposes, it didn't enter into my frame of reference.

To be a kid in Enid, Oklahoma, was to have a lot of free time. Your time was not hyper-organized like it would be today. There were some organized activities outside of school. There were sports, there were church-sponsored summer day camps, and YMCA (Youth Men's Christian Association), and Cub Scouts and things like that. But kids were much less structured in how they spent their time then. There was no such thing as a "play date" nor did I have any actual schedule outside of school. We also had a lot of independence, in part because the level of safety was so high. As a little kid I could just wander around the neighborhood. Later I'd wander around the town, and nobody ever thought anything about it. That a child would have to be cautioned, "Don't talk to strangers," or things like

that, I don't remember that ever actually entered into my world. This was, to use a phrase which is now very obsolescent, an "Ozzie and Harriet" world. I remember my first knowledge of marijuana was because it was a part of life in Oklahoma for American Indians, some of whom I went to school with. I knew that some Indians smoked marijuana, which grew wild, but the notion it would be something that any of us would use would never have crossed my mind.

Something that was not so "Ozzie and Harriet" was racism. The town had a small African American minority, and during my early years—even though this was not part of the South, Enid was very near the border to Kansas, so this was not the South in a cultural sense—segregation was very real. I remember being puzzled by it, when I was a little kid, because I couldn't figure things out. I was in a public park one day at age four or five and I went up to a water fountain to get a drink of water. In those days they had two water fountains, for whites and for "coloreds". I was drinking from the wrong fountain, and an adult yelled at me, but I had no idea what the problem was. All I was doing was taking a drink of water, but I was taking it from the wrong fountain. I also remember about the same age being in a movie theater. In the middle of the movie, I had gone back to use the men's room and for some reason decided to go up to the balcony to see what was there. I got up to the balcony, and as I looked around, there were all black faces. This was a time when African Americans could only sit in the balcony, they couldn't use seats on the ground floor. I found this puzzling, because I hardly ever saw any black faces. I simply did not comprehend the segregation around me.

When I went to elementary school, it was all white, but so was the neighborhood the school served. We had some American Indians in the school. There was no overt racism against them, or perhaps that was simply my perception. It wasn't until I moved to what was called junior high school—what's also called middle school, which was the seventh grade—that my town integrated its school system, which was in 1960. That's the first time I ever had any personal contact with blacks at all. As far as recall, I had never spoken to an African American until the seventh grade when our school system was integrated.

One of the positive things I recall about growing up in small town Oklahoma was the acknowledgment that our Indian neighbors were wronged people. We were taught in the schools, very early, that this had been their land, and about the Trail of Tears and the expulsion of the so-called Five Civilized Tribes to the Oklahoma territory during the Jackson Administration. We learned even as little kids that this was an injustice. We learned that very early. And yet, the broader problem of American racism towards blacks and the legacy of slavery was still out of sight and out of mind, but would not be for long.

Q: Did your parents ever mention this, or discuss this?

MERRY: I don't think I ever heard either of my parents use an ethnic, racial or religious derogatory term, or slur, at all. The single exception was that my father always referred to "Japs" as he had a lingering antagonism toward Japan for having taken five years out of his life. For the most part, these issues just didn't enter into our daily life. I grew up in a

white family, in a white neighborhood, in a white community. The black people lived in what was referred to as "Colored Town," a section of the town completely occupied by blacks where they had their own elementary school and, up until 1960, their own high school. You could be a little kid and scarcely be aware of race as an issue. Until I was about twelve years old I was hardly aware of the existence of another race. That changed as the Civil Rights movement began to appear on the television news.

You could say the same was almost true in religion. I must have been about the same age before it finally occurred to me what Catholics were, because this was a very Protestant town, basically Baptist and Methodist and other denominations. I think it was not until I was in junior high school that I first met somebody whose family was Roman Catholic, a good friend for years, in fact. There was a Catholic church and Catholic community in the town, but so far as I recall, they'd never come within my frame of reference before.

Q: By the way, for somebody reading this, we've made several references to an "Ozzie and Harriet" type of existence. That was the name of a TV program of a mother and father and their two sons and very much in the '50s. Sort of considered, at the time, to be the typical family. Obviously it wasn't, but it does portray a certain existence of white, middle class kids.

MERRY: My family was different in at least one respect, in that after I was old enough to start school—there were no kindergartens, as far as I know, in the town—but fairly soon after I started school, my mother went to work as a legal secretary at the local Air Force base. That made us a somewhat unusual family because in most families the wife and mother did not work. Our family was a little unusual in that we were a two-income family, and my brother and I were latch-key kids from when I was seven or eight.

We were also unusual in that my parents' sense of identity remained with Tulsa, a city of about 500,000, a much more urban, much more cosmopolitan place, where both my parents still had relatives, particularly my father's mother, my paternal grandmother. We went to Tulsa about every six weeks for a weekend. For my parents, Enid was always kind of a temporary habitation, even though they lived there from 1949 until 1976. It was, I think, in a very real sense, never "home" for them. Their identity was much more with Tulsa, and I think they regarded Enid as kind of hick, of lacking in sophistication, lacking in urbanity, lacking in all the things which Tulsa, to an unusual extent in Oklahoma, did have and did offer. Despite their decades living in Enid, they never really felt of the place. I wouldn't say they were standoffish, just not of the place.

Q: What was your religion and was this important?

MERRY: My father was one of the most thoroughly secular people I've ever known, in that he had absolutely no religious inclinations or beliefs, partly because, having seen other religions, particularly when he was in India, his view was how can all those people be wrong if we're so right, or vice versa? The only time I ever saw my father go to church was when there was a family obligation; when I was baptized, or something like that. Otherwise he was utterly uninterested in church and stayed home with the Sunday

paper, the Tulsa Sunday paper.

On the other hand, his religious tolerance was also near absolute. His view was that anything you want to believe, anything you want to practice, that's fine. That's your business. It has nothing to do with me; don't bother me with it. He was to some degree reacting to his mother and sister who were both intensely religious, both "born again" evangelical Protestants, and thus he balanced his secular views with his belief in personal tolerance.

My mother was different. I can't actually say with much confidence how deep was her religious belief, though I certainly do think there was some. She did, however, feel quite strongly that it was part of her maternal responsibility to give a religious upbringing to my brother and myself. She took us to church every Sunday until our mid-teens. We were in a denomination called the Disciples of Christ, a Midwestern denomination, in which Ronald Reagan was also raised, that's not well-known on the East Coast. I would describe it as theologically nondescript, middle-of-the-road, Midwestern Protestant. Growing up in this particular denomination, theology was never really very demanding. It was not like being Lutheran or Catholic or Southern Baptist. It was nondescript and reflected the broad nature of my upbringing, which was Midwestern, middle class, middle America, in which religion, other than Sunday morning, played very little role. The High School offered Bible study as a course option, but it was conducted outside the school building.

Q: Where did the family fit politically, or did they?

MERRY: My parents were both Republicans, certainly up until fairly late in life, when my father started voting Democratic, and the town was pretty much Republican. I would say Enid, Oklahoma was probably three-quarters Republican or more. In elementary school we had a class vote for the election of the president in 1956, and I was surprised that there were a couple of kids whose votes were for Adlai Stevenson. As far as I knew, everybody was for Eisenhower. It was very much a Republican town in what was at that time a Republican part of the state, though the rest of the state, the eastern and southern part of the state, were predominantly Democratic, albeit with a southern Democratic leaning rather than a northern.

In growing up, until the Vietnam War, politics was pretty much in the background. This was the 1950s, after all, kind of an Era of Good Feeling for people like us, a family moving up the economic scale in post-War America. The single dramatic exception was the assassination of President Kennedy, which was a shared national trauma. His funeral, which was of course on television, live, was one of those events that you remember even though you were young. The other shared national experience was the space program and the astronauts, and it was the one thing that, in school, they would stop classes for. Everybody would go to the school auditorium, where they would have a standard television set up. We could not see the thing very well, but we would all share in the various astronauts going into space. This was long before the moon program.

Q: Now, going to you. Were you much of a reader?

MERRY: I said this was a town where, as a kid, you had a lot of freedom, a lot of free time. Unless your parents were on your neck, which my parents were not, you had a lot of choice with a lot of time, particularly in the summer, when you had basically nothing but free time. Kids could do different things. My parents raised both my brother and myself in what I would call a fairly loose-handed, independent way. We were taught to think independently and make decisions for ourselves and to take responsibility. We were also raised in a household environment in which some things were just taken for granted, like being on time. The fact that I went to school on my own meant that I was always there and I was always punctual. I was never late. The idea of not doing your homework or not turning in some lesson, or not paying a bill—such things were just conceptually not on the table at all in our family. The same applied to neatness and how you dressed and putting things away and eating all the food on your plate, which, given my father's experience in Calcutta, was an absolute rule.

But what I did with my free time was pretty much my choice. In my case, I discovered books fairly early, and that's partly because the town was blessed with a Carnegie Public Library, which, when I was a kid, was in the old original building, which I loved. They later built a more modern building which was functional but had no charm. One of the things the Carnegie Libraries all had was a children's section, and I remember crawling around the children's section of this Carnegie Public Library at a very early age. One of the benefits of an open-stack public library in a town like this was you could start exploring things well beyond your years in reading. In elementary school, two reading experiences that became very important to me both started with motion pictures. One was the Walt Disney version of *20,000 Leagues under the Sea*, which came out when I was seven and which gave me a very active fantasy life for several years after that. A couple of years after that came a British film adaptation of *The Hound of the Baskervilles.* These movies got me to start reading Jules Verne and Arthur Conan Doyle in the original out of the library, which, at my age was fairly advanced.

I was often reading things I didn't fully understand the first time through. I saw the movie of *The Hound of the Baskervilles* on a summer day when I was 11. The motion picture theater was catty corner across from the public library. I just went across and downstairs to the fiction section, got out the volume of The Complete Sherlock Holmes, which was 1100 pages long, and spent the rest of the summer on my first read-through of all the Sherlock Holmes stories. I understood about half of what I was reading, but loved it. To be able to spend a summer with Arthur Conan Doyle and these stories set in a London that I'd known nothing about, in an era about which I knew nothing, was a very culturally broadening experience. The same was true of my reading of Jules Verne, which I consider as perfect reading for a boy in a small town in the middle of the prairie, these wonderful adventure and science fiction stories written in the 19th century and set in a completely different environment.

Q: Did you get caught in the boys' books, the Hardy Boys, Tom Swift, and that sort of thing?

MERRY: No, I never did. The whole category of children's books was something I graduated from pretty early. I can't tell you why I didn't actually read more of those when I was in elementary school, but I didn't. I had a very early interest in history; it was always a subject in school that I liked a lot.

Then came an influence that was extremely important on me, when I started junior high school, seventh grade. The school librarian, Mrs. Denker, was a family friend from our church. She was an enormously important influence on me, because I think she sensed that I was ready to start reading well beyond what I knew till then. Not only did she get me to read things in this junior high school library—I worked as a student assistant in her library—but she started giving me things that were not in the school library, things which nowadays she probably wouldn't, for political reasons. I'm very glad she did, and my parents had no problem with my being exposed to more mature reading. My mother, who sang in the church choir, knew Mary Helen Denker, who played the organ in our church. Mrs. Denker started exposing me to things that were not just beyond the junior high school level but beyond even what then was high school level. For example, I was always interested in the classics, Greece and Rome. She started lending me the novels of Mary Renault, which are set in classical Greece.

Q: The Bull from the Sea?

MERRY: Yes. The first one I read was The Last of the Wine, which is set during the Peloponnesian War. This was my very first encounter with homosexuality, of which I had known nothing, had had no concept. In the prevailing political culture of that time and that place, a novel which dealt fairly frankly with homosexuality would have been regarded as dubious even for adult readers, let alone to be given to a 13 year old, which she did.

But Mrs. Denker had confidence in me, and started exposing me to books at a fairly elevated level and challenging rate. I started reading continuously. I read a good deal of classical literature in translation – Greek and Roman – plus histories of the ancient period. One summer—this was before air conditioning, so summer reading in a place like Enid, Oklahoma meant reading with a fan on you or going to a library that might have some cooling. One summer I decided to read Winston Churchill's war memoirs, all six volumes of them, front to back. I obviously understood about half of what I was reading. But I did things like that. My family purchased a set of the Great Books of the Western World, and I actually read about half of the set including things from Aristotle to Dostoevsky. I would take on these enormous reading projects in part because I had time for them. At that age I could absorb a lot, so I would frequently be reading two, three, or even more books at the same time. Through my mother's employment at the Air Force base, I had access to the base library, which not only was cool in the summer but the base also had a swimming pool I could use. Being an Air Force base library, it was very strong in history, particularly in military history. So, I had access to a lot of books. Between the Carnegie Library, the base library, what I had at home and what Mrs. Denker loaned to me, I had an extraordinary range of books for a kid in a small town. I would say that

growing up, in my early and mid-teens, my primary occupation was reading, and going to school was kind of an annoyance that took up time that kept me from reading.

Q: Of course, reading is still a cornerstone to the way one educates one's self. Did you have anyone you could share things with? You're reading these things, anyone you can discuss them with?

MERRY: Not very much. I discussed almost nothing I was reading with either of my parents. They had no problem with what I was reading but I was reading things they were unfamiliar with. They both worked full time, remember, and then they had the house and they had their responsibilities to us. My father liked gardening for relaxation. They were not book readers. They were both newspaper readers; very conscientious in keeping up with current affairs, including international affairs. Very conscientious about that. But they were not book readers, either of my parents. Neither was my brother. I was the only book reader in the family.

Q: What about the outside world? This is an era where TV reporting was becoming more and more important. I don't know what the Oklahoma newspapers…How were you getting international news and were you interested in international news?

MERRY: The local newspapers, the Enid newspapers, were fairly thin and didn't have a lot of national or international coverage but some. My parents took, on Sunday, the Tulsa newspaper, which was a much more substantial newspaper in terms of its coverage of news beyond the local. Then, of course, there was the coming of television news, and I can still remember that, initially, Enid had only one channel. It fairly quickly blossomed into NBC, CBS, and eventually ABC, and then a public television station. They were not local but were broadcast from Oklahoma City, which was the center of the state from where coverage came to us in both television and radio. Certainly, television news and documentaries played a very important role. We were loyal to Huntley and Brinkley on NBC, rather than to either of the competing networks. We watched that at home every evening.

I was particularly intrigued with what television offered in those days in terms of historical documentaries. On Sunday afternoon, there was a program called The 20th Century, narrated by Walter Cronkite, which was a half-hour documentary program about things historical, many of them having to do with the Second World War, because there was film footage. There was no point in having a topic in which they couldn't show anything visually. I learned a lot about the Second World War and other things that had happened in the 20th century, in the '30s and in the post-War period by watching that program, which I did almost religiously. That was probably a more important part of my Sunday than going to church in the morning.

Q: The reading and what you were doing—one, it was opening up the world to you, but at the same time was it isolating you from your peers or not?

MERRY: Both. Yes. I was, from fairly early on, somewhat isolated from my peers.

That's not to say I didn't have friends growing up; I did. But I recognize in retrospect that my friends tended to be guys who were also kind of isolated from the larger group. In looking back, in Enid, whether as a kid or a teenager, for boys there were basically four routes you could follow. First was athletics, which was by far the most prestigious. Then came academics. Then mechanics, basically working with your hands. And finally there was delinquency. Of course, many boys were some mixture of the four.

I was almost entirely of the academic. My brother was more of the mechanical. He eventually went to MIT (Massachusetts Institute of Technology) and studied electrical engineering, so his room was full of electrical and electronic stuff. Not finished products but things that he would be building or disassembling, and tools. Whereas in my room, the walls were covered with National Geographic maps and there were books. Neither of us were, in any way, athletic. Athletics was the prestige pursuit for boys. This was a town that was absolutely manic on the subject of high school football. The fact that neither of us had the slightest talent or inclination in athletics did tend to isolate us. I was something of a natural swimmer, but that did not count as a "sport" in those days. The fact that each of us pursued our own interests and talents further tended to isolate us.

In my own case, there was also the issue that at school, from a fairly early age, I was something of a discipline problem. Largely this was because I found elementary school boring. Starting in the second grade, I found things like diagramming sentences and memorizing categories of prepositions and stuff like that to be almost unbearably stupid. I withdrew first into a fantasy life which was, for several years, based on Walt Disney's film version of *20,000 Leagues under the Sea,* which was a real lifesaver for me as a little kid, though I only saw it on one occasion when I was seven. Remember, we didn't have videos or compact discs or anything like that; when a movie came out, you saw it once, maybe twice. Sometimes I would sit through a movie twice, but that was it. I didn't see the Disney adaptation of Jules Verne for another 40 years, until it came out on video cassette. In those days I would see something and really focus on it, because that was the only time you were going to see it, whether it was on television or a movie. So it would often remain quite vivid.

I was certainly a squirmer in school. A kid who didn't like to sit quiet and sit straight. And I was very impatient, and very bored, and thought that a lot of what we were being taught was kind of silly, which I suspect is what most kids think. Different teachers reacted different ways. Some of my teachers were accommodating and tolerant and some of them didn't care for this attitude at all. My first confrontation came pretty early. In second grade, I acquired a life-long skepticism about authority. At age seven I was already interested in astronomy, but my teacher denied and ridiculed the notion that the gravitational forces of the sun and moon have an impact on the earth's tides. Even when I brought in a kid's astronomy book, she just said it was wrong and I should shut up. From this I learned two important lessons. First, just because a person is in a position of authority does not mean they actually know anything about anything. Second, when persons in authority are confronted with their ignorance or error, they tend to retreat into pure authority. That experience has colored my attitude toward authority from that day to this. So, second grade was not wasted in terms of life lessons.

I did not bond with any of my elementary school teachers. I was hardly a stellar student, with fairly middling marks. I even got an F for one six-week period in arithmetic in third grade because I was angry at the teacher. My father looked at the report card and commented that it would be a good idea if that did not happen again; nothing more. I got the message and brought the grade well up for the next period. I think I never rated better than a C in penmanship, because mine was pretty poor then and became atrocious later. Thankfully, I learned to type in high school. But in elementary school I was no great shakes in subjects that did not interest me. An A student in history and geography, but not motivated in grammar, for instance. Plus, I was inept in sports and had an attitude problem. Today, I would probably be medicated for attention deficit disorder or some such, whereas I was just a bright but frustrated kid.

Things got a lot easier when I moved to junior high school because we weren't with one teacher all day. I had problems with a number of teachers in junior high school, but I had others that were really important to me and my first experience of men at the front of the classroom, which I suspect is important for boys. First there was the librarian, Mrs. Denker, who I have mentioned as a mentor and intellectual guide, but some other teachers were important to my development, even if it might not be in a subject that had anything to do with my future life. I recall algebra and biology teachers who earned my respect, but subject matter was not always important. For example, in eighth grade the girls all had to take cooking and home economics, while the boys all had to take shop, which I was not very good at, and mechanical drawing, in which I was top of the class. My mechanical drawing teacher, Mr. White, was just a wonderful man, an inspirational teacher. During that semester I absolutely flourished doing something which I never did again in my life, which was mechanical drawing. At that age, it is good to find you are highly proficient in something and something hands-on.

The difference of having some teachers I liked was reflected in my overall performance, which improved dramatically from elementary school. I was still not a straight-A student, but much improved. The real contrast showed in the standardized aptitude tests we were given every few years, called the Iowa Tests. As I recall, we took these tests in the fifth grade and then in the eighth. My composite score went up about 35 percentage points over three years. On the earlier test, I had been above average but not a lot. After a bit of blossoming in junior high school, I was in the 99^{th} percentile in everything but mathematics, and in the 97^{th} in that. I had the highest scores in the school, which had not been my experience previously. Over those three years, I became a fundamentally different person, a person liberated by books and by a more open and supportive school environment. Of course, this was also the time of puberty, which must have made a difference as well.

Some teachers were very supportive and others were not. I do not recall that school management in any way welcomed my outstanding scores on the Iowa Tests. If anything, I think the test results were regarded as confirmation that I was a smart-ass troublemaker (which was true). Certainly, I was not offered any special course work or other opportunities. It was not a particularly good school system. The standing joke, which we

were all aware of, was "thank God for Mississippi." Oklahoma's public schools were always rated 49th. It was Mississippi that kept Oklahoma schools from being the absolute bottom of the barrel. I would say that the public school system in Enid, Oklahoma, by today's standards, was certainly nothing special, but it did employ a number of teachers who were damned good teachers and good people and who were very important to me, and made a big difference in my life. Much of my school experience was a void, but the good parts changed me for the better in every way.

Q: Well, I'm not surprised, and it's a point of personal prejudice, how so much of education is done by the individual, particularly through reading. There are other ways; some people are really orally acclimated, they listen and they pick it up, but most of it, if you really want knowledge, you go out and get it, and you read it.

MERRY: I have many times said that, for me, the Carnegie Public Library in Enid, Oklahoma, was as important if not more important than the public school system. The public school system taught me to read but then didn't give me much of anything to read. The fact there was a public library and the Air Force library and that I had access to some private things allowed a kid in this small town in the middle of the American Midwest to blossom in ways that I doubt many kids would do today because now you have so many alternative media, Internet, and other things. In those days you really did have to go and hunt for what you were looking for. One of the things it really did convince me of—which I saw later in some other countries was not the case—is the absolutely critical importance of the free public library in the development of this country and in American lives.

Q: One of the things that struck me when I went into the Foreign Service was how poor the public library system would be, say, in a country like Germany. You would think that here are people who are devoted to the academic world, but yet their public library system was very exclusive.

MERRY: Yes, very much so. The first free public library in the city of Berlin was the library built in West Berlin with Carnegie money as a memorial to the Berlin Airlift, and I later saw it was packed with users. The thing that made the Scottish and then the American public library systems so different and so important was that the library be accessible to all. This made a world of difference to me.

As I grew up I would be running around with books under my arm in school that would sort of shock people. One instance I remember was in high school, so I'm now 15, 16 years old, and I was reading Herman Kahn's <u>On Thermonuclear War</u>, which was an enormously thick, fairly turgid book about nuclear war theory. The fact that a teenage kid was lugging this book around in Enid High School raised eyebrows. If you talk about being isolated from your peers, I think it's a pretty solid bet that no other kid in that high school even considered a book like that. But, again, I had lots of time, I had complete freedom of choice of whatever was accessible to me. There obviously were a lot of things that were not accessible to me, but I had more than enough things to read. I read a lot of classic literature, by which I mean Shakespeare and Dostoevsky, which I didn't begin to

comprehend. I loved Lawrence Stern, for example. I read Tolstoy in my mid-teens. I was too young to understand but still, it was all there. I read War and Peace for the first time in small snippets in the morning before going to high school one year.

Q: I think we might both take our hats off to Andrew Carnegie. He also did the same thing in England and Scotland. And here is the case of somebody who put his great wealth to tremendous public benefit. I mean, the multiplier is just incredible.

MERRY: Carnegie, as a young man, had access to a rich man's private library and believed that it changed his life, and he was determined, after he became rich, that it shouldn't just be by happenstance, by accident, that people should have access to books. That's why he began his free public library program. Not all free public libraries in this country were funded by Carnegie, but many of them were, and the one that I benefited from was. So yes, I feel a sense of warmth to Carnegie and overlook some of his other unfortunate tendencies, particularly the way he treated labor.

Growing up in a small town, there were not many cultural opportunities in those days, other than recorded music, though the school system did introduce us to art history from a fairly early age. The public television station from Oklahoma City introduced me to some wonderful things, like Shakespeare's history plays and the string quartets of Béla Bartók, but it was somewhat hit and miss. I was lucky that we had family relations in cities with art museums, which I loved. The first was the Gilcrease Museum in Tulsa, a wonderful collection of American Western art, a place once called the "Louvre of the West." The second was the Nelson-Atkins Museum in Kansas City, where I had my first exposure to Asian art. A couple of times I spent part of the summer with relatives near San Francisco, which was a great treat in every way. While it was certainly not like growing up in a big city with major art institutions regularly available, the early exposure was important to me, both in broadening my perspectives and in reinforcing my individuality.

Q: How about high school? You went your full four years to—was it one high school?

MERRY: There was only one high school in the town. It was three years. There were three years of junior high school and then three years of high school, and one high school in the town, Enid High, and that's where we all went.

Q: Now, had integration appeared at that time?

MERRY: Oh, yes. The school system was integrated when I started the seventh grade. So junior high school and high school were all integrated. One of the reasons integration took place largely without difficulty was that the town was presented with the notion that with a single integrated high school, Enid could take on the bigger high schools in Oklahoma City and Tulsa on the football field with a reasonable chance of winning. In fact, Enid High was state champion most of the years I was in high school, so the scheme worked. Since a winning football team was what the town really cared about, the schools were integrated without much difficulty, though I will say that white and black kids did not mix very much. This was true, for example, in the cafeteria at lunchtime. The black

kids would all be eating with each other. Probably the most contact that we had was in gym class where we all playing whatever sport the coaches set us to. That was all fully integrated.

Frankly, the black kids were very much a minority. Most of them came from families that were economically much less advantaged than the rest of us, even those of us that came from modest backgrounds. I would say my family was lower middle class when I was born, and by the time my parents retired they were pretty much upper middle class and fairly comfortable by their standards. But most of the black kids came from families that would have been fairly low on the economic spectrum of this town because there were not a lot of economic opportunities for their parents, were there? There wasn't a lot of contact, but I remember very little overt racism. Now, if I had been one of the black kids I probably would remember a lot more because I would have been on the receiving end of it. But I remember very little overt manifestations of racial tension in the town. That's partly because the African Americans were a pretty small minority.

A couple of years later when coming home from university for the Christmas holidays I ran into a black guy I had known from high school amateur theatrics. He was just back from Vietnam where he was a combat Marine. He considered himself damned lucky to be alive. That impressed me with the privilege of my life, that I was a student and not in Vietnam. Many years later I checked the list of combat dead in Vietnam from Enid against my high school yearbook and discovered that all the guys who died had been white, but all from modest socio-economic backgrounds. Yearbooks are very revealing social documents. These contemporaries of mine, about eight, had not gone to college, been drafted and sent to Vietnam, and died. The distinction, however, was not race but family status.

Q: How about in high school, social life, dating and that sort of thing?

MERRY: I didn't date very much. There were a few girls at least tentatively interested in me, but I was largely outside the school's organized social life, which was the girls' domain. Cheerleaders ruled the roost. My social life, if you can call it that, was oriented to astronomy and chess, neither of which engaged females in those days. I had more contact with girls in high school amateur theatrics, in which I acted and directed. I was consumed with my own interests. I suppose it would be fair to say that I was something of a dork. I don't remember that term was current at the time.

Q: A grind, maybe.

MERRY: Whatever. I certainly did not work hard at classwork, so maybe a nerd would be more accurate. The boys who got the attractive girls tended to be the athletes. Nothing new about that. Also, the girls I was interested in lived in a much more tightly supervised world than mine. The independence I have described was true for many boys, but I suspect for very few girls. This was in the early 1960s. A remarkably—what's the word I'm looking for?—a not pristine but…

Q: Staid?

MERRY: Yes. The idea of sexual relations before marriage was very daring. I'm sure in some cases it happened, but I'm sure it didn't happen very damn much. Most of the girls just wouldn't have done it, no matter what the boys wanted. This was a fairly traditional, conservative society in which the boys did boy things and the girls did girl things, and there were organized events that brought them together, dances and such like. The kind of easy mixing that girls and boys have at younger ages today didn't exist. We were separate, in the way we dressed and in expectations. This was definitely a system in which the focus was on the boys. The expectation, of course, was that the girls would grow up to marry the boys, and that was their pre-ordained role. Things like going on to college didn't exclude the girls, by any means. But there wasn't any question as to where the priorities were and the priorities were definitely on the boys.

Q: OK, let's pick it up, then. You graduated from high school when?

MERRY: 1966.

Q: Now, was it pre-ordained that you would go to college?

MERRY: No, nothing was pre-ordained, but it was anticipated. Neither of my parents had gone to college. One of my uncles had. In this environment nothing was pre-ordained, because, as I indicated, we were pretty much a middle class family. My brother and I had done well in school but we were kind of episodic. We could be rebellious enough. Neither of us were straight-A students because there was always at least one subject that we just sloughed off in. We just couldn't be bothered. The kind of focus on grades that kids may have today was much less then because, among other things, you didn't need it. I got very good scores on the college entry exams, like the SAT, ACT, and National Merit exams. Plus, I was put forward by one English teacher for a special test which got me a rating from the National Council of Teachers of English as in the top ten percent of the top one percent of students in English language ability, so that was something of a coup, though it produced absolutely nothing in terms of recognition or support from the school as an institution. The students the administration favored were the talented athletes and the socialites. Academic achievement was, I think, almost suspect in the high school front office.

So, my high school experience was a mixed bag. I had a very good French teacher and good instruction in things like chemistry and mathematics. The drama and debate programs were pretty good. There was a quite good course in economics, which started me in that discipline. However, history was simply an afterthought, something given to teachers who had to fill in time in their programs. I recall one history teacher who did not believe I had actually written a paper I turned in because it was so sophisticated, reflecting that I knew a good deal more about ancient Greece than she did. However, I should mention a very important influence on me which was the physics teacher.

Q: Who was that?

MERRY: Mr. Smeltzer, who was a young guy, only recently out of college himself. He was a very talented teacher and a very go-getter, who, among other things, somehow obtained grant money to build an observatory on the top of the high school, with an 18-foot rotating dome, and a couple of serious telescopes. I had always been interested in astronomy, so I spent much of my high school years on astronomy. I was often up at three o'clock in the morning, taking astronomical photographs. We had our own darkroom in the high school so I did all my own darkroom work. One of the things that redeemed the predictable boredom of high school was that I had this one teacher who had created this unusual opportunity for the few guys who loved astronomy, including that the school had a year of astronomy actually added to the curriculum. I recall Enid was only one of four high schools in America that offered astronomy at the high school level.

I often spent evenings, nights, and weekends in the observatory and in the darkroom doing eclipses and rings of Saturn and a lot of lunar photography, which I enjoyed enormously. That was, for me, at that age, a really gratifying thing, which existed only because of this one go-getter physics teacher.

Q: But this is also the post-Sputnik time, wasn't it?

MERRY: It was.

Q: So this type of thing had a place in the national agenda.

MERRY: Yes, though the guys—and it was all guys—who really got into this astronomy thing tended to be a very small group. We were all kind of isolated from our peer group, particularly a couple of friends of mine who were also very into astronomy. We were also chess players and chess nerds tend to be, shall we say, somewhat alienated from their social environment. Sadly, most of my real friends in high school did not have happy lives. A couple of them died young, one got into serious legal problems, and one had serious long-term health issues. Looking back, I am struck how lucky I have been in terms of opportunities to escape the fates which consumed most of the guys I was close to in those years. I was a chess nerd and I was an astronomy nerd and I was a bookworm, and the teachers for the most part probably thought of me as being a smart aleck and a pain, but smart. Some of the teachers, however, were very encouraging and supportive, particularly Mr. Smeltzer, the physics and astronomy teacher.

There was another opportunity, which first my brother and then I took advantage of. The National Science Foundation, as part of the post-Sputnik response, decided to try to identify and encourage kids to consider a future in science and engineering. They put on summer programs at a few universities around the country, one of which was at Oklahoma State University in Stillwater, which is not far from Enid. If accepted, you'd spend the summer doing an introductory freshman sampling of various science and engineering coursework. The idea was to try to get you interested in these things beyond the high school level, and give you sort of a leg up when you actually went to college.

My brother, who was going to be an engineer, an electrical engineer, did this. Even though my interests were history, politics, international relations and economics, this was an opportunity. So I went to OSU for the summer before my senior year as well. There were about 55 guys from across the Midwest. I don't think it ever occurred to anybody that a girl might go into this program, in those days. It was all guys. I think I was the only one—in fact, I know that I was the only one—who was not intending to go to college in some science or engineering field. My intention was always to do economics, political science, history. But I had this summer program which I enjoyed enormously. I even learned a fair amount. I got my calculus up to speed, which I never would have been able to do just in high school, and did some introductory engineering coursework; things like mechanical and civil engineering and learned to do Fortran computer programming, my first computer programming, which was very frustrating.

During that summer I had a different peer group. These 55 guys were all basically science nerds, right? These were science nerds from high schools from eight or nine surrounding states. My roommate was from Wisconsin; there were guys from Texas and Kansas and Missouri and elsewhere. This was a really great experience because we were all in an environment in which none of us were the exceptions. We were all doing what we all liked to do. And of course I had access to a university library, which was pretty sweet, too. That was the summer before my senior year in high school.

Q: What were you pointed towards, you yourself? And how did things work out?

MERRY: My intention and expectation was to go to university. I had very few specific notions as to what that would entail, in terms of place, financing or anything else. Nowadays, of course, kids are incredibly organized and structured in how they pursue all this. In my day, it was pretty slapdash, partly because the school system gave absolutely zero encouragement. In fact, my high school guidance counselor actively discouraged students from even considering a college experience outside of Oklahoma. My high school graduating class had five National Merit finalists, of whom I was won. Three boys, two girls, any of whom could have gotten into very good universities outside of Oklahoma; one of whom—not a particular friend of mine but a nice guy—was a shoo-in for Harvard or Yale because he was president of the high school class, he was quarterback of the football team, he came from a leading family of the town, and he was a National Merit finalist. He was a shoo-in for the Ivy League. But, no. The other four all went either to the University of Oklahoma or Oklahoma State. I was the only kid who even applied out of state, because the school system, and the environment of the town, created parameters of expectation and, as I say, the guidance counselor actively discouraged me from even thinking about a university experience outside of Oklahoma.

Q: OK, why you? Why did you think beyond this?

MERRY: Partly because, as I mentioned earlier, my parents never regarded Enid as really home. For them, Enid was just where we were, because that was where the jobs were. I had been raised in a household in which the notion that Enid is what you should aspire to was not shared. I think most of my classmates, even the very bright ones, probably grew

up in an environment in which the expectation was to go to the University of Oklahoma or Oklahoma State University, and come back to Enid. My parents, I think, would have been disappointed if my brother or I had followed that path. They never indicated anything; this was our choice. But I think they would have found it unworthy of us to have so limited ourselves.

My brother, who is two years older than I am, got into MIT, in part because our high school physics program was strong enough that MIT sent a recruiter to Enid most years. No other institution did. As a National Merit Finalist, I received unsolicited offers from all kinds of schools, about which I knew little or nothing. I really didn't have a clue and pretty much no one to advise me in a helpful way. I applied to Harvard and Stanford and didn't get into either one which, if I'd known anything about how one goes about applying to those kinds of institutions, I would have done a more systematic job or I wouldn't have tried in the first place. I also applied to the University of Wisconsin-Madison, and the reason was purely because Mrs. Denker, the junior high school librarian who had been such a great influence on me, had been there for a summer librarian's program and had talked it up to me a lot. I really didn't know very much about the place except that it was not in Oklahoma. I got in and was offered a scholarship, a very generous scholarship.

Now, the money was a not trivial consideration because, as I mentioned, my parents both worked, but we were not a well-to-do family. The deal my parents offered my brother and myself, which I regarded as eminently fair at the time and in retrospect even more so, was that they were willing to pay the costs of our going to an Oklahoma institution: University of Oklahoma or Oklahoma State University, which was to say fees, which were not very much, and then dormitory costs, books, miscellaneous costs. Anywhere else we wanted to go was fine, but the financing was our problem, not theirs. They were willing to pay for us to go to college in-state, where their taxes paid to support the institutions. Anything more expensive than that was up to us to arrange the financing. That's just the way it was. In retrospect, I think this was a remarkably sensible thing for them to do. It meant they were not going to go into debt. My parents did not do debt. The only debt my parents had was the mortgage on the house we lived in. They bought everything else for cash. Cars, furniture, appliances, anything. If you didn't have the money, you didn't buy it. Debt was just an anathema in my family. It still is for me.

So they weren't going to go into debt to send us to college. My mother was working and it was her working that would pay for the level of support they were offering us. But they were not that far away from retirement; remember, they had married fairly late because of the War. When they retired, they weren't going to retire in Enid. They were planning on building a place—which they eventually did, in the Mark Twain National Forest—in southwestern Missouri, where they were going to retire. And that was not going to be for free. So they were offering us support to go to college but where we would want to go, where we would apply, where we would get in and how it would be paid for, that was our responsibility. I happen to think that was a remarkably smart way to go about it. It meant the responsibility was ours. And the support was only for four years. Anything beyond the undergraduate level was not their burden at all.

My brother went to MIT with scholarships and loans and jobs. I went to Wisconsin with scholarships and jobs, and then went on to graduate school at Princeton with a fat fellowship. My parents fulfilled the obligation they had put on themselves and after undergraduate graduation they felt that they'd done their job and should not have to spend any more money on us. It wouldn't have crossed my mind that they should.

Q: You were at University of Wisconsin from when to when?

MERRY: 1966 to 1970, though I should note that I also spent the summer after high school graduation at another summer university program at the University of Kansas in Lawrence (KU). This was a program to give talented students who were going to go to KU a head start. You took three undergraduate freshman courses in the summer. I never indicated that I was going to go to KU because I hadn't even applied to KU. I applied to the summer program only. I wasn't misleading the University of Kansas; I was already committed to Wisconsin but the University of Kansas in its wisdom admitted me to this program and even gave me a scholarship. Another of those opportunities I have been blessed with. I spent a really wonderful summer at Lawrence, a place I have nothing but the fondest memories of—a lovely university—and took three undergraduate courses, which gave me a leg up as a freshman because I took with me nine credit hours when I started at Wisconsin, so I didn't have to take those introductory courses there.

Q: Let's talk about particularly the '66 to '70 period, and the view of social movements as a critical one. Of course, the University of Wisconsin was not exactly the most placid place in the world.

MERRY: That it was not. First, I should say that I had a wonderful undergraduate university experience; better, I am now quite confident, than if I had been admitted to Harvard. I would have been a fish out of water at Harvard or any place like it. I think I would have been rebellious and unhappy. I was absolutely in the right place at the right time at Madison. I had great professors, great coursework, plus a very rich life outside of class. I had the kind of maturing, broadening intellectual experience that university years ought to be for everybody. I have a feeling for many it is not. I was lucky and had what I would consider to be almost an optimal university experience. Loved it, loved the university, loved the campus, loved just about everything about it except, of course, occasionally getting tear-gassed during political demonstrations.

My undergraduate major was in economics, though when I graduated they informed me I actually had a double major because I had fulfilled all the requirements in political science as well. I had not even been aware until they told me. I also took a lot of coursework in history, in art history, in music, and other things. I spent a lot of time at the music school, which was very important to me.

Q: Did you have an instrument?

MERRY: No, I did not. My one real regret in growing up is that I never learned to play a

musical instrument, but as I pointed out, my growing up was fairly lower middle class. There wasn't really money for that kind of thing. But I took advantage of all that Wisconsin had to offer, particularly in music and in film societies. I later became the president of the Wisconsin Film Society, the oldest university film society in the United States. It is no longer in existence, because film societies at universities were put out of business by VCRs and DVDs. Back then in the 60s I got to do a lot of things in music, fine arts, film. I even did work in some of the archives in the historical library. And of course I did my coursework plus everything else that one does at that age.

Q: Let's talk about when you arrived in '66, because I assume there was a development during those four years as far as attitude, political movement. You were part of "a don't trust anybody over 30" and that generation. Did you arrive with an attitude or…

MERRY: Oh, no. The years I was there, because of Vietnam and other things, were years of enormous political activism among the student body, much of it very disruptive. Wisconsin was not alone in that regard. There were Columbia and Berkeley and others. But Wisconsin was certainly among the forefront.

The attitude I arrived with was to get a good education. For me, going to Madison was my decisive step away from Enid, Oklahoma. Not that I in any way condemn Enid, but it was time for me to go. It was time to go on to other things and to a broader world. I loved Madison because it was all the things Enid was not. One, it had water. Lakes, big lakes, everywhere. It had trees, it had hills. It had real winters, arduous though they were, which I came to love. It was a bucolic environment. I remember arriving there at the beginning of the class year in early September and I was just struck by the physical beauty of the place. Everything was green, there were trees, and I was looking out over these enormous, beautiful lakes with sailboats and kayakers and canoes, and people sitting on the terrace of the student union overlooking the lake and I thought, "Jesus! I have arrived. This is heaven!" Keep in mind that Madison has one of the most beautiful campus environments anywhere; it was and still is a very special place.

Like many a freshman student, when you don't know what it is all about, I had a period of adjustment but I learned fairly quickly. The University of Wisconsin, very much in common with my own parents, basically said, "It's up to you. You make your own decisions, you make your own choices. It's up to you what to do with your time." It told students at the outset that the university did not practice *in loco parentis*. For me, that was great. Several years later I was employed by the university as a counselor for incoming freshman and learned that this kind of environment is not great for everybody. A lot of kids were overwhelmed by it, they got lost, they needed direction, they needed structure, they needed a less independent environment. For me, it was ideal. So, again, I was in the right place at the right time.

I didn't bring with me any particular political attitude. Even though I had been a difficult student in Enid, I was difficult as an individual, rather than difficult politically. I was not fully formed or mature about politics, but skeptical about herd instincts. I much later told a friend in East Germany that, during those student years, when I was back home visiting

in Enid, I was regarded as a left-winger and maybe a communist, while in Madison I was regarded by my fellow students as a right-winger if not a fascist. In fact what I was, in those days, was sort of a Hubert Humphrey Democrat, which meant that in the context of the student movements I was hopelessly right wing. In the context of Enid that was hopelessly left wing. So, everything is a matter of context.

Perhaps I should confess how little I resembled the stereotype of students in those days. I was entirely abstemious, so that I went through four years at a university which served beer in the student union and never consumed a drop. Nor did I drink coffee. Both alcohol and caffeine entered my system only years later. I also never used any kind of drugs, not even cannabis let alone LSD or any of the other things circulating. For me this was entirely a personal choice and had little to do with the laws against drug use. I think I did not know a single other student during those years who was an absolute abstainer as I was. Just about everyone I knew smoked marijuana, and I was present when it was used hundreds of times. I never had a problem with other people using "grass", though stronger things really scared me. It was simply that I was, in those days, a real health fanatic. I had this "healthy mind in a healthy body" notion, which must have looked pretty silly to my peers. However, I was none the worse for not having the hangovers so common to students and for not developing a taste for drugs. In any case, I really did not have the money to consume any of those things, so my lifestyle choices were reinforced by financial necessity.

Q: First of all let's talk about the academics and then we'll move to the political movement. What course grabbed you? Did you find yourself specializing or focusing on anything?

MERRY: Some of the things I didn't go into are worthy of note. The University of Wisconsin is famous for its history department, but that department was very politicized. Much of it was semi-Marxist. Even though I took a number of courses in history, I tended to shy away from much study there, despite the fact that history has always been a primary interest of mine, because of the political culture of the department. Not so much its faculty, I suppose, than its graduate students and teaching assistants and the other students who were much under the influence of Herbert Marcuse, whom I regarded as drivel. I took no courses in the philosophy department, despite a personal interest in doing so, because I was so alienated by its intensely political tone.

My focus was in the economics department and political science department, which were politically left of center within the American context but were not politicized. You could study macroeconomic theory and the professor had no way of knowing what your political views were and could not care less. The question was, "Do you know how to derive a demand curve?" The same was true in the political science department. Even though they were teaching politics, they didn't have a political axe to grind.

Q: Had the political science department gone septic by this point? I'm talking about turning into everything is computerized, and everything has a mathematical model?

MERRY: No. The methodological claptrap that political science has now was happily in the future, at least in Madison. No, the political science department where I got my second major was very much about politics in the real world. State and local government, political institutions, constitutional law. One of my best courses was a full year of constitutional law, which served me very well later as an American diplomat. There was none of the methodological mumbo-jumbo. If there had been, I wouldn't have stuck around very long.

I was unusually fortunate in the economics department as an undergraduate—and remember, these were big departments with lots of undergraduates—in that I was favored by a few professors. One was a man who, I think, never became famous but was just a wonderful teacher, my first macroeconomic theory professor, John Bowman. A young guy, who took a shine to me and helped me obtain some research assistant jobs within the department, of which there weren't very many for undergraduates. But I got two of them. I got to study with other really great professors. One was David Granick, who was an expert in something that was not very fashionable, which is comparative economic systems and socialism. I took a lot of coursework on how economies are organized in other countries, France or Japan or Germany or Yugoslavia, and I took a lot of socialist theory, which later stood me very much in good stead in the Foreign Service.

Above all, I got to study under, and for a while work for, Robert Lampman, who was, at the time, the leading American economist in what's sometimes called welfare economics. He was the man credited with having persuaded the White House, under John Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson, that a rising economic tide would not do anything fundamental to reduce entrenched poverty in the United States; that poverty was not going to disappear just because of economic growth and prosperity. He was a wonderful man, a wonderful teacher, a wonderful professor. I remember a course of his called "Wealth and Income," that, at the end of the semester, the students stood around outside the classroom saying, "Damn, I learned a lot in that course." He also was generous enough to give me a research assistantship, which, as an undergraduate, was basically a form of charity. I think he probably knew I needed the money, but it was a lot more interesting than working as a short-order cook. For a summer, I was close to the man who at that time was advising Arthur Burns, who was advising President Richard Nixon on healthcare reform, because Nixon was very interested in healthcare reform. The man advising Nixon was Burns and a man Burns was listening to was Bob Lampman, and I was this young undergraduate, working for Lampman as he was doing this. This was my very first contact with the public policy world, and in domestic policy at that.

Q: What sort of things were you doing?

MERRY: I was doing research work that was probably too primitive to give to a graduate student. He had graduate students working for him. I was doing fairly basic stuff, but on interesting topics. I studied the first year of the new Medicaid program and realized that it was a budget-buster from the outset, that its costs would skyrocket unless some discipline was introduced into the program. In reality, the job was a form of charity. They had a few

jobs for undergraduates in the economics department not so much for what you would produce but so you could make some money and would get more involved in economics and in the department. Another summer I had a job on a team for another professor who had a grant from the Carnegie Foundation to produce an economics basic textbook aimed at the bottom five percent of the class. This was for kids who couldn't understand freshman economics. Those of us who worked on the project referred to it as "Samuelson for simpletons." I drafted two of the chapters trying to explain basic economics concepts to freshman who just couldn't figure it out at all. I'm not sure whether any of my actual writing ever went into a finished product, but this was an opportunity that was mostly given to graduate students. I think there were two undergraduates hired to work on this project. It seemed like fun with some income, but now I understand how much of a privilege I was given.

Doing this work in the economics department, and in the associated Institute for Research on Poverty—where Lampman was also located—as an undergraduate I got to do things normally only a graduate student does. I acquired some insights into economic policy issues and how academia relates to the formulation of policy in Washington for the first time. I am also pretty sure that some of my professors, in the economics or political science departments, identified me for other potential things. In my senior year I was offered a job, purely out of the blue, by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), to work on Soviet strategic systems analysis. Clearly, one or more of my professors had been a spotter for the CIA. I didn't take the job because I went on to graduate school, but to have somebody actually come to you with a job offer—it's not something that happens every day at that age.

Q: It's good for the soul.

MERRY: Yes, and clearly that was because I had these individual relationships with some of my professors. One of my political science professors was a man named David Tarr, who had the most unpopular specialty imaginable in those days, which was military policy—it was extremely politically incorrect in those days.

However, I wouldn't want you to imagine that I spent most of my time as an undergraduate on my coursework. That would be misleading. I spent my time doing a myriad of other things, which I enjoyed enormously. There were lots of interesting people, as you might imagine, from all kinds of backgrounds. I was certainly not alienated from my peer group at Madison, which was a wonderful change. I couldn't have had a more diverse experience, whether it was swimming laps or showing movies, or working in library archives or getting involved in political arguments.

Q: Let's talk about that. The University of Wisconsin-Madison is considered sort of the pre-eminent state university in political affairs, along with the University of California at Berkeley. What were the currents that were going on there, and what was your involvement?

MERRY: Well, the student body was intensely politicized in that period, though during

the four years I was there that intensity grew, and ultimately went over the top, in terms of violence. I knew quite a few students who were politically very active on the left. One girl I knew later went into the Weather Underground. I knew students who were Trotskyites, who were active in demonstrations against the war in Vietnam, against U.S. policy at home, and, of course, in the Civil Rights Movement. This was a very intensely politicized environment and it was all around me, where I was studying and where I was living, and partly just because this was in the air. I was never, however, much of a participant, because my political views were different.

I say it now with some degree of embarrassment, but in my university days, I steadfastly supported the U.S. war in Vietnam. It wasn't until I got to graduate school that finally the nickel dropped and I figured out it had been all a ghastly mistake. Part of the reason why I supported U.S. government policy, particularly the Lyndon Johnson administration, was that I had come from a political environment in Enid, Oklahoma that was fairly centrist, patriotic, and tended to be very trusting and supportive of your country and its government. It was also the case that I maintained my position as a student because of a natural contrariness which led me not to be persuaded by what all my fellow students were saying and shouting and demonstrating for. The more my fellow students tended to vilify the administration and demonstrate against the war, the more I tended to go the other way. It's sort of my natural cantankerousness, that being right in the midst of one of the most politically left-wing and active American university campuses during the late 1960s, I was on the other side of the fence politically. All of my friends knew this. I was regarded with either annoyance, or, frequently, with kind of amused tolerance. I remember one of my Trotskyite friends who genuinely believed in the impending revolution, one day took me aside and, very concerned, said he wanted me to know that after the revolution I would not be shot; that I would be kept on to help administer the new social order.

Q: Oh, how nice.

MERRY: How nice! But some of the more extreme student organizations took a much less tolerant attitude toward me. Things got very politicized, particularly in that year of the U.S. invasion of Cambodia, and the killings at Kent State.

Q: That was the summer of 70?

MERRY: Actually, before that. This was in the spring of '70. My senior year at Wisconsin, 1969-70, was the year in which American universities everywhere were just going up in flames. Normal course work was disrupted, there were innumerable demonstrations and I was downwind from tear gas on many occasions, partly because I lived in a part of town that was all students. If you lived in the middle of students, you were going to be in the middle of demonstrations and there was going to be some tear gas. On a couple of occasions I took refuge for several days with friends who lived outside of town just to escape the disruptions and the tear gas.

I maintained my independent political views, which became—I think I would say, in

retrospect—downright quixotic, because in 1968, before Lyndon Johnson pulled out of the presidential campaign, I was the chairman of the University of Wisconsin Students for LBJ, which was, to put it mildly, one of the smallest student groups at the university. I think we had a grand total of seven members. This made me the subject of considerable hostility. I received a couple of threats, I was physically attacked a few times, never with any damage. But the fact that I would actually stick my neck out overtly in favor of Lyndon Johnson, in 1968, in Madison, Wisconsin, was just quixotic. I accomplished absolutely nothing at all other than to annoy many of my more extreme fellow students. Perhaps that's what I was seeking to do.

Q: I guess thinking that your later life, and dealing with the Soviet Union and the People's Democratic Republic of Germany and all, that you were getting a very good look at revolutionaries in their embryonic state. All these little left-wing leaders; embryonic ones in college trotting their stuff…

MERRY: Of course, the Soviet Union and the GDR (German Democratic Republic) never would have tolerated any of this in students. They would have crushed them underfoot without any hesitation.

Q: Well, yes. But it shows the beginning of a revolutionary movement.

MERRY: Looking back on the '60s—and I was very much a member of the '60s generation—there was youthful rebellion going on in lots of places. In Paris, where they were reacting against Charles de Gaulle; in Germany, where they were reacting against the falsehood and hypocrisy of their parents' generation; in Japan, where they were reacting against the Japanese establishment; in Prague, where they were against the communist system. Partly it was that in the late '60s rebellion was in the air around the globe, as it had been across Europe in 1848. In our country, it was driven first and foremost by the war in Vietnam and by the struggle for civil rights. But a large part of it was of the generation. My favorite bit of graffiti on a wall in Madison proclaimed, "Armed Love!" My cynical recollection is that politics were by no means the leading motivation for the youth revolution. I would say the key factors were, in order, sex, drugs, and rock and roll, and politics came somewhere after that.

Q: But you had a fatal leaf of politics spread over the whole thing.

MERRY: Well, it was interesting. There were many people who were politicized but who really didn't understand very much about what they were demonstrating for or against. Many kids were just going with the crowd. At a place like Madison, there was a substantial core, which was several thousand people, who were politically quite literate. I knew several people who were very well-read, well-prepared Trotskyites, who would go cut sugarcane in Cuba, or something like that. Many of the core student demonstrators in Madison were very politicized and some of the academic departments, particularly philosophy and history, were practically breeding grounds for views which the state legislature regarded as seditious, and not entirely without some justification, I might add.

This all did enormous damage to the relationship between the university and the state. The attitude of the people of the state of Wisconsin toward the University of Wisconsin-Madison, I think, has never really recovered from this period. I think my generation inflicted massive and long-lasting damage to the university. Particularly, we alienated the university from the people of Wisconsin in ways that even I recognized at the time, and made me very unhappy. I felt deep, personal gratitude toward this university and to the people of that state who, among other things, were giving me my scholarship. I felt that many of my fellow students who were not from Wisconsin, many of whom were New Yorkers and from New Jersey and other places on the East Coast, were inflicting damage to this institution in a very casual, thoughtless, willful way that I considered was, really, a violation of hospitality, if I can put it that way. I always felt, as an Oklahoman, something of a guest in Madison, and I felt some of the responsibility that a guest has to behave in somebody else's home. Many of my fellow students didn't think that way or, the subject having been broached, would have regarded my attitude as hopelessly bourgeois. But they certainly did a lot of damage to the institution.

They also, however, created an experience which, for me, was very much part of my university education. To be in Madison, in the late '60s…

Q: Oh, yes, if you're going to see something, that's the place to see it.

MERRY: It was sort of like being in Paris or in Berlin or in Prague during that period. Yes, it was partly an education in extremism, in irrationality, in how exuberance and enthusiasm and testosterone can be detached from reality, but also in how institutions respond to it. The leadership of the university—and indeed, of much of the state—were themselves liberal Democrats, and they were not seeking to crack down. They were trying to preserve the institutions while also being tolerant of freedom of speech. One of the things I remember discussing with professors and watching was how the university administration dealt with the challenges.

At one point I was involved in this, because in my last two years I was employed by the College of Letters and Science as an advisor for incoming freshman and their parents. I was one of four students hired for orientation purposes, for new freshmen. That program became the target of extreme students, who sought to take it over, co-opt it, use it for their purposes. I worked with one of the deans – a very fine man – about how to do our job and prevent our role from being disrupted while at the same time not turning the university into a police state. I came to have a lot of respect for the senior university administrators, and also for the university police department and the Madison police department, who were, in many cases, the subject of very extreme provocation. I look back and I still think it's a miracle nobody got killed at some of these demonstrations.

I was someone who, perhaps because I came from a lower middle class background, tended to identify in some of these street confrontations more with the police as people than with my fellow students. The cops were basically guys from lower middle class backgrounds and the students were, of course, mostly the children of privilege; many of them children of considerable privilege. It was not that I was shoulder to shoulder with

the police—in fact, I was trying to stay out of the damn tear gas most of the time—though I will say that I was not averse to observing demonstrations. This was part of what was going on. I wasn't one of the demonstrators but I was out there watching what was happening. But even then I tended to have a sense that if my sympathies were to anybody, it was with these cops, who were behaving with great restraint and great discipline in situations in which they were under a lot of provocation, a lot of stress, and no small amount of danger. On a later occasion I watched what French cops did to student demonstrators in Paris, where God help you if you get in the way of a French riot policeman, they don't take a lot of crap. I came away with a very strong sense of respect for the way the institutions of the university and the institutions of the law in Madison dealt with these challenges.

Q: They got through it, which is remarkable when you think about it. I have to say that while all this is going on, '69, '70, my observation was somewhat different. I was the consular general in Saigon at the time and we would read about this. Although, not that we didn't have student riots, too, with tear gas, in Saigon.

MERRY: Keep in mind that one of the things my student experience involved, of course, was not being drafted. Here was I, overtly in support of U.S. government policy in Vietnam; but I wasn't exactly volunteering to join the Army. I had my student deferment and kept it. I could, however, have done what a lot of my fellow students did, which was manipulate things to be classified 4F, and not subject to conscription at all. I assumed that when I graduated I would probably be called up when I lost my student deferment. Then Nixon introduced the lottery system in my senior year and, quite by the luck of the draw, I had a high lottery number so was not drafted. But before that happened, as I could see my graduation in the not-distant future, I assumed I would be drafted, because my draft board was in Enid. I took it for granted that once my student deferment ran out, with my undergraduate years, that I would be drafted and that I would go. There wasn't any question about it.

Q: I think this is a good place to stop, Wayne, but we'll pick this up the next time. You're graduating, 1970…

MERRY: Well, perhaps I should end up with one last political event in August 1970, which was the bombing of the Army Mathematics Research Center, which was the time when the student resistance went completely overboard and led to a human fatality.

This was, as I understand, the largest domestic bomb set off in the United States before the Oklahoma City bombing of 1995. It involved a panel truck full of ammonium nitrate pellets and diesel oil, the same that was used later in Oklahoma City, carried out by four students, very radical students, to bomb Sterling Hall, which was the physics department, which contained a small facility that did contract work for the U.S. Army. This was called the Army Math Research Center. In the preceding couple of years there had been violent attacks on a number of university facilities that had some connection with the government, particularly a firebombing of a gym building, where one corner of the building had some ROTC affiliation. I was particularly annoyed because this was where I

swam laps every day, and for several months the damn building was closed because of this firebombing. There had been attacks on other ROTC facilities, there had been physical violence, including firebombings of a number of places.

At the end of the summer of 1970—I had already graduated in June—came this seminal event. I had already been accepted for graduate school at the Woodrow Wilson School at Princeton University with a full fellowship, so money was for once not an immediate issue. I had saved up enough money from working so I could give myself the summer off, as sort of a graduation present to myself. I got a room in one of the fraternities that was not functioning during the summer, so it was dirt cheap. I gave myself a summer to read and look at the lake and swim and just have a very relaxed summer after my graduation. That involved, since there was no air conditioning, doing a lot of reading late at night and on this particular night in August I was up, reading, at about three-thirty in the morning, when the bomb went off, which was, from where I was, perhaps two miles as the crow flies. I didn't just hear it; it shook the building I was in. I knew immediately it was something big. I had no idea what it was but I quickly got my shoes on, went out, got down to where it was, and there were the fire trucks. Massive damage had been done to the building and surroundings. There were also students spontaneously celebrating because the bombing had been carried out against the Army Math Research Center.

This kind of jubilation at the destruction of an academic facility, of a university facility, repelled me enormously even before we learned that a man had been killed. He was a researcher getting his computer time who had nothing to do with the Army Math Research Center but he was the victim. Only a few days later I left Madison to go to Princeton so, in many respects, the very last event of my four very eventful, very fulfilling, generally extremely productive university years was this rather chilling incident that was front-page news all across the United States, and I suspect well beyond the United States. It was a transformative event. I know that many faculty members began their courses a few weeks later, when the new semester started, with fairly impassioned statements that things had just gone too damn far. Not just that a fellow faculty member had been killed but in attacking the institution itself in this way. I think many professors who had been agonizing for months as to how far things had gone felt now, clearly, that things had gone too far.

There are few things you can remember decades later exactly as if they had just happened, but I can put myself exactly where I was sitting when I heard that explosion and what happened in the ensuing hours and what I saw. It was one of those events that just puts a searing impression onto your mind, as I'm sure 9/11 did for millions of people. That morning in 1970 in Madison was that kind of personal experience for me and confirmed in me, I suppose, my rejection of emotional extremism and uncritical self-rationalization and the use of violence, which reaffirmed my basic sense as to what my core beliefs are. Watching how good intentions can go so far astray and how young people who proclaimed they were building a better world and how everything was going to be wonderful as they were chanting these moronic sayings from Mao Zedong, who of course was killing tens of millions of his fellow people…

Q: He only killed about forty million. Oh, no, it's higher than that.

MERRY: It was an unfortunate, sour note on which to leave Madison, a place where I still return almost every year to visit friends. One of the things you get in your university experience are friendships that last the rest of your life, and those have been very important to me. Leaving your undergraduate years is kind of a going out into the world. I was going on to graduate school so I wasn't exactly going out into the world, but for most people, I think completing an undergraduate experience, if it has been meaningful, that is a transitional moment, and for me it was doubly a transitional moment, because it involved me being a witness of this particular act of wanton violence which defined how parts of my generation and I would never be able to see eye-to-eye. My fellow students who were out celebrating that morning were just completely alienated from me.

Q: OK, so we'll pick this up in 1970, when you're off to Princeton.

MERRY: Yes.

Q: Today is the 18th of March 2010 with Wayne Merry. And Wayne, where did we leave off?

MERRY: We left off when I had just departed from the University of Wisconsin-Madison at the end of my undergraduate years and was on my way to Princeton to begin graduate school.

Q: You were at graduate school from when to when?

MERRY: 1970 to '72.

Q: Let's talk about that. What graduate school?

MERRY: I was at the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs, which is not part of the general graduate school of Princeton University. It is a self-standing institution, as if it were a law or business school. Not only does it have its own legal standing but, more to the point, it has its own endowment, which originated with an anonymous gift from the so-called X Foundation. Originally it was $35 million. It has later been identified with a family named Robertson, and a couple of years ago, before the recent financial crisis, the endowment had grown so that the Wilson School's endowment was almost a billion dollars, which is, to put it mildly, grotesque. There's many a fine university that doesn't have an endowment of that size.

The Wilson School had, and still has, an identity crises as to what exactly it is preparing students to do. The idea behind the endowment gift from the Robertson family was to prepare people for public service with an emphasis on service in public institutions. Not just foreign, but domestic, whereas in fact most of the student body, when I was there, and still today, go into what you might broadly call the public realm but not into public service as it would have traditionally been thought. This led to legal action by the

Robertson family to get their money back, though they finally reached a settlement with Princeton. I felt a good deal of sympathy with their belief that their gift was not being used for the purposes intended; it certainly was not in my time.

Q: How do you divide public realm from public service?

MERRY: Well, for example, one of my classmates went to Exxon Corporation. Exxon certainly is involved in international affairs in a big way but I wouldn't exactly call that public service. Of my graduating class, which was 55 or thereabouts, only two went into the Foreign Service, and I'm the only one who remained. So if you think of the U.S. diplomatic service as a classic place for people from places like the Kennedy School or the Fletcher School or the Georgetown School, I was the only career Foreign Service officer produced by my class, and I think the class before me had only one.

Q: How big were the classes?

MERRY: About 55. Graduate school.

Q: So it really is quite different from the Fletcher, the Johns Hopkins and that sort of thing?

MERRY: It is different. I think the Wilson School always had an identity problem that the Kennedy School, or Fletcher or Hopkins or some others have not had. Some schools of public affairs have been very explicitly oriented to training people for various domestic American public roles: city management, state and local government, the administration of domestic American federal agencies. There's plenty of stuff other than international affairs.

But it was remarkable at the time when I was at the Wilson School, which was toward the end of the Vietnam War, how completely out of fashion the U.S. government's international affairs activities were. So far as I know, the military academy graduates and I were the only members of my class who envisaged leaving the school for a long-term role in the foreign policy institutions of the U.S. government.

Q: Not only fashionable but 1970 was the spring of Kent State and the apex of the anti-war movement. At graduate level, often—I mean, you're not kids anymore.

MERRY: The difference was not just going from undergraduate to graduate school but going to Princeton. For example, at Wisconsin, the graduate students were every bit as politically active as the undergraduates; in some cases more so. In some departments the graduate students were the most politically active, providing much of the actual intellectual leadership of the counterculture and the anti-war movement. Princeton was different in several respects, one of which had nothing to do with that particular time in politics. At Princeton the graduate programs are almost hermetically separated from the undergrad. In my two years at Princeton I had contact with exactly one undergraduate, who just happened to share a particular professor with me. Whereas, as an undergraduate

at Wisconsin, I had a lot of activity with graduate students and graduate programs. I worked as a research assistant. I wouldn't call it free flow, but certainly there was an active interaction between senior-level undergraduates and graduate students. Whereas, at Princeton, they are deliberately separated, even physically separated.

Q: I don't know Princeton but I know of the eating clubs and all that. That had no impact, eating clubs? You didn't have eating privileges?

MERRY: That had nothing to do with graduate students, because there was a big debate in the early part of the 20th century where to physically locate the new graduate college, which would be the residential structure of the graduate program. It was located a fair distance away from the main campus, so the graduate students would live and eat physically as far away from the undergraduates as you could practically get them. The graduate students all lived together and ate together. This was for all the departments.

Princeton was, I suspect, one of the least politically-charged prominent universities in the United States at that time. It was not like Columbia; it was not like Berkeley or Wisconsin. I think there was a lot more political activity at Harvard or Yale. Princeton, both at the undergraduate and graduate levels, was remarkably passive.

Q: Did you have any feel for the reason for this?

MERRY: I'm bound to say my classmates and I, who all had come from politically-active undergraduate institutions, were surprised, baffled, and in some cases offended, by this new institution where, as far as you could tell, there was no war in Vietnam, and the confrontations over Cambodia and Kent State of the previous year had never happened. There was almost no reflection of the broader political context of American society discernible to us. That's an exaggeration; there was some, but it was precious little. I think it had a lot to do with the character of the institution and of the students it attracted, both at the undergraduate level and at the graduate level.

At the graduate level in most departments—and since we lived and ate together, we did get to know graduate students from outside the Wilson School—were people who were really quite serious about what they were doing. For example, I knew a couple of graduate students in the mathematics department, which was reputed to be the best in the world, and they were damn serious about mathematics. My sense is that most of the graduate students there were so focused on their own fairly advanced intellectual activities that the outside political context was pushed aside. About the undergraduates, it's harder for me to speak, since I had so little contact with them, but my sense was that Princeton at the undergraduate level was still as much a social experience as an educational one, and that the student body was still an institution for students from so-called "good families." It had not been touched much by the turmoil of the late '60s, which had affected students everywhere from Tokyo to Berlin and certainly most American big universities.

Q: One does, as I look upon doing this oral history and also my experience of Foreign

Service, run across quite a few people from all the major schools in the United States, and Princeton seems to fill up its alumni; they're more a band of brothers and sisters, it's my impression, than most other universities. I went to school, I liked it, that was all fine. And then I went my way. I don't feel any particular tie to Williams, but boy, my Princeton colleagues seemed to. They were going to reunions all the time and maybe it's where it's located. I don't know.

MERRY: I think that's much more the undergraduate experience than of the graduate school. Certainly Princeton does not let a week go by that it doesn't ask me for money, which it is not getting. In my case, I have a very strong sense of personal loyalty to Wisconsin, partly because I had a terrific undergraduate experience and partly because they were kind enough to give me a scholarship to make it possible for an out-of-state student to attend. So, I support a scholarship at Madison to repay what I received. At Princeton, I was one of half a dozen students at the Wilson School whose fellowships were not funded by the school but through a separate program funded by an outside foundation. Why we were special, I never actually understood, and the amount of the fellowship was the same.

In contrast to Madison, my experience of Princeton was, to some degree, one of impatience and boredom. That was, I think, fairly common among my compatriots at the Wilson School at that time. This was a reflection of that particular time, as most of my fellow students, like myself, had come from undergraduate experiences which were not just academic and intellectual, but also very politically charged and where you were doing lots of things outside the classroom. We then came to Princeton to be graduate students at the Wilson School, and suddenly all of that non-class-oriented activity pretty much disappeared. I think most of us had difficulty in gearing down to what was a much slower pace, a much less active personal existence, and, frankly, just to the quiet of Princeton. My fellow students at the Wilson School in those years were certainly nothing if not a rambunctious bunch, and we found it kind of boring. Indeed, the admission director who selected us was fired after we had been there a semester.

There was also a problem at the Wilson School, that its faculty was divided between two groups: one, who were permanent faculty of Princeton University and frequently cross-listed either with the department of political science or some other department, economics, sociology, history, whatnot; and, two, people who were essentially killing time during a Republican administration in Washington, waiting for a chance to go back into government themselves. I must say that my academic experience was almost entirely negative with the latter kind, and most of my positive class experience was with the permanent faculty. Particularly, I was fortunate in having a close relationship with one very senior faculty member named Klaus Knorr, who was a famous American academic in the field of military studies and nuclear policy. He was a prominent advisor to the Pentagon, the Atomic Energy Commission and other Washington agencies. He was a refugee from Nazi Germany and was one of the people in the post-war United States who developed the intellectual framework of American policy, not just in military structure and doctrine but particularly in nuclear weapons policy.

In the early 1970s, Knorr's field was anathema to most students, including graduate students, so during the two years I was there, I think I was his only graduate student. This is not to say he didn't give graduate courses that had other students, but in terms of a one-on-one relationship, I was his only graduate student, which allowed me to have access and time with him that was unusually generous. We got to know each other quite well. I liked him enormously. I found him not only intellectually very acute and very experienced but enormously skeptical about the whole area in which he had particular expertise, about nuclear weapons. This was no Dr. Strangelove. This was a man who was deeply informed about the nature of nuclear weapons on both sides of the Cold War, and how they were prepared for potential use, and profoundly of the view that the only rational use of nuclear weapons was non-use. This was a man who knew so much that you couldn't fool him into any notion that nuclear weapons were in some way controllable or usable. He had enough experience, particularly since his own home city, Essen, had been blown to smithereens by the U.S. Air Force and the Royal Air Force during the War, that he knew what war was about. I found him very intellectually challenging, but also a very good mentor, with a great sense of humor. I benefited because none of the other graduate students at Princeton wanted to spend time with him. Other students might take a course from him, but that was the end of it. His subject matter was unpopular but was right up my alley, and I kind of had him all to myself, as a graduate student for two years.

Q: Did you run across my old former boss, George Kennan? Was he there?

MERRY: I met Kennan, but only a little. Remember, Kennan was at the Institute for Advanced Studies, which is in the town of Princeton, but has no affiliation with Princeton University and is physically separate. George Kennan came to a number of Woodrow Wilson School classes as a guest. He was working, however, on his writings. He was, in fact, completing the second volume of his memoirs at the time. He wasn't teaching, but I did meet him when he would come over as a guest lecturer. I got to know him better in later years but never all that closely. I knew other members of the Kennan family in later years. The Institute for Advanced Studies was to the university what the graduate school was to the undergraduate school. There was considerable distance there.

I do, however, recall quite vividly reading one of his articles then, where he talked about the problems that would face a post-Soviet Russia. This was in the midst of the Cold War, and Kennan was already discussing a Russia that seemed unthinkable to most of us, one beyond the Soviet period. This was the first time I had encountered the idea of the Soviet Union being only a phase of Russian history and one which would pass, whereas the presumption of all U.S. policy and of our national security institutions was that the Soviet Union was the culmination of Russian history and hence permanent. Therefore, the Cold War must be permanent, and our institutions of the Cold War also permanent. I was immensely taken with Kennan's argument that the Soviet period of Russian history would be temporary, though I very much doubt he then imagined he would himself outlive it. This notion was also present in the work of another of my professors, James Billington, now the Librarian of Congress, whose work on Russian cultural history also comprehended that the Soviet Union would not endure. These were very radical concepts

in those days, but I was immediately attracted to them.

Q: What were you pointed towards?

MERRY: I didn't really know, and one of the things that my two graduate school years did was give me some direction. When I had completed my undergraduate studies I had a number of job interviews with CIA and NSA (National Security Agency), both of which offered me jobs, but both also wanted to send me to graduate school, and since Princeton was willing to pay for my graduate studies without any obligation that seemed the better deal. I also interviewed with a number of corporations and other kinds of things. I really had nothing particular in mind. My interests were certainly in international relations and in public service in some sense, but I hadn't really focused. I had no notion of myself as a future American diplomat. I hadn't ruled anything out but, unlike many people who go into the Foreign Service, it was not something that had been a focus of my attention for a long time.

Given my undergraduate work in economics, there was the option of continuing in that field. I believe that broad training in economics was very good preparation for my later work as a political analyst in the Foreign Service, in part as an intellectual discipline. However, economics in those days was dominated by rather abstract theoreticians with very little of the integration of real life into theory which marks economics today. At that time, many of the issues now examined by economists would have been regarded as mere sociology and, hence, as not really economics. Most of the faculty I had known well at Madison were very much engaged in real-world issues, but that was not where the academic field was oriented. Had economics then been like it is today, I might have stayed in that field. However, I was moving toward some kind of foreign affairs role and toward the subject matter at the heart of the Cold War, which is to say security issues and the political divisions of the Cold War. That was clearly where my interests and my future lay, if I could figure out a way to make it work.

One component of the graduate program at the Woodrow Wilson School was an internship during the summer between the two years, which I did at the U.S. Mission to NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) in Brussels. The Wilson School had an arrangement with the Political Section at USNATO, to send two of its graduate students as interns there. NATO didn't have to pay anything for this; the Wilson School provided minimal financing to cover living expenses. Even that was fairly inadequate. The only thing USNATO had to do was to get us a security clearance. I spent almost four months working in the Political Section at USNATO, which was, for me, a watershed experience. The ambassador when I arrived there was Robert Ellsworth, a very distinguished former member of Congress who went on later to become a senior figure in the Defense Department. The deputy chief of mission and later chargé was George Vest, certainly one of the most prominent FSOs (Foreign Service Officer) of my time. The political counselor, for whom I directly worked, was none other than Lawrence Eagleburger, who had come there from the White House after he had a physical collapse working for Henry Kissinger, and of course, he later went on to be, among other things, secretary of state for a brief time. Eagleburger and his wife even put me up for over a month at their residence,

which was my first introduction to the generosity and camaraderie of the Foreign Service. His replacement, when he left later in the summer, was James Goodby, who played a very important role in my later Foreign Service career. These were all men for whom I have the highest esteem.

USNATO, at that time, must have been one of the most well-staffed American diplomatic missions on Earth. Even at the time it had a reputation that everybody in the Political Section and in the Political/Military Section, which is to say not just the Foreign Service people but the military people, were all the *crème de la crème*. I was there over the summer, which is a transition time, of course, in any American diplomatic post. I performed as if I were a first-tour junior FSO. Sort of a dogsbody position. Unlike many summer internships, which are kind of make work, during much of the time I had real work to do. It was introductory work; it was apprenticeship work. But I did what a newly-minted Foreign Service officer would do if a newly-minted Foreign Service officer had been sent to such an elite mission. That meant in the four months I was there, I had real experience, varied experience, and I worked for people like George Vest, Larry Eagleburger and Jim Goodby and with other people of very high caliber. So as an introductory taste of the Foreign Service, it was pretty heady wine.

They also arranged for me to do some travel. I went to Paris, where the Vietnam peace talks were going on and talked to the people there. I went to NATO Headquarters at Mons. Most importantly for me, I went to Berlin. This was important because the summer of 1971 was the culmination of the negotiations on the Four Power Agreement on Berlin, which was kind of the keystone of a complex of diplomacy going on between East and West in Europe, that would result in the Helsinki Final Act, the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two German states, the opening of diplomatic relations between East Germany and the Western Allies, and the beginning of what became the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe, and the process that began the CSCE (Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe). For the three West Berlin allies, the prerequisite for all this was an agreement with the Soviet Union on Berlin, to regularize and guarantee the position of and access to West Berlin not just for the allies but for the people of West Berlin. This was coming to a culmination, and I had a chance to travel to Berlin to meet with people, not just in the American mission but in the other Allied missions and with the German authorities, and to spend a day in East Berlin.

East Berlin, in 1971, was like a bad Cold War movie set. If you would picture your stereotype of what a grey, grim and utterly lifeless communist society would look like, that's what East Berlin did look like in 1971. I pretty much fell in love with it at first sight. I came away thinking, "I want this. I want to be posted to this place, because it is so different from a West German or west European experience." It very much appealed to me. Ever since I had been in my mid-teens, I had been interested in what's broadly called Mitteleuropa (middle Europe), that part of Europe then behind the Iron Curtain. To me, this region was a sleeping beauty waiting to wake up. The idea of going to someplace like Prague or Warsaw or Budapest had always appealed to me, but when I saw East Berlin it seemed to me to be the cynosure of everything about Mitteleuropa and Mittel Deutschland (middle Germany) and the Cold War division of Europe. In East Berlin,

there you were: the divided city in the divided country in the divided continent. This was the focal point of all of the issues that had interested me and, in some ways, it struck me that since we were going to be establishing diplomatic relations with East Germany as part of this broad diplomatic overture, that appealed to me for my own future.

As it happened, one of the people I got to know at USNATO was a man named David Anderson, who later became U.S. ambassador in Yugoslavia, but who was also very much a German hand. David was very instrumental in my going on this trip to Berlin, and was the key person at USNATO dealing with the Four Power Agreement on Berlin.

Q: I know David very well because David and I and Larry Eagleburger all took Serbian together back in '61, '62, and then we all served under George Kennan in Yugoslavia. I was chief of the consular section and David was the vice consular there.

MERRY: That's interesting. David was very generous with his time and attention to me during my internship and noticed, I think, my interest and fascination with Berlin affairs, East Berlin, Germany, East Germany, and all of these issues, which had very much defined his own career. I think he made a mental note about that because a couple of times he would take me off for a drink, just to discuss some of these things. I suspect he thought, "Aha! Here's a young man who's interested in many of the same things I am interested in. Let's keep a mental note about him," which actually later turned out to be very important to me. David was one of the people I was associated with at USNATO, along with Jim Goodby and George Vest and Eagleburger, who all later played an important role in my Foreign Service life.

Given the short time I had in this internship, I did not travel very far afield other than the sponsored trips to Paris and Berlin. I got to know Belgium and Brussels fairly well, and liked them both. Like anyone who has lived in that country, I have my share of anecdotes about the internal strains of Belgium. I was there at a time when they were painting over the streets signs in each other's language. I got my first serious workout in French in conversations, often just on a park bench, and received very contrasting generational impressions. Young people reacted to meeting an American with some comment about Vietnam, while their elders cared only about the fact that Americans had twice come to throw the Germans out of their country. While I lived with the Eagleburgers, I met a Spanish couple who lived downstairs. She had an old magazine cover portrait of Eisenhower pinned on the wall above her ironing board, because in her mind he was "The Liberator." In that household, the walls held images of the Crucifixion, the Virgin Mary, St. James, and Ike. That was a perspective which members of my generation needed to experience to balance somewhat the cynicism of the 60s. I think you can learn a lot about a place in only a few months if you get out and explore and listen, so I consider that Belgium is a country I have actually lived in, even if it was only for four months.

After this fascinating sojourn in Brussels—the first time I had ever been in Europe, by the way, and the first time I had ever had a passport, the first time I had ever been outside the United States except for Canada—I went back for my second year at Princeton, which was defined, above all, by trying to figure out what I was going to do afterwards. I had no

desire to continue in academia; I didn't want to get a Ph.D. In fact, having been a student since I was five or six years old, without a break, I was entirely fed up with student life. I had been a student too long and I was tired of it. I wanted to go out and do something real.

Q: Was there anything else about the academic world that struck you one way or the other?

MERRY: Well, the majority of graduate school writing just didn't interest me. I wanted to write things that somebody would read in the near term, not something that would be written for the sake of the writing. I later came to understand why the academic approach to studying a topic has great relevance, but at the time, of course, being young and also inexperienced, I was very impatient with academia, with the pace of academia, with what seemed to me to be the purposes of academia, which I found somewhat irrelevant, abstract and, at Princeton, rather pretentious. So I was prepared to emerge into the real world.

There was also the fact that I had no money or source of income other than my very generous graduate fellowship. After my second year at Princeton I was going to have to get a paycheck. The idea of going out into the world without something to live on was just not an option for me. So, given the experience I'd had the preceding summer at USNATO, I took the Foreign Service exam, the written exam, and then the oral exam, both of which I passed.

Q: Do you recall any of the questions asked on the oral exam?

MERRY: Well, the oral exam in those days was simplicity itself. You sat down with a panel of three people and spent about 45 minutes with them asking questions and you answering. Then you went out into the corridor for 10 to 15 minutes while they discussed it, and then the chairman came out and either gave you a thumbs up or a thumbs down and that was it. The later, more complex oral examination strikes me as probably no better in terms of the way it selects people.

Q: I've given both those and I think the first one is probably a little better because it's more tailored to the person.

MERRY: I had a big advantage in taking the oral exam, in that I had done an apprenticeship with the Foreign Service at USNATO, and I had done it under some of the big names of the Foreign Service, people like Vest and Eagleburger, and I imagine this clearly gave me a leg up.

Q: I'm sure they would.

MERRY: But the panel was not composed of Europeanists, by any means. The chairman of the panel was George Moose, who later went on to be an ambassador several times but was not a Europeanist. I don't remember who the other two members were. While my

experience at USNATO certainly gave me an *entrée*, it didn't guarantee me anything. I remember, in particular, that they asked a lot of questions about Latin America. They were trying to find out whether I could deal with subject matter that was completely separate from European security issues. For whatever reason, they passed me, and the question then was an entry date. There was a class in May and a class in November.

Q: This is '72?

MERRY: This is '72. The class in May would have started while I would still be at Princeton and taking my final exams. This meant I had to wait for an entry class into the Foreign Service until November, which was alright given the amount of time it took to get a full security clearance— the clearance I had at USNATO was secret, not top secret—and the medical clearance and all the other folderol—these things took time. They take more time now but they took time then.

I will tell one final, interesting story about Princeton, which is about my oral examinations for the graduate degree. My orals panel consisted of two people: Klaus Knorr and a junior untenured faculty member who was more nervous than I was, because he was intimidated by being on the same panel with Klaus Knorr. My oral exam consisted of Knorr and myself having the kind of conversation we'd had in his office many times, and, frankly, was probably as pleasant and agreeable an oral examination as any graduate student has ever had. The poor younger faculty member barely got a word in edgewise. So that passed me out for my graduate degree.

What was I going to do between my completion at Princeton and entering the Foreign Service? Through a variety of circumstances, I got a job at the Treasury Department, in its international division, which I understood perfectly well was merely an interim position to fill the half-year before I went over to the Foreign Service. I was up front about that. But the Treasury Department also thought it might interest me in sticking around. One of my classmates took a career job in the Treasury. I worked initially in the Office of Trade Policy and then in the statistical analytic section of the international division of the Treasury Department. It was both a positive and a less than positive experience. It was like a summer internship but without the degree of substantive work I'd had during my real summer internship at USNATO the previous summer. It was not particularly demanding, engaging activity. It was educational in terms of the kinds of things I got to see, because the Treasury Department was very much a powerhouse. When I arrived the secretary was John Connolly and then George Shultz took over. This was my first experience of George Shultz. The Undersecretary for Monetary Affairs was Paul Volcker, who I found intellectually intimidating. This was before he went to the Federal Reserve. His towering intellectual command of financial matters impressed the hell out of me, even in my rather lowly position.

The Treasury Department was a very important policy instrument of the Nixon Administration under Connolly and Shultz, and with Volcker in the number three position, the trade and international offices of Treasury were very engaged. There was a lot going on, which made it an educational experience. The problem was that they didn't

know how to use new staff, like myself, in challenging ways. While I benefited from the half year there, it did not tempt me to stay on at the Treasury rather than to enter the Foreign Service, when my entry class came up in November. It also gave me my first residence in Washington and my first real paycheck. I even remember what it was. The annual salary was $11,400 which, to me at the time, seemed like wealth beyond the dreams of avarice. I was paying more in federal income taxes than I'd ever previously had in income. I just couldn't imagine such plentitude of income as having $11,400 a year.

The Treasury gave me my first protracted taste of Washington as a place to live and of the U.S. government and its policymaking, and how issues are dealt with in the Congress, in the inter-agency process, and so forth. One of the few issues I worked on that I remember well was a dispute about imported cherries. There was a complaint from cherry growers in upstate New York, about unfair foreign competition from imported cherries.

Q: Where were they coming from?

MERRY: They were coming from a variety of places. I learned more about cherries than I ever would have imagined: pitted, unpitted, brined, unbrined, and so on. Eventually we found that the New York cherry growers were being out-competed by growers in California, not by imported cherries. It showed me there are issues that seem very obscure, and yet the more you get into an issue, the more there is to it, and there are real people, in fact significant numbers of people, for whom a matter like the price of cherries is a big deal. That's their bread and butter, and agricultural issues certainly get people passionately committed. This was not a Cold War security issue. It didn't have a damn thing to do with the Cold War. But the people who cared about it cared about it very deeply indeed.

The other thing I learned during that period at the Treasury was about statistics. Working in the statistical analytic branch, I discovered I really didn't want to do statistical analysis for the rest of my life. I also came to understand better how official numbers are used, not that anything we did was unethical or improper or that we were lying, just that statistics vary in how terms are defined, numbers compiled, and in their reliability—and of course, this varies enormously from country to country. I worked on an analysis of durum and non-durum wheat imports and the European Common Market's variable levy on them. On one country's exports, we believed their numbers were accurate only plus or minus ten percent, so we understood there was about a 20 percentage point spread on how reliable and accurate these numbers actually were, yet the branch chief had us do all the computations out to four decimal places. You might think, "Why go to four decimal places when the numbers you're basing them on are only good plus or minus ten percent?" The reason was to take advantage of the common misperception that precision denotes accuracy. That's a very important distinction I took away, that just because an official number is precise doesn't tell you a damn thing about whether or not it's in any way accurate.

That single lesson probably justified the couple of months I spent working in that

statistical job, because it imbibed in me a skepticism about official numbers. Beyond socialist numbers which are just fabricated, even numbers that are fundamentally honest may reflect degrees of unreliability because of the inherent quality of statistical formulation. I've never believed official numbers since, having spent a short time in the business and seeing how numbers are produced and manipulated. It's like what Bismarck said that two things you should never watch being made are sausage and policy.

Q: Had you had any statistics prior to this?

MERRY: Oh, yes, as an undergraduate and then as a graduate student. I had plenty of training in statistical technique and analysis. I knew how to do this stuff, but training in it and then actually doing it in a real world situation on something like non-durum wheat exports from Italy are very different things. The practical, hands-on application of statistical techniques to a real world situation was very much an eye-opener, and it has led me to be very skeptical about the arrogance with which some people throw around statistics. In Washington, I think it's almost a truism that people who quote statistics never understand what the numbers actually mean or what they don't mean. So that was a rather valuable lesson.

Q: Did you gain a feel for the Treasury Department; its competence and all of this?

MERRY: I certainly gained a sense that, at that time, under Connolly and Shultz—this was in the Nixon administration—the Treasury Department was a heavy-hitter in policy. No ifs, ands or buts about that. It was also, however, a somewhat loosely-structured place. The Treasury Department was, in fact, a huge agency, because it included, at that time, the Customs Service; it included the Internal Revenue Service. It had many agencies, including the Secret Service, that were under the secretary of the treasury, often with very little relationship to the core policy functions of the Treasury. One of the things that struck me about the Treasury, even while I was there and more so when I went to the more structured Department of State, was just how unstructured the Treasury was. For example, when George Shultz made his first couple of overseas trips, the office that I was in had a role in supporting him, but the trips were organized as if no secretary of the treasury had ever traveled before. Everything was done on an ad hoc basis. There were no established procedures, and there was no effective executive secretariat at the Treasury. I rather imagine that's no longer the case but, at that time, the Treasury was a remarkably casual place in how bureaucratic discipline was maintained, which, of course, was a very sharp contrast to the State Department, where the executive secretariat is a very powerful central nervous system that keeps all the bureaus more or less marching to the secretary's will.

I found out that during the time he was at Treasury, Secretary Shultz went on one trip that was organized by the State Department, after having been on a number of trips organized by his own department, and he asked that from there on out, all of his trips be organized by State. Not that the people at Treasury were any less competent, but it was done as if it had never been done before, and there were no procedures. This was certainly a very poor way to run a major institution. I am quite confident that is no longer the case; I'm talking

about 1972. It's a long time ago.

Q: Coming to November of '72, you're going into a Foreign Service class. What class was it, do you remember the number, by chance?

MERRY: 104.

Q: I was in class 1, by the way. Way back, you know.

MERRY: That's any easy one to remember.

Q: Well, Ben Franklin was our mentor there, but anyway. What was the class like? What was the composition of the class?

MERRY: One, it was a fairly largish class, because there hadn't been one since May and was one of only two classes that year. I seem to recall there were about 60, 65 people in it. A diverse bunch, a very talented bunch. I haven't had much contact with the other members of the class afterwards because we scattered in all directions, in the nature of things. But during the time we were together, both in terms of class activities and social activities, I was very impressed with them. It was a fairly young class, I think, in comparison with what a Foreign Service class would be now. Most were people more or less directly out of school, either undergraduate or graduate. There were a few who had some other outside experience but not that many and not that much.

We came from very diverse backgrounds. I was quite impressed by the extent to which we were not the stereotype of the old Foreign Service, you know, white Anglo-Saxon male, East Coast, Ivy League, but were, in a real sense, much more reflective of the diversity of America in terms of gender, of geographic background, of universities. There wasn't as much of an African American presence as there probably should have been, but there was at least some. We were a class that kind of looked like America. We were also, of course, a class during a period when most of our peers would have regarded the Foreign Service, the State Department and the U.S. Government with great skepticism. The very fact we had sought entry into the Foreign Service made us a self-selected group different than our generation, for the most part. Where we were on a political spectrum, left to right, I haven't the faintest idea, because the subject, of course, isn't much discussed in the Foreign Service, being kind of improper. We all shared, I think, a very strong interest in the world, an interest in our country's engagement with the world, and a strong sense of simple patriotism. I can't imagine that anybody would have entered the Foreign Service in 1972 who wasn't pretty patriotic because you were joining an institution which, among other things, was still attached to a failed war in Vietnam. At that point, the failure of our Indochina engagement was obvious for a blind man to see.

All of us, I think, were very motivated by a sense of commitment to American international engagement over a longer term, beyond Vietnam. I don't recall that any of my classmates had any interest to be assigned to Vietnam, though you could have gotten a Vietnam assignment for the asking without any difficulty. Many had an interest in the

developing world, Africa, Latin America, Asia. Some had an interest in Europe, but it was a diverse bunch and, given the political tenor of the time—this was just as the Watergate scandal was getting going—I would describe us as a pretty enthusiastic bunch. I remember us approaching the Foreign Service with genuine enthusiasm. This wasn't, "Well, I need a job somewhere, and this will do for a while."

Q: This was a career. You were in for it.

MERRY: I can't speak to that for anyone else because I'm not sure what others' views were. It was not a career commitment for me. I entered the Foreign Service in part because, yes, they did offer me a job and I had passed the examination process, partly because I had the experience at USNATO and I understood what it would be like, and partly because other things I had interviewed for, like a job at Citibank, struck me as boring. I did not enter the Foreign Service with a commitment to it as a career. I was giving it a try and, indeed, the Foreign Service was giving me a try. We all were going into a probationary period, which is a very good thing. Looking back, I think the probationary requirements should be stricter than they are. I was entering with an open mind, to see whether this was right for me. Whether it would be right for me was not at all clear, not because of my uncertainty about the Foreign Service, but because I didn't really have a clear sense in my own mind of what I wanted to do. So it was not so much me judging the institution as me feeling out myself, over time.

Q: Did you feel that you had blue-collar roots or not, at that point?

MERRY: I felt very much that I had Midwestern roots. My roots were not so much blue-collar as middle class, small town middle-America, although I had just been at Princeton, which is an unusually pretentious, East Coast, Ivy League environment. Like a number of my classmates at the Wilson School, I had found that environment at Princeton off-putting. Whether or not I would fit into the environment of the American diplomatic service remained to be seen. I had worked at what may have been the best mission the Foreign Service had in the world for four months, and had been accepted and treated with consideration and even generosity by people like George Vest, Larry Eagleburger and Dave Anderson. So I didn't figure the Foreign Service was too high-hat for me or culturally alien. Eagleburger was very forthrightly Midwestern, from Wisconsin. But I entered the Foreign Service thinking of myself not as a Princetonian, but as a Midwesterner, very much a product of Oklahoma and Wisconsin.

Q: How did you find the instruction?

MERRY: The A-100 class, as it was called, was to some degree a time filler, and they told us so. The instruction was not as good as it really should have been. There were some very good presentations, but they made it clear that we were undergoing six weeks of orientation rather than instruction, to allow the personnel system time to figure out what to do with us after that period. Some of the program was quite good, but it didn't have as much of a focus as I felt it should. One of the better exercises assigned us to write a report on a specified subject in current American politics as if we were at an embassy in

Washington. Then they brought in a young diplomat from the British embassy who critiqued our work as if we were reporting back to London about this aspect of American affairs, which I thought was very useful.

Q: It sounds like an excellent idea.

MERRY: Yes. All these decades later I still remember it, partly because my paper was rated rather highly. In contrast, one of my colleagues, a very talented person, had written a rather academic paper, in which the opening paragraph was, "I'm going to talk about this, then I'm going to discuss that, then I'm going to analyze this and this, then I'm going to wrap up with this." That's one thing you should never do in a Foreign Service report. You need to get your message right up front, not begin with a table of contents. That is the difference between academic writing and Foreign Service writing, in terms of presentation. Ours is much more like journalism.

One session I remember vividly—in fact, I can remember parts almost verbatim—told us about the new Dissent Channel, which was a relatively recent innovation in the Foreign Service because of problems during the Vietnam War. The person who explained Dissent Channel to us wrapped it up by saying, "Of course, if you use it you'll never be promoted again, but you can use it." I think that's verbatim, and it made a strong impression on me: they had created an instrument to allow people to express alternate points of view within the system, but even presented it to newly-minted FSOs as something you would be punished for if ever you used it.

Q: It actually wasn't true. It's a mixed bag.

MERRY: My own later experience fulfilled what we were told, though I know of cases where use of Dissent Channel may have been rewarded. Keep in mind that this was at a time, in the early '70s, when the Foreign Service was going through a significant amount of reform, often involuntarily. For example, bringing in more women and promoting women was done by the State Department under court order. This was soon after the famous case of the Foreign Service officer who had been expelled because of a single damaging report in his file, which was, in fact, on a different officer of the same name, the man who was fired for a filing error.

Q: He committed suicide.

MERRY: He committed suicide, which created a huge stink on Capitol Hill at the time. This led to the Foreign Service getting a grievance procedure, which it had never had before. As I was told at the time, State was the only executive department in the government whose grievance procedure had been mandated by Congress. The State Department didn't want to reform itself, so Congress basically rammed it down the State Department's throat. This was a time when you were actually allowed to see your own performance file, which previously had never been allowed. This was a time when they stopped having a section in the performance reports evaluating a wife, which they'd had up until then. This is when they stopped requiring women in the Foreign Service to be

single. Up until that time, a woman in the Foreign Service who married had to resign. This was all done during a brief period just before my entry, during which the Foreign Service and the State Department were sort of dragged kicking and screaming into the 20th century in terms of personnel policies. Things like Dissent Channel and grievance procedures and being able to see your file and the role of women and minorities, and so on, were reflected very much in my entering class, which was a class that looked like America.

The people ten years senior, and particularly those twenty years senior, to us rather noticeably did not look like America. You did not see women, you did not see Hispanics, you did not see blacks. You didn't see very many Midwesterners, either. The upper ranks of the Foreign Service I entered in late 1972—which obviously had some extremely talented people—was, to a large degree, reflective of the popular stereotype of the Foreign Service: East Coast, Ivy League, "good family", white, Anglo-Saxon, male, Protestant. Whereas the Foreign Service of which I became a part was reflective of a broader American society. Less elitist and, perhaps, in some ways less elite. But certainly more inclusive and more representative, and, I think, a healthier service for that. In my first few years there was certainly a notable tension between the older Foreign Service and the younger Foreign Service.

Q: There's also a generational thing that was felt throughout the country. It was still "Don't trust anybody over 30." I remember there was a junior officer organization, which was making, you might say, demands and all, which before that, nobody had made demands of the senior Foreign Service. So there were this generational dispute, which was being played out everywhere.

MERRY: Yes, that was going on not just in the Foreign Service and the State Department but throughout American society, partly because the young people coming into institutions were all of the generation of the '60s. Whatever the '60s may have been, we were certainly all exposed to the whole culture of the Civil Rights Movement, of the anti-Vietnam War movement, regardless of what your own role or views were. I had been very supportive of the Civil Rights Movement; my views on Vietnam had been very slow to turn against the war. I think it was not until I was in graduate school that I finally realized it was a losing proposition. My mentor Klaus Knorr certainly thought so. All of us were the product of that cultural environment, and I don't think it's too much to say that it rubbed many more senior people in the Foreign Service the wrong way.

To some degree, I got a bit of a false impression during my apprenticeship at USNATO because I had worked for an extraordinarily open-minded group of people, whereas in my early assignments in the Foreign Service, I learned that not everybody was quite as intellectually engaged with contemporary trends as they had been.

Q: I had the same. When I was in Belgrade, I was there five years, but David Anderson worked for me, Larry Eagleburger was number three in the economics section, George Kennan was our ambassador, Jim Lowenstein later got involved, particularly with Senator Fulbright and all that, who actually took Serbian with us. And others there, I've

never seen such a collection of talent.

MERRY: I've seen it twice. Once during my summer internship at USNATO, and the second time was during my first Moscow assignment in the early '80s, which we will come to. That was also just a golden accumulation of talent, which really sort of spoils you in some ways.

Q: OK, there you are. You're in A-100. Did you have a preference? You wanted to go to Berlin, I guess, but what happened?

MERRY: Among the many forms that you filled out was one—I don't know whether they still do this, they probably do, should if they don't—was a form in which you listed the three places that you most wanted to be posted.

Q: Known as the April Fools' report, at one point. It was due on the first of April.

MERRY: Oh, I didn't know it had that characterization. In any case, my three were East Berlin, Moscow, and Bucharest, even though we didn't even have diplomatic relations with East Germany yet. That wouldn't come for another three years, but I wanted to get my bid in early. You can see from East Berlin, Moscow and Bucharest that I was communicating, "I want Eastern Europe, communist countries, the other side of the Cold War." It took me a while to get there, because they did not assign new junior officers to those posts, which I did not then know. However, they came to us during one A-100 class and said, "We have a job for a junior officer that is just opening up. It is staff assistant in the Office of Congressional Relations. It will be a one-year assignment working on the seventh floor of the State Department and then you would get your first overseas assignment after that." It required truncating the A-100 course by, I think, about a week. It would be starting right away, just before Christmas, and not going abroad for a first assignment. There was only one person in the class who found that appealing, me. There was no competition for the job. I was the only one interested.

All my colleagues wanted to go abroad for their first assignment, which may have been the right choice. It just struck me that an introductory year in the department at the seventh-floor level as a staff aide would be a terrific educational entry experience. So I interviewed for the job, and Larry Eagleburger, who was back in Washington, somehow found out I was interested. I certainly did not call him. He knew Marshall Wright, the incoming assistant secretary, and gave me a boost. So I got the job, and I hadn't even completed the A-100 class when I started out as a seventh-floor staff assistant.

The Office of Congressional Relations, which was known by the initial H, was the only bureau in the State Department which had a first-tour, junior-officer staff aid. The reason was it was technically a training assignment. The bureau didn't have a real staff aide slot in its staffing pattern, but it had this training position, which is why it was given to somebody who had no experience. I was the only staff aide in the entire Department of State right out of A-100, which was a disadvantage in some ways because I was so inexperienced and green. But my anticipation that it would be a terrific educational

experience was right on.

My duties were very general, everything from meeting visiting members of Congress at the C Street entrance to organizing luncheons on the Hill to processing my bureau's considerable paperwork through the Executive Secretariat. God, the place produced a lot of paper. As most of the professional staff in H spent their days on the Hill, I was often the on-the-spot interface in State for their activities with the rest of the department. Not surprisingly, I was on the phone all the time and on the run a lot. We kept both State Department and Congressional schedules, so the days were long. We had a morning staff meeting but also one in the evening, so during this year I had effectively no social life during the work week. Friday was especially long, as I edited a weekly report to the White House about foreign affairs activities on the Hill. This document was often twenty pages, single spaced, in the era before word processing. The input came from the various staff of the bureau, many of whom were not real strong on English prose, but I had to compile it and ensure a uniform quality of presentation for Wright to sign. I then carried it by hand to the West Wing, often close to ten at night. This was my first, but not my last, experience of high-speed editing, something I can do but prefer not to.

To be on the seventh floor, as a glorified clerk, I got to observe an enormous amount. In particular, the relationship between the department and the Congress during 1973 was an extraordinary one. This was the end of the tenure of Secretary Rogers and the coming of Henry Kissinger as secretary of state. I worked, in a very humble way, on his confirmation hearings. The Watergate crisis was getting out of control. That had a huge impact on relations between the State Department and Capitol Hill, especially after Kissinger came on board. It also was the period when the Congress finally laid down the law, literally, on getting out of Vietnam. Congress enacted legislation that prohibited "any funds under this act or any other act being used for military operations in, over, or from off the shores of North Vietnam, South Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia." I can still quote the law. This was obviously a period of huge tension between the executive branch and the Congress; between the Nixon White House and the Kissinger State Department on one hand and the Congress, both parties, both houses, on the other. The Hill was fed up with Vietnam and getting fed up with the administration over Watergate and other issues. This was also a year of intense activity in international relations because of the 1973 Middle East war and everything that went with it.

To be a staff aide on the seventh floor of the State Department in any bureau, let alone the congressional relations bureau, where everything came together, during this year of exceptional international activity, but even more of extraordinary American domestic political turmoil, was highly educational. Particularly since, in those days, we did things we weren't allowed to do thereafter. For example, part of my job was to monitor all of the assistant secretary's phone calls, through a dead key on my telephone. Whenever he was talking with a senator or member of Congress or anybody at the White House or anybody else, I would listen in and take notes. Now, fairly shortly thereafter, that practice became illegal, but I listened in to many hundreds of conversations between Assistant Secretary Marshall Wright and people on the Hill or people within the government. There were a few times when he told me not to and I understood those were going to be

conversations of exceptional sensitivity. Given the sensitivity of conversations that I did listen to, my mind boggles about the conversations he didn't want me hearing.

Q: To put it into context you better explain why you were doing this. I mean, this wasn't eavesdropping for eavesdropping's sake.

MERRY: No, this was an assigned duty. It was so I, as the staff assistant, could follow up on things that needed to be done. He would have a conversation with a senator, and that conversation required some action. If he had the conversation just by himself he then would have to dictate a memo or go out and explain the problem or in some way transmit it. Since I had listened to the conversation, he would give me a few words of instruction as to what should be done and I could save him time and effort because I knew the issue.

Q: It was really a very practical thing. It got a bad name but in actual fact I've always thought it made good sense.

MERRY: In a sense it was no different than, say, if you were having a conversation in your office, and you had an aide with you to listen in, take notes and do the follow-up. That would, in most cases, not be thought of as anything unusual. But because it was done on a dead key telephone line, it got a bad reputation. Most of what I did involved issues that were not in any way classified, because they didn't involve national security information, but were often extremely sensitive. The distinction between things that are sensitive and those that are classified is, perhaps, not an obvious one. In point of fact, in Washington, most stuff is not classified, but you sure as hell don't want to have it spread out on the front page of the Washington Post.

Q: Can you give an idea of some of the matters that you would call sensitive in that era?

MERRY: In some ways the most sensitive involved the fact that my boss, Assistant Secretary Marshall Wright, was one of the very first senior people in the government who actively warned the highest levels of the U.S. government that the president was facing impeachment. He had just become an assistant secretary, as a career Foreign Service officer. He'd become the assistant secretary under Secretary Rogers, and was kept in the position under Secretary Kissinger. His warnings were not just over Watergate, but really over Indochina policy, the exposures of the bombing in Laos and Cambodia, the revelations about things the administration was doing that were not authorized by Congress—sometimes not even known to the secretary of defense, for God's sake. Marshall Wright showed what I thought was extraordinary integrity and guts in telling people who really didn't want to hear it that the president was facing potential impeachment. This was what he was hearing on Capitol Hill, but I can tell you that even though it was certainly true, to say so to the Nixon White House did not make you many friends, and the tendency to kill the messenger is as prominent in American politics as it is anywhere else. I thought it showed extraordinary grit in 1973—this was just before the so-called Saturday Night Massacre —to be telling the White House that the president was actually facing the potential for impeachment proceedings.

Q: What do you know about the background of Marshall Wright?

MERRY: He was a Foreign Service officer who had a fair amount of experience in southeast Asia. I didn't get to know him personally very well. He was good to me as a boss, but at that point he was a senior FSO assistant secretary and I was the most junior Foreign Service officer in the building, in a glorified clerk role. He once chewed my ass on something I screwed up, but he did it privately and then let the issue go. His bureau was intensely involved in what became high politics, issues involving the 1973 Middle East war and the special legislation required for assistance to Israel, the cutoff of funding for military operations in Indochina, and the increasing deterioration of the Nixon Administration more broadly, that would lead to the ultimate resignation of the president. It was probably the most politically-charged environment I have ever been in other than in Moscow during the breakup of the Soviet Union.

Q: Here you are a junior officer, sensing the environment of people dealing with Congress in the H bureau. And within your limited contact of others in the building, was Congress the enemy? Was the White House the enemy? Or were we just befuddled, or what?

MERRY: Congress was the enemy for the building. Regardless of whether you agreed with the policy line, Congress was regarded as a nuisance. This was not Wright's view, to put it mildly, but it was the mentality of the institution. My job as staff aide meant I was the interface with all the other bureaus, their staff aides, and the Secretariat. I was often the harbinger of bad news. When I walked in the door, people would wince because I was bringing a congressional intrusion into foreign policy. The extent to which the Foreign Service and the State Department regarded the Congress as at least obnoxious and intrusive, if not actually the enemy, was one of the most relevant things I learned during that year. If I came away from that assignment with any conviction it was of the legitimacy and the importance of the congressional role in American foreign policy. I have seen plenty of shabby, corrupt, silly and inept congressional initiatives on foreign policy, but I came away with the fundamental feeling that the Congress not only has a constitutional role but it is a vital one, and its legitimacy is one the Foreign Service should not only accept but honor. But the mentality of our institution is adversarial to the Congress, which is unfortunate and bad for ourselves.

You can't get away from the fact that the Congress—and many of its members and staffers—can be a pain in the neck to deal with, and many congressional demands on the Foreign Service and the State Department are unreasonable and sometimes inappropriate. This was, during my H year, particularly true of Wayne Hays, congressman from Steubenville, Ohio, who was in a chairman's position, where he literally bullied the State Department. I listened in on a number of phone calls in which Hays was just a shameless, flagrant bully, throwing his weight around in ways that were totally inappropriate and which left behind a residue of understandable ill feeling with the people on whom he flaunted his power in the State Department. When you've got 535 members, and that's a changing group, and all the staffers that go with them, you're going to be dealing in the Congress with many people who think rather highly of themselves, many of whom have

thoughts about the external realm that are ill informed and sometimes downright stupid and sometimes even worse than stupid, or corrupt. But that doesn't, in my view, detract from the institutional role of the Congress in foreign affairs, and the necessity for the Foreign Service and the State Department to understand, appreciate and accommodate to it.

Dealing with the Hill on foreign affairs was very much a dynamic process and is at any time. Secretary Rogers understood and appreciated the Congressional role. Secretary Kissinger, I think, simply regarded the Congress as the enemy. I had a boss who understood that treating the Congress as the enemy is just going to make things worse. There's the old Spanish proverb that whether the stone hits the pitcher or the pitcher hits the stone, it's going to be bad for the pitcher. Well, in any real dust-up between the State Department and the Congress, the State Department loses. It is just absurd for the State Department to get involved in throwing bricks at the Hill, because they can do the department much more harm than the department can do them. Some of the prejudices in the Congress about the Foreign Service and the Department then, as now, are ones that need to be overcome, not reinforced.

Kissinger's attitudes toward the Congress were antagonistic, to say the least. But the Congress was absolutely essential in the American response to the 1973 Middle East war because it came down to a question of money, and money in a big hurry. The Congress was able not only to pass appropriations on an expedited basis, but the Congress played a role in a number of things essential to American policy during the 1973 war, some of which I don't feel at liberty to talk about even at this passage of time. One was the resupply effort by air between the United States and Israel, which required some very significant compromises with the then semi-fascist government of Portugal, to allow us to use bases in the Azores, which required congressional action of a sensitive, confidential nature by very responsible statesman-like people in the Congress who could do things that needed to be done, and do them in a hurry. This was related to the Soviet response as the Egyptian position in the Sinai was imperiled, and this was an area where the Congress had a very important role to play.

Q: The Soviets had mobilized their air drop capability.

MERRY: Well, as a seventh-floor staff aide you get to see a lot of things and hear a lot of things, and many I, even at this distance, don't feel at liberty to discuss, even in an oral history, but the 1973 Middle Eastern war was a pretty damned dangerous episode for the world. It was one of a few situations I have lived through where, if you look at it in a broader historical context, you'd think this is how big wars start. I'm not saying that the 1973 Middle Eastern war brought the United States to the brink of nuclear war with the Soviet Union in the same way as did the Cuban Missile Crisis, but it was a situation in which things could have gotten out of hand in a hurry. We could have ended up in a war. It was a situation where there was a recognition—certainly in Washington, because I saw it, and I assume also in Moscow—that our respective clients in the Middle East could ultimately lead the great powers on a path to destruction, which we had to control, because, damn it, we're the great powers. They're the client states and we are not going

to let them destroy us. I expect the dangers involved between Israel and Egypt in that conflict were seen in Moscow as just as high a priority as they were in Washington.

The irony was, of course, that as soon as the Egyptians had the chance to switch patrons from Moscow to Washington they did so without hesitation, so that pretty soon both Israel and Egypt were American client states. But in 1973, the Soviets felt they had an enormous investment in Egypt, which indeed they did. Not just political, but financial. They saw it potentially going up in smoke, and the extent to which the United States, the Nixon White House, and Kissinger responded, in my view quite correctly, in telling the Israelis when to stop and compelling them to do so demonstrated that, even as the political situation of the Nixon White House was going to hell in a handcart domestically, it could still exercise real statesmanship abroad.

Q: Again, to put it into context, the Israelis surrounded the Egyptian Third Army on the wrong bank of the Suez and put troops sort of in the suburbs of Cairo.

MERRY: Right. The Egyptians were facing imminent military catastrophe. Not just defeat but real catastrophe, and the Israeli field commander was Ariel Sharon. The story I heard—if it's apocryphal, it should be true—is that Moshe Dayan, who was defense minister at the time, went to a meeting in the field with Sharon and told him they had to stop because the Americans told Israel to stop. And Sharon said, basically, "Screw the Americans. We've got the Egyptians by the short hairs. Just give me two days and I'll destroy the Egyptians and we will be in charge of everything between the Jordan and the Nile." The story is that Dayan took his semi-automatic pistol out of its holster, put it on the table, and said, "The bullets in that gun were not in this country last week. The Americans tell us to stop, we stop." What that story illustrates is how nip-and-tuck the resupply effort between the United States and Israel was, because the '73 Middle East war went through munitions and military equipment and consumables at a rate that was literally off the charts of what anybody in the Pentagon previously thought could happen. The Israelis were living really on a hand-to-mouth basis in terms of resupply from the United States, which gave Nixon and Kissinger enormous leverage on the government in Israel. We only had to have a few C5-A missions slow down.

Q: C5-As are very large cargo aircraft.

MERRY: We would only have had to slow it down a little bit and they literally would have run out of ammunition, both on the Syrian front and on the Egyptian front. So we used that leverage, used it effectively and used it wisely because the end result, of course, was the negotiation of a peace treaty between Egypt and Israel. Israel was much better off than it would have been just destroying the Egyptians.

Q: Going back to relations, you were there during when Kissinger took over? How did that go? He was still the national security advisor until you left, probably.

MERRY: Yes. He was foreign policy czar when he replaced Rogers. I'm a person who, though I had only about half a year experience under Secretary Rogers, came to share a

high evaluation of him. There were a number of senior people in the department who felt that Rogers had been very shabbily treated by the White House, by both the president and Kissinger, and that had Rogers been allowed actually to be secretary of state, that a number of failures could have been avoided. In particular there was a distinct school of thought to the effect that, if Rogers had been allowed to pursue his efforts at Middle East peace, there might not have been a 1973 Middle East war, that it might have been avoided.

Certainly Rogers was regarded within the State Department as a more honorable man than his successor, to put it bluntly. Kissinger's coming was regarded with mixed feelings. On the one hand, there was no question the State Department was now going to be headed by the person who actually, along with the president, made foreign policy, that the locus of foreign policy decision making and power would now be on the seventh floor of the State Department, which it had not been in previous years. But there was also the sense that Kissinger was bringing with him what I could say was the odor of the scandals already engulfing both the White House and the National Security Council (NSC) staff. I remember one senior member of the department resigned when Kissinger became secretary, stating publicly that Bill Rogers never tapped his subordinates' telephones. There was a sense that Kissinger, as secretary, regarded the department he was heading in an adversarial way. He began overtly trying to be friendly and engaging, but this was regarded, I think it's fair to say, with a great deal of suspicion. People weren't quite sure what he was going to be like as a secretary, other than obviously he was going to be very dominant and active as a secretary, which of course he certainly was.

The first thing he did was to commission the wife of Senator Jacob Javits, who was an interior decorator, to do a fair amount of redecorating, particularly of the secretary's office, and to do a massive repainting of the corridors of the State Department in very bright, vivid colors, and candy-striped wallpaper. This transformed corridors which had been a cream white for as long as the building had been up and now suddenly were either bright red or iridescent green or candy-striped. I remember the contrast between walking down those corridors— because as a staff assistant I walked corridors a lot—of the sort of neutral color that had been there and suddenly walking down what looked like a capillary of blood. This was the overt introduction of the new regime.

One of the people Kissinger brought with him was Larry Eagleburger, who came back to the department in a senior executive assistant position. I had very little contact with him because it would have been inappropriate for me, as a junior staff aide, to have done so, but I ran into him a few times. We chatted briefly a few times. The concentration of decision making in the immediate secretary's office, rather than the more shared collegial approach that Secretary Rogers had used, was a fairly dramatic shift. It meant that pretty much whatever Kissinger was interested in at a time—the Middle East, after the start of the '73 war, the Soviet Union, Indochina—whatever his interests were, that's basically where all the energy and attention went. Trying to get attention to things other than whatever Kissinger was focused on was very difficult. Under the Rogers approach, you had a more staffed, decentralized system in which problems like Cyprus or Africa or Latin America or Central America or Europe or whatever it was, would at least get more

attention. Kissinger's highly-centralized system tended to suck the energy out of the system toward whatever he was focused on at that time.

Q: I know your other colleague in NATO, George Vest, was, for a short time, Kissinger's spokesman, and couldn't stand him. Why, though? I have an oral history with George Vest, who talks about that.

MERRY: Well, one of the things I did, which I will not elaborate on, even at this point, was during Kissinger's confirmation hearings. One of my assigned tasks was to go through all of his comments—not his prepared comments, but his responses to questions—looking for areas in which he may not have been telling the truth. The department would need to prepare talking points and responses on what were, in some cases, potential acts of perjury. My task was to staff this out, throughout the bureaus of the State Department, to get ready to respond to inquiries on this or that misstatement, as need be.

Q: Oh, boy.

MERRY: As I said, my job didn't involve a lot of classified information but it involved a ton of sensitive information.

Q: Was there an appreciable change in paranoia or whatever, when Kissinger came?

MERRY: The paranoia had been there, except the paranoia had been focused on the West Wing of the White House and the National Security Council's staff. When Kissinger occupied both NSC and State roles, the paranoia came over to Foggy Bottom itself. I think the answer has got to be yes, that there was a feeling that we have a boss who doesn't trust us and, based on the way he treated his much smaller staff at the NSC, we would be foolish to trust him. At the same time, many of the senior people in the department thought we have a secretary who can get things done. If we can persuade him of the need to do x, y or z, he is a mover and a shaker and it will happen.

In my particular position, of course, the focus of our concerns was relations with Capitol Hill, and Kissinger's relations with the Congress were a combination of his public and media charisma, which members of Congress always liked to share in, and the fact that many members of Congress didn't trust him farther than they could throw him. He regarded many members of Congress as troublesome at best and as the enemy in most cases. His relations with the Congress were of mutual mistrust and often flat-out antagonism. My sense was that Kissinger was much more likely to speak the truth to someone in Cairo or Moscow or Beijing than he was to somebody in the Senate or the House. Not being stupid— because very few members of Congress are really stupid—they figured that out. They figured that out just fine. But most members of the Senate and the House also understood that you only have one foreign policy at a time, one secretary of state at a time.

This was such an odd time because the Nixon White House was heading toward collapse,

and this made Kissinger more important. The United States was going through the biggest domestic political crisis since the Civil War, at a time when we had all these tense engagements, in southeast Asia, in the Middle East, with the Soviet Union, increasingly with China, with our NATO allies and so forth. Nobody in the Congress wanted to damage the interests of the United States. At least, nobody in the Congress wanted to be accused of damaging the interests of the United States. So, in many respects, as the Nixon White House became more turned in on itself and increasingly weak and paranoid and lashing out at its opponents, this tended to make Kissinger's position at State more invulnerable, more important. It became unpatriotic to attack Kissinger. It became unpatriotic to undermine Kissinger, even when members of Congress were very dubious about some of the things he was doing.

Q: Was Marshall Wright there the whole time you were there?

MERRY: He was there the whole time, yes.

Q: He was a survivor.

MERRY: He was a survivor, but he had an often very combative relationship with Kissinger because he told Kissinger the truth. I know because I'm the one who processed some of those one-on-one memos, for which there was one copy held and I'm the person who held the copy. No, Marshall Wright told Kissinger the truth about things on the Hill and that often didn't go down too well. Another point of minor friction was that Wright was a very literate and even literary person who liked to use poetic or literary quotations in his memos. He gave first-class dictation of quality memos. Rogers had enjoyed receiving non-bureaucratic memos, but Kissinger did not. I recall one instance in which Wright said, in writing, that we were facing a particular issue on the Hill with the serene confidence a good Christian feels in four aces, a quote from Mark Twain. I was informed by the staff aide grape vine that Kissinger had been both baffled and not amused.

Q: Did you come away with any of the top people—I'm thinking of Fulbright—but several of the top leaders in Congress. Did you come away with any particular impression of them?

MERRY: Congress, and particularly the Senate, had a lot of impressive figures in those days, much more than today. Two who were retiring at that time, who had been enormously helpful and friendly to the Foreign Service, were Senator Gale McGee of Wyoming and Congressman Peter Frelinghuysen of New Jersey, both of whom were people the department could go to on things relevant to the department and the Foreign Service. These two men were real friends of the Foreign Service, not because there was any political interest to them, but just because both of them were friends of the Foreign Service. They would sponsor legislation, they would sponsor an amendment, they would take care of this or that. They would be entry points into the House of Representatives or the Senate for things that were of importance to us as an institution, to us as a service. When each of them retired it was a huge loss. They were impossible to replace.

Q: Gale McGee later played a fairly significant role on the Panama Canal treaty. I've interviewed him.

MERRY: He did, yes. But he was no longer a senator. I mention these two people because these are forgotten names, pretty much. They reflected the fact that an institution like the State Department, like the Foreign Service, needs friends on Capitol Hill, and we had damn few of them, damn few. John Sherman Cooper in the Senate was another. We had some false friends; one was Claiborne Pell, a senator who had been in the Foreign Service for a few years, who thought he knew everything about the Foreign Service, and yet he was grotesquely out of touch. His view of the Foreign Service was that it was populated by people who had inherited wealth.

Q: Yes, which he did.

MERRY: Which he did, but which few of us did. Nobody in my entering class had inherited wealth. He had this notion—and I remember he spoke to an A-100 class that I took up to the Hill—that people in the Foreign Service shouldn't concern themselves with things like salaries and allowances and benefits and things like that.

Q: Actually, that's the Foreign Service I came into. And I had no money, and we eventually got some changes, but that was our main consideration. It wasn't ideology, it was just to get away from this idea that you didn't bother to cash your checks, practically.

MERRY: Yes, and I thought somebody like Claiborne Pell was the kind of friend we could really do without. I've already mentioned Congressman Wayne Hays of Ohio, who basically treated the State Department as a lackey and could get away with it, until his own scandals brought him down.

Q: He was brought down by a blonde typist bimbo, wasn't it?

MERRY: Yes, he kept his mistress on the payroll, which is not that unusual, but Hays had made so many enemies on the Hill that when his problems arose, he had no support network to fall back on.

I would say in general, though, in looking back, this was a time when, even for all of the controversy involved in the war in Vietnam, and all of the still stereotypical attitudes that many people had toward the Foreign Service that dated from the McCarthy period, the Department of State and the Foreign Service had entrée on Capitol Hill of a kind that we never really, as an institution, appreciated. I remember one thing we were told in my A-100 class, that almost nobody acted on, was "Go up and see your congressman. Go up and see your senator. Introduce yourself as a new member of the Foreign Service and let them know that their district is represented in the diplomatic service of the United States." I think that was damn good advice. I think every Foreign Service officer should do that.

Q: I'm going to stop at this point. Is there anything else? Think about it, and we have another meeting next week, but if there's anything we should cover before you move off from this job….

MERRY: I think this is probably about a good time to go.

Q: So where did you go then?

MERRY: I went to Tunis.

Q: So we'll pick it up going to Tunis.

MERRY: OK.

Q: Today is the 23rd of March 2010 with Wayne Merry. When we left off you were off to Tunis. When did you go to Tunis?

MERRY: I got my assignment to Tunis when I was still in the Office of Congressional Relations, which is to say late in 1973, for a posting that would start the next year in '74. As an untenured junior officer, this being my first overseas post, there was no particular rhyme or reason as to how these assignments were made. In fact, the story, which was not entirely apocryphal, was that the junior officer political cone assignments officer had a National Geographic map of Africa on the wall of his office and a dart on his desk, and that the day I was assigned he had a particularly strong throw because the dart hit high on the map. That's basically the way these assignments were done, because there was no particular reason why I should go to Tunis or why the embassy in Tunis should get me.

In fact, they almost didn't, because after I had been assigned I was made an offer by Graham Martin, who was preparing to go out as United States ambassador in Saigon, the last one as it happened. I had worked a bit on his confirmation hearings, which had been a protracted process because many senators thought he was the wrong man for the job, being very gung ho about a war the United States was getting out of. He would be needing a staff aide at the embassy and he asked me to go out with him. I was so completely green about the ways of the State Department that I declined because I'd already been assigned to Tunis, not realizing that with a single phone call from Martin to the Director General that assignment could have been altered and nobody would have cared one way or the other. I've long wondered what it would have been like to have gone to the embassy in Saigon at the end of our presence there, working for the last ambassador. I certainly would have seen a lot of history. Whether it would have been a beneficial choice or not, I'll never know.

In any case, I went to the embassy in Tunis in summer 1974, after a few months getting my French up to speed, on what was essentially a probationary and training assignment. I have to say it was not, from my point of view, a very satisfactory one, which had nothing to do with the country. Tunisia was a place I liked very much. I traveled quite a bit in the country, in part related to my job, and I have nothing but positive things to say about

Tunisia. I can't say the same about the embassy or my position in it. Embassy Tunis was a sleepy Foreign Service post in which the principal activities were tennis, bridge and things of that kind. There certainly wasn't very much work to do. This was before the PLO (Palestinian Liberation Organization) moved to Tunis, and the country was under the leadership of an aged Habib Bourguiba. Everybody in the country of a political character was waiting for his passing, which was still several years in the future. Even though the country's economy was doing reasonably well, there really wasn't much going on. I was only at the post for 17 months, rather than a regular two-year assignment, because an inspector's team examined the post, and they quite correctly recommended that my position be abolished, which it was.

Q: What position were you in?

MERRY: I was divided between the Economic and Political Sections, a classic case that the last thing you want is be under two supervisors simultaneously. The lesser role was in Political, where there were already two full-time political officers. Based on my later experience in other political sections in other countries, I would say there was about enough work, really, for one, as there was so little going on in the country. One energetic reporting officer could have adequately dealt with whatever Washington needed, in terms of both political reporting and diplomatic activities in the limited roles we had. There really was almost nothing for me to do in Political except a few things related to customs and narcotics and the occasional official visit and delegation handling.

Most of what I did was in the Economics Section and it, too, was overstaffed. Again, there were two full-time officers, the younger of whom was very energetic, very capable, and certainly more than adequate for our requirements. My job was the administration of so-called Special Foreign Currency projects. This was a program which the United States conducted in a number of developing countries, to which we had contributed very large amounts of surplus American agricultural products under a law called P.L. 480, the "Food for Peace" Program, for which the U.S. had been paid in local currency, which was nonconvertible. Various agencies of the U.S. government could conduct business in that country using that local currency. The largest and most famous of these programs was in India, where, at one point, the program became so big that the United States government ended up owning a disproportionate share of the total Indian money supply. There was also a large program in Egypt and one in Morocco. The one in Tunisia was spending about $3.2 million equivalent a year on programs administered by the Smithsonian Institution, the National Science Foundation, and the National Institutes of Health. I was the in-country person who, in essence, represented those Washington agencies in the day-to-day supervision and management of their projects.

The projects were very diverse. One had to do with archaeology in the ruins of Carthage. Several dealt with public health issues. One concerned earthquake seismic studies and engineering, a particularly troublesome project. Another dealt with marine science. We financed the Mediterranean Marine Sorting Center, run by the Smithsonian, with P.L. 480 funds. There were about a dozen projects in all. A number were very interesting but essentially self-managing. I would go out and take a look at them, from time to time, and

talk with local sponsors. Sometimes there was an American scientist directly involved. Generally speaking, there was not much for me to do. A couple of the projects involved headaches due to personalities, or due to competing visions of what the money should be used for. In one case, the Tunisian head of the National Engineering School, who was a brilliant but very difficult individual, wanted to use the National Science Foundation's money for things that were not within the remit of the project and this created problems.

Thus, I was the person on the spot for about a dozen projects, from several American government agencies. It appeared that I was administering, in a very loose use of the term "administering," as much foreign assistance in Tunisia as was the Agency for International Development (USAID) which had a 49-American mission in-country. It was a classic USAID mission in which the overhead costs exceeded the program costs, not even counting the overhead costs that were buried inside the program costs. Here was I, on a half-time basis, overseeing a program that was, in dollar equivalent terms, as big as what USAID was doing. That was largely because the funding agencies in Washington knew what they were doing and it was my job just to carry out their remit.

Q: Who was the ambassador while you were there?

MERRY: The ambassador was Talcott Seelye, who was an Arabist, who had spent much of his career east of Suez. The embassy in its senior ranks, with one notable exception, reflected the old Foreign Service: East Coast, Ivy League, and rather snobbish. The great exception was the admin counselor, a man named Harold Vickers, who was the friend, champion and delight of almost all the younger people in the embassy, and not just the State people. He was a wonderful human being and a first class administrator. But most of the senior ranks at the embassy were, I would say, reflective of what the Foreign Service was like before my entry and untypical of the Foreign Service today, and not particularly representative of America as a whole.

An episode which illustrates the nature of the post was a July 4 reception at the ambassador's residence. Each member of the embassy staff was assigned a rotation schedule on a grid system so that we would circulate. You might have thought that adult members of the Foreign Service could handle their own movements at a reception, but no, that was not the front-office view. During the reception, for some reason, the prime minister of Tunisia approached me and initiated a conversation. I have no idea why, other than he had not attracted anyone else's interest. I was politely listening to the man and overstayed my allotted time in the grid position. The DCM approached, took me by the arm without a word, and pulled me to my next assigned grid position, leaving the prime minister of the country talking into thin air. Absurd!

Frankly, I found the entire experience fairly off-putting. This certainly said as much about me as it did about the post. I was a young, fairly brash person who was looking for something to do and was in a job that really didn't have more than two or three hours a day of actual content. In H I had done that much overtime in a normal day. I was, I think it's fair to say, not just frustrated, but bored. I also proceeded to get myself into a dispute with one of my two supervisors, the one in the Economics Section, over what, to me,

appeared to be a significant conflict of interest on one of the projects I administered. The head of the National Engineering School thought that the way to influence the American embassy was by hiring the economic counselor's wife. I objected to that as a conflict of interest and was basically told to mind my own business. As it happens, the National Science Foundation in Washington shared my concerns, but that didn't help me any. This was why, at the end of 17 months, when my position was abolished thanks to the inspectors, I departed post fairly joyfully. Later I had to file a grievance to get one of my performance evaluations removed from my file as prejudicial. This meant that almost half the time I was at the embassy in Tunis was ultimately not even reflected in my performance file; there was just a gap there.

The experience taught me that I would never again, ever, take an assignment at a place presented as comfortable to live. Never take a job that isn't going to be demanding and challenging and substantive and full, if not over-full. While I was there a woman friend came for a longish visit, which she enjoyed as Tunisia is great for a vacation. However, at the end she announced she would not be a Foreign Service wife for all the gold in South Africa. Based on my own experience at post, I could hardly blame her. Embassy Tunis at that time was, I thought, a parking ground for people who were not looking to be challenged.

Q: There are parking spots. What was the situation in Tunis? How did it strike you as a country?

MERRY: As a developing country, as an African country, as an Arab country, Tunisia then was one of the real success stories, largely because it had a ruling elite which hadn't made many egregious errors in the political system or in economic development policy. This changed later, under Ben Ali, with terrible consequences. Under Bourguiba, Tunisia was a semi-authoritarian state, no question about that. It was a highly elitist state, and that elite was very French-oriented. They spoke French more than they spoke their native Arabic, in terms of doing business. But they brought with them French standards of ability and administration, with a French orientation how a country should be run, which is very much top down, but also with a high degree of competence. Over the years, Tunisia was proof that if you conduct reasonably good policies over a long period of time, the results pay off. I had a lot of admiration for many of the Tunisian officials I had contact with—which was quite a few because of these various projects I administered—and I thought that Tunisia, as a country, was kind of a model for developing countries. However, because it was not doing anything egregiously wrong, Washington didn't pay much attention to it. It wasn't in crisis; it wasn't a problem. There was nothing fundamentally screwed up or wrong, so of course Washington relegated it very much to its back burner. When, decades later, it did go into crisis, the Bourguiba legacy was largely a thing of the past, sadly.

Tunisia is an interesting country historically because of the various civilizations that have been there over the centuries. The elite— because in practical terms I had almost no contact with ordinary people, most of the Tunisians I dealt with were members of the elite—were very conscious of the richness of their national traditions. They were

beginning to reflect the difficulty of being a successful developing country that was Francophone in a world that was increasingly Anglophone. One of the problems you could see among younger officials was that being dead fluent in French was just not going to be enough in the world they were going to live in.

Q: Well, too, they were blessed by not having oil, which is always sort of a poisoned chalice.

MERRY: They had a little bit of oil but it was only really enough to take care of their own domestic needs. Their principal exports, then and now, were phosphates, olive oil, agricultural products, workers—for purposes of remittances—and then, of course, they had a good deal of tourism. None of these were fully adequate for a developing country with a large, young population. There's never enough jobs. But if you compare Tunisia with any other Arab country, any other African country, any other developing country—I mean, on almost any index—it came out as one of the more successful. I was there a long time ago, but for many years it avoided most of the egregious errors of other, comparable countries. Then, as we know, the Ben Ali crowd introduced levels of corruption and authoritarianism which altered the picture dramatically for the worse.

Under Bourguiba, Tunisia had pretty much southern European levels of corruption and nepotism, but it was still an opportunity environment in which a talented young person could get scholarships and advance in life; I saw several cases of that myself. Under Ben Ali, the country attained Middle Eastern levels of corruption, and the opportunities pretty much disappeared. I thought something that probably contributed to the uprising against Ben Ali was a broad public understanding of what they had lost; that their parents had lived in a country that really was developing and acquiring the attributes of a lower-end developed country, but that they themselves were living in a typical Arab despotism. They had seen better and knew the difference; that was the basis of the rage, I suspect.

Q: While you were there, did you feel—I mean, you were obviously at the bottom of the food chain in the embassy…

MERRY: Very much so.

Q: Were there concerns about its two neighbors, Algeria and Libya, messing around?

MERRY: Well, principally Libya. Relations between Tunisia and Algeria were pretty much all right, largely because Algeria's internal problems then, as now, were so convulsively bad. This was a time when Gaddafi next door was sticking his nose into Tunisian affairs and there were a number of incidents of either terrorism or domestic insurgency that clearly were sponsored from Libya. That was an issue. It was one of the few subjects that allowed me to do any serious political reporting. Among my miscellaneous junior officer roles, I was the embassy liaison with various law enforcement establishments in the country. My reporting reflected the official concerns about these issues, which were fairly serious. At the same time, the Tunisian leadership was very conscious about not overreacting and not letting a situation on its border get out

of hand. Tunisia is a fairly small country, and everybody regarded Colonel Gaddafi next door in Libya as unpredictable. The Tunisian approach was to try to orient Gaddafi towards his more fundamental conflict and rivalry with Anwar Sadat in Egypt. If there was going to be a war anywhere, let it be a war on the Libyan-Egyptian border rather on their border with Libya, which strikes me as a very sensible policy for Tunisia.

I might add one point: when I was in Tunisia, the economy was at the end of seven years of fat and was going into a period of lean. This was quite clear from all the indicators, and many of the economic officials we dealt with were fairly clear about this. They could see that the country's earnings from a variety of things would decline—the lines on the charts were going in a bad direction. This was largely because of global economic changes in the aftermath of the 1973 Middle East war, in which Tunisia, being a small country, couldn't really do very much but would be affected. A consequence in the embassy was that I saw something I would see again—not all that often, but I certainly saw again—the phenomenon of an American ambassador who didn't want to report bad news about his country, because negative developments within this country would somehow reflect on the ambassador's stewardship. It was extremely difficult for us to report back to Washington about the directions in the Tunisian economy, which Tunisian officials were quite candid about, quite clear-eyed about, and yet we just couldn't get reporting cleared out, to tell Washington that the good days had been very good but now this country was going into a period that was going to be considerably more difficult. I was quite surprised at this first experience of ambassadors who project their own ego on the country to which they are accredited. It's not the only time I saw this, but it came as something of a surprise to me.

Q: 1973 or so, you left?

MERRY: I left there at the very beginning of 1976. Mid-winter.

Q: So where did you go?

MERRY: Because my position in Tunis had been abolished half a year early, I was off-cycle for assignment. Instead of transferring in the summer, which most Foreign Service officers did, I was transferring at New Years. There were only two positions available for a junior officer; a consular position in Pretoria and as exchange officer at the headquarters of the U.S. Marine Corps in Washington. Since my experience at Embassy Tunis had soured me a good deal on the Foreign Service and I was giving serious thought to resigning, and didn't particularly want to stamp visas in Pretoria, I opted for the Washington position, which was explained to me as a six-month holding position to get me back on cycle.

So, in January of 1976 I went to the headquarters of the Marine Corps without a clue as to what I was getting into, and encountered one of the most wonderful professional experiences of my life. This was a real exchange position, not a liaison or political-advisor job like some FSOs had when sent to the Pentagon. I was on exchange for a Marine Corps lieutenant colonel working in the State Department African Bureau. The

Marine Corps expected the FSO they received to fill what would have been their officer's billet in Marine Corps headquarters, which was in the Joint Plans and Policy Branch under the Operations Deputy. This branch dealt with all issues in the "joint arena," which is to say, relating to the role of the commandant of the Marine Corps as a member of the Joints Chiefs of Staff. This office was comprised of five officers from the Marine Corps, plus me; one colonel; four lieutenant colonels; and me. These officers were absolutely the cream of field-grade officers in the U.S. Marine Corps, which is to say, a very high quality of cream indeed. I was working with some of the most talented people in the most quality-oriented of the uniformed services.

I was preposterously junior to have been exchanged for a Marine Corps lieutenant colonel—I was too young in age, I was much too light in rank; I was a junior officer and I'd been swapped for a lieutenant colonel. The Marine Corps, after what must have been, initially, a little shock at how young I was, decided to treat me as if I was up to the job. I was told, "We expect you to do exactly what the Marine Corps lieutenant colonel would do if he was in this job." I was treated on those terms. I was never condescended to. I was never expected to do less than anybody else in the branch or in the division. I was treated with complete hospitality and was given duties and responsibility commensurate with the position, not with my own background and experience. I absolutely loved it.

I thought all my colleagues were first class, but especially admired my branch chief, a Marine aviator named Al Jorgenson. He really took me in hand and mentored me in the ways of the Marine Corps and the Pentagon. The three-star Operations Deputy was a very wise man as well. I had never been prejudiced against the military like many of my generation, but this experience gave me a decided prejudice in the other direction. This was useful later on, because I have always been able to work cooperatively with military officers in embassies and in Washington, which unfortunately many members of our service cannot. I strongly believe the military is usually the natural ally of the Foreign Service on most issues, but we tend not to deal with them on a basis of respect and so lose what should be a partner. For me, working with the Marine Corps as a junior officer was a real stroke of luck – not in career terms, of course, because my performance evaluations from that job were not taken seriously in the department – but in terms of working relationships in later assignments.

Marine Corps headquarters was an inspiring place to be, not just because of the nature of the work I was assigned, and not even because of the quality of the people I was working with, but because the Marine Corps is an institution which gives very high priority to two institutional attributes on which the State Department is, shall we say, somewhat weak: teamwork and leadership. The Foreign Service attracts talented individuals, and gives those individuals a lot of leeway. I've benefited from that over the years greatly. But it's not very good at getting the whole to be greater than the sum of its parts. Our service is strong on collegiality but generally does not make the transition to genuine teamwork. The Marine Corps is, to put it mildly, strong on teamwork. If fact, they will not tolerate anything less than first-class teamwork. The Foreign Service also kind of assumes that leadership will be there when you need it, so it promotes officers on other attributes. The Marine Corps view is entirely the opposite. Their view is that if a young officer has

leadership skills, that's it. They will teach him anything else he needs. They give top priority to the identification and promotion of leadership skills. It's an institution that completely defines itself by its ability to make the whole much greater than the sum of its parts, to generate force multiplication as it's called in the military.

On one occasion I had an issue that could legitimately be decided in either of two ways. I could not see much difference, so I went to my branch chief to benefit from his greater experience. I explained the issue and the options and asked for his decision. To my surprise, he told me to decide and that my decision had his approval in advance. You see, what he was doing was teaching me, the junior officer, to make decisions and to take responsibility, which in the Marine Corps is more important than the issue itself. I never forgot the experience and tried to replicate it myself in later years when I was a supervisor. However, I found it is not really the Foreign Service style.

This was the most stimulating bureaucratic environment I've ever been in. Let me give you an illustration. In the Department of State, or in the civilian part of the Defense Department, where I later worked, or in the Treasury Department, where I had worked previously, if you're the action officer for some issue which requires the attention of the top policy level, the secretary or deputy secretary, what happens is that the lowly action officer prepares a brief which goes through various layers of hierarchy, where it is reworked, changed, altered. What finally goes to the decision maker may, in many cases, bear little resemblance to what the action officer initially prepared.

Marine Corps headquarters was completely different. For anything requiring the attention of the Commandant, the action officer prepared a written brief in a designated format. It then went up through the intervening layers, where the colonel, the two-star, the three-star, the four-star, could add their views. They could append their views, but they could not alter what the action officer had written. The brief that went to the boss was exactly what the action officer prepared, and when it came to an oral brief, the person who briefed the issue was the person closest to the issue, the action officer. This took place with all the other brass in the room. I briefed the Commandant more than once and, believe me, it's intimidating as a 27-year-old to be in a room full of stars. To face the Commandant of the Marine Corps, with senior officers who can disagree with you, puts you on your mettle. You are required to stand up, present the issue, and you must make a recommendation and then defend it. I can tell you, it's an amazingly stimulating, even intoxicating, experience, to have that kind of responsibility and trust placed on you. You're the guy closest to this issue, so, by God, you're the one who has to make the recommendation and then you've got to defend it to the boss. I loved it.

Q: What were some of the issues, or an issue or two, that you dealt with?

MERRY: I dealt a lot with security assistance, which is to say U.S. military assistance to other countries, primarily developing countries. I spent weeks working with representatives of the other services on the annual iteration of a thing called the JSOP (Joint Strategic Operational Plan) Book Three, which was about security assistance. Fourteen inches thick in draft! I also worked on issues relating to the law of war, the law

of the sea—which was then in negotiations, the big international Law of the Sea Treaty negotiations—and a variety of other things. But most had to do with security assistance. While the subject matter I worked on was intrinsically interesting, what made this job so positive was not the content but the environment in which I worked. Almost every day I would go down to the Pentagon, as we were in a separate building, representing the Marine Corps with representatives from the other services and the Joint Staff on issues relating to law of the sea or security assistance, or whatever. I was usually the only civilian in the room. I was there, civilian though I was, representing the United States Marine Corps, representing the Commandant of the Marine Corps, and preparing briefs for my bosses on what the position of our institution should be. So, while the work was intrinsically interesting, it wasn't so much the content that I found stimulating as having gone from a position in Tunis, where I really didn't have much of anything to do, to a position where I was given responsibility and trust, with emphasis on the word trust, far beyond what my years or my rank would have justified.

Q: Where did you go from there?

MERRY: I came close, actually, to defecting to the Marine Corps. After a short time in the job I extended the six-month assignment into the following year, which surprised the personnel people at State. I loved the place so much and fit in so well that they made me an offer. The Marines would have given me a reserve officer commission in the Marine Corps so I could keep working there. While I was immensely flattered by this, I had a more prudent thought. I realized there's more to being an officer in the Marine Corps than just being an effective Washington bureaucrat.

Q: Because every Marine officer has to be an infantry officer, too.

MERRY: Yes. The Marine Corps is fundamentally built around supporting the guy who pulls the trigger, no question about it. They understand their priorities. The other reason, other than knowing I wasn't really the right person to be a Marine officer, much as I admired them, was that I had a better offer. This came from David Anderson, who I mentioned earlier in this history at USNATO and was now the director of the Office of Central European Affairs in the State Department. David remembered my interest in East Germany. I think he had also heard from George Vest, who was director of the Office of Political Military Affairs, which was the institutional interface with the Pentagon. The Commandant had spoken with Vest, I expect at the behest of my branch chief, to express appreciation for my work at Marine Corps headquarters, a classic case of the Marines taking care of their own. James Goodby, who was now deputy assistant secretary in the European bureau, also went to bat on my behalf, so this trio of outstanding officers whom I had met as a summer intern in Brussels proved decisive in getting me the plum assignment I most wanted. I think David understood I was considering getting out of the Foreign Service, but he knew of my interest in East Berlin, and we were, just at this time, mid-1976, establishing an embassy to the German Democratic Republic. David made me an offer I was certainly incapable of refusing, which was to be assigned to the new U.S. Embassy in East Berlin.

I've always felt a deep sense of gratitude to David for that because it both gave me an assignment I had wanted even before I entered the Foreign Service and it's what kept me in the Service, no question about that. David also trusted me to be the right choice, even though my initial overseas assignment in Tunis had been less than glorious; certainly less than sterling. For whatever reason—and I do know that the Commandant and George Vest had discussed me at one point—the Bureau of European Affairs, and David Anderson in particular, decided to offer me East Berlin, and I snapped at it like a trout going after a lure. This involved first taking half a year of German training at FSI (Foreign Service Institute) under a couple of really top-notch German language instructors, particularly Margaret Plieske, who was most famous for having been the person who tried to teach John F. Kennedy how to say a few words in German.

I had excellent German language instruction, and then went out to East Berlin in the summer of 1977. This was what I had wanted since I entered the Foreign Service, so I arrived at post in a very upbeat mood. The assignment proved to be, in most respects, better than I had expected or hoped for. My aspirations were entirely justified.

The embassy was not brand new; it had been operating for almost a year. The first U.S. ambassador, former Senator John Sherman Cooper, had opened the post. He departed just before I arrived, but the post was up and operating. It had recently moved into its permanent building, a stately pile that once had been the Prussian Officer's Club. The paint was pretty much still wet, but I was not involved in the establishment of an embassy, something I always wanted to do and never did. This was the smallest U.S. embassy in Europe other than Reykjavik. I was the bottom half a two-officer Political Section. My boss, Otho Eskin, was also newly-arrived. The deputy chief of mission, Sol Polansky, was also newly-arrived, as was the ambassador, David Bolen, which meant that much of the embassy was quite new. It may seem odd the embassy turned over much of its staff only a year after it opened. That's because the people who opened the post, except Cooper, had previously been attached to the U.S. Mission in West Berlin, in what was called the Eastern Affairs Section. It happened that their tours ended with the completion of the first full year of our presence in East Berlin. This worked out very well for me because I was moving into a functioning embassy. I took over my predecessor's apartment – it was all furnished – and I inherited some of his contacts, and was in a position to start the job.

Q: You were there for how long?

MERRY: Two years, though I very much wanted to stay more.

Q: Describe what was the state of things in East Germany, particularly East Berlin, of course, when you arrived there?

MERRY: Let me be clear: my job, as the junior political officer, was to explore East Germany. We had a certain amount of diplomatic interchange with the GDR. The Political Section did normal reporting on international issues, to which I contributed. But my job was to explore, to get out of the office, get out of the embassy, meet people and

travel around East Germany—there were no travel restrictions on us at all—and learn about this country which Washington didn't know much about. Washington's perceptions of the GDR were out of a bad Cold War spy novel. As a government, we had a long history of engagement with Poland, or Czechoslovakia or Hungary or Romania, but East Germany was sort of a lacuna (lack) in the heart of Europe, and much of what Washington thought it knew about East Germany was wrong. U.S. perceptions came either through the prism of West German perceptions of East Germany—and they were sometimes wrong and always biased—or through what you might call a Sovietological interpretation of East Germany, which was also not entirely appropriate.

I tried to understand East Germany on its own terms. What kind of a society is this? What kind of a political system is this? What kind of economy is this? I looked at the place not just as the eastern wedge of a divided Germany or the western wedge of the communist bloc—both of which, of course, it was—but also as a place with its own dynamic. I had a great advantage in that I had not previously served either in West Germany or in the Soviet Union, so I did not try to understand the GDR in terms of either of those places, but on its own terms. I started fresh, which was a great advantage.

East Germany, in the late '70s, had made a lot of progress from the time of my first visit in the summer of 1971. Ulbricht and his regime were gone. Erich Honecker and his regime not only were very much in power but had a considerable record of economic progress. They had not yet slipped into that detachment from the problems of everyday life which they did by the late '80s. This was certainly not a system based on the consent of the governed, but it was a country that had, in the late '70s, a ruling elite which was, for the most part, talented, economically aware, and very interested in taking advantage of their new openness to the West in terms of diplomatic relations. Having waited three decades from the end of the Second World War to get their place in the sun, they now had it, and they wanted to exploit their acceptance as a more or less normal and permanent state. To be sure, anywhere in the world you used the word "Germany" people thought of the west and not the east, but the GDR had achieved considerably more international stature, especially in the Third World, than is generally recognized. They claimed to be the tenth largest economy in the world, which was not true, but they were in the top twenty.

East Germany as a political culture was certainly authoritarian. The GDR reflected the axiom that any country with the word "democratic" in its official name, isn't. It was, in its own way, a police state, but it was much less repressive either than Western perceptions or than most of its Eastern neighbors. I traveled in a number of the other bloc countries during the time I was in East Germany, and I can tell you the atmosphere, for example, in Prague, was dramatically worse in terms of political repression than anything you would have encountered in East Berlin or anywhere in East Germany. In Prague I was stopped by police for a document check several times because I had a beard. That never happened in the GDR. Hungary had much better food and wine that East Germany, but the political atmosphere at that time was certainly worse. Obviously a place like Romania was light years worse, and Bulgaria the same. Poland had developed the precursors to Solidarity, but Poland was always a special case. Even at that point, the GDR leadership was very

worried about internal developments in Poland and the potential for political infection, so cut off most human contacts with its closest eastern neighbor.

Within the East bloc countries, the GDR, in the late ’70s and into the ‘80s, was curiously one of the more benign environments. That’s not to say that it was a democracy or rule of law state by any stretch of the imagination, but Western perceptions of it, including perceptions in Washington, were that it was one of the worst of the bloc countries. The reality was the reverse. In terms of how average people lived, not just in economic welfare and well being, but in their latitude of activity in day-to-day life—what they could read, their ability to watch West German television, their ability to have contacts with Westerners, the openness of the society—East Germany was, in fact, second only to Poland, which then, as always, was a unique political environment. I don't count Yugoslavia, because it was not part of the bloc and was, of course, fairly open to the west. If I look at the countries of the Soviet bloc, including the Soviet Union itself, from the late ‘70s toward the end of the Cold War, I would say East Germany was second only to Poland in terms of its openness and what one might call the personal freedoms people enjoyed in their daily lives. Political freedoms were a very different matter, of course.

Q: When you traveled, I assume you’d go to party headquarters in towns and things like that.

MERRY: I did sometimes, but that was actually not a very prominent part of what I did.

Q: What was the reaction of having an American official bouncing around internally?

MERRY: I had a lot of surveillance. Keep in mind that the Western diplomatic presence in East Berlin was quite small and the number of diplomats who got out and engaged the local society was miniscule, half a dozen or so. It was not difficult to keep track of us. The Staatssicherheit (State Security Service), the Stasi, were with me all the time, but with immense discretion. They went to great lengths not to show themselves. I know I was under surveillance for two reasons; first, Stasi files in Berlin make that very clear. But, second, we were doing surveillance on their surveillance. The United States had a big electronic listening facility in West Berlin, at a place called Teufelsberg. On a number of occasions our people did intercepts of the walkie-talkie conversations of the Stasi people tailing me in some part of the country. I didn’t have a car, so all of my travel was by train, which meant they had to tail me on foot. They couldn’t just put a car behind me, as they would if I’d been driving. They had to use teams of people to tail me, and that meant they had walkie-talkie traffic, and that was something we could listen to, so there were times they were surveilling me and we were surveilling them surveilling me. It was like “Spy Versus Spy” in the old Mad Magazine. But the Stasi went to great efforts not to reveal itself, and not to interfere directly in anything I was doing. This was quite different from my experience with the KGB (Komitet Gosudarstvennoy Bezopasnosti) (Committee for State Security) later in the Soviet Union.

Q: Why was this? Because often, with the KGB, the fact that you’re being surveilled, it’s not that secretive thing, but it’s a means of control. In other words, “Don’t do that.”

MERRY: People who came to East Germany after having served first in the Soviet Union expected that. I served in East Germany before I went to the Soviet Union. The Stasi's approach to dealing with foreign diplomats was the diametric opposite of the KGB's. They were seeking not to intimidate but to create a sense of well being, to make you think you weren't under surveillance, to make you feel secure. If you feel secure, you would get sloppy about what you said and what you left around your apartment. This worked with a number of diplomats who were astonishingly careless about surveillance. I wrote a paper on this distinction some years later, in which I speculated that the difference between Stasi and KGB surveillance methods reflected the difference between Jungian and Pavlovian schools of psychology. The KGB wanted to freak you out. The Stasi wanted you to feel safe.

Now, I knew perfectly well they were always there. I would sometimes set little traps for them to prove that, yes, they had been in my apartment; yes, they were there. I would knock books out of alignment on a shelf near the front door, only to find them straight when I returned. An ashtray would be rotated from the position I had left it. Things like that. Most of my East German friends and contacts, who had been under Stasi surveillance practically since they were weaned, were expert at spotting them. I learned a great deal about how to spot surveillance from East Germans, who were very skilled at this sort of thing.

The key point is that in two years of being very active in meeting East Germans, particularly people in the East German Lutheran church—the church, Protestant and Catholic, was the one institution in East Germany outside of the government and party monopoly—the Stasi never once overtly interfered with me. What they did do on at least two occasions was to recommend to the foreign ministry that I be declared *persona non grata*. We knew this from intercepts, that at least twice the Stasi went to the foreign ministry and said, "Throw this guy out. He's talking to too many people." Once, the foreign ministry called in my ambassador, complaining about me having too many "churchy" contacts; being too active in my associations with people in the GDR. Other than making that complaint at the ambassadorial level, they never did anything that would impede or interfere with me. There were no acts of sabotage against me or intimidation at all, ever. Quite the opposite of my diplomatic experience in the Soviet Union.

Q: What was the role that you were seeing, at that time, of the Lutheran church?

MERRY: The church in East Germany became very much my specialty, almost a personal hobby as well as a professional interest. I reported on it extensively, including one report that, as I recall, was 37 pages, single-spaced. I heard it arrived as something of a surprise in the State Department because most people did not know there even was an active church behind the Berlin Wall. I became interested because I got to know people in it—Lutheran pastors, mostly outside of Berlin and mostly in Saxony and Saxony-Anhalt. I soon realized two things about the church in East Germany: first, it was the only structured institution in the country that was not within the control of the party and the

state. The only independent institutions were the Roman Catholic and the Evangelical Lutheran churches—their independence was unique. They alone constituted what today we would call "civil society" in the country, if you define "civil society" as that part of a society between the family and the state. In the GDR, the church was the only legitimate civil society in the country, so, therefore, very interesting. The second reason was that the more I got to know people in it, I realized that many of the most talented people of my generation in that country were involved with the church. It occurred to me that any institution outside of the state and party that could attract the best and the brightest of its country was an institution worth taking a good hard look at.

It was also the case that the Lutheran church had genuine appeal for young people. The official Free German Youth organization and other structured youth activities in schools and so forth, pretty much bored the kids out of their minds. Young people—people in their teens, in their twenties, in their thirties—who were really looking for something else often found what they were looking for was the Lutheran church. This was not necessarily something spiritual; they weren't necessarily looking for God, but they were looking for a place where they could be themselves, where they could be independent, where they could have conversations, could discuss things, could learn without the ideological and political claustrophobia of the GDR. They were looking for civil society, if you will, and found it under the sign of the Cross. If you wanted to get a sense of the dynamics of the younger part of the society, that was the place to do it.

The East German church—and I reflected this in my reporting—had a self-perception of itself as the legatee, the inheritor, of the greatest moral failure in the history of Christianity, which was the role of the church during the Third Reich, and a profound commitment not to make that mistake again. This church, unlike the church in West Germany, existed within a communist authoritarian state, but also with the heritage of a fascist authoritarian state, and almost everybody in the church had a sense that their burden was not to behave that way again. This was, I thought, a very interesting place to meet people. I'll tell you this: conversations with people in that institution were a hell of a lot more interesting than conversations in local party headquarters.

I met my closest friend in East Germany because he happened to be the pastor in the village where Friedrich Nietzsche was born and is buried – so he lived in the Nietzsche House and had the grave beside his 13th Century village church. Through him I met another pastor in Wittenberg who lived, quite literally, in the Luther House. Both of these men, and their families, lived cheek by jowl with those historical legacies while dealing day to day with the problems of their communities and societies. They saw East German society from the bottom up, with all the rough edges. They dealt with family issues, alcohol, the elderly, social alienation and even employment problems. Sometimes, even the local police would consult them about youth issues. Through these friends and others I obtained some real insight into the place. After awhile, I stopped seeking answers about the GDR, and started gradually to learn the right questions. This was one of the key lessons of two years there: that Washington's questions about other countries generally reflect Washington's biases and are the wrong questions; a key job of the Foreign Service is to learn the right questions, even if there are no answers. The only way to learn the real

questions is by listening, and listening takes time and patience and human interaction. Fortunately, I had the chance over many days and evenings to listen and learn. I wonder how many people in the Foreign Service nowadays have that opportunity, how many supervisors allow junior officers that time and independence. Not many, I think.

I also knew people without church connections, sometimes people with cultural roles or university connections. One older couple were connected with the Humboldt University, and through them I acquired some insight into the early years of the GDR and why many Germans who could actually choose east or west chose the east. Most did not, of course, but the aspiration to build a true socialist Germany after the experience of the Nazi period was real for many people. Their hopes and aspirations remained intact after many disappointments, but intact. From people like that, I found it is misleading to generalize about people in any society. I knew a few people in the small Jewish community and was the only non-German present for the reconsecration of the largest synagogue in East Berlin in 1979. That was a very moving experience, because the place was nearly empty in a part of Berlin which had once enjoyed a thriving Jewish life. Remember, East Germany was a society in the heart of Europe with myriad traditions to draw from. You could scarcely turn around in the country without encountering some aspect of German history, whether positive or negative, but the past was everywhere in people's lives. The most obvious was the recent past, the Cold War and the Nazi period, but there were many layers.

Q: On the local communist side, was there press, and the speeches and talking, pretty much the boilerplate communist stuff?

MERRY: Most of that was in Neues Deutschland, the party newspaper, and was predictable, but I read it in the same way that later I would read Pravda, which is, I learned to look for the little indications of something out of the ordinary. I learned to look through the boilerplate to find where the little snippets of interest were, which were never in the first third of the article or speech. You could ignore the first third of any speech. If there's going to be anything interesting, it would be buried deep inside. For the most part, the formal politics of the GDR were pretty damn dull. I accompanied my ambassador to meetings with several members of the politburo (Central Committee's political bureau), some of whom were intelligent men, most of whom had very interesting personal histories of resistance to the Nazis—some had lost their entire families to the Nazis. Some had been in prison for long periods of time. But they were almost entirely doctrinaire. However, something about the GDR leadership Washington didn't appreciate was that they were not cynical opportunists. Their formative years had been during the street battles between communists and Nazis of the late '20s and early '30s. The long struggle against German fascism had defined them; it had destroyed almost all of their generation and their families. These guys were true believers. When they talked about proletarian internationalism, they believed it. When they got up at a rally and sang the Internationale, they believed it. They were quite sincere, which is why, a decade later, they were so out-of-touch with younger people in their own society, for whom their own experience was simply not relevant. They became social dinosaurs.

In my experience traveling around the GDR, there was never—and I think I can say so with no exceptions—never a place I went, where as an American and American diplomat I wasn't immediately welcomed. Even in an official venue where the meeting was going to be utterly sterile in terms of content, the welcome was genuine. Americans were like people from Mars. In many instances people told me I was the first American who'd set foot in their town since the country was divided after the end of the war. The last Americans they had seen had been the U.S. Army in 1945, or occasionally groups of American Lutheran pilgrims who'd travel to East Germany to see various Luther sites. For most people, I was the first American they had ever met. Whether it was just a casual encounter on a train, whether it was a family I'd come to know in personal terms, whether it was people I knew in the church, whether it was local editors or officials or party people on whom I would pay an official call, for them, meeting with an American diplomat was something special. Unlike later in the Soviet Union, where sometimes encounters out in the provinces would be positive and sometimes they would be rather negative, I don't think I ever had a negative personal experience traveling in the GDR.

Of course, the GDR was not such a big place. It was the size of Ohio with about 17 million people. It had a lot of very interesting historic cities: Dresden and Leipzig and Wittenberg and all the historic cities of Saxony and Thuringia and Mecklenburg and Neubrandenburg. There were lots of places to go and lots of places to try to meet people. Two years was certainly not enough. One of the advantages I had was that as I began to meet people, particularly within the church—where I developed some very strong friendships, which I am happy to say endure to this day—they all knew people elsewhere, so frequently I would have an introduction when I went someplace new.

So, instead of spending most of my time on the road in official settings, I spent most of my time on the road in peoples' kitchens. One of the things I did that came as a shock to some people in my embassy, is that I frequently overnighted in peoples' homes in East Germany. I did that over a hundred times in the two years I was in East Germany. I overnighted in somebody's home in many different places. In one February I spent a week in a village south of Leipzig where a friend was the pastor. I learned more about East Germany in that week than in anything else I did during my assignment there.

Q: Were they concerned about you spending the night? That meant three or four hours in the Stasi office in the next day. Or not?

MERRY: Sometimes. My contacts sometimes told me they had been questioned, but often they were not, especially if they were someone with other foreign contacts, as with the church in West Germany. I've seen references to me in other peoples' Stasi files, in the Stasi files of East German friends of mine. Something I had to judge—and I tried to be very conservative about this—was the extent to which my actions might compromise the well being of the people I was dealing with. Usually, the people who would invite me to stay overnight were very compromised politically already, which is to say pastors within the Lutheran church, people within the peace movement, people who already had other foreigners overnight, such as West Germans or co-religionists from other bloc countries. So I was not the first. Often enough, the invitation to me to stay was their

method of thumbing their nose at the authorities. I tried to be very careful about bringing trouble to peoples' doorsteps. I would be very candid to people, that if they felt in any way uncomfortable in meeting with me, I didn't want to ever press it. This had to be their choice and a choice made with their eyes open.

In point of fact, most of the people I met in East Germany were more sophisticated on this issue than I was. These were people who had been living with the reality of their political police state system all their lives. Many had been in political trouble since adolescence, and were now sheltering within the institutional protection of the church, not just as parishioners, but as employees of the church, people who were within the structure of the church. I got to know a number of people who were not in that situation, where I restricted my contacts out of concern that it would compromise them. A number of other contacts, some rather important to me, were with people whom I knew perfectly well were semi-official, people who maintained contact with me not entirely for personal reasons but also for reporting reasons.

Q: One of the things that appears to have come out is that the Stasi files, everybody had a report on everybody else. At a certain point, I lived in Yugoslavia, and I knew we were bugged but what the hell difference did it make, except to give occupation to the buggers?

MERRY: Well, I never, both in East Germany and the Soviet Union, I never thought that it didn't make a difference. It affected my behavior patterns all the time. For example, I never took any personal mail home from the embassy. None of my financial records, none of my personal letters, ever left the safe in my office, to make it more difficult for them to build a file on me. They could come into my apartment, which they did. They could find out what kind of books I owned, what kind of records I owned, they could find out what kind of laundry detergent I used, that kind of thing. That would contribute to their obsessive file-building. But I had no desire to let that file touch other people, particularly other people back in the United States. I also was very cautious about anything I would say in any bugged facility or on the telephone. In all of my personal contacts, I'd let my East German counterparts determine the pace, the direction and the intensity of the relationship. It was their choice, and I worried a great deal about a number of them. In one case, I much later found out that a young man did suffer from it, in the tasks he was given once he was drafted. He was given a not very pleasant job in the army, and it was made clear to him it was because of his relationship with me. However, it was a couple of decades before he opened up to me about that.

Still, East Germany was not Romania. It was not even Czechoslovakia. People were not freaked out and paranoid about contact with Westerners. Chance conversations on the train or in the theater were more or less normal, not tense encounters at all. I discussed this with some other Western diplomats, particularly the West Germans, who had the only really substantial diplomatic presence in East Berlin, and with some journalists. Our experience was pretty much the same, which was that both in East Berlin and in traveling around East Germany, we were all astonished at how easy it was to do our jobs, how easy it was to meet people, how open people were, how people did not recoil from having contact with us. It was striking how open people were in this forbidden territory that,

since the Wall went up, had been closed to the outside world. Many local people were starved for outside contact, to meet the kind of people they saw on West German television. God, the number of questions about America I had to answer, or try to. I had to try to explain the meaning of lyrics of rock songs I did not understand in English.

I also got to know the families of a number of people who were arrested for political activity. In fact, one of my closest friends from East Germany was arrested for political activity that had nothing to do with me; it predated my arrival. He spent about a year and a half in a political prison until he and his family were bought out by West Germany. The Bonn government purchased the freedom and immigration of political prisoners from East Germany. I'm happy to say that, to my knowledge, no one in East Germany was arrested, incarcerated, because of associations with me. I knew a number of people whose political activities did get them into legal jeopardy, but that was for doing things that were perceived by the regime as much more challenging, much more subversive, more controversial than knowing me. For example, one of my closest friends was an East German lawyer who represented political cases. He was a defense lawyer for people who were in serious political trouble with the regime. I knew him and his family very well. Eventually, he was pressured to leave, to emigrate to the West with his family. But he didn't feel the slightest hesitation about having contact with me, because the associations he had with his clients had already burned his bridges with the regime. One evening I went to their place for his wife's birthday party, and among the crowd saw an older couple on the sofa looking very uncomfortable. The man was wearing a party lapel pin, which I though quite odd. My friends took me in the kitchen, burst out laughing and said it was her parents, who evidently freaked out when they learned a U.S. diplomat was present. They left quite early and the atmosphere eased immediately. Odd, that my presence would be deemed normal, but her party member father would be out of place.

I met hundreds of people in East Germany and got to know a few dozen fairly well, people you would use the "du" (informal you) basis with, in German, people who I got to know not just as individuals but as families, often several generations of the families, people in whose homes I would be not just once but many times. Getting to know the kids was very rewarding, as they are always entirely genuine. Now, I always understood it was possible some of those people would, in fact, be Stasi. In most cases, I was quite confident the person was not, but I was always a little fearful as to who might be. One thing you could never do in a place like East Germany was mix your friends with each other, because if they didn't already know each other, or if they didn't know of each other through a mutual friend, you, the foreigner, could not bring them together. Your trustworthiness as an American was clear. Their trustworthiness to each other was not. So you had to compartmentalize your friends and contacts.

There's one case I should mention because it became famous in Germany after the Wall came down. A young man named Knud Wollenberger later proved to have been Stasi. He became a *cause célèbre* after unification because his wife had been very active in the opposition toward the end of the GDR, and later became a member of the German parliament. He had been informing on her during the entire time of their marriage.

Q: I remember.

MERRY: I knew Knud long before he even met Vera, his future wife. I met him when he was in his late teens, an aspiring poet and mathematician. I came to know Knud Wollenberger very well. I now know, in retrospect, that he was informing on me to the Stasi from the first time I met him. My reaction to that revelation was one of sadness for him, because this was a young man who got pulled in, as a teenager, into a situation which I think he believed he would be able to control and was not able to. He came from an interesting family; his mother was Danish. His father was a German Jewish scientist and communist who had lived in the United States during the war, had been a physicist, had come back to Germany after the war, and was in political trouble in the GDR in the Ulbricht period. His son had been born in Denmark, so he actually had a Danish passport as well as an East German passport. He could travel abroad, which his younger sisters could not. He was a very bright young person and looking for some kind of a role. First a role in science, second a role in literature, in a country where that kind of role was difficult to fashion. He compromised himself as a Stasi *inoffizielle mitarbeiter*, an unofficial coworker, of which there were many, many thousands in the GDR.

His wife, when she found out later what he had been doing, divorced him and this was evidently a very bitter experience, but I have never held any personal grudge against Knud. I feel no animosity toward him, just sadness. I was an American official and so I was fair game for Stasi surveillance. If there had not been surveillance, I would have been astonished. To me, the surveillance had nothing to do with me personally. It was purely an official thing. It had to do with my job. I wouldn't have been in East Germany without my official status. So I don't feel any sense of resentment or anger or betrayal toward Knud. I feel sadness for him. I have found this is a difficult subject, though, to discuss with other East German friends, because they feel, even if they never knew Knud Wollenberger—most of them didn't—they felt what he did was so morally compromised that they feel resentment and anger at him. And they find it a little strange that I do not.

Q: Well, we're at some remove. One, it's family. I'm talking about if you're East German, it's family. We're in America.

MERRY: Yes.

Q: Have you ever run across the Merkel family at all?

MERRY: You mean Angela Merkel's? No, not at all.

Q: Because I know, in the Lutheran circle…

MERRY: Partly, the place in East Germany where she came from was the area…

Q: She's now the chancellor of Germany. She was younger then, of course.

MERRY: She came from a part of East Germany that I didn't visit that much, the

northwestern corner. But she also had a church family background.

Q: That's why I said this. One of the things you were saying, that the people knew their place, so what the hell? Something that has become, to a certain extent, apparent, is that a good number of East Germans have become disillusioned with being a part of Germany. Part of it is that you were paid, you had your rent taken care of, medical—everything was pretty well taken care of for you, and it seemed to undermine, you might say, the drive or initiative that was much more apparent in West Germany. Did you run across this dichotomy?

MERRY: Well, as it happens, I published a 5,000-word article on this subject in the March 2010 issue of Current History, about why Eastern Germany 20 years after the fall of the Wall is still such a different place; why the identity issues in the GDR period have created such an enduring legacy. East Germany, in those days, in the '70s, was a place in which peoples' expectations were the product of the reality of the Cold War, of the division of Europe, the division of Germany, the division of Berlin, which everyone assumed was going to go on for the rest of their lives. Everybody in East Germany assumed they would live, raise their own families and then would grow old within the confines of this place that was about the size of Ohio. They would occasionally be able to travel to Prague or Budapest or the Black Sea coast, but the notion that all this Cold War *stasis* in Europe would come to a radical end within the foreseeable future, no. People didn't expect that at all.

Expectations were very limited, but therefore, they tended to focus on what was achievable within this context. People put a lot of emphasis on the quality of their lives, on their families, their near friends, their neighborhoods, and on what you might call human relationships. For example, in many parts of East Germany people still did things like the early evening promenade on the main street of the town. People did the afternoon *kaffee und kuchen* (coffee and cake) with friends, even if the coffee was bad. They found time to go into the woods to collect mushrooms, or to do things with other people, and that was very important in a society in which the ethos was "they pretend to pay us, we pretend to work." It wasn't that hard to find time for these kinds of personal relationships. It's also true that people in East Germany took immense pride in the legacy of their country from earlier times, in being the land of Bach and Mendelssohn; in being the land of Goethe and Schiller, of Luther, of the great museums of Dresden and the literary heritage of Weimar and the musical traditions of Leipzig. These were terribly important to people.

Q: Had they completely pushed the Hitler time over to the West? Being a communist regime, they had no guilt?

MERRY: One of the things the GDR promulgated was a doctrine of a "GDR nationality." This was the official response to the inevitable question, "Who are we? Well, we're German but then there are other people who are German, too." So the regime promulgated a "GDR nationality," which was kind of clumsy and never really worked very well, but it said that, "We're members of the socialist camp, we're allies of the

Soviet Union, we're the first workers' and peasants' state on German soil." I heard that phrase *ad nauseam*: "The first workers' and peasants' state on German soil." Under this doctrine they assigned all of the opprobrium for the Third Reich to the Federal Republic next door, to West Germany. East German kids were told, "You are in no way the inheritor of any of the accountability, legacy or sense of guilt from that."

People in the East German churches, both Lutheran and Catholic, rejected that idea. They said, "Look, we're German, and we bear our share of that guilt." I think people in the church felt that more particularly because of the compromised role of the church in the Third Reich. For example, on the anniversary of *Kristallnacht* (the Night of the Broken Glass) in 1978, which was the 40th anniversary of the destruction of many synagogues…

Q: In '38.

MERRY: There was no official commemoration at all in the GDR, but there were church-organized commemorations in every city and town of any size. I participated in those in East Berlin. They attracted large numbers of young people who held seminars, discussion groups, then went on candlelight vigils in front of ruins of the synagogue on Oranienburger Strasse. Their view was, "Yes, this is part of our history too and we have to deal with it," and that differentiated the church from the regime and was one of the reasons why the church had credibility with young people, because it was willing to talk about this legacy. It was willing to face up to the past.

But the official line on historical responsibility has had a poisonous effect, lasting till this day, because when the Wall came down, East Germans said, "We are one people, we want to be just German." Then they suddenly learned that part of being German meant taking on the moral opprobrium and responsibility for all of Germany's past. This had been a very protracted process in West Germany; something that had taken decades, two generations, in West Germany. Now people in East Germany were told practically overnight to do this. A lot of the Neo-Nazi skinhead activity in East Germany today is a reaction by young people, who had been taught in school that it had nothing to do with them, and then overnight being told it had everything to do with then.

In 1988 I was on a personal visit in Poland and I met a German-speaking tour guide in Warsaw. She was a Pole, and most of her job was taking around German school groups, West German and East German. She told me that she would always ask them at the beginning, "Do you want to visit the site of the Warsaw ghetto and these other places in Warsaw from the War?" She said the West German young people would always say, "Yes, of course. We must see these things. That's part of why we came here." The East Germans would always say, "No. That has nothing to do with us. We don't want to be bored with that stuff." I think the teaching has had a terribly poisonous long-term impact on peoples' mentality in East Germany.

Q: What about Soviet presence in East Germany and the East German view of the Soviets while you were there? We know what the Poles felt, even at the height of the authoritarian regime. They detested the Germans, but particularly the Russians.

MERRY: In East Germany the Soviet presence was omnipresent and yet mostly out of sight. There were 22 Soviet armored and mechanized divisions in East Germany, a country, again, the size of Ohio, with comparable airpower and nuclear weapons and chemical weapons. There were Soviet bases all over the place. But you could live and travel in East Germany and only occasionally, and almost by accident, encounter the tangible Soviet presence. The Soviet troops were pretty much kept on their military reservations. They had little contact with the local population. I remember being in the city of Naumburg, an old cathedral city, which had a Soviet corps headquarters. It was a Sunday, so the Soviet officers and their families were promenading as were the German population and their families. I was the sole American there; I was with some East German friends. It was a beautiful Sunday afternoon in this lovely old cathedral city, in which two groups were promenading as if they were in alternate universes. There was zero contact between the Soviets and the East Germans that day. Absolutely none. It wasn't that they were hostile to each other, they were just going through the pretense that the other wasn't there.

I think behind all of the official socialist brotherhood propaganda, the average East German attitude toward the Soviets was not suffused with the kind of hostility that existed in Poland or in Hungary or in Czechoslovakia. First, the crushing of the 1953 worker uprising was a long time ago, and everybody knew it was Ulbricht that was the problem. The Soviets just did the dirty work for Ulbricht. It wasn't so much a Soviet intervention as it was the Soviets providing the muscle to back up the East German leadership, which was quite different from what happened in Budapest or Prague. Also, of course, the East Germans were on the wrong side of the Second World War. They knew why the Soviets were there. Most East Germans, whether they liked it or disliked it, whether they accepted it or hated it, understood the fundamental reality of their lives—the country in which they lived, the condition of their broader nation, of their continent and everything that determined their existence—was the product of the Second World War and the Cold War, things about which they had very little, if any, influence.

The presence of the Soviet forces in East Germany, which was much, much larger than the Soviet presence in Poland—which is a bigger country—or in Czechoslovakia, was conducted by the Soviet group of forces specifically to avoid problems with the local population. There were a few incidents. I remember an instance when a small number of Soviet soldiers stole a van and went racing through East Berlin to try to get to Checkpoint Charlie to defect. They got all the way to Unter den Linden before they were stopped in a gun battle with East German police and they were all killed. But for the most part, the Soviets were out of sight and when they weren't out of sight they were on good behavior.

I got to know one diplomat at the Soviet Embassy, who was assigned to be liaison with me. This was my first contact with a Soviet official and not a very encouraging one, as he was pretty much a stereotype. A waste of my time rather than a learning experience. The Soviet Embassy was huge and the Ambassador, Pyotr Abrasimov, was really a proconsul. He hated Germans, having lost a son in the War, and lost few opportunities to lord it over the GDR leadership. Honecker obviously hated him, but was stuck with him until

Brezhnev died. Honecker then asked Andropov to replace him. The irony is that the GDR ruling elite really admired and even loved the Soviet Union, as they were true-believers and saw Moscow as the Mecca of socialism. The Soviets, in contrast, saw the East Germans as fundamentally more German than socialist. They understood the importance of the GDR and envied its economic achievements, but there was no love lost on the Soviet side. I saw this often enough in the eyes of Soviet officers watching GDR military ceremonies; their trigger fingers were itching. To be fair, diplomats of other countries, such as French, Poles, Danes, and others, reflected rather similar views. They all wanted the United States to keep control of "our" Germans while the Soviets did likewise in the GDR. As the French statesman Francois Mauriac said, he loved Germany so much he preferred to have two of them.

Q: Let's talk a bit about the embassy itself. How did it fit within the greater German context? We had a mission in West Berlin and an embassy in Bonn.

MERRY: The U.S. Embassy in Bonn, of course, was humongous. The U.S. Mission in West Berlin was quite large. We, as the embassy to the GDR, were smaller than some of the consulates in West Germany. We were much smaller than the consulate in Munich or the consulate in Frankfurt. Probably we were about the size of the consulate in Hamburg. We were a very modest-sized post and were regarded by some of our colleagues in the West with a certain degree of condescension and derision. There were still some who felt the United States should never have had diplomatic relations with the East Germans. The nature of the diplomatic relationship between the United States and the GDR was pretty narrow. We had a number of bilateral issues that never progressed very far, particularly claims of U.S. citizens for properties from before the war, and Jewish material claims. We did sell, at that time, a considerable amount of feed grain to East Germany, but that was a medium-term economic relationship. Broader trade was minimal.

Of the countries of the Soviet bloc, I would expect that, with the exception of Bulgaria, the actual diplomatic interchange we had was the smallest, partly because there was no active ethnic group in the U.S. with ties to the GDR. It was not like Poles or Hungarians or Romanians in the United States, or Yugoslavs, who had contacts with the old country. The only human contact we tended to get were American Lutheran groups, who might not have any family connection with somebody in the GDR, but who visited Wittenberg and Eisenstadt and the Wartburg and places like that. So, our embassy was not very large and not terribly important, either within the German club of the State Department or within the Soviet club. We were not as important an embassy as Warsaw or Belgrade by any stretch of the imagination. That was partly because, when I was in East Berlin, the relationship was brand new. Everywhere I went was someplace new. Every report I wrote was on someplace Washington didn't know anything about. Much of what we were doing was exploring, discovering, learning, developing contacts, many of which would later prove to be extremely important during the crisis of East Germany ten years on. I'm happy to say that a number of people who were contacts of mine became very important, if not critical, embassy contacts in the late '80s, when the GDR came to its crisis and the Wall came down.

Diplomatically, the embassy was testing the limits of what we could develop, in terms of a relationship with the GDR, and that often came into conflict with the U.S. position in Berlin, because the GDR was always looking for ways to try to nickel and dime us on something concerning our Berlin rights. One of my roles in the Political Section was as sort of the keeper of the Holy Tablets on Berlin status.

Q: If one doesn't know—I mean, how far you lowered the tailgate. It was really a Holy Bible.

MERRY: I had to learn a lot of Berlin theology, but my role was actually fairly simple. It was to remind everybody in the embassy, starting with the ambassador, "We do not discuss Berlin matters with the GDR. The U.S. government discusses Berlin matters with our Soviet counterparts and nobody else." There was a very simple response, whenever the GDR tried to raise a Berlin issue, whether it was in Berlin or in Washington, the correct response was to say, "There are established relationships in which that issue is discussed and you know what those relationships are." Full stop. The one thing I had to keep reminding people over and over again is, "We do not get into a discussion on this issue." That was the basis upon which we, as an embassy, did not get into a pissing match with our counterparts in Bonn or West Berlin, because in any such conflict, we would lose. Berlin was not our responsibility, it was the responsibility of our colleagues in West Berlin and in Bonn; we stayed the hell out of it.

Q: For example, if you had traffic problems, parking problems, in front of your embassy, would you go to our mission in…

MERRY: No. The question often was, "Why is the U.S. Embassy to the German Democratic Republic in East Berlin, the Soviet sector of Berlin?" Official answer: "For administrative convenience only." On anything having to do with administration, management of the embassy, the building, apartments, parking, stuff like that, of course we dealt with the East German authorities as the people who, under broader Soviet authority, ran the eastern part of the city. But if it had to do with a Berlin status issue, or anything involving West Berlin, that's when we would stand back and say, "No, you don't talk to us about that."

Q: OK, a GI (Government Issue) ends up in East Berlin, or an American gets drunk in East Berlin or something. Who took care of that?

MERRY: If it was an American tourist, we would. If it was a GI, we wouldn't touch it. That would be for the Mission in West Berlin. There were plenty of Americans who would visit East Berlin on day visas coming from West Berlin, to shop, or to go to the opera. Like any American citizen, if something happens, well, we've got a Consular Section. We do American citizen services. If it was anyone associated with the U.S. presence in Berlin—which is to say an American soldier, an American diplomat, or dependent, anything that had to do with the Allied status of the city—we wouldn't touch that with a barge pole. It actually made life more convenient for us, since we didn't have to get into that sort of thing.

The problem was this anomaly greatly constrained our ability, diplomatically, to develop much of a state-to-state relationship with the GDR, because Berlin was always there as a landmine. Ultimately, for both the U.S. and the GDR, our bigger and more important relationships were with West Germany and with the Soviet Union. Our relationship with the GDR was a second-order offshoot of those two broader relationships. My ambassador had, I think, some difficulty in accepting the marginal character of our diplomatic role. He wanted it to be more like the U.S. relationship with, say, Poland, but Poland is Poland. Poland is not half of a Poland. From my selfish point of view, not having a broader diplomatic relationship was fine, because it gave me more time and freedom to do what I wanted to do, which was to explore and learn about East Germany as a society, as a culture, as a place, to understand the dynamics of it. That was the narrow perspective of a second secretary pursuing his hobby at taxpayer expense. If you look at what we as an embassy could do in terms of what embassies normally do, which is the conduct of diplomatic relations and foreign affairs for your government, our relationship with the GDR was a second-order offshoot of our relationships with the Federal Republic and the Soviet Union.

Q: What did Otho Eskin do?

MERRY: Otho was my boss in the Political Section, and he was great, an ideal boss for an independent young colleague. Otho was very protective and supportive of my role as "explorer", which many another boss might not have been. I found him a very wise and witty person whose advice I valued greatly. I consider myself blessed to have had him as my senior during those years. In his job, he had enough to do because this was a time when we were really trying—hoping, but at least trying—to get some progress on a number of issues: claims issues, trade issues, and unfortunately, I think we went all the way to the end of the GDR and never really got a hell of a lot done on any of those. But, as anybody who's been involved in diplomacy knows, just because you're not accomplishing very much doesn't mean you don't burn up a lot of time and effort in the process.

I should also mention Sol Polansky, the deputy chief of mission, who was very supportive and brought a perspective of someone who had served in Moscow, where I wanted to go. I must say that both Sol and Otho were important for me in that they shielded me and my work from our ambassador, who was rather skeptical about my establishing contacts outside the official world. He would, I think, have limited our activities to GDR officialdom and to local "authorized" people, but I managed to get away with a lot because Otho and Sol understood the importance of reaching out. I suspect they did not pass on just how active I was. I think they both remembered life as a junior officer and appreciated that low rank has its compensations. I also got critical support from Washington in the person of James Goodby, whom I had known at USNATO and who was deputy assistant secretary in the European bureau at the time. Goodby evidently knew there were tensions within the embassy in Berlin, and he wrote to the ambassador praising some of my reporting. This made all the difference for me, as my work became "valuable" in the ambassador's eyes, in giving his post visibility in

Washington. I doubt this visibility went much beyond Goodby, but kudos from his level were a godsend in giving me the freedom to get on with my job. I must admit that I had the most interesting, the most personally enjoyable, job in the embassy.

Q: I assume you went to Dresden.

MERRY: Oh, of course I did. Frequently.

Q: Did you get any reaction to what happened in Dresden during…

MERRY: Not only did I go to Dresden frequently, sometimes, in fact, I just went down for the day. I could catch a train from Ostbahnhof (East Railway Station) that would get me into Dresden 15 minutes before the museums opened, and I got another train at six o'clock that got me home at eight-thirty. So I even remember the schedule, I did it so often. In both my years, I went down for the anniversary of the bombing in mid-February, for the commemorative service and concert. I would say there wasn't any real hostility. This was a time when East Germany and Germans in general were still very quiet about trying to claim victimhood. The official East German line was that the bombing of Dresden was a war crime by the British and the Americans. When I talked to people in Dresden, they tended to take more the view that it was a great tragedy. I knew two older women who had survived the bombing, and they looked back on it as a tragedy rather than a crime. I was asked a number of times by different people, not just in Dresden, why the city had been bombed, because of all of the different conspiracy theories. I said that, by early 1945, the Allies had thousands of bombers, and hundreds of thousands of air crew, and the British and the American governments had devoted very large proportions of their total war effort to creating this destructive mechanism, so they could not just not use it. And we were running out of targets, among other things.

I would say there was a gap between the official East German government position, which was the bombing of Dresden was a war crime by the Western Allies, and the recognition most East Germans had, which was that yes, it's a terrible tragedy and we don't understand it, but look at all the destruction that our allies, the Soviets, did. One of the most interesting books published in East Germany during the time I was there—which was a very limited edition, it was hard for me to get a copy, I got it through contacts—was a very detailed two-volume inventory of the physical destruction that had taken place within the territory of the GDR during the war, and exactly when it had happened. Some was from British and American bombing, but a lot more was from fighting, and the fighting was overwhelmingly by the Soviet forces fighting their way into the Third Reich.

Both years when I went down to Dresden on the anniversary of the bombing for the commemoration, I was the only Western diplomat who did. I was not there in an official capacity, was not a representative, just there as a person. I didn't encounter any hostility. It was a very solemn occasion in those days. There was always a concert. The first year it was Beethoven's Missa Solemnis. The second year was in the Kreuzkirche; it was Brahms's German Requiem, which could have been written for Dresden. Afterwards all

the church bells in the city would ring during the period the bombs had fallen, and I would walk entirely alone through the cold streets and squares and embankments of that beautiful city. It was a very, very solemn event, the commemoration, and very moving for me.

Q: It wasn't a rabblerousing?

MERRY: No, the contrary. The kind of thing you get now, Neo-Nazis with the slogan that "Auschwitz plus Dresden equals zero," no, they never had that in those days. People in the GDR in the '70s, were—I wouldn't say resigned to their lot, but they were conscious of how narrow were the parameters of their lives. They all recognized why the map of Europe was the way it was. It was because Germany started a war and lost.

Recalling Dresden reminds me how cultural events could often be a point of entry to understanding the society. I knew a number of writers and attended openings of new plays that had a political content. Performances in cabarets or even the opera often carried a political undertone. I recall attending a production of the play Accidental Death of an Anarchist by the Italian Communist playwright Dario Fo. The play is a satire about Western societies, but the audience saw it in terms of East Germany, as a portrayal of the idiocy of officialdom in their own country; in fact, I do not think I have ever been in an audience which laughed so hard, or that I ever laughed so hard in a theater. I was with a couple of young friends, and we all saw the play as a send up of East Germany. But, because the author was a respected Italian communist, it could be produced.

Unlike the Soviet Union, where spiritual music was rarely performed in a concert environment, the GDR took great pride in supporting world-class ensembles to perform the passions and cantatas of Bach. I heard both passions in the Thomas Church in Leipzig at Easter in superb performances. East Berlin had two fine opera houses, plus lots of theater. Unlike today, there was little attempt to restage a traditional work to make it more "relevant." For example, the hyper-nationalist speech by Hans Sachs at the end of Wagner's Meistersinger was performed straight, without any gloss, though I must say it caused a bit of a stir among the audience.

In contrast, however, there is an interesting bit of history about the opera Fidelio in East Germany. This is Beethoven's only opera, about freedom, and the first half ends with the famous chorus of prisoners who sing about their dream of freedom returning. I was told the first performance in East Berlin after the Wall went up led to an actual riot in the opera house, so it was taken off the repertoire for some time. However, you cannot be a respectable German opera house and not perform Beethoven's only opera, which Hitler hated. So, they started performing it at the State Opera with the prisoners' chorus removed for some years. By the time I arrived, the production was complete – it was a very fine production, in fact, and the prisoners' chorus left much of the audience in tears – but an East German friend had told me the authorities kept a squad of riot police in back of the opera house during the performance, just in case. I was a bit skeptical of that, but during the intermission the first time I saw Fidelio in East Berlin, I went out and looked around. It took me awhile to find them, because they were in a truck in the courtyard of a

nearby building and, when I pulled open the canvas flap in back, there were a dozen riot cops in full gear. Thereafter, whenever Fidelio was on the playbill, I would drop by to check if the riot cops were present; they always were. That says a lot about the attitude of the regime toward its population and toward the uses and dangers of culture. It is also the kind of experience and knowledge you only gain by living in a place.

The cultural life of West Berlin was also, of course, open to me in all its richness. By an odd chance, I got to know the great conductor Erich Leinsdorf, when he was visiting West Berlin for some guest appearances. A mutual friend told me he wanted to visit East Berlin, so I escorted him, his wife and another friend around the east, took them to museums and to lunch – for me, very much a pleasure and privilege. Then, he invited me to be his guest at both a concert and the opera in West Berlin. It turned out he was very appreciative of the Foreign Service in general, and he later invited me to performances in Washington and New York, and to their apartment on Fifth Avenue. I was fairly overwhelmed, but delighted. This is the kind of special treat that life in the Foreign Service can bring.

Q: I am just concerned here, for people who want to go back to archives, the two interesting movies that came out, was it Listening to Others? Was that it?

MERRY: The Lives of Others.

Q: The Lives of Others, about the Stasi, and the other one was a comedy, Goodbye Lenin.

MERRY: They're both quite interesting. I have discussed both of those films with East German friends, and one of the things about The Lives of Others is that East Germans tend to say it's a very fine motion picture, it's very powerful, but it couldn't actually have happened like that. The notion of a Stasi officer being in a position where he could take mercy on one of his subjects just couldn't have happened, the officer would not have had the freedom of action. I think that's probably the truth. The films showed East Germany as it was later on, in the late '80s. I was seeing East Germany earlier when I could see the seeds, some of the buds, for what came to full flower a decade on, particularly the role of dissidents and opposition within the church, and the growing sense people had of the illegitimacy of much of their political system. But don't forget that East Germany was, by the standards of the socialist bloc, a success story economically. It might not have had the best life style, but it had the highest standard of living in the Eastern bloc.

Q: This brings up the question, in our economic section, was anybody pointing out that there's really, we talked about how successful East Germany was, but basically when it came time to take it over, we found that most of it wasn't worth a pile of dung, practically.

MERRY: That's something we'll come to in a few years, when I was on the German desk, when we had a superb economic reporting officer in East Berlin, who was informing Washington in great detail about the extent to which the East Germany economy in the mid-'80s was falling to pieces. Unfortunately only a couple of people in

Washington actually bothered to read these reports, myself being one of them. But in the late '70s, East Germany as an economy was, to some degree, at its apogee. The horrible pollution hadn't become really intolerable; the infrastructure wasn't yet falling to pieces. In the late '70s, East Germany had recovered from the war and the immediate post-war period, had emerged from the really grey tedium of the Ulbricht period, and was really not such a bad place to live. Most East Germans in the late '70s were looking back on the way things had been five, 10, 15 years earlier, and it had, in many respects, made a lot of progress, and people lived much better.

They certainly had higher standards of living than did other people in the bloc and they knew it. What they didn't have, of course, was something that was fairly fundamental, which is the ability to travel very much outside of their own country, and that was a huge inhibition. But if you looked at what was available in shops and stores, within the buying power of average people, this was not a developing country. This was a semi-developed country, and in some respects, everything is a matter of comparison. I've told an East German friend of mine, who later went to live in Britain, that in the late '70s, average restaurant food—not top quality, but average restaurant food in East Germany—may have been better than average restaurant food in England, because average restaurant food in England was so ghastly. An average café in the GDR in the late '70s was certainly a more pleasant experience than going to an average café in the UK.

Q: I'll tell you, I was with our—I can't remember—Allied or occupation troops in Germany in the early '50s, and going to a German restaurant was a delight. I went on leave to Great Britain and my God.

MERRY: My God, yes.

Q: I'm thinking this is probably a good place to stop. We'll pick this up, the next time, where are you off to?

MERRY: Well, we might talk a little bit more about East Germany.

Q: All right. Can you think of something you'd like to talk about? We'll put it here and we'll pick it up.

MERRY: I think one of the things I would say, looking back on it, is that my two years in East Germany were not the most important for me professionally. Either of my Moscow assignments were more important in terms of the substance and content of what I was doing. But my two years in East Germany, in personal terms, were probably the most important of my entire Foreign Service life.

Q: What you've described is a very good view of a country at a particular time. For an historian, I think this is probably going to be very valuable.

MERRY: What made it so important to me are the personal relationships. There is no country I have been in where I developed more and more important personal friendships

than I did in East Germany, and these are personal friendships which were not just at that time, but continue now to this day. I still have some personal friendships from Russia, from Greece, but my years in East Germany, in terms of human relationships—and this would surprise most people who would think, how could you get to know people that well in East Germany? In terms of human relationships, my two years in East Germany were probably the most important of my adult life.

Q: We'll pick this up, then, the next time. Where did you go?

MERRY: Moscow.

Q: This was when, what year?

MERRY: '80.

Q: OK, we'll pick it up then.

MERRY: OK.

Q: Today is the 31st of March 2010, with Wayne Merry. Wayne, where did we leave off?

MERRY: We were completing a discussion of my two-year assignment to the embassy in East Berlin, and, for the most part, this was one of the best, if not the best, personal experiences I ever had in the Foreign Service. It certainly was, both professionally and personally, a memorable two years for me. It was also the assignment which finally got me off probation in the Foreign Service. That took a long time because part of my performance file from Tunis had been removed due to a grievance and then my reports from the Marine Corps were not taken seriously because they were written outside the building. So, it was not till my fourth posting, after three short ones, that I finally became a tenured member of the Foreign Service and could think about future assignments in a serious way.

There was one negative aspect of my Berlin years which I should mention, and that was the relationship between the embassy and its ambassador, which became quite difficult. I arrived shortly before a new ambassador, David Bolen, arrived. Almost from the first day, the relationship between the ambassador, a career Foreign Service officer, and the staff was fraught with tension, which became very stressful at times. This led to a Foreign Service inspection near the end of my assignment, which resulted in an extremely negative report on the ambassador. In retrospect, it remains difficult for me to pin down exactly what the problem was. The question of race obviously looms, because Bolen was African-American, but I hope this was not the issue. At least, I never heard racist remarks among the staff. From my perspective, a continuing difficulty was that the ambassador wanted his embassy to be something it never could be. He wanted to develop a relationship of trust with the leadership of the GDR and for our embassy to have a standing comparable to that of other U.S. embassies in the Soviet bloc. Those things simply were not going to happen.

Ambassador Bolen talked a lot about his efforts to engage with what he called "top people" in the GDR. These were representatives of the so-called bloc parties, small, captive political parties that played a marginal, cosmetic role. He had very little contact with really senior figures. He had one meeting each with most of the politburo members, but not even all of them. None of the GDR leadership ever came to an event at the ambassador's residence. The East German foreign ministry was a nonentity within the political system, so there really wasn't a lot to engage with, but that reflected the reality of the relationship. The East German ambassador in Washington didn't have a whole lot of *entrée* either, but that's because the relationship between the United States and the GDR was one at the margins. I thought it a lot more interesting to deal with nonofficial people, and the ambassador, if he had chosen, could have interacted with writers and artists and people in the church. A lot of interesting people would have welcomed opportunities to meet with the U.S. Ambassador. His predecessor, John Sherman Cooper, had a very wide range of contacts in a short time. But Ambassador Bolen was really not interested in that kind of person. He was interested in trying to engage with officials, but the officials available to him were not first string in the GDR system.

I think Ambassador Bolen was unrealistic about the nature of German policy issues, despite being an obviously intelligent person. He came to the embassy with a background largely in commercial promotion and, in my opinion, was somewhat out of his depth in dealing with inner-German issues, Berlin, and general East-West relations at that period of the Cold War. He was in almost continual conflict with his deputy and his principal section heads. I must say that he treated me, in most respects, quite well. He obviously appreciated that my reporting received praise from the department, and he liked the fact that I could write up his official meetings with the kind of detail and specificity he wanted. He treated me as well, if not better, than anybody else at post, but even I had some problems with him. I suspect it was a personality issue as much as anything else. In time, however, it became a political issue, because he acquired a reputation for being sympathetic to the East German government.

Over time the ambassador's standing in Washington was largely discredited, a reflection both of his efforts to make the relationship with East Germany more friendly than Washington was prepared for and of inevitable feedback to Washington about difficulties within the embassy. I never badmouthed the ambassador to Washington, but I suppose some of my personal comments to colleagues at the Mission in West Berlin found their way back to the Department. So, even when the ambassador made recommendations I would support, they tended to be dead on arrival in Washington because of his reputation as "soft" on the GDR. This reputation was unfair and, certainly, nobody in the embassy was more an advocate of improving the relationship than I was, but during the Cold War you simply needed to be known as "tough," and Bolen was not. I later learned that a senior GDR official went to Washington with the message, "Look, send us your hardest line Cold Warrior; we can deal with that. But send us someone you trust." Even the GDR had come to understand that the American ambassador lacked credibility in Washington and that was not in their interest.

These tensions reflected the changing character of the Foreign Service, in that ambassadorial status by the late 1970s was not what it once was. An ambassador no longer enjoyed the automatic authority of a naval ship captain. Successful ambassadors now derived their legitimacy and authority more from leadership than from command. I have worked under some really excellent ambassadors who demonstrated that ability, my next ambassador in Moscow being a classic case. The contrast between Ambassador Bolen, who never really bonded with his staff, and Ambassador Hartman, who did so supremely well, was illustrative of the changing nature of the service, and of relations between diplomatic staff and chiefs of mission.

Q: Did you find yourself in a position where you and others at the embassy tried to sit down and figure out what made this man tick, or—I don't want to use the wrong term—how to get around him or get what had to be done to make more of an impact in Washington than perhaps he was able to?

MERRY: There was a lot of back-channel complaining to Washington. I never engaged in it in part because, as a young officer just tenured in the Foreign Service, I didn't have anybody to back channel to. It is also not really my style. A good deal of it passed through the Mission in West Berlin, because they heard the gossip from our embassy and were in very close touch with people in Washington, so it all got back, perhaps in somewhat aggravated form.

In any case, this was a difficult aspect of the assignment, though one which I must say my immediate boss, political counselor Otho Eskin, and the DCM (Deputy Chief of Mission) Sol Polansky, largely shielded me from. Partly because of my junior position, I was, more or less a noncombatant in some of this internal strife.

Q: Who replaced him?

MERRY: Bolen was replaced by Herbert Okun.

Q: Herb was a very tough-minded guy.

MERRY: Yes. Washington took seriously the challenge from the GDR, "Send us your hardest line Cold Warrior." I got to know Okun in East Berlin because I returned several times during the four years after my departure to visit with friends, and I always checked in with the embassy, with my successors, plural, since when I left my position was replaced by two officers. I always let the embassy know what I was hearing. Ambassador Okun was extremely welcoming to me as sort of a GDR-nik. He had initially consulted with me in Washington after his nomination. Ambassador Okun always welcomed my visits and my contribution and he even sent out reporting I wrote. He didn't feel that a political officer from the embassy in Moscow running around his turf was in any way untoward. I was always up front about it: I got country clearance and all that. He was very welcoming of my continuing personal engagement in the GDR.

Q: You left there when?

MERRY: I left there in 1979.

Q: Was there any thought, while you were there—we're talking ten years later, it was gone. But was there any thought that something like that might happen?

MERRY: Not, certainly, in such a short time frame. To begin with, the Soviet position on Germany was still adamantine. Without flexibility from Moscow, the parameters of potential change in the GDR were very limited. I'll talk about this later, when we get to my work on East Germany in the Department in the mid-'80s. At this time, the late '70s, the East German economy was actually doing quite well, whereas by the late '80s the East German economy was in genuine crisis. During the early years of the U.S. diplomatic presence in East Berlin, the GDR had kind of reached maturity. The Ulbricht regime was out in 1971. The Honecker regime was as effective as it ever was. They had not yet entirely alienated themselves from the population, and the economy had been doing quite well for a number of years. The standard of living in East Germany in the late '70s was the highest of anywhere in the socialist bloc. Higher than Czechoslovakia, higher than Poland, higher even than Hungary. Certainly much better than the Soviet Union or any of the other countries. So the GDR looked to be, in its socialist bloc context, like a success story. And it was.

That the GDR within seven or eight years would be in very serious economic crisis and heading toward economic collapse, as well as political and social crisis, was certainly not evident then. Later, I saw it very clearly in the mid-1980s. But when I left East Berlin in 1979, I would say no. It looked to me as I think it would have looked to most people, and certainly as it appeared to the West German government, as a political and economic reality in Central Europe we would be dealing with for the foreseeable future. I think everybody in Bonn, everybody in Washington, assumed the German Democratic Republic would be part of the map of Europe for as long as any of us were alive.

Q: You left in '79. Where did you go?

MERRY: I went back to Washington for a year of Russian language training at the Foreign Service Institute, which was not as satisfactory an experience as my German language training had been. They were using new, touchy-feely instruction techniques that were, in my view, not as rigorous, not as systematic, not as grammar-oriented as my German training had been. Many of the students were dissatisfied; a number of students, including from other U.S. government agencies, complained about the lack of rigor, the lack of structure and what I would say was a lack of firm grounding in grammar. If you don't know good verb grammar in a language you don't know much, do you? According to the new techniques they were using, we were supposed to learn the language as if we were little children. The problem is that we're not children. Little children have minds like sponges and don't feel the need for structure in learning, whereas adults do.

So, it was not a satisfactory language learning experience, though very useful as a bonding period with a large crew going out to Moscow in 1980, not just from the State

Department but from the Pentagon and CIA and the Department of Agriculture and USIA (United States Information Agency). We got to know each other at FSI during our year there, and we developed a team spirit we took with us to Moscow. This contributed to one aspect of Embassy Moscow I greatly valued, the sense of teamwork across interdepartmental lines. Representing different Washington bureaucracies abroad does affect the nature of the work you do, but I don't think I've ever been in an embassy in which people worked together as a true country team as much as in Moscow in the early '80s. It was partly the adversarial nature of our relationship with the host country, the Soviet Union, but there was little of this, "my agency comes first." It was "we are all working for the same country," and there were very good personal relations across interagency lines. I certainly had excellent personal and professional ties with colleagues from other parts of the government; worked very well with them.

During this year I also did extensive reading on the Soviet Union and Russian history, with a special emphasis on the Russian church, as I intended to look into it as I had done in the GDR. I also prepared physically for the Moscow assignment, as I knew the reputation of the place as unhealthy and physically demanding. After language training every day I would swim laps, as I wanted to be in good shape for Moscow. This was a fairly immersive year of preparation, and none too much as it happened.

The broader political context is important to keep in mind. The Soviets invaded Afghanistan at the end of 1979, putting a deep chill on East-West relations. The United States led a partial boycott of the Moscow Olympics in the summer of 1980, which was deeply resented by the Soviet leadership and by many ordinary Soviet citizens. Whatever efforts the Carter Administration had made to further detente not only died in Afghanistan, but the relationship with the Soviet Union became an important topic in the 1980 U.S. presidential election campaign, with Ronald Reagan pledging a robust military buildup and a forceful response to perceived Soviet expansionism. So, the atmosphere in which I arrived in Moscow in October 1980 was not only chilly in a literal sense, but in a political one as well. We were in one of the tense periods of the Cold War, with things going to get worse before they got better.

The Soviet action in Afghanistan had a very direct impact on me, as I had been assigned to help open a new consulate in Kiev. This was part of the general detente policy of the Carter Administration, but the White House decided to punish Moscow for Afghanistan by delaying the establishment of the post in Kiev indefinitely. This was later described by Jack Matlock as a policy of "if you don't do what I want, I'll cut off my big toe." Certainly, we did no damage to the Soviet Union, it was just a case of Washington wanting to look tough without doing anything which might actually entail risks or costs. In any case, the rug was pulled out from under me, but I landed very well because I was almost immediately reassigned to Moscow. So, in truth, I probably lucked out.

Q: You were there in Moscow from 1980 to…

MERRY: '83. Embassy Moscow in its State elements was staffed in an interesting way. The State Department always had more political and economic officers wanting to go to

Moscow than it had positions, but it always had too few administrative and consular officers bidding for jobs there. Often the way you got an assignment to Moscow was by agreeing to spend one year in either in the Consular Section or in the Admin Section, and then moving to a position in the Political or Economics Section. In many cases, of a standard two-year assignment, as Moscow was a hardship post, only one was in the officer's professional area. I did three years on this tour, one year in the Consular Section and two years in the Political Section. I'm not complaining about this, because the year I spent in the Consular Section was one of the most interesting and rewarding I ever had. It was an absolutely fascinating experience. To begin with, consular work in Moscow in the Cold War was intensely political. To illustrate, we had six American officers in the Consular Section that year: two consuls, of whom I was one, and four vice-consuls. Of those six, only one was an actual consular cone officer. The others were all political and economic officers doing their year in Consular before they went upstairs to the other sections.

It was a fascinating place to work, and not a routine consular section at all. I got my baptism of fire on my very first day in country. I flew in from East Berlin—I'd been back there to visit East German friends—in October of 1980, and was met at the airport by my new boss, Kent Brown, a political officer who had recently taken over the Consular Section. I was his deputy. We went to the embassy, where it was the lunch period. The Consular Section was on the ground floor of the old embassy, whereas all the reporting sections were upstairs. I went into the Consular Section to get acquainted and look at what would be my office. While doing so, the receptionist came back and said, "There's an American woman out front insisting that she see a consular officer immediately." I foolishly agreed to meet with her. What I should have said is, "Look, I haven't even checked in, I just got off the plane. She's going to have to wait half an hour until one of the vice-consuls comes back from lunch." But, no, in my enthusiasm I agreed to meet with her.

The woman comes into my office, closes the door, and starts taking her clothes off and threatens to commit suicide. Honest to God, this was my first professional experience in Moscow on the day I arrived. Her story, in brief, was that she was a former Soviet citizen who had emigrated to the United States years before, become a U.S. citizen, and changed her name so she could come back on a group tour to retrieve manuscripts of her writings she had left behind in safekeeping. The reason she was taking her clothes off was these manuscripts were concealed on her person. She threatened to commit suicide if I did not agree to send the manuscripts out through the diplomatic pouch, so she could have her writings when she got back to the United States. This was in my very first hour of my first day on the job in Moscow. Obviously the first thing I did was try to calm her down somewhat, and the second was to get hold of our real American Citizens Services vice-consul, to contribute his invaluable experience in dealing with U.S. citizens abroad.

What could illustrate better the intensely political nature of consular work in Moscow than to have this on my hands first thing? Our initial concern was to get this woman the hell out of the Soviet Union before they figured out who she really was, because her passport did not show she was born in the Soviet Union. Her passport indicated she was a

native-born American. We got her out of the Soviet Union before we had a real problem on our hands, but then we were stuck with the manuscript and what to do with it. Under international law it was not proper for us to use the diplomatic pouch to send it out. The issue was eventually resolved and she got her papers, though it took a lot of back and forth with the Department. We had her manuscript, which was several inches thick, sitting in the vault in the Consular Section for several months. This incident illustrates that in Moscow nothing was routine in consular work. Absolutely nothing.

Most of our work had to do with Cold War issues—we had a big program of Armenian immigration, of Armenians leaving Soviet Armenia for southern California, for purposes of family reunification, and every one of these cases involved complex human issues. We also did a considerable amount of non-immigrant visa work, particularly for third country people. There were large numbers of Third-World students in Moscow who, as soon as they had completed their university training in the Soviet Union, wanted to go to the U.S.A. and not back to Bangladesh or Sierra Leone or wherever it was that they came from. Not surprisingly, very few of them got a visa from us. We were also involved in reciprocity issues with the Soviets, what I called the "visa wars" of tit for tat visa denials, often to little purpose. From that experience, I acquired a lasting skepticism about sanctions in situations where both sides can play the game.

Given how little tourism and trade there was in those days, we had a substantial number of American citizens who got themselves into problems of one kind or another in the Soviet Union. Issues that would have been straightforward in most other posts were anything but in Moscow. We also had—and this was particularly my responsibility during this year—seven Soviet citizens who were living in temporary refuge in the embassy.

Q: This is at the consulate?

MERRY: Within the embassy but the responsibility of the Consular Section. They were the so-called "Siberian Seven," seven members of two families of Pentecostals from a city named Chernogorsk in Western Siberia. This was a very highly-publicized case in the United States. The responsibility for this case, and for the actual care and feeding of these seven individuals, rested with me. I spent a lot of time with them and found them both deeply sympathetic and frustrating to deal with. These people had become, in many respects, reflective of the Soviet system which had oppressed them. Pentecostals had been subject to all kinds of Soviet pressures, repression and discrimination, and because of that experience they were intensely suspicious people. Suspicious of everyone, including suspicious of the American Embassy which was giving them temporary refuge, and much of that suspicion came for a time to focus on me. It was my job to tell them the truth that their migration desires could never come to fruition as they wanted but only by compromising with the realities of Soviet emigration procedures.

What made the case especially difficult was that it was not about seven people, it was, in fact, an immigration case of 29 people, because the size of the two families was 29, only seven of whom were at the embassy at Moscow. The other 22, from two different

families—and the two families were often not on speaking terms—were back in Chernogorsk. The seven were not interested in simply emigrating from the embassy to the United States. They were not willing to leave either the Soviet Union or the embassy without all of their family members. Many people in the United States did not understand that this was not about seven people, this was about 29 people. Relations between the families were often quite tense, and their relations with the embassy were also tense. The Soviet authorities would not even talk to us about this case. As far as they were concerned, the solution was for the United States to throw these people out of the embassy and for them to go back to Chernogorsk and apply for exit permission. Well, they had been applying for exit permission for decades, literally decades. They had in fact been to the embassy several times before, over a period of many years, seeking help in getting out of the Soviet Union.

The case, happily, was successfully resolved, but not during the period I was in the Consular Section but a year later, after I'd moved to the Political Section. It finally did involve the families going back to Chernogorsk. This was after the change in U.S. administrations and some fairly high-level negotiations between the early Reagan Administration and Soviet authorities, which met the Soviet requirement that these people could not emigrate directly from the embassy, that they had to go back to Chernogorsk. There were assurances given in Washington, from President Reagan personally, that the United States Government would not embarrass the Soviet Union if it did allow these people to leave.

The seven lived in the embassy, in two rooms on the ground floor of the south wing, for almost five years, but they did eventually achieve their goal. A central problem in the early years was simply the publicity issue, that the Soviet authorities were absolutely adamant they were not going to be forced into letting people emigrate through what they saw as a public relations stunt of taking refuge inside the U.S. Embassy. The final compromise involved a promise from President Reagan matched by a commitment from the Soviets that, if the people did go back to Chernogorsk, then their applications would be approved. Making that all happen took literally years. I contributed about 10 months to that process, but it went on for another year and more before it actually came to fruition. During my time on the case, the gap between Washington and Moscow was too wide to effect a deal. It was ultimately the personal intervention of the new U.S. President that closed the gap, so the Soviets could say, "All we've ever said was that these people had to obey our laws and obey our procedures." That was, in fact, humbug, because these two families had been following the procedures for many years and had never gotten anywhere.

It was quite an educational experience for me in the political culture of the Soviet Union. It was a cultural challenge for me to speak with people who were ill-prepared to believe anything they heard from any official, even an American official. I had not previously encountered such a mentality. During one period I had a series of conversations with them about what I came to call the "helicopter fantasy," when they believed the solution to their case was to get the other 22 family members to Moscow, to come into the embassy, and then the Americans would send a helicopter to land on the embassy roof

and they would all fly off to the United States. Of course, they had seen pictures of the evacuation from Saigon and imagined something similar could be done for them. It was quite a job to persuade them that we could not fly a helicopter into the middle of the Soviet Union, land on the roof of the U.S. Embassy and take 29 people off to live happily ever after in the U.S.A.—that took a lot of persuading. I had an Air Force colleague speak to them about it. That was only one aspect of a continuing effort to convince them that we were their friends and champions and not their enemies. That's what I spent my time doing, dealing with things like the helicopter fantasy. In addition, they did not actually want to go to the United States, which they regarded as hopelessly decadent, but to the Biblical Kingdom of Israel. Not the contemporary State of Israel, mind you, but its Old Testament predecessor. Kind of hard to issue visas for that.

It was a terrifically good year. We had a great team, not just the six of us who were Foreign Service, but our other American employees, and I would say even our Soviet local employees. We had a lot of work. We had a number of serious incidents. We had several cases of people using violence to seek entry to the embassy, not always Soviet citizens but sometimes third-country nationals. We had a lot of problems with physical security. The American Embassy was, of course, one of the most well-known political venues in the Soviet capital. The Consular Section was on the ground floor of the north wing right at the front entrance archway, with Soviet guards on the sidewalk but no American security of any kind, so anything that came through the archway tended to come in to us. The Marines were upstairs guarding the so-called "core." Downstairs we had no security other than the Soviet guards, while our policy supposedly welcomed free access to the embassy. That was not always wise, as we had several violent people force their way in. During the final months of my consular assignment when I was acting head of the section, I made some strong representations to the front office that our security problems needed attention. It was only after a Soviet man with a shotgun got into the residential part of the complex that this problem was addressed.

While the question of Soviet dissidents was largely the responsibility of the Political Section, we in Consular had a role to play concerning those seeking to leave the country, coordinating with our colleagues at the Dutch Embassy about Jewish emigration, because the Dutch were the protecting power for Israeli interests and for immigration to Israel. We had a number of cases of Soviet Jews who had an American connection and sought to go to America. Some had claims to U.S. citizenship, so we were involved in that. We had a surprisingly large number of cases of claims to dual citizenship, often from descendents of Americans sent by Henry Ford when he established some plants out in the Urals…

Q: These are the red diaper babies.

MERRY: Yes, and these families often got stuck there under Stalin. There were also people who had been American citizens and had gone back home to their countries of Latvia, Lithuania or Estonia when those republics were independent between the wars and then were caught when the countries were taken over by Stalin. Some of these people were still alive, but mostly it was a question of their children. In many cases, they had legitimate claims to U.S. citizenship. In our view they were binationals, Soviet and

American, and we had to represent their interests.

One fine day I had a young man come in to see me, a Soviet citizen who announced that he was the son of Donald Maclean, of Burgess and Maclean the famous British espionage duo, and he was claiming U.S. citizenship.

Q: How come? Maclean, of course, was British.

MERRY: Maclean was British and had been a British diplomat in Washington, but Mrs. Maclean was an American citizen, and there were three children: a daughter who was born in the UK and two sons born in the U.S. The father had been on the so-called "blue list." He had full diplomatic privileges and immunities, so being born on U.S. soil didn't give his son U.S. citizenship, but the fact that his mother was an American citizen did. It was adjudicated that he had a legitimate claim to U.S. citizenship. Here was the offspring of one of the most famous espionage cases of the 20th century coming into my office, saying, "I'm Donald Marling Maclean, and I was born so-and-so, and I'm claiming U.S. citizenship, and I want you to get me the hell out of here before I get drafted into the Soviet army." These were the kinds of cases we had.

Q: What happened with that?

MERRY: We could give him a U.S. passport. The trouble is, we couldn't give him a Soviet exit permit. That was a separate issue. Eventually the kid did get out, but the fact he had a legitimate claim to U.S. citizenship and a U.S. passport couldn't guarantee him departure from the Soviet Union. None of these cases was purely consular. In many other countries a claim to U.S. citizenship would be a fairly straightforward matter of paperwork. In Moscow, nothing was straightforward and nothing was simple.

What else did we do? We set up a proxy marriage in Montana for the child of Yelena Bonner, the wife of Andrei Sakharov who was in internal exile at the time; the child was from her first marriage. I once represented the daughter of a famous Soviet film star who was murdered under very suspicious circumstances. The daughter was in the U.S. but was not allowed by the Soviets to attend her mother's funeral, so I did. I visited families of people with claims to U.S. citizenship in places like western Belarus, the Baltic states and Armenia, if only to demonstrate they had not been forgotten. I was the point man with the foreign ministry on the Polovchak case of a Ukrainian family which had gone to the States and the parents decided to return to the Soviet Union but their two offspring thought otherwise. That was all over the front pages in both countries. I counseled American students who wanted to marry their Soviet boy or girlfriends, whose interest was often purely in getting to America. Never a dull day in Moscow Consular. There were a number of cases I cannot speak about, even now. I recall it as pure variety, with lots of things I never would have anticipated. Made for a great year.

I also, of course, was getting settled in Moscow and to life in the Soviet Union. I had never even visited the place, but I was completely smitten with the experience from my first day. Of course, for an American diplomat, this was the most important posting in the

world, and it was also something of the front trench of the Cold War. I thought it a privilege to serve there, and so did many of my colleagues. Not all, there were people in the embassy who really hated the place and bitched and moaned about it all the time. Given my previous fascination with East Germany, it is probably not too surprising that I took to service in the Soviet Union with real enthusiasm. In addition, I genuinely liked living in Moscow. God knows, it is not a user-friendly place, but I was in my early 30's and single and full of beans, so I was more than ready to enjoy the place. The housing was modest but quite adequate. The working conditions were, by most diplomatic standards, pretty spare and even primitive, but I did not mind. I found the city of Moscow absolutely fascinating from the very start and just loved exploring it and soaking up its history.

One thing I learned very quickly was to wear hats. I had never used hats before, but in Moscow you can die in the winter without a fur hat. In addition, not to have a hat on of some kind except in summer marked you as a foreigner. So, I learned to wear hats and have never stopped. One thing which struck me early on was the very different human dynamic of standing in lines in the Soviet Union from the lines I had known in the GDR. East Germans stood in lots of lines, but with a note of anticipation and impatience. In contrast, Muscovites endured their lines with a stoic resignation and a wary realism that there might be nothing left for them after the long wait. The experience reminded me of something George Kennan had written, that textual study of the Soviet Union was inadequate until a person had stood in Russian lines. Without having Russian mud on your shoes, you could not really understand the place, he said. He was right. I later often saw the distinction in perceptions of Russian realities between those Americans who had and had not spent serious time standing in Russian lines.

Q: Well, a little time there, we might as well cover this. Were you particularly, or your colleagues, targeted by the KGB?

MERRY: In my own case, that started intensively when I moved from Consular to Political. I think this was the experience of many people, that during the year in which you were working in the Administrative Section or the Consular Section, the attention from the KGB was fairly moderate. Once you went into the Political Section the attention went up very sharply. That certainly was my experience. Unlike many of my colleagues, I did not experience much initial attention from the KGB for purposes of file building because obviously they already had my file from their colleagues in East Germany. They didn't have to start a file on me; they inherited a very adequate file. This does not mean we were not under surveillance, but even the KGB had to establish priorities. In East Berlin, the foreign diplomatic community was tiny. In Moscow, it would have required inordinate manpower to perform intensive surveillance on all of us all the time.

I might note that during this first year in Moscow, the year in the Consular Section, we had two chiefs of mission. One was the outgoing U.S. ambassador from President Carter, Thomas Watson of the IBM family, whom I scarcely got to know because he left a couple of months after the election. He seemed a very amiable and rather popular ambassador. With the election of Ronald Reagan came the question of a new ambassador

to Moscow. The new Reagan team decided, since Ambassador Watson had departed with the end of the Carter Administration, to send Jack Matlock, an experienced senior Soviet specialist in the Foreign Service, to be chargé d'Affaires on an interim basis until they settled who would be ambassador. Matlock expected this was going to be a few months; it turned out to be 10 months. He didn't even bring all the seasonal clothing he was going to need. In any case, Jack Matlock—who, of course, later was ambassador to Moscow in his own right—got to spend 10 months as chargé in Moscow. I think he enjoyed it enormously.

During most of this time I was in the Consular Section, and that led to some interesting supervisory issues, because Jack had himself served in the Consular Section in an early assignment. He exercised more direct oversight of the Consular Section than most chiefs of mission would. In most embassies the front office wants the Consular Section to do its work competently and not to worry about it. Matlock was one of the very few chiefs of mission who wanted to scrutinize outgoing consular cable traffic and know the details of consular cases. As our cases were often very political, there was some justification for this, but as the acting head of the section for about the last four months I was there, I would have preferred a front office less directly engaged. In any case, I never had anything but good personal ties with Jack Matlock. He is, of course, something of a legend in his own time as a Soviet specialist within the Foreign Service. I mention this because this was the only time I ever worked for him. I never worked on the Soviet desk, and I was not at the embassy when he was ambassador. My only period working with Jack was when he was chargé and I was acting head of the Consular Section.

This was the only consular assignment I ever had in the Foreign Service. Many people complain about having to do a consular tour of duty at the beginning of their Foreign Service career. I didn't do one. My first consular assignment was not as a vice-consul but as a consul, first the deputy head and then the acting head of an important section. I enjoyed it thoroughly, and I think it was a very educational experience. I had daily contact with ordinary Soviet citizens and with real problems created by the Soviet system. In Consular, we saw the human grit and grimness of Soviet life a bit more close up than was the case in the rest of the embassy. We dealt with real human tragedy. One case involved two sisters who had been separated for decades, one in America and one in a village in Ukraine. A real human drama worthy of a great writer. Sometimes we could really help people, whether Americans or Soviets, and that is not something you get to do much in a political section. The intense gratitude of local people whom we could help was something I would not experience again. One elderly woman from Estonia told me I was the first official she had encountered in her entire life who had treated her with respect; she wept at the experience of simple courtesy from an official. Every day in that job was more of an education in Soviet reality than a year of reading. I was a better and more effective political officer in the following two years because of my consular year, plus we never had a dull moment.

Then, in 1981, I moved up to the Political Section, which in Moscow was divided into two. They were called External and Internal. Political/External dealt with Soviet foreign policy, both bilateral with the United States and Soviet policy toward the rest of the

world. Political/Internal dealt with Soviet domestic affairs. I was in Political/Internal, which was definitely what I wanted and was there for two years during a fascinating transitional phase in the Soviet Union. This included the last year of Leonid Brezhnev's rule, the coming to power of Yuri Andropov after Brezhnev's death, the end of what later came to be called the "era of stagnation," and a period of great ferment under the surface. To most outside observers, there was very little going on politically in the Soviet Union other than one old man following another at the top. That was very misleading. In fact, there was an enormous amount going on and it was the job of the Political/Internal Section in the Moscow embassy to try to get below the surface to find out what was happening and, of course, to report this to Washington and explain what it all meant.

There were six officers in Political/Internal. Other people in the embassy made contributions to domestic affairs reporting, but the work focussed on a half dozen of us. This was a much larger reporting unit than any other Western embassy had; only the Chinese had more. The chief, in the job I had a decade later, was Kent Brown, who had been my boss during the previous year in consular. We got on famously, and I can say I have rarely had so smooth a working relationship with an immediate superior, and I have been pretty lucky in that regard overall. One officer was responsible almost full time for dealing with Jewish refuseniks, a demanding and difficult position, which brought with it very heavy KGB harassment. One officer was our Sovietologist and Kremlinologist, a guy of rare talent and skill in this regard. He was extremely valuable. My own area of interest and responsibility was primarily nationalities. I was in a job which required me—and I might say allowed me—to travel a lot in country. I was the most traveled Foreign Service officer in the embassy in my two years in Political/Internal. I got to all fifteen of the union republics and to a total of 74 cities of the Soviet Union.

My job was to get out of Moscow and explore those parts of the Soviet Union we were allowed to visit and, of course, report on it. This was similar to my job in the GDR, but much more challenging. Diplomatic travel in the Soviet Union was nothing like as easy or productive as it had been in East Germany. Many parts of the Soviet Union were prohibited to us, closed to travel by foreign diplomats, involving huge amounts of territory and many cities we would very much have liked to visit. We also only traveled in pairs; that was our own requirement for security reasons. Any trip I wanted to make, other than to Leningrad where we had a consulate, I had to find somebody to go with me. That usually meant someone from another section, since it was difficult to take two people away from any one section at the same time. I would travel with somebody from Political/External, or another section, or even someone from another Western embassy. Sometimes I traveled with one of the military attachés, despite their intelligence role which greatly increased surveillance. Many people in the embassy wanted to travel for personal reasons, to see something of the country, but often their jobs militated against it. Other than the military attaches who had special reporting interests, it was unusual for an assignment to require domestic travel, so I was often limited by the need for a travel partner.

The logistics of travel in the Soviet Union were also a problem, because of the scale of the place and the fairly primitive facilities. Winter travel could be especially fraught with

uncertainty. There were any number of trips I tried to organize that, for one reason or another, never came off. Occasionally the Soviets would refuse permission, because we had to get foreign ministry authorization every time we left the Moscow area, but often it was something more practical. It required constant effort, but it was worth it. During those two years, I traveled around the Russian Federation, throughout Central Asia and the Baltic states, into the Caucasus, Ukraine and Moldova. These were very eye-opening because you could get a false impression from being only in Moscow or Leningrad.

Q: I'm told that you stepped outside of the outer ring of Moscow and all of a sudden you're in the 16th century.

MERRY: I wouldn't go quite that far, but if you got much beyond the ring highway, yes, you went back in time. There were places within suburban Moscow where I have seen peasant women doing their laundry in winter by taking a big rock and bashing a hole in the ice of the stream or pond. The enormous contrasts of underdevelopment and mis-development that the Soviet Union presented were much more obvious when you got outside of Moscow or Leningrad. I happened to love living in Moscow. This was not, perhaps, typical of most Westerners there and certainly not of most American Embassy staff, but I enjoyed Moscow. Some colleagues in the embassy found my enthusiasm a bit weird, but after all this was one of the great cities of the world, the Cold War notwithstanding. I found Moscow a fascinating, stimulating, interesting place to be, and I got to meet and know many Russians, to be invited to Russian events, and to Russian homes. I got to know people especially in the arts communities, such as painters, jazz musicians, actors and graphic artists and people engaged in a variety of semi-legal and semi-underground cultural activities. I found Moscow a very engaging city, also, in terms of searching out its history. I loved to find and explore the old monasteries that had been converted to secular purposes. The city was full of older buildings with a role in some aspect of the city's history that had been swallowed up by urban expansion. You really had to hunt for a lot of these places.

In fact, after a year or so, I started writing a series of articles for the embassy newsletter of historical walks around the city of Moscow. I had developed these for my own purposes, but I wanted others to know how easy it was to find places of historical interest in the city. I started the series out of frustration hearing people complain at lunch that there was nothing to do, nothing of interest in Moscow. My first article simply revealed some the wonderful historical structures within a ten minute walk of our front gate. This series became fairly well known within the diplomatic community, although the articles were far from scholarly. In fact, the last time I was at the Embassy, I found they still have a compilation of them for staff, though they are far out of date. I have always been an enthusiastic urban walker, so it was natural for me to explore any city. It also reflected the fact that I found Moscow anything but the gray, dreary, boring, tedious stereotype.

I am particularly fond of classical music, and Moscow is a first-class music city. I went many times to performances at the Great Hall of the Conservatory, one of the great concert halls of the world, and to other venues. Obviously, this included the Bolshoi. Despite the prevailing negative perception, getting tickets to the Bolshoi in those days

was not a problem for diplomats. In this three year tour I went over 70 times, both for opera and ballet. In my two Moscow tours I saw "Boris Godunov" at the Bolshoi eight times. Moscow was also a great theater city, though the acting style in those days was sometimes a bit stilted. Diplomats had special access to just about everything, if we went to the trouble. The embassy ticket lady, a Soviet employee, got to know my interests and tastes quite well, as I was an excellent customer. I am sure this was reported for my KGB file, but they knew it already from my opera and theater-going in Berlin.

Getting to know this complex and challenging city consumed a lot of my weekends, especially after I came to know some Russians and went around with them. Moscow reflects a history of forced urbanization under Stalin, but is really a number of Russian towns loosely patched together. Sometimes on a weekend, I'd get on the Metro—I did not have a car in Moscow, I used only the Metro, only public transpiration—and go out to one of the more distant, obscure Metro stations and just explore the neighborhood for half the day, sticking my head into shops and churches and parks and seeing what life was like, getting a feel for the place. On Sunday mornings I would go a different church, in part to see the interior and in part to observe attendance. There were about 45 working churches in Moscow at that time, and I went to them all over a couple of years. Some represented competing sects within the Orthodox church, like the Old Believers, and I could often strike up a conversation with someone. During Easter week, Holy Week, I was very active in going to church services, meeting people, getting a sense of who was still religiously active and the role of religion in Soviet society, which was much more alive than most people in the West imagined. Most families still had their children baptized, even if surreptitiously, and many young couple had church weddings.

I also spent a fair amount of time in Leningrad because our consulate there was always understaffed and frequently in need of temporary assistance. When they needed somebody to help out for a week or two, I would often volunteer. As I was a bachelor, I was frequently the only person who did volunteer. As a result I got to know this second great Russian city, both during the winter and in the summer during the famous White Nights. I spent about a month in Leningrad one summer. That was another city I just loved to explore; it is heaven for an urban walker. Leningrad was replete with not just political history but literary history. I searched out the places Dostoevsky had lived, and he moved a lot because he frequently couldn't pay the rent. I found places described in, for example, Crime and Punishment, that are real places. You can visit them. The city is full of places where political incidents took place during the Revolution or during the Siege or in earlier periods. Leningrad, in the winter or in the summer, was an utterly fascinating city to explore and to walk in.

Please do not imagine I did not work during those visits to Leningrad. This was my only experience working in a consulate, which I think are much better value for taxpayer money than huge embassies. I regret that we have closed so many consulates, as they are not only excellent places for younger diplomats to gain experience, but they are the best means of providing support to American citizens abroad who may need assistance with no embassy anywhere near. In the summer in Leningrad there were plenty of cases of Americans, especially students, with problems requiring consular support. In one odd

case, an American tourist required treatment in a psychiatric hospital for ten days. As the staff spoke no English, I went every morning to translate, taking great care to respect this citizen's privacy in what I would and would not translate. I imagine I was the only American diplomat who ever spent much time in a Soviet psychiatric facility, which gave me an opportunity to learn something about it from extensive talks with the staff while performing my consular duties.

As I didn't have a car and used public transportation and was walking extensively around Moscow and Leningrad and the other cities I visited, I gave the KGB a lot of work because they had to keep me in sight. The poor buggers, I think, had to use up a lot of shoe leather. The quality of the surveillance would vary dramatically, but the only occasions on which they ever deliberately showed their hands or engaged in harassment was when I was engaged in what they would consider a political act. Unfortunately, they considered many things political. For example, in Vilnius, in Lithuania, my travel partner and I were visiting the family of a Lithuanian nationalist who was in political prison. We'd been there for two or three minutes when, literally, the door was just kicked off the hinges. They didn't even knock, they just kicked the door down to inform us that we had no right to be there. If I was trying to attend a dissident trial in Moscow, or if I was visiting a Soviet dissident, then, yes, the KGB could become, shall we say, overt. On one occasion a colleague and I were physically thrown out of the supreme court building of the Russian Federation. When I say thrown out, I was briefly airborne going out the front door. Of course, we protested that to the Foreign Ministry, because they weren't supposed to physically lay hands on diplomats. They were just supposed to tell us to leave. They weren't supposed to pick us up and heave us out the door, which in this case they did.

For the most part, I would say my experience with the KGB was—I certainly wouldn't call it benign—but it was less adversarial than one might think. Something I noticed, and I was not the only one who noticed, was that the KGB tended to harass people whom they felt were disrespectful of Russia, people forever making derogatory, condescending, even semi-racist remarks about Russia and Russians. Those were the people the KGB really harassed. Whereas people—not just Foreign Service officers, but some of our military attachés—who were genuinely interested in the country, its history, and who experienced its culture and clearly had a respect for the nation, for the society, tended to get less harassment from the KGB. Not that they didn't keep a close eye on us, not that they weren't tailing us, not that they weren't tapping our telephones and bugging the apartments and so forth, but they tended to treat with respect those people whom they felt reciprocated some respect. I once asked the foreign ministry for special permission to visit a cemetery that was closed to the public – because Khrushchev was buried there – to lay flowers on the grave of Dmitri Shostakovich on the anniversary of his death. This was simply a personal gesture for me, but I think it redounded to my credit with the Soviet authorities. Cemeteries play an important role in Russian culture, and manifestations of respect for cultural figures are taken seriously.

They did occasionally screw up. One Columbus Day, a Monday holiday for us but not a holiday for them, I had slept in till about ten o'clock in the morning, something like that.

I was just beginning to putter around in the kitchen when I heard a key in the lock of the front door. I turned to look into the entry hall, but knew instantaneously what I was about to see. The door opens and two guys in winter coats and hats appear, they see me in my bathrobe standing in the kitchen. One of them mutters an appropriate Russian obscenity. The door closes, they lock the door, and off they go. They had assumed the apartment was empty because this was a Monday, a working day, and they hadn't heard anything on the microphones. It was a classic illustration that they were certainly there. They did regular visits to inventory your apartment for anything of interest, to keep track of what you were doing. Some colleagues suffered real damage to their property, but in my case they only stole corkscrews, several times. Corkscrews were a scarce but necessary item.

On occasion we screwed up as well. I was on a trip across Siberia with a colleague who bought us tickets for the boat on the river at Novosibirsk, but who thought it was going fifteen kilometers downstream rather than the fifty it in fact went. This put us beyond our permitted travel zone. We were detained at the final stop by the uniformed police, with ample plain-clothes guys in evidence taking photographs. The police wrote up a protocol of our violation, which we refused to sign, which was noted, and we were put on the boat back to Novosibirsk. An embarrassment, as we were in the wrong. Nothing much happened in consequence, and I found the experience somewhat educational because the uniformed police captain in the small town where the incident took place was very competent and courteous. I hope he went on to better jobs.

There were significant differentials in how we were treated. My colleague who handled Jewish refuseniks was a constant target of the KGB, they just made his life a misery, whereas my contacts with Christian dissidents were evidently less toxic in their eyes. Leningrad was a much tougher KGB town than Moscow, much. I think this was a common experience for diplomats and journalists. I received more personal harassment in a total of about three months in Leningrad than I did in almost three years in Moscow. They conducted a series of near hit and run encounters with our consular staff. I was one of the targets and was very nearly hit by their car, with its license plates covered over. The Leningrad KGB were real sons of bitches. We found out that, to some extent, the harassment in Leningrad was retaliation for harassment of Soviet UN mission staff in New York by the Jewish Defense League. So, that was reciprocal bullying.

Out on the road, it varied. In some places the KGB were quite obstreperous; in other places they just kept an eye on you. In such a large and diverse country, surveillance was a patchwork. In some cases the surveillance was skillful; in some cases it was comically poor. I remember one KGB guy of rather large girth trying to conceal himself behind a fairly narrow birch tree in Odessa as he was tailing me. It was a like a bad Max Sennett comedy routine. But it varied enormously. For the most part, in the provinces there was little overt harassment. This may have reflected how few and far between were visits by Western diplomats. The exception was the Baltic states, where Soviet sensitivities about local contacts with the outside world were very high. During a trip in Turkmenistan I think my partner and I may have harassed our minders more than they did us. Ukraine tended to reflect its reputation for bully tactics, while places like Armenia and Georgia were astonishing in their relative openness. Tajikistan was very sensitive for them

because of the ongoing Soviet campaign next door in Afghanistan. In all, I learned not to generalize too much about the Soviet Union outside of the capital.

There was never any question but that the Soviet Union was a police state, and that the role of foreigners, particularly diplomatic foreigners, was, for them, a sensitive one. They viewed all of us as spies. If you look at their concept of espionage, well, from their perspective, yes, we were all spies. From their viewpoint, just buying the morning newspaper at a kiosk constituted an act of espionage. The fact that I was working for the Foreign Service and the State Department and not for an intelligence agency did not, in any way, from their perspective, distinguish me from anybody else in their very broad concept of what would be espionage.

During these years, I very much enjoyed myself both at work and beyond, traveling extensively in the Soviet Union, exploring the two great cities, Moscow and Leningrad, getting to know a fair number of Russians in different contexts, having many fascinating conversations in railway compartments and cafes and concert intermissions and peoples' kitchens and while out collecting mushrooms, or visiting somebody's dacha (seasonal home) on the weekend, having what, for me, was a very fulfilling and educational experience learning about Russia—and of course, writing a lot of reports back to Washington. I would say my main occupation during these years was listening. I had learned in East Germany not to ask questions so much as to listen to what local people wanted to talk about, to let them guide the conversations, in order to understand their perspective and their concerns. This meant answering, or trying to answer, their questions about America. This was probably a common experience of Americans in the Soviet Union, but I must have been challenged with thousands of questions, often quite naïve, about my country. I would describe the perception of America which existed in the Soviet Union as being out of a novel by Theodore Dreiser. Dreiser was, in fact extremely popular among Russians, both as an author and as a viewpoint on America. Now, whatever relevance Dreiser may once have had, by the '80s, his description of our country was hopelessly out of date. Many, many times I tried to correct or at least modify what I would call a Dreiseresque understanding of America among people I knew. These conversations reflected what I consider now to have been the most important role I played during those years, which was to represent America to a number of Russians. This was quite distinct from representing the United States to the Soviet Union. That kind of official representation is, of course, what diplomats do. But, for me, representing my country as a person to people in the Soviet Union was much more rewarding and, also, much more informative for me. I learned a lot about that country and that society by answering their questions about my own.

At the same time, there were important things going on. The early years of the new Reagan Administration and the aging, decrepit Brezhnev regime in Moscow could be quite adversarial and at times even confrontational. The rhetoric on both sides was completely detached from each other.

Q: Were they laissez-faire? Just no connection, almost?

MERRY: Very little. You have to keep in mind that each side, the early Reagan Administration and the late Brezhnev regime, were each coming from such completely different experiences and worldviews, with contrasting notions about the most basic questions of what a society is, what is political legitimacy, what the future of the world should be, that they were talking past each other to an extraordinary extent. This became actually quite dangerous during the martial law crisis in Poland. Washington tended greatly to overestimate the danger of a direct Soviet intervention in Poland, and Moscow tended greatly to overestimate the extent to which events in Poland were being driven by Washington. In point of fact, the crisis in Poland was a Polish crisis. It was based on Polish workers and Polish intellectuals and Poles in general being Poles. Moscow wanted to see the hand of the United States somehow behind this. Washington wanted to see the beginning of a Soviet military intervention of the kind that had taken place in Czechoslovakia, and before that in Hungary and before that in East Germany. The danger of these mutual misunderstandings leading to a real crisis in East-West relations was, I think, more real than most people would, in retrospect, recognize. When the Polish government declared martial law in mid-December of 1981, we had a 24-hour watch in the Political Section, a genuine crisis watch. The concern was legitimate. This was a real crisis, in my view the most serious crisis between the United States and the Soviet Union since the 1973 Middle East war. It didn't rise quite to that level of danger because there was not an ongoing war, but it was certainly a damned dangerous period.

I became directly involved beyond what my position normally would have called for. At the end of a Friday—actually well into the evening—I was locking up when the political counselor, Sherrod McCall, came to me with a special assignment. He said the front office had just been on the secure line to Washington, where there had been a report in that morning's Washington Post of military reserves being called up in Russia, and people in Washington were becoming frantic over the danger of a Soviet intervention in Poland. The embassy had a lot of contact with informed people, editors, people in Soviet think tanks and so on, and we had a much more balanced view of Soviet intentions, which was that Moscow wanted General Jaruzelski to control the situation in Poland on his own. The Soviets had absolutely no desire to intervene in Poland because they knew it would be a disaster. McCall told me Washington needed a high-level message from the embassy, to calm things down, so he gave me the task. It should have gone to a colleague in the Political/External section, a friend of mine, but he was out of the country at his sister's wedding. Sherrod McCall decided I was the guy to write this message, perhaps because I had recently written a long report about the impact of Polish events on neighboring Lithuania. Starting around eight-thirty or nine o'clock on a Friday, that's what I did all night. I had a decent draft by the time people came to work on Saturday – we pretty much all came in on Saturdays in the Political Section. However, this message required a lot of clearances and tweaking, and eventually went out on Sunday morning. I worked on this message from Friday evening until Sunday morning, getting breaks for food and some rest while waiting for clearances. Keep in mind that in an era of typewriters, every alteration required retyping pages of text, and I did it all.

This was a high-level message from the ambassador to Washington saying, "It is our judgment that the Soviets want, above all, to avoid military intervention in Poland. They

are under no misapprehension that the Poles hate them. They know perfectly well that an intervention in Poland would not be like intervening in Prague, that it would not be only one city, that it would involve cities all over Poland, and this would create a crisis within the socialist bloc that would dwarf what had happened in the crushing of the Prague Spring or even in the invasion of Afghanistan." As memory serves, that is pretty much what the message said, but at much greater length.

I'm fairly proud of that message because, after the end of the Cold War when Yeltsin started declassifying Soviet high-level documentation—much of which is now available through the Cold War International History Project—we have the declassified minutes of politburo meetings of the Soviet leadership during this time. If anything, our evaluation and what I wrote in this message were more correct than even we understood. The Soviet leadership had made a decision that no matter how bad things developed in Poland, they were not going to intervene, that even if Jaruzelski couldn't keep things together they weren't going to intervene. That was certainly farther than the analysis I was willing to put down on paper at the end of 1981. I'm happy to say this was a case when the U.S. Embassy really served the national interest by telling Washington to calm down, because the country we were responsible for understanding, the Soviet Union, was not going to be as bellicose as many people in Washington feared. Although I wrote the message, obviously I distilled information gathered by a number of people and the thinking of a number of colleagues. I had my own point of view and I fought for it and, with some modifications, that's what went out. I think we all earned our paychecks that weekend.

During the ensuing year, 1982, we experienced the end of the Brezhnev era, with the death, not just of Leonid Brezhnev himself, but of other members of his generation of the Soviet leadership. Among the first to die was Mikhail Suslov, who was the politburo member in charge of ideology and supposedly a true hardliner, though some of the declassified documents after the end of the Cold War put him in a somewhat less hard-line light. It was pretty obvious, during 1982, that we were approaching the end of the Brezhnev era. We had an embassy contingency plan for Brezhnev's death. We were, all of us, very focused on the question of the succession; what's going to happen after Brezhnev. Who's going to take the helm?

Q: That's a big question.

MERRY: This was obviously a matter of intense interest to Washington. By this time, the Reagan Administration was beginning, at Reagan's behest, to look for areas of engagement with the Soviet Union. The relationship was still pretty bad; that didn't change until later in the Reagan Administration, after Gorbachev had taken power. That's still quite a ways in the future. But in 1982, the Reagan Administration was trying to find what could be done in arms control and with various East-West issues. We were very unhappy with things they were doing in Nicaragua, things they were doing in parts of the Middle East, the continuing Soviet war in Afghanistan. They were unhappy with some things we were doing: our very substantive support to the mujahideen (Islamic guerrilla fighters) in Afghanistan, our efforts to destabilize their partner regime in Nicaragua, and confrontations in places ranging from Ethiopia to Angola. But there were senior people in

the Reagan Administration who understood that a transition was approaching in the Soviet leadership, and that transition was going to be important to the United States.

As I mentioned earlier, it took 10 months for the Reagan Administration to send a new ambassador to Moscow, but they certainly picked the right man for the job. They sent Arthur Hartman, a career Foreign Service officer who had been, for the previous five years, ambassador in Paris and had earlier been assistant secretary for European Affairs. Hartman was a man with no direct Soviet background. He was not a Russian speaker, he was not a Russia hand, he was not a Soviet hand. He had a lot of experience with the Soviets, particularly as assistant secretary for European Affairs under Henry Kissinger. He was something of a surprise choice for Reagan's ambassador to the Soviet Union. He was not a known hardliner. He was not known as somebody who would publicly smite the communists hip and thigh from an ambassadorial position. He was known as a top-flight professional diplomat, but he had just spent five years in Paris and was coming with no formal background in Soviet affairs. He was, however, Reagan's choice. He arrived in the fall of 1981, and brought with him as his deputy Warren Zimmerman, who had worked with him in Paris, who had a background in Yugoslavia and in the Soviet Union. I think the U.S. Embassy in Moscow during my second and third years, under Arthur Hartman's leadership, was, all told, the highest quality mission in my entire professional experience. That's partly because every U.S. government agency sent really good people there. The military did, the CIA did, the Department of Agriculture did, USIA did, and the State Department certainly did.

With Hartman and Zimmerman there was an extraordinary amount of not only good team spirit, but the kind of leadership that is somewhat rare in the Foreign Service. True leadership, and a warmth between the chief of mission and the staff, was something I found extremely gratifying. I could never quite bring myself to address the ambassador by his first name; I could never call him "Art." I do now that we're both retired. When he was the ambassador, I just couldn't bring myself to address him as anything other than "Mr. Ambassador." But many people called him "Art," and he was a remarkably approachable, easy-going guy as a chief of mission. He was also a remarkably tough, even downright steely person in dealing with the Soviets on issues. Behind that somewhat urbane, Frenchified exterior, Art Hartman had real steel. He understood how to deal with the Soviets, that you couldn't let them nickel and dime you, that you had to maintain your position on the small things, not just the big things, and that you had to show them when and where you just wouldn't give way. On a number of occasions he really annoyed Foreign Minister Gromyko, which is something of an achievement.

I came to have not only personal liking for Arthur Hartman—which wasn't at all difficult—but a lot of respect for him as the kind of smart, tough-as-nails but non-ideological ambassador that I thought the United States really needed in the Soviet Union during this period of the Cold War. I thought it was just a first-class embassy, which did a lot of first-class work. We had excellent leadership in the Political Section under, first, Sherrod McCall, who was regarded with great fondness by almost everybody who worked for him; he was known as "Uncle Sherrod." Then came Curtis Kamman, a man for whom I have the highest regard and personal liking. I think we just had a hell of a

good team. I look back on it as being the epitome of the U.S. professional diplomatic service at a key point in our nation's history during the Cold War, in the absolute front line of the Cold War in Moscow.

Q: How did you operate there, as a political officer?

MERRY: Well, as I mentioned, the Political Section being split between Internal and External, we had very different kinds of tasks. Our colleagues in External were in the business of dealing with the foreign ministry. I never did. Other than when I was in the Consular Section, I don't think I ever set foot in the Soviet Foreign Ministry. Those of us on the Internal side were dealing as much as anything with the cracks in Soviet society. We had a number of contacts with Soviet think tanks, such as the U.S.A. and Canada Institute, editors of the Communist Party journal Kommunist, various political writers—some with somewhat nefarious reputations, like Victor Louis, and others of real repute, like Roy Medvedev—who had insight into what was going on. We also dealt with the diplomats from other countries who had insight into what was going on: a few of our British colleagues, French, German. The Chinese were particularly well informed. Some of the foreign journalists based in Moscow were very good and well informed. One of the best at that time was a Dane, which shows you that individual talent has nothing to do with a country's size. Our embassy was a center for much of the discussion of Soviet affairs among a wide range of people because we represented a superpower. People wanted Washington to have their insights and views. We all traded information and rumor, so that we tended to pool our collective experience to try to understand what was going on in this fairly opaque political system.

We obviously followed the Soviet press carefully, a quite tedious undertaking. I first started drinking coffee only then, to help me get through Pravda in the morning; tea was just not enough. The Soviet press was not completely lacking in real information. It was a matter of understanding how they packaged it, and what various words and phrases meant in a particular context, and how to glean information about who was on top and who was not and where the political winds were blowing by reading Pravda in the same way that a Soviet Communist Party official out in the boondocks would read Pravda, to get the little indications of which way the weathervane was turning. My colleague the embassy Kremlinologist was much more skilled at this than I was. They would occasionally reveal bits of information in odd ways. It was my habit to look at the afternoon daily Izvestia late before I left the office. One Friday afternoon, buried in the middle of the sports news was a little paragraph about Andrei Sakharov, who was then in internal exile in the city of Gorky, that he was on a hunger strike and had been taken to a hospital. It was just a couple of sentences. Of course, we had known about his hunger strike, but no more. Immediately I got on the phone to Washington and started knocking out a telegram.

We could sometimes glean interesting comments by trying to meet the author of an interesting article to follow up with him. Sometimes that would be productive and sometimes it wouldn't. You could never tell, when you walked into an office, whether you were going to be wasting your time or were going to be getting real insight. I remember being in Volgograd, the former Stalingrad, shortly after the 40th anniversary of

the German surrender in February 1983. I had gone down there with a colleague, to see how they marked the anniversary. That part of the trip was interesting enough, though it was bitterly cold. In addition our local sponsors decided we should visit the hydroelectric power station on the Volga. I thought to myself, "Oh, God. Another hydroelectric power station." By that point I had been to a number of Soviet dams and heard the statistics and felt I knew the drill. In this case, however, we never actually saw the dam. They did not show us the turbines or tell us how many cubic yards of concrete were there and how many kilowatt hours it put out. We were shown immediately into the office of the deputy director, and had one of the most fascinating conversations of my three years in the Soviet Union. This man had spent his entire professional life building and operating hydroelectric power dams, which he now believed were a mistake. This man had become an environmentalist, he was a "green" in a senior management position in the Soviet electric power sector. He spent a couple of hours explaining to us in detail why his dam was an environmental mistake, why the Aswan dam in Egypt he had worked on was a mistake, and why all the great Soviet dams were a mistake. It was the damnedest thing. We didn't even ask to talk about environmental issues, but this man unloaded on us why his life's work needed to be undone. It was a fascinating insight. The man obviously knew what he was talking about. Again, when you walked into somebody's office you could not know if you're going to get screamed at or bored out of your mind or really informed.

In another case, I was in Ufa, the capital of the Bashkir Republic in the Urals. Somehow,—I think by mistake—they gave me an unscheduled meeting with the top man in the republic government. I was astonished, as I had never been received at that level before. I think it was the result of confusion in the bureaucracy when I showed up, as they couldn't quite figure out what to do with me. I don't think they'd ever seen an American diplomat before. They showed me into this guy's office, and he was a screamer. I was there for about three-quarters of an hour while he had a series of brief meetings with other people, and his sole means of communication was screaming at people, on the telephone and in person. Mostly he just ignored me, as I sat there watching him scream at others. Finally, he got to me and said he wouldn't talk to me, that I had no right to be in his city and his republic, and he wanted me out by nightfall. I pointed out that the foreign ministry in Moscow had given me permission to be there, but it was quite clear this man was a feudal lord in the Bashkir Republic. There were no laws that in any way inhibited him. Moscow was a long way away. He was the laird and could do pretty much anything he wanted to do, and he was a bully in every sense of the word. I actually felt some moderate fear just being in the same room with this man; I was alone in this instance. I was glad when the meeting was terminated. It wasn't an informative meeting in the same way that my meeting with the dam director had been in Volgograd, but it was certainly an educational and instructive meeting.

I mention those two as contrasting characters, illustrating the range of a couple hundred meetings in various parts of the Soviet Union, many of which were not particularly memorable. But some of them certainly were.

Q: Did you get anything from these—I don't know what you'd call them—educational

lectures?

MERRY: Oh, yes. I would occasionally go to what was called the Znaniye Society, "znaniye" meaning "knowledge." These were public lectures on all kinds of topics, oriented towards the better educated part of the Soviet public. I went to these lectures if they were on a topic of special interest to me. It wasn't so much the lecture I wanted to hear, but the Q&A session afterwards; that was how you could get a sense of public concerns. For example, I went to a lecture on "scientific atheism," a topic that will put you to sleep, if nothing else will. During the Q&A period, there was a guy in the audience who was a provocateur, who kept asking questions, like "Is it true the Bible is the most popular book ever published?" This and similar questions. The lecturer got really flustered, because he obviously was not accustomed to dealing with even simple questions from a religious believer. This provocateur was tying the lecturer in knots in front of the audience. Finally, whoever was running the program started showing a movie about how spaceflight proves there is no God, and the debate moved out into the corridor with the provocateur now departed, but another man just furious that this Znaniye lecturer couldn't deal with the questions. The man identified himself as a Communist Party member, but he was outraged, demanding, "This organization is called znaniye! What the hell kind of znaniye is it if you can't answer a few simple questions from a stupid believer?" It was a really interesting evening.

One of the interesting items in my portfolio was the production of the annual "Moscow Miscellany" telegram. This was a compendium of Soviet political humor and anecdotes, obtained from the entire embassy staff but largely the Political Section. This was an old tradition in Moscow, and also in a number of other bloc embassies – I had done a similar annual message from Embassy Berlin. The "Moscow Miscellany" was unique, however, in the readership it received in Washington. By some accounts, it was the most widely distributed and read Foreign Service telegram of the year. President Reagan loved it and would occasionally use items in his speeches. That fact imposed some restraint on me as the editor, because some anecdotes involved identifiable individuals, so I felt the item could not be included lest the President unintentionally compromise one of our local sources. There were the so-called "Radio Yerevan" jokes and the "Rabbi, Rabbi!" jokes. For example, "Rabbi, rabbi, is it possible to build socialism in one country, say in Holland? Of course, my son, of course, but what have you got against Holland?" As Brezhnev became increasingly feeble, there were lots of jokes about him, often quite vicious. Some jokes I recognized as recycled Walter Ulbricht jokes from the GDR, though I suspect that humor about aging dictators has a very long pedigree. Once Andropov took over, the humor took on an edge of anxiety, as people did not know what to expect from the new regime. Brezhnev jokes were much funnier than Andropov jokes.

Q: You were there in the political section—this would be '81-'82 or so?

MERRY: It was '81 to '83.

Q: If you were to characterize what was going on, was there anything, a political movement or anything, or developments going on at that particular time?

MERRY: No. There were some things going on of a national character in the Baltic states, and in parts of Central Asia, particularly around the Fergana Valley and parts of Central Asia that bordered on Afghanistan. There would occasionally be rumblings in the Caucasus. In Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Armenia, you'd occasionally hear little bits and pieces. I received my first full-bore Armenian nationalist sermon in Yerevan, in a man's apartment, where he lectured me at length on what Woodrow Wilson had supposedly promised the Armenians and my personal responsibility to fulfill the creation of a "greater Armenia." Within Russia itself, there were famous dissidents like Sakharov and others mostly not known in the West, who were seeking an opening up of their society. For the most part, however, these were classic representatives of the Russian intelligentsia, who throughout Russian history have been the lonely voices of truth speaking to power. Their courage was very admirable. I knew a few of them, and they certainly had more guts than I do. However, they were voices on the outside. What mattered were the under-the-surface fault-line changes taking place within the nomenklatura, within the Soviet Communist Party system itself. We would occasionally have conversations that were quite candid, with people within the system who were just utterly disgusted with the Brezhnev leadership.

I remember conversations with people who had traveled to the West, and had seen the contrast between their country and the West. Sometimes, not even the West, but people who had traveled to Poland and East Germany, or people who had been in Finland, and could see the contrast between the way people lived in those countries and the way people lived in their own country. The conflict for them inside was fierce, as these were very patriotic people, people who were very proud of their country, and yet were faced with this contrast of the squalid conditions in which most people in their country lived in comparison with other countries that had been just as badly damaged in the war, like Yugoslavia or Poland, where people now lived much better. Polish workers were organizing Solidarity and moving towards overthrowing the communist system in Poland, and yet Polish workers would eat meat once or twice a day, when their Soviet counterparts would be lucky to have meat that often in a week, and not even as good meat. Many people in the Soviet elite—particularly what was called the Golden Youth, who had traveled abroad and seen the outside world—were just fed up with the stagnation of the Brezhnev era and really, really wanted a change.

The figure on whom many of them focused their hopes and aspirations was Yuri Andropov. Not yet Gorbachev—that's still in the future. Even though Andropov's background was the KGB, he was also known as being a highly intelligent, sophisticated man who wanted to change things; who wanted to get the Soviet system off of its duff, and to make Leninism work. There were a lot of people who were really champing at the bit waiting for the change, waiting for the transition.

Q: Was this a period where you would sit and watch Brezhnev get up and wonder if he was going to finish his speech or not?

MERRY: On one occasion, I went to a session of the Supreme Soviet. I was in the

diplomatic loge and was in fact the only spectator of any kind at the session. There wasn't a soul in the balcony. There were half a dozen loges along the side, one of which was for diplomats. I was the only person in any of them, and was there with my little Zeiss pocket binoculars, looking at the leadership, trying to figure out who was going to be the next one to die. We could observe this, to some degree, on television, but television wasn't going to show any really embarrassing stuff. So I was up in the diplomatic loge studying everybody on the stage, to see who looked the most fragile. It's the kind of thing American diplomats did in the old Soviet Union.

Eventually, in November of 1982, Brezhnev did die. We received an indication of this from an unofficial source. It hadn't yet been announced. I got a call at home early in the morning from my immediate boss, Kent Brown, and he did not tell me what they had heard, but he said, "On your way in, go by the Central Committee complex and look into the central courtyard." I understood exactly why he was asking that, because we knew from satellite photographs that whenever the Central Committee of the Communist Party had a plenum, they would clear out all of the cars from the courtyard so the big cars, for the big shots, could get in and out. Clearing out the courtyard was an indication of an unscheduled Central Committee plenum, which would of necessity take place if Brezhnev had died. So I went down there on the Metro, and hiked around the Central Committee complex, looking in through the gates and, sure enough, the courtyard was empty. We had indications from other sources that Brezhnev was dead. So we told Washington, it's pretty clear that he's gone.

That was not long before the official announcement came out, and then started what were some of the most demanding three or four days of my life, Brezhnev's funeral. The Reagan Administration sent Vice President Bush and Secretary of State Shultz to the funeral, obviously to make contact with the new leadership, which had not yet even been announced. Vice President Bush was on a multi-country trip in Africa, which they interrupted. He flew up to Frankfurt, dumped most of his staff and came into Moscow, and Secretary Shultz came in separately. I was assigned to be the embassy liaison officer with the vice president's team, first with his advance team and then, once the vice president arrived, with him. I wasn't his control officer, that was Mark Parris the head of Political/External in the embassy. Mark was in charge of the visit. The vice president's advance team asked for somebody who knew Moscow well to be assigned to them full time. As I had a reputation of being out and around Moscow all the time and had written those walking tours, I was chosen to be with the visitors day and night. This meant getting about two hours of sleep a night for the next four nights, as we went through the preparations for the funeral and then the funeral itself.

Vice President Bush's staff were very professional and very good to work with. They were already exhausted, as they had been on this African trip. They were functioning on Benzedrine and willpower, but they were first-class, easy to work with, very professional, no nonsense. We spent a couple of days organizing what the vice president would do, and then, once the vice president arrived, doing it. That included going to the Hall of Columns in the House of Unions for a wreath-laying directly from the airport, going to the actual funeral itself on Red Square the next day, and then to the official meetings

afterwards. I was on Red Square during the funeral, although I wasn't supposed to be. The U.S. presence was limited to the vice president, the secretary of state and one Secret Service man, but at the very last minute three staff were added so I was actually on Red Square for Brezhnev's funeral in violation of protocol, but it wasn't our violation. A Soviet three-star KGB general who was more or less in charge just said to us, "Why don't you guys go on out and watch the show?" So the White House doctor, the Regional Security Officer and myself were taken on to Red Square and placed right in front of the entire general staff of the Soviet Army. I looked back on rows of generals, and they obviously wondered who in hell we were. In some of the photographs, we're quite conspicuous.

After the funeral, I accompanied the vice president to a series of meetings, including the first meeting with Andropov. I wasn't actually in the meeting, of course. The only people in the meeting were the vice president, Secretary Shultz, Ambassador Hartman and the interpreter. I was the logistics guy for that meeting and meetings with various other people who were in Moscow; for example, the Pakistani president was there.

Q: I can't remember—was it Chernenko or Andropov who followed Brezhnev?

MERRY: It was Andropov. Now, that is an interesting point, because shortly before Brezhnev's death, we had a visit by a team experts from CIA, and there was a dispute with them because the embassy—not myself, but my colleague, our Sovietologist—had been telling Washington that Andropov would be the successor. The common wisdom in Washington was that Chernenko would be the successor. I'm happy to say the embassy was right. My colleague, when the actual announcement came out, was like the cat who has eaten a canary, because he had been right where all of the smart money in Washington had been wrong. I remember watching Andropov as this first meeting with Bush was starting. I was not in the full meeting itself, but there was a presence to him that had been notably lacking in the Soviet leadership in recent years. There was a "there" there. There was an active mind behind those eyes.

This four-day period, from the time Brezhnev died through the time we put the vice president on his plane to go back to his truncated Africa tour, was, as I recall, just complete, round-the-clock work. I got about two hours of sleep a night each of those nights. It was also quite cold; not yet a Russian winter, but cold enough to feel; it was November. We were going non-stop. This was a vice presidential visit with no preparation: no briefing books, no planning, no prior organization. The advance team, including Secret Service, were working with us, and we're working with the Soviets, and it got done. Most of it, to me now, is a blur. The part I remember really well was the actual funeral, because that was the only time I got to stand still and not be doing anything during this four-day period. It was an hour and a half standing out on Red Square during the funeral. If I had been able to sit down I'm sure I would have gone to sleep.

However, I did get a good telegram out of the experience. As I had seen more of the preparations and conduct of the funeral than anyone else at the embassy, I thought it

might be good to share what I had witnessed with Washington. The cable was titled, "A Clockwork Red." It almost did not go out, as I had second thoughts about the thing, that it was not sufficiently "serious". Curt Kamman had doubts as well, but decided to send it in. We got more positive feedback on that message than on anything else the Political Section did that year; people in Washington just loved it and passed it around. I took a lesson from that for my own later role as chief of Political/Internal, that illustrative slice-of-life reporting can be more effective in attracting a readership than even high-quality standard reporting. Washington readers like to be titillated.

Q: How soon after this did you leave?

MERRY: This was in November of 1982 and I left in the summer of '83. Obviously the next half-year was a period in which the embassy was evaluating, examining, hearing things. There was a lot going on, particularly in the economics field, as people who had worked in economics institutes, not just in Moscow but particularly out in Novosibirsk, who knew what the problems were, who understood what needed to be done, but who couldn't get any attention up until that time, were now formulating schemes and proposals. There was a lot going on within the Soviet system, most of it out of public view. With Andropov, there was the end of an era, the Brezhnev era, and the beginning of something else. What that something else was going to actually be, we didn't know.

Of course, the Andropov era was very truncated because he only lived another 15 months. He was followed by Chernenko, who also didn't live very long, 13 months, and who was a throwback to Brezhnev. Chernenko was an appalling choice for a Soviet leader, but the transition ultimately resulted in Gorbachev. It's an interesting question, how things would have developed had Andropov been healthy enough to run things for a few years. He would have been Gorbachev without Gorbachev's more benign instincts, I think. Would the Soviet Union have endured longer with an Andropov who wanted to reinvigorate things, but who still had a firm hand and would be ruthless in maintaining and exercising power, which Gorbachev ultimately was not? Hard to know. Obviously, it's a counterfactual question. With the coming of Yuri Andropov came the retirement of many of the Brezhnev-era people, the beginning of the exposure of some of the pervasive corruption of the Brezhnev era. A few people were arrested, people who had been related to people at the top, who'd been a little too greedy and were now made an example of.

We tended to focus on the top-level political issues, because that was what Washington cared about, but you often learned more about the erosion of the Soviet system from ground-level experience. Now, everyone who lived in the Brezhnev era has a fund of anecdotes to illustrate its inherent fragility, but my all-time favorite is not even an experience of my own. One of the assistant military attaches had vehicle trouble on the road to Leningrad and got a tow from a Soviet truck driver – very much a common practice, by the way, given the crappy cars and crappier roads. Along the way he learned that the driver was not, as appeared, delivering a load of tires to an address in Leningrad but was on an illicit vacation. His superior at the tire factory in Odessa had given him the tires with fake delivery paperwork to get past the police checkpoints along the route. Once they were out of sight of the final checkpoint on the outskirts of Leningrad, the guy

stops, drops the back flap of the truck and dumps the brand-new tires into the ditch by the side of the road. Then he got back into the cab, looks at my friend with a big grin and recites one of the classic slogans of the system, "Thus we are building Communism!" Honest to God, I am not making this up. That was how some members of the proletariat regarded "real existing socialism."

My point is that the Soviet Union in those days was a giant with feet of clay, but Washington pretty much saw only the giant. That was understandable, as nobody knew in which direction the Soviet leadership would turn. In retrospect, it is not at all obvious that things would develop as they did. The Soviet Union could very well have become violent and destructive in its final years. If either Grishin or Romanov had become party boss after Andropov, I hate to think what our world might have looked like. So, those last six months of mine in Moscow were a period of questions without clear answers. A large part of what we were doing was asking questions and speculating. I wrote a long article for a classified in-house State Department opinion publication; I don't remember what it was called, but it was a classified journal with official distribution, for individual views. I wrote a piece for it, which I haven't seen since and do not remember at all. It was not a dissent, but a personal musing on where the Soviet Union might be heading. I mention it because it's illustrative of the kind of speculation which the outside world was starting to generate about what kind of changes we could expect from the Soviet Union.

Until Brezhnev's death, we had not had a congressional delegation in a very long time. As soon as Andropov was in, congressmen started to come to Moscow in droves and, of course, they wanted to meet with Andropov. They did not get the meetings because the Soviet system was not yet that open to the West. Journalists started coming, wanting background interviews, which I remember giving a lot. There was a sense, not just among the diplomats, but among everybody, that the Soviet Union had been hibernating for a number of years, and now the bear was waking up. What would that mean?

Many of us wrote things—I remember writing a long speculative telegram on the subject that I recall did go in. Embassy Moscow had a fine tradition, which it maintained for a long time and still may, of occasionally submitting an individual officer's views not as dissent channel but just as an expression of an individual's views. I can't remember seeing any other embassy do that. I doubt my speculations in that message would look very prescient now, as I tended to perceive the Soviet future in negative terms. After all, the visible evidence all pretty much was negative.

Q: Were you within the ranks of looking at the internal situation, looking at the ethnic mix, and what would this mean?

MERRY: Since nationalities were part of my responsibility, that's one of the things I speculated about but I did not see the serious ferment ahead. It was mostly pretty quiet. The real problems among the nationalities were still a few years into the future. Things really started perking up out in the provinces of the Soviet empire after Gorbachev came in, partly because Gorbachev had a real blind spot on nationalities. He believed the nationality problem had been solved. He never understood nationalism, certainly not

within the Soviet Union. Much more of his concern was focused on nationalities within Eastern Europe. Poland, first and foremost, but not too far behind, Hungary. It was pretty clear that Ceauşescu's regime in Romania was creaking towards some kind of end. But everything centered on Poland, because Poland was the one country where the government was not, in any reasonable way, in control of its own population. The communist government in Poland functioned at the sufferance of its people. So particular attention was focused there. Within the Soviet Union, lots of non-Russian peoples were beginning to ask questions, but keep in mind that what seemed possible just a few years later, when Gorbachev was in power, was still within the realm of fantasy and the unthinkable when Andropov was in power.

Q: I'm looking at time and this is probably a good place to stop.

MERRY: OK, let me just cover one other thing: one subject that I pursued during my two years in the Political Section in Moscow that was of particular personal interest and for which I gained something of a reputation was the role of religion and the church in Soviet Russia. This initially raised some eyebrows because nobody had written about religion or the church, other than as a human rights issue, in living memory. Nobody had reported on religion as a social issue, as a question of national identity, of the Orthodox Church in Russia as an institution that had a role to play in society and in national identity, or argued that the church was not just a bunch of old women. Some people thought I must have a personal religious act to grind, which was not the case. From my time in grad school I had recognized the enduring spirituality of Russian culture and understood it remained vibrant, despite official hostility. This was not just part of my official responsibilities. I pursued this theme because I was interested in it, and I got support from my bosses within the embassy because nobody had written on this in many years. In fact, I had to go way back—back to George Kennan; he had written about religion when he was at the embassy—to find somebody who actually took the church seriously.

Because of my expertise in this field, I was chosen to shepherd Billy Graham on a controversial visit in which he took part in a Soviet-sponsored ecumenical "peace conference." While he did take part in religious services in both Baptist and Orthodox churches, he was strangely uninterested in the realities of life for Soviet believers. I saw believers beaten and arrested outside the Orthodox cathedral where Graham and other conference participants were attending services, but he expressed no sympathy for them when I told about it afterwards.

The time and attention I devoted to the study and reporting of religion in the Soviet Union were personally gratifying. I met many interesting people who would not otherwise have had any contact with America. Years later, I was vindicated because, once the Soviet Union fell apart, the Russian church demonstrated it was not just a bunch of old women and that it did still have a vital role to play in Russian society. Not necessarily always a positive role, but certainly a role, and at least back in the early 1980s there was somebody at the embassy in Moscow telling Washington that spiritual institutions were still very much alive and ultimately an important part of what Russia is.

Let me wrap up this portion by paying tribute to the superb quality of the team we had in Moscow in the early 80's: the military attaches, the Station personnel, the USIA people, from the Department of Agriculture, the Admin and Consular staff, and of course the Political and Economic Sections. I have been fortunate to work in some pretty fine diplomatic missions, but none ever was quite as good as Embassy Moscow in those days. We had real team work and dedication that made coming to work each morning a stimulating experience. Patriotism certainly played a role, as we were in the front trench of the Cold War. I cannot say that other people enjoyed living in Moscow as much as I did; there is no question I was a bit odd in that respect. However, everyone understood the importance of what we were doing. First-class leadership from Ambassador Hartman and his deputy Warren Zimmermann played a very important role, but I think the embassy was just first-class top to bottom. If you look at how many of the staff went on to become ambassadors, it is very impressive.

Living in Moscow was certainly not deluxe in any way. We had very limited access to fresh foods during much of the year, so it was important to take vitamins to avoid health problems. The city was neither healthy nor user-friendly; I would not want to be handicapped in Moscow, then or now. I was in my early 30's and active, so the limitations of the place did not bother me. I actually enjoyed the winters, although November with its freezing rain and mud was always pretty depressing until we got a lift from our Thanksgiving Day festivities. Housing was pretty basic. My apartment was quite small, with a living room, bedroom, kitchen and bath, with the washer/dryer in the living room in a closet. It was "cozy" shall we say, but I was quite content there. My kitchen had a view onto an old monastery with a bell tower and cathedral dome, so the first things I saw in the morning were a bit of old Russian architecture. I used only the Metro, but it was by far the most sensible way to get around that enormous city. We got hardship pay for Moscow duty, and I expect we earned it. The place was no hardship for me, but I was widely viewed as eccentric in my enthusiasm for Moscow. Enthusiasm overcomes a lot of perceived hardships in our service, I find.

It was also the assignment I remember as the most fun of any I have had. Given that Moscow was a pretty gray and grim place, and that many people bitched and moaned about it a lot, it was striking what a great party place that embassy was. We had terrific weekends at the embassy dacha, we had some nigh-legendary embassy parties, like one St Patrick's Day bash that will live in the memory of all who were present, and we did things like meet in the Political Section most Friday afternoons for caviar and vodka, our "Friday afternoon snort." We had amateur theatricals, and I was conned into directing a production of "Oklahoma" that was a big hit despite my input. It may surprise some people who would regard Cold War Moscow as not a very cheerful place, but I have never had quite so much genuine fun, both with Americans and with locals, as in those years in the early 80's.

It is also true I did a lot of drinking in Russia. Most of my intake was with Russians, so it was kind of an occupational hazard, but as someone who had not used alcohol at all until my mid-20's, getting into the booze level of Russian society was quite an adjustment. Russian parties – and I was at many – were always alcohol driven. Whatever you may

have heard about drinking in Russia, the truth is worse. Red wine with vodka toasts, for example. One New Year's Eve I spent with a young scientist from Georgia – Georgians are legendary boozers even by Russian standards – and I paid with a brutal hangover after five bottles of wine and spirits between two people. In Russia, alcohol is both a social lubricant and a disease. I never approached anything like it again, even in my second Moscow tour, thankfully.

I also did some travel outside of Russia, though not as much as others in the embassy. I liked in-country travel so much that I did not feel a need to get to the West regularly. We each got a free trip to Helsinki once a year, from which I acquired an enduring admiration and liking for Finland. I went to France once to visit friends and, candidly, to eat my way the length of the Loire Valley. I took one long out-of-country trip, to Thailand and Burma at the invitation of a Canadian colleague in Bangkok. That was a terrific change of pace. I traveled through much of Thailand on my own, which I loved, and spent a week in Burma, which was fairly off the beaten path in those days but utterly fascinating.

I very much wanted to stay a fourth year, but Warren Zimmermann felt I should come up for air and then get another Moscow assignment later on. I worried I might never be able to return, which in the Cold War was not an unreasonable concern, and I might never see some of my Russian friends again. I had some final meetings with people I cared about very deeply with the expectation this was a last meeting in our lives, that we would never see each other again. In some cases, I was able to pick up the relationship years later, but in others, I simply could not find them again after the passage of time. I still recall with pain parting from a friend on a metro platform with both of us knowing it was forever. That rupture of human relationships for political reasons was one of the things I hated most about the nature of the Soviet system and why, unlike some people, I feel absolutely no nostalgia for nor regret for the demise of the Soviet Union.

Q: OK, we'll pick this up in 1983. Where did you go?

MERRY: I left Moscow and I went to New York to work at the U.S. Mission to the United Nations (UN).

Q: We'll pick it up then.

Q: All right, today is the 22nd of April 2010 with Wayne Merry. Wayne, I think it's '83? Anyway, you've left Moscow and you've gone to the United Nations.

MERRY: Yes.

Q: You were with the United Nation from when to when?

MERRY: I was with the U.S. Mission to the United Nations (USUN) from 1983 to 1985, which, to put it in context, was the second half of the ambassadorship of Jeane Kirkpatrick there. This was in the first Reagan administration.

Q: First let's talk about Jeane Kirkpatrick and then we'll talk about the issues you were dealing with. She was quite a controversial character and a very powerful person in the foreign field. What was your impression or dealings with her?

MERRY: I got to know Jeane Kirkpatrick, over the years, fairly well. Our initial few months were somewhat bumpy, but they smoothed out. Kirkpatrick represented in much of the public's mind an adversarial relationship with the United Nations. That was not actually her own perspective. She was very much a believer in engaging the United Nations, but felt the United Nations had become dysfunctional and, in many respects, corrupt, both of which were God's truth. Her prescription was something of a tough-love approach to the UN. My own view is that Jeane Kirkpatrick talked and advocated a much better program for U.S. relations with the UN than she ever really practiced. The problem was that she was not in New York enough. She spent most of her time either in Washington, as a senior participant in the policymaking process there, or on the road, either domestically in the United States, where she was clearly establishing a political profile of her own, or abroad. In fact, at the time she left USUN after four years, the logs of her security personnel showed she had been in New York less than one-third of the time. Anyone who has worked at the United Nations will know it is a very hands-on place. Successful diplomacy in a multilateral environment requires constant day-to-day, week-to-week interaction with your counterparts.

Kirkpatrick was a part-time chief of mission, and she really conducted relatively little of that program of engagement which she advocated extremely well. Happily, she had assembled a team of deputies who were, in many respects, more energetic at this than she was. I had a direct relationship during these two years with her principal deputy, Jose Sorzano. During most of the time I was at USUN, Jose was effectively in charge of the mission, which meant he was damn busy but nonetheless gave me exactly the kind of ambassadorial-level support I wanted. He was a very effective embodiment of the program of engagement with the United Nations that Kirkpatrick advocated. One of the things I came to admire about Kirkpatrick was that, in my view, she surrounded herself with a team of people who were not only more diplomatically engaged but perhaps even smarter than she was. She did not, evidently, feel threatened by this.

Our United Nations mission was unusual because it had, at that time, five ambassadorial positions at the top. Now it has six. It then had no fewer than five people with ambassadorial status dealing with different parts of the UN. There was one who represented the U.S. on the Security Council, one who worked the Economic and Social Council, and so on. It was a very top-heavy mission in terms of political appointees. Not all of Kirkpatrick's associates were particularly beloved within the UN system, because they could be fairly adversarial. But I'll tell you this: it was a mission with unusual intellectual capabilities at the top. Whether you agreed with a particular policy position or not, it was a smart bunch of people to work for and it was a fun place to work. It was a place that had pizzazz and energy. It was not a mission with, as I think some might have imagined, an air of negativity. Yes, we were in a somewhat combative relationship with the UN structure across the street, across First Avenue, but, in point of fact, USUN was a lively, engaging, forward-thinking place, even when we were engaging in—as was true

on a number of my own issues—obstructionist diplomacy. In multilateral diplomacy, obstructionism is hardly an unusual position for almost any government to take, let alone that of the United States.

I found my first two years at the United Nations— because I came back for a couple of General Assemblies in later years—very agreeable and very stimulating. Our mission was an excellent team, including the Foreign Service staff and the permanent civil service staff, our equivalent of local employees, who were of a very high order, particularly in legal affairs, which had an absolutely key role, and public affairs, which was very important there. All told, it was a good place to work and it was a fun place to work.

As a career Foreign Service officer, I will say a word of tribute to Jeane Kirkpatrick, because she probably doesn't receive very many: she did more to make an assignment in New York financially viable for the Foreign Service than any other chief of mission had ever done. She got the housing allowance for Foreign Service personnel posted to the UN significantly increased, so that as an FSO you could actually afford to live in New York. I could not have accepted the assignment without a substantial housing allowance. Kirkpatrick played a key role in getting the housing allowance, which already existed but had been quite modest, increased to the point that it made an assignment in New York something a Foreign Service officer wouldn't find prohibitive because of expense. She did that quite explicitly so that the best of the Foreign Service would not reject a USUN posting for financial reasons. She wanted to be able to recruit the best people in the Foreign Service to her mission, and found out that to do so, she had to make it more financially viable, and she did. She used her influence with the president to do that.

Q: Tell me, before we get into the policy specifics, who were some of the best and the brightest you mentioned?

MERRY: A lot of people. I probably shouldn't mention too many by name because it was such a talented mission, and my portfolio directly involved only a couple. In addition to Sorzano, who was my front-office boss, the person for whom I most immediately worked, the person who wrote my job evaluation, was the deputy political counselor Sally Grooms. She is now Sally Cowal. It was the first time I had ever worked directly for a woman, and it was a first-class experience. Sally did not have a background in my area of expertise—the Soviet bloc or arms control, which were my areas of responsibility at the UN—but she was a very supportive supervisor who understood how to let talented people in a very active political section do their jobs, but also make sure we were all more or less on the same policy course. She also was extremely supportive of me later on, when I had a medical issue I will come to that demonstrated why, in some moments, the Foreign Service really can rally around its members in a time of need.

Q: What was your job?

MERRY: The United Nations at that time was much more focused on the work of the General Assembly than on the Security Council. At that time, in the mid-1980s, the Security Council met only when there was a perceived need. It didn't meet continuously

as it does now, and much more of the work of the UN and of the U.S. Mission was in the so-called seven Main Committees of the General Assembly.

My one foray into the Security Council came just days after my arrival with the Soviet downing of a Korean airliner with great loss of life. As the "Soviet hand" within the Mission, I was drawn into the work on this issue, though I made very little contribution. It was my first exposure to Kirkpatrick, and not a positive one. She returned from vacation to take the U.S. seat in the Council to denounce the Soviet action as a manifestation of the bankruptcy of Marxism-Leninism. With that stroke, we lost the Chinese vote, which had been pledged to us. Her tactics very nearly lost the necessary nine votes to force a Soviet veto. In the Mission, she declaimed on the incident as proof of "Bonapartism" in Moscow, which was the last thing it was. In a thousand years, the Russians have made almost every error of governance except resort to the "man on horseback." Kirkpatrick was very much a product of political-science methodology, but she really knew very little about our Soviet adversaries. She certainly did not understand the Soviet policymaking process; it was all a stereotype to her.

My area of responsibility was the First Committee, the Disarmament Committee, which at that time had by far the largest number of resolutions and the largest number of issues to deal with of the seven main committees of the General Assembly. Within USUN, I had the largest number of topical questions to keep track of within a session of the General Assembly, plus others through the rest of the year. Many First Committee resolutions were driven by the Cold War rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union, and NATO versus the Warsaw Pact. They dealt with nuclear testing, chemical weapons, nuclear-weapon-free zones, and a plethora of multilateral arms control issues.

Keep in mind that arms control at the United Nations is not, and never was, real arms control. New York was a locus for the rhetoric of disarmament and the global debate about nuclear weapons. Real arms control was going on in other venues, either between the United States and the Soviet Union directly or between NATO and the Warsaw Pact, and in a few specialized multilateral venues. What we were doing—what I was doing—in New York was more the public theater, the global stage, of arms control in one of the more combative periods of the Cold War. This was before Gorbachev and during the first administration of Ronald Reagan in Washington. This was a fairly contentious period between East and West, particularly on issues like intermediate-range missiles in Europe and the pace of the nuclear arms race.

I was a very busy individual, but I was also somewhat secluded in my work. First, my office – which was very large and nice with a terrific view – was on a different floor from the rest of the Political Section with no secretarial support. More importantly, very few of my issues overlapped into other areas of United Nations activity. None of my issues came up in the Economic or Social Council, and none were addressed in the Security Council after the Korean airliner affair. While the First Committee was the largest of the individual portfolios in USUN, it was mine and mine alone, and everybody seemed quite happy to let me take care of it. Many arms control issues seemed very arcane as well as pretty much irrelevant to the North-South development issues that were becoming—

correctly, in my view—the principal focus of the United Nations. The East-West, Cold War stage was very prominent at the United Nations, but for most delegations the main stage was about North-South, First World/Third World issues.

Kirkpatrick and Sorzano recognized that the arms control portfolio was important because it reflected some fundamental priorities of the Reagan Administration, but my issues played a fairly small role in their ambassadorial duties. Very rarely did one of my issues involve Ambassador Kirkpatrick. For the most part, I did not even engage Ambassador Sorzano, even though he had direct responsibility for overseeing arms control and disarmament issues within USUN. He had far too much else to take care of and did not have a personal interest in arms control as had his predecessor. Sorzano, whom I came to admire greatly, told me at the beginning, "Look, I don't understand any of this arms control stuff. That's your job. Anytime you need to involve me on an issue, just let me know. Give me a little advance warning, and tell me what I'm supposed to do, otherwise you take care of this. This is a huge portfolio. Nobody else in the mission knows anything about it. You're supposed to know this stuff, so take care of it, and if you need to engage me, let me know and I will do it." No bullshit, Jose.

Q: We're talking about weapons, and weapons are part of the military. So I would think that this would be very much a matter that the Pentagon was interested in.

MERRY: To some extent, except most of my backstopping in Washington, which was often referred to as "backstabbing," came either from the Bureau of Political-Military Affairs in the State Department or from the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency. ACDA was the main player on multilateral arms control in the U.S. government. I did get Pentagon involvement initially on a number of issues, but the Pentagon understood that multilateral arms control in the United Nations was more the appearance than the substance of arms control. So long as we in New York—which, in most cases, meant me—maintained the position of the U.S. government, held the fort, and did not vote the wrong way or permit our Allies to deviate from those positions, everything was fine. Early on I had to demonstrate that Washington did not have to worry when I was in the chair in New York on arms control issues. First, that I understood the issues, and second, that I would carry out the policy. Our mission was also pretty casual about getting instructions from Washington on many issues, because Kirkpatrick resented the idea that her mission should be instructed. As a cabinet member, she did not consider herself beholden to mid-levels type at State or the Pentagon. I took advantage of this fairly often. I would write a presentation, give it in whatever venue, and then send the text to Washington without getting any clearance. Often, time was short, so getting the job done precluded inter-agency or Washington input. It worked.

After my first few months, Washington learned not to worry and they basically left me alone, except on Geneva-based Conference on Disarmament issues. During the initial weeks of each General Assembly in the fall, I would be joined by a delegation from our mission to the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva and from ACDA who would work most of the First Committee issues in committee. All the major countries did this. For that period, I was anything but alone doing First Committee, having as many as a dozen

experts on hand to conduct the detailed work, which they did full time in Geneva. This was a blessing, because I did not need to delve into the arcane background of dozens of obscure resolutions, nor did I have to deal with the other country delegations from Geneva, some of whom were headed by egomaniacs. Our guys were fine, from my perspective, but some of the Geneva-based arms control ambassadors were among the most pompous and self-centered people I have ever seen in the practice of diplomacy, and that is a pretty high bar. I much preferred my New York counterparts, who were more or less at my rank and almost always easy to deal with – with a few exceptions, of course. We all said goodbye to our Geneva colleagues in mid-autumn with some relief, and then did the remaining work of First Committee in the General Assembly itself on our own.

Q: What was our policy at that time? This was the Reagan administration. What was our policy and what piece of the action did the United Nations have of this, because there were always arms control meetings of one type or another going on in Europe, weren't there?

MERRY: In the United Nations any country could introduce a resolution on anything it wanted. The number of competing and overlapping resolutions on arms control issues was ridiculous. There were, for example, four competing resolutions on chemical weapons, and three competing resolutions on intermediate-range missiles in Europe. There routinely would be a resolution from the Non-Aligned group, a resolution from the Warsaw Pact, and a resolution from NATO. Coordination among the Western countries was a large part of my job. Our formal mechanism for First Committee coordination in New York was called the Barton Group, named for a previous Canadian ambassador. We met at the Canadian mission because they had a conference table big enough for all of us. It comprised all the NATO countries plus Japan, Australia, New Zealand, and Ireland; these were all allies of the United States, with the exception of Ireland. Ireland was at the table because it was in the European Union. Ireland was very much the odd man out on arms control issues, because all the other countries were in treaty-based security relationships with the United States. Policymaking on these issues often took place in Brussels at NATO, or between Washington and allied capitals, and then was finalized in New York. Ireland could be and often was a pain in the neck, in part because they enjoyed that role.

Group coordination is the name of the game in New York. Much of my job was coordination within the Western group of countries, as my counterparts from the Soviet mission did with their group of countries, or others did among the often amorphous non-aligned group of countries. Voting in the General Assembly was, and is, a matter of group dynamics. A few countries voted individually—China being a notable case. For the most part, countries voted in groups. My role, you might say, was as whip of the Western group on arms control issues, to make sure a country like Greece didn't get too far afield on the issues, and to interact with other delegations that might be wavering from their group. For example, Romania was frequently off the ranch within the Warsaw Pact, which drove my Soviet counterparts nuts.

The dynamics of the General Assembly involved, then, about 185 member states voting on scores of competing and overlapping resolutions on many topics, plus votes on individual paragraphs and amendments. There were votes in committee and then votes in the General Assembly. I needed a grid system just to keep track. It wasn't a simple question of an up or down vote for or against any particular aspect of arms control. There were competing texts with competing interpretations. The game was to see how many votes you could get on yours and how many the other side could get on theirs. We had to explain to Third-World delegations the distinctions, because most delegations from developing countries didn't have much expertise in arms control, to put it mildly. For many, the complexity of First Committee was challenging. They were not well staffed in New York, so they usually voted as part of their regional group. Votes could also involve personal dynamics, and personal dynamics were very important.

The best advice I got when I first arrived in New York was from Jose Sorzano, who had been in New York two years already before he moved into the senior deputy job. He told me, "There is an enormous amount of paper at the UN, but this is not a paper place, this is a people place. Don't work the paper. Work the people." That was exceptionally good advice. In fact, I soon tended to ignore much of the paper. You could spend all your time doing nothing but reading UN documents, trying to keep up with all the verbiage. There were folks at ACDA who actually read the stuff. In New York, it often was people who determined how delegations would actually vote. In some cases, what we wanted was for them not to vote. Sometimes my job was to convince a delegate to go out for coffee during a particular vote so his country would not participate if it couldn't vote the way we wanted it to.

Another early piece of advice I got was from an experienced Austrian colleague who told me that, as the American representative, the good news was that people would always take my calls and always be available to me, while the bad news was that there was no issue at the UN I could ignore. On many contentious questions, Austria could simply punt and nobody would care; that option was not available to the United States. I quickly learned he was right on both counts.

Q: In a way, looking at this from a distance, it sounds, particularly when you're dealing with something like disarmament, that you're really talking about the Soviet Union and the United States. They've got all these things, and the whole idea is to bring them down. You can get the Libyans, the Sudanese, the Brazilians, talking about this, but they really—I don't want to say they don't have a stake in the thing; they have stake on the outcome—but they don't have their choice in the collection. And I can see that we're going through this motion, but at the same time, this thing is really going to be settled by some Americans and Soviets sitting a smoke-filled room somewhere.

MERRY: That's true. Let me, however, clarify a few points. In the mid-1980s, arms control was not about reducing weapons at all because the arms race was still in full flow. Both the United States and the Soviet Union were increasing their nuclear arsenals and developing new systems. Much of the concern of Third-World countries—and indeed, many European countries—was that the nuclear rivalry, the Cold War arms race between

the two superpowers, seemed to be out of control. I think that was not an unreasonable perception. It came under control fairly soon thereafter, when Gorbachev came to power, when he and Shevardnadze decided the Cold War arms race was unwinnable and was bankrupting their country. But when I was at the UN, the Cold War arms race was still going full tilt.

Many Third-World countries, while they loved nothing better than to criticize the superpowers and the United States above all, also had regional issues of their own. For example, India, which was the most pompous and sanctimonious of all of the critics of the United States on nuclear weapons, was, of course, a nuclear-weapons state itself and had regional hegemonic ambitions. Mexico and Sweden just liked to annoy Washington and demonstrate they were not under our thumb. Countries used the United Nations as a vehicle for regional arms control agendas. While the game was predominantly about the arms race between the superpowers, it was not exclusively so, and many other countries used New York to further regional ambitions and to exercise influence on the bigger powers. This was not just true of Third-World countries. It was also true of some NATO and Warsaw Pact countries, because in Europe public opinion played a role in policy: concerns about new types of nuclear weapons or deploying missiles in Europe or nuclear testing issues, chemical weapons developments, and so on.

Public concern in Western Europe about the course of the arms race was intense, and the stance of many European governments in New York was a response to that domestic concern. Within the Warsaw Pact public opinion was not an issue, but there was the one eccentric country, Romania, where Ceauşescu was completely at odds with Moscow on a number of arms control issues and pursuing an agenda of his own. The Romanians sponsored a resolution on intermediate-range missiles that united all the other Warsaw Pact countries and the NATO countries in opposition. Again, arms control in New York was the public theater of arms control, while the reality of arms control was still marking time between Washington and Moscow. In a remarkably few years, there would be a series of major agreements: the treaty to eliminate all intermediate-range nuclear weapons, the beginning of what became the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe, one of the greatest arms reduction treaties ever, START (Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty), and others. If you look at arms control in terms of a snapshot when I was in New York, it looked pretty hopeless. If you look at that period as prologue, it appears quite different.

Q: You were setting the underpinnings for all this.

MERRY: Well, to some degree I was playing Horatio at the bridge, trying to hold back a deluge of global criticism of U.S. government policy in New York. Much of what the Reagan Administration was doing or proposing to do was immensely unpopular around the globe: developing new weapons systems, such as the MX missile, deployments of intermediate-range missiles in Europe, plans for resumed underground nuclear testing, programs on chemical weapons. Things the United States was either engaged in or talking about doing created enormous concern throughout much of the world, which the Soviets, of course, played on skillfully. They were, in fact, the country with huge

stockpiles of chemical and even biological weapons. The United States had no biological weapons. The Soviet nuclear force structure was bigger than ours and still growing. They had nothing to be proud of, but nonetheless, they were in a position to exploit European and Third-World concern and to direct that concern against the United States. My job was to deflect, respond to, counteract and, to the extent I could, redirect it towards Moscow. I often asked delegates why they never seemed to criticize the Soviets and they would sometimes answer honestly, "Because you Americans listen."

Q: What was happening out in the real world? The big thing was the introduction of the SS-20 intermediate missile by the Soviets and our response with the Pershing and the cruise missiles.

MERRY: Yes, that was the big thing.

Q: Was that happening when you were at the UN?

MERRY: Very much so. That issue was coming to its critical moment, with the debate in the German Bundestag (federal diet) to permit the deployment of the missiles in Germany. There were other missile deployments in Italy and the Low Countries and Britain, but the critical domestic political debate was in Germany. This was not just a European debate but a trans-Atlantic debate, and a test of the integrity of the North Atlantic Alliance. The Soviets were leaving no stone unturned in their political efforts to prevent the deployments. This was a major focus in New York during my first General Assembly; somewhat less during the second.

Q: Did you find that you and the Soviet representative—or representatives—were in a daily duel or not?

MERRY: Professionally we dueled, personally not. I had several counterparts at the Soviet mission. My most exact counterpart was Sergei Kislyak, currently the Russian ambassador here in Washington, a very talented, professional diplomat who was a trained physicist with a specialty in arms control, which was why he was assigned to the First Committee. Another man who came from Moscow on an occasional basis was Ambassador Roland Timerbaev, a really fine and cultured Russian. During the lengthy breaks in the committees, he and I talked about Moscow and found we both had an interest in Constructivist architecture, the semi-Bauhaus School in the Soviet Union during the '20s. We both knew many of the buildings and discussed them, which gave us a bit of a personal bond. It requires only something as simple as a common historical interest to create a degree of personal warmth. Now, we both did our Cold War duties, but without any personal rancor.

The way the Soviets operated, I would have multiple Soviet counterparts. They tended to be overstaffed, by our standards, and did not trust staff on their own very much. I got along very well with my Soviet counterparts. I had just come from Moscow. I liked Russia and I spoke Russian. I didn't have a demonization complex towards them as people. I like to think we interacted rather well. Heaven knows what their oral histories

might say about me! The official statements we produced and delivered reflected the Cold War. I claim authorship of some of the most intensely anti-Soviet rhetoric in the UN during that period, some of which I didn't myself deliver; some I wrote for more senior people. I wrote a speech for International Human Rights Day—in December—which Jose Sorzano delivered in the General Assembly. This provoked a protest from the Soviet foreign ministry to our embassy in Moscow, complaining about me by name, because they had no difficulty figuring out who had written it, in part because it contained Russian historical and literary references.

The fact that we and the Soviets were going at each other hammer and tongs in various UN bodies did not impede my personal relations with my Soviet colleagues. Other people in the U.S. Mission had less agreeable relations with their Soviet counterparts in other committees, in the other bodies of the UN. I was probably the only person in the U.S. Mission with good personal ties with the Soviet mission; but then, I was the only Russia hand at USUN. I didn't take any of it personally, and I assumed they were professional enough to know this was not about them personally.

Q: This was the second half of the first Reagan administration. Reagan came in with a very conservative outlook. Later he was practically read to give away the store when he and Gorbachev got together. But at this point, was there a strong conservative group within the policy apparatus that viewed disarmament with suspicion?

MERRY: Oh, I think certainly so. Keep in mind this was the culmination of the Cold War rivalry, which within a few years would move toward the end of the Cold War and the reversal of the arms race. In the mid-'80s, Andropov and Chernenko were in power in Moscow. There was very little prospect for relaxation of tension from their side. We were actively supporting the mujahideen in Afghanistan, we were trying to shore up our alliance systems not just in Europe but in Asia, and there was a trillion dollar increase in defense spending to rectify what was seen to be the weaknesses of the previous Carter Administration. Again, the Cold War nuclear arms race was in full flow, and the prospects seemed pretty dismal in terms of ever getting it under control. There were certainly proposals, and Ronald Reagan, we now know, kept demanding of his advisors ways to escape from the danger of nuclear war. He hated mutual-assured destruction as a basis for American security. He hated balancing the prospect of nuclear holocaust with the alternative of surrendering the quest for freedom in the world.

On one occasion, I experienced this in a tangible fashion as a substitute speaker for Kirkpatrick at a big gathering of ethnic groups from the Warsaw Pact countries, Ukrainian-Americans, Polish-Americans, Bulgarian-Americans and so on. My job that evening was to explain Reagan's Strategic Defense Initiative, sometimes called Star Wars. I talked about the immorality of the United States basing its security on the threat to annihilate the peoples of those countries, to destroy civilizations, not just in the Soviet Union itself, but in other countries, if we ever came to general thermonuclear war. I argued it was an immoral position for a democratic republic to take as a long-term policy. I not only received a standing ovation, but many people in that audience were in tears, because I had touched on a point that obviously was a very deeply emotive one for them.

I mention this because there was, not just in Western Europe or in the Third World, but also in the United States, a broad popular sense that we needed to get away from this balance of terror. Average people were very uncomfortable with it. The specialists, the arms controllers, the strategic thinkers and the think-tank people, and the Pentagon could rationalize nuclear terror and do it fairly well. But I can tell you that Americans across a very broad swath of society just didn't like it. I know because one of my roles during my two years in New York was as the designated public speaker for the U.S. government on arms control issues in the northeast. The administration was trying to engage American audiences on these issues, and since I was in New York with a remit on arms control, I was assigned to this task for New England, New York state, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania. I did over 50 public speaking engagements on arms control issues: American Legion halls, church groups, universities, all kinds of venues. I can tell you that people were genuinely worried. People didn't like mutual-assured destruction. They didn't like the nuclear arms race. They didn't want a weak American posture, but they were deeply desirous that somehow this process be gotten under control.

When Reagan and Gorbachev, a few years later, started doing so, even though it caused Reagan some difficulties within the right wing of his own party—and, indeed, with advisors within his administration—he was responding to a very deeply felt desire among the public at large. I think he had a clear understanding that the American people thought the way he did, which is that somehow we've got to get away from this nuclear terror. One of things not at all apparent at the end of Reagan's first term was the extent to which this president was going to be the American leader to turn around the nuclear arms race and get us to the point where we'd start tearing the stuff down rather than building it up. I think this is one of the reasons Reagan was so popular at the end of his presidency, that he had worked with Gorbachev to put the nuclear genie back in the bottle.

I might note the importance for me of those public speaking engagements. They not only helped inform me, but they were great practical experience in public speaking. This is something the State Department needs to do much more, in my view, getting Foreign Service people out to communicate with the American public, and not just ambassadors. Public speaking is a learned skill; you need to do it and face live audiences with real questions and do it without a net. Prepared texts are terrible for these events, and I never once used one. In those days, Washington trusted its own people to know what to say. As I was charged with speaking on these issues at the UN, I was allowed to do public speaking without any oversight. Nobody in Washington gave me a script. Today, the limitations on public speaking for State people are terrible. Many groups I speak to now tell me they simply will not invite anyone from State, because they are boring and use prepared texts which say nothing and cannot handle questions well. In retrospect, I think the public speaking I did during my New York years was some of the most important work I performed, and I certainly gained from doing it.

Q: What was your impression of the apparatus of the United Nations at the time?

MERRY: The United Nations at the New York level is multilateral diplomacy taken to its logical or illogical conclusion. In the contemporary world, multilateralism is where at least half of all diplomacy takes place. Multilateral diplomacy includes things like NATO, the International Monetary Fund, even things like the International Olympic Committee. It involves economic issues and technical bodies like the International Postal Union and scientific and agricultural bodies. There's no limit to the complexity of multilateral diplomacy. Most of it takes place within institutions with a reasonably narrow and clear focus on what they are doing: the UNHCR or the World Bank or whatever it is. Most multilateral diplomacy is issue driven.

The United Nations in New York is different in that it's a catchall where every country has a seat and every conceivable issue is on the table. The United Nations has a real problem focusing on anything, because every issue imaginable is on its agenda. If you really want to deal with an issue, any issue, in concrete terms that are result-oriented, New York is probably the wrong place to take it. Multilateral diplomacy has a better chance of producing something real if it is not done in such a global venue, if it's done in some more specific, more narrow environment. What makes New York important is that everybody does have a seat at the table. In a world with almost 200 supposedly sovereign, independent states—those terms are greatly exaggerated, of course—New York is where everybody feels they have a role to play. Most countries—many of them fairly small in terms of intrinsic power and influence—value their role in New York because often it's the only global role they do have. Countries have figured out that the only way they can get the attention of the big countries is by banding together in regional and other groups to have a block of votes in the UN. That will get the attention of people in Washington, Moscow, now Beijing, wherever. And they are right.

Of course, the United States claims paternity of the United Nations—it was an American scheme, an American project, an American creation, and is therefore appropriately headquartered on American soil—so the United States is the country that, more than almost any other great power, is inclined to be influenced in New York. This does not necessarily mean we'll change an American policy because of what happens in New York, but we take what happens in New York sometimes more seriously than we should. I don't know how many times diplomats from other countries, allies of the United States and even non-aligned countries, would come to me on some issue and say, "Why do you Americans take this so seriously? Why don't you just let this thing be voted on and ignore it? Why do you Americans care what's in this resolution? It doesn't have any impact on what you do. Why don't you just ignore it?" I must have been given that advice dozens of times and it was, in many cases, good advice, but it's not what Washington would do.

Even the Reagan Administration, which appeared adversarial towards the United Nations, in fact cared deeply what happened there. We took the rhetoric of issues—in my case, arms control—often much more seriously than we needed to, and the other delegates in New York knew that we did. They knew we took the UN process seriously. A question I would raise with Third-World delegates was, "Why are you always just picking on the United States? Why don't you reserve any of your bluster for Moscow? They're worse

than we are!" The response was always, "Yes, but you listen. The Soviets don't give us the time of day. You Americans listen, so of course we focus on you." The irony was that the United States actually encouraged rhetoric of the kind we were seeking to avoid, because we would give the appearance of treating it seriously. That is the dilemma of being a superpower but also the creator of this global forum. We invited the world to tell us what they thought, and, by God, they're damn well going to do it!

Q: It reminds me of a long time ago, when I was interviewing somebody who had been ambassador to Chad, and he had received instructions to go to the president to seek the Chadian support of a resolution against whaling. And the president listened carefully and said, "Mr. Ambassador, what is a whale?"

MERRY: Occasionally, I had to explain to some visitor from Washington that what I was engaged in was not real, it was theater. On occasion I would take a position or make a statement that might not be quite according to Hoyle in terms of the U.S. position. I was playing a game, and, happily, I had the support of my mission on this, particularly from Ambassador Sorzano, who understood the UN game very well. Occasionally I would engage in a tactical ploy in a UN body that caused some anxiety in Washington, and we had to reassure them that this was a game, a tactic, theater.

This was the case in one of the more obscure and pointless of all UN bodies, on which I was the U.S. representative, the United Nations Ad Hoc Committee on the Indian Ocean, a body created to consider the "Indian Ocean as a Zone of Peace," an utterly nonsensical notion put forward by Sri Lanka many years before. The Sri Lankan government had long since decided this was not as great an idea as they had previously thought. It was being pushed by New Delhi. The Pakistanis, privately, said IOZP was really "India only zone of power", and that was pretty much true. In point of fact, almost every country on the Indian Ocean Committee thought the whole thing was nonsense, but there were over 30 countries represented on this body, including our Soviet counterparts, various European countries, Australia and all the Indian Ocean littoral states. We engaged in seemingly endless rhetoric and, frankly, I got to the point where I decided that if we're going to do this nonsense, I might as well enjoy it. So I introduced some little tactical changes to American policy, knowing perfectly well the other countries would not follow suit, even though supposedly they wanted us to do what I was now proposing. For years there had been talk about a conference in Colombo, in Sri Lanka, about the Indian Ocean as a zone of peace. For years the United States had opposed this, and other countries had comfortably allowed the United States to be the bad guy and to take bad publicity in newspapers in Indian Ocean countries.

So I took the position, in my second year, "OK, you guys want to have a conference in Colombo? Fine. Do it. My delegation will be interested to hear what you accomplish after you come back to New York." I no longer opposed the conference, but simply implied we would not participate. This threw the regional countries into a tizzy because they didn't want a conference. They didn't want it at all, but now, they no longer had the United States to hide behind. I must say, I enjoyed that enormously, after watching these delegations make pompous, hypocritical statements against the United States. Now they

were scrambling to avoid having to do what they had publicly declared for years their governments aspired to. It was typical of the United Nations, using the United States as the bad guy on issues that allowed other countries a comfort zone, in which they never had to take responsibility for anything. They could pompously accuse the Americans of being the problem.

This committee was perhaps the worst UN body in my experience. A total waste of time for everyone concerned. I came to dislike the Indian delegates as people, rather intensely, though I was quite friendly with most of my fellow sufferers, including the Soviets. Some characters, however, just could not distinguish rhetoric from reality. My Canadian counterpart, a really smart and fun Army officer named Alex Morrison, referred to the representative of Democratic Yemen in the Indian Ocean committee as "Frankly Speaking" because this man began every one of his interventions by declaring, "Frankly speaking, Mr. Chairman, I do not understand the position of the American delegation." Honest to God. This became a source of comic relief for the Western delegates on this committee.

Q: What was the background of your boss?

MERRY: Sorzano. Jose Sorzano was a very interesting guy. He was a Cuban émigré who had arrived in the United States with nothing and was a dishwasher in some restaurant and had a classic American Dream story. He worked, got an education, became an academic at Georgetown University, and was known to Jeane Kirkpatrick, who brought him along to the United Nations. Initially, in his first two years, he was working on the Economic and Social Council. In his second two years, as her principal deputy, he had responsibility, among other things, for arms control issues. Very, very sharp. A smart guy who understood that the United Nations was really about human dynamics. It was about people. He had not the slightest hesitation in saying things that were very candid and almost outrageous, that caused annoyance to some delegations and delight to many another. I remember one of my counterparts, a British officer in the UN Disarmament Division, once described Sorzano as a real breath of fresh air, because among all of the pomposity and hypocritical nonsense that pervaded the United Nations, Sorzano could be a voice that would simply speak that which actually was, which as Lassalle said is a very revolutionary thing to do.

He and I got along like a house on fire, partly because he figured out that we were kind of kindred souls, also because he figured out that I actually did understand this arms control stuff, which he had no desire to burden himself with. He understood he could rely on me to do the job in the First Committee and only bother him with it when something needed to be done at his level. What annoyed him were the people who came from ACDA or from the U.S. delegation to the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva, which was the other big multilateral arms control environment. They would come to New York during part of the formal session of the General Assembly, in the autumn, to work on their arms control issues. During those weeks I was not alone in First Committee, which was a blessing, although something of a mixed blessing. During the rest of the year, I did it all entirely on my own.

Some of these arms control specialists just drove Jose nuts. I knew perfectly well how busy he was and so, when I had to brief him, I would take about two minutes of his time. I didn't bother him with arcane detail. I just said, "Look, Jose, I need you to do this, one, two, three." He would ask a question or two and then, boom, end of meeting. Two minutes. The people from Geneva would take 20, 25, 30 minutes of his time to discuss incredibly arcane issues to which they devoted thousands of hours in Geneva. At the end of one of these sessions that had obviously annoyed him no end, Jose said to me, "You know, there are some people who look at the forest, and some people who look at the trees. These arms controllers are obsessed with twigs." Jose understood that in New York, we weren't discussing twigs. We were discussing the appearance of a forest that wasn't even a real forest. It was a stage forest. We were trying to affect how our country appeared in international terms. He and I got along extremely well. He was very supportive, particularly a couple of times when Jeane Kirkpatrick became annoyed with me. He would calm her down, as she didn't take dissent terribly well.

Jose and I got along very well, and I had the greatest respect for his understanding of how to work the UN. One of his mantras, which was dead-on right, was that the way to be successful at the United Nations is by never saying "no"; always say "yes, if…"; and then work the "if" clauses. That's exactly what we did. I'm not saying we accomplished a great deal, but it was a lot of fun, because every country sent some of its best diplomats to represent it at the United Nations. The quality of the people with whom you were interacting, whether they were your allies or your adversaries, was very high. All of our allies, both our Pacific allies and our NATO allies, had extremely high quality people at the United Nations. My counterparts were top-flight professionals, almost without exception. This was also true of the Warsaw Pact delegations and most Third-World delegations. Dealing with very smart, professional counterparts made it really enjoyable.

Q: What about the role of the Israelis? Everybody knows they have nuclear weapons and they won't say they do. We have to pussyfoot around this.

MERRY: Curiously enough, that issue was fairly marginal at that time in the General Assembly. Everybody understood the Israelis had nuclear weapons, but the broader question of Israel and the Palestinians, the Middle East Peace Process, took place elsewhere, not in the First Committee. What was on our agenda was the question of the nuclear weapons capability of South Africa, of the apartheid regime there. That was a very hot topic, because the African group, of over 40 countries, cared very deeply about it. The Islamic group chose to deal with Israel's nuclear capability in other venues, but the African group saw the United Nations General Assembly as the only available venue for publicizing South Africa's nuclear capability. It was an uncomfortable topic for me. Israel was in a neither confirm nor deny mode; but the South Africans were in an actual denial mode, which is to say they were lying. The position of the United States was, to put it mildly, an ambiguous one, endlessly stating this was a question that needed further study. It was, I'm bound to say, one of the positions I had to represent in New York that I found embarrassing, because it was a tissue of evasion and not one you could argue much on the basis of substance.

This was a classic New York issue in that a lot of Third-World countries—in this case the African countries—wanted the world—the big countries, the United States, the Soviet Union, Europe, so forth—to focus on what, for them, was a very serious regional security question, the development of nuclear weapons by the apartheid regime in South Africa. The African group understandably wanted to use the General Assembly as a vehicle to get that issue addressed seriously, while the United States, among other countries, engaged in a pattern of avoidance and evasion. For two years, the person who did that was me. I would have liked to have had a different position to represent, but was struck with my instructions. Happily, this topic was later overtaken by events by the end of the apartheid regime in South Africa itself.

Q: Did the Brazil-Argentina situation, where they were both making noises and doing a little to develop nuclear capabilities, did that come up?

MERRY: This was not really an issue at that time. It had been in earlier years. The regional nuclear issues were about proposed nuclear-weapons-free zones, which the Pentagon disliked even in principle. Overwhelmingly, the nuclear issues were East-West, superpower, NATO/Warsaw Pact issues. Given what was happening in the world, that was understandable. A good deal of hypocrisy was spoken by all, but the fact that the world was worried about the nuclear arms race between the superpowers was expressed in New York and legitimately so.

Q: You left there when?

MERRY: Let me say a bit about my personal situation in New York. I liked living in New York. I lived in Midtown Manhattan. One of the problems with the General Assembly is that it takes place during the autumn, from the middle of September until Christmas, so I never had a chance to do anything outside of my official duties during the prime season for culture. I never had a chance to go to the theater, to the opera, to a symphony or anything in the evening, because during the formal session of the General Assembly I never got home before 10. The General Assembly, at least in those days, was a very demanding role, and it allowed you almost no time to have any interaction with the Big Apple. One of the most common complaints among my colleagues from other countries was that they would be assigned for some years to New York and not only would never get a chance to see anything of America, but never got a chance, really, to see a lot of New York City itself, because they were all focused on the East Side of Manhattan in an artificial environment of multilateral diplomacy.

However, my life in New York changed quite dramatically one Saturday afternoon. It was a week before Christmas in 1983, after I'd been at post only a few months. I was walking up Fifth Avenue looking at the pre-Christmas shop windows, when a car at 53rd Street went out of control, came up over the curb and drove at high speed down the sidewalk in front of the famous jewelry store Cartier's. What finally caused the car to stop was that it ran into the Olympic Airways building, and in the process, it put over 50 people in the hospital, one of whom was me. This was a big news item for a day; it made

the front page of the Sunday New York Times, it was on all the television news. I didn't get to enjoy any of this because I was in the emergency room at Bellevue Hospital. The short version of what happened is that an illegal alien from Columbia, who had been working in Connecticut illegally, was in New York with his wife who had been driving. He had no driver's license. She had double parked to run into a shop and a meter maid told the man he had to move. Instead of waiting for his wife to come back, this guy pulled out into traffic, immediately sideswiped another vehicle and then panicked. His foot slammed down on the accelerator, his hands locked on the wheel, and he started hitting people in the crosswalk, which is when I first heard something happening. He came up over the curb and right down the sidewalk at what the police later estimated was 30 miles per hour. A '78 Pontiac, unfortunately, has a good deal of pickup.

My means of escape to the side was blocked by a big concrete planter and, if I had been more on the ball, I would have leapt on top of the planter. But this happened in very real time. The whole thing, from start to finish, I later estimated, lasted less than four seconds, from the time the guy sideswiped the vehicle until he hit against the building. Four seconds does not allow for much decision making. I went right over the hood ornament and bounced off the windshield, and then came down onto the concrete with a severely broken lower right leg and other bodily bruises, contusions and a fair amount of spinal damage, although the spinal damage didn't really become clear until later. It was some time before I understood this was really a life-altering event for me. I initially thought of the injury as the equivalent of a skiing accident, from which you recover in a few weeks or months. It was a shock when a doctor told me it would take several years just to recover from the basic damage, let alone that I would be in pain for the rest of my life.

Along with the 50 other people, I was taken to a hospital emergency room, and mine was at Bellevue Hospital, which is a public hospital in New York, a huge institution and somewhat anonymous. At the outset, I was in the emergency room with several other victims and in considerable pain, but the lady next to me was in much worse shape as she had gone under the car. I spent the next week in the orthopedic ward of Bellevue Hospital, which was a surreal experience. I was the only native English speaker there, not just among the patients but among most of the staff. I was able to converse with the man who was setting my leg because he was from Leningrad and we could speak Russian. There were three other people in the room I was in; two were Chinese-speaking, one was Hispanic. There wasn't a whole lot of communication. During my second day I was taken down to x-ray and mislaid for several hours, so I had time to look around. I counted 28 other men waiting for x-rays. I was the only one of the 29 men not handcuffed either to a police officer or to something like a radiator. That gives you a sense of what Bellevue Hospital was like.

Happily, after a week in this—I'm going to be diplomatic and say "less than agreeable experience"—Sally Grooms, my boss, and her then boyfriend got me out and took me to their townhouse so that I wouldn't have to spend Christmas weekend in Bellevue Hospital. I was a wheelchair case, with a full-leg cast, in fairly bad shape in general. They took me to their home so I would not have to be in the hospital over the holidays. It was an exceedingly gracious act, for which I am still very grateful, because the prospect of

spending Christmas in that orthopedic ward was pretty unpleasant.

I spent over a year in the initial recovery process. I was in various casts for 14 months. After 10 months, when the damn leg was not healing properly, I had to go in for remedial surgery, although not at Bellevue. The surgeons re-broke everything and installed a Hoffman brace, which involved six stainless-steel pins going through my leg. I was in all kinds of outpatient offices and physical therapy for the remainder of my posting in New York. The process continued on and off during the ensuing years. For the bulk of my time in New York, I was on crutches and had either a cast or this Hoffman brace underneath my right trouser leg.

So, I was the cripple in the UN for most of my time in New York. I would like to say that the U.S. Mission was extremely supportive and helpful to me. For several months, Jose had his car and driver pick me up and provide me home-to-office transportation, which he didn't have to do. It was very helpful. My colleagues were very helpful in all kinds of ways. After I got out of the wheelchair and on to crutches and could become functional again, I spent a year going back and forth to the UN building and to other missions and lunches and whatnot, and I became, probably, a recognizable figure as a diplomat on crutches. To have an injury of that kind without some kind of a support network would have been very difficult.

I needed the remedial surgery during the next General Assembly session. I went to Jose Sorzano and said, "Look, I need this surgery but we could delay it until after the General Assembly because otherwise it would interfere . . . ," and he cut me off and said, "Screw the General Assembly. Numero uno (number one) is numero uno!" He insisted that my surgery came before any other consideration. We brought a couple of staff from ACDA to New York to fill in for me for the time I would be out because of the surgery. Having that kind of institutional support makes a big difference. The Foreign Service showed it is kind of an extended family. This was the one time I was on the receiving end in a serious way. It meant a lot to me because this was a pretty miserable experience anyway; but it would have been a lot worse if I had not had this support.

This was, and indeed continues to be, a learning experience, one I might have wished to avoid, but I certainly came to learn a lot about the world of the handicapped. Dealing with my own problem and observing others in many waiting rooms and therapy sessions, I thought about issues of human frailty which had never really received much of my attention before. In particular, I came to understand the anger of the handicapped, how small and thoughtless things – like a four-inch step – can make their lives so difficult, when a smidgeon of consideration by others can help so much. I know very well I am among the lucky ones of the injured of this world, but now look on others with perhaps a more mature eye than I did before.

Q: Where did you go from there?

MERRY: Toward the end of my New York assignment, we got a new leadership team, as Vernon Walters took over as the Permanent Representative and Herbert Okun as his

deputy. This only affected me for a few months and, as I already knew Okun fairly well, I had no problems. This was during a fairly quiet time for my portfolio in the summer, but it was interesting to observe the different styles, as Walters was a consummate diplomat with a command of several languages who really enjoyed the hurly-burly of the UN in a way that I think Kirkpatrick, with her academic background, had not.

After my two years in New York, I went to Washington, the second time I served in the Department. I worked in the Office of Central European Affairs in the European Bureau. Central Europe, in those days, meant Germany, Austria and Switzerland, a very different definition than a traditionalist would consider as Central Europe. I was in charge of a three-officer unit that dealt with Berlin, East Germany, and inner-German relations. Keep in mind that in those days Berlin alone received as much policy attention as a good-sized country. The United States was one of the three "protecting powers" in West Berlin, a role we took very seriously. The Cold War in Europe was still centered on the divided city of the divided country of the divided continent. That was the work of our unit, how the east-west competition played out in central Europe. I took this job in part because of a long-term interest in Germany, but also because I really wanted to get back to Berlin, back to East Germany, and I hoped this assignment would put me in a position to do so. It did not, because I was still one grade junior for the political counselor's role at the embassy, and another officer, a personal friend at the right rank, got the job. He was in East Berlin when the Wall came down, where I would liked to have been. However, for these two years, I was in charge of the GDR and Berlin desks.

Q: The two years being?

MERRY: The two years being 1985 to 1987. This was a very good office. We had a marvelous assistant secretary for Europe, Rozanne Ridgway, who had previously been ambassador in East Berlin among other things, which of course meant she had knowledge and an interest in the GDR far beyond what would normally be the case for an assistant secretary. The head of the Office of Central European Affairs was Harry Gilmore, a guy with a lot of relevant experience and a wonderful human being. All the staff were excellent people and good colleagues. You couldn't have asked for a better working environment, and I was working on issues of direct personal interest to me.

But, to a considerable extent, I was miserable. I was suffering from the kind of mild but prolonged depression which often accompanies extended recovery from a traumatic injury. Again, the working environment, the issues, the people were all favorable—everything about my assignment in the Office of Central European Affairs was positive. I had absolutely nothing to complain of, but I was going through a bad personal period. Although no longer on crutches or in a cast, I was in a long process of therapy and exercise and medication, which was very frustrating. It seemed to be accomplishing nothing. Even though I was in tip-top shape in terms of cardiovascular health, the orthopedic side was all pain and frustration. In retrospect I recognize this as a fairly normal, actually quite common, problem with a prolonged recovery period. I know this now but did not then. Unfortunately, my doctors were dealing with my leg or my spine or some other part of my anatomy, but none with my mental condition. None of them

pointed out to me that some depression in a situation like this is not unusual. If I had understood it—maybe even taken a little medication—I think it would have helped a lot. Frankly, I was working too hard at my physical recuperation. I was up before dawn to swim a thousand meters every morning before I went to work, and doing other exercise and therapy. I really didn't have much of a life other than the office and physical recuperation. In fact, I would have been better off doing less physical therapy. During this period, my mother suffered a severe and debilitating stroke which obviously was an additional element of stress.

During this assignment I focussed on two important issues relating to the U.S. role in Germany. The first was the killing of an American Army officer in East Germany, Major Arthur Nicholson, a member of the U.S. Military Liaison Mission (MLM), an institution in Potsdam in the GDR, accredited to the Soviet forces. Major Nicholson was shot by a Soviet sentry at a facility he was trying to look into at night. The sentry obviously screwed up, and the Soviets never disputed that the sentry was at fault in shooting Major Nicholson. The real issue was whether the Soviets provided adequate and immediate medical care for Major Nicholson. He died. This became a matter of prolonged dispute between the United States and the Soviet Union. Secretary of Defense Weinberger chose to make it a big political issue, which the Army did not want to do, which the State Department did not want to do, and which the Nicholson family did not want to do.

This issue occupied much of my time for the first year in this job. As it happened, the commander of the Military Liaison Mission in Potsdam was an old colleague of mine, an Army officer from Moscow, and I was quite familiar with the role of the MLM and its need to maintain a degree of secrecy and to keep itself out of the newspapers if it was going to do its job properly. Having the Nicholson affair at a political-level between Washington and Moscow was not good for the MLM's operational role. Weinberger simply never understood the role and importance of the MLM. To him it was a relic of post-War relations with the Soviets, rather than an important component of American-Soviet communications in the final years of the Cold War. The issue slowly resolved, because the Soviets never pretended they were not to some degree at fault. What they disputed was the degree of fault and what they would say by way of apology.

As the Nicholson affair was receding, another affair replaced it, the terrorist bombing of a nightclub in West Berlin, the La Belle Discotheque, in which a number of Americans were killed or injured. This was traced to Libya, and to the Libyan embassy in East Berlin, which caused the United States to bomb Tripoli in Libya in retaliation. My role as director for GDR and Berlin meant I spent most of my second year dealing with the aftermath of the La Belle Discotheque attack. I had an excellent country officer for the GDR and an excellent officer who dealt with Berlin issues, so I focused on the two politically-sensitive issues, the Nicholson killing and the La Belle Discotheque bombing.

Q: If the Libyans arranged it in East Berlin, were we trying to stick the GDR with complicity in the case?

MERRY: No, but it did involve an embassy accredited to the GDR and four-power Berlin

issues, as that embassy was in East Berlin, which we regarded as the Soviet sector of a single city. This incident had complications that would not have existed anyplace else in the world, because only in Berlin was there a sector of a four-power occupied city serving as the capital of another country. Which aspects of the case concerned the Soviets and which the GDR? These were important but not obvious issues, arcane and complex issues that existed only in Berlin during the Cold War. Very few people in Washington knew about or understood these questions. Even in my office, only the Berlin officer and I really appreciated them. It was our task to make sure that U.S. interests in Berlin were not compromised. I had to get tough with my own bosses on occasion to make sure they adhered to policy positions they tended to forget.

Q: Before we leave that, how did the East German government respond to this?

MERRY: Their position was that they had no involvement at all. They certainly never acknowledged the GDR was in any way complicit. I see no reason to believe it was. If anything, relations between the GDR and Libya were in a difficult phase, and the last thing the GDR would want would be to have the status of its declared capital compromised. It would do the GDR no benefit. The GDR was a side issue for the United States; Libya was the culprit.

During this period I of course took a special interest in the GDR. After all, one of the main reasons I had taken this assignment was the hope it would return me to East Berlin. It's fair to say I was just about the only person in the State Department who really had much of a personal interest in the GDR. The country officer said candidly that his work could just as well have concerned some other country. While Assistant Secretary Ridgway had been ambassador there, it was not an experience she had enjoyed very much. We discussed this some years later. For me, being a second-secretary reporting officer in East Berlin had been one of the most enjoyable periods in my life, but as ambassador her years there had been boredom and tedium because she couldn't do most of the things I had done. She was a prisoner of her role.

Q: I was looking at an oral history I did with Dick Barkley, who was our ambassador.

MERRY: Our final ambassador.

Q: Our final ambassador there. In his oral history, he says in the spring of '89, he was talking to his wife and he said, "You know, this must be the most boring job in the Foreign Service."

MERRY: Yes, I think to be the ambassador in East Berlin was pretty boring, because it was a diplomatic relationship on the sidelines of the U.S. diplomatic relationships with West Germany and with the Soviet Union. As ambassador you couldn't get out and meet people and do things and have the freedom that I had had as a junior reporting officer. Rank has its privileges, as the saying goes, but it also has its limitations. In the Foreign Service, I think to be young with tolerant supervisors is the best.

In Washington, Ambassador Ridgway was knowledgeable about the GDR, but she was certainly not giving it any preferential treatment as assistant secretary. Far from it. God knows she had more than enough other issues to deal with. I think it's fair to say I was the only person in the building who had much of an engaged intellectual interest in the place at a time when the GDR was starting to change in very important ways, leading to the dramatic events two years later when the Wall came down.

We had a superb ambassador in East Berlin at that time, Frank Meehan, one of the most experienced American senior diplomats in central and eastern Europe. He was also just a prince of a human being; we all loved him. We received excellent reporting out of East Berlin, particularly on the developing crisis of the East German economy. There was a young economic reporting officer in East Berlin who was simply brilliant, named John Sammis, who sent in a series of exceptionally fine fact-based analyses of the developing crisis of the East German economy. These were the best economic reporting I ever read in my quarter century in the Foreign Service and, remember, I was trained in economics. The only problem was that these cables, as near as I could tell, had exactly two serious readers in Washington: one guy at CIA and me. I read these cables so carefully and annotated them in such detail that I almost memorized sections of them, because they demonstrated in a very clear way that the GDR economy was approaching systemic crisis.

The East German economy, which had been quite successful in the late '70s when I had been posted to East Berlin, was, by the mid-'80s, pretty much shaking itself to pieces. It was running far beyond capacity. Capital stock was deteriorating at an alarming rate. Infrastructure was woefully inadequate. Energy usage was very inefficient; pollution levels were becoming simply catastrophic. The East German economy was being driven by the political leadership well beyond its capabilities and was no longer the great success story of the socialist bloc as it was normally portrayed. On the contrary, it was becoming a basket case and creating critical social and political problems, particularly due to horrendous levels of air, water and ground pollution that provoked a very negative reaction among the East German public, particularly among families with children. It was making East Germany unfit to live in – in some areas, quite literally so. I was very interested in these developments and in the other reporting, the political reporting, coming out of our embassy in East Berlin. My position allowed me to travel there fairly often. Because of my role supervising Berlin affairs, I could travel to Germany on what was called the "Berlin occupation budget" anytime I wanted, and the German government paid for it. Unlike most people in the State Department, who had very limited travel opportunities, I traveled on German money rather than our own.

In the spring of 1987, I made a fairly long trip to the GDR, part of which was escorting a member of Congress for a few days, but most was entirely on my own. I spent 11 days in the GDR over the Easter period, and visited with East German friends in different parts of Saxony and Thuringia and Berlin. I had conversations which completely challenged my long-held assumptions about the social dynamics of the place. The underlying tensions were all coming out into the open. The patina of fear of the police state was evaporating. The claustrophobia resulting from travel restrictions was provoking people to think about

alternatives they would not have a few years before. A subject everyone wanted to discuss with me was “People Power” in the Philippines; how a few months before an authoritarian regime had been overthrown peacefully. They were not claiming they could do the same, but they were fascinated by this model on the other side of the world. This was kind of a “global village” phenomenon, that activity on the streets of Manila could have a profound impact on people's minds in central Europe.

That experience, combined with the analyses I’d been reading, led me to conclude that East Germany was approaching collapse, politically and economically. Obviously, this conclusion depended on the profound changes taking place in the Soviet Union and in Moscow's attitudes toward its external empire, especially Gorbachev's views on Germany. I returned to Washington—this was in the spring of ’87—and I bandied these views about within the office, where they were treated with polite incredulity, because everybody knew the GDR was a great success story. I also made remarks at a seminar at the Woodrow Wilson Center, then in the Smithsonian Castle, where I predicted the GDR would cease to exist within five years. This was a personal, not an official, statement. Most of the audience probably thought I was out of my mind, but at least one person who was there remembers that I predicted the GDR was approaching collapse.

My error was that it took only two and a half years, not five, but by the time I left this job in the Office of Central European Affairs it was clear to me that change was coming very quickly in this core component of the Soviet empire. By this time, of course, Gorbachev was in power and things were changing in Moscow, but also in Poland and in Hungary. Things were not yet changing in Czechoslovakia, Romania and Bulgaria, but they were certainly changing in the Soviet Union. I believed the GDR was going to experience dramatic changes, and they were going to happen soon. This was partly because of the crisis of the economy, but it was also because of changes in public attitudes in East German society, and the extent to which people were fed up with their aging, out-of-touch leadership. The Honecker regime, in the ‘70s, had been more or less in touch with their own society even as a communist, authoritarian system. By the mid-‘80s, they were totally out of touch. They hadn’t a clue what was going on, and the society knew their leadership didn’t have a clue.

The society was increasingly frustrated, alienated from the power structure, and really worried by the ecological damage overtaking the country, which was quite frightful. You had to be in it to believe it. One close friend of mine was a pastor in a place called Lauchhammer, a not very important town between Leipzig and Dresden. This place had an old coking coal factory built in the early 1950s, and the pollution in this town was so bad, the water in the streams was actually black. The pollution level was so high that in the schools, the teachers gave the kids—starting in kindergarten—a daily tranquilizer, because otherwise the kids were uncontrollable from all of the sulfates and other crap in the air they breathed and the water they drank. This was not unusual. Many parts of the GDR were really not fit to live in. The forests were visibly dying, for example.

Q: What was the situation? Was the leadership just milking the country without any regard or what was happening?

MERRY: The leadership wasn't so much milking the country as flogging the country. They insisted on ever-increasing levels of industrial output. Industry was based mostly on the use of soft lignite coal, which is extremely polluting. It was the only kind of coal the GDR had domestically. Much of the GDR's export industry was in chemicals and things like paints. The chemical plants, particularly the Leuna and Buna plants, were based on facilities from before the Second World War. Hopelessly out of date; fantastically polluting.

Q: I take it using lead still?

MERRY: Using all kinds of crap. There were many places downwind of industrial facilities in East Germany where there was actual ecocide; forests that were dead; sand dunes where forests had been – I saw it close up. There were complaints from Poland and Czechoslovakia, because they were downwind and it was having a deleterious impact on their agriculture. This contributed to a very broad sense among the younger population of the GDR that they just could not go on this way. Applications to leave the country – which involved often serious political repercussions – increased sharply among younger people, including some friends of mine. I had a very strong impression from my visits to East Germany that the population was losing its sense of intimidation, that people were no longer willing to remain passive, to accept that their situation was something they could not do anything about.

This was particularly true because they were watching real change taking place at the center, in Moscow. They saw the Soviet Union itself experimenting, opening up, at least being willing to talk about issues. That was not happening in their own country, in the GDR. For decades the generalized sense among people in East Germany was, "Our situation is the result of the Second World War and Germany's defeat. Our occupation by the Soviet Union, the Cold War, and the division of Germany and the division of Europe, are essentially imposed on us, and are therefore involuntary." Now they saw the Soviet Union itself beginning to experiment with new ways of, at least, talking and thinking. Perhaps not so much doing, but at least talking and thinking. They realized that, "No, the strictures in which we live in this country are not coming from the Russians. They are self-imposed by our own leadership. The problem is not in Moscow. The problem is in Berlin. The problem is not of Russian making, it is of GDR making and therefore we, as East Germans, ought to be able to at least follow the example of the Soviets. If they can make changes, and if people in Poland and in Hungary can begin to do things differently, why the hell can't we?"

The East Germany leadership was totally out to lunch. They hated Gorbachev. The Honecker leadership feared and hated what was going on in Moscow. Margot Honecker later said—this was Honecker's wife and also minister of education—"We never expected the counterrevolution to come from the Soviet Union." That's how they regarded Gorbachev, as a counterrevolutionary, whereas most people in East Germany regarded Mikhail Gorbachev as a long overdue breath of fresh air; as the kind of leader they would have liked to have themselves. They looked to Gorbachev as an example of

hope. Then they looked at their own leadership and thought, "These old men are hopeless." The tensions within East Germany resulted from a combination of things: the growing economic crisis the GDR leadership had itself created; the ecological crisis, which was a result of economic overproduction; the changing attitudes of young people toward what was or should be possible within their own society that were, in part, a product of Gorbachev's reforms in Moscow; and an overall sense that the static, rigid situation in Europe had outlived its time, that the divisions and control structures that had existed throughout the Cold War, particularly in Germany, were brittle and beginning to collapse.

For me, this was difficult. I felt it and understood it but could not prove it. First, it was difficult to put these impressions, this understanding that I had, into words that would be persuasive or comprehensible. It was damn hard for me to explain why I was so sure East Germany was coming apart. Second, it was impossible to get anybody to believe it in Washington. I remember one of my superiors told me, "Look, we all understand you're the Department's leading authority on East Germany, but come on. Everybody knows East Germany is going to be the last place in the Soviet bloc where anything is going to happen." I was the only person in the building for whom East Germany was not just a professional interest but a personal interest. I had been following it for many years, had recently visited the place several times, and actually knew something about East Germany society. But the dominant assumption was that East Germans were never going to revolt; they were both Germans and the other side's Germans, so they will never do anything. There was also the conviction, which I also had held till then, that the Soviets would never let anything happen in East Germany. The bedrock belief was that East Germany would be the last place where anything would happen. By God, when it did happen, Washington and London and Paris and Moscow and Bonn and just about everybody else were taken entirely by surprise. I say, with some degree of personal satisfaction, that I was not taken by surprise. I was delighted, but not surprised.

Q: I would like you to talk a bit about the end of your tour. How stood things—this is for next time—but how things stood when you left that job? But also, I want you to talk a little about—you had Austria and Switzerland?

MERRY: No. The way the office was set up, there was a unit that did West Germany. That was the big ticket unit. There was a unit, which I headed, which did Berlin, East Germany, inner-German relations, and then there was one guy who did Austria and Switzerland. He was quite busy, due to the scandals involving Kurt Waldheim in Austria. Normally, that was a quiet job, but not then. The Waldheim case was front-page news and the Department was deeply engaged.

Q: So we'll pick this up. You left that job in what?

MERRY: 1987, to go to Athens.

Q: Today is the 3rd of May 2010, with Wayne Merry. Wayne, I was going to ask: you left the German desk, whatever you want to call it, in 1987. How stood things at that time?

MERRY: In 1987 Gorbachev had been in power in Moscow for two years, and things were starting to change. Exactly how far they were going to change was still a matter of significant speculation. Attitudes within the various East bloc countries were certainly changing. I think this happened most dramatically in East Germany at the time of the Socialist Unity Party congress in 1986, where the leadership made it very clear it wasn't going to engage in any of this new thinking, glasnost (openness), perestroika (restructuring), any of that nonsense at all. One of the senior party figures reacted to Gorbachev's reforms by stating, "Just because your neighbor changes his wallpaper doesn't mean you have to." This was hugely important in East Germany, and I think also in the other East bloc countries, that the leash was no longer tight from Moscow. The source of each country's problems were the deadheads in each country's own leadership.

In terms of thinking in Washington, clearly Reagan, in his second term, was taking a very different approach after the end of the multiple transition in the Soviet Union. Brezhnev to Andropov, Andropov to Chernenko, Chernenko to Gorbachev. A lot of people in Washington, in the government and outside of it, were very skeptical of Gorbachev. Given his background within the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, it would have been imprudent not to have been skeptical. But he was a younger figure, and he was somebody talking a different talk. For one thing, he could talk. He could actually give an interview. He could speak without having a prepared text. The problem with Gorbachev was not getting him to talk freely, it was getting him ever to stop. He was called the master of the 45-minute sound byte. A journalist or a congressman would ask him a question and he'd still be answering it an hour later, which was a huge difference from the very rigid, scripted character of his predecessors.

In Washington, at the level of Reagan and Shultz, there was an interest in seeing what could be attempted, what could be done. One event related to Germany and me. This was President Reagan's famous speech in Berlin in front of the Brandenburg Gate in June 1987, where he said, "Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this Wall." As it happens, I wrote the first draft of that speech, but under protest. I thought it was a futile exercise, because nothing prepared in the State Department would be used at all by the White House speechwriters. Reagan's speech would be written by his own people in the White House. To prepare a draft in the State Department was a waste of time. Nonetheless, I was assigned to do one, so I did, and very little of my draft made it into the president's actual address. What was, to me, interesting was that Reagan was in Berlin, in Germany, in front of the Berlin Wall, and yet he addressed his appeal to Moscow, to Gorbachev, to the Soviet Union. This demonstrated that neither he, nor practically anybody else, had any notion that the Wall would be coming down in a couple of years, not because of an order from Gorbachev, but because of events on the streets of East Germany, in Leipzig and Berlin and other cities. It shows the extent to which we were totally Moscow centric in our thinking, as Reagan addressed his appeal to Gorbachev without any reference to the people of East Germany. They noticed that, by the way, they told me so.

Q: Was there any reporting on the growing split between the attitude in the East German government and the Gorbachev government? Was this a subject of reporting, discussion?

MERRY: The key question was domestic reform, where most of the East bloc countries had sclerotic, aging, out-of-touch leaderships. East Germany was a good case of that. The East German leadership under Erich Honecker had been fairly effective during most of the 1970s, but by the mid to late 1980s they were hopelessly out of touch with reality. They had no idea what was going on in their own society. The official programs for youth were just farcical. They were a bunch of old guys living on their memories of street battles against the Nazis, and they didn't understand Gorbachev. Gorbachev, to them, must have been like John Kennedy had been to Adenauer and De Gaulle and Macmillan, a young man who doesn't remember the things they remember, a man whose formative experiences were not their formative experiences. They saw Gorbachev not as a reformer but as someone unwilling to confront the ideological challenges they saw threatening the integrity of the socialist bloc.

Q: I realize you were working on the Western side, but on the Eastern side, where there any new figures that seemed to be coming up?

MERRY: Certainly in Poland. My specialty was not just inner-German relations but East Germany. Clearly the one country that was the exception within the East bloc was Poland, and increasingly, Hungary. Hungary had reformed communism, sometimes called goulash communism.

Q: Hungary was sort of slipping under the radar in a way.

MERRY: A little bit, but the Hungarians had been doing that slowly since 1956. The country well above the radar was, of course, Poland, because Solidarity had come out of its period of imprisonment and was able to challenge the government in open, free elections and win. Moscow had made clear it was not going to intervene, and the changing dynamics of Poland were seen as terrifying to leaders in places like Prague, Sofia, and East Berlin. What was most terrifying was that Moscow was so benign about it all. These other guys expected Moscow to do something, to put a stop to the erosion, and when Gorbachev and Shevardnadze were willing to let Poland be Poland, that was pretty scary to the rulers in the other East bloc countries.

Q: When you're looking at this thing strategically, the situation between West and East, you had two big armies sitting there. Poland sat astride the main communications of the Soviet army.

MERRY: Certainly. The Group of Soviet forces in Germany was composed of 22 armored and mechanized divisions with vast air forces, nuclear weapons, and everything that went with it, and it was almost totally dependent on railway lines and fuel pipelines crossing Poland. The Soviets had, for a number of years, ever since the beginning of Solidarity in Poland, been trying to develop alternatives: expanding land routes across Hungary and Czechoslovakia and sea routes across the Baltic. But Poland was the strategic hinterland of the Soviet position in Germany, and militarily, without Poland, the whole thing didn't make a lot of sense. This has to be seen in conjunction with the fact

that Gorbachev and Shevardnadze had already come to the conclusion that the Cold War was a mistake, unwinnable, and that they needed to get out of it to release resources for Soviet reform. They were beginning the diplomacy that would lead to the treaty on intermediate-range nuclear forces, the elimination of all of their SS-20s and of all of our cruise missiles and intermediate-range missiles from Europe; that would lead to the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe, certainly the most successful arms reduction—not just arms control but arms reduction—treaty that has ever been. That treaty led to the scrapping of tens of thousands of battle tanks and armored combat vehicles and artillery systems and all the rest of this junk in Europe; it transformed a Cold War Europe that had been an armed camp on both sides for decades into a semi-demilitarized zone with extraordinary speed and consequences.

I think the senior people in Moscow understood something which didn't quite yet compute to us in the West, but was realized at the level of Gorbachev and Shevardnadze. I'm not talking about the Soviet general staff, who, of course, were very upset about this. The political leadership was less concerned about the changes in Poland because they were willing to accept a massive reduction of armaments, theirs and NATO's, throughout Central Europe. Given that the changes in Poland, which they knew they couldn't deal with other than by massive military intervention anyway, were something they had to accept, they might as well make a virtue of necessity. This was all very puzzling to the West, because everybody's assumption, my own as well till then, was that there were clear limits to what the Soviets would ever tolerate concerning Germany. In fact, in the developing relationship between West Germany and the Soviet Union, between Gorbachev and Helmut Kohl, there was much more understanding and basic agreement than there ever was between Erich Honecker and Gorbachev. Still, neither Gorbachev nor Kohl understood the speed with which political changes would accelerate nor that the dynamic would be driven not from above but from below, by events within societies. They did not recognize their own incapacity to control or direct these events. Not just in Poland, but in Romania, in East Germany, then in Czechoslovakia, and then, of course, in the Soviet Union itself. Nobody appreciated that this great incoming tide of history was going to move as dramatically and as quickly as it in fact did.

However, by 1987, things certainly were in flux. For example, about the future of Yugoslavia, could it maintain its internal integrity, how would it respond to a period of severe economic decline and political crisis—how would that fit in to everything else happening in Europe? There were also dramatic changes within the traditional political left in many Western countries. The Cold War roles of such stalwarts as the Italian Communist Party, the Italian Socialist Party and the French Communist Party—these parties were just crumbling. Younger voters in Western Europe saw the Cold War as a tiresome, irrational anachronism, and this was matched by their counterparts in the East, in Poland, East Germany, Hungary, Czechoslovakia and Romania, who were willing to start pushing and pushing hard. This was a fascinating dynamic to behold and was why I really wanted to go back to our embassy in East Berlin. Unfortunately, I was one grade too junior for the position, and another officer, a good friend of mine, who was certainly superbly qualified for the job, got it.

Q: Who was that?

MERRY: That was Jonathan Greenwald, who was the last political counselor in East Berlin. He later wrote a fascinating book about the experience. We had an excellent embassy in East Berlin which I would have loved to rejoin. But 'twas not to be. Ironically, just as things in my part of the world—the socialist bloc, the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe, Central Europe, the places that were of most interest to me and where I had already done two assignments, in East Berlin and in Moscow—were beginning to undergo their greatest changes ever, I was sidelined for an assignment in Athens.

This was a classic personnel issue. There just wasn't a job at my grade with my languages. I didn't speak Czech or Polish or Hungarian, and all the jobs in Moscow I would have wanted were, again, still one grade beyond me. I needed one more promotion before I could get the jobs I would want, and most of them were not available in terms of the rotation cycle anyway. Unless I wanted to spend another year in Washington, which, for personal reasons, I did not, it meant going off for a while in a different direction.

Q: You went to Athens from when to when?

MERRY: I was in Athens from '87 to '90.

Q: What was your job?

MERRY: I was the number two in the Political Section, called the deputy political counselor, in a four-officer section. There was also a separate Political-Military Section which dealt with issues affecting the remaining U.S. military facilities in Greece. I got the job because my predecessor there curtailed his assignment by one year to take a job in Washington, and that opened up this slot a year early but fairly late in the assignment cycle. I was qualified in terms of grade and background. I was not qualified in the language, but because the assignment was a vacancy, it came with a language waiver. Normally the posting required a year of Greek. I was concerned about going to a Political Section without the language. After some disagreement between the embassy and FSI, it was agreed I would go out a couple of months early for an intensive tutorial in Athens rather than taking minimal Greek instruction in Washington.

I arrived in Athens during one of the hottest summers in modern Greek history and spent six weeks taking language tutorials from a marvelous Greek woman who had been an instructor to American ambassadors and other diplomats, and who became a close personal friend.

Q: Who was that?

MERRY: Annie Moller. She was married to an embassy communicator, and they had served in a number of Foreign Service posts before returning to Athens. We became very good friends, and she even managed to teach me a fair amount of Greek. Six weeks is entirely inadequate for a very complex language with a verb structure which dwarfs

Russian in its complexity. I got through the three years linguistically because at the foreign ministry, and in much other business, I could do everything in English. At that time, French was still an active second language for the upper classes, so at fashionable dinner parties I could use French if English was not spoken. In dealing with workmen and blue-collar Greeks, I often could get by with German, because many had been gastarbeiter (guest workers) in Germany. In traveling around the country and doing day-to-day things, I had enough Greek to function. So, with one thing and another, I could get along all right. As it happened, most of the diplomatic corps—not just the Americans, but most of the diplomatic corps—did not speak Greek, often less than I did. Our embassy was unusually strong in the language within the Athens dip corps. Our ambassador, Robert Keeley, whom I had known earlier, spoke excellent Greek. Our political counselor and my other colleagues in the Political Section all had good Greek.

Q: Who were they?

MERRY: The political counselor was Gregory Mattson, who was on his second four-year tour in Greece. Greg was a very fine mentor who knew the local scene extremely well. As his understudy, I emerged pretty sophisticated about Greek politics and society. We also got along very well, which is important for a deputy. I have been a deputy a number of times and think it is harder than to be the principal, as you must do your own job but maintain your boss's position on things as well. My other colleagues had backgrounds in Greek affairs, either modern or archeological. The U.S. Embassy was one of the strongest in town in terms of people who could speak not only basic Greek, which many diplomats did, but quite superior levels of Greek. I was the exception. I was the only officer in the Political Section, among the four, who didn't speak good Greek.

This was the first post I'd been to—because most of my time had been in communist countries—where I had the benefit of local employees attached to the Political Section. We had two FSN (Foreign Service National) employees, and they were both very experienced and talented people. The senior FSN (who was my age) had only been working for us for a short time, but was one of the best analysts of Greek politics in the whole country. He had become frustrated working for one of the political parties and found a comfortable home working for the American embassy. I learned an enormous amount from him on a daily basis about Greek politics. This was my first experience of Political Section FSNs, and I must say that any embassy in a position to use FSNs in that role is foolish not to, if you can get really good younger people.

Q: Could you explain, at the time, the Greek political situation, without spending a couple of hours doing it?

MERRY: Greece had a government led by the center-left party, PASOK (Panhellenic Socialist Movement), headed by Andreas Papandreou. Greek politics was mostly divided between two major parties, PASOK, which was center left, and New Democracy, which was center right. There was also the good old Greek Communist Party on the hard left, which, for practical purposes, had still not de-Stalinized, but got 10 percent of the vote or more. There were splinter parties on the left and right, as well. Greek politics then, as

now, were exceedingly partisan and, to put it mildly, colorful and very adversarial. In the late 80's, the basic competition was still between two main parties, which collapsed two decades later. Following Greek politics, I must say, was a lot of fun; it wasn't anything like the staid, gray politics of the Soviet politburo under Leonid Brezhnev. Greek politics were often on the streets. During election seasons political demonstrations would attract several hundred thousand people to the streets of Athens.

Greece is a highly politicized society, actually an overly-politicized society, where politics plays a vibrant role all the time. Every discussion in Greece very quickly becomes political. I developed a theory that Greece is the only country where men are more interested in politics than in girls. I saw this on a number of occasions, when a Greek man would have the choice between flirting with a pretty girl or arguing politics with another man, and he'd prefer the politics, which to my mind is simply perverse. Women were also intensely political. To illustrate, I had occasion to use several medical practitioners in Greece. All were women, all trained in the United States, and all were excellent. But the first question these doctors asked me on my first appointment was about my political party affiliation. No doctor had ever raised politics with me before. In Greece, that was the threshold before being accepted as a patient, a political one.

Q: Was this Democrat or Republican?

MERRY: Yes, she wanted to know what my politics were in the United States, a subject which is never asked within an embassy. It's a taboo subject for the Foreign Service. I replied that in the diplomatic service we have a tradition of serving the Republic and are a nonpolitical service. So, I got the appointment. It was my only experience where a doctor felt it was any of his or her business to ask a patient about their politics. I think it demonstrates the extent to which Greece is such an intensely politicized society.

But it was an interesting place to be. Greek politics were going through a transitional phase. In my third year, the country had three general elections, which resulted in six governments during that 12-month period. That was very interesting. My own responsibilities within the Political Section changed over time. During my first year, I was focused mostly on Greek-Turkish relations and Cyprus, both of which were active subjects and mostly improving. A few months before I arrived, Greece and Turkey had been on the verge of one of their recurrent moments of potential armed conflict. The two governments recoiled from that experience and tried to begin a detente. There also had been a change of government in Greek Cyprus, which contributed to relations between Athens and Ankara improving significantly. There was a personal rapprochement called the "Davos process" between Papandreou and his Turkish counterpart, Turgut Özal. There was at least the appearance of movement on the Cyprus issue. As these were issues that did not require a particular command of the language, that's what I mostly worked on my first year. I went to Ankara, I went to Nicosia, visited political figures in Turkey, in Turkish Cyprus, in Greek Cyprus, and talked with a lot of people in Athens. This was a subject of interest to Washington, because Greece and Turkey were both our allies. An improvement in their relations was something long wished for, and the Cyprus problem was a perennial thorn in everybody's side. Even the appearance of progress made these

issues relevant.

As it happened, the real improvement in Greek-Turkish relations took place some years later, but the "Davos process" set the stage. The difficulty was much more on the Greek side than the Turkish. Much of the Turkish establishment, both in government and in the business sector, was ready to improve ties with Greece, because Turkey had so many other external problems that were more important. For Athens, Turkey was the foreign adversary number one – though Yugoslavia and Bulgaria were also quite problematic. In Greece, the business community wanted improved relations with Turkey, but just about nobody else really did. The tabloid media was strident in its attacks on Turkey, while the foreign ministry and military were very resistant to any change in policy. The basic problem was that in Greece, the "Davos process" was essentially one man deep, while in Turkey it had broad institutional support. Nonetheless, this period did see the onset of reciprocal visits by politicians of a kind you would have thought would be normal between neighboring states, but had not happened between Greece and Turkey. A number of Greek politicians told me after returning from their first trip to Istanbul – which they always called Constantinople – of their surprise at the lack of hostility they encountered. One man, the mayor of Athens, told me in genuine astonishment, "They don't hate us!" I had to restrain myself from telling him, "Yes, because they really do not take you seriously." The Turks regarded the Greeks in general like near-do-well cousins, who are charming but not really very responsible. If the Greeks knew that the Turks looked down on them rather than hating them, the problem would have been even worse. Today, the long-term process of reconciliation between Greece and Turkey has progressed a long way, in part because Greece now has so many other problems at home and in the Balkans. I was present at the creation of this process, so can appreciate just how far they have come.

A persistent headache in Greek-Turkish relations – then and now – involved disputes over airspace and naval passage in the eastern Aegean. My prior experience played a helpful role because from my days at Marine Corps Headquarters I knew something about the law of the sea, and disputes between Greece and Turkey in the Aegean involved law of the sea issues. You could not simply believe what either government declared, so knowing what was in the Law of the Sea Treaty was very helpful. I think I was the only person in the embassy who knew enough about law of the sea to understand when the Greek government was trying to pull a fast one and when it was not; when the conflicting claims of Greece and Turkey fell within the body of accepted international law and when they did not. Greece asserted archipelagic rights in the Aegean even though it was not an archipelagic state under the definitions of the Treaty. This was a unilateral Greek assertion accepted by no other country. In the nature of things, the Turks were the most frequent "violators" of the Greek claims, though the U.S. Navy did so as well from time to time. The Greek authorities would proclaim violations of its air or sea space, and most people would not be aware that many Greek claims in the Aegean had no international support whatsoever. Understanding this issue was part of my job and was intellectually interesting. This expertise helped establish my standing in the embassy.

I should probably confess a bias. When I was at USNATO in 1971 I learned of an old

saying of the British diplomatic service, that there are two experiences likely to make one pro-Turkish, the first being service in Turkey, and the second being service in Greece. I resemble that remark, in that my experience in Athens emphasized the stark contrast in the American relationship with the two countries. The Turks felt honor bound to carry their own weight in their alliance with the United States, and not simply to freeload. The Greeks felt no such compulsion and, indeed, their pride led them to believe they owed nothing in return for American support and assistance. I came to the conclusion that, while my country was an ally to both countries, the Turks were also an ally to mine while the Greeks were not. This may sound like an exaggeration, but three years in Athens confirmed me in this prejudice, that the Greek relationship with the United States was entirely selfish with only a facade of reciprocity. I think this contrast explains why official Washington – excluding parts of the Congress, of course – was so hostile toward Greece and so partial toward Turkey.

In New York at the UN my Greek counterpart would pledge that his country supported us on some issue – even telling me so on the morning of a General Assembly vote – and then vote against us. On one occasion, I learned that he had boasted within the European group how he had "outsmarted the Americans," provoking our French colleague to respond, "you did not outsmart the Americans, you just annoyed them; it is not the same thing." It was this habit – of treating deception as clever – which I experienced over and over in Athens that left such a bad taste in my mouth about dealing with Greeks.

Over time, the focus of my work shifted to Greek internal politics, as the Papandreou era was coming to an end. As I mentioned, in my third year we had a perennial election season, with two inconclusive general elections. We had three general elections and six governments to report on. I wrote most of the embassy analytic reporting on these elections and changes of governments. By this time I'd had two years studying Greek politics and learning about Greek elections, which are very complex. My colleagues had broader and better contacts than I did, due to my limited Greek, so much of my knowledge was second hand. I tried to distill the knowledge of our ambassador and political counselor and other political officers and FSNs, and put it into regular analytic reports back to Washington, so our government would know what we knew. I was somewhat annoyed that I was doing so much of the actual writing because I was by no means the reporting officer who obtained most of the information. However, I was an old-fashioned Moscow-trained reporting officer who believed that if you haven't told Washington what you know you have not done your job.

Q: How did we see, in the first place, Andreas Papandreou? Initially—I don't know how towards the end of the time—he was quite anti-American. He had the Colonels coup and been under threat of death and I think we got him out of that, but he didn't seem to be overly-appreciative and blamed us for everything. I found the Greek experience is that the Greeks always blame somebody else. I was wondering, how stood he as his regime was fading away?

MERRY: Keep in mind that Papandreou had very complex attitudes towards the United States. He had lived here, he had been an American citizen.

Q: He had been in the Navy.

MERRY: He'd also been a professor here. He'd been the chairman of the economics department at Berkeley for a while. His first two wives were both Americans. It would have been no surprise if he had completed his life working as a leftist academic in Berkeley, California, rather than going back to Greece. However, he came under fairly intense pressure to go into the family business, the Papandreou family business being politics, because his father, George Papandreou, had also been prime minister of the country. In Greece, almost all activity, including politics, is organized within the family and is based on kinship relationships. This is common in traditional societies. The Papandreous were an established family of stature in Greek politics. Andreas Papandreou had a very conflicted relationship with his father, who had separated from his mother when Andreas was very young, but he was still the heir to the family business.

Andreas Papandreou's views toward the United States were a mixture of affection and resentment, envy and disappointment. He saw himself as a Greek JFK, at least in terms of image. But, Andreas Papandreou had a huge ego and for him, Greece was simply too small a pond. He wanted to play in the global power game. He felt that his political skills, his political genius, warranted a global stage, and he wanted to be one of the big players. Under Papandreou, even though Greece entered the-then European Community—it became the European Union—the same year that PASOK came to power, 1981, Papandreou never took Europe really seriously. This was foolish because Greece's destiny clearly, then and now, lies within an integrated Europe. Papandreou simply didn't regard Europe as a sufficiently grand stage for his own talents. One of the reasons his rhetoric was so often antagonistic toward the United States was because Washington wouldn't let him play the grand statesman role he wanted.

Papandreou badly wanted an invitation for an official visit to the United States. He signaled this to several U.S. administrations. He wanted to be received in Washington as a world statesman, and a series of U.S. administrations couldn't be bothered. His relationship with America is perhaps more fit for psychological analysis than political analysis. On one occasion I sat down with my Soviet counterpart in Athens—this was in the Gorbachev era, so we were having open and candid conversations with our Soviet colleagues—and found that the Soviet analysis of Papandreou was the same as ours; that he thought there should be three seats at the global table: the American president, the Soviet leader, and himself. His frustration was that the Americans and the Soviets insisted on talking to each other without himself to lend his higher wisdom and counsel. On the other hand, opinion polls showed that at least 12 percent of the Greek public thought that Andreas Papandreou was a CIA agent. Other people on the Greek left, who didn't go quite that far, nonetheless regarded him as dangerously pro-American. They said you could not believe anything Andreas said about America, you needed to look at what he does. Indeed, it was true, Papandreou let the United States do a lot of things, quietly, that some of our other allies wouldn't, particularly in intelligence activities.

Q: We had intercept stations on Crete, for example.

MERRY: We did all kinds of things I'm not going to discuss even now. As long as it was under the table, and there was deniability and appropriate compensation, Andreas Papandreou was remarkably blasé about letting the United States do what it wanted. I don't think Greek sovereignty actually was as important to him as to most Greeks.

I had occasion to observe Papandreou as a political actor, a couple of times close up but mostly from a distance. He certainly projected considerable charisma to his supporters and was a highly effective speaker, especially in front of a massive live crowd. One of his talents was combining the aura of the strong and decisive leader with that of the errant little boy who needs your help. Merging these two aspects of his public persona without evident contradiction was part of his political genius. There were frequent rumors of massive personal wealth from corruption, but I did not give them much credence. To be sure, his government and party were riddled with corruption, as was all politics in Greece, and Papandreou knew about and tolerated it all for reasons of political control. In my view, however, money for itself meant nothing to the man. For one thing, he never picked up the tab for anything. He had wealthy associates who paid for whatever he wanted. I concluded that Andreas Papandreou was motivated by only three things: power, sex and food. He had no cultural interests and pretty much lived to gratify his three appetites. In that regard he was hardly exceptional for a Greek male, just that he did it all on a larger scale and without restraint. Even as a child he had been famously spoiled rotten, in a society where boys are pretty spoiled in the best of circumstances. His selfishness was legendary and the subject of many anecdotes, often repeated by his supporters and friends.

During this period, Papandreou separated from his American-born second wife and took up with an airline stewardess named Dimitra Liani, who was 36 years younger. This became a big international scandal, with the general assumption that it was all about an aging satyr going after a much younger blonde bimbo. Certainly, sex was central to this relationship, but politics just as much so. The Liani family was something of a third-string family on the Greek political left. Dimitra was engaged in upgrading the status of her family through alliance with the premier family on the political left, the Papandreous. She initiated the relationship, not him, and she pursued Andreas with a careful plan to become his third wife and even the matriarch of a new branch of the Papandreou family. She got the marriage, but Andreas was not quite capable of fathering another son. Dimitra Liani was, in my view, a classic Greek in that her motives were both familial and political. She was no blonde airhead, but a smart and ambitious political climber. She made alliances within the more hardline and nationalist faction of PASOK which did not favor the obvious heir to the family title, young George Papandreou, who was part of the moderate and EuroSocialist side of PASOK. If Dimitra had had enough time to fulfill her plan, who knows how the course of Greek politics would have been affected? If nothing else, her role pretty much compelled George to take up politics himself as the eldest male of the family, something he was more than a little reluctant to do. George never really had the fire in the belly of a true politician, but the challenge from Dimitra and the PASOK hardliners gave him little alternative to taking up the challenge and becoming in time the third Papandreou prime minister.

I don't think anyone should deny the extraordinary political talent of Andreas Papandreou, although his stewardship of the Greek economy was disastrous. Many of the underlying problems of public finance which brought Greece to crisis a generation later dated from Papandreou's use of public funds, and of EU subsidies, to purchase political support at home, like pension programs for average people which even a Persian Gulf emirate could not afford. With EU membership, Greece had a once-in-a-lifetime chance to move itself from the margins of Europe to become a real First World economy. It would not have been easy, but the human capital in Greece was ample. It was the institutional structures and dysfunctional nature of the political system which held Greece back. Andreas reinforced the problems rather than reformed them. Rather than using EU money to modernize the economy, as Ireland and Portugal did, he used it more for current consumption, which was politically motivated. It is perhaps a warning lesson about the damage a Harvard PhD in economics can inflict on a country.

Q: Question: I was in Greece from '70 to '74 at the height of the Colonels, and it was no secret, in fact, I have a book here called Legacy of Ashes, about the CIA. The CIA had extremely cozy relations with the Colonels, and much of the reporting or attitude towards the United States in the government emanated from the CIA. Without getting into details, was the CIA Station a real factor for you there or not?

MERRY: In many ways it was. Much of it had to do with Greek terrorism, a topic I will come back to, because that was the dominant issue of my three years in Greece in both my professional and personal life. In political reporting, the Station tended to make the classic mistake of using sources who told it what it wanted to hear. For example, in predicting the outcome of the three general elections I mentioned, the Political Section—and I wrote the cables—predicted all three correctly. The Station, which was listening only to right-wing sources, was really very unsophisticated in its analysis. Greeks are highly politicized, and tell you either what they think you want to hear or give you their own partisan preference rather than an objective analysis. Sorting out reality from that kind of biased sourcing is the essence of good political analysis. The Station told Washington what its sources were saying, but those sources were biased sources, whereas the Political Section did not accept uncritically what anybody said. There were only two or three Greeks I met with the capability of disaggregating their own political preferences from their political analysis. There was only one political polling firm whose methodology was objective; we subscribed to their product and used only their numbers because all the other opinion-polling numbers were garbage.

Our political analysis was not only more widely sourced, more representative, but was based on objective analysis of hard opinion-polling data and hard analysis of electoral trends. The Greek electoral system is very complex. It took me months of studying to figure it out but I finally did. I think we did a much better job than the Station. I took considerable satisfaction that, before the third election, I wrote a report predicting that in the 300-seat parliament, New Democracy would win exactly 150 seats, have neither a majority nor a minority, and would have to make a deal with a one-seat representative of a splinter party. That's what I predicted and that's exactly what happened. I got a fairly

nasty comment from one of the senior people in the Station when that cable went out just before the election because that wasn't what they were reporting. They were predicting another hung parliament, while I forecast that New Democracy would be able to form a government by adding one seat to its 150. When this turned out to be the case, they were bent out of shape because, for the third time running, the Political Section had been right on the money. So I took a certain professional gratification in that.

Q: What were American stakes in the political process in Greece?

MERRY: Well, truth be told—and no Greek would believe this but it was the truth—the importance of Greece to the United States had been in significant decline for years. The only things that really drove our relationship with Athens were the Greek domestic lobby in the United States and the U.S. relationship with Turkey. For example, the reason we maintained a consulate in Thessaloniki was because we maintained three consulates in Turkey. The State Department felt it was politically impossible to tell the Congress we would have no consulates in Greece and three in Turkey. The reason we maintained any bases in Greece—Air Force and Navy—was because we had major bases in Turkey. The uniformed services very much wanted to get out of Greece, as their facilities were redundant, having been made obsolescent by other facilities and by satellites, and they didn't like the Greeks. They had nothing but trouble with the Greeks; the Navy in particular hated doing business with Greece. The political leadership at the Pentagon insisted we maintain some bases in Greece to balance the importance of our bases in Turkey. Greece, in and of itself, really wasn't that important.

Increasingly— because Greece had been in the European Community since 1981— responsibility for Greece, in a broad international sense, was shifting from Washington to Brussels and to the major European capitals. After the War, we had taken on the burden of Greece from the British and now were passing it on to Brussels. I think that was an entirely positive development; long overdue, in fact. However, the future financial crisis between Athens and Brussels was evident even that far back. Our Economics Section did excellent analyses which showed in stark terms how far outside of European standards the Greeks remained. They cheated on EU rules by orders of magnitude more than anyone else. The shamelessness of Greek behavior was infuriating to the other Europeans. I heard this a lot from European colleagues. Many of them said bluntly that letting Greece into Europe had been a mistake. An Irish colleague told me Dublin was the only EU capital which wanted Greece in, because the Irish were no longer viewed as the bad boys of Europe, the Greeks being so much worse. When you keep in mind that, without the European Union and its subsidies, Greece has a Third World economy, it is striking how little the Greeks felt they even needed to go through the motions of adhering to European rules.

During my final year, I was acting political counselor during the time when Greece held the six-month rotating presidency of the EU. I can say with complete candor it was the most aggravating six months of my professional life. I later went through two attempted coups in Moscow, but would do that again in a heartbeat rather than another Greek EU presidency. They just would not, or could not, do anything by the rules. To make my job

more difficult, Washington would not, or could not, comprehend what the Europeans all understood, that nothing could get done during a Greek presidency. The other Europeans were willing to wait for the Spanish presidency, but Washington insisted the embassy get answers from the Greeks that simply were not forthcoming. Rather than give a wrong answer and be embarrassed, the Greeks gave no answers. Washington blamed the embassy, of course, not the Greeks.

Today, the shift of the Greek burden from America to Europe is pretty much complete, thank God. The current Greek financial crisis is not the U.S. Government's problem. Nobody at the Treasury Department or the Federal Reserve will have to shell out money to save Greece. The only Washington institution that's involved is the International Monetary Fund. In those days, by contrast, there was a huge asymmetry between the reality of Greek importance to the United States, which was small and due to American ethnic politics, and the Greek perception, which was that they were the absolute center of American interests and were the most important country in the world to the United States.

Q: I remember when new people were assigned to Greece, the ambassador or something like that, the papers would speculate, "What does this mean? Why have they assigned so-and-so?" When actually it was pretty bloody routine.

MERRY: Yes. Greeks always have a sense of themselves as being the navel of the world. The self-image of the Greeks—not so much derived from classical Greece, I think, but from imperial Greece, Constantinople, and the Eastern Roman Empire that was, after all, the most enduring and, in some ways, the most cultured empire European history has ever produced—is a legacy of enduring vanity. The extent to which they persuaded themselves of their centrality for America was exceeded only by the even more bloated vanity of Greeks on Cyprus. I remember a conversation with a Cypriot member of parliament in Nicosia, who had never set foot in the United States in his life, but who lectured me about how the American people, average people across the length and breadth of the United States, cared deeply about the Cyprus issue and how Americans were passionate about Cyprus and so on. Finally, I was sufficiently annoyed by this tirade that I told him that, for most Americans, Cyprus was a tree. I met any number of Greek Cypriots who truly believed Americans were passionately engaged on the Cyprus issue.

At least the Greeks in Athens weren't quite that bad, but they certainly took a view which was reflective of Andreas Papandreou's view of himself. Papandreou, having been an American citizen, could at least claim some identity in America. Most Greeks just could not accept, for reasons of vanity, conceit, pride – and pride is almost the defining characteristic of the Greek national identity – could not accept that Greece was to the United States what Bulgaria was to the Soviet Union, if even that.

This attitude produced some really wacko conclusions. I was in Athens during the 1988 U.S. Presidential campaign. There was a brief period when Governor Dukakis was ahead in the polls. So far as we could ascertain, Dukakis had set foot in Greece only once as a tourist, but I met supposedly serious Greeks – educated people – who believed that if a Greek American entered the White House, Greece would get its empire back. They were

digging out old family papers for properties in Constantinople on the assumption the capital would be moving back there once the Americans recreated the Byzantine Empire for the Greeks. Really! I am not making this up! When Dukakis lost, it was explained in the Athens press because he had not married a Greek girl; his failure to become president was explained by what one paper called his "Jew bitch wife." Supposedly, an ethnic Greek wife would have ensured his election by the American public. Go figure.

Q: Tied to that, I was consular general in Greece for four years and had served in the same capacity in a lot of other places. But the Greek Americans went beyond any other ethnic group that I had to deal with, as far as maintaining their Greekness, which often became heightened when they went to the United States.

MERRY: This is not an unusual attribute for immigrant groups.

Q: But these were an arranged…

MERRY: Believe me, I know what you're talking about. The irony is that Greek Americans tended to be looked down on by Greeks as inferior. The attitude was, "Well, yes, you may have gone to America and become a millionaire, but obviously your family are not good Greeks or they never would have left." Here is a country that depends on its diaspora—not just Greeks in the United States, but in Canada, in Australia, New Zealand, Kenya, Britain, all kinds of places—for enormous support, not just in terms of remittances, pure money, but in terms of political support. Yet, Greeks in Greece condescend really quite blatantly to Greeks abroad.

Q: But not only do that but again, to use one of my problems, Greek Americans would return and buy a little homestead back in their village or something, and immediately, one, they'd be pressured by so-called relatives to give them stuff, but their property would be diminished by moving boundary stones and all that. It was something to behold. These were milk cows, to be milked.

MERRY: Since you were in the Consular Section I will mention that when I was there we still had—and I'm sure we still do—one of the largest federal benefits programs abroad in Greece, which are people collecting Social Security. American federal benefits programs are enormous in places like Mexico, Great Britain, the Philippines and all kinds of places. Even during the Cold War, we maintained huge federal benefits programs in places like Poland and Romania.

Q: And Yugoslavia.

MERRY: There's many a village in Romania and in Poland that lived, pretty much, off of one guy's U.S. dollar Social Security check. The program we had in Greece was unique in that it had—and this was a big problem for the Consular Section—by far the highest fraud rate of any federal benefits program in the world.

Q: We had a representative of the Social Security agency in Greece, who did nothing but

check.

MERRY: We still had that problem on a massive scale when I was there. Our people would go out into some village in the middle of nowhere, where some little old lady who was the widow of a guy who had worked in the States for a number of years and qualified for Social Security might or might not still be alive, but the village had an interest in making sure that she still got the check, whether she was alive or not.

The reality was of a progressively diminishing stature for Greece in the American scheme of things. Greek-Turkish relations improved during these final three years of the 1980s, which was something we favored; the Cold War was coming to an end; tensions between Greece and Yugoslavia were easing, for the time being at least; the beginnings of political change were rustling even in Albania; the East-West relationship in Europe was cooling down, and then, of course, came the fall of the Berlin Wall, which happened in 1989, while I was still in Athens; then came the revolution in Romania, and the Velvet Revolution in Czechoslovakia, the coming to power of a popularly-elected government in Poland, and the onset of Soviet collapse. In this context, Greece as a Cold War bastion became something of a backwater. Turkey was still important, because of Iraq, because of Iran, because of the whole Middle East. Turkey would, in fact, become more important in the post-Cold War world than it had been during the Cold War. But if you don't have a Cold War in Europe, if you don't have a divided Europe, you don't have East-West tensions, you don't have a Warsaw Pact, exactly what is the place for Greece in terms of American interests? On basing, we had more than adequate facilities in Italy and in Turkey, with governments that maintained much more agreeable relations than we did with Athens.

The U.S. Navy and the U.S. Air Force found Greece more trouble than it was worth and, except for trying to keep a group of Hellenophilic or Greek-American senators and congressmen happy, frankly, we could have eliminated the whole American military role in Greece. A four-star admiral unloaded on me once about how much he hated Greece and would, if given the chance, remove the entire Navy presence there. We couldn't, because of these senators and congressmen. The naiveté of many American senators and congressmen going to Greece beggars imagination. They behaved as if they expected to run into Pericles in the lobby of the Athens Hilton. It was not true in all cases. We had a few congressional visitors who impressed me very highly. For the most part, however, they imagined they were traveling into a Mary Renault novel rather than to the reality of the modern Hellenic Republic.

With the change of administration from Reagan to Bush Senior, Greece was relegated to a fairly low priority. This was demonstrated when, at the very beginning of the new Bush Administration, the new secretary of state, James Baker, visited all of the NATO allies in one trip. I was control officer for his visit to Athens, which was nothing more than a meeting with Andreas Papandreou. To show you where Greece fit in our scheme of things, Baker started the day in Bonn, spent the morning and most of the midday in Ankara, came to Athens in the late afternoon, and then had dinner with the prime minister in Rome. Basically, the secretary of state had afternoon coffee in Athens. In fact, he

didn't even go into Athens. He had his meeting at a coastal hotel that Papandreou used for this kind of thing. Baker never even went into Athens, which was a relief for me as control officer, because he would have run into huge anti-American demonstrations. This shows where Greece was in the pecking order, that it didn't even get part of the day—it got part of an afternoon—in Baker's trip. I think that was a pretty clear manifestation that, with the end of the Cold War, came an end to Washington's willingness to put up with Greek obstreperousness and Greek anti-American overt propaganda. There was a widely shared sense in our government that Greece was a pain in the neck as opposed to Italy and as opposed to Turkey, both of which were held in very high esteem in Washington as exemplary allies. There was increasingly a sense that, all right, we have to go through the motions for the Greek lobby on Capitol Hill. Beyond that, people in Washington weren't going to cut Greece much slack.

I should say a few words about the two ambassadors I served under in Athens. For the first and second years, my ambassador was Robert Keeley, whom I had known both at Princeton, where he had been a mid-career fellow, and thereafter in State. It was due to admiration for Keeley in part that I took the Athens assignment, as it was well out of my normal area of interest. He had a long family and personal history with Greece and had served at the embassy during the early part of the military dictatorship. When I arrived at post, I was frankly shocked by my first office visit with the ambassador, as he looked totally exhausted and almost fit for a hospital. He had been there already two years and was, in my opinion, near burn out. The Greek media was just vicious in its treatment of the ambassador and of his wife, with a near-daily torrent of lies and libel. Spending four years in the job was, in my opinion, fair neither to himself nor to the embassy. Junior Foreign Service staff called him the "absentee landlord" because they never had any contact with him. Later I happened to see Keeley some years after his retirement and he looked twenty years younger. My third year we had a political appointee as ambassador, Michael Sotirhos, about whom I prefer not to speak at this time. In sum, during those three years, and despite some excellent colleagues, Athens was not a high-morale embassy, and I know the contrast well.

Q: Let's talk about terrorism. You were saying that became a big thing on your list.

MERRY: It was indeed. When I went out to Athens in 1987, I understood there was a terrorism problem because of a group called November 17th (Revolutionary Organization 17 November), which had begun in 1975 by killing the CIA Station chief in Athens, and was largely unopposed by the Greek police forces. I understood this was going to be part of my life, a concern about terrorism, and I understood it was also going to be part of my job, as the embassy counterterrorism reporting officer. I had nothing to do with counter-terrorism assistance programs or operational stuff, but only reporting. When I showed up at the airport at Athens, my predecessor was there to greet me, and he had a half dozen Greek plainclothes cops as bodyguards. Well, this was not a very agreeable introduction to Greece. It turned out this Greek bodyguard detail was going to become mine in a few days. The problem was that my predecessor had a fairly high profile.

Q: Who was your predecessor?

MERRY: Thomas Miller, later an ambassador in Athens. As you know, having served in Athens yourself, it was not just the American ambassador who became a public figure there. Other people in the embassy attracted public attention, whether they wanted to or not. Miller had wanted to, I think, and had thereby become a potential target. I inherited the bodyguard detail and had them for a couple of months before I was able to persuade the embassy's regional security officer (RSO) to get rid of them. I did so for two reasons: one, I thought they attracted far too much attention. I had every intention of maintaining a low profile in Athens, although my arrival was greeted by a number of press stories that identified me as the new CIA Station chief or other inaccurate characterizations. Nonetheless, I thought if I kept my head down, I would probably be better off than by having this rather flamboyant entourage of bodyguards. Second, the head of the bodyguard detail, who was a sergeant and obviously a very conscientious policeman, came to me privately one day and asked if I could get him some ammunition for his pistol. While there were bullets in the gun, that's all he had ever been issued, and he had never fired the weapon. If I could get him some extra ammunition he would go into the countryside on his day off and get some target practice. When I found out that the sergeant, who was the head of the bodyguard detail, was carrying a weapon he had never fired, my confidence in this bodyguard detail sort of went down, shall we say.

Q: Oh my God, yes.

MERRY: I persuaded the embassy regional security officer, who was first-class by the way, that I was serious about security, I understood this was a high-risk post, I was not going to take this problem lightly, I was going to do all the things you're supposed to do, particularly in varying your routes and times, and it was my judgment I'd be better off without the bodyguard detail. The RSO agreed and got rid of them. I was very conscientious about personal security, at time almost obsessive. I deliberately found an apartment in a building that had entrances not just into two different streets but, because of the configuration of the terrain, actually into two different neighborhoods. I varied my routes and times very conscientiously, which I did on foot, which I thought gave me greater flexibility in terms of being able to spot potential danger and not get ambushed.

Unfortunately, very tragically, the next year, November 17th murdered our defense attaché, a Navy captain, William Nordeen, of whom it was said in his office that you could set your watch by his morning schedule. The terrorists positioned a car bomb down the street where he lived and killed him as his vehicle was passing. As you can well imagine, the murder of one of the senior figures of the embassy—he was the defense attaché, the head of the defense attaché's office—had a fairly chilling effect, not only on the climate of the embassy, but on our security measures. At this point, the RSO wouldn't let me walk to work anymore. To and from work I had an armored sedan with a driver, and there were uniformed Greek police posted outside my building with automatic weapons. I still felt my conscientiousness about security was probably my own best defense, because I was none too impressed either by the training of my driver or by the skills of the police guards I was given. The RSO once received a complaint from the Greek police that my morning movements were too erratic and asking that I maintain a

more predictable morning routine. The RSO gave me a gold star for that. I certainly did take security very seriously and, because I was the embassy counterterrorism reporting officer, I dealt a lot with the Minister of Public Order and with other Greek officials involved with the terrorism issue. By my second year, terrorism had replaced Greek-Turkish relations and Cyprus as the principal focus of my reporting and it remained so even despite the electoral activity through the third year.

As it happened—and I saw this in a chart in a book written much later—the three years I was in Athens were, by far, the most active in the quarter-century history of November 17th, in the number of their attacks and the number of fatalities and victims. It's not clear why that three-year period was so active. Perhaps it had to so with the broader political turmoil in the country; certainly, nothing in the relationship with the United States was special. They also killed a Greek member of parliament, whom I knew a little bit, and targeted personnel from other embassies, plus senior Greeks of all kinds, doctors and politicians and businessmen. It may have been because they had recruited a new generation of trigger men who wanted to be active. For whatever reason, the three years I was in Athens coincided with the peak years of activity of this terrorist group. Much later, one Greek tabloid newspaper said that proved I had been in charge of the terrorists.

The problem, as I came to understand, lay as much, if not more, on the side of the Greek counterterrorism forces, the police. I said then and later that Greece did not have the world's worst terrorism problem or anything like it, but Greece did have the world's worst counterterrorism problem. It became quite clear to me and to others that not only were the Greek police lacking in modern constabulary competence, but politically there was almost no motivation to stop the terrorists. In fact, they were tolerated by the PASOK government, which regarded them, I think, as fellow comrades from the struggle against the colonels' regime who had simply not yet given up the armed struggle, but would in time. I don't know how many times senior Greek officials in the foreign ministry and the Ministry of Public Order, or members of parliament, told me that the solution to November 17th was just time. "Wait a while and they'll get tired of this killing and bombing and give it up and they'll stop." But they didn't give it up, and they didn't stop. They kept doing it more and more and became better and better at it.

Q: Now, have they turned on the Greeks? Or was this pretty much against…

MERRY: Oh, no, it was also against Greeks. The member of parliament who was killed was the son-in-law of the head of the New Democracy Party and future prime minister, Mitsotakis, and the husband of the later mayor of Athens and foreign minister of Greece, Bakoyannis. Many senior Greeks were also targeted; in fact, there were more Greeks under threat than foreigners. But the Greek ruling classes were remarkably blasé about this. A member of a family that lost one of its sons to November 17th told me later, "I knew about this problem. I even knew other families who had been hit, but I never really felt any sense of particular interest in the problem until my own brother was killed." The semi-official tolerance was matched by a broad public tolerance of terrorist violence as an acceptable element of political life. Violence was viewed as a legitimate form of political speech. The killing was somebody else's problem. There was an almost carnival

atmosphere at the funeral of the member of parliament who was killed. You would think other members of parliament would be horrified and shocked and energized that a member of parliament had been gunned down in broad daylight in the center of Athens. But no, this was not a big deal for them. The death of the man who had married the boss's daughter in New Democracy was seen in political terms, not in public safety terms. The other MP's assumed that somehow the problem was not theirs, so why worry?

Q: You're our contact person, I imagine. Our security people were, too. But as a contact person, were the people you were contacting engaged?

MERRY: Well, it varied. The Greek police were not very competent. For example, on a number of cases, the officer in charge of the scene of a political assassination would give expended shell casings to his journalist friends as souvenirs. Basic ballistic evidence, shell casings on the scene after somebody had been shot, would be given away as souvenirs. On the other hand, the real problem was political. I remember vividly taking some official visitors from Washington to meet with the minister of public order. I won't say which one because it would identify things too clearly. On the way out, we used the minister's private elevator, which only held three people, so we went down in groups. One of the senior uniformed police officers held me back so that he and I would be the last. As we were going down he hit the button to bring the elevator to a stop so we could talk but nobody could hear us. He proceeded to unload on me. He said, "Look. We're not Sherlock Holmes here, but we're not idiots. We can catch these bastards. But we're handcuffed." And he put his hands in front of him as if his hands were in handcuffs. "The political leaders don't want us to get these guys. The only way we're ever going to get these bastards is if you Americans get our political orders changed. We're not complete idiots here. We can do the job if we're given an opportunity."

Q: Was there anything in it to keep this going for the political people?

MERRY: I think there were two things. First, a generalized sense that the terrorists were fellow old comrades from the underground struggle against the military junta, because many people in Greek politics had been involved in armed struggle during those years. There were lots of members of parliament and other respectable people who had been engaged as insurgents, as terrorists during the period of the Colonels.

Q: There wasn't much going on.

MERRY: I'm aware of that.

Q: Maybe they thought they were but they…

MERRY: The image that people had was of political armed struggle. A lot of these people thought of November 17th as fellow combatants who just hadn't gotten over it. That comes to the second problem. For many people and senior political figures, there was concern that if the terrorists involved in November 17th were exposed, this would lead to embarrassment elsewhere, it would lead to questions about other people. I think

there was a generalized sense that turning over this rock would bring out things they did not want exposed. They rationalized inaction by the belief the problem was going to resolve itself, that it was just going to go away. It was quite clear to anybody seriously following November 17th that it was not going away: reading their proclamations and studying their increasing operational competence and their increasing sophistication in weapons and in explosives and in armed robbery, plus expanding the number of young men doing the trigger work for them. This was a growth operation. This wasn't a bunch of old guys getting ready to retire, the simple age structure of the attackers made that plain, however old might be the leaders. For most of the Greek political elite, the view was, OK, if they got an American now and then, a Turk now and then, one or two people from the opposite political persuasion from us, that's an acceptable level of casualties.

Q: What was the American embassy here? You have the American ambassador. We're the targets. We could be yelling from the rooftops and make very unpleasant publicity for this by saying, "They're incompetent," or "They don't care," or "They're promoting it."

MERRY: The problem on our side was we were hamstrung by the domestic political protection that Greece got from their lobbies in Washington, that no pressure should be brought to bear on Greece.

Q: That doesn't seem to wash. We're talking about people getting killed.

MERRY: Yes, I know.

Q: We're not talking about artsy fartsy Greek-Cypriot problems. We're talking about terrorists.

MERRY: I'll tell you this. My view is that Washington was shamefully hypocritical about November 17th. I believe this was true under U.S. administrations of both political parties. Every time somebody was killed—in all, there were four Americans killed; four American embassy people were killed over a period of years. Every time it happened, there was a speech by the secretary of state or whoever, that we will not rest until . . . . . Then everything went back to business as usual and no administration faced with November 17th ever made a serious political issue of it with the Greeks. I drafted the embassy submission for the annual global terrorism report to Congress, and it was badly watered down in the Department. One year, when I complained that the candor of our submission had been lost, I was told by the desk that the judgment in Foggy Bottom was that if State publicly told the truth about Greek terrorism, the Congress would cut the Department's budget in retaliation. That, I think, pretty much says it all for Washington's attitude.

Except, it really is not all, as at the embassy we had reason to believe that some of our classified reporting on terrorism was being given to the Greeks in Washington. I won't go into specifics on this, but I became quite confident some of my own reporting on terrorism was compromised by people in our government with Greek connections. If you think I am being paranoid, I might mention that the Greek security services not only

provided some protection for me, they also kept me under surveillance including tapping my home telephone. After East Berlin and Moscow, I was quite accustomed to a phone tap, but the Greeks were so incompetent that it interfered with the phone connection. Often, after a phone call, the tap would keep going – I could actually hear the tape recorder in the background – and I could not get back a dial tone. I would have to go to the Station the next morning to ask them to contact their Greek colleagues to give me back a phone connection. This was an annoyance, but you might wonder why the Greek authorities who were supposed to be fighting terrorists were in fact running surveillance on American diplomats, and poorly at that.

It wasn't until, some years later, after November 17th very unwisely murdered the British defense attaché, that the British government—Tony Blair and Jack Straw—did what no U.S. administration had ever been willing to do, which was really put pressure on Greece. They sent a team of people from Scotland Yard to Athens to stay there until the group had been busted. I was out of government by then but was very much involved writing articles and op-eds and doing television interviews about the terrorism problem in Greece, and I was well informed about the British response. I'll tell you, if Washington had ever shown the political backbone on this issue that London did after its defense attaché was murdered, this group would have been put out of business years earlier. I think the lion's share of the blame lies in Athens. But I think there's plenty of blame and shame for Washington as well.

Q: I can't help feeling that if we really said that this cannot be tolerated—this whole bloody country—

MERRY: Yes, and they were giving us all this crap, "It's like looking for a needle in a haystack." No, it wasn't. November 17th had its origins among radical leftist Greeks in Paris during the period of the military dictatorship; that had been obvious from the very beginning. What was needed was some cooperation with the French authorities, which a later Greek minister of public order actually did. He went to Paris, personally. He got permission from the French to look in their files on Greek Trotskyites who'd been in Paris during the years in question, and that's how they did bust November 17th—that, and the cooperation from Scotland Yard on the forensics and ballistics. All of this could have been done years earlier.

The Greeks, fairly forcefully, rejected any serious American participation or cooperation on the basis of national pride, on the basis of sovereignty, and on the basis of evasion, in my view. Later, they couldn't quite take that view with the British because they were all in the European Union together and the British had treaty-based rights to get involved. Even then, the Scotland Yard people were given the run-around for months. But Washington never pushed very hard, either. Washington never really tried to get the Greek side to do the job. Washington did authorize one failed effort shortly after my departure, of a CIA clandestine team sent to trace November 17th, but they were publicly exposed and had to be withdrawn. In terms of making November 17th a political-level issue, I have to tell you that Washington never did over a quarter of a century. The ultimate solution was the result of pressure from London and action by a new public

order minister who was serious, with the additional motive—this is springing forward in time—of the upcoming 2004 Athens Olympic Games. The Greeks were then under intense pressure from the International Olympic Committee and from the American and British Olympic Committees, that they had to do something about their domestic terrorism problem or they might face a boycott.

This is something I got involved in after my retirement from the Foreign Service. Among other things, I briefed a senate delegation going to Athens to confront the Greeks about the link between their domestic terrorism problem and participation in the Athens Games. My view is that the reason November 17th was finally broken up is the Greek government at that time—this was a later government, of course—was genuinely concerned that it faced a significant boycott of the Athens Olympics. They were also under enough pressure from the British government that they decided they really had to do something and they did. I believe it could have been done years earlier if the United States had actually taken responsibility for the danger to our own people.

Q: Was there any connection, during that time, with any external terrorist group?

MERRY: It's an interesting question, on which I wrote a number of messages from the embassy. In Greece, theories about November 17th were legion. Some people thought they were CIA. Some people thought they were KGB. Some people thought they were Turkish, that they were Arab, they were associated with Palestinians or associated with radical German groups. I think the evidence was fairly clear that November 17th—which was a highly ethnocentric as well as Trotskyite group in its politics—never had any contact with any foreign groups whatsoever. That was one of the key ways they maintained their internal security. They didn't need much money, and got it by robbing some banks. They were able to get all the weapons and explosives they needed by raiding Greek police stations and stealing them. One of the things that made November 17th kind of hard to penetrate, in a classic police sense, was that it was so ethnocentric that it had no contacts with foreign groups.

Now, some other international terrorist groups—particularly Palestinian groups—were present in Greece. In fact, some were openly present in Greece and had public offices, which embarrassed or did not embarrass Greek governments, depending on the time in which it happened. There was a lot of terrorist violence going on in other countries; in Italy, Turkey, Germany, and of course in the Middle East. Greece was seen as an easy entrepôt and point of passage for things like buying fake passports and making deals to buy various kinds of weaponry. Greece has such a porous set of borders, whether its islands or its northern border, that these groups could pretty much do anything they wanted. International terrorist groups were certainly active, using Greece for their own purposes, but they did not actually conduct terrorist operations in Greece. Most of them found it such a benign environment, so why spoil it?

I was involved in another international terrorist matter, when the Greek police managed (with our assistance) to detain a Palestinian named Mohammed Rashed, who had planted a bomb on a PanAm flight in 1982 which killed one passenger. The United States had

been after Rashed ever since, and finally managed to run him to ground when in transit through Athens. Then began the process of trying to get the Greeks to extradite him. I will not go into details, but only say the case remained pending when I left Athens and remained a bilateral issue for years. The case consumed a great deal of my time, though I was quite pessimistic that the Greek government would turn him over. Frankly, there was a lot of domestic sympathy for the man in Greece which made it politically difficult to give him to the Americans. Finally, after he had been in a Greek prison for eight years, he was deported to Egypt – I do not know why – and then to the U.S. He was sentenced to additional prison time in the United States and, as I understand, is due for release and deportation sometime in 2013. This was yet another instance of the frustrations of dealing with the Greek authorities on terrorism matters, where they were pretty much always at least uncooperative if not downright adversarial.

Q: Is there anything else we should cover that you were dealing with in Greece?

MERRY: I might say a few words about the experience of living there. Many people, I have found, when they hear what places I served, tend to assume that Greece must have been my favorite assignment; that it must have been an unusually pleasant place. They are shocked to hear that, in looking back on all the places I've served, the least agreeable place was Athens. Not Moscow, not East Berlin, but Athens.

A good part of that, of course, had to do with being a terrorist target. I was one of the people on the embassy short list as being high risk, because there were newspaper articles about me in Athens—I had been identified incorrectly as the Station chief—and because I was involved in the counter-terrorism effort on the reporting side. So I had additional security. Waking up every morning with the thought that the most important thing you had to do that day was to get to the office alive, puts a bit of a damper on your enthusiasm for any place. Especially after Bill Nordeen was killed, the burden of security was like a shroud every day.

I traveled fairly extensively in Greece and enjoyed that. I loved the more remote parts of the country, places like the central Peloponnese and Crete and the mountains near the Albanian frontier. I moved around Athens fairly freely because, other than the commute to and from work, there really wasn't a security problem, since November 17th always carefully prepared their attacks. I knew a number of interesting people, was the object of several marital plots (unsuccessful), and I didn't find life there unpleasant. But I found it pretty narrow and limited. Athens, for example, had the least of what I would call cultural life of any place I've ever served. Less than Tunis, for example. The only cultural life in Athens was imported by the British Council, the Alliance Française (French Alliance), the Goethe Institute, and the Hellenic-American Union. I had a lot of personal visitors from America and Europe, as you might imagine, and almost ran a pension at times. It was good to have visitors, and for them Athens was an attractive place to visit. I tended to downplay the security problems, as I knew they would not be targets.

What people did in Greece for recreation was eat and argue, and principally argue. Evenings out in Greece were political argument and nothing but political argument.

While informative for a political officer, that got more than a little tedious after awhile. The fact that people had such limited interests, that people had such a narrow range of discussion, that the place was so provincial and parochial, annoyed the hell out of me. I found such a contrast in visits to Istanbul—a much more vibrant, alive and real city. Other places tended to reinforce my sense of Athens as a pretty provincial place. I spent one summer vacation in Poland, before the political transformation there, and found it a breath of fresh air.

Q: My impression of Greece—people say, "Oh, it must have been wonderful." The kids loved it. I had teenaged kids, two teenaged girls, and they'd go anywhere. Maybe things have changed. We turned them loose and they got on their bikes and they were all over the place.

MERRY: Sure, no problem.

Q: But for us it was sort of exhausting and the thing that got me more than anything else was that the Greeks blamed the United States for everything that had happened. They never were at fault. This is the time of the Colonels. Now, when I went later to Italy—and a lot of things didn't work there. But the Italians would say, "Gee, we've got to do something about this." They wouldn't blame somebody else.

MERRY: Greece is very much both a whining culture and an envy culture. It was described to me as a place where, if a peasant has one goat and his neighbor has two goats, he wants his neighbor's goats to die. In terms of victim mentality and conspiracy theories—you know, it is the Balkans. I had thought that the Russians were the world leaders in conspiracy theories until I lived in Greece. After I had been in Athens for a couple of years, I told people I felt like buying a plane ticket to Moscow to go up and down the streets apologizing to people because I had thought so ill of them. "Who is doing this to me, who is to blame, who is guilty?" Always looking to point the finger at somebody else is bad enough in a place like Russia, but it's mild compared to Greece. Three years were more than enough. A German colleague who had served a long time in Athens said the one thing he wished he had experienced was to hear a Greek accept responsibility for something. It is a social and political culture which focusses almost entirely on self, and with a strong sense of patriotism but almost none of civic duty.

On the positive side and to be fair, Greece outside of Athens could often be a joy. One of my favorite places in the world is Mount Athos, the monastic community occupying a peninsula in northern Greece. I made the pilgrimage to Athos three times and would go again tomorrow. It is a unique combination of unspoiled natural beauty, man-made beauty in the monastic complexes, and the extraordinary aesthetic of a spiritual lifestyle largely unchanged since the 10th Century. Athos certainly is not for everyone, and I am sure most people would find more than a day or two there boring, but it appealed to me in a very deep and abiding way. I have always had an empathy for the monastic life, and there is nowhere I know where it exists in such pure form as the Holy Mountain of Athos.

Chance encounters in non-urban Greece could be agreeable reminders of the ancient

traditions of hospitality to the traveler. One time along the road in northern Greece we stopped in a village to use the facilities in a small shop, and an old man tending his garden presented me with a bunch of onions right out of the ground as a travel gift, and did so with a simple nobility which touched me deeply, especially after weeks and months of aggravation in Athens. Life in Greece was like that: daily annoyance and nerve-wracking encounters with the bureaucracy and with urban life, contrasted from time to time with the most charming and refreshing experiences, usually outside of Athens. So, while my memories of Greece are at least five to one negative, it is on the positive memories I like to dwell.

Q: It's probably a good place to stop, I think. Where did you go afterwards, so we can pick it up?

MERRY: From Greece I spent a year in Garmisch-Partenkirchen, at the U.S. Army Russian Institute, before returning to Moscow for the end of the Soviet Union.

Q: We'll pick that up then.

MERRY: The next section will be interesting because it's the end of the Soviet Union and I was the chief political analyst.

Q: Today is the 14th of May 2010 with Wayne Merry. Wayne, where did we leave off?

MERRY: I believe I was just departing my assignment in Athens in 1990. I had an onward assignment to go back to the embassy in Moscow, to be the head of what was called Political/Internal. The Political Section in Moscow, in those days, was very large with three subsections: one that dealt with arms control, Political/Military; one that dealt with Soviet foreign policy, Political/External; and then one that dealt with domestic politics. Political/Internal was where I had worked during most of my first Moscow posting. For me, this was the Holy of Holies of Embassy Moscow, and even of the entire U.S. Foreign Service during the Cold War. I thought that to be the head of Political/Internal in Moscow was intellectually the finest and most challenging job for a political officer in the entire Foreign Service. To me, it was much more attractive than a job with a much more elevated title, even an ambassadorship. Just the anticipation was heady stuff.

I was genuinely surprised to get the assignment because I had been away from Soviet affairs for three assignments: New York, the State Department, and then Athens. Even though I had bid on the position, I was surprised when I got a phone call from the director of Soviet affairs, saying they wanted me for the job. After instantly accepting, I told him so, because I thought of myself as almost a forgotten person in that field. He told me the deputy assistant secretary, Curt Kamman, had made the choice. Curt had been the political counselor my third year in Moscow during my earlier assignment and had remembered me, evidently favorably because he chose me for what obviously was a rather key position in the embassy at a time when, even though we didn't know the Soviet Union was coming to an end, we certainly knew Gorbachev's efforts were

reaching a crisis phase. The domestic politics of the Soviet Union were going to be a matter of primary importance to the United States.

This assignment didn't become effective for another year, till 1991. In the intervening year I went to the U.S. Army Russian Institute (USARI) in Garmisch-Partenkirchen in Bavaria for advanced Russian language training. This was a school the U.S. Army had created after the war, in Germany, to teach Army officers advanced Russian language and Soviet area studies. For many years, there had been one or two Foreign Service officers per year in this program. USARI no longer exists, which is too bad. It had the reputation within the Army as the jewel in the crown of the U.S. military training system and a reputation among Russia hands as a special place to get advanced Russian language training. I was delighted to go there and, in addition, to spend a year in Garmisch-Partenkirchen, which gets three stars in Michelin as a summer and winter alpine resort.

In the event, I had a somewhat mixed experience. Living in Garmisch was wonderful. I spent almost every weekend hiking in the mountains or biking around the valleys of Bavaria. Among other things, I was getting into good physical shape for a return to a Moscow job, because I knew perfectly well it would be a demanding and draining experience, not just mentally, but physically. I spent much of my year in Garmisch out of doors on weekends, and I'd bike to and from USARI every day. However, the Institute had fallen on ill days, because of a series of internal labor disputes between some of the staff and the administration, with a lot of lawsuits and inspections. There was a sour atmosphere about the place, which affected the quality of the training and also affected the camaraderie. USARI had a reputation as a place where people didn't just study together but lived and played together and bonded closely. That was still the case to some extent, but the atmosphere was often quite tense.

The Army administration—and the colonel who ran the place—couldn't have been nicer to me. They were as hospitable as one could wish. I was the only FSO in the program that year but not the only non-Army student. There were Defense Department civilians and visiting officers from the British Army and the Australian Navy. As bachelors, I chummed a good deal with the Aussie. Several of the Army students would go on to become successful attachés in Moscow or in other Russian-speaking posts. I must say, the Army certainly picked the right people among its Russia-area specialists for those sensitive jobs, and it trained them very well. In general, the experience was a positive one, but not as positive as I had hoped it would be.

I also had the chance, as I was back in Germany, to travel back into East Germany to visit friends of mine there, and to be able to entertain some of them in my home, something I had not been able to do before the Wall came down. Now I could invite them to spend time in Garmisch, which is, of course, a wonderful holiday resort. I was delighted, finally, to be able to reciprocate some of the hospitality I'd had in East Germany. Formal German unification took place while I was living in Bavaria, but my neighbors were anything but enthusiastic about it. I watched the Berlin festivities on television, on what was also my birthday, October 3, with somewhat mixed feelings, because I understood better than most people in the West that this was going to be a long and difficult process.

The notion that the former GDR would be easily absorbed into the Federal Republic were uninformed and unrealistic. The East German economy was competitive only so long as it benefited from subsidized raw materials and energy from the Soviet Union within the ruble zone and from access to closed markets for its products that did not depend on convertible currencies. Once they had to compete in the global economy, East German enterprises had no advantage either of price or quality. Why would you buy something from the GDR when you could get something better and cheaper from South Korea or Sweden or West Germany? Very few East Germans understood how weak their economy was in international terms; they thought that being the best within the socialist bloc meant they were world standard. The exposure to economic reality when the Wall came down was a shock, but also seemed something of a betrayal to many people who simply did not understand how second rate their economy actually was.

I also understood this was going to be a difficult time for my friends, as well as a time of great opportunity. Some of them hoped to maintain a separate East German state as a political and social alternative to West Germany. The near total collapse of the GDR economy made that aspiration futile, but it was obvious to me even then that unification would be viewed by many in the east as FRG expansion rather than a genuine coming together of two rather different German societies. The carpet-bagger aspect of unification was already well underway, and ill feelings on the eastern side were pretty evident to anyone willing to listen.

A component of the program at USARI were class trips. Even though I was only there for one year, I was included in two annual class trips. When I arrived we made a trip through the Balkans, including Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, Romania and Hungary in the summer of 1990, when the Warsaw Pact was in full disintegration. We were hosted by the Soviet Army Western Group of Forces headquarters in Hungary, who were very candid that we were the last visitors they would ever host because they were closing up shop. In those East European countries, the transformation was often dramatic. We were in Bucharest, in Romania, a year after Ceauşescu's regime had come down. The place was still pretty disorganized, but you could see how dreadful a regime it had been. One of the highlights of the trip for me was in Sofia, in Bulgaria. Purely by chance we were there as the old regime was taking its last gasp, and I was in the crowd in front of the Bulgarian Communist Party headquarters building as the workmen were literally chiseling the hammer and chisel off of the tower in the front of the building.

Q: Hammer and sickle.

MERRY: Hammer and sickle, I beg your pardon. Hammer and sickle. It was fascinating to be in Sofia at a time when the regime there collapsed because I would be in exactly the same position in Moscow a year later. The second class trip was in the spring of 1991, and it was to the Soviet Union. We went to Moscow, to Kiev…

Q: Still it was the Soviet Union

MERRY: Still the Soviet Union. We went to Moscow, Kiev and the Crimea and, again, it was pretty obvious that things were falling apart. This was particularly true in Kiev, where the on-the-street manifestations of nationalism – of rejection of the Soviet Union – and of movement toward an independent Ukraine were just blatant and unmistakable, and so was the lack of any credible effort by the Ukrainian authorities to do anything about it. This was a few weeks before President Bush went to Kiev and gave his so-called "Chicken Kiev" speech in which he warned against "suicidal nationalism" in the Soviet Union. It was pretty clear on our trip that nationalism, whether destructive or otherwise, was very advanced in Ukraine. In Moscow I checked in with the embassy to consult with the man I would replace, John Parker, a Soviet expert with State's Bureau of Intelligence and Research who had been loaned to the Foreign Service to head Political/Internal. He wanted to remain in the job, but had been told by his home bureau to return, which was a blessing for me.

This travel was important acclimatization for me after eight years away from the Soviet Union. I watched Soviet television via satellite during the year I was in Garmisch, which was absolutely riveting in those days. I had very strong impressions that exciting times were coming, especially after visiting the place in late spring 1991. After completing the program at USARI, I went to Washington for consultations prior to taking up my Moscow assignment. The contrast between what I had seen on Soviet television and on the streets of Kiev and Moscow with what I heard in Washington could not have been more stark. To put it candidly, Washington was out of touch about the seriousness of the changes taking place within the heart of the Soviet Union. I had one interview with a very senior official, who I will not name but a very recognizable name, who told me, "Oh, you're going to Moscow. That's nice, but it's really too bad you're going now because all the really important changes have already taken place. Gorbachev has pushed the system as far as it can go and now they're just in for a long period of stagnation and drift." I mean, this was in July of 1991!

The only person I talked to who had any sense that important things were coming was George Kolt, who was the National Intelligence Officer for the Soviet Union at CIA. He had recently written—and I read in his office—what later became a rather famous memo called "The Soviet Cauldron." I recall it well, sitting on his office sofa reading his analysis of the turmoil within the Soviet system. This memo did not exactly foresee the breakup of the Soviet Union, but certainly it understood that we were not facing a period of stagnation and drift; that the really big stuff was still coming. Kolt did not predict the events of later that year at all, but he warned in stark terms that Gorbachev and his reforms were heading into a crisis, and something very different would emerge from that crisis. I entirely agreed, even though I as well had not the faintest notion of what the next six months would bring. I did know I was going to be a very busy boy in Moscow.

In contrast, I was quite struck in discussions at the White House, the State Department, the Pentagon and, with the exception of Kolt, even at CIA, that people in Washington viewed Soviet changes in very mechanistic terms. They had little sense this was a great historic dynamic with a tempo and momentum of its own. East Germany had fallen apart from the bottom up; Romania had collapsed because of a lack of willpower within its

ruling elite; Hungary, Poland, Bulgaria had failed from the bottom up; Yugoslavia was clearly coming to pieces; and forces within the Soviet Union itself—within the Baltic states, within the Caucasus, and Ukraine—were clearly getting out of control and not subject to management by Gorbachev or anybody else. These things seemed so apparent that I was really quite shocked at the bland indifference—which may be an exaggeration but not by much—that I encountered during many of my consultations in Washington.

I remember this quite well, because after my year of preparation at USARI – where we had regular visitors from Moscow and had traveled through Eastern European and for a couple of weeks in the Soviet Union, having followed what was going on with great care, albeit from this Bavarian idyll – I believed I was going to be in Moscow during some of the most tumultuous and important events of my lifetime. I knew that my job there, as head of Political/Internal, was going to be more stimulating and interesting than anything I had ever done before. I was actually somewhat worried whether I was fully up to it. Then back in Washington I hear, "Oh, well, it's too bad you're going out there now because you're not going to really have much to do."

Q: I can think of two things going on in a bureaucracy. It's happened before and it will continue to happen. One is that the normal bureaucracy will do straight-line projections. The way things were, they'll be this way with some deviation. And there's a reason for this. If you say, "Things are falling apart and really it's going to change and all," you are sticking your neck out and you've seen it, the old _____, a _____. You're out there saying there's going to be a change. Bureaucracies don't like change. And the other thing is that you often find senior officers are straight-liners, whereas junior officers get excited about things that are happening. Did you see any of that?

MERRY: Yes, my first macroeconomic theory professor had a series of axioms we called Bowman's Laws, and Bowman's First Law was that straight-line extrapolations are always wrong. I have never known that law to fail.

Keep in mind that the underlying assumption of the entire American foreign affairs establishment was that the Soviet Union was the culmination of Russian history and hence permanent. Therefore the Cold War and its institutions must be permanent as well. During my graduate school years at Princeton, I had encountered the contrasting view that the Soviet Union was a phase of Russian history and, like other phases, would come to an end and be replaced by something else. Now, I certainly did not expect to live to see that happen, let alone to experience it in a very direct and personal way, but the concept of something beyond the Soviet Union and the Cold War was not entirely new to me. Keep in mind also that the end of the Cold War and the end of the Soviet Union were not the same thing. They were linked, yes, but not the same thing at all. Gorbachev ended the Cold War precisely in order to preserve and reinvigorate the Soviet Union. He failed, but had that effort started earlier, the distance in time between the effective end of the Cold War and the Soviet collapse might have been many years or even decades rather than months.

The tendency in Washington in 1991 was to welcome Gorbachev's concessions on arms

control and his retreat from Soviet positions in places like Afghanistan and Ethiopia, but to see what was happening in the Soviet Union itself in traditional Soviet terms, as a closed system, a controlled system, a system managed from the top down, where what matters are the disputes taking place in the politburo and the central committee at the center. Those were the things Washington was focusing on because that's what they had spent their lives studying and learning how to do…

Q: The Kremlinologists.

MERRY: Yes. In contrast, what had started in Poland and East Germany, come to violent fruition in Romania, was turning to violence in Yugoslavia, and was clearly developing in the Soviet Union itself, was that the control mechanisms were failing. What struck me during my consultations was that my perceptions were utterly out-of-sync with what I heard from many people in Washington. Not all of them, but I mention this because it will be a recurrent theme in the months ahead, of how difficult it was for the embassy in Moscow, during the breakup of the Soviet Union, to get Washington to accept what was happening. As I will relate, in the months ahead my biggest single problem as head of Political/Internal was getting Washington to believe that things which were so obvious to us in Moscow were, in fact, true.

Q: What were you getting from your Garmisch instructors? These are all former Soviets?

MERRY: Mostly.

Q: Were they just reflecting the old way?

MERRY: No. Many of the instructors had been living in Germany for a fair amount of time, but there were a few of more recent vintage who were really interested in talking about what was going on. They were utterly glued to their television screens watching the news from Moscow and were very sensitive to the importance of these events, that this was not just nattering around the edges. My view tends to be that émigrés are useful as sounding boards for a few years, but then they can get out of touch. However, it is a very individualistic thing. The Army Russian Institute had become a closed, cocoon-like environment for some of its staff. While many were excellent language instructors, only two or three were really very valuable in terms of political discussion, but they certainly were. The small number who were interesting could be quite useful, if only because they gave insight into the mentality of the Soviet Union. This was something I was familiar with because I had spent three years there already, but I was the only student at USARI who had ever actually lived in the Soviet Union. For most of my classmates, the instructors were valuable for anthropological education. The instructors who'd been out for 10, 15 or 20 years tended to be fixed in the past in their thinking about the place. That's human nature. I'm not complaining about it. Some of the students—the really good Army students, the best of the Army students—were really excited at the prospect of the changes because it might mean they would have more interesting work to do in the future, as indeed they did.

Q: To go back to a side thing, your East German friends, what were you getting from them? Germany had been just united. Were they disappointed, excited? What were you getting from them?

MERRY: This was the period of the wende (the turn), and it was still fairly chaotic. Formal unification only took place that year, in autumn 1990. They were adjusting to the norms and the bureaucratic requirements of being citizens of the Federal Republic of Germany as opposed to being citizens of the German Democratic Republic. I visited one friend when she was registering for her health insurance, West German health insurance, and I spent about half a day with her as she struggled with the paperwork, the forms. A lot was just learning the ways a citizen would interface with the structures of the West German welfare state. They were moving from one German welfare state to a different German welfare state, but things were different, and it was aggravating, and time-consuming, and some of it was tedious. It was a learning process.

Most of my friends were doing pretty well, but they were young enough and smart enough to adapt. For some others, it was much more difficult, as options shrunk with age. It was very tough for the society in general. Many people were put out of work as enterprises downsized their enormously overloaded workforces. People were put on make-work programs. They had a thing called "Kurzarbeit mit null stunden," which was "short work with no hours." It was a variant on the kurzarbeit, the short work scheme used during recessions by the German government to keep down unemployment, but this was short work with no work at all, but paid as if a person was doing a certain amount of work. There was growing societal resentment against the somewhat neo-colonial attitude of many of the West Germans coming east, that "we know everything, you don't know anything, there's only one right way to do anything and it's our way; you collapsed, and now you should dutifully follow our tutelage"—the Wessies were already very much wearing out their welcome in the East.

Q: I have to say that I was laughing, because my first assignment was Frankfurt—this is '55—with my wife and our daughter was born there. We would be walking down the street with a baby buggy and the good Germans would come up to us and look at us and adjust the covers, the clothing, or tell us how to do things and walk on.

MERRY: Another little vignette was in Garmisch in October of 1990, when full German unification formally took place. The big festivities were in Berlin, in front of the Brandenburg Gate and the Reichstag, but I can tell you that in Partenkirchen, where I lived—the smaller, more traditional part of Garmisch-Partenkirchen—there were no celebrations at all. In fact, on the day of German unity, the 3rd of October 1990, the only place in Garmisch-Partenkirchen where I saw a German flag flying was on the post office and at the entrance to the local German Army kaserne (barracks). Otherwise, the only flags flying were the Bavarian blue-and-white. My Bavarian neighbors did not think German unification was a good idea at all. They certainly didn't cotton to the notion of the capital moving from Bonn back to Berlin. Their view was that Berlin was the place where all the mistakes had been made and that nothing good ever came out of Berlin or Prussia, from their perspective. The Bavarian sense of its own identity vis-à-vis the rest

of Germany was strongly apparent. It was quite noticeable that this national holiday, the day of German unity, was distinctly unfestive down there in upper Bavaria.

Q: So you go to Moscow. In the first place, you were there from when to when?

MERRY: I was there from the beginning of August 1991 to the middle of the summer of 1994.

Q: When you went—I suppose every month has a change—but when you went, what was the situation there?

MERRY: August in Moscow tends to be a fairly quiet time. This one proved not to be, to an extreme.

I think it is worth starting this section by saying that anyone reading my recollections of the end of the Soviet Union and the Moscow experience of 1991-94 should also look at the oral histories of several of my colleagues. I suspect the reader will encounter something of a "Rashomon effect" as each of us recalls the same events in different ways. Each will have our own priorities in how we remember and interpret those events, and each of us is subject to the frailties of personal memory. Obviously any history of August 1991 in Moscow, let alone of what followed, should be a history of the Russians and their experiences, but I cannot help but believe the perspective of official Americans who were there, and often directly engaged, will provide a useful counterpoint to the various Russian perspectives. I also would urge any researcher not to trust entirely the recollections of any individual, myself included, but to review a range of oral histories, compare them with other sources, and be constantly aware of the sharp divergence in the official perceptions in Washington and at the Moscow embassy. Those of us at the embassy enjoyed the huge advantage of proximity to the events in question, and we were frequently frustrated that Washington was often so behind those events in comprehension. At the same time, large governments are slow-moving organisms, while we in Moscow were but minor players in the formulation of American policy. These contrasts, Russian vs. American and embassy vs. Washington, can help clarify not only what the United States knew but what our government did with its knowledge.

Coming back to my initial weeks in Moscow that August, it was a time of transition at the embassy. Ambassador Jack Matlock was just completing his four-year assignment. He and I overlapped for only three days. I had a chance to chat with Jack only in passing as he was departing. The new ambassador, Robert Strauss, had not yet arrived. Our chargé was the deputy chief of mission, Jim Collins, who would later become ambassador in his own right. The embassy was in a temporary working environment because of a major fire at the old embassy building in the spring. It would be a couple of years before repairs to that structure would allow it to be reoccupied. The chancery was located in temporary quarters in what had been intended to be the Consular Section of the new embassy compound plus in a series of large metal containers in the underground parking garage of the new embassy compound. The high-rise future chancery building itself was sitting empty and uncompleted because of the problem of Soviet electronic listening devices that

had been discovered in it and figuring out what to do about them. So, even though there was a new office building sitting in the middle of the compound, it was not to be occupied for quite a few years to come.

The housing on the new embassy compound was all fully occupied. There were about 155 units, as I recall, which were already far too few for the greatly enlarged embassy staff. I had asked not to live on-compound. There was a gymnasium and a small swimming pool and a cafeteria and various support facilities, and then the temporary embassy working setup. The Economics Section and the Science Section were working in secure metal containers in the underground parking garage. The Defense Attaché Office was in space intended for a future bowling alley. The ambassador's office and the Political Section were better off as they occupied what had been intended as the future Consular Section. The ambassador and DCM shared a suite intended for the consul general and his deputy. The tripartite Political Section (Political/Military, Political/External, and my own Political/Internal) were all spread out in the consular waiting room. This was a big, open space, and we were working on sawhorse trestle tables. Some months later, we got cubicles which was sort of an improvement, but not much.

The Political Section in Moscow, at that time, was enormous by Foreign Service standards. It had well over three dozen people and I'm not counting cover positions in that figure. Political/Internal was half of the whole. At that time, it was reinforced with several officers called "circuit riders," young officers in new positions whose job was to travel around various parts of the Soviet Union for reporting and other purposes. In addition, two officers who were to open the new consulate in Vladivostok were attached to Political/Internal for reporting purposes for nearly a year. Thus, during this first year of my assignment, I was supervising 17 people; 16 reporting officers and a secretary.

Q: Of course, in Foreign Service terms that is absolutely remarkable.

MERRY: It must have been one of the largest peacetime reporting entities in the history of the Foreign Service. Within a year it shrank by a third, as several officers went to open new embassies in parts of the former Soviet Union. There was also a lot of turnover that summer. Political/Internal in August 1991 was an amalgam of about two-thirds new people and one-third carryover. Thankfully, one of the carryovers was my deputy, Ed Salazar, who, years later, would be head of Political/Internal in his own right.

Q: And whom I'm interviewing now.

MERRY: Good. He played an absolutely essential role during those months and was a real life-saver for me. I had Moscow experience, but not recent experience; so I had a lot to learn, but much less time than I needed. Hence, Ed was to me as Collins was to Strauss in some ways. The holdovers in Political/Internal were a very talented group and would by themselves have constituted a top-flight political section anywhere else. However, the incoming people were also a very talented group. Even though Political/Internal was unusually large, its quality was extraordinarily high. This team had been picked with

some care, given the importance of the work we had to do. The Soviet desk in the State Department had a long tradition of emphasizing cadres and getting the very best people to serve in Moscow. I played no role whatever in the selection of my team, but doubt I could have assembled anything as good, let alone better.

Nearly a dozen of these people had just arrived in Moscow but without my experience of prior service there, with one exception. Most of the new arrivals, like myself, were in temporary quarters. I was camping out in a temporary apartment, and would not move into my real apartment until November because there just never was time with the political events taking place. Although my household shipment arrived in Moscow before I did, the crate sat in the embassy garage for almost half a year. Frankly, I got along pretty well just with airfreight. The physical working conditions of the embassy were not just provisional, they were chaotic. We were literally working on sawhorse tables in this huge room with almost 40 people, in what had been intended as a waiting room. Communications equipment and word-processing facilities were hopelessly inadequate, despite our status as the most important American diplomatic post on earth facing what soon would be the most important geopolitical events of our lifetimes.

The embassy was hobbled by a mass of security rules – much more than had been in effect during my previous assignment – despite the fact the Cold War was coming to an end. The embassy had experienced some real problems associated with bugs in the new chancery building, but also some alleged security compromises, especially involving one Marine security guard with a powerful fantasy life. The embassy security office in 1991 seemed determined to prevent anyone getting anything done, especially in the Political Section. That changed, thank God, after Ambassador Strauss took over. When I arrived, I learned that nobody was allowed to have any in-person contact with a Soviet citizen unless another cleared American was present. This was preposterous and completely impractical for Political/Internal. In-person contact was what we did, after all. So, at my first staff meeting as the new chief of Political/Internal, I gave everyone a blanket waiver from this restriction, but with the caution not to mention it to anyone. This worked fine until new, more rational, rules came into effect.

So, in the quiet period of mid-August everyone was trying to settle in and figure out where things and people were. I was meeting colleagues in other sections I would be working with. I knew some of the people, particularly in the Defense Attaché's Office, but there was only a single person in Political whom I had worked with during my previous Moscow assignment. Almost everyone was new to me, but then I was new to them. The city outside was the same; it was all fairly familiar but all very new and different.

I had been in town for 10 days, and had spent the weekend of August 17-18 in the office reviewing reporting files I had not seen for the preceding months—the reporting done by Political/Internal when I had been in the U.S.—so I would be up-to-date. I had not quite completed that task, so I decided to come in a couple of hours early on Monday, August 19, to finish it off, so I would start off that Monday, that week, fully read up and ready to get on with the job. Well, I never did get those damn files read.

I arrived at the embassy that Monday two hours before normal starting time—this was just at seven in the morning—by Metro, of course. I walked toward the north gate of the embassy compound, which is not the main gate; that was really the back gate and only for staff. There was a Soviet police booth in front of the gate with one uniformed Soviet police officer. He saw me and came out of the booth. This was no more than two or three minutes after the hour, after seven. I was reaching in my pocket to get my diplomatic ID so he would let me enter the embassy. He didn't bother with that at all. He stepped in front of me and immediately asked, in Russian, "Are you an American?" I replied, in Russian, "Yes," figuring this was about identifying myself. He said, "Do you speak Russian?" I said, "Yes." His third question was, "Have you heard about the overthrow of the government?" Stunned, I said, "What?" He had just heard, on the radio, the first announcement of the putsch against Gorbachev, the first statement from the so-called Emergency Committee, that Gorbachev was "resting," meaning under house arrest, in Crimea and the committee was in charge. He quickly described to me what he had heard just seconds before on the seven o'clock special news broadcast. I was the first person he'd laid eyes on after hearing it. Then he said, "I am afraid, very". I replied, "me too." Then I ran past him through the gate, which had a little cipher lock on it. There was no American there. Unusually for me with my bad leg, I actually sprinted down the embassy compound to the Marine desk. There I found Jim Collins, who had also just heard the news – his townhouse was on the compound – and was already on the phone at the Marine desk back to the Operations Center at the State Department in Washington, telling them what was going on. Jim was not a former director of the Ops Center for nothing; we were their main customers for quite awhile thereafter.

I quickly consulted with Jim. He told me to get the defense attaché's people mobilized to check the city for military deployments. DAO was located right inside the entrance to the chancery and, being military guys, they tended to be early starters, so I knew there would be people there. I raced into their office. None of them knew what was going on because we were not allowed to have radios inside the embassy core for security reasons.

Q: Because fear of transmission.

MERRY: We got that foolish rule overturned fairly soon. In any case, I shocked the hell out of them with what was going on and told them Collins wanted them to start deploying around town, to see what was happening in terms of movements of forces. DAO (Defense Attachés Office) is absolutely superb at understanding what they're looking at when they see forces. Most civilians are hopeless at reporting military movements. "Oh, there were tanks moving." DAO would know what kind of tank, what unit, and what structure that unit works for, is it ministry of interior or KGB or Army. They know what they're looking at, whereas most civilians in the embassy gave reports so vague as to be more confusing. Thankfully, our military colleagues were concrete in their reporting.

Then I raced down into the Political Section and, God love him, there was Ed Salazar, already there, all alone. He had also listened to the news and knew things were going to be hopping. He was already busily checking the Russian wire service and figuring out

what we actually could tell Washington. We were the only ones there. He had been the first member of the Political Section to arrive and I was the second. The next thing I did was start calling all our staff at home. I don't know how many people in the Political Section—I called my own people in Internal, first, obviously—were either woken up or had their breakfast scrambled that Monday morning by me informing them that Gorbachev had been overthrown, and giving them their initial assignments. I could hear gasps at the other end of the line. They answered the phone, with "Oh, good morning, Wayne. What's happening?" I said, "Gorbachev's just been overthrown." "What?" Then, "OK, here's what I want you to do. On your way in, I want you to stop at the following places to see what is going on. Don't spend a lot of time because we're going to have a busy day. But on your way in, I want you to check the following." This was what Kent Brown had done with me the morning Brezhnev died, so I kind of felt at home. Then, of course, people started showing up in a hurry and we got ourselves organized.

At the time, not only did we not have an ambassador but the outgoing Political Minister Counselor, the person who supervised all three components of the Political Section, was literally packing out that day and the next. He had fairly limited time for the office. The newly arrived head of Political/External, Thomas Lynch, was on board, but the new Political Minister Counselor, Louis Sell, would not arrive for several weeks. Collins decided that we had to deal with this crisis on the assumption it would continue for some time. That was absolutely right. It was terribly important not to burn ourselves out in the first days, because embassies sometimes get so focused on dealing with a crisis, they don't pace themselves correctly. For reporting, he established a day team and a night team. This was not just for people in the Political Section but included reporting officers from the other State sections. Everybody focused on this crisis. The DAO and the CIA people had their own tasks to do. The administrative people had many tasks to do.

The State reporting people, which were from the Political, Economics and Science sections, were brought into this all-hands reporting operation. The night team was headed by Tom Lynch and the day team was headed by me. They overlapped. The day shift, as I recall, was about 15 hours long, and the night shift was about 12 hours because we needed a certain amount of time to pass the baton and get people briefed on current events. The idea was that when people completed their shift, they would go home and get some sleep. I found this was a problem, particularly with some of the more junior officers. They wanted to be involved all the time. I got short with some of them, exercising my nascent authority, saying, "We're going to be doing this for days, maybe for weeks, maybe for months." I had been on some 24-hour crisis teams before, and could appreciate that human frailty becomes a real problem if you don't pace yourself through these things.

Q: Let's say the first 12 hours, as you are all getting out, getting information and all, what were you coming up with? A couple scenarios, maybe two scenarios, three? What were our concerns?

MERRY: Our first concern was just trying to find out what the hell was going on. Another concern—not mine, but it was an embassy concern—was, of course, the safety

of embassy personnel and other Americans in Moscow. Few people had ever imagined a coup in Moscow, so there was something of a tendency among tourists and contractors to panic. This is a primary consular function, and it was an important one, though there really was no danger if people stayed away from the key political points of the city. However, the situation for the embassy was very different, because the main focus of opposition to the putsch was at the so-called Russian White House, which is right across the street from the new U.S. Embassy compound. It is a wide street, but the locus of Yeltsin's opposition was within 200 yards of our compound wall. We were not just eyewitnesses. The embassy, in which 155 families lived, was potentially in the line of fire of anything that would happen. Two years later, it was very much in the line of actual fire: a lot of bullet holes and one near fatality. That was not the case in 1991, but there was no way of knowing how things were going to develop and how much violence might come with it.

Security was not my concern. My concern was reporting, making sure our people were getting out to the right places, including those who already had local contacts, that we were in touch with people: officials, semi-officials, dissidents and, in particular, as Yeltsin rallied the opposition across the way at the Russian White House, in establishing regular communications with his people, with him. We also had to regularize our reporting, for which there are standard Foreign Service procedures for situation reporting in a crisis. Fortunately, we had a few hands who had been through coups in other posts, so they knew the drill. This is not something an embassy should try to do ad hoc; following the established procedures for crisis reporting really does result in a better job. Obviously, we were doing classified telegraphic reporting – sit reps (situation reports) plus analytic reports – but also real-time telephonic reporting to the task force in the State Operations Center which, like it or not, had to take place over an unsecured telephone line. The secure telephone equipment we had then was just more damn trouble than it was worth. In any case, by the time the Soviets monitoring our conversations with Washington could get them transcribed and processed, the crisis would be over.

Q: When you arrived, just before this, how did we view Yeltsin? In the first place, talk about straight-line projections, Yeltsin was considered a little bit of a fly in ointment wasn't he? Gorbachev was our man and Yeltsin was… How did you all feel about that?

MERRY: Washington, I think, regarded Yeltsin as a dubious character, but I had enough impressions from the previous year to know that Yeltsin was immensely popular, particularly in the city of Moscow where he had been a progressive head of the Moscow party apparatus until his resignation from the Soviet leadership. Yeltsin was a man who—in retrospect this might not be so obvious, but you can take my word for it—had real charisma, particularly face-to-face, in front of a crowd, in the flesh. Boris Nikolayevich Yeltsin had charisma by the bucket. I have never been in the presence of anyone else who exuded such an aura of dynamism and sheer force of will. He was a true leader, a commander. It was, I think, pretty obvious to all of us in Moscow that with Gorbachev under lock and key down in Crimea, and with the institutions of the Soviet government in the hands of the Emergency Committee, there was only one locus of opposition and that was Yeltsin. A lot of people who rallied to Yeltsin that week were not particularly

enthusiastic about him personally or about his policies. But they understood that he was a true leader, in much the same way that in 1940 many people in Britain, such as the Labour Party, who had serious peacetime reservations about Winston Churchill said, "This is not peacetime. Whatever else Winston may be, he's a fighter." In 1991, in August, whatever people may have thought about Yeltsin in other terms, everybody knew that Boris Nikolayevich was a fighter.

Q: Did we feel that if we had our druthers, that this committee that was formed to oust Gorbachev was a bad thing?

MERRY: Yes, we certainly did. I do not recall so much as a moment in which that issue was in doubt. During that first day a number of things happened in Moscow and back in the States that were quite important in establishing Washington's view. Now, keep in mind that most of this was communicated at the policy level by Jim Collins, our chargé.

Q: Whom I'm interviewing now.

MERRY: Quite correctly. He was the only one in direct touch with Washington at a senior level. My job, as head of the day shift, which was about 15 hours long for me, was to direct a very large reporting effort, which meant I was the guy to whom everybody fed information. I was not out on the streets. I was not out gathering information. I was not having conversations with Russians. That would have been my personal preference, but that was not my role. I was the person to whom several dozen people were providing input and I was making sure it went back to Washington in different formats. I was familiar with the requirements of crisis reporting and since, speaking candidly, I can get prose down clearly and accurately in a hurry, my job was like that of the editor of a news room at a major newspaper in a crisis. I was not the reporter, I was the editor.

We had—and this demonstrates how primitive things were—we had, between the embassy and Washington, one working telephone line. One. Keep in mind that there were pitifully few telephone lines between Moscow and the West at that time. That one telephone line was at a desk in the Political Section. At one point, someone foolishly hung up the phone and it took us I don't know how long to get another line back to Washington. Then we wrapped the cradle of the telephone in masking tape, so it could not be hung up. It looked like a mummy telephone, that stayed open 24 hours a day for the duration. That was the primary mechanism for quick reporting. This was an open international phone line, so it was certainly tapped, and not just on the Soviet end, it was probably being tapped by several governments before it ever got to Washington. The phone line was how we kept the Operations Center task force informed of quick-breaking news. Then the sit reps, the situation reports, were the classified telegraphic means to inform a broader official Washington readership on an hourly, and multi-hourly basis, of what was going on. Then there were the daily wrap-ups and evaluations, which I will come to. We were interrupted a lot with queries from Washington. I remember, I was supervising the preparation of a situation report . . .

Q: This is the first day?

MERRY: This is on the first day. Whoever was monitoring the telephone to the State Department Operations Center, turned around and said, "Where's Jim?" I was already getting annoyed with Washington always wanting to speak with Collins, because they needed to learn to talk to other people and not always bother him. So in a testy way I asked, "Who wants him?" The answer was, "The president." The room went dead. Total silence. I turned to somebody and said, "Get Jim." All of us then watched Collins, as the chargé, on his end of the conversation with the president at Kennebunkport in Maine. I think I will let Jim relate that conversation in his oral history. However, this led to what I think was one of the most important aspects of American policy that first day. We had violated the security rules and got a television into the political section…

Q: You had to.

MERRY: So we could watch CNN (Cable News Network). We had to watch CNN to know what people in Washington were seeing on CNN – often to correct something they reported wrong. However, I remember distinctly watching President Bush giving an impromptu press conference at Kennebunkport, and his statement, when somebody asked him if the United States would accept Gorbachev's removal, Bush said, "Coups can fail." I think those were three of the most important words that George Herbert Walker Bush ever said in public, because it was a message heard in Russia. In addition to the messages we were sending to Yeltsin personally—when Jim went over to see him, when other people we had working in the Russian White House gave messages to Yeltsin and to people around Yeltsin—this was a public message. This was a statement from the President of the United States that the United States was not taking this coup as a fait accompli (an accomplished fact), that we were keeping an open position.

Some other Western governments, unfortunately, were less far-sighted. Some European governments were already communicating that they were willing to accept Gorbachev's overthrow and proceed with the new order.

Q: Which governments are these?

MERRY: I remember the French government was a little precipitant in its willingness to take things as they appeared. However, the only Western government statement that anybody on the streets in Moscow, anybody in the Russian White House, gave a damn about was ours. President Bush's statement was not a condemnation of the putsch as such but was a clear statement we were not involved with the putsch, which some people might have suspected, and that we were keeping our options very much open. It was terribly important. It meant that people on Yeltsin's side understood that the Americans hadn't committed themselves to accept what had been done illegally in their country.

For many, many people in Moscow and in other parts of Russia, this whole crisis was about something which had scarcely existed in Soviet politics, which was legality. A large part of why people rallied at the Russian White House was not so much support for Gorbachev or what Gorbachev was doing—because by that time Gorbachev had lost

much of his credibility and popular support—but because his removal was the result of a palace coup and was clearly illegal. That was extremely important and represented a watershed in Russian political history. A lot of Russians thought, "We going to put Gorbachev back in his legal position and then we'll change him, then we'll remove him legally." The focus on legality is what made the events of August 1991 unique in Russian history and why the American official position was so important to the people defending legality there.

At the end of the first day, we had to figure out what we thought it all meant. Jim Collins, and the outgoing Political Minister Counselor and I sat down in a tiny classified conference room to discuss this. Since I was the head of the day reporting team, it was my job to write the message. We discussed what it should say. This was Collins's interpretation, because it was his embassy, but an interpretation with which I entirely agreed, that as the sun went down the first day, the outcome of the coup attempt against Gorbachev was an open question, it was by no means clear how this was going to work out. There were a number of very strange things about this putsch. First, there was nothing up in the sky. There were no helicopters. They didn't have control of army aviation.

Q: In other words, the coupers did not have full control over the world?

MERRY: That's right. We also knew from our colleagues up at the consulate general in Leningrad that the navy was not on board. We had considerable indications that the air force was not on board. The very fact they were conducting a coup in the middle of the massive metropolitan area that is Moscow and there were no helicopters in the sky was a fairly strong indication that not everything was under control. Second, the telephones were still working in the White House. Yeltsin had telephones. What the hell kind of a coup is it when you can't control who's got a telephone land line? (This was before cell phones.) There were just a lot of things that were not clear.

In contrast, it was clear from our talking to people around the Russian White House that not only was there genuine large-scale popular support for Yeltsin—particularly among young people—but that the various military units deployed around the Russian White House were under different and perhaps contradictory chains of command. The junior officers, the company-grade officers, who were there in armored personnel carriers hadn't the faintest idea what they were supposed to do. They were receiving very conflicting indications from their respective chains of command as to what they might be ordered to do. Here were young guys in military equipment, with loaded weapons, looking around and unsure what the other units under other chains of command might do. If ordered to move forward, they did not know if the units to their right and left might do the same or perhaps open fire on them. It was clearly a very uncertain situation.

Then there was the famous press conference by the Emergency Committee, which was something of a shambles, during which the chairman, Vice President Yanayev, as he was reading their statement, was trembling. You could see on television his hand shaking like a leaf. For most Russians, that was the dominant visual image of the putsch. Most people

outside of Russia think of the image of Yeltsin standing on the armored vehicle reading his statement. That was a CNN image, a global image. It was carried, at least once, on Russian television, but the dominant image for Russians, because it was live and unedited, was Yanayev's hand shaking as he read the statement. So it was pretty obvious to people this was a less than impressive bunch of coup plotters.

So, our assessment, in a fairly short telegram for high-level distribution in Washington at the end of the first day, was that the putsch was by no means a done deal. This coup was by no means a success. We would just have to play this situation as it developed, which as it happened took only three days. Then, to show myself as an example to the other day staff, I went home to bed.

The second day is one I don't remember very well except that there was a lot of work. It is striking that many parts of the first and third days of the putsch are crystal clear in my memory, but the day in between is pretty much a blur. The weather deteriorated, with overcast and rain, to match the political mood. We settled into a pattern of reporting activity, with everyone knowing what their duties were. The opposition forces also settled in at the White House, making it clear they were there for the duration. This presented the Emergency Committee with a problem. They may have expected public demonstrations to be short lived, but that was not the case. In their preparations for their seizure of power, the plotters had devoted inadequate attention to the White House, the seat of the Russian Federation government. It is not true, as many people think, that the plotters failed to secure the center of Moscow; they very much secured the Kremlin, the Central Committee complex, the KGB complex and defense ministry, the Moscow city government building, and most of the other important institutions of Soviet power. What they failed to move against promptly was an institution of the Russian Federation. The Russian White House was not an important Soviet institution. It was the headquarters of the government of the Russian Federation, which in the Soviet system had been a facade of an institution and even something of a joke, until Yeltsin made it otherwise. In my previous Moscow assignment, I don't think it had ever crossed my mind to seek an appointment in the Russian Federation government, because it was not a government in substance. I suspect the coup plotters failed to deploy forces early against the White House because it did not occur to them that this white marble building on the edge of central Moscow could represent power, let alone legitimacy, in Soviet affairs. They secured what for them were the bastions of Soviet power, like the Kremlin, but neglected the physical seat of Yeltsin's position, the Russian Federation government. By the time they recognized their error, the crowds defending the White House were too large to disperse without major bloodshed, something they wanted to avoid.

The second night the Emergency Committee sent in a small armored unit to probe the defenses around the White House. There was considerable confusion among the various units involved, plus a lack of clear direction at the top. They encountered serious resistance in one of the traffic underpasses just a block from the embassy, in which three young Russian men were killed. I was asleep at the time because that was not my gig; I was not doing night duty. It was not a very resolute use of force and demonstrated, if anything, the fissures within the plotters and their lack of will and of a thought-out plan.

The third day, the Wednesday, was the day the putsch collapsed—and parts of that day are utterly vivid in my memory. It's hard to convey, but in my chief-editor position, reports started coming in to me from our people and from other sources that made it clear things were falling apart, made it clear the coup plotters were moving towards a plan B. I remember a period in the early afternoon when I could almost physically feel the putsch disintegrating. Some of this was instinct, but the momentum of events seemed very clear to me. This may sound like a weak basis for telling Washington the coup was failing, but in Moscow there was really no ambiguity in my mind. After only two weeks back in Moscow, I was already drawing important conclusions from incomplete evidence, but that is part of what I was paid for. The conclusive piece of evidence was when we learned the coup leaders were headed for Vnukovo airport south of the city to fly down to Crimea to talk to Gorbachev. At that point, whatever residual authority they may have possessed disappeared, as everyone on the Russian side recognized the putsch had failed.

As it happened, this took place simultaneous with the arrival in Moscow of Robert Strauss, the new U.S. ambassador, who had been sworn in hastily in the Oval Office when the coup started. Jim Collins, the chargé, had gone out to Sheremetyevo airport north of Moscow to greet him and bring him to the embassy. As they were coming into the city along the Leningradsky Prospekt, they passed lines of armored vehicles going away from the center. The orders had been given to return to barracks. So, they could see what was happening even if they had no other information. I calculated— because we didn't have cell phones in those days, so you had to do these things by guesswork—when I thought it likely the car with Ambassador Strauss and Collins and some of Strauss's associates would arrive, and I raced out to what's called Townhouse One, the DCM's residence, where they were going to arrive. I got to the sidewalk just a couple of minutes before the vehicle pulled up. The doors open, and out steps Robert Strauss. I knew what he looked like, but I had never met him. He sees a disheveled guy in a dirty white cotton sweater—I hadn't slept much and I probably looked like hell—a rather improbable excuse for an American diplomat on the sidewalk, who was introduced to him by Collins. Jim didn't fully know what was going on during the time he had gone to the airport to pick up the ambassador. I quickly briefed them on what we knew and what I thought was happening. Strauss – always to the point – asked me, very clearly, "Are you telling me you think this coup has failed?" I said, "Mr. Ambassador, that's exactly what I am telling you." Happily, my analysis was right. It was ironic that Strauss had been sent out to Moscow in a hurry to deal with one set of circumstances, one situation, and within minutes of his arrival was facing a very different one, and a much better one.

Things were somewhat confused for awhile. A group of western ambassadors was preparing to fly to Crimea to engage Gorbachev, and they wanted at least Collins to go with them. Fortunately, he did not, because Gorbachev was already on the way back to Moscow. Then came the important question how we would deal with the return of Gorbachev, which took place that evening, and our relations with Yeltsin. Keep in mind that Gorbachev was again the legal head of the Soviet power structure and Yeltsin technically was a second-tier figure as head of the Russian Federation government, at that time still a federal component of the Soviet Union. Obviously, their roles were reversed

in terms of the legitimacy of their positions and their popular credibility. The Soviet structures under Gorbachev were either collapsing or transferring their allegiance to Yeltsin. This was a tricky time for the United States because, of course, governments deal with other governments. Strauss would present his credentials in a few days to Gorbachev. Washington very much wanted Gorbachev's return to constitute a restoration of his authority, regardless of the failing integrity of Soviet institutions. To anyone actually in Moscow during those few days, however, the contrary reality was manifest. You could see it and you could feel it. Power had shifted and the integrity of the Soviet state was irrevocably gone. I knew in my own mind that the only questions were of time and process, but not of outcome. I am fairly certain my view was shared by many of my colleagues. As we soon learned, it was not shared by Washington.

For me, personally, those three totally exhausting days were the beginning of what would be an exhausting seven months, and even three years. However, that evening I finally was able to get out to walk around, walk around the Russian White House, around the barricades where the young people had rallied to Yeltsin. There was still the detritus of the three days all over the streets. It was one of those beautiful, late-summer Moscow evenings, after a couple of cold and rainy days. Almost everyone had gone, probably in need of food and sleep, as actually I was. It was nine or later, which was as early as I could get out of the embassy. God, it was a beautiful evening and, for the most part, I had this great historic scene to myself. It was very odd to be on that historic ground while still daylight, but almost nobody else there. I remember walking, looking at all this, and thinking, “Hundreds of years from now, a thousand years from now, people will be writing and debating about what happened right here this day. And I’m here. I’m seeing it and I was part of it.” I had a profound sense of being on one of the cusps of history, of being an observer and, in a small way, a participant, in what I already clearly understood was the greatest geopolitical transformation of my lifetime. I understood this was the end of the Soviet Union; that the Soviet Union could not recover from this. Although it was warm, I felt chilly just from the realization of standing on the edge of an historic tectonic plate that had just moved. I would not trade that evening for any other of my life.

Q: The planes are going down, Gorbachev is released and coming back, was there the feeling, with the armed forces, the KGB and all that lined up against them, that they were going to go down quietly? Or were you thinking of Red and White armies?

MERRY: We didn’t know too much of what was going on behind the scenes, though there were plenty of rumors, of course. The one really important thing was the largely peaceful collapse of the putsch. Other than the three young men who had been killed in the night fighting the second day, there was no lethal violence. Jim and I represented the United States at their funeral a few days later. There were three suicides among those involved in the coup attempt. A real loss was Marshal Akhromeyev, a very honorable man and not one of the original organizers of the putsch, who joined it from a sense of duty, and then committed suicide. His entire life had been defined by the military slogan “I serve the Soviet Union.” I suspect that is why he aligned himself with the putsch, despite reservations, to try to preserve the state to which he had devoted his life. I know his death was very much regretted by his counterparts in Washington. I understand Colin

Powell thought the world of him. Here was a man who felt his honor required him to atone with his life. For the most part, the organizers of the putsch passively accepted the outcome and they were sent to—I think they were in Lefortovo Prison. I'm not absolutely sure. I believe it was Lefortovo where they were imprisoned.

Once Soviet willpower failed at the top, the intimidating aura of the police state more or less evaporated. Moscow in the ensuing days had a party atmosphere. The first two-and-a-half days of the week had been gray and rainy. The end of the putsch brought with it the sun. Then there were several days in Moscow of those lovely, late-summer Russian days that were just made for the festive atmosphere which came pouring out. On the Thursday evening, the day after the putsch collapsed, a colleague and I were on Dzerzhinsky Square, in front of the KGB building, as they were taking down the huge statue of Felix Dzerzhinsky, the creator of the Soviet secret police. There were fireworks in the sky. We went down to the Communist Party headquarters building on Old Square, where a number of Yeltsin's associates had taken possession of the building, so the files couldn't be taken away or destroyed. There is a street that looks past the Communist Party headquarters and into Red Square, along which you can see the flagpole on top of what's called the Senate building inside the Kremlin. Instead of the red flag with the hammer and sickle on it, there flew the white, blue and red Russian tricolor. I practically put my neck out as I did a violent double-take as my peripheral vision spotted what, to me, seemed the wrong flag on the flagpole. I physically catapulted around when I saw the Russian tricolor above the Kremlin rather than the Soviet flag. I had not expected that change to come so quickly, but whoever it was within the Kremlin who flies the flag understood which way the wind was blowing in every sense.

The next morning while taking the metro to work I decided to stop by Dzerzhinsky Square to see if anything was still going on after the festivities of the previous evening when the statue was removed from the massive pedestal in the center of the square. It was, for many people, a normal working day. As I came up the steps to ground level, I walked beside a Moscow matron with her shopping bags, shuffling up the steps. As we came into the open, she gave a casual glance to her left onto the square, stopped dead in astonishment, and asked of nobody in particular, "Where's Felix?"

As busy as we continued to be professionally in the embassy during the days after the putsch, we could enjoy the festive atmosphere, the sense of celebration, of triumph, of a kind equal to Berlin with the fall of the Wall. This was a genuine expression of what is sometimes called "people power". Now, that statement simplifies what happened. I'm not for a moment saying these events involved more than a tiny fraction of the population of the city of Moscow, or the city of Leningrad, let alone the population of the country. This was not a mass movement as had been true in Poland and in East Germany and then Czechoslovakia, but these events certainly had mass resonance. This was a failed palace coup. But unlike the palace coup that removed Ceauşescu in Romania, the palace coup in Moscow failed in large measure because of mass popular opposition on the streets, particularly in Moscow and in Leningrad, and because there was a political force in opposition, centered around Yeltsin. The coup plotters bungled things. They took physical possession of the wrong center of power in Moscow. They deployed in force

around the Kremlin and Red Square, but were slow to move against the Russian White House. They didn't understand there was an alternative source of political legitimacy, or that Yeltsin could rally mass support a couple of miles away from Red Square. Perhaps with more resolution and better coordination, they could have pulled it off, but they could not turn back the clock to the era of Brezhnev or Chernenko.

This was really a question of willpower. I don't think anybody can deny that Boris Yeltsin had guts and he had determination. For all his later failings, which I have written about elsewhere, he was the unquestioned man of the hour in Russia in August 1991. Not Gorbachev. If Yeltsin had failed, he would have paid for it with his life, and he knew it. He showed leadership, and he displayed backbone and determination, which inspired a lot of other people to do the same. The people on the other side were internally divided, bickering, sometimes drunk, and unable to get their own institutions, particularly the military, to back what they were doing. It was the unwillingness of the military to rally around the coup that was its ultimate undoing.

I think some of the real heroes of this episode—the unsung heroes, at any rate—were the senior military people who themselves regarded the putsch as illegal, who hewed to their own sense of duty, and maintained their professionalism rather than participating, because they certainly had ample forces with which to crush the opposition. I don't think there's any question they could have done so. But it was not clear who was going to give the orders and who was going to obey those orders. It was a remarkable moment in the history of any country, let alone the history of a place like Russia, to have an event of such political importance take place more outdoors than in; more on the streets than behind closed doors. That fact was reflected in the thousands of people who participated, even in a small way, and who could feel real pride. There have not been many events like that in modern Russian history.

Q: Did we have any contact or encouragement role, during this first day, with Yeltsin?

MERRY: The first day or first days?

Q: Well, first day.

MERRY: The first day, yes. Collins went over to see him with a message from the president.

Q: What was the message, essentially?

MERRY: Well, I'm not sure I should be the one to discuss that. Since you're interviewing Collins, maybe he should deal with that.

Q: OK. Were we talking, at your level, with people down below?

MERRY: Oh, yes. And we weren't simply maintaining sources of information, we were communicating sympathy and support. Fortunately, that turned out all right, but it might

not have. As a diplomat you've got to be careful about the perception that you're promising more than you're actually going to be able to deliver. Obviously there was the risk that people would interpret any indication of support from the United States as more tangible than just political. That was a problem.

Later in the week our involvement lost any ambiguity. We very publicly welcomed the failure of the putsch and the return of Gorbachev. We cheered Yeltsin. Strauss spoke for the United States at a mass rally on the weekend – entirely without authorization from Washington and without a prepared text – to associate our country with what had happened. I don't think most people in Washington understood that Gorbachev was returning for his last hurrah—he returned to Moscow, but not to power in any real way—and that Yeltsin had emerged from this event the unequivocal leader of Russia. That was soon manifest in a combined session of the Soviet and Russian Supreme Soviets when Yeltsin overtly dominated Gorbachev, almost forcing him to read aloud the names of those who had conspired against him, a list of men he had himself put into positions of power. Anyone watching that event could see both that power had shifted to Yeltsin and that he would not accept anything like a subordinate position to Gorbachev again.

Keep in mind that there was a lot of bad blood between the two men, and that Gorbachev had several times publicly humiliated Yeltsin. Boris was getting some revenge on Gorbachev, a man who was much more haughty and arrogant at home than his Western image. Yeltsin had endured a lot from Gorbachev in a very personal way and would now return the favor. However, the basic issue was not personal but political. Gorbachev had, to the very end, staked his banner to the Communist Party of the Soviet Union as the vehicle of his power. When his own team within the Party and Soviet power ministries lost faith in Gorbachev and betrayed him, he was left with no real basis of power and authority. In contrast, Yeltsin had built a new vehicle in the Russian Federation after leaving the Party and, with his triumph of August, enjoyed massive legitimacy. What made this process so post-Soviet was that legitimacy was the core component of power; legitimacy actually mattered. That was Gorbachev's legacy, though it pulled the rug out from under him.

This began a difficult process between the embassy and Washington. In the weeks and months to come, Washington was continuously behind events in Russia and frequently, I would have to say, in denial as to what was happening. There were debates, legitimate debates, about exactly what was happening. Within the embassy there were conflicting views whether Gorbachev was finished or was now going to get his second wind. A few thought that, restored to office and with the putschists out of the way, he would be able to fulfill his program. There were other people who said it was only a matter of time before his lack of political authority would be entirely exposed, as well as his own responsibility for the crisis of August. Remember, the people who tried to overthrow Gorbachev were people he had trusted despite warnings from Shevardnadze and others that they were going to move against him. Gorbachev was the man at the top, so the ultimate accountability rested with him, which he was not willing to accept.

These were legitimate debates, toward the end of August, as to what was happening and

what was going to happen. To me, as someone who was on the scene, who had daily engagement with these events, not from a distance but with immediacy, it was quite clear that Gorbachev was politically finished, expended, exhausted, whatever term you want to use, and that Yeltsin had emerged from these events the unambiguous winner. There was not going to be a duality of leadership, there wasn't going to be both a Soviet and a Russian Federation leadership for more than an interim period. No repetition of the "war of the laws" of the previous spring. There was going to be just one power in Moscow, and it was going to be Yeltsin.

I must acknowledge that in one of my early messages after the putsch I fudged the question of Gorbachev's future. This was an analysis summarizing the events of August and what they meant for the United States. I recall I used the phrase, "we should not abandon Gorbachev." I regret that now. I would not have recommended actual abandonment of the man, but I should have stated clearly that he was finished politically. My hesitancy reflected the split views within the embassy and, I suspect, my position as a relative newcomer. I recall a spirited conversation with Robert Clarke, the head of the Science Section and a good friend from my first Moscow assignment, in which he argued forcefully there would be only one man standing and it would be Yeltsin. I agreed with him, but was not yet willing to be so forthright in what I wrote to Washington. That would change quite soon, but I was still a bit uneasy in my new role as political analyst at the most important embassy of the United States during this immensely important global transformation. I was still somewhat intimidated by the role and the responsibilities it entailed, and unwilling to stake my views to the mast for all to see. Events would change that soon enough.

It was also pretty obvious that the Soviet Union as a multinational empire was coming apart; the three Baltic states were not only going but, for practical purposes, were already gone. Yeltsin made it clear publicly he was happy to cheer them on. I remember in late August getting a phone call—how he got the phone call through I still can't comprehend—from one of our officers from the Leningrad consulate who was in Vilnius, the capital of Lithuania, calling me from the KGB headquarters building in the center of Vilnius. He had accompanied a number of Lithuanians who went to the KGB headquarters to see that files didn't get destroyed. When they arrived, at about six o'clock or so on a summer evening, the building doors were open; they went in and everything was intact. The staff had simply removed their personal belongings and had left everything entirely in place. After a while he picked up the telephone and was able to get a call through to me at the embassy in Moscow. I can still remember the awe in his voice that he was calling me from inside the KGB headquarters in the capital of a Soviet republic. His Lithuanian friends were in possession. Clearly Soviet power in the Baltic states was a thing of the past. Things were also beginning to move fairly quickly in Moldova, in western Ukraine, central Ukraine, in Georgia, in Armenia. Less so in the central Asian countries, but I think the fragility of the Soviet system was becoming pretty clear.

Q: What about Leningrad/St. Petersburg, what was happening there?

MERRY: That was second only to Moscow as a place where interesting things were happening. The mayor, Anatoly Sobchak, was one of the leading reformers in the Soviet system. He actually was the first political sponsor of Vladimir Putin, who was one of his students in law school and became a deputy mayor sometime later. One of the first things Sobchak did after the putsch was change the name from Leningrad back to St. Petersburg. The consulate-general had done superb work covering the Baltic states for several years, but Washington imposed an abrupt halt to that work when we recognized their independence, which cut off a large number of valuable contacts in those countries for months.

At the start of September, the new minister-counselor for the Political Section, Louis Sell, arrived. He was in overall charge of the three components of the section and was the management layer between it and the front office, meaning Strauss and Collins. His arrival changed what had been a pretty informal and very collegial working environment into something more structured and layered, as was probably inevitable. I had been in the habit of working directly with Collins morning, noon and evening. As the events of August were overwhelmingly the responsibility of Political/Internal, it was natural that the embassy front office should engage us without an intervening layer. Probably I was spoiled during the putsch and its aftermath. However, it was time for the embassy, with something like 1200 total staff, to function in a more structured way. Political would always have pride of place with the front office, and we were physically the closest to the ambassador and DCM, but they had a lot more to worry about than us.

I had never worked before with Louis Sell and had met him only briefly while in Washington on consultations. He had a background in Soviet and Yugoslav affairs, but I really knew very little about him. I came to have considerable professional respect for Louis, but unfortunately never a true collegial relationship. Our personalities contrasted quite a bit: I am a compulsive wit – even a smart aleck – while Louis is not real strong on irony. He arrived in Moscow with the declared view that the failed putsch demonstrated the failure of reform in Russia, while I saw it as a huge step forward. I came to see Louis as more comfortable with the unambiguous confrontation of the Cold War than with the messy post-Soviet and inchoate Russia we were dealing with. Louis can be, at least in my perspective, somewhat Manichean in his political outlook, whereas post-Soviet Russia was nothing if not morally ambiguous. Our contrasting views and personalities would cause problems in the years ahead.

Political/Internal emerged from the events of August a genuine team. I do not mean to say there were no personal tensions, but they were few. It was the hard work and strain of August that forged the team, much more than I ever could have done. This was a genuine blessing for me, because for the following two years I had a reporting instrument in my hands that largely functioned on its own; in the third year with new people this was not the case. I never was able to overcome the tendency of FSOs to want their own personal portfolio rather than sharing their work with colleagues. People in our line are quite territorial, and I had hoped to change this in Political/Internal based on my experience with the Marine Corps. I failed, as each officer hewed to his or her own turf. It is part of our institutional culture and, much as I deplore it, my management skills – such as they

are – were insufficient to alter the culture. Otherwise, my management duties were remarkably light. I had to provide direction and definitely had to exercise quality control on written product, but this was a group of self-starting and self-motivated professionals of a very high order. Some were outstandingly good writers, though not all.

As the editor, it was a joy to receive drafts that I knew would receive keen attention in Washington, opening up new perspectives on local realities. My view was that there were thousands of people working on Soviet affairs in various parts of Washington and we should not duplicate work they could do any more than necessary. Our task, as the comparative handful of official Americans on the spot, was to observe, report and interpret in ways people in Washington could not. Our comparative advantage was proximity to the events, so that should be our focus. I encouraged my troops to get out of the office and on to the streets and into contacts with as wide a range of official and non-official people as time and circumstances allowed. Then, of course, they had to produce reports on what they had learned, preferably of a topical character rather than just a recitation of a conversation. Some drafts needed a fair amount of reworking, as I could be very demanding in terms of quality of written product. I considered we were the most important reporting section of the U.S. Foreign Service, so we owed Washington top-quality output. They suffered daily under my illegible blue pen, but I hope they emerged as better reporting officers from the ordeal. It is hard to know how you are regarded by those under your authority; I still do not know what they thought of me.

During these months, and even well into 1992, we at the embassy had access to Russian official and non-official contacts of a kind most diplomats could only dream about. I think it is not an exaggeration to say we had better access in those days in Moscow than we would in Ottawa. Indeed, our level of access was unnatural, and I warned my staff and official visitors that this was an abnormal period which could not last. It simply was not normal for a government, any government, let alone that of a great power with deep traditions of pride and of paranoia, to open itself up so completely to foreigners, and still less to foreigners from its former adversary. This struck me forcefully one evening when escorting a Congressional delegation to some meetings in the former Communist Party Central Committee building. This was a structure no U.S. Embassy official had set foot inside during my first Moscow tour, or ever expected to. Now, I was allowed by the Russians to wander around this inner sanction of Soviet Communism without an escort of any kind. The corridors were piled with official portraits from the old regime waiting for disposal, even though that regime supposedly still existed. There I was strutting along like a conqueror looking at these relics of the Leninist system. It was a gratifying feeling, but I understood this was no more than a moment in time of Russian weakness, against which they would recoil, and those doors would close on us again.

As September progressed, it was pretty obvious the political competition in Moscow was coming to a crisis. By this point, Yeltsin had very little use for Gorbachev. The two men had once been allies, but with their political separation had developed a very deep personal antipathy. Really, neither of them could stand the other. Gorbachev's great historic achievement was in ending the Cold War, but he did so in order to preserve and perpetuate the Soviet Union and the Leninist system. Yeltsin, by contrast, came to regard

the entire Soviet experiment as a mistake which could not be reformed and should be abandoned. This was an extraordinary transformation for a man who was not just the product of the Leninist system but had risen almost to the top of it. This was, I think, as much a personal journey as a political one. After his first trip to the United States some months earlier, Yeltsin had told one of his closest associates, "Our system is shit!" In my view, Gorbachev was a great historic reformer, but Yeltsin was a great historical revolutionary. August and its aftermath gave him his opportunity. Yeltsin certainly had a very strong instinct for power, and understood he was the winner. Gorbachev was little more than a figurehead who was very popular among Western heads of government and Western journalists, but not within the Soviet Union, or within Russia. Gorbachev was a shadow of his former self, because by this point the Communist Party had been declared illegal. Since Gorbachev had been general secretary of the Soviet Communist Party, that pretty much rendered his main source of power null and void. He still had his role as executive president of the Soviet Union, but what was the Soviet Union at this point? Who was there to command and who was there to obey? Increasingly little.

Strauss initially asked official Washington to stay away until things sorted out a bit. Senator Larry Pressler insisted on coming anyway just after the putsch, and I spent a Saturday handholding him when I had plenty else to do. Then came the flood of visitors and delegations. James Baker, the secretary of state, came for the first of his innumerable visits. I can't even remember how many times he came. With all of this activity, we were trying to explain what was happening within the limits of what we could understand. It was a changing tableau, and a rapidly changing tableau. The Russian cast of characters involved many people whose names now are no more than historical footnotes, but who were very important people then. For a few months there were parallel structures of governments and ministries, Russian Federation and Soviet Union, that obviously were not going to last very long. As the economy started to crumble and inflation started to soar and the integrity of basic livelihoods began to erode, Russians focused more and more on immediate issues: the coming of winter, among other things, which is a big deal every year, let alone that one.

There developed, during September, October, and November, an increasing gap within American official perceptions, a contrast between what seemed obvious in the embassy but either was not accepted or even rejected in Washington. Let me give you a vivid example. This is something I can talk about because there was a study done a couple of years ago for which the various documents were declassified. I was consulted for the study, so I know about it. I think I can legitimately discuss it now. In late October 1991, George Kolt, who was the National Intelligence Officer for the Soviet Union—he was the leading Soviet specialist at CIA—sent a memo to the White House, to the NSC, saying that Ukraine might become an independent country within five years. The leading Soviet specialist at the National Security Council, Edward Hewitt, rejected this entirely. The two of them—they're both now deceased—Kolt and Hewitt, got into what reportedly was quite a confrontation over this issue. They were two of the most senior Soviet watchers in the United States, and, in fact, probably the two most senior specialists on Soviet affairs in the government, and they were arguing into early November of 1991 whether Ukraine might become an independent state within five years. It happened within less than five

weeks. They had been told that Ukraine was heading toward independence through a national referendum at the end of November in detailed reporting both from the consulate in Kiev and from the embassy in Moscow. The Russians knew Ukraine would be independent before the end of the year, whether Russia liked it or not. Washington still perceived the Soviet Union as an intact and viable entity when its demise within weeks was no more than a formality. By mid-autumn we could see this, quite vividly, because we were at the very heart of the process. Washington was in denial. For example, having refused for decades to recognize the forcible incorporation of the Baltic republics into the Soviet Union by Stalin, the United States was one of the last Western governments actually to welcome them back as independence states in 1991 for fear this might somehow undermine Gorbachev.

This inability in Washington to see what seemed so obvious in the field was a major disconnect. It was reflected in October, when President Bush had his last summit meeting with Gorbachev, in Madrid. I did the scene-setter telegram for that, which I entitled Gorbachev's Last Hurrah – a reference to the Edwin O'Connor novel about Boston politics. I said very bluntly this would be Gorbachev's final performance as a statesman on the global stage. Ambassador Strauss went to Madrid for the summit and later debriefed a number of us on his return. He said he had given the same message to the president and the president's entourage before the meeting and told them, "Mr. President, you're looking at the last U.S. ambassador to the Soviet Union and I'm going to be the first U.S. ambassador to a place called Russia." And evidently, Sununu, who was one of the president's top White House advisors…

Q: He was chief of staff, I think.

MERRY: Chief of staff, but not a foreign policy advisor, interrupted rather rudely and rejected what Strauss, the ambassador on the spot, had said. Sununu declared he had read all of the intelligence reports, that Yeltsin was just a flash in the pan and Gorbachev was the guy we needed to stay with. Strauss evidently told him off in fairly blunt terms. Here was a meeting with the President of the United States, the secretary of state, the director of Central Intelligence, Robert Gates, Scowcroft, the national security advisor, Sununu and a few others, and the only person in that room who understood what the hell was going on in Russia was Bob Strauss, a Texas politician with no background in Soviet affairs, but who had been ambassador in Moscow for a couple of months and who absolutely did know what the hell was going on.

Q: And he's also a politician. Being a politician, he knew power.

MERRY: He knew power very well. This actually might be a good moment to say a few words about Strauss…

Q: I interviewed him, by the way.

MERRY: For whom I had and have the greatest admiration and personal affection. I've often said that a couple years earlier or a couple years later, he might not have been the

right man to be ambassador in Moscow. But in 1991, Strauss was exactly the right man at the right place at the right time because he brought to Moscow no intellectual baggage. Not being a Soviet specialist or a Russia hand, he didn't have any particular unlearning to do. He had extraordinary instincts and understanding of power relationships. This was a man who could walk into a room full of people he didn't know, with whom he didn't have any language in common, and when he walked out of the room he'd know exactly who was hot and who was not. I don't know how he did it, but he did.

This was also a man who was absolutely no bullshit in his conduct of his ambassadorship. He never pretended to know anything he didn't know. He strongly took the view that other people in the embassy should candidly tell him what he ought to know. He frequently said that if you put himself and Collins together you had a pretty good ambassador. He never hesitated to give credit to Jim and others. He never considered himself to be anything he was not, but he was a superb leader of the team and terrific in making people in the embassy feel that what they did was important, that it mattered, that their judgments, their work, were feeding right in to the top of American foreign policy, that he was taking what they were telling him and giving that directly to the president in phone calls, in meetings and such. He was also remarkable at accepting the speed with which things were changing. He had a great metaphor, which was that we – including Russia's leaders – were all like a pissant riding on a log in a river going downstream imaging it determines the direction the log is going and its destination. So, anybody who thought they were in charge of Russia's future was like this pissant on a log. Strauss knew neither Gorbachev nor Yeltsin was determining where things were going. They were going with the flow like everybody else. Strauss understood that the United States could not affect that, either; that we shouldn't even try.

I got to know Strauss during these months pretty well because he liked to interact directly with members of his staff who could help him understand the place. He had brought along a staffer from the State Department who, among other things, was supposed to be his speechwriter, but the first speech draft the guy produced, Strauss hated. Strauss went to Collins to identify someone else to write his speech. Collins fingered me and I wrote a draft that Strauss, frankly, loved. So, from then on, for the remainder of his time in Moscow, in addition to my other duties, I was the ambassador's speechwriter. Not that I needed any more work, but it did give me access to and contact with Bob Strauss that allowed me to appreciate that, behind the good-old-boy bonhomie of the Texas politician, was a man who was smart as hell. I also enjoyed getting his genuine voice into the speech drafts, based on our respective origins in Texas and Oklahoma.

Strauss was extremely well connected in Washington, and he understood how to use his ability to pick up the phone and get anybody in Washington to take his call. Two congressmen later told me that what became the "Freedom Support Act" of assistance for Russia and the other new countries should have been named for Strauss, as it was his personal lobbying for the legislation which got it passed. He also knew how to lead an embassy and make the embassy serve not just his own purposes but serve the broader purposes of the United States through him. He had not wanted the job in the first place, but knew he was a key man at a key time for the country, so he was going to do his best,

but he had no false ego issues. Yeltsin warmed to him immediately; they were very sympatico. The Russians were impressed as hell at the things he could do, like picking up the phone and getting the president, senators, any Cabinet members on the line. A few months later, in early '92, the Russians were putting together their first presentation for the International Monetary Fund and didn't have a clue what do. I happened to be in Strauss's office when he put a phone call through to Paul Volcker, and the conversation was, "Paul? Bob. I want you to get your butt over here. I've got a job for you." Two days later, I was sitting across the table from Paul Volcker, briefing him on the domestic political situation.

Q: Paul Volcker was, at that time…

MERRY: I'm not sure what he was at that time. He was the former Chairman of the Federal Reserve System, but Paul Volcker was then, as now, one of the biggest names in American financial policy. To have somebody tell him to just drop everything and get on an airplane and fly to Moscow demonstrates the kind of thing that Strauss could do. No Foreign Service ambassador who ever lived could get away with something like that.

Strauss was also extremely good, as an ambassador, at lightening the mood. People were working very, very hard and there was an immense amount of stress, and some people were grinding the enamel off their teeth at night. People had a lot of trouble sleeping, and the embassy medical unit had to get extra supplies of various medications just for the Political Section. I was still on strong medications for my back injury from 1983 in New York, and the stress certainly did not make it any better. Strauss was great at getting people to lighten up, getting people to relax. He had an unlimited stock of jokes and funny stories which he used to lighten the mood and the load, which is also, I think, a characteristic of leadership. I will never forget watching Bob tell off-color Strom Thurmond jokes to a Senate delegation which included Strom Thurmond. Strauss was also very approachable, not at all at a distance from embassy staff. For example, most days he had lunch in the embassy cafeteria, standing in line like anyone else, often wearing a cardigan sweater. Anyone could sit with him and chat with the ambassador, which made people feel that the boss was one of them. This was a nice touch, from which Strauss also got access to a variety of views about post operations and such.

Above all, Strauss was known to be very close to the president and secretary of state—who were, of course, old friends and political rivals—and with practically every member of importance in the Senate and House of Representatives, and various other Cabinet members, everybody in Washington who was anybody. He was the man who could convince these people that, whatever Washington might want, the Soviet Union was coming to an end, Gorbachev was exhausted as a political force, and Yeltsin not only was the person we were going to deal with but Yeltsin was a person that we could and should deal with. Getting this message to Washington was, of course, my job, but in terms of effectiveness in communicating the message, nobody could compete with Strauss. I probably achieved more communicating through him than through reporting.

Strauss and Collins were very supportive of my role and my work, which was twofold.

First, I was the editor for a huge reporting section, of 16 talented and productive reporting officers who pushed out a lot of reports. We were covering not just events in Moscow and in Russia, but in the Caucasus, Central Asia and Moldova. Our consulates in St Petersburg and Kiev covered lots of territory, but we still had most of the Soviet Union to report on. Members of my team were on the road constantly, and often in very difficult and dangerous situations. I vividly recall receiving a phone call at home in the middle of the night from one of my teams in Tbilisi when the civil war there was in full swing. They were calling from their hotel room in the center of the city, and I could hear the heavy shooting outside and even the impact of rounds on the wall of the hotel; not surprisingly, they were on the floor, but they managed to get a report through to me. This is the kind of work Political/Internal FSOs were engaged in. They routinely met directly with the top figures in the republics, who were eager for contact with the United States, even if that meant a first or even second secretary from our Moscow embassy.

There were many days when the volume of the reporting we sent to Washington was simply exhausting for me. I rarely got home before ten. I tried to be a light editor in some ways, in that I almost never rewrote anyone's text, but I could be a demanding editor in requiring them to rework their own texts to what I considered Moscow standard. Some of my staff produced drafts which required nothing more from me than my initials, with perhaps an occasional suggestion. Others, I regret to say, would turn in a basic draft which they had never bothered even to proofread themselves, depending on me to perform the quality control. This did not amuse me much, especially when I had to deal with this kind of thing several times a day. I found it was, in part, a generational thing. FSOs in their 40s produced drafts of a much higher quality than did the younger colleagues. One talented but erratic younger FSO explained to me that in school she had been taught to get in touch with her feelings rather than how to spell. That may be true, but I still believed that a member of the U.S. Foreign Service should not require a supervisor for things like subject-verb agreement.

The second part of my job, and the part I found most rewarding, was writing longer analytic reports to explain the broader picture of what was happening and what it meant. These are sometimes called “think pieces” in the Service, to distinguish them from normal day-to-day reporting. Now, even our routine political reports usually had a concluding comment paragraph or two explaining what the event meant for the United States. A busy person in Washington could read the summary of an embassy report and then flip to the back for the comment section and skip the main body of the message. Our reports contained the standard “who, what, when, where and why” of good reporting, but also tried to answer the question “so what?” I several times encouraged the entire Political/Internal staff to apply themselves to longer “think piece” analyses, telling them Washington needed multiple points of view about events of this magnitude, but none ever took me up on the offer. In part, I think they all felt they had more than enough to do, but in part I think there was some reticence to put themselves in the shoes of George Kennan, so to speak, and interpret for Washington the broad directions of Russia's future.

For myself, the “big picture” writing was what I found most enjoyable, although time consuming. I could not imagine a context better suited for broad-scale speculative

analysis than the collapse of the Soviet Union and, as nobody else seemed interested in the task, I took it on with enthusiasm. It was part of my job, to be sure, but to be in charge of Political/Internal in Moscow was for me not just a challenge but a welcome opportunity. Unfortunately, the only time available for such writing was at night or on weekends (and I worked every Saturday and Sunday through the end of 1991 with the exception of one Sunday I was in Petersburg for consultations). I pulled many all-night drafting sessions in order to produce "think pieces" during this assignment, in part because there were always new and important things to interpret for Washington. The demands of combining my editor day job with my writing job were exhausting, but I always emerged from a solitary nighttime session working on a longer message with a deep sense of personal satisfaction. In part, it is the pure craftsmanship of writing that I love.

I was rather surprised at what I was able to get away with in terms of approvals for my messages. Any policy-relevant message required front-office approval as a matter of course. Often Louis Sell, the Political Minister Counselor, had reservations about some of my views, but he rarely challenged my drafts, as he recognized this kind of writing was inherent to my job. Collins and Strauss were remarkably accommodating in sending in very expansive analyses which had one of their own names at the bottom. I already mentioned my scene setter for the Madrid summit, and there were others during the autumn. Later, when Yeltsin went to Camp David in early 1992 to meet with President Bush, I wrote a message trying to explain the Russian leader. Strauss appended a short paragraph at the end of the message saying he was not sure he agreed with all of the analysis, but wanted Washington to have the benefit of it. How could one not admire an ambassador with that kind of tolerance and self-confidence?

In early November of 1991, I became very frustrated by what I was hearing from Washington about lack of understanding of events in Russia, and especially the dispute between Kolt and Hewitt I mentioned earlier. It seemed incredible to me that Washington could not see that the Soviet Union was within weeks of its end, that they were still debating how to support Gorbachev. I worked out my frustration by writing a real zinger of a message, a report intended to be a bucket of ice water in Washington's face. I deliberately over-wrote the draft in anticipation the front office would tone it down quite a lot; I expected to sacrifice some florid language to get clearance on the basic arguments. Wouldn't you know, Collins and Strauss signed out the whole damn thing with only minor changes. I have a redacted copy of the message here with me, obtained by the Public Television program "Frontline" under Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) several years ago, so I can quote from it openly. The subject line pretty much conveys the tone of the message: <u>The Bolshevik Goetterdaemmerung: End of Empire and Russian Rebirth</u>. It is over 20 paragraphs intended to shock the State Department, or at least whoever might actually read the thing, out of their complacency about Soviet events. The lead paragraph opens with, "Leninism is dead." You get the idea: attract their attention through overstatement.

In the message I made the following arguments, each getting a paragraph or so: Soviet Communism failed due to its own deficiencies and deserved to; "the Soviet government

is disappearing before our eyes like a sandcastle at high tide;" Gorbachev's days are numbered, and in days rather than months; "the Russian leadership is slap-happy from the ceaseless torrent of events;" Russian members of parliament "are struggling to determine what their role should be and how to stand up to their dominating (and sometimes domineering) president;" the Russian loss of imperial stature is unprecedented; for most Russians a greater shock than the failure of Soviet power is the independence of Ukraine; however, the separation of Russia and Ukraine will be peaceful, and not like Yugoslavia; while the response of Yeltsin and his team has been "remarkably moderate," "it is simply not in human nature for great empires to proceed graciously into extinction;" Russians "are not humbled by the mess they are in: frustrated, angry, confused, even humiliated – yes; humbled, no. Russians feel deeply their own greatness as a people;" August was not just the end of the Soviet era but "the onset of a dramatically new era in Russian history;" the newly independent states will be "something far less workable and dynamic" than the EU; the new Russian state will be the core of American interests; Russians "want a genuine partnership with America (not tutelage);" "Russia today is looking outward; it may not do so for long if it does not find answers to its problems;" the Marshall Plan is the wrong model for our engagement with the new Russia.

Unfortunately, at this point, the redacted version I have from FOIA blanks out the entire last two pages, which were the recommendations for U.S. policy. I do not cite this message just to demonstrate my own prescience, because Sell, Collins and Strauss all agreed to it. This was not a message of dissent by an individual, of a kind I did later, but of dissent by the Moscow embassy. Sending this message certainly made me feel better, and I heard it received a very wide readership. Who knows? It may actually have done some good in persuading Washington that its preference, a restored Gorbachev with authority over a reformed Soviet Union, was simply not going to happen.

Q: One of the things, I think, for somebody looking at this in later times, is that Gorbachev, back in the establishment in the United States, was a darling.

MERRY: Very much so.

Q: Because he really had started things going. He was a steady force. And for that reason, you can't have two darlings, so Yeltsin was being denigrated. Yeltsin had drinking problems and personality problems, but the point being that he was really being knocked down by the munchkins, the little people in the White House and State Department and all, because their boy was Gorbachev. So this was not just cold analysis. No one would bet on this horse.

MERRY: Of course, it had taken Washington a fairly long time to warm to Gorbachev. Washington had been very skeptical about him for several years. So was I, for that matter. He was not a product of the Brezhnev era for nothing. He gets too much retrospective praise, in my view, because he remained a Leninist in thought and motivations. His biases and ignorance about America were much worse than Reagan's about Russia. Much worse. When American elites finally did adopt Gorbachev and decided he was our boy they, as is often the case with Washington, just went whole hog.

Washington so often tends to personalize foreign countries and governments and attaches U.S. policy to foreign leaders as they are on the way out. In late 1991, Washington could not see that, in the historical transformation underway, Gorbachev's time had past. Gorbachev was an immensely important figure; I don't want to denigrate his role in the slightest, but revolutionary changes tend to chew up political leaders at a rapid rate.

Q: Revolutions eat their young, as the phrase goes.

MERRY: Yes, Gorbachev had his time, and then his time was gone. Washington was extremely slow and reluctant to accept that fact. This led to one of the more interesting roles I played before the end of this momentous second half of 1991. During the latter part of November and through December, I was in regular contact with a member of Gorbachev's personal staff, whose identity I will protect. This was a backchannel that was, so far as I recall, not authorized by anybody on either side. Gorbachev's inner team needed somebody they could talk to directly on the American side because they were terribly frustrated that he was constantly receiving phone calls from people in the West, including Washington, telling him to hang in, "we're with you, stick with it, don't resign." This was in December, when Gorbachev's inner circle was telling him to face facts, that it was time to exit the stage. Gorbachev received contrary advice from leading people in Europe and the United States – including people in high government positions. Gorbachev's staff wanted to communicate to somebody who they believed was not part of the problem, and that happened to be me.

I learned, among other things, that a number of senior people in Washington were talking to Gorbachev directly and encouraging him to hold on. These were semi-official communications and constituted policy freelancing directly with Gorbachev. Certainly they were not going through the Department of State or through the embassy. The delicacy of this particular backchannel was that I learned about things emanating from my own government that I wasn't supposed to know about. For me, the key point in this backchannel was to learn when Gorbachev would finally face the inevitable, finally exit the stage. He wanted to wait for a better or more dignified moment, but his own staff told him there was never going to be a graceful moment, and the longer he dragged it out the worse it was going to get. When he finally resigned, Gorbachev had little more than a handful of staff and electricity for a few offices in the Kremlin. If he had waited much longer, I think Yeltsin would have pulled the plug literally.

One of the interesting historical questions I like to raise is exactly when the Soviet Union came to an end. Most people would identify it with Gorbachev's resignation on December 25, 1991. I reject that view as conflating the man with the state. Even at the end, the Soviet Union was more than just one political figure. Within the Soviet constitutional system, Gorbachev was an unelected executive president, but he wasn't an emperor or a king. He wasn't the state and he did not incorporate its sovereignty. My own preference is to look at the juridical origin in the Treaty of Union which created the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics in December of 1922. Within the Union Treaty, I see the USSR as an asymmetric federal system, whose cornerstone was the Russian Federation. Other Union republics could come and go without affecting the juridical

integrity of the whole – as, indeed, they did over the decades – but the loss of the Russian Republic would remove the heart of the Soviet state. So, in my view, the Soviet Union came to an end when the Russian Federation, at Yeltsin's behest, abrogated the Treaty of Union on December 10, 1991, and the Russian Supreme Soviet confirmed that act. To me, the Soviet Union was a legal nullity two weeks before the world perceived it to be, and Gorbachev's abdication was from a state structure devoid of sovereign authority. This is just my view, and perhaps somewhat pedantic. I know people who agree that Gorbachev's resignation could not terminate the Union, but point to the final session of the USSR Supreme Soviet to vote itself out of existence a couple of days later as the final moment. However, I consider the corpse was dead before it was pronounced dead.

This was not an entirely scholarly issue, as it affected the date of transfer of applicability of all the treaties to which the USSR was party. As it happens, Russia and the other successor states took on those obligations without the West ever much quibbling about what date in December was the date of transfer. It says something about the pace of events that the December 10 Russian abrogation of the Union Treaty passed with almost no international notice. I wrote a short message, in which my comment seemed stirring to me, even if nobody else cared. I said, "The core of the Leninist project, Soviet Russia, is Soviet no longer." I remember that line because I thought it was a very big deal.

In any case, Ukraine held its national referendum on December 1, which overwhelmingly voted to leave the Soviet Union. The other republics, other than some of the Central Asian states, were already gone or going quickly. When Mikhail Gorbachev finally bit the bullet and agreed to his resignation, it was a somewhat tawdry and shabby end to his official political life. Yeltsin was willing to tolerate his rival till then only to maintain his own good reputation with the West. Yeltsin could have turned the lights out on Gorbachev much earlier. Yeltsin and his counterparts from Belarus and Ukraine had met together in early December and agreed on a new entity they called the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). They did this is part in response to a last-gasp Gorbachev proposal for a new "Union of Sovereign Republics." The CIS in its origins was just a slap in the face to Gorbachev by the new Russian, Ukrainian and Belarusian leaders. Russia then abrogated the Union Treaty. For all practical purposes, there was no Soviet Union in either substance or form. There was just a man named Gorbachev sitting in an office in the Kremlin.

I must tell you about one absolutely absurd episode during this great historic drama. The agreement to establish the Commonwealth of Independent States specified that its secretariat would be in Minsk. We thought nothing much of this, but somebody in Washington evidently did. The embassy received a telegram from the Foreign Buildings Office in State stopping any further work on the new embassy complex on the logic that the United States would not need such a large diplomatic establishment in Moscow as we would be moving the focus of our diplomacy to Minsk. Really! I am not making this up! People in Washington actually imaged that Minsk was going to be the new metropole of the post-Soviet region. Obviously, this nonsense did not last very long, but it tells you something of what we were dealing with during this period.

Q: I'm looking at time. Why don't we pick this up the next time. 1992.

MERRY: Well, let me just complete the vignette of Gorbachev's denouement. Gorbachev arranged his resignation in conjunction with CNN, and was interviewed by Steve Hearst, the Moscow bureau chief of CNN and a top-notch broadcast journalist. The head of CNN had come over from Atlanta to make this all happen.

Q: Ted Turner.

MERRY: No, this wasn't Turner. This was Tom Johnson. They did the interview, which was live worldwide, and Gorbachev goes to the desk to sign his letter of resignation and, with supreme irony and appropriateness, there's no ink in the desk pen. Johnson whips out his Meisterstück and that's how Gorbachev signed the letter. Johnson got his pen back, which I understand he still has, that signed Gorbachev's resignation. What could be more appropriate to bring the curtain down on the Soviet Union than an abdication ceremony a couple of weeks after the Soviet Union was already gone and with no ink in the desk pen? It's confirmation of Marx's dictum that history repeats itself. First it's tragedy and then it's farce. This was farce.

Q: We'll pick this up at 1992.

MERRY: At the beginning of 1992, because there were a lot of interesting things that happened for New Year's Eve.

Q: Today is the 25th of May 2010 with Wayne Merry. Wayne, where did we leave off?

MERRY: We are at the end of 1991 in Moscow and the end of the Soviet Union. Gorbachev has just resigned in his famous gesture, finally recognizing reality and stepping aside. I remember those last few days of that year because of a different episode, when the United States Government decided to recognize all of the successor states of the former Soviet Union. This didn't involve, obviously, Russia or the Baltic states and, initially, Washington made a distinction between recognizing all of them and establishing diplomatic relations with only some, though that distinction was swept away within a very short period. We received instructions from Washington to deliver letters from President Bush recognizing these countries, and to do it before midnight on New Year's Eve. We delivered the letters to the Moscow representations of each of these former Soviet republics.

Q: Was anybody home?

MERRY: We called them to make sure that somebody would be home, and they knew what we were bringing. This shouldn't have been too difficult except that, in Washington, they made a hash of the five Central Asian countries, the 'Stans. In the letters, they mixed up the five countries with the respective capital cities and the names of the leaders. Your tax dollars at work. The United States was recognizing five countries and, literally, didn't know which was which. It fell to me to sort this out. At least, I knew which city went

with which country and which leader. So, I revised five presidential letters without reference to Washington, although I sent a back channel a few days later to let them know I had done it – never heard a word back, not surprisingly.

Then we divvied the letters up for delivery among a number of embassy staff. For some reason which I cannot recall, I got Moldova and Turkmenistan. I went first to the Moldovan mission, at a place called Kuznetsky Most, where the Soviet foreign ministry had been until after the Second World War. The place was lit up and crowded, because they knew I was bringing their first diplomatic recognition as an independent country. I was greeted like Moses coming down off Mount Sinai. All the staff was there, and they had television cameras, and a huge spread of food and booze, which doubtless had been laid on for New Years. They were obviously going to party all night, and they graciously invited me to stay and participate. But I had to get over to the Turkmen, to deliver their letter. At the Turkmen mission, the place was dark. It was totally dark. I knew they knew I'm coming, so I kept ringing the bell until, finally, from the back of the place, emerged a young man who, it turned out, was the junior-most diplomatic member of the staff. They hadn't had time to check with Niyazov, the big boss in Turkmenistan, whether he wanted to be diplomatically recognized as independent by the United States. For fear of making a mistake, they assigned this role to the most junior member of the staff, and everybody else decamped. As I presented the letter from the President of the United States recognizing his country as independent, this young man looked like I was giving him his death warrant because he assumed he would be the fall guy if it turned out not to be what their leader wanted.

This episode illustrates that not all of the emerging countries from the Soviet collapse were entirely enthusiastic about independence. A number certainly were—the Baltic states, Moldova, Georgia and Armenia, Ukraine—but the farther east you got, the more of a mixed picture it was. Among the Central Asian republics, independence was thrust on them by the circumstance of the Soviet collapse, rather than reflecting a genuine desire for an independent role on the world stage.

Q: It wasn't just the form of it. Actually, I was Kyrgyzstan a little bit later and they were getting more money than was being taken out. They were coming out ahead, as I suspect most of the 'Stans were. They were coming out ahead in this union deal.

MERRY: In addition to the resources from the "Center," for many there were significant security issues. The Central Asian countries were all near Afghanistan, which was still engaged in civil war. Several of them were near Iran. Several had borders with China. They cared deeply about who would provide them security and what would be their future—not so much their future as countries, but their future as ruling elites. This was, I think, uppermost in their minds in those capitals. I mention the contrast between the way I was received by the Moldovan and by the Turkmen missions to demonstrate this was a somewhat contradictory experience across the length and breadth of the Soviet empire.

Q: What was happening to some of your colleagues that were recognizing? I take it the big ones were happy. It was the 'Stans which were problematic.

MERRY: In most cases, it was fairly straightforward. I think my experience with Turkmenistan was the only one where the attitude was, "Please leave the letter and we'll get back to you."

Q: They had good reason. They had a guy who outdid Stalin.

MERRY: Yes, that was the problem with the Turkmen. They had no way of reading Niyazov's mind. Since they couldn't get instructions in time, they didn't want to refuse to receive a letter from the President of the United States, but, on the other hand, they weren't sure what the consequences would be.

Q: They could always say, "Well, the young man acted on his own and here's his head."

MERRY: Yes, that's what he thought. That's exactly what he thought.

Speaking of fear, there is another vignette from that December which has remained in my memory which illustrates why people who are nostalgic for the Soviet Union – including some in the West – are wrong. In mid-December, Isaac Stern came to Moscow in his first visit to his native country in a quarter century. He played two events. The first was a concert in the Great Hall of the Conservatory, which was packed to the rafters – even I had trouble getting a seat on the benches in the balcony. Then he did a recital in a small hall in the Pushkin Museum, which could seat only a couple of hundred. For that event, I had two tickets. As it happened, Secretary Baker was arriving that day, and I was the only person at the embassy willing to blow off the Secretary of State for Isaac Stern. I went to the back entrance of the museum before the event, where there was a crowd of music lovers hoping to catch a glimpse of the great violinist, and picked out an older gentleman to go inside with me. He was stunned, but initially delighted. We were third row on the center aisle. It turned out he was a Jewish amateur violinist, for whom Stern was almost the Messiah. So, this should have been a wonderful evening for him. However, when he learned I was from the American Embassy, the classic fear of association with foreign officials overcame him. He was genuinely scared someone might report him and he would get into political trouble. Mind you, this was within days of the end of the Soviet Union, but habits endure. During the intermission he stayed as far away from me as he could and left in haste as soon as the recital was over. The poor man should have enjoyed one of the finest evenings of his life, but it was spoiled for him by the fear he could not overcome of sitting next to a diplomat. I imagine everyone who ever lived in the Soviet Union has similar stories to demonstrate the sickness of the political system, but this one is particularly strong for me as it occurred when Soviet power was already finished. For this old man, the fear lived on.

Q: Leading up to this, was there a point when all of a sudden you said, "You know, the Soviet Union is going to fall apart?" Or did that gradually evolve? I'm saying before it actually happened. At our embassy.

MERRY: We discussed that at some length last time. Certainly, in my own mind and that

of some of my colleagues, it was clear in August the Soviet Union was falling apart. This was an imperial power system which collapsed, rather than succumbing to conquest by foreigners or overthrown from within. I thought, in August and early September of 1991, the Soviet Union would probably survive, in some truncated shape, through the winter. I thought it would last until the spring of '92. That was optimistic; in fact, of course, it was gone sooner than that. But the question in most of our minds was not whether, but how quickly and with what ramifications? With how much broken crockery? What would be the consequences in terms of disruption, destabilization, and problems, not just for the countries involved, but for the outside world?

The uncertainties affected daily life at the most basic levels. I will give you an example from my own experience. As the economy deteriorated during the autumn of 1991—which it did very quickly—a lot of people in Moscow who had dogs couldn't afford to keep them and feed them, and so just let them go. The dogs reverted to genetic type and formed packs, and went out hunting to survive. In a big city like Moscow, that could be perilous. One evening in early November, I came home quite late, just before the Metro closed, so about one in the morning, and was walking from the Metro station to my apartment building. There wasn't a soul in sight, and it was snowy and cold, early winter. About a hundred yards from the gate to my building a group of seven or eight dogs spotted me and decided I was dinner. They started coming after me. I'm not much of a sprinter, but I want you to know that I ran like hell. As I got close to the gate, I yelled ahead to the Russian guard on duty. He stuck his head out of his little booth, saw what was happening, came out quickly, and got the gate open just enough for me to leap through – and I mean leap through – and he then slammed the gate closed and dropped the latch, as those dogs ran up against the chain-link fence. Not my favorite Moscow experience, by a long shot. I mention it because there were other people in Moscow that winter, particularly the elderly and the inebriated, who didn't get away from those dog packs.

Q: I might point out something that surprised me in my short time in Kyrgyzstan, how many very large dogs. We're not talking about little Yorkshire terriers and all. I take it it was a sign of accomplishment. The bigger the dog, the fancier you were or something.

MERRY: Oh, indeed. Exactly. It was in these last months of 1991 that I first started seeing, for example, serious breadlines. Long lines of people at the bread store, including the store where I bought bread, because of shortages and rumors. People started seriously working the land on their dachas or even new land they were pioneering outside the city, to grow some of their own foodstuffs because they were genuinely concerned about what would happen.

Something that tends to be overlooked when people make an historical or retrospective examination of an event like the collapse of the Soviet Union is the things which did not happen, but might have and which occupied a great deal of the time and concern of governments. During the final months of 1991 and into the following year, the embassy and Washington were concerned about potential developments which, in the event, did not develop, but would have been damn important if they had. At the top of our list was

what was called “loose nukes,” meaning the danger that nuclear weapons might fall into the wrong hands, be sold to terrorist groups abroad or simply be compromised in their security in the chaotic conditions associated with the Soviet breakup. In fact, the Soviet and post-Soviet militaries which had possession of these weapons exercised stringent controls over them. That was not the case with many of the huge stockpiles of chemical and biological weapons and with nuclear materials other than actual weapons. They could not control all the fissile materials, related technologies, and the personnel with nuclear expertise, but they held onto the nuclear weapons with great responsibility.

We also worried about “warlordism,” that some generals out in the provinces might try to seize local power and set themselves up as feudal lords or provoke the further breakup of the Russian Federation. There was particular concern this might happen in the Russian Far East. However, except for the start of the secessionist movement in Chechnya, in November of 1991, this phenomenon was entirely absent during the Soviet collapse.

There was also concern in Washington, although less in the embassy, about a massive social breakdown leading to large-scale hunger or even mass migration by millions of people westward into Europe seeking food. None of that happened, although the worry in Washington led to a little-remembered effort called “Operation Provide Hope” in which large quantities of surplus U.S. military rations were airlifted into Russia and neighboring countries to supplement local food stocks. This was, in the event, a program looking for a problem rather than being a genuine solution, as reserves in Russia were adequate. The Soviet Union maintained huge stockpiles of commodities of all kinds. In many localities, our representatives were assured the donated products would be put to good use, but were not really needed. The gesture was a genuine one and conveyed the right impression, even if it reflected a tendency in Washington to see the problems of post-Soviet countries in terms of historical analogies which were often irrelevant. Within the embassy I dubbed the program “Operation Provide Photo Op” because it was used by Washington to portray a much more active American engagement with Russia than actually existed. I personally advocated a program to provide a daily vitamin supplement to every school child, hospital patient and elderly person in the country, to counteract the real problem of vitamin deficiency, but this was not something the U.S. government had in surplus.

Looking back, I think the most important dog that did not bark during the night of the Soviet collapse was active politicization of the military. There was nothing like what happened in Weimar German, no “Stahlhelm” (steel helmet) movement, although there were a few field-grade officers who tried to inspire something like it and failed utterly. There was nothing like the role of the French military in politics after Algeria, no OAS (Secret Army Organization). Thank God, there was nothing like the role played by the military in the breakup of Yugoslavia. Within Russia, Ukraine and Belarus, the post-Soviet militaries retained their non-political professionalism. That was not the case in Georgia, where there was a vicious civil war, or in the war between Armenia and Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh, or in the developing Tajik civil war. However, in the Slavic core of the disintegrating empire, civilian control of the military prevailed. This was one of the positive legacies of Leninism, the subordination of the military to political authority. This useful principle survived largely intact through the Soviet imperial

collapse, which was really an extraordinary thing given the many historical precedents to the contrary in other countries. I have long thought that Western commentators are remiss in not acknowledging this positive aspect of the Soviet military. It was, in large measure, the unwillingness of the military to be dragged into politics which made the August 1991 putsch fail. Had the Soviet army leadership really wanted to perpetuate the Soviet Union, it could have done so for some years, until the final collapse would have been a more destructive process, and bloodier, than what we experienced. So, just a tip of the hat to the Soviet men in uniform who through their political passivity made our world a better place.

Then, in the early weeks of 1992, when the new Russian government abolished price controls, the country experienced massive inflation. This was not what I consider hyper-inflation but rather mega-inflation. To me, hyper-inflation is when the rate of increase of inflation goes up continuously, in logarithmic progression. In Russia there was inflation of a couple of thousand percent in the first few months, and then a sharp leveling off to more moderate levels of inflation. To me that's mega-inflation, it's not hyper-inflation, but certainly it destroyed the savings of almost everybody in the country. I knew a case of a little old lady who didn't have any family, who'd been saving out of her pension for years for a church funeral when she died. I think it was about 600 rubles she had saved up, which of course was turned to nothing by the inflation. So, this poor woman, who had suffered loss and indignities almost beyond number, starting in the '30s, through the War and the post-war period, now at the end of her life had one last injustice and indignity levied on her. That sort of thing happened to enormous numbers of people.

The winter of 1991-92 was a very difficult one for many people. The basic life support systems of the society did not fail. Food was still delivered and, for the most part, power and heat and water continued. But things got pretty dicey. Most industrial enterprises and many other places of employment failed because they had been living off of state subsidies and that money ended. Very large numbers of people either were out of work or were still employed but were not paid or paid in some kind of product. There was the onset of massive asset stripping by new entrepreneurs, including the later "oligarchs," who discovered they could make more money in many factories by stripping the copper wiring out of the machines and selling it abroad than operating the production lines.

This was a difficult period, not just for the economy but, of course, for ordinary people. Moscow, being the capital, was less adversely affected than many of the several hundred cities in Russia that have only a single employer, a town built around one factory. In Moscow, with a much more diversified economy and with the government, things were not as difficult. During this period large numbers of elderly people went onto the streets to sell their possessions—antiques or something they had kept in the family for generations—and even beg. These were not socially marginal people but often from fairly successful middle-class backgrounds, whose income was now reduced to the government pension, which was woefully inadequate due to the inflation, and who didn't have any other means of survival. I kept money in my outer coat pocket for old ladies who were reduced to begging on the streets in the dead of winter.

During this period I wrote a longish cable – I cannot recall what the subject line was – trying to explain to Washington how different this new Russia was from the old Soviet Russia. I had personal knowledge of both, with a lot of on-the-street experience which convinced me that there was absolutely no going back. This was a point of serious concern in Washington, a return of Soviet power and institutions, but I had seen the Soviet collapse and knew the credibility of the Leninist project could not be restored. If nothing else, there were no resources for a restoration. What was very unclear was what kind of Russia was going to develop. I pointed to things that had never existed in the Soviet period which now shaped life in the new Russia, things like free media and real exchange and interest rates, plus the younger people – by which I mean under 30 or even under 40 – were simply not willing to let the clock turn back. The future looked pretty grim, however, during this difficult winter and average people wanted to see some tangible progress. About this time, Yeltsin stated publicly that if Russians worked very hard they might be able in five years to live like Poles did then. I thought that was a pretty realistic assessment: no quick fix and no easy transition. In fact, it was optimistic.

Q: Did you note a change in the effectiveness of the government? Did corruption increase? Did you get something from the government or was it a more benevolent attitude on the part of people?

MERRY: With the end of the Soviet Union most Soviet state institutions were incorporated within the government of the Russian Federation. It was a whale swallowed by a minnow. In other parts of the Soviet Union, All-Union institutions broke apart and remained with various successor republics. Many individuals had to make a choice as to their new nationality. This was often a very difficult choice. I knew people whose ethnicity may have been Ukrainian or Azeri or Moldovan or Kyrgyz, but whose professions militated that they should stay in Russia, either in Moscow or Petersburg or somewhere else, because that's where their lives were, that's where their families were, that's where their careers were. But they had to make a choice, and this was not always an obvious or an easy choice. If you're a Ukrainian living in Moscow, should you pick up and go back to Kiev and seek to create a new identity for yourself in an independent Ukraine? Or should you maintain your sense of commitment to whatever it was you had been doing previously in Moscow? You had ceased to be Soviet, but now what were you?

This was a particularly serious issue for the military and the security services. Where is your loyalty? The great slogan of all of these institutions, for generations, had been "Sluzu Sovietskomu Soiuzu" (I serve the Soviet Union). Now, if you were in the army, or air force, or Ministry of the Interior, or KGB, you no longer serve the Soviet Union. Where is your loyalty? For some, that might be defined by nationality. I knew a man who was a Soviet Navy submarine commander but was Moldovan. Obviously he wasn't going to be able to operate submarines for the new Moldova, but he chose to go back to Chisinau and develop a new military identity for Moldova, despite his own background as a naval officer. For a lot of people Russia became the substitute for the Soviet Union; Russia, as the core of the Soviet Union, and Russia, as the historic imperial great power, attracted the loyalties of a lot of people whose ethnicity was something else. For several years, Russia's deputy minister of foreign affairs in charge of dealing with the United

States was an ethnic Azeri. The later Russian ambassador to the United States, Sergei Kislyak, is Ukrainian on both sides of his family. These issues were not just the product of the collapse of the Soviet Union. They often were the detritus of the Russian imperial project itself, in which the questions "What am I?" and "What do I want to be?" and "Where do my ultimate loyalties pull me?" were common dilemmas. In 1992 these questions were imposed on millions of people almost overnight. Many had to make very difficult and often very disruptive choices, not just for themselves but for their families. They had to bet on where they thought they would have a better future. For many ethnic Russians in other republics, this meant abandoning what had been "home" for many years, even generations, to return to a Russian "home" which was entirely new to them, and without employment or housing. Often the experience was a form of involuntary emigration, with all the attendant disruptions and stress.

Most of the institutions where people worked, including the military, were broke. There wasn't any money to pay salaries. There certainly wasn't any money in the military for things like fuel for training or operations or almost anything. There was at least one instance of actual starvation in a military unit in the Far East. The crisis ranged from august institutions like the Academy of Sciences down to primary and secondary schools, to the people who provided basic hygiene services in hospitals, and the people who manned the fire stations. These were people who didn't know where their next paychecks were coming from or what those paychecks would buy. It was an extraordinarily disruptive period for all of the peoples involved.

In some areas, it was also a violent period. In Moldova, in the Transnistria region; in the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh; in the gathering disputes in Georgia both among Georgians and with ethnic minorities; and worst of all in the developing civil war in Tajikistan. The break-up of the Soviet Union is often portrayed as bloodless. That was essentially true within the three Slavic core states. It was certainly not true around the edges of the Soviet Union, where there was more than ample bloodshed, creating situations which either took years to resolve or, indeed, never have been resolved. It was a bloodless end of empire for the imperial Metropole, but not for the periphery of the empire.

Q: What was our embassy doing? In the first place, we had a consulate in Kiev but that was about it, wasn't it?

MERRY: One of the first challenges the U.S. Government faced was how it was going to establish tangible diplomatic relations with all the successor countries, which meant to establish embassies. This is a fascinating story, to which I was more of an on-looker than a participant. Other than losing a third of my staff in Political/Internal, I played no direct role. As I understood, the State Department did not have the money to establish new posts, did not want to go to Congress for the resources, and got the money by making deals with the intelligence agencies and the Pentagon. The State Department decided it would take on this formidable task within existing budget resources, which meant it never would have been done without financing from other parts of the government. This shows what a nickel-and-dime institution the American foreign ministry can be.

Q: Apparently, Secretary of State Baker did this. Many people felt it to be a really terrible mistake. It's the sort of thing you can make in Washington. He had no feel for the operations of the State Department.

MERRY: None at all. They put out word for adventuresome people to open embassies in 10 new places. The consulate in Kiev became an embassy, so that was fairly straightforward. There were already people establishing embassies in the Baltic States, but then there were all of the others. This was done faster and better, with the posts open and effective, than I would have expected. I thought it was going to take half a year, if not a year, and for the first six months or so, that most of the actual reporting would go through Moscow. I was wrong. In point of fact, these little vest-pocket embassies established their individual identities and their direct reporting vis-à-vis Washington very quickly. They did so in part because they saw the importance of avoiding the appearance of going through the embassy in Moscow which, in retrospect, was quite valid. They also understood that, if they were going to be effective, they had to function on their own. Most initially worked out of hotel rooms. They did, I must say, an extraordinary job.

This process had a big impact on me, as some of my reporting staff was taken to help staff these new embassies plus the opening of our consulate in Vladivostok. Some of my most talented people went to other posts, where their talents were needed. Pol/Int still had a dozen people, of course, so we were hardly impoverished. While my resources declined, at the same time my reporting responsibilities declined, since we were no longer responsible for reporting on internal affairs in Tajikistan or Moldova or Georgia. There was a transition period when we still covered remnants of the Soviet Union while the U.S. Government was getting squared away to deal with each of them separately. I hope the colleagues who opened these embassies didn't feel they were condescended to by the big mother embassy in Moscow. However, the fact remained that, for most of the U.S. Government, the relationship with Russia was not first among equals, it was just first. The others were not equal.

The principal priority for Secretary Baker and the Bush Administration was to get the nuclear arsenal and nuclear resources of the former Soviet Union under single-party custodianship, meaning Russia's. Baker's great diplomatic achievement was to strong-arm and cajole and persuade the new governments of Belarus, Ukraine and Kazakhstan to surrender all of their nuclear weapons and delivery systems to Russia in return for various commitments and support from the United States. This was a stupendous diplomatic accomplishment, one of the most important ever carried out by a Secretary of State. Although I do not like the man, I think Baker merited a Nobel Peace Prize for the denuclearization of the three post-Soviet states. Without him, it might not have happened. He then persuaded all of the successor states to sign on to a variety of international agreements, some which the countries did not understand, such as the human rights and civil liberties commitments under the OSCE (Organization for Security and Co-Operation in Europe). Some of the new governments signed those documents without reading them and without any notion they would have obligations to fulfill. The Russian Government, as the successor to the Soviet Union, took those commitments much more seriously. We

had an internal debate whether the Central Asian states, and perhaps those in the Caucasus, should even be invited into the OSCE, as they manifestly were not part of Europe. I thought it a bad idea, but the desire to tug them away from Iran or China was dominant among policymakers.

With the breakup of the Soviet Union, the Joint Chiefs of Staff were very concerned about what would happen not just to nuclear systems but to the vast inventories of weapons and munitions of the Soviet military scattered across eleven time zones. They wanted to deal on key issues with only one counterpart, their Russian counterparts. The senior Russian military were people the Chiefs respected, with whom there were some good personal relationships. Probably the most pro-Russian group in Washington at the time was the Joint Chiefs. The anti-Russian centers in Washington clustered on Capitol Hill, where ethnic groups not only wanted to support the newly independent states but to take an anti-Russian approach as well. Yeltsin's government in Moscow was as accommodating with the imperial breakup as it could reasonably have been expected to be. Yeltsin's own view was the sooner Russia got the other countries off Russia's back, Russia could stop pouring resources into those places and, hence, the sooner would come some kind of prosperity for Russia. If anything, Yeltsin was happy to cut bait.

Within Yeltsin's team, and within the broader Russian elites, there was an understanding that it wasn't going to be so simple or easy. They knew their own country, especially its weaknesses. The states of the former Soviet Union were tied together by much more than historical experience, but also by infrastructure and by enterprises that depended on other enterprises across new political frontiers. There were immense disruptions when nobody knew who was in charge of an enterprise and who had legal authority in many areas. For example, there were only two pharmaceutical facilities producing sulfa drugs in the whole Soviet Union. One of them was in Azerbaijan. Because of the disruption of the Azeri economy with the breakup of the Soviet Union, that plant stopped producing, which meant people actually died. People in hospitals and clinics died because there was a shortage of sulfa-based pharmaceuticals to deal with infections. Likewise, there was only one factory for computer punch cards in the entire Soviet Union, in Lithuania, where independence separated it from most of its traditional customers.

In December 1991 I traveled with Bob Clarke of the Science Section to Syktyvkar, the capital of the Komi Republic, about 1,000 kilometers north of Moscow. The Komi is a region very rich in natural resources, but the problem they faced was how to market what they had. In a series of meetings, including with the republic president, the range of their difficulties seemed almost beyond human capacity, and this was a region with many advantages. We met an informal trader from Latvia in the bar of our hotel, who gave us a vivid description of his business, which was barter trade of sausage from Latvia for rare metals from the Komi. It was pretty basic, but it worked. On another trip, to the Solovetsky Islands in the middle of the White Sea, I stayed with a man seeking to develop tourism in these northern islands. There was much to attract people, including one of the most stunning monastery-fortress complexes I have ever seen plus Stone Age relics and the site of the very first Soviet political prison. His key challenge was getting fuel in this remote locale, which he managed through a chance encounter with a

bureaucrat who had connections in the fuels ministry. All this was very primitive in market terms, but it was also taking place without any basis in legality. In Soviet law, almost all private enterprise, even of the most primitive variety, was illegal, and the political culture regarded private initiative with great suspicion. There was no corpus of commercial law, just the traditions of Soviet law which were hostile to business. Nobody could say what could be done, let alone how it should be done. Obviously, the door was opening for enterprising people, but also for unscrupulous and ruthless people.

There were many, many instances of disruption across the new borders. People wanted to continue their work and to produce and be paid, but nobody knew who was going to pay the bills, who could sign a document. The ruble was the single currency for Russia and many other countries, but the viability of the ruble was in question because of inflation. It was not a convertible currency with the West, only within the so-called "ruble zone." The rapid loss of value of the ruble was a problem well beyond Russia, for other countries which used the ruble, including enterprises and individuals. Finance ministries and state banks in the new states were more a matter of theory than of reality. Most enterprises had been centrally-planned and centrally-funded organizations in the Soviet period where management did not even use double-entry bookkeeping. Here were a dozen countries with no corpus of commercial law. Who owned anything? Who could make trade commitments with anybody abroad? These were enormously complex and difficult problems that were, of course, all emerging simultaneously.

One evening, Jim Collins and I paid a call on General Dmitry Volkogonov, a prominent army historian who had become anti-Soviet during the late Gorbachev years and was a senior advisor to Yeltsin. He later produced a groundbreaking series of books on Lenin and Stalin based on his unique access to archives. A really insightful man. He told us that Russia's basic challenge was that it needed good people in every field – politics, business, law, education, administration, you name it – and there simply were not enough good people to go around. This meant the transition would, of necessity, be carried out by inadequate people and the result would be far short of what people hoped for and expected. I think he got it dead right: there simply were not enough good people for all the demands of such a great historical transition, not in Russia and not in the other countries either.

Q: Was there at all a change in the role of the embassy officers becoming almost consultants or colleagues?

MERRY: Parts of the embassy became intermediaries between Washington agencies and Russian counterparts. Embassy staff were spending a lot of time within Russian bureaucratic institutions. CIA officers were actually conducting meetings with the KGB, something previously almost unthinkable. People in the Political/External Section who dealt with Russian foreign policy had meetings in the Russian Foreign Ministry of a kind that would have been unimaginable in earlier times. One guy was even taken into one of the ministry's classified typing rooms, something that would never happen in Washington. The Economics and Science Sections were loaded down with visiting delegations and with taskings from Washington to establish contacts and programs. For

Political/Internal, it was more a matter of reporting and analysis, though we in some ways had even more access to people who made and influenced policy. We met with most of the top people around Yeltsin. We had relatively few programmatic duties at that point, though we did support programs in legal affairs and in rule of law. Heaven knows, Political/Internal had enough Washington visitors, but nothing like the burden on other sections.

The role of the United States in policy formulation in Russia eclipsed that of all other governments and multilateral institutions and, at times, went much too far. I do not mean to say that the ultimate responsibility for policies did not rest with Yeltsin and his team; certainly, it did. But it is difficult to overemphasize the influence and the intrusiveness of American official and semi-official activities in all aspects of Russian public policy. Much of this influence came through multilateral institutions, like the IMF and World Bank, but it was American influence just the same. To all intents and purposes, the United States was the primary external source of influence on the Russian reform process. I know quite well that other countries were involved and sometimes had better programs and advice than we did, but all other countries combined did not exercise anything like the influence we did. Everyone understood this. Countries like Germany, Britain and Japan were largely guided by what the United States did, and their embassies in Moscow always wanted to know what we thought and how we planned to proceed.

The pervasiveness of the American role was, in my view even at the time, as much a curse as a blessing. A more multi-national approach would have been better, with Europe more in the lead than ourselves. The Europeans had more realistic expectations of reform in Russia than did Washington, with American faith in the miracles of macroeconomic stabilization and the ideology of the "Washington consensus." Americans also approached post-Soviet Russia with far too heavy a hand, with arrogance and often a missionary mentality. The consequences of that period live on today, as many Russians blame us for the failures of reform in the '90's and believe we deliberately set out to ruin their economy. We forgot that it is basic human nature to resent dependency, which is why teenagers rebel against their parents. A great nation like Russia could not experience this foreign tutelage – and that is what is was for several years – without building up a reservoir of resentment. Russians are perhaps more likely than many other peoples to blame their troubles and shortcomings on someone else, and the United States almost went out of its way to assume that role.

One of my colleagues in Moscow recently reminded me of something I had forgotten from 1992. At a G-7 summit meeting, the United States more or less dictated to the Russians the terms under which they would receive large-scale Western assistance. Keep in mind, we were giving them a lot of money with little assurance of how it would be used, this was an assistance program. In a staff meeting of Political/Internal, I commented, "They will never forgive us for this." I felt the humiliation would last longer than the money. While covered in good intentions, much of our assistance efforts from that period achieved little while leaving behind a thick residue of resentment.

In the Political/Internal Section, we were not operationally involved with U.S. assistance

policy, so our views about how to interact with the Russians on reform were pretty much ignored. The one area where we were directly involved was in judicial cooperation, as the embassy link for programs of the American Bar Association and the Justice Department with Russian counterparts. This was quite useful, as it opened doors for us in the courts, in judicial training centers, and with legal reformers. We learned a lot from that. Personally, I got to know the Chairman of the Constitutional Court, Valery Zorkin, who had great hopes and plans for judicial progress in Russia. He told me he wanted to be remembered as the John Marshall of Russia. While things took some odd turns for him later, Zorkin still is a very important figure in legal reform in that country.

In terms of Russian political figures, in the government or in the legislature, we had access that was almost unprecedented, not just in Russia but in most of the other new countries. I several times told my staff this couldn't last. As I mentioned earlier, we had better access in Moscow during those months than the U.S. Embassy would have in Ottawa. I told people, including Washington visitors, "This is not natural. This is a transitional phase, and we should be careful because this is all about Russia's weakness. The Russians will remember their weakness and they won't remember kindly those who they perceive as taking advantage of the weakness." A large part of the problem was that Moscow was now flooded by visitors from Washington and from other Western countries, with their advice, counsel, opinions. Russians soon called it "assistance tourism," and they were right. Russia particularly attracted advocates of the "Washington consensus," a neoliberal economic doctrine blending macroeconomic stabilization and reforms—so-called shock therapy—which was pushed on the Russians with religious zeal combined with almost total oblivious ignorance and disregard for Russian realities.

It's fair to say that many of the Russian architects of economic policy during this period were already sold on the neoliberal program. They didn't need it to be forced down their throats. However, the fact remains that the U.S. Treasury and the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank and others, particularly associated with Harvard University, regarded post-Soviet Russia as a gigantic laboratory for macroeconomic experimentation, while their knowledge of the conditions of the laboratory and its occupants was extremely shallow. This was not just a matter of comprehension, but of lack of human empathy. After seven decades of Soviet-style political and economic mismanagement, the problems were deeply entrenched and intractable, meaning the transition to something else would be enormously complicated and time-consuming. The human costs were a topic the ideologues swept aside with masterly derision. I heard some pretty vicious jokes about things like little old ladies freezing to death, which was not a joke to me as I actually saw those old women on the streets every day. The advocates of the "Washington consensus" had their ideology, which they believed was applicable everywhere on earth and, with just the right amount of shock therapy, Russia would, in a short period of time, emerge as a practicing, viable market economy.

They ignored little things, like the fact Russian enterprises didn't even use double-entry bookkeeping. There was no basis for contract law, there was no ability to enforce any kind of an economic agreement in a court system. I recalled that Margaret Thatcher used to say the basis of capitalism is not money but enforceable contract. The means by which

agreements were conducted in Russia were personal relationships, handshake deals and occasional violence. The neo-liberals had very little sense that Russia was, as a market economy, extremely primitive, even though it had a highly-literate workforce, massive industrial infrastructure and modern technology in many areas. The truism is that Russia was neither developed nor underdeveloped. It was mis-developed. Policy mechanisms that might work in a developed country would not in a mis-developed country. We had no relevant policies, so we used ones we thought applied to everyone, everywhere.

The embassy was very much at the center of this issue. This initiated a conflict which would develop in the following years—for me especially in 1993-94 and for those who came later—a fundamental division within the embassy between people who knew something about Russia and those sent out to enforce the "Washington consensus" policy. This is getting ahead of things, because it happened mostly in the third year of my assignment. In the first two years, there were excellent professional relations within the embassy, thanks to Ken Yalowitz, the economics counselor, with whom it is almost impossible to have a bad relationship. Then Washington sent out ideologues to run the Economics Section. The conflict was also within the Economics Section, because there were very talented younger people there, who did know Russia, who were also skeptical about the policies we were pushing. It became a conflict of those associated with the Treasury, International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, with the "old Russia hands," of whom I was one, who were not just skeptical but increasingly opposed to the policy.

However, looking back on the very early post-Soviet period, I am struck by the intensity of embassy activity from late 1991 through the fall of 1993. Russia's transformation in every area of public policy created work for us, as the embassy was responsible for following, reporting and explaining everything to Washington. Much of that was, of course, in the political area. The dynamic of 1991 and the breakup of the Soviet Union, continued on into the following years. In addition to the real events were the rumors and scares. I don't know how many false alarms there were of new coups, which Washington always treated seriously as many people there expected Yeltsin to fail quickly. There was a bizarre episode in early 1992 when a coalition of die-hard communists announced a rally at which they were going to "restore the Soviet Union." This was ludicrous, but Washington heard about it and perceived a serious threat to Yeltsin. We were under intense pressure—"What's happening? What's happening?" We eventually produced eight reporting telegrams on this non-event, four or five in advance and three or four in the aftermath. In the normal course of things this rally would have justified one reporting message. The same Washington which had denied the reality of the oncoming Soviet collapse now anticipated Russian collapse on almost a weekly basis. We devoted serious reporting to this silly matter for over a week, trying to get Washington to calm down.

During that winter, there were so many false alarms I became quite blasé about them. On one occasion, I behaved pretty irresponsibly. During these months, Washington had the very bad habit of phoning us in Moscow without regard for the time difference, so we were always getting calls in the middle of the night. I know Jim Collins, as deputy chief of mission, rarely went through a night without a phone call from the NSC or the State Department or somebody. In his own self-defense, he told the State Department

Operations Center (which he had once directed) that, when it was about Russian domestic affairs, to call me. I didn't entirely appreciate this move, but I could understand it. On one occasion I got a call about four o'clock in the morning from the Operations Center, because some office in the Department had heard there was a coup d'etat going on in Moscow. The Ops Center didn't see anything about it on the wire services or other sources. There was nothing on it, no intel, but they wanted to check with me. I told the guy, "OK, hold the phone." I went into my kitchen, which looked down on October Square and the intersection of Leninsky Prospekt with the Garden Ring road. This is one of the major traffic intersections in the city, particularly for traffic leading toward the center, toward the Kremlin. A headquarters building of the Interior Ministry was across the square from my building. I stood there for a few minutes, watching absolutely nothing going on, and decided there was no way anyone could conduct a serious coup in Moscow without some activity at that intersection. So I picked up the phone and told the watch officer in Washington, "Nope, no coup in Moscow," and went back to bed. The next day, I got in touch with the Operations Center and found out the whole thing was the result of an article in a magazine about the potential for a coup in Russia which a senior official (whom I will not name) had read over the weekend. This had evolved through staff layers into a belief a coup was going on that night. For this, I lost valuable sleep.

I probably should have checked more thoroughly before dismissing this rumor to Washington. If I had been wrong, it would have been really embarrassing. By this point, however, I had become pretty short-tempered with nonsense when there were so many really important things going on. I could also be short-tempered with visitors from Washington, of which we had an unending stream. Embassy working conditions were still very primitive, and many visitors demanded almost constant hand-holding and special services. I recall one visitor who had a fit because there was no towel service at the embassy swimming pool; I pointed him to a paper towel dispenser. It got to the point where, again in his own self-defense, Jim Collins made sure that whenever Baker or somebody like that was in town, I was assigned to maintain our reporting. I was not assigned to control officer duty because I could be less than hospitable. This was just fine by me, because it allowed me to continue doing what I considered to be the serious work of Political/Internal. I was control officer often enough later on. To keep some balance in this self criticism, I certainly did yeoman's service in briefing visiting officials and journalists every day.

On many days I gave multiple backgrounders to American journalists and officials, and it was a rare day I did not have to devote an hour or more to briefing visitors of some kind. I had done many backgrounders in previous assignments, especially in Athens where there were no resident American journalists, but nothing like what I did in Moscow. It was not unusual to give two, three or even four a day. This reflected the masses of American journalists coming to Moscow, almost all of whom wanted an embassy backgrounder on the Russian political scene, while even the resident journalists wanted to keep up with the embassy viewpoint. I spoke with many non-Americans as well. For the most part, I like journalists and see them as friendly competitors to our diplomatic reporting. I also think an embassy profits from trading notes with knowledgeable resident journalists, of which Moscow had a lot in those days. In any case, I considered that we

were not just working for the State Department or even the government, but for the American public which had a right to know what we thought was happening in Russia, even if they got it second hand through journalists. Some of my embassy colleagues disliked or at least did not accommodate journalists, so much of this work came to me. It was a burden, but I thought then and still think it was among the more valuable things I did, in influencing how the American media presented these events to our own public.

There were fringe benefits to not being a control officer very often. It gave me at least an iota of a life outside the embassy, for some time with my Russian friends and to enjoy the wonderful classical music life of Moscow. There was no place in that huge city I valued more than the Great Hall of the Conservatory, one of the great concert halls of the world. I had a fistful of concert series subscriptions, which were dirt cheap on a dollar income, but I was unable to use most of the tickets due to press of work. However, any evening I could break away from the embassy would find me in the lap of Russia's magnificent musical traditions. I already mentioned the visit by Isaac Stern in December 1991. For many Russians, this was the musical event of the decade. The Horowitz visit marked the 80's and the Stern visit the 90's. His concert in the Great Hall was defended by three cordons of police to control gate crashers. It was a wonderful evening. I already described how his later recital in a smaller venue was bittersweet. For my money, you can have James Baker any day, but Isaac Stern in Moscow was a once in a lifetime opportunity. There was later a visit by the National Symphony from Washington under Rostropovich with the young Ignat Solzhenitsyn as soloist in the first Shostakovich piano concerto. They also did the Shostakovich Ninth Symphony, which Rostropovich had first heard at the Moscow premier shortly after the War. A magical evening, including a conversation I had afterwards with Rostropovich. It is experiences of that kind which make a Foreign Service life really special.

I was not able to travel in Russia in my second assignment even remotely as much as in the first; that was a burden of my position. However, the opening up of the country to the outside world did offer some opportunities I was able to take advantage of. We opened a new consulate in Vladivostok, with a huge consular district that was almost entirely new territory for the United States. Our two-man team out there did terrific work in showing the flag and finding investment opportunities for American business. I made one trip in the Russian Far East in the company of Randy LeCocq, our principle officer in Vladivostok and an old colleague. It was in the dead of winter, but we visited a number of cities, including Komsomolsk-na-Amure, where the local authorities told us we were the first Americans ever to set foot in the place. Komsomolsk is a large military-industrial city, which was desperate for foreign investment, so they really let us see a lot. The change of pace from my desk in Moscow was just wonderful. I also led an embassy survey team to Yekaterinburg in the Urals to determine if that city should be the site of our next, and final, Russian consulate. This was the city where Yeltsin had been party boss for many years and the center of the Urals industrial region. It was a fascinating place, with much more in the way of history than most Soviet cities. It had been tightly closed to Westerners when it was still called Sverdlovsk, so the only proper accommodation they had for us was Yeltsin's former dacha. I got his own suite, including what had been Yeltsin's bathtub, which was huge. We recommended that Yekaterinburg

be the home of the next consulate, which it duly is.

My life in Moscow was mostly work, with some free time for music and Russian friends. I think I visited the embassy dacha only twice in three years. As a section chief, I had a large and modern apartment, but I was not there very much. To my taste, it was too large and sterile, with new government-issued furniture. However, it was just as well I had three bedrooms, because during these years I almost ran a pension. I had more visitors in Moscow than in all my other assignments combined. Many friends just wanted to visit the new Russia, but some needed a place to stay while trying to establish business connections. I had several friends in place for a month or two. That was fine, but they were more or less on their own as I rarely got home before nine or later. I did make the time to show around some old American and German friends with no Russian experience.

One oddity of this assignment was that I had supervisory responsibility for the POW/MIA unit. This was a team of military and retired military officers who worked with Russian authorities to locate the remains of American service personnel from the Second World War and the Cold War under a new bilateral agreement. They did good work, but their activities had nothing to do with Political/Internal. The decision to attach the team to me was made while I was out of town, and made no logical sense. They did not want to be associated with the DAO, to avoid any implication they were involved in intelligence work. However, they should logically have been attached either to Political/Military or Political/External. They were not much of a burden to me, as they were a self-administering team and needed me only to authorize their reporting. They gave me no trouble, but it showed the danger of leaving the office for even a short domestic trip; something would be dropped in my in box while away.

In that regard, I got into hot water in the embassy due to one trip. I had given Ambassador Strauss – at his request, I might note – some thoughts in writing about post management out of frustration at the slow adaptation of the embassy to the new demands on us. I was fed up with always hearing the excuse that something could not be done because this was Moscow. Tasks that could be accomplished in real hardship posts in the Third World were routinely ruled “impossible” in Moscow. Strauss had reached similar conclusions on his own and, while I way away, sent Secretary Baker what he called a “Come to Jesus” telegram about what the embassy needed, but he incorporated my memo in the telegram in toto. Naturally, that message circulated within the Department and then came back to Moscow, where it won me no friends in Admin, though I maintain everything I said was valid.

During early 1992, Washington and Moscow were settling into a new relationship. Yeltsin made his first visit as Russian president to Washington, where he was greeted with the public enthusiasm previously enjoyed by Gorbachev. I wrote the scene-setter telegram for his February meeting with Bush at Camp David, in which I tried to encapsulate what made Yeltsin different from Gorbachev. I quoted Aleksandr Yakovlev's view that Gorbachev was by nature a democrat, but always afraid of democracy. In contrast, I said, Yeltsin was not by nature a democrat, but not afraid of democracy. He believed that empowerment of Russia's people, both political and economic, was the

solution to the country's problems and the road to its future. The meeting was a success and overcame some of Bush's earlier doubts about Yeltsin. Also, at Camp David, Yeltsin discovered M&Ms, which we later supplied to him.

At the end of the Russian winter, I really needed a break. I hadn't had any leave at all from before the August putsch right through to the spring of 1992, except for a short illness in February. I had had very few Sundays off. I had just finished the annual performance evaluations on my very large team and, I am happy to say, everyone who was eligible for promotion was promoted. Nothing like being on the cusp of history to provide good material for an EER. In the spring I went on home leave, the only full home leave I ever got in the Foreign Service. I did several weeks of camping with friends in the wonderful national parks of Colorado, Utah and Arizona. Just what the doctor ordered! I also saw relatives and friends in the Midwest and on the East Coast, and returned to Moscow with the strong impression that President Bush was in real political trouble. In the embassy the view was Bush could not lose, as he had won a war to liberate Kuwait with subsequent sky-high popularity numbers. When President Bush lost the election, I was one of the less surprised people at the embassy, because I had heard so much on home leave that, while Bush was respected, he certainly wasn't liked and was seen as out of touch on domestic issues.

Russia was not an election issue in the United States in 1992, because the view of Yeltsin as a good guy was pretty consensual among Republicans and Democrats in Washington. Strauss had a lot to do with that. Personal encounters also helped to overcome skepticism. A number of congressional delegations came to Moscow initially quite skeptical about Yeltsin because of things they had heard about him. After a meeting the Congressmen would come away dazzled with his charisma, his convictions, just his sheer political dynamism. I recall one House delegation that had three meetings in one day. The first was with the speaker of the parliament, Ruslan Khasbulatov. The second was with the vice president, Alexander Rutskoi. The third was with Yeltsin. That evening, they were prepared to give Yeltsin almost a blank check, because they had seen what some of the alternatives might be.

We had one congressional delegation which I actually enjoyed – though I should say I think congressmen need to travel abroad more, not less, as part of their duties. Jim Collins asked me to shepherd Newt Gingrich during a delegation visit because Gingrich wanted to speak with someone with experience of August 1991 for a book he was writing. I complained, as I thought of Gingrich as the "Peck's Bad Boy" of American politics, but I was given the job. As it happened, Gingrich was great, one of the best congressional visitors I have ever experienced. He was very low-maintenance, courteous, intensely curious about everything Russian and very smart. I took him on a long cross-town walk to show him things while briefing him, and he liked it a lot. The next year, when the same delegation returned, I actually volunteered to be control officer for Gingrich, which I have never done for any other Hill visitor. Years later, I traveled to Russia with him in a different context and found him again unusually interested and sympathetic to Russia's reality.

However, 1992 was the year which demonstrated the fundamental weakness of the constitutional and legal constructs of post-Soviet Russia. The Russian Federation had a government system and a constitution, but they were of the Soviet-era Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic, the RSFSR with some modifications. This was not a viable legal foundation for the new Russia because the RSFSR had always been kind of a legal fiction within the Soviet Union. In the turmoil of 1991-92 there was never time or political energy to replace the existing constitution, although everyone understood that constitutional reform would be necessary for post-Soviet Russia. What kind of government the new country should have was a critical question. Many Russians, including many Western-oriented political figures, worried about Yeltsin exercising too much power. They worried that a presidential republic would not break from what later was called the "vertical of power." After decades of Soviet over-centralization and excessive executive power, the inclination among many Russians was for a parliamentary type of government like that of Germany or Britain, rather than a presidential system like France or America. Given the pace of other changes, constitutional reform was pushed back from month to month until brought to the fore by political confrontation at the end of 1992.

Yeltsin and his prime minister, Yegor Gaidar—who was never confirmed in the job, he was always acting prime minister—were operating under one-year emergency powers granted to Yeltsin by the Russian Federation legislature in November 1991 which would expire at the end of November 1992. Almost everything the Russian government did in economic policy during 1992, often in cooperation with Western governments and the International Financial Institutions, was under this temporary emergency power. That included the first stages of "shock therapy," the elimination of price controls which created massive inflation, the collapse of many industries with consequent unemployment, the dramatic increase in poverty and the growing crisis of public health. The negative consequences of the Soviet collapse were attributed, by much of the Russian public, to the economic policies of the government, with Western sponsorship. Not surprisingly, these policies were not popular in Russia and were deeply resented by most of the legislators who had given Yeltsin his emergency powers. As the year went on, it was difficult to convince Washington that this situation was not going to last; the emergency powers were going to expire and almost certainly would not be renewed. The legislature of the Russian Federation was a real legislature, and it contained many people opposed to the policies plus many opposed to Yeltsin himself. The emergency semi-dictatorship was not going to last beyond the end of November. However, if you tried to explain this to people from Washington, they just didn't want to listen.

Q: Was this a problem that so often happens, that straight-line projection?

MERRY: Oh, yes, to some extent. The view was "We like Yeltsin. We think Yeltsin's a great guy. We support Yeltsin. So what's the problem?" The problem was that not everybody in Russia supported Yeltsin, not by a long shot. Yeltsin's popular support started going downhill from about October of 1991. Many people never forgave him for his role in bringing about the dissolution of the Soviet Union, and many others fundamentally disagreed with the character of the government he put together and the

policies they promulgated throughout 1992. The opposition started with Yeltsin's own vice president, Rutskoy, and represented a majority of the Supreme Soviet. The pain associated with the economic reform policies was very great for normal people. Anybody who paid attention to the dynamics of Russian politics—but frankly, there were very few foreigners who did—understood there was a lot more than just Boris Yeltsin and his government. Washington wanted to believe that Yeltsin could do whatever he wanted because he had been popularly elected.

Q: When you say Washington, it's not George, it's Washington. It had me thinking of a few people. Was this the White House, or the secretary of state?

MERRY: Oh, no. I think it was almost everyone. It was the White House, it was members of Congress, it was the State Department, it was the Defense Department, the Treasury, particularly people on the economic side. There was a belief that, since Yeltsin has our support, he must be able to do whatever he wants – meaning, whatever we want. Yeltsin, like Gorbachev before him, had become much more popular in the West and among Western governments than he was at home, and the same forces which had ultimately disabled Gorbachev now had their sights on Yeltsin. This would happen more quickly with Yeltsin than it had with Gorbachev, because the new power structure lacked the legitimacy previously exercised by the Soviet system. These realities were just not understood on our side. Gorbachev as General Secretary of the Communist Party stood atop a mechanism of real control and of established legitimacy. Yeltsin had only his position as the elected president of Russia and the twelve-month emergency powers on the economy. The fact that Gaidar was never confirmed as prime minister showed the parliament was already pushing back.

In point of fact, the Russian Federation constitution gave much more power to the legislature, the Supreme Soviet, than it did to the president. The presidency was an ad hoc position created during the waning months of the Soviet Union, and was never fully fleshed out in law. Yeltsin exercised power because he exercised power, not because he had the juridical power of an American or French president. The legislators had bequeathed much of their power to him in the crisis conditions of late 1991, but come midnight at the end of November 1992 that would turn into a pumpkin, as his legal authority to do things on his own would disappear. That was a very hard message to get across because it was, to put it mildly, a very unpopular message. Finally, in November 1992, I sat down and wrote a blunt report, entitled <u>The Underlying Russian Political Crisis.</u> This explained in, I hope, clear terms that from early December the terms of reference of Yeltsin's authority in Russia would be fundamentally different. I predicted this situation would precipitate a broader political confrontation between Yeltsin and the legislature, which could well turn violent. I expected the crisis to come in the spring of 1993, although I do not recall whether I actually made that prediction in the message; I expect I did not as I tend to shy away from explicit predictions.

This message got a fair amount of attention back home, indeed, much too much. In fact, it was promptly leaked to CBS News and some of it was read by Dan Rather on the CBS Evening News. This upset a lot of people in Washington and, I was told bluntly from the

Department, the Treasury wanted me fired. I hadn't leaked the message; I had written it and everything in it was valid, so far as I was concerned. It was a cleared embassy telegram. This was a case of the "shoot the messenger" psychosis that exists even in modern governments, that the Treasury blamed me because Dan Rather read extracts from this message on the CBS Evening News. As it happened, CBS used the message quite responsibly. The quotes they used were not taken out of context or irresponsible at all. It could have been much worse.

However, the consequences on the far side of the world were briefly serious, though preposterous as well. The Ops Center told me the Treasury was in a lather because the Japanese yen and the Tokyo stock market were in free fall, supposedly because of my message. This, as you might imagine, baffled me. It took a couple of days to figure out what had happened, with help from the CBS rep in Moscow and from our colleagues in Tokyo. The CBS Evening News was broadcast in Tokyo with a simultaneous voice-over translation, during the start of the business day in Japan. The translation in this case garbled things so badly as to imply a violent crisis was actually underway in Moscow, rather than in prospect as I had written. This provoked short-term panic selling of the yen and a downturn in the Nikkei, for which the Treasury people held me responsible. I learned from colleagues in Tokyo that no real harm was done as the markets recovered within hours. For a brief time, however, it really looked like my goose was about to be cooked just for doing my job.

This message did focus some attention in Washington to the fact that, with the December session of the Congress of Peoples' Deputies and the expiration of the emergency powers, Yeltsin would be forced to restructure his government and change some of his policies unless he wanted to go outside the constitution and the law. One of the remarkable things about this period in post-Soviet Russia was the extent to which people really did value legality and its appearance. Maintaining respect for legal structures, even those left over from Soviet law, was quite important, because Russians wanted to believe their country was now truly European and a country based on law. Russians watched what was happening in Georgia, where the civil war was destroying the center of Tbilisi, and at other conflict areas around the former Soviet Union, and thought of themselves as superior, as a European country where things were now done in legal, civilized ways. In the event, Yeltsin had to make considerable concessions which he was very loath to do, including the replacement of Gaidar by Viktor Chernomyrdin, and the modification of some policies, particularly ones favored and sponsored by the United States.

This political confrontation at the end of 1992 ended entirely peacefully, but it foreshadowed what would take place less than a year later, which would end violently. The political crisis of late 1992 established the terms of reference for the coming confrontation between Yeltsin and his supporters with the forces in opposition to him. This did not, by any means, divide good guys from bad guys, despite Washington's perceptions. Many people moved into opposition to Yeltsin, not because they favored Soviet policies, but because they were increasingly concerned about the directions of Russian legality. I knew a number of these people, including most prominently the Chairman of the Russian Constitutional Court, Valery Zorkin. These people had been

Yeltsin's political allies in the late Soviet period, and certainly had joined enthusiastically with the effort to build a new, independent, non-communist Russia, but they were increasingly concerned about the basis of legitimacy of the government and its policies. Many of these policies seemed, to them, wrong for Russia. That these policies were all advocated—and often originated—in Washington meant Russian policy increasingly appeared to be made in the United States. We were seen as on Yeltsin's side, while Yeltsin was seen as our man. This was, indeed, the way many people in Washington viewed things. This perception became an important problem for Yeltsin and for American interests with Russia.

In November 1992 we also had an election in the United States, and that would be important for the embassy and for our Russia policy. I had seen a little of the run-up to the election when on home leave in the United States in the spring of 1992. The change of administration from Bush to Clinton meant a change of ambassador. I had been fairly close to Ambassador Robert Strauss, had worked as his speechwriter and had unusual access to him. I thought he was a first-class ambassador and a hell of a lot of fun. The embassy farewell party for Strauss was very genuine in its warmth, the most heartfelt outpouring of affection for an ambassador I have ever seen. But Strauss had taken the Moscow ambassadorship reluctantly, because of his age, because his family didn't want to live in Moscow, and because this was so far afield from what he really did, which was American politics. Even though he had been a Democrat working for a Republican administration, he made it clear to President-Elect Clinton that he wanted to go home.

Clinton correctly assessed that relations with Russia were going to be one of the most important foreign policy issues of his presidency and he wanted an ambassador who would have the kind of stature Strauss had. So he offered the job to former Vice President Fritz Mondale, who accepted. In Moscow, under instructions from Washington, we went to the Russian government to get what's called "agrément" (concurrence) for Mondale; this is standard international diplomatic practice. Not surprisingly, Yeltsin was delighted. Yeltsin had the highest regard for Strauss, but now was getting a former vice president, a former Senator, a former presidential candidate, someone of major political stature.

Then Mondale changed his mind; decided, on reflection, he didn't want to go to Moscow, but to be ambassador in Tokyo. Clinton agreed, and decided to send the senior-ranking U.S. professional diplomat, i.e., somebody who would go where he was told. That was Thomas Pickering, who had been in New Delhi for less than a year on his sixth ambassadorship, which had included the United Nations in New York. He had no experience in Russia or the region and, as far as I could tell, had never served in a country with real winter. Russia was one of the few parts of the world he did not know from direct experience. We informed the Russian government, including Yeltsin, that they were getting a career Foreign Service officer, albeit the most senior and experienced we had, but were not getting someone with political stature. Thus, the new U.S. Administration started things off with Russia a bit on the wrong foot.

Outgoing President Bush made a final overseas trip, mostly to the Persian Gulf but with a stop in Moscow on New Year's Day. You might notice that our holidays at Embassy

Moscow tended to get scrambled by political events. This summit, with Yeltsin, was supposed to take place in Sochi, on the Black Sea coast, because someone in Washington saw Sochi as comparable to Yalta in geography. Unfortunately, the planners did not ask enough questions about the climate in Sochi, so they got a winter weather mess worse than Bush's December summit with Gorbachev in Malta in 1989. In this case, the White House advance team plus 95 embassy staff went to Sochi to conduct the event and then got stuck there by bad weather, when the summit was switched to Moscow. This meant the remaining embassy staff had to organize and carry out a summit meeting on 24-hours notice and do so on New Year's Day. Can you imagine what it is like to get Russian officials to do anything on New Year's Eve? It was a challenge but, fortunately, the visit was short. It was also damned cold, minus 28 Fahrenheit, for visitors with almost no winter clothing. For once, I volunteered my services, to look after the Eagleburgers, because Larry (then Secretary of State) and Marlene were on this trip. This allowed me to return a bit of the hospitality they had accorded me as a summer intern in Brussels back in 1971. Mostly, I took Marlene shopping on the Arbat Street, and later listened to Larry grumping about her purchases at the hotel. Just like old times. For me, that was more important than the presidential meetings.

During this transitional period in Washington, support for Russia and for Yeltsin was still bipartisan. Russia had not been an issue in the presidential campaign, and the new Clinton Administration was determined to continue most of the policies the Bush Administration had conducted. After an initially difficult start, Bush and Yeltsin had achieved a good personal rapport. Yeltsin was extremely grateful for the support Bush had expressed in critical moments, and for the support of a more tangible character during 1992. The United States had favored Russia as the sole successor state for the nuclear arsenal of the former Soviet Union, something they obviously appreciated. The relative centrality of Russia in our policy was also appreciated, despite concerns about how active American diplomacy was becoming with the other countries. At the same time, their own resources were so lacking that Russian influence in many of these areas was often either ineffective or not centrally directed from the Russian presidency.

With the change of American administrations, there was concern in Moscow that the priorities of the U.S. Administration would change. The new administration tried to project continuity, but the inability to send out Mondale as ambassador communicated a lessening of priority in Russian eyes. Only a handful of people knew about this episode, but that handful included Yeltsin and that’s what really mattered.

Collins remained deputy chief of mission to Ambassador Pickering. I was never personally as close to Pickering as I had been to Strauss. I think that was just a matter of personality. Pickering was certainly one of the most skilled professional diplomats I have seen or anybody has ever seen. He was a very quick learner about Russia. He was very interested in anything we had to tell him about Russia, but his focus, I think, was more on the changing international environment involving Russia, for example in Yugoslavia. That would have been true with any ambassador.

I had noticed that Pickering's presentation of credentials ceremony was, by chance, on the

same day as Andrei Sakharov's birthday. There was an annual memorial concert in the evening in the Great Hall of the Conservatory, in memory of Sakharov with many political and intellectual figures in attendance. I sent Pickering a memo proposing that, after his presentation of credentials and first meeting with Yeltsin in the afternoon, his first public act as ambassador be to attend this memorial concert for Andrei Sakharov. I thought that would be very well received and send exactly the right message. He agreed, and so the first thing I did with the new ambassador was to escort him to what is, perhaps, my favorite single public space in Russia, the Great Hall of the Moscow Conservatory, and to introduce him to some of the Russian intelligentsia. His attendance was front-page news the next day. So, it all went really quite well.

Q: Did you get any feel for Warren Christopher vis-à-vis Russia?

MERRY: I never did. Within the new State Department team, Russia was the purview of Strobe Talbott, who did not at the outset have a really top-level position, but he had access to the president, which is what Washington power is really about. The new State Department front office, Christopher and such, made almost no impression in Moscow at all. It was a complete change from James Baker, who had exercised a personal relationship with Eduard Shevardnadze in the Gorbachev period and had spearheaded many missions to Russia and other former Soviet countries. He had negotiated the terms of United States engagement with all the successor states, and spent considerable time directly with Yeltsin and foreign minister Kozyrev and others. That kind of personal engagement by the American secretary of state didn't exist under Christopher. He made some trips, but I doubt he made much more of an impression on the Russians than he made, obviously, on my memory.

Q: On us here in the States, he kind of came across as the president's lawyer on international affairs.

MERRY: As a personality, he could scarcely have been in greater contrast to Baker. Baker was certainly not my favorite human being. As an official visitor, he was a royal pain in the neck. Even Strauss got fed up with Baker's entourage. As I mentioned, the embassy leadership assigned me to other duties during those visits, because I could be kind of short-tempered with those folks. But you have to give the man credit as an activist foreign minister for our country, in dealing with the leaderships of Russia, Ukraine, Kazakhstan, dealing with people like Yeltsin, Nazarbayev and others in a very personal, engaging and sometimes downright physical embrace. For example, being in the banya (sauna) with those guys and conducting diplomacy in the flesh, quite literally. That was something James Baker could do very effectively. That wasn't Warren Christopher at all. That just wasn't his style, that wasn't his way.

Q: Did you get any feel for Strobe Talbott? Was he a positive influence, in your perspective, or not?

MERRY: Talbott was the president's man on Russia, and was for the duration of Clinton's presidency. I never had any kind of personal relationship with Talbott. I met

him a number of times, briefed him, but there was never any real chemistry between us. I was never a Washington player during this period. I was in Moscow, and my job was to inform Washington through reporting and talking to visitors from Washington, whether they be official visitors or journalists or anything else. Increasingly, I was the bearer of bad tidings, the purveyor of the view that Russia was not going to be the miraculous reform success story that Washington wanted. If nothing else, my reputation for candor and skepticism about the applicability of the "Washington consensus" to Russia made me less than a welcome voice. I knew that was so, and embraced the role. I was certainly not a hapless victim, as I knew perfectly well how I came across. For me, the opportunity to be that voice during this period in Russian history was a great opportunity, but it carried with it the duty to pour cold water on many easy and false beliefs at the other end.

The new administration—Clinton and company—quickly adopted the same uncritical, wholesale support for Yeltsin that had been the case under their predecessors. Now, let me be clear: I was, and indeed remain, a fan of Boris Yeltsin. He later made some terrible, terrible mistakes, of which the worst was the war in Chechnya. But I had the highest admiration for Yeltsin as the Russian leader willing to jettison the entire Leninist project and the Soviet empire to seek a very different future for his country. Where Gorbachev was a failed reformer, despite his epic achievement in helping to bring an end to the Cold War, Yeltsin was a true revolutionary, a man willing to reject the entire political and ideological system of which he was a product. My problem as head of Political/Internal was to communicate that Yeltsin was only part of a broader political dynamic in Russia, which was, curiously enough, still a democratic political dynamic. The legislature may have been a holdover from Soviet times, but it was an elected legislature, just as Yeltsin himself had been democratically elected. This political dynamic reflected pluralism and the many conflicting interests within Russian society, often not committed to Yeltsin either as a leader or to his policies. The new Clinton Administration engaged in unthinking, uncritical support for "Boris"—not even Yeltsin, it just became "good old Boris." Washington wanted Russia to be democratic but for its leader to rule by decree. This was not, I thought, a very sophisticated or nuanced approach to dealing with a Russia that was going to have very serious internal political difficulties.

One thing I found curious and off-putting about the Clinton approach was this use of first names, to refer to the president of Russia by his first name. In Russian terms you could refer to him as Boris Nikolayevich, which is perfectly respectable. You could refer to him as President Yeltsin or just as Yeltsin. But to refer to him just as "Boris," and to do that quite openly and publicly, had a distinctly condescending quality. Clinton tended to condescend to Russia in ways Bush had not. The public speeches Clinton made in Moscow made me wince. He also conveyed that people in Washington didn't understand that Yeltsin was not Russia. The United States needed to maintain relationships with a broader spectrum of Russian political figures than just those associated with Yeltsin. I became increasingly concerned about this. Keep in mind that the new U.S. administration had many other things to deal with, so they tended to be reactive to events in Russia. Ambassador Pickering, for example, was not in place until late May when the deterioration of the Russian domestic political situation was already fairly far advanced.

The political confrontation from the end of 1992 resumed early in the following year and resulted in the violent crisis of the fall of 1993. However, the entire year was one of political crisis, with only short lapses. At the start of the year, Yeltsin was in a depressive funk. Yeltsin as a personality was definitely manic-depressive and had occasional depressive periods, but he tended to come out of them with bouts of manic energy. This happened in the late winter when his opponents in the Supreme Soviet attempted to impeach him. This was an interesting concept. There isn't even a word in Russian for impeachment. They used the English word and concept, impeachment, because such a thing had no precedent in Russian history. The notion that a chief of state could be removed from office through legal means obviously is not very Russian. This standoff between president and parliament progressed into March and could very easily have become violent – indeed, I expected it would – but did not for two reasons. First, the opposition retreated in real fear from an open and direct confrontation with Yeltsin, which they knew they would lose. A vote to impeach the president failed; though it is impossible to say what would have happened had it passed. Second, Yeltsin came up with an alternative. On television he proposed a national referendum on four questions. This referendum in April was about the direction of national policy and the authority of the president, and was pushed by the government under the slogan "Da, Da, Nyet, Da," meaning they wanted people to vote "Yes, yes, no, yes" on the four questions.

The idea behind the four-part referendum was to create public pressure and momentum for a constitutional convention, to rewrite the Russian Federation constitution from the relic of the Soviet period which was still the legal framework of the country. This was, I thought, a brilliant stroke by Yeltsin. It avoided what might otherwise have been a very destructive confrontation; whether an effort at impeachment by the Supreme Soviet or direct rule by Yeltsin himself. It had the advantage of going back to the people, of transcending the existing constitutional structure through direct democracy in a national referendum. Initially, the scheme worked pretty well. The opposition was flustered and could not unite on a tactical response. The government won the vote with sufficient majorities to achieve credibility for a constitutional drafting convention, which began in the early summer. Then, characteristically with Yeltsin after a fight, the momentum slowed and his leadership lost dynamism. Whenever Yeltsin was in an overt confrontation, whether in late 1992 or earlier in '91, or later in '93, or in this particular confrontation in February and March of 1993, when Yeltsin was in a battle, he was in his element. But in the follow-through—the detailed political effort required for a constitutional convention to create a new basic law and get it put into place—his attention wandered and the whole thing lost momentum in the summer. Yeltsin was always a great fighter, but not a patient and detailed political in-fighter.

This concerned me because I had said to Washington, in my cable of November of the previous year, that the underlying Russian political crisis would have to be resolved, either with the reformulation of constitutional structures by peaceful means or by violent confrontation. The dilemma could not go on for an extended period. The dissipation of focus in the middle of '93 was worrisome. It was compounded, at the end of the summer, by a terribly ill-advised currency reform, when the Russian government withdrew a

massive amount of currency from circulation. This created public panic during the height of the summer vacation season, when people didn't know if their money was going to be worth anything, if they could pay their holiday bills. It was done in a way that conveyed to the Russian people that the officials who made policy were indifferent to the impact of their actions on everyday life for the people, that this was still a top-down, authoritarian state. This action stood in terrible contrast with the national referenda in the spring, which had said, "The people rule here." In the late summer, the utterly heavy-handed and unnecessary currency reform showed people how little they really mattered. This set the stage for the autumn crisis of 1993, as the finance minister, Boris Fyodorov, initiated a series of macroeconomic tightening measures during the autumn, which produced major economic pain throughout much of urban Russia.

This is a complex subject, and my views on whether or not these measures were good economics are not universally shared. However, whether they were good economics or not, they were certainly lousy politics. The Russian people had been through a couple of very, very difficult years, including the winter of '91-'92, and then through '92 into '93. People had survived those two very difficult years with massive inflation and huge disruptions. By the middle of 1993, Russians were beginning to feel they were over the worst, that they were over the hump, that things were beginning to improve, and people were beginning to see what you might call a light at the end of the tunnel. Then came these macroeconomic stabilization measures that just knocked the support out from under the basic livelihood of much of the urban, blue-collar labor force. In my view, this was unnecessary and certainly politically very foolish. Yeltsin was already looking toward another national referendum on a new constitution and to elections for a new legislature. To manufacture a major deterioration in working class living standards in preparation for such elections showed the arrogance and political blindness of many of the so-called Westernizers and economic reformers.

I dwell on this because many people think the confrontation between Yeltsin and his parliamentary opposition in late September and early October was about personalities and came out of nowhere. Washington saw the confrontation as a morality play, of good guys versus bad guys. This is false. The confrontation had a long and deep context. Yeltsin was always a controversial figure, even during his greatest days in 1991, but this confrontation involved a chain of events including the expiration of his emergency powers at the end of November '92; his capitulation on large elements of policy to the Supreme Soviet in December of '92; the replacement of much of his government; his decision, in February of '93, to challenge the legislature again; the failed effort at impeachment that followed; the spring confrontation that resulted in the four-part national referendum; the constitutional drafting process and its loss of momentum; the currency reform, and the fiscal tightening measures. These all created an environment in which the underlying dilemma of Russia's constitutional structure came to a head in the second half of September of 1993. The world remembers the images on CNN of the violent confrontation in Moscow in early October, but that was the culmination, if you will, of something that had been in process for over a year, and had been more or less unavoidable for months. I think violence could have been avoided, but the basic political confrontation could not. There was a lot of history—including personal history among

the participants, of course—so that at the end of September, Yeltsin's own vice president, Alexander Rutskoy, was on the other side of the barricade. The parliamentary speaker, Ruslan Khasbulatov, was on the other side of the barricade. The head of the constitutional court, Zorkin, was on the other side of the barricade. People who had been working very diligently n the summer on constitutional revision, like Oleg Rumyantsev, ended up on the other side of the barricade. These had all been Yeltsin's allies earlier.

The step which provoked the ultimate confrontation was Yeltsin's. He became frustrated, impatient, fed-up with what he saw as the lack of progress on constitutional reform. After a series of political maneuvers, Yeltsin decided to prorogue the legislature. He lacked the legal authority to do so, but did it anyway. He went on television and dismissed the legislature with a call for new elections, plus the writing of a new constitution and a referendum on it, which in theory was what they were working toward anyway. But he decided, on September 21, to short-circuit a process he saw not going where he wanted or as quickly as he wanted.

To Yeltsin's surprise, I am sure, the opposition, if I can use that broad term, decided to take a leaf from Boris Yeltsin's own book from August 1991 by rallying their forces to the same place he had rallied his forces then, which was the Russian White House, the seat of the Russian Parliament. The Supreme Soviet voted to declare Yeltsin a traitor and Rutskoy as acting president. Rutskoy, Khasbulatov and others, under the banner of constitutional legitimacy and legality, summoned everyone who was in opposition to what Yeltsin was trying to do. This included a very wide spectrum of people who ranged from the most ultra-nationalist, anti-Semitic, vicious people you could imagine to many of the most, I would say, liberal, progressive, pro-Western, democratizing individuals in the country. For example, Oleg Rumyantsev, who had portrayed himself as the James Madison of Russia and was the leading intellectual light in the fashioning of a new constitution, could not swallow what Yeltsin was doing, the man for whom he had sought to fashion that constitution. One should not imagine this confrontation was progressives versus communists, or reformers versus reactionaries. Many of the best people in Russia simply could not abide Yeltsin's departure from legality. However, the other end of the opposition spectrum was in a swamp. I remember vividly a piece of graffiti inside a telephone booth near the Russian White House that said, "Death to the Jew Yeltsin!" The notion of Boris Yeltsin being Jewish was preposterous, but this graffiti associated Yeltsin in the minds of some of these people with the ancient "Jewish enemy" in Russia. This anti-Semitic spleen was directed at Yeltsin, as well as at Gaidar and others, some of whom actually were Jewish.

The ability of the opposition to rally large numbers of people to the Russian White House, with its important symbolism from August 1991, very much caught Yeltsin by surprise. The crowds around the White House in 1993 were not the youth of 1991, but they were more or less on the same scale. He held off using riot police or troops, hoping his opponents would lose heart or lose face or at least seek a compromise with him. None of those things happened. The anti-Yeltsin forces remained steadfast and even grew in numbers and determination. They saw this moment as their opportunity either to reject the Western-oriented policy of the government or to establish genuine constitutional

legitimacy, depending on their point of view. Compromise was not in the air. There was plenty of political rhetoric, none of it very productive, which extended from September 21 into early October.

One of the things I had learned from August 1991 was to have changes of underwear and other spare clothing in the embassy, in case we had another extended crisis. It was just as well, because this time I did not leave the embassy compound for 10 days. This time we did not have day and night shifts. So, I was working about 18 hours a day in the embassy, and sleeping in the sub-basement of the DCM's residence. I needed someplace to sleep, so I used what had originally, I think, been intended as a maid's room. Each night I would wash out one set of shirt and underwear in rotation for the night ahead, and for dinner I had the leftovers from a large reception Collins had hosted a few days before. There were enough leftover canapés and partial bottles of wine to keep me, but they got to be pretty stale.

The DCM, Jim Collins, was in Washington at the time, and his advice and counsel were so valued they wouldn't let him come back to Moscow. Ambassador Pickering was in Moscow without his deputy, but he had been through a number of similar events in other countries in his time. I think Jim probably was more valuable staying in Washington. Keep in mind that this time the embassy was not showing solidarity with the people inside and around the White House. We did maintain contacts there for reporting purposes, but it was nothing like the interchange we had in August 1991. We were much less activist this time and certainly not seen as friends within the White House. Indeed, there came a point when even our normal contacts became difficult to maintain due to the general hostility we faced. The embassy was in a very insecure location because it faced directly toward the Russian White House with only the low compound wall for protection. In contrast to August 1991, there were a lot of people in the crowd with guns of various kinds.

Each evening before I went to sleep about midnight I had a phone conversation with Collins back at the Operations Center in the Department, to discuss where I thought things were that day. This was in addition to our classified reporting and analysis and was more in the nature of a personal exchange of views, me to him. I could say some things, even over an open phone link, that I might not in cleared embassy reporting. This routine went on for a week and a half. Candidly, I often did not have much of substance to say. Our access to knowledgeable contacts during this Russian crisis was a fraction of what we had had in 1991, on both sides. The Kremlin was not saying very much, in part because they really did not know how things might develop. We had people covering the crowd outside the White House and talking with contacts inside, but this got to be dicey. Talking to Americans was not popular in the White House, as it was clear the United States supported Yeltsin. The mood of the crowd sometimes was pretty ugly and potentially threatening toward embassy staff. At one point, I pulled some people back for their own safety. I often had little to report other than rumors, but that reflected the fact there was little real news from either side. The adversaries were talking past each other and both were trying to wait the other out. The Moscow public was sitting on the sidelines, just hoping for a peaceful outcome.

At the end of ten days, we were into the first weekend in October, and things at least appeared to be moving toward a resolution. Russian Patriarch Alexy had been on a trip to the United States when the crisis occurred and had cut it short to return to Moscow. He then started mediating high-level political talks at the Danilov Monastery. This mediation process was really the first ray of hope for a peaceful end of the crisis, as both sides were at least willing to take part given the prestige and stature of the patriarch. I had considerable respect for Alexy and knew that neither side would want to appear to rebuff his peacemaking efforts. So, it looked like things might yet sort out or at least remain calm during the mediation talks, but as there was little news emanating from the Danilov Monastery, there was little for the embassy or for me to do but wait.

October 3 was a Sunday morning and a beautiful autumn day. As it happens, it was also my birthday, and I decided I could go home for part of the day. I wanted to get some really clean clothing and do a few things. I thought I could leave the embassy for a Sunday. And, sure enough, that's when the whole thing just blew sky high.

Q: During this period before things blew sky high, how were you getting information?

MERRY: As in August of 1991, we had an expanded reporting team, though much more concentrated on the Political Section and not working around the clock. We had reasonable contacts with Yeltsin's people, and with some of the opposition. Things started off all right, as everybody initially wanted to tell their position to the Americans. That attitude deteriorated as the crisis became protracted. I was out a few times in the crowds around the Russian White House, and the type of people there changed for the worse as time past. To begin with, it was sort of a middle-class law-and-order crowd, but with the passing days the crowd got to be ugly, paranoid and antagonistic. We still had adequate access, but it was a very different mood than in 1991. In the previous crisis, we at the embassy felt empathy and support for the people across the street, but in 1993 it was quite the contrary. My job as coordinator and editor was similar, but the tone was strikingly different.

Q: Did we have any either overt or covert position? How did we want this thing to come out?

MERRY: Washington supported Yeltsin, but without much sense of nuance or what our support would mean in Russia. They tended to view things in black and white, that the people on the other side of the barricades must be the bad guys of Russia.

Q: One of the things that can poison any view, if someone has extreme anti-Semitic views, and the opposition, as you mentioned, there was this—

MERRY: It certainly contained that.

Q: What was the name of the group that was sort of a party or something?

MERRY: There were a number of people involved of a fascist character, some of whom we actually knew. But, the opposition was internally diffuse and inconsistent. It contained factions ranging from brown through red, plus people with no faction. There were fascists through communists, plus many people I would characterize as legalists. There were a few odd characters who wanted a military government, but agendas were all over the map. If the opposition had won the confrontation with Yeltsin, their own fragmentation would have been almost instantaneous. What united them for the moment was opposition to Yeltsin, rather than the leadership of Rutskoy or any other figure. What Washington thought was that opponents of "our guy Boris" are bad people.

Q: I thought we might stop at this point. It's a good place to pick up, where the fighting started.

MERRY: OK, October 3rd. My birthday.

Q: Actually, I was sitting in Bishkek at the time, watching it on TV. I was out there. I had been retired for some years. I retired in '85. But I was sent up by USIA as a consultant, to set up the Kyrgyz government, to set up a consular corps. So I was watching this damn thing on—anyway.

MERRY: Well, let me tell you, it got damn exciting.

Q: Today is the 10th of June 2010 with Wayne Merry. Just briefly, where did we go up to and where did we leave off?

MERRY: We had gotten to the 3rd of October 1993, a very dramatic day in modern Russia. In fact, this was the one of the few events in the post-Soviet period in Russia that I think can legitimately qualify for that much-overused term, historic. This was the date when the country really faced a crunch point.

For the preceding week and a half, there had been a largely peaceful but nonetheless very high-tension confrontation between Boris Yeltsin's government and his opposition, who were holed up in the Russian White House. This involved large scale demonstrations around the White House, which is right across the street from the American Embassy complex, and a very tense standoff over Yeltsin's effort to abrogate the then-existing Russian Supreme Soviet with an eye to new elections and a new constitution. A constitutional drafting process had been in progress for much of the previous six months, but had essentially bogged down. Yeltsin had always intended that the Russian Federation would get a new constitutional structure to replace that which it had inherited from the Soviet Union, and this would create a much more presidential-style system, patterned somewhat on De Gaulle's Fifth French Republic. In the late summer that effort ran out of steam, partly because of lack of focus by Yeltsin himself but for a variety of other reasons. In the early fall, the political process was in drift. Yeltsin, in mid-September, decided to cut the Gordian knot by dismissing the Supreme Soviet, which constitutionally he did not have the authority to do. He called for new elections, not just for a new legislature, but for a new constitution, which was at that point half written.

The opposition to Yeltsin was now led by Yeltsin's own vice president, the former air force general, Alexander Rutskoy, and the chairman of the Supreme Soviet, Ruslan Khasbulatov, both of whom had been close allies to Yeltsin in the crisis of 1991. They were now leading the opposition, which was an unstable amalgam of very conflicting Russian political forces, some of them neo-Soviet, members of the Russian Communist Party, but also members of groups that were semi-fascist, some of them entirely fascist, a few people who overtly advocated a military government—actually quite few in number but quite extreme in their politics—and many people who were simply opposed to Yeltsin, Yeltsin's reforms, Yeltsin's government. The opposition had attracted a motley but intense group of people distressed because of the breakup of the Soviet Union, the loss of the Soviet Russian empire, and of course, the extreme economic turmoil in the country during the late Gorbachev period and the first two years of Yeltsin's presidency.

Also in the opposition were what I would call progressive, pro-democracy, pro-market, pro-Western liberal reformers, who felt that Yeltsin's approach had itself become too authoritarian. Their commitment was to the existing legal constitutional norms, with a view to their replacement but through legal means. What united what I would call liberal reformers with what I would call reactionary neo-Soviets and semi-fascists was an opposition to Yeltsin's unequivocally illegal and unconstitutional methods to try to resolve the political crisis. He did not have the authority to abrogate the Supreme Soviet. He did not have authority on his own to drive a constitutional revision. I think it's fair to say he did not have broad popular legitimacy in doing so. This led to the confrontation on the streets of Moscow, centered around the Russian White House, which had gone on for a week and a half.

On Sunday, the 3rd of October, a process of mediation was taking place under the sponsorship of the Patriarch of the Russian Orthodox Church, Alexy, at the Danilov Monastery, the headquarters of the Russian Orthodox Patriarchate. Alexy had been on a tour of Russian Orthodox sites in North America and had cut that short to come back to Russia to try to help resolve the political crisis. His stature was such that pretty much everybody in leadership positions on both sides, both in the government and in the opposition, agreed to let Alexy try to work out some kind of a resolution to this crisis. That was ongoing that weekend. I believe that if this process had started earlier, maybe four or five days earlier, Alexy might have been able to pull it off. We'll never know. There were many people on both sides trying to find a way out of this confrontation that would not involve use of force by either side, and the one person who had a real chance to pull this off was Alexy. As it happened, he came too late.

As I mentioned before, I had been in the embassy for a week and a half without a break. This being a Sunday and a day when the confrontation was supposedly in abeyance because of the mediation effort, it looked to me to be a good day to go home and get some change of clothing and take care of a few personal things. It also happened to be my birthday. I thought, "I've been working 18 hours a day for the past 10 days; maybe I can take this Sunday off and go home." Well, it didn't work out that way.

My apartment was in a high-rise building which overlooked October Square, one of the main traffic interchanges in Moscow and also, at its center, site of the largest statue of Lenin in Moscow. Representatives of both sides were engaged in the mediation effort, while Yeltsin and other senior members of the government had decided to do what I did, which was to take this Sunday off, as they were mostly at their dachas. With nobody in charge locally on either side, people on the street took events into their own hands. There was a demonstration scheduled for October Square in front of the Lenin statue to rally people opposed to Yeltsin. In principle, this should have been a normal peaceful manifestation of political opposition to the government, and it could have been. The problem was two-fold: first, many of the people who showed up for this demonstration were in a very foul mood after 10 days of confrontation. Many of them had been camping out around the Russian White House for days, if not a week or more, and some were looking for a fight. Unfortunately, they got it because of the second factor. The Ministry of Interior behaved stupidly. Rather than let this demonstration take place and let people vent their anger, they decided to send in riot cops to break it up. What they sent were a bunch of young, inexperienced, semi-trained riot cops who really didn't know what they were doing. As it happens, my kitchen looked right down on the square and on the demonstration. I had a panoramic view of the collapse of peace.

The riot police, instead of standing to the side to let the demonstration take place or keeping it where it wouldn't interfere with traffic, closed in on it from all sides. They compressed the demonstrators, which was foolish beyond belief. They didn't try to push them off in one direction. They actually pushed in from various directions. A lot of the demonstrators were older people, and older Russians have fairly thin skins about being pushed by young people in the best of times. At some point, the compression caused a human explosion and the demonstrators surged out and just stormed right through the riot cops, who were mostly kids and didn't know what they were doing. There was no effective leadership and the demonstrators trampled these symbols of government authority pretty much underfoot. Then it was, "Katie, bar the door."

I had not the faintest notion that this relatively local event I had witnessed spelled the collapse of political peace in general. If I had, I would have returned to the embassy immediately, rather than just reporting what I had seen by phone. It did not occur to me that this event would spark others and lead to a loss of government control in much of the central part of the city, but that is just what happened. The demonstration – now a full-bore riot, in my view – started moving up the street, what's called the Garden Ring, in groups to the area in front of Gorky Park, across a bridge over the Moscow River, and then on toward where they had come from, which was the Russian White House. On the way they engaged in increasing levels of violence, particularly when they got to the square in front of the Foreign Ministry. By the time they got back to the Russian White House, and of course to the American Embassy, the police forces on the street had disintegrated, and, for the most part, simply fled for their own safety. There obviously was a lack of leadership and organization on the police side on this Sunday afternoon. Most of the senior people were at their dachas. Some of the Russian police who provided security at the entrances to our embassy actually had to take refuge inside to keep from getting beaten up by the crowds.

At this point much of central Moscow on this Sunday afternoon belonged to the opposition. It was really messy. It illustrated one of those things Russians are always telling you, that Russian society is either strictly controlled or it's anarchy. Russians, particularly elite Russians, often justify the authoritarian nature of Russian government on the argument that, without a strong hand, Russians will just descend into chaos. In this instance, the analysis was valid. I saw it happen, though I do not assert this was uniquely Russian behavior. During the course of the afternoon any kind of organized government control disappeared. The demonstrators took over the part of the city centered on the Russian White House. They had most of the major streets in that district in their hands. They decided to commandeer vehicles and go north to Ostankino, where the main television broadcast tower and production studios are located. There was a violent confrontation with police at Ostankino, but the government never lost control of the airwaves, which was very important. By that time, the government started to get its act together and sent forces to the television complex.

I reported to the embassy by phone what was happening – because my kitchen was a prime vantage point – and learned that things were much worse than I had thought. The embassy faced a real security problem, because the embassy complex, which included something like 155 residences of families with kids, was right in the middle of this urban battle zone. The exterior perimeter wall had been deliberately built not very high so as not to be intimidating. It was only about eight feet high, or nine feet high at the most, and energetic, athletic demonstrators could get over that wall. If, as seemed almost certain, a large-scale battle between government forces and opposition forces was impending, the embassy would be right smack in the middle of it, much more so than in August 1991. In 1991, nobody would target the Americans, whereas in 1993, most of the opposition forces regarded the United States as being deeply in bed with Yeltsin, as being Yeltsin's principal foreign support. The hostility towards the United States among some opposition figures was quite extreme. So there was a real chance the embassy could be in danger, or even physically overrun, which would not have been difficult.

Ambassador Pickering had previous experience with comparable situations—this was his seventh ambassadorship, and he had, in previous assignments, seen political violence on a large scale—and was in his element. He got everybody hunkered down. Everyone in the embassy not in essential duties was moved into the large underground gymnasium, which was the safest place in the compound. Nobody was allowed to be in their residences. Some people were working in their offices, which, for the most part, were also underground, and the Marines were providing our security. Those who lived off compound, the majority of embassy staff, were instructed to stay at home.

Ambassador Pickering understood the embassy might actually be cut off or overwhelmed, and decided to establish a backup embassy. He assigned me to that duty, as officer in charge. This was in part because I was not in the embassy at that time. I was still at home, reporting by telephone what was happening on the streets. I was assigned to gather together a small team of people not in the embassy compound— because the area around the embassy now was a battle zone—and to go to his residence, Spaso House,

which is about a mile and a half away from the embassy, and establish a backup embassy in case of need. The team consisted of two of my own Political/Internal officers living in the same building I did, two military attachés, two people from the Station and a couple of communicators, and we all proceeded—mostly by Metro, because the streets were not very navigable due to the chaos, but the Metro was still functioning—to Spaso House, where late on a Sunday afternoon we set up an Inmarsat for communication and established ourselves as potentially the replacement U.S. Embassy in case the main embassy was overrun.

Q: Spaso House is the residence of the ambassador.

MERRY: It's the ambassador's residence, in a fine old neo-classical building. It was built shortly before the First World War. The problem was that Spaso House is also very centrally located. It's about a mile and a half or so, as the crow flies, from the embassy, which the next day proved to be not as far away as I would have liked. In any case, we camped out to wait and see what happened. We had a direct phone link with the embassy, so I could stay in touch with the Political/Internal team there. We watched Russian television during the evening and into the night. The two defense attachés, who had a vehicle, knew where to look for the units with heavy weapons the government would bring into the city. They found them on the outskirts of Moscow camping down for the evening, bivouacking for the night. It was quite clear the government was not going to confront the opposition in a major way until daylight. This was another proof of the essential role of our military colleagues in covering a wide-ranging event that transcended the political. None of us FSOs could have performed this task. We reported this vital information to the embassy. During the hours of darkness the opposition forces engaged in sporadic fighting with security forces on foot. With the exception of the television station and the Kremlin area, they were just rampaging with frequent gun fire. This included the area around the embassy, which received some hostile fire. The very worst moment of this period, for me, was when word came over our radio net that one of the Marines had been shot. We did not know how bad he was, but the fact one of our Marines was hurt sent a chill through me. I recall vividly the sick feeling I had at that moment. However, we had done our job, reporting that significant armed forces were on the outskirts of Moscow and would come in pretty much at first light.

Once we had properly communicated to Ambassador Pickering and Washington, it seemed to me the rational thing to do was get some sleep. I tried to encourage all the members of the team to do the same. I couldn't them to go to bed because they were just glued to the television in these events. For me, I decided it had been a long week and a half already and God knew what tomorrow would be like and the days after that. So, I went to one of the guest bedrooms and went to bed, went right to sleep. I suspect I may have been the only adult in the embassy who got a good sleep that night. What woke me was the reverberation from the first 120 millimeter tank cannon round being fired into the upper floors of the Russian White House.

Q: By the way, 120 millimeter—that's pretty big stuff.

MERRY: This is a big—

Q: During World War II they had what we called "long Tom," which is 155.

MERRY: This was a long-barreled tank gun. In any case, the reverberation from a 120 millimeter tank gun, fired from almost two miles away, shook the windows of Spaso House. That's what woke me up. I found out what was going on, had enough sense to take a shower before I got dressed, knowing this was going to be a long day, and then we had little else to do than watch on television what the world was watching on CNN. Remember, our job in Spaso was to be a reserve embassy, not to be out covering the events and reporting on them. Ambassador Pickering's instructions about our role kept us in Spaso House, even though our inclinations were to be out on the streets. CNN's cameras were on the other side of a major bridge on which the army's tanks were deployed as they were firing at the Russian White House from the south.

Q: Why was this the target? You have this mob going around, and so what was…

MERRY: The world saw only a very limited part of what was going on. While the visual imagery of that day is of tanks firing into the upper floors of the Russian parliament building, the real fighting was out of sight of the cameras. There was a large-scale battle underway on the streets between government forces and opposition. This battle zone was fairly extensive, about two and a half miles wide and maybe a mile and a half deep. The center of the battle was on the north side of the Russian White House, in an area partly between the Russian White House and the perimeter wall of the American Embassy compound. There's a large park and a soccer field north of the White House and across the main street from our compound. That's where the biggest battle was going on. The government forces used the soccer field as a staging area for an assault on the building. The tanks were firing from the south into the upper floors of the White House to suppress sniper and automatic weapons fire from windows on the north side. The tanks were maybe a quarter of a mile away on the other side, and were firing high-explosive rounds into the upper floors of the tower of the Russian White House to suppress that fire. The tower of the Russian White House is wide east-west but is quite shallow north-south. It's only maybe 80 or 100 feet deep. If they had used armor-piercing rounds, the shells would have gone all the way through the building and out the other side. The tanks fired into the building as their part of the larger battle on the other side that the world did not see because CNN's cameras couldn't show it. That battle was taking place literally right in front of the American embassy.

Q: Were any Russian TV stations involved in this?

MERRY: I cannot recall. We were watching both, but my memory may not distinguish correctly what I saw on Russian television and what on CNN.

Q: I was watching the thing, of all places, in Bishkek at the time.

MERRY: What you were watching was CNN, because they were the only media

covering the events with a camera. The problem, and this is often the case, is that what television can photograph is what the world thinks is happening. In point of fact, the battle going on that Monday was quite extensive, involving thousands of people.

Q: Were there any disaffected troops involved?

MERRY: There are debates about that. Certainly not any units, but probably some individuals. The government forces were elite army units and forces of the Ministry of Interior, domestic security forces.

Q: You mean the old KGB types?

MERRY: The Ministry of the Interior. The army supplied the tanks, though the tanks were crewed only by officers, who were regarded as more politically reliable. We later learned there had been a very intense debate between Yeltsin and the leadership of the army, as to what should be the army's role— because the army was very reluctant to get involved in a domestic political dispute—and there was also the question who could be trusted. The tanks were manned exclusively by officers because they were somewhat reluctant to trust enlisted personnel in such a delicate operation.

Exchanges of automatic weapons fire went literally right over the walls of the American Embassy. There was a small hotel, the "Mir," across from our main gate, where opposition forces holed up. Government forces fired at the "Mir" over the corner of the American Embassy; some of our walls and structures were heavily pockmarked with bullets. A lot of our windows were shot through. Most of the personnel were safely underground in the gym and offices, but this was a strenuous day, because we had several hundred Americans, basically families, in the center of this battle zone.

Then the battle came to us at Spaso House. As the government forces closed in on the Russian White House, various opposition elements moved off in other directions. By establishing the alternate embassy at the ambassador's residence, we had made ourselves, if anything, potentially more vulnerable than the people in the embassy compound, because the ambassador's residence was a wide-open piece of property with no security at all. We had no Marines. The gate was open. Soon, armed figures were moving around in the garden. It was hard to tell who was who, because when you see a guy dressed all in black with a ski mask and an automatic weapon you have no idea who the hell he is. The American flag was flying on the flagpole from the front of the building. I wished I'd had enough sense to take that down during the night but I hadn't thought to do so, and it made us rather conspicuous. There were also snipers operating from balconies on high-rise buildings in the area. At one point, we were gathered in refuge in a basement room when several guys in black ski masks started looking through the window into this basement room. We quickly shifted our refuge to the attic of this 1912-era building. I doubt more than a handful of people have ever been in the attic of the ambassador's residence in Moscow. But it seemed to be the safest place to go for a while.

Q: You have the street mobs and snipers. How were they getting guns? I would assume

that guns were not easily obtained in Russia?

MERRY: By 1993 the opposition had plenty of weapons. There was no lack of small arms firepower on either side. At this point, we in the ambassador's residence were actually in greater physical peril than the people in the main embassy. This was a nasty irony. The lesson was that we should have established the alternate embassy at what's called the "near dacha," a little weekend place we have that's inside the city of Moscow but far enough away that we wouldn't have been at any risk.

Once the battle had moved away from the White House, the embassy had to evacuate us, as if they did not have more than enough to worry about. The ambassador's vehicle was an armored limousine, and our regional security officer came to rescue us. This was a superb guy who had come to Moscow from an assignment in Beirut and knew difficult security situations very well. The vehicle had to make three trips to get us all out. Pickering came over on the first run to get some things, but soon returned to the embassy. I forget exactly how many of us there were, but it took three trips to get us all out. After the first trip, the opposition forces in the area understood what was going on, that an evacuation was underway. For the second run, the one I was in with the ambassador, there was a lot of automatic weapons fire at the gate. Initially, we couldn't get out the gate to the street. After communications by walkie-talkie with the embassy and then with the authorities, the Russian security forces nearby used automatic weapons to suppress hostile fire at the gate. We went out the gate pedal to the metal, across the plaza, and down the street, and finally into the embassy, which was surrounded by what looked like a battle zone. There were burning buildings and burning automobiles and burning debris, the detritus of an urban battle.

We all got safely out of the ambassador's residence, which I'm happy to say was not damaged. I then learned the embassy the previous evening had started something which we had never really thought about for Moscow: emergency destruction of classified material. Most vulnerable embassies are supposed to maintain a relatively small amount of classified materials, so an emergency destruction can be done within a certain specified period of time. The embassy in Moscow, to put it mildly, had never been in compliance with those standards because during the Cold War the joke had always been that, if the American Embassy in Moscow had to destroy classified material, a U.S. thermonuclear warhead would do the job. We had years and years of back files. When they started the destruction process, it quickly became a shambles. The paper shredders jammed. Fortunately, they didn't get to shredding any of my files, which was nice. One of my colleagues steered them away from my safe. This demonstrated how completely unprepared, mentally, we Old Moscow Hands were, that this could take place in a city which we had all thought of as the paradigm of the police state, that the one thing we would never have to worry about was being overrun by domestic violence.

Something much more serious was the injury to one of our Marines by gunfire. Corporal Bell, a young Marine, was a very popular guy, much loved by embassy kids who regarded him as a collective big brother. He was in an observation post on top of the new office building, which was still unoccupied. He was shot through the neck, perhaps by

one of the government forces who had no idea what they were shooting at. There was nothing on the compound to identify it as the American embassy. We didn't have the flag out. Most of the troops brought in by the government didn't know the city of Moscow. This was just another building, and they saw a guy in a helmet and uniform on top of a building and somebody shot at him. He was nearly killed. Our embassy doctor took care of him, and we received, I'm happy to say, good cooperation from the Russian authorities in evacuating him to a Russian hospital and saving his life. Despite the hugely important political events taking place around us, I suspect that for many of the Americans involved, the shooting of Corporal Bell is the most painful memory of those days.

The embassy didn't really do much in terms of reporting that day because Ambassador Pickering had given orders the previous day that everybody who was not in the embassy compound—and most embassy personnel lived somewhere else—were to stay at their residences. People were not to go out and observe what was going on. They were not to engage in reporting activity. People were to stay away from the battle zones. A number of the staff disobeyed that order, feeling this was a major political crisis and we were there as reporters and that was what we should be doing. I myself felt uncomfortable with the limitations on our reporting activities. In retrospect, I understand why Ambassador Pickering did what he did. He was a man who had seen this kind of violence before, several times in his career. He made the judgment that no reporting message is worth somebody getting killed. Ultimately, of course, it was his authority, it was his decision. Today, I agree with it. Then, I felt frustrated by it. Most of my staff felt very frustrated and complained. In retrospect, I think it was the correct thing to do.

During the remainder of that Monday, October 4th, and into the next day, the American Embassy remained hunkered down. That night was particularly eerie for me because I quite seriously believe I was the only person in the place who had been to bed the night before. Everybody else was utterly exhausted by Monday night. Other than a handful of Marines, who were on their shift providing security, I was the only person awake most of that night. I was the embassy duty officer that night because I was able to stay awake and functional. This was a strange night, with embassy staff sleeping on the floors under their desks. Ambassador Pickering was asleep on the floor of his office. The staff were asleep throughout the embassy offices, which were in semi-darkness. The one person awake, maintaining periodic contact over the phone with the Operations Center in Washington, was me. I rejected every effort by people in Washington to wake up Ambassador Pickering or wake up somebody else to ask a question. My feeling was that tomorrow would be a long day, too. These people all needed some sleep. From time to time, I watched the Russian White House burn across the street, as the tower was reduced to a gutted ruin. As the hours passed, I maintained communications to Washington, which mostly meant telling people things they should already have known, answering obvious questions repeatedly.

The one thing of value I contributed—other than that somebody had to be on duty that night—was my concern about Corporal Bell. After it was clear he was out of danger, I tried to get somebody in Washington at a senior level to call his widowed mother. This proved difficult because these events in Moscow were simultaneous with the so-called

"Black Hawk Down" events in Mogadishu, when a number of U.S. Army Rangers were killed. Washington's immediate focus was not on Russia, it was on Somalia. The White House and the State Department and the Defense Department treated the crisis in Moscow as a second-tier issue that was overshadowed in American public interest by the fight in Mogadishu, the famous or infamous "Black Hawk Down" incident. The president, the vice president, the secretary of state and secretary of defense were making phone calls to the families of the troops who were killed or wounded in Mogadishu. I tried for, I forget how long, for several hours, to get somebody to call the mother of our casualty. Finally, Strobe Talbott as deputy secretary of state did, which I much appreciated. I was quite struck how the attention of senior figures in Washington was not on the crisis in Russia, which we naturally considered the most important event going on anywhere in the world, but on events which attracted more American domestic interest—and of course, American media attention—which was the fighting in Mogadishu. That place was nowhere near as important as Russia, but it involved American fatalities. So, we played second fiddle that night. It was a good lesson for me.

In the immediate aftermath of these events, most of the leaders of the opposition were arrested and taken to Lefortovo Prison. The Russian government began cleanup operations, including the rebuilding of the White House. The view in Washington was that Yeltsin had won and that's good. This was a view with which I strongly disagreed. I acknowledged that, once it came down to a real shootout between Yeltsin and the opposition, it was necessary that Yeltsin win. However, the Clinton Administration saw a victory by Boris Yeltsin as a victory for reform in Russia, that the economic shock therapy we had been advocating would now be carried out and everything would be wonderful. I believed the confrontation had been a disaster for reform in Russia and for Yeltsin's ability to maintain genuine political legitimacy. People in Russia had felt pride until then that there had been no political violence of the kind they saw in Tbilisi or in Tajikistan. Russia had not been like Romania, but now it was. Russians, regardless of which side they had been on or whether they were on a side at all, felt real shame and disappointment that their country had been reduced to kind of Third World status, with a shootout involving tanks and troops in the middle of the capital. I felt very strongly the episode represented a huge failure for Yeltsin's leadership and was a huge setback for the development rule of law in Russia.

In contrast, Washington was almost ebullient that Yeltsin's opponents were now in prison while people we liked were the winners; therefore the policies we favored would be carried out. I can tell you, my view that this victory was Pyrrhic was not welcome in Washington, nor really even within parts of the embassy. People visiting Moscow who heard this view from me were not pleased. They also did not like to hear that Yeltsin's image among his fellow countrymen, among Russians, had been irredeemably tarnished by his choice of overt confrontation. There was no question the underlying problems of Russian constitutional government needed resolution, but it was Yeltsin's choice in mid-September to violate the law, to use extraconstitutional means, which placed the burden of the crisis on him rather than on his opponents. Having chosen to abandon the slow process of political compromise, he bore the responsibility for what would come afterwards. That people in the opposition actually initiated the violence and the looting

did not, in my view, obviate the fact that Yeltsin set the stage for it.

In addition, during the crisis, Yeltsin's government had been pretty ineffectual in dealing with it. They just waited for the opposition to get tired and go home, to either give up or compromise. They were caught completely flatfooted on the Sunday and had no better response than battle tanks. That the confrontation could challenge the integrity of Yeltsin's government was not, I think, well understood in the Kremlin. The ineffectualness of Yeltsin's approach was demonstrated by the fact it took an initiative by the Patriarch to even begin a process of discussion which could have led to a peaceful resolution. Whether or not Patriarch Alexy could have succeeded in that we'll never know, but he alone had the prestige and popular legitimacy even to try; Yeltsin did not.

I tried to put my views into a major analysis, but never finished the message. The pace of ensuing political events in Moscow took up all my time and energy, but I also had some difficulty in bringing my thoughts into coherent written form. With more time, or perhaps with more determination, I could have produced a significant message, but I did not. My views were certainly not a secret, but there was no point in having those views if they were not made available to Washington in writing. That was my job, even if it made enemies. Not completing and sending that message was a personal and professional failure, which I still regret.

Another policy issue from that period which merits comment, even though I was not directly involved, was U.S. policy on the future of NATO and the expansion of the Alliance to included former Warsaw Pact countries. This obviously was a sensitive topic for Russia, as Moscow believed it had made a deal with the previous Bush Administration that Soviet acquiescence with German unification was linked with a Western commitment not to push NATO eastwards. Obviously, events in the region quickly went far beyond Germany and the context looked very different in late 1993. Nonetheless, this was a delicate topic in our relations with Russia. That fall, Washington proposed and NATO adopted a new program called Partnership for Peace. In Moscow, we presented this program to the government, meaning to Yeltsin, as the substitute for NATO expansion. Not surprisingly, he was very pleased and very appreciative toward President Clinton. However, on the very same day, the program was presented in eastern European capitals as their accelerated path to NATO membership.

I recall the next morning holding in one hand our outgoing report on what we had told the Russians and in my other hand a report from Embassy Warsaw on what we had told the Poles. The contrast was quite stark, as was our duplicity. The Poles and others publicly trumpeted their achievement of quick entry into NATO, so the Russians knew we had more or less lied to them. I never understood why we did this. It would have been much better to tell Yeltsin the truth and work with Moscow on how to manage the issue to improve ties between NATO and Russia. I think it was a characteristic of the Clinton Administration, especially in its relations with Russia, to believe it could have its cake and eat it too, that we could blatantly deceive the Russians about a matter of great importance to them without some loss of credence on their part in our word and in our intentions. Good diplomacy is not lying for your country, as is often said. Good

diplomacy is being known as true to your word. Our approach to Russia on issues like NATO expansion was, in my view, shortsighted and inconsistent with long-term American interests. Evidently, people in Washington did not perceive a problem which could not somehow be managed.

It was at this time that the embassy staff moved back into the old chancery building, which had been rebuilt after the fire of early 1991. It was a huge disappointment. Most of the place was pretty much what I remembered from the early 80s, with little more than cosmetic changes. In particular, the fire safety improvements were a disgrace, with the exit stairs still with broken steps and broken handrails from when the building was built under Stalin. The Political Section was on the top floor, so we had the furthest to go in case of a fire. I knew enough about the building – a fire trap for decades – to order all Political/Internal staff not to secure classified material in case of a fire alarm, just to get out as fast as they could. Someone reported this to someone, and the Admin counselor complained about it during a staff meeting. The result was that Ambassador Pickering applied that order to the entire embassy. More than two years were spent redoing that structure, and the result convinced me more than ever than we should have let the damn thing burn down when we had the chance. Today, we finally are in the new embassy, but the old building is still in use, at least till the next time it catches fire.

Well, back to the domestic political story. In the aftermath of the very dramatic events of early October, the Russian government scheduled national elections for mid-December to include a referendum on a new constitution, which would be written entirely by Yeltsin's people rather than reflecting a wide spectrum of viewpoints and political forces. What became known as the "Yeltsin Constitution" was an amalgam of Russian and Western models, but in its essence was patterned on the constitution of the Fifth French Republic written for De Gaulle. There would also be elections for the new parliament, both upper and lower chambers, to be created by the constitution. The lower chamber, the State Duma, was patterned on the German Bundestag, with half the seats elected in districts and half from national party lists. The elections presumed that the constitutional referendum would both pass and attain the 50 percent participation needed to be valid. So, Russians on one day were going to vote for two members of the upper chamber, two members of the lower chamber and the constitutional referendum. In some cases, there would be regional and local elections as well. This was going to be a very big election.

Washington assumed the election would be a great triumph for Yeltsin, reflecting his victory in early October, and would set the stage for a vast new wave of reforms favored by the United States. My job during November and early December was to try to convince Washington that such expectations were wrong. It became obvious to me rather early, both from anecdotal evidence and from polling data, that the party led by Gaidar, called "Russia's Choice" and essentially Yeltsin's party, was not going to have an easy walk to victory in the election. In part this reflected the popular revulsion against what had taken place in early October, but, even more so, it was due to public unhappiness with government economic policy. Simultaneous with the political confrontation, the finance minister, Boris Fyodorov, had instituted a very stringent program of macroeconomic stabilization, which had produced a severe tightening of the domestic

Russian economy. While the outside world focused on the very visible political events, most Russians were more keenly aware of the sharp deterioration of their economic situation, and particularly that the macroeconomic stabilization program was leading to massive loss of livelihood for urban blue-collar workers.

This economic tightening was instituted just as Russians thought things were starting to improve a bit. Russian families had endured a series of economic traumas in the late Gorbachev era, during the breakup of the Soviet Union, and afterwards. By mid-1993, people had a sense the worst was over and now things would slowly get better. Indeed, they had been promised by the Yeltsin government that things were going to get better. Then with the autumn of 1993 government policies threw many people back into economic crisis again. This was particularly true for urban blue-collar males. The level of frustration Russians felt with their government over economic policy was largely invisible to the outside world. In conversations with visitors from Washington, I was struck that they didn't even make a connection with the political process. They assumed Russians would vote in favor of Yeltsin's constitution and Yeltsin's party, because Yeltsin had won the political confrontation on the streets of Moscow—had won it with firepower but had won it. They completely missed the fact that what most Russians, not just in Moscow but across the length and breadth of this vast country, were concerned about were their livelihoods, and the fear they were going into yet another period of economic stringency. As the weeks went by, the more palpable was this sense of fear, real fear. This was something I had not seen in 1991 or 1992, but did in late 1993.

It is curious in retrospect that three of the most important messages I wrote in Moscow were in the month of November. In 1991 it had been my "Goetterdaemmerung" message to get Washington to understand that the Soviet Union and Gorbachev were toast. In 1992 it had been my cable on the underlying constitutional crisis to explain that Yeltsin was heading for a serious confrontation. Now, in 1993 it was time to try to shake up Washington again, to tell Washington what it needed to know rather than what it wanted to hear. This time, the message would be really unpalatable.

Near the end of the month, I wrote a telegram predicting the election, which was now slightly over two weeks away, was going to be a disaster for the government. First, I was concerned that the referendum on the constitution would not achieve a 50 percent level of participation, required under the law to be valid. It wasn't so much that people would vote against the constitution, rather that not enough people would cast a ballot, that they would abstain as a means of opposing the new constitution. Second, I thought it very likely that Gaidar's party, "Russia's Choice," would do very poorly in the voting for the new parliament and would not be in a dominant position in the new State Duma.

Ambassador Pickering faced a difficult choice. Obviously, such a firebrand message required approval by the ambassador; I would never have considered sending it out without his clearance. He was presented with a message that said, from the subject line to the final line, things Washington did not want to hear, and said so in fairly bleak terms. Pickering showed his mettle as an ambassador because, even though he did not agree with me—he thought I was overstating the case, he thought I was excessively

pessimistic—he sent out the telegram and only altered the subject line. He didn't change so much as a punctuation mark in the text. My subject line had been something like "Russian Election Countdown: A Grim Prognosis," and he changed it to "Russian Election Countdown: Watch for Surprises." He didn't alter any of the predictions in the telegram even though he didn't agree with me because he felt it was my job to analyze these things. I must say that most ambassadors, in my experience, wouldn't have had the integrity to send in a telegram that Washington would really hate on matters of such importance. Strauss, yes, but not many ambassadors from the career service.

Q: When you talk about Washington are you talking about …

MERRY: Pretty much everybody.

Q: Strobe Talbott, basically?

MERRY: I'm talking about the State Department, the Treasury and the White House, including Talbott who, by that point, was deputy secretary of state and very much the president's leading man on Russia. I am by no means pointing a finger at Talbott. He was always, I thought, an informed and attentive senior reader of our product. If we had an open-minded reader at a policy level in Washington, he was it. Such was not the case in the Treasury. The Treasury Department hated the telegram. I got a lot of negative feedback, to put it mildly. By this point, I think it's fair to say I had been identified in the minds of people dealing with Russia policy as the naysayer in Moscow.

Q: Where was the CIA in this?

MERRY: Hard to say. Keep in mind that we did not see what they sent to the White House. I think George Kolt at the National Intelligence Council—he was the National Intelligence Officer for Russia—shared some of my concerns but he didn't go as far as I did in anticipating popular blowback against Yeltsin.

As the elections, which took place on the 10th of December, approached, my view that the government was going to be decisively defeated increased. The information we had about probable voting intentions got worse rather than better, especially after national television appearances by all the leading political candidates. An irony was that the 1993 elections were, without question, the most legitimate, free and fair elections that have ever taken place in Russia, before or since. The government was so completely confident it would win that it engaged in very little cheating. This was the first full national post-Soviet election. Two years later the elections would not be as legitimate. There were some exceptions, especially in a few place with regional elections where local authorities cooked the books for their own purposes, but these were the most legitimate reflection of popular sentiment at the ballot box that Russia has ever had.

Election day was a Sunday in Russia. Of course, we had a full-court press for reporting. I was in the embassy as sort of "election center" to collate reports from our various observers and to keep Washington informed on a continuing basis. As it happened, Vice

President Gore, accompanied by Deputy Secretary Talbott and others, was in the region. They were in Central Asia on election day and would arrive in Moscow the following day. The idea was that the vice president and a big American delegation would arrive in Moscow just after election day to congratulate and celebrate the victory of Yeltsin, Gaidar and the pro-American forces. The vice president would bless this great democratic victory for the American program in Russia.

In the middle of the afternoon I got a phone call from Talbott's chief aide traveling with the vice president's party in Almaty. She had recently worked for me in Moscow and was calling to get my sense as to how things were going. I told her bluntly over an unclassified telephone line that the election would be a disaster, that Yeltsin's forces would be soundly defeated, and the big winners of the election were going to be the Russian Communist Party on the left and a right-wing neo-fascist character named Vladimir Zhirinovsky. Whatever reporting we had sent in—and our reporting in the days immediately before the election reflected even more grim evidence than had been available when I wrote my long telegram in late November—Washington just didn't buy it. I later learned the vice president's party were expecting Yeltsin's people to win. They expected a great victory at the polls in Russia, even though their own embassy had told them just the contrary for over two weeks.

As the election numbers came in during the course of the night, things turned out even worse than I had predicted. I had been optimistic, wouldn't you know? On the positive side, the first of my dire predictions was not borne out, in that the referendum on the new constitution did get over 50 percent participation and hence was valid. There was – and, indeed, still is – debate on that subject in Russia, whether some ballot boxes had been stuffed to push participation above the required level. My detailed analysis after the fact was that it did get over 50 percent but not by very much, certainly not by the official 54 percent. My concern that the referendum would fail because of inadequate participation proved wrong, but it was a near-run thing.

In contrast, the voting for the new State Duma, the main house of the new national legislature, turned out even worse than I had predicted, because Gaidar's party, "Russia's Choice," got only 15 percent of the vote, which for a ruling party in any democratic election is pretty bad. Due to the mixed party list/constituency system, "Russia's Choice" did somewhat better in parliamentary seats, but they still were badly outnumbered by opposition parties. The communists got slightly less, which was still impressive given that many of its leaders were in prison. The shocker was Zhirinovsky's party, the ill-named "Liberal Democratic Party," which got almost a quarter of the vote. I had predicted, in the days just before the election, that Zhirinovsky would get 17 to 18 percent, and some colleagues at the embassy told me I was hysterical, that it was impossible. In point of fact, he got between 23 and 24 percent of the vote. Zhirinovsky became almost overnight a worldwide celebrity—I think it's fair to say most people in the West had never even heard of Zhirinovsky before the election—but he became an instant symbol of what seemed the rise of fascism in post-Soviet Russia. In the Political/Internal Section, we knew Zhirinovsky quite well. Several people on my staff had even been to his home and had reported on him in some depth. We knew the guy.

With analysis after the fact, it became clear to me what had happened. Zhirinovsky had inspired the urban blue-collar male labor force to turn out overwhelmingly for him. He had used television very effectively; in the televised political debates before the election, he had performed well. He did not behave like a clown, which he sometimes could do. He talked directly into the camera and he addressed real peoples' real concerns, whereas most of the television appearances by candidates from across the political spectrum were just boring. They talked down to the people, which Zhirinovsky did not do.

Q: It was the old Soviet style, I assume, of using television to propagandize? Was that the…

MERRY: Just about everybody except Zhirinovsky was tedious on television. Zhirinovsky looked right into the camera, looked right at the people watching, and talked about tangible issues, about jobs, about prices, about availability of goods, about security of employment. He spoke directly to the concerns of those people who had been most damaged by the macroeconomic stabilization policy the government had been implementing for the preceding months. His high showing on election day reflected two factors: first, Zhirinovsky got two-thirds of the votes of the urban male blue-collar labor force, which is to say, in Marxist terms, the proletariat, but, second, they turned out to vote in unusually high numbers. The participation rate of his political demographic was higher than any other, by almost a dozen percentage points. As a result, he got almost a quarter of the vote in this one election. Two years later, his vote total fell in half, and in the election after that it had fallen in half again, back to what was basically its norm before 1993, which was six to eight percent. However, a key point is that the proletariat did not vote red, it voted brown, as has happened in France and some other places.

Therefore, the political forces Washington expected to roll easily to overwhelming victory got about one vote in six while a brownish demagogue got about one vote in four. Combined with the votes given to other parties, the anti-government tally was about three to one. If this didn't demonstrate a rejection of the government in power and of the policies it represented, I can't imagine what would.

We had an interesting situation. The vice president was showing up on Monday, the next day. What was he going to say? Our expectations—or Washington's expectations—had been somewhat shattered. I must say, I did personally feel a bit of schadenfreude (pleasure derived from the misfortune of others) because there would have been no surprise if Washington had paid attention to what we, and particularly I, had been saying. The major telegrams conveying bad news had been written by me, in part because I believed so strongly in the analysis and in part because this was how I interpreted the job, to be the bearer of bad tidings. Most of my experienced team in Political/Internal had rotated the previous summer, so my role as the most seasoned person increased my responsibility to take on the dirty work. It was an excellent group of new officers, but they understandably were still adjusting to the turmoil of Russian political events.

Q: For the vocabulary impaired, I might mention schadenfreude is a German word for

joy in the shadow. In other words, if things are bad, at least I'm looking good.

MERRY: Well, I understood during those last weeks before the election—and this came up in conversations a number of times—that if I was proven wrong, my credibility as a political analyst would be gone and nobody would ever let me hear the end of it. If I proved right—which I did—nobody would ever forgive me for that. Washington never forgives the bearer of bad news who is proven right. Never.

Q: Oh, absolutely. Also, for anybody reading this transcript at a later date, then all of us, when there were elections, particularly if there's an unpredictability about them, political officers get a special place in heaven for their own satisfaction if they get it right. But as Wayne is saying the system itself just does not appreciate being proved wrong.

MERRY: In this case, we had an interesting situation, in that the U.S. Government was going to have to make up its mind what to say real quick because the vice president was arriving and a big reception was scheduled at the ambassador's residence, to which we had invited hundreds of Russian political figures and journalists. The plan was for it to be a victory celebration. Now it wasn't going to be.

After the vice president, Talbott and the rest of the delegation arrived, there were some fairly hurried and intense consultations in which I played no role whatsoever. Nobody from Washington wanted to talk to me. Nobody in this delegation wanted to consult the person who had been telling them for a month that this was going to happen. Nobody was interested in learning why Zhirinovsky had done so well and Gaidar so poorly. There were some high-level telephone conversations over the secure phone with the White House, and they had a choice. The United States could take the position that "the voice of the people is the voice of God," that the Russian people had spoken, and the elections represented legitimate popular choice and democracy. However, that was not the decision the U.S. Government made. The decision was to say publicly that perhaps our policy of "shock therapy" had involved too much shock and not enough therapy. The solution was to modify the program slightly and proceed with it. We communicated to the Russian leadership, to Yeltsin, Gaidar and company, that we felt they should stay with the program and since, obviously, this program could not be conducted in conjunction with the newly elected parliament, that it should be pursued outside the brand-new constitution, in defiance of popular will expressed at the polls.

The Yeltsin constitution was something of a patchwork, and not all the pieces fit together very smoothly. The structure was patterned on the French Fifth Republic constitution of De Gaulle. But it had a lower-house electoral system based on the German Federal Republic and it had a few imports from the American system, while drawing a good deal on Russian traditions as well. It allowed the presidency and the government a great deal of leeway in many areas of policy. But in economic policy, the government shouldn't have been able to conduct policies without the agreement and the participation of the legislature. The new State Duma clearly had been elected by the people to change economic policy. However, the word Washington gave to the people we supported in Moscow, who had just been very decisively rejected by the Russian people in the most

legitimate expression of popular will at the ballot box that Russia's ever had or is likely to have for a long time, was basically to ignore the will of the people and to give the people what we felt they should have rather than what they had publicly and openly said they wanted.

Q: I take it the establishment in Washington felt almost that we owned the Russian system, that we were in charge in a way.

MERRY: Well, to an extent your question leads me toward the next major event in my story. I am accelerating a bit, but in the aftermath of the December elections and the establishment of the new constitutional structure and the new parliament, which was completely dominated by people antithetical to what the United States had been advocating in economic policy, there developed in Russia essentially parallel governments. There was the legislature that had just been elected and there were the structures of the presidency and the executive conducting policies of dubious legitimacy within the new constitutional system. There was something similar to what in France is called "cohabitation." In the French system, there was a period in which Francois Mitterrand was president and the opposition was in control of the legislature.

Q: Jacques Chirac, I think, did that. His crew.

MERRY: Yes. In a very real sense, what Russia had was cohabitation with one side of the political spectrum controlling the executive and very different forces controlling the legislature. There were two important distinctions. In the French case, the prime minister is answerable to the parliament while in Russia the government answers directly to the president, and in Russia this situation came into being from the very initiation of the constitutional system. Yeltsin's constitution, which was referred to fairly openly as the "Yeltsin Constitution," since it had been written for him and was pushed to a national referendum by him, was now violated by Yeltsin himself and his people in rejection of the obvious will of the Russian people as expressed in national elections.

There was some debate, within the Kremlin, whether Yeltsin should try again, should abrogate this legislature as he had done in September. That would have been particularly egregious because this legislature had just been elected and elected very legitimately, and because he would have abrogated a body created by his own will in the new constitution. The very fact they were even considering this alternative demonstrates how unhappy the Kremlin was with the verdict the Russian people had delivered as a judgment on its policies. The new State Duma showed its attitude toward the Kremlin early in 1994 by releasing from prison via amnesty all of those involved both in the 1993 confrontation and the coup plotters from 1991. Thus was set the stage for a period of competing parallel national authorities, but this time Yeltsin did not enjoy any advantage of electoral legitimacy. His strongest card, as was the case with Gorbachev toward the end of the Soviet Union, was support from the West and especially from Washington.

My own feeling, a strong feeling, was that the real villain of this story was the so-called "Washington consensus," the ideology of macroeconomic stabilization which the United

States had favored, and which the finance minister, Boris Fyodorov, had instituted with such vigor in the early autumn. The Russian people were not rejecting democracy. Not at all. They were not rejecting a Western-oriented Russia or engagement with the outside world. What they were rejecting was a policy of economic stringency. Within the embassy we had intense, shall we say, discussions on the validity of these policies. One of my colleagues later said on an episode of "Frontline," the Public Television program, that there had been a "war" within the embassy between the Political and Economics Sections, between people who knew Russia and people who were advocates of the "Washington consensus." The new USAID mission actually discouraged the hiring of people with on-the-ground Russian experience as somehow tainted – with realism, in my view. I thought Fyodorov's policies were not appropriate for Russia, could not work successfully and were a mistake. However, even if they were valid, it was lunacy to carry out a stringent macroeconomic tightening in the run-up to a general election. In any rational democratic system, if you've got to engage in severe belt-tightening, you do it after the election. You don't do it before the election.

I think this period demonstrated the incredible arrogance of Russian elites, that they believed they could crush the living standards of blue-collar workers all over the country, but those workers would turn around and vote for the elites if given a legitimate election. The arrogance of this, to flog the workers and then expect the workers to kiss their hand in gratitude, demonstrated that many of the pro-market, pro-Western elites of Russia in the Yeltsin years were just as arrogant and just as contemptuous of the Russian people as were the Soviet elites before them and the Russian aristocratic elites before them. One very senior figure on Yeltsin's team privately referred to the Russian people as "the manure of history." It's one of the depressing recurrent characteristics of Russian political culture, that people in the ruling classes, whether Romanovs or Soviets or post-Soviets and whether Gorbachev, Yeltsin or Putin, display an arrogance toward the Russian people that just beggars belief. It's a medieval attitude and it tells you something about the integrity of a society in which elites are so detached from everyday life in their own country and where the people, the "narod," are so alienated from their rulers. It's one of the great shortcomings of Russian society.

The arrogance on their side was matched, in my view, by comparable arrogance on ours. This was reflected in the really shameless conflicts of interest of some of the Americans involved. One case eventually went to court in the United States, that of the link among several people in the Harvard Institute for International Development (HIID), USAID and various Russian counterparts. Of course, nobody went to jail, but at least there was some public embarrassment for Harvard, but not a jot in comparison with what was deserved. The "old boy" links between Russian and American elitists who treated the Russian people as little better than fuel for their theories and even their self-aggrandizement is well remembered in Russia today. Putin recently made a public comment about the HIID scandal, in which he simply took it for granted that these people had been part of a CIA plot to impoverish Russia. Sadly, understanding of the American-sourced scandals in Russia of this period is almost zero in our country. The one exception is a landmark book by Janine Wedel called Collision and Collusion which deservedly won a major journalism prize.

The conflict within the embassy, what one of my colleagues later characterized as a "war," reflected a change in the top levels of the Economics Section in mid-1993. During the previous two years, there had been good working relations between Political/Internal and Econ. We did not always agree, but every discussion was professional and collegial. I liked Ken Yalowitz, the counselor, very much and always felt an ease in working with him. Things changed that summer when he departed. As disagreements over matters of policy increased, the level of professional courtesy and mutual respect declined very sharply. I cannot deny some culpability in this regard, as I am not the least opinionated person and, after two years of intense work in Moscow plus my previous experience in Russia, I felt I knew something about the place. The Economics Section, however, now was run on "Washington consensus" lines, with priority given to doctrine, while lack of prior experience in the country was viewed as an actual asset rather than as a liability. Relationships within the embassy deteriorated and never recovered. I can only say in my own defense that, so I have been told, things became even worse later, after my departure, so I was not entirely the cause of the problems.

By this time I had attained some notoriety within the halls of Washington. This is not to say I was in any way a famous person, but only that people who dealt with Russia policy at the NSC, State, Treasury, the Pentagon knew there was a political analyst out in Moscow who was not "with the program." That was absolutely true. I was not alone. Much of the Political Section felt the policy of macro-economic stabilization was not going to work in Russia. There was a good deal of tension with some, but not all, people in the Economics Section, as well as the Treasury attaché's office, whose whole function in Moscow was to carry out the "Washington consensus" in Russia. A bitter irony in my eyes was that the Russian people had rejected the Soviet Union in large measure as a revolt against ideologically-driven social and economic policies. The United States responded with a new ideologically-driven set of policies of our own. In the final days of the Soviet Union one of the most common slogans in demonstrations was, "No more experiments!" So, what did they get from us? They got a policy which viewed Russia as a vast economic and social laboratory and the Russian people as little better than laboratory rats. If you think I exaggerate, you do not know the champions of the "Washington consensus." Whatever attitudes the neoconservatives later took to Iraq was matched in full by the neoliberals in Russia.

For me, there was never a question of being pro-Russian or anti-Russian, but of being realistic about what Russian society and Russian political culture could sustain in the early years of the post-Soviet era. I considered myself to be strongly anti-Soviet, but not anti-Russian – a distinction not always shared within our government. To me, the question was how to serve American interests by forging a working, cooperative relationship with the new Russian Republic. I had no fantasies of alliance or even of partnership, but only of generally cooperative relations developed slowly. To me, the worst approach was to seek to turn Russia into an economic dependency. The Russians remained intensely proud and deeply insular. Other than a few intellectuals, they would not accept tutelage from the United States, while they profoundly resented what they perceived as American condescension and arrogance. Their perception was, sadly, often

justified.

The institutional focus for U.S. Policy was the so-called Gore-Chernomyrdin Commission, established by the Clinton White House in cooperation with the Kremlin to expedite bilateral initiatives. The idea was to engage the American vice president and Russian prime minister to cut through bureaucratic delays and opposition. I welcomed this approach and hoped it would really speed things up. Unfortunately, in the way of bureaucracy the world over, the Commission became a bureaucratic mechanism all its own. In some areas of cooperation where things were proceeding well, the Commission may actually have slowed things down. In other areas, the Commission was more a vehicle for periodic signing ceremonies and formulaic assertions of progress where little was actually occurring. The Commission came to resemble a Soviet planning mechanism, with its stress on meeting regular production targets, regardless of the quality or substance of the targets; it existed more to justify itself than anything else. This was sad, because the Commission might have been a real turning point in bilateral cooperation, if it had been tempered by an understanding of Russian realities. On the American side, people associated with the Commission did not want to hear bad news or questions about the program.

Within the Economics Section itself, there were a number of younger officers who had good Russian language skills and traveled extensively, and who became skeptical about how things were going. I know because their draft reports would come to me first for a political clearance before approval within the Economics Section. I cleared on almost twenty draft messages reporting bad news that never left the embassy. These reporting officers were reporting grim truths, or at least trying to, and their messages never got out. Some of them came to me, often rather anguished and in one case in tears, because they couldn't get their messages approved. The Economics Section was no longer in the business of telling Washington the truth about our programs in Russia.

The disputes over policy became confrontational by the spring. At this point, I was approaching the end of my Moscow assignment with the knowledge that I didn't have much in the way of onward prospects. Too many bridges had been burned as the bearer of bad tidings. So, I decided, yet again, to write a long telegram, and this really was a long telegram – as I recall it was 75 paragraphs. It argued basically three things. First, macroeconomic stabilization and the whole "Washington consensus" program wasn't working in Russia and could not work. The legacy of seven decades of the Soviet Union had created conditions in which these policies were inappropriate and premature; it would take years or decades for Russia to transform before these economic mechanisms could work. Second, by trying to impose on Russia an American economic model—trying to force the Russian round peg into an American square hole—we were creating enormous antipathy toward the United States, both among Russian elites and also among the broad mass of the Russian people. The failures of these policies were attributed by Russians to their American authors; increasingly Russians blamed their daily pain of unemployment or inadequate wages on the United States. Third, rather than fostering a useful potential partner in an American-led global system, we were doing exactly the opposite. A humiliated Russia would become an adversary rather than a partner. Thus, our policies

were compounding the legacy of the Soviet era and poisoning the environment in Russia toward the United States.

Finally, I argued Russian reform was fundamentally none of our business. Ultimately, Russia was going to have to find its own way to a post-Soviet identity and ways of doing things. The Russian historical legacy was an enormous burden, particularly from the Soviet era but even from before it. The Russian collective national experience was so completely different from our own that Americans had really very little that was applicable or appropriate by way of models or lessons. American policy would be much more self-serving if we would keep our hands off of Russian internal affairs and let the Russians figure things out as best they could. This would take a long time. To involve the United States directly in Russian affairs and to sponsor political allies and economic policies, as we were very much doing, would generate hostility toward our country which would last much longer than the policies. In most of these arguments I was, of course, following in the footsteps of George Kennan, so I can hardly claim originality.

This telegram was very long, perhaps too long, but it certainly was from the heart. My title was pretty blunt: "Whose Russia is It, Anyway? Toward a Policy of Benign Neglect." The title had two literary references. One was to a stage play I had seen in London called Whose Life is It, Anyway?, about the right to die. The other was to Daniel Patrick Moynihan's famous policy proposal advocating benign neglect toward African American society in the United States, arguing government policies made things worse rather than better. What I intended the title to communicate was that Russia is beyond American capacity to transform and we serve our own interests better by keeping our hands off. Although I could not know it at the time, I was making essentially the same argument against the neoliberal agenda in Russia as I would later against the neoconservative agenda in Iraq. I see strong parallels, especially in terms of the pernicious combination of institutional ignorance and arrogance in both instances.

This message was going to be a very hard sell in Washington, and I never expected it to receive embassy clearance. Ambassador Pickering chaired a small meeting about the draft, in which he again showed his consummate professionalism by saying he was willing to send the message out front channel, but clearly labeled as an expression of my personal views. I thought that was very generous of him, since the message said the entirety of American policy towards Russia was wrong. He was prepared to let that message go to Washington so long as it was clearly labeled as just one person's viewpoint, which was fine by me. That provoked very strong opposition from the economics counselor and from the Treasury attaché, who said that if the message went in it would give Larry Summers a heart attack.

Q: He was secretary of the treasury at the time.

MERRY: Actually, he was undersecretary at the time but he was the leading American architect of the macroeconomic stabilization program in Russia. In any case, I felt that, while Ambassador Pickering was very generous in offering to send the message in front channel, given how controversial the text was and how completely outside the frame of

U.S. policy, it would be more appropriate to take upon myself to send it in via what's called Dissent Channel. The disadvantage of using the Dissent Channel is that the distribution of messages is very narrow. It's only within the State Department. If the message had gone in as Ambassador Pickering offered, it would have been distributed broadly throughout the U.S. government. As Dissent Channel, it went to only a handful of people and only within the Department of State, though I learned later it was leaked around town. A friend in CIA said it was widely read there. So, Xerox machines in Washington did manage to get the thing around.

The message went in Dissent Channel, thought it was quite long even by the standards of Dissent Channel. The procedure is that somebody on the Policy Planning Staff has to write a response to a Dissent Channel message. As it turned out, the response was written by Thomas Graham, my successor in Moscow a few months later. He kept the response polite. More interestingly, the new deputy chief of mission, Richard Miles, showed me a classified letter he received from Deputy Secretary Strobe Talbott which was a thoughtful reflection on the message, which he obviously had read with some care. It was a serious, respectful but unpersuaded response, but at least it reflected that Talbott had treated my dissent with intellectual respect. That's about as much as you can expect. Beyond that, the exercise didn't accomplish very much. Of course, the use of Dissent Channel in the Foreign Service is kind of notorious as career suicide, but by this point, I was long past worrying. I at least got my despair with American policy off my chest in this message. It was about this time that I began to think of my role as comparable to that of the Holy Fool in Boris Godunov, who is allowed to speak truth to power, but without any impact.

Some years later, after my retirement, I tried to get a copy of my Dissent Channel message under Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) and was refused. An appeal was also refused, with a rationale which shows the hypocrisy of the State Department on the whole subject of dissent. The appeals board said, in writing, that to furnish a Dissent message even to the person who had written it years earlier might discourage other people from making use of Dissent Channel in future! Obviously, the exact opposite is the case, because if FSOs knew they would be able to declassify their Dissents at some point, they would be more likely to write them. This exchange confirms the widespread skepticism within the Service about Department policy both on dissent and on responding to FOIA requests. Indeed, I have heard from good sources that use of Dissent Channel has more or less disappeared during recent administrations. Hardly surprising, when the policy is to punish the messenger and bury the message.

The spring of 1994 continued to be a full and demanding period for political reporting. There was a lot of work, other than pursuing my personal Quixotic crusade. Political/Internal remained a top-flight group of reporting officers, though it lacked some of the "band of brothers" quality of previous years. One very positive experience for me was having a Fascell Fellow in Political/Internal. This is a terrific program, and I can only regret it was not created much earlier. We were back in the old embassy building by now, on the top floor of one of the worst conceived chanceries ever. We should have let that building burn down when we had the chance.

These months of 1994 are something of the tail end of these three years in Moscow. To be a close eyewitness to so much historical change was exciting but exhausting. By the late spring, I was pretty burned out—physically, psychologically—even though this was still a superlatively high-quality post in which to work: Ambassador Pickering, his deputy, Richard Miles, my own staff in Political/Internal. For a few months I worked for Bill Burns, the new minister counselor for the Political Section, who was delightful. I had nothing but the most professional and personal treatment by Ambassador Pickering and Ambassador Miles. In retrospect, I realize how unique were the conditions I enjoyed as head of Political/Internal during those three years. Obviously, it was the most important and interesting time to hold the job. In addition, I worked for two ambassadors who were both entirely supportive but not themselves Russia hands. I suspect that an ambassador who had a background in Soviet and Russian affairs would have taken a more direct role in the analysis the post sent to Washington on domestic political developments. That would have been entirely appropriate, as an ambassador who really knows the country should be the top embassy analyst. In my case, Strauss and Pickering came to Moscow without Russian experience, so tended to let their subordinates take the lead on interpreting what was happening. This gave me a special freedom which I suspect few FSOs in such a critical place and time have ever enjoyed, but it also entailed special responsibilities as I saw them. I suspect that ambassadors of lesser stature – less confident of themselves – would not have been so supportive or tolerant.

However, the disputes over policy within post had deteriorated to the point of being unprofessional. I include myself in that regard. They had become personalized and antagonistic. The atmosphere had become fairly poisonous, to which I was clearly a contributor. One of my predecessors as head of Pol/Int had warned me before I got to Moscow not to serve a fourth year in the job, that the burnout factor would be too much. He was right. It was clear that it was about time to go. The question: go where? At this point, I was largely persona non grata in the Department of State. I did get a Superior Honor Award out of all this. Not that it ever makes much difference.

In terms of an onward assignment, pickings were a little thin. One possibility was Lahore, in Pakistan, as principal officer. I was fascinated by the idea of the Punjab as a completely new intellectual and personal experience. I think it would have been a good change of pace for me. As it happens, they assigned another officer who was better-qualified. Another option was Algiers as the deputy chief of mission, which obviously was about as far from dealing with Russian policy as I could get. I almost did that, but declined because both my parents were very elderly. I had had three assignments abroad and very little leave time at home. I felt an obligation to return to the United States for family reasons. Otherwise, I would have been just as happy to stay abroad.

A third option was really out of the blue, and that was to go to Nagorno-Karabakh, the disputed territory over which the newly independent Armenia and Azerbaijan had fought a bitter and bloody war during previous years. An OSCE-sponsored mediation effort was underway, with the U.S. one of the leaders, seeking a peace agreement. In April I was in Prague on vacation, for the music festival and to see the Czech capital really in its glory, when I received a phone call from the Department wanting me to deploy within weeks to

Karabakh as the senior American in a multi-national peacekeeping mission. I was astonished, as I had no notion the negotiations were that close to an agreement, but the offer was intriguing. The concept was for a peacekeeping force commanded by a Finnish two-star general with a Russian one-star deputy and an American political deputy. I told them I was interested, but could not commit to anything without clearing it with Ambassador Pickering as it would leave a short-term gap in his staffing. As it happens, expectations of a deal on Karabakh were premature. There was no peace agreement nor peacekeeping mission nor job for me. It would have been arduous, that is for sure, but also interesting.

Then came another offer, from the Pentagon. The Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) had military personnel, particularly Army officers, who spoke Russian and had Russian experience, but was weak in civilians with a comparable background. There were lots of people who dealt with Russia on a variety of issues—arms control, nuclear cooperation and so forth—but OSD did not have a civilian who was, you could say, a Russia hand. Military officers, yes; civilians, no. Secretary William Perry gave very high priority to improving defense and military contacts between the United States and the Russian Federation, and with other countries of the former Soviet Union. The senior uniformed Russia hand was General John Reppert, with whom I had served twice in Moscow when he had been an Army attaché. Evidently, John fingered me. I don't know to what extent Reppert understood that I needed a job, but the offer was made to me, to go back to Washington, not to the State Department but to the Pentagon.

Q: OK, well, I'm just looking at the time, Wayne, and this would be a good place to stop.

MERRY: Let me spend two minutes on this and then we'll wrap it up.

Q: OK, well.

MERRY: I thought about this. I understood perfectly well that if I went outside of the Department that was also career non-enhancing, because I had done that before. My only real reservation was this would be my third assignment with the Department of Defense. I had served at Marine Corps Headquarters and at the Army Russian Institute. This would be three detached assignments to the Department of Defense. I'm not sure that's a record in the Foreign Service, but it's certainly a lot.

The offer was a generous one, and would give me a new start in a part of the U.S. Government that was trying to do positive things with Russia. The fact they wanted me when, in my own department not many people did, seemed rather gracious. I accepted the offer, and then the State Department fought it for petty and bureaucratic reasons of turf. The State Department didn't want me, but objected to a Pentagon initiative, that the Office of the Secretary of Defense had undertaken a job search and identified the State person they wanted by themselves. Eventually, it was resolved, but after a ridiculous waste of effort which went all the way to the deputy secretaries.

I left Moscow in midsummer, with some sense of relief but also with a good deal of

regret, as the place meant a lot to me. I had not only intellectual and professional involvement with Russia but also a lot of emotional attachment. The two places I have served which engaged my emotions in the long term were East Germany and Russia; in both cases, the political system was adversarial, but the societies and the people were warm and engaging. I have retained a sentimental attachment to both places entirely separate from my political views; perhaps in part because both societies have been so wounded over the past century. I tried to distill some of what I had learned about Russia into a final message, my last telegram from Moscow of hundreds. This was a very personal statement, and was labeled up front as my views rather than the embassy's. It was an individual view sent in by courtesy of the Ambassador. Allowing individual expression of views was something of a tradition at Embassy Moscow, though I doubt anyone took advantage of it as often as I did. Still, I think it is a very fine tradition which should become the norm within the Foreign Service. The Department of State would be well served, if routinely annoyed, by that kind of message coming in from many posts.

My conclusions after these event-filled years in Russia were that we, the U.S. government, gave far too much attention to high-level political events, to the political facade of the post-Soviet transformation of Russia. Obviously, a government and an embassy must devote considerable time and attention to the kind of political issues which had dominated my work for the previous three years, but I argued we were losing sight of the broader and more important changes in Russian society from which future political developments would emerge. I identified two topics in need of greater U.S. attention. First and most important was the condition of the Russian nation – the people, not the state – and the demographic and health crises left behind by the Soviet era as manifested in social problems like alcoholism. Second, I recommended we watch the Russian Orthodox Church as a bellwether for where Russian society was going, for good and for ill. I said the church contained reactionary and nationalist forces as well as progressive and outward-looking forces. Which way the church would go could tell us a lot about where Russia as a society and political culture would go, because the church is the deepest-rooted and longest-lasting institution of the Russian nation. While governments and parties and even ideologies come and go, the Orthodox identity of Russians is permanent, even for those without religious belief. I kept this message fairly short and non-controversial, but I felt good about finishing my tour with something of this kind. A Russia specialist at DIA later told me he had a copy of it framed on the wall of his office.

Q: OK, so we'll pick this up. This is 1994?

MERRY: 1994.

Q: And you're off to the Pentagon. And we'll talk about that.

Q: Well, today is the 25th of June 2010, the 60th anniversary of the North Korean invasion of South Korea. This rings well with me because I got caught in the Korean War. We are with Wayne Merry. Wayne, where did we leave off?

MERRY: It is the summer of 1994 when I left Moscow. I did not yet have an onward

assignment, though my position in the Office of the Secretary of Defense was going to happen. This proved to be a protracted dispute across the Potomac, as to who was going to get my warm body. It lasted from late spring 1994 till early 1995. Absurd. The Pentagon was persistent, but I was somewhat in limbo when departing Moscow. So, after taking some leave, I was assigned to New York, to the United Nations Mission, as one of the so-called Senior Advisors. These are experienced extra bodies who are sent to USUN during the General Assembly in the fall to help out. When I was in the mission myself in the mid-80's, there had been Senior Advisors, though my committee did not use them as I had extra people from ACDA and the Geneva arms control staff. This was a filler assignment for me, from September through December. I returned to a familiar environment, but found things had changed.

The role of the General Assembly had declined dramatically in the decade I had been away from the United Nations. Now the Security Council, which previously had met on an intermittent basis as need required, was more or less permanently in session. If a country was not on the Security Council, it was pretty much shut out of the most important issues, because little of substance was done in the General Assembly. I thought that was unfortunate, because it left the great majority of members states feeling they were hangers on and observers rather than active participants. I think diminishing a primary role for the General Assembly has been a mistake for the United Nations. What the UN really needs is not so much Security Council reform, which is talked about a lot, but General Assembly reform, to make the General Assembly a viable and functional body. Not an easy job, by any means, but where the UN really needs to change.

The other thing that had changed was the U.S. Mission, which had been a vibrant, active and high-morale place when I served there in the mid-‘80s, but now was a quite low-morale post with internal factions and backbiting and a generally unpleasant atmosphere. I couldn’t help but contrast the mission I’d worked in under Jeane Kirkpatrick with this mission under Madeleine Albright, just in terms of the spirit and the energy of the staff, which were considerably changed for the worse. I can’t say my duties were particularly onerous. Most of what I did was interact with delegations from the former Soviet states, who were still comparative newcomers in the UN. They had been there for a couple of years, so they were not novices, but still the world stage was new for them. Not surprisingly, most of these delegations were very friendly toward the United States. In regional terms, this was one of our most supportive groups of countries. There really wasn’t much of a challenge for me. Candidly, this posting was kind of an expenses-paid autumn semi-vacation in New York City, which I was quite happy to partake of.

Q: Were there any issues during that time that you got particularly involved in?

MERRY: The Cold War rivalries which had so defined the UN before were mostly gone. There were no real East-West problems. Important topics like the Middle East were handled in the Security Council, and that work was jealously held by a small number of people at the U.S. Mission.

I did one special job, which was to arrange a bilateral meeting of the presidents of

Armenia and Azerbaijan to discuss their dispute over Nagorno-Karabakh. For some reason which I do not remember, this was a purely American initiative, which I did all on my own. No one from Washington took part. No other delegation was involved in any way. The meeting took place in Albright's residence in the Waldorf Towers. The Armenian delegation was staying in the Waldorf Hotel, so for them it was merely a matter of changing elevators. The Azerbaijani delegation got stuck in Manhattan traffic, so I finally went out on the street and found them. I introduced myself to President Heydar Aliyev and explained we could save a lot of time by proceeding on foot. He was amenable, though his security team looked very dubious when I escorted the delegation through the Waldorf basement to the VIP elevator. Aliyev was quite cool about the whole thing. The two delegations met for over an hour in the dining room, followed by an intense one-on-one encounter of Aliyev and Armenian President Levon Ter-Petrosyan. I was out in the living room with the two staffs, but we could see the presidents conducting an obviously very friendly conversation in the dining room. What I recall vividly is that both staffs were anxious – very anxious – that their respective bosses might actually be coming to a peace agreement. It was easy to see that Aliyev and Ter-Petrosyan understood each other very well, but the peace they were discussing has still not come about.

While I was in New York, the Yeltsin government launched the tragic military intervention in Chechnya. I confess, I did not see that coming. I had followed the problems in Chechnya from late 1991, when I wrote a message after a botched military intervention which I described as Yeltsin's Bay of Pigs. In the intervening years, there was no doubt the situation there and in the northern Caucasus in general had deteriorated badly. Little of this was reported in the Western media, but violence and lawlessness were quite bad and clearly demanded a more coherent government response. Unfortunately, Yeltsin authorized the large-scale use of military force in Chechnya, which made no distinction between civilians and combatants, nor even between Chechens and ethnic Russians who were a large component of the population at that time. I had been away from Russia since mid-summer, and out of touch, but still I feel my judgment simply failed in this instance, in that I did not think Yeltsin would screw up as badly as he did.

Speaking of Yeltsin, he came on an official visit to the United States that fall with an initial stop in New York to address the General Assembly. His official welcome to the USA would be at Andrews Air Force Base outside Washington. Technically, his arrival in New York was the business of the United Nations. However, it was simply out of the question that the Russian president should arrive on American soil without some kind of U.S. official on hand. I tried to get Washington to send somebody senior to New York, but no dice. I then tried to get one of the higher ups at USUN to take it on, but also no luck. At that point, it appeared I would be the sole U.S. Government person on hand at Kennedy Airport to welcome Boris Yeltsin. I thought this was preposterous. Thank the Good Lord, Ambassador Pickering came. He had other business in New York, but understood the need for his presence at the airport. The two of us went to a back corner of JFK airport in the middle of nowhere, with a UN protocol officer and a raft of Russian Government officials, to receive Yeltsin. The circumstances were pretty shabby, in my

view. This was no way to treat a visiting head of state, still less one from a major power. The Russian VIPs already on the ground thought so too. However, we did the welcome, and Yeltsin saw a scrum of American journalists behind a police barrier. He made a bee-line for the press, while his staff looked around for an interpreter. For some reason, they had no interpreter on hand, so the Russians looked at me. For a few minutes, without any formal training, I served as a presidential interpreter. Thankfully, the questions and answers were pretty simple and it was over in a few minutes. The episode showed me how little attention our government gives to matters of protocol, except when a top U.S. official like our president is on hand. If it is a matter of proper hospitality to a visiting foreign VIP, we can be pretty shabby.

Q: So then after this interlude, where?

MERRY: After this interlude, I went to New Zealand for a month of glorious hiking in one of the most beautiful environments you could imagine on earth. It's such a long trip that, if you're going to go, you should go for a month, but I did, and I enjoyed it enormously. I returned to Washington, where the dispute over whether or not I would be given to the secretary of defense at his request had still not been settled. The Pentagon did not give up and escalated the issue to the top. The problem was that the request for me had originated with OSD, rather than them waiting for State to offer them someone of State's choosing. As my name was pretty much "mud" at State, it refused the Pentagon request, even though the personnel system at State had nothing else on offer for me – nothing, zilch. State rejected the Pentagon request first at the deputy assistant secretary level, then at the assistant secretary level, then at the undersecretary level, and then at the deputy secretary level. OSD then put the question on the agenda for the weekly luncheon meeting of Secretary of Defense, Secretary of State and National Security Advisor, at which point the State Department conceded. I was told nobody wanted to explain to Warren Christopher why this was an issue in the first place. Can you imagine anything so silly? To take the assignment of one FSO to the cabinet level for resolution. You would have thought State would welcome the opportunity to place one of its people in an influential spot in the Defense Department, into a newly-created position dealing with important issues. No, it had not been State's idea, so they fought it. For me, this petty squabble illustrates that there often is plenty of fault at State in inter-agency battles. I would like to hope State is on the side of the angels in Washington dust ups, but I know from experience such is not always the case.

Finally, nearly a year after the position was first offered to me, I went across the river to the Department of Defense to work in the Office of the Secretary of Defense, in what was a fairly new office dealing with the countries of the former Soviet Union. I was Regional Director for Russia, Ukraine and Eurasia, which was all the former Soviet countries other than the Baltic states. The office was headed by a political appointee as Deputy Assistant Secretary, Liz Sherwood, who was very good to work for. She was fairly young for the job and sometimes startled me with things she did not know. For example, she did not know what Lend-Lease was. However, she was a fast learner and had none of the typical hang-ups of people from academia about working with the military. She had excellent uniformed officers on her staff, and recognized their qualities.

The office had been created, and I was asked to work there, because Secretary of Defense Perry had noted that the only part of the world where the Department of Defense had no office that conducted defense and military contacts—the diplomacy of the armed services and of the Pentagon—were the former Soviet states. As Perry later said to a number of delegations from those countries, the Pentagon had previously regarded them only as target points. He wanted to change that, he wanted to engage them as normal countries with militaries and defense ministries, in the same way we would with countries in Europe, or Latin America or Asia. The Pentagon had offices which dealt with arms control or threat-reduction activities in the former Soviet Union, but not with the former Soviet states in terms of engagement. I was one of the people recruited to change that.

The office was staffed in an odd way in that most of its personnel were loaners from somewhere else in the bureaucracy, as I was. At one point I supervised people from eight different U.S. Government agencies. It was kind of a grab-bag of people from different areas who had relevant expertise or interest in this part of the world. Our great advantage was we had the full support and interest of the secretary of defense. Dr. Perry was simply wonderful, one of the finest people I ever saw in public service. He cared deeply about what we were doing, so our office sometimes functioned almost as an adjunct of his. That was not the normal way the Pentagon functions, so we were spoiled.

We had lots of resources. We had astonishing program money and operational money. When I first arrived, I enquired how much travel money we had and the answer was, "How much do you need?" Not an answer you would ever get at the Department of State. We had almost unlimited representational money, too, which was somewhat embarrassing. For somebody coming from the State Department, which of course is a nickel-and-dime organization, I had to adjust to a job where, quite literally, I spent millions of dollars. I believe I had, personally, more representation money available than anyone at the State Department other than the secretary and the deputy secretary. On a number of occasions, assistant secretaries and equivalents at the State Department would come to me for assistance in acquiring an aircraft to make a regional trip. If anything, we had too much by way of resources for relationships that were still nascent.

We were establishing defense and military contacts in places they had never existed. We traveled to those countries and invited their ministers of defense, chiefs of defense staff and other delegations to come to the United States. I traveled a lot in this job. Traveled around Central Asia, the Caucasus, Ukraine, Russia, but even more around the United States with our visitors. I visited something like 30 or 35 different military facilities within the United States, everywhere from West Point and Norfolk to Fort Bragg and Fort Knox and the National Training Center at Fort Irwin in the Mojave Desert. I escorted defense ministers and generals from these countries to see how things were done in the United States and for bilateral talks. We engaged in a very personal way with the military and defense leaderships of these countries to establish a basis of communication and to introduce them to various bilateral cooperation programs and to NATO's Partnership for Peace defense and military contacts programs.

It was a lot of fun. Among other things, traveling as the representative of the secretary of defense is definitely better than traveling on State Department travel orders. In most cases, we had our own aircraft from the fleet at Andrews Air Force Base, whether we were traveling domestically or abroad. That gives you a lot of flexibility, and it's a comfortable way to travel. On a number of occasions, I was the senior Department of Defense official on the aircraft, which is definitely a nice way to travel. Every place we went in the United States, local base commanders really put on a superb show for our visitors, in part because of genuine interest and in part because the host in Washington was the Secretary of Defense himself.

We got terrific cooperation from the services in explaining to these visitors things they really wanted to understand about the American system, particularly in training, in personnel, and above all, in our noncommissioned officer corps, which the Soviet military had no equivalent of at all. Perry told one top-level delegation he was going to reveal to them the secret of the American armed forces. As they leaned forward expectantly, he said "sergeants." He was not kidding; he really meant it. Some of our most interesting visits were to noncommissioned officer training facilities in Georgia and in Kentucky to see how our sergeants are prepared, which is, I can tell you, a much more challenging program than most people would imagine. It was extremely impressive, not just to me but to our visitors. Some of our visitors went back to their capitals just brimful with ideas for reforms and different ways of doing things, some of which were implemented, some not.

Q: I know I've interviewed Admiral Crowe, and he was saying he took Akhromeyev through—it was equivalent to a _____ in the Soviet military, and he was saying that the real strength of your forces are, obviously, in the noncommissioned officer corps.

MERRY: Yes, I escorted the then-minister of defense of Moldova en route to Fort Stewart in Georgia. He was a former two-star Soviet general, and said, "All my life I've been hearing about your sergeants, but I really just don't understand what it's all about, and I'd like to learn." I related this to our host, a three-star general, who said, "No problem." The next morning we helicoptered out to the middle of a swamp—I mean a literal swamp; you could only get to this training facility by helicopter—and spent the day seeing how the U.S. Army trains and prepares its sergeants, its noncommissioned officers. It was just impressive as hell. At the end of the day, we were sitting around a briefing table with the three-star general, our host, and these noncommissioned personnel who were the trainers of the other noncommissioned personnel, and the defense minister from Moldova asks our general an interesting question. He said, "So, tell me, in your army, what do the officers do?" This got a good round of laughter from the sergeants present.

The issues related to the denuclearization of Belarus, Ukraine and Kazakhstan were administered by a separate office that existed purely for that purpose. We were involved in other policy issues, including a number of active or passive armed conflicts. There was civil war underway in Tajikistan, there was a tenuous ceasefire in the war between Armenia and Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh, the conflicts in Georgia over Abkhazia

and South Ossetia were still dangerous, and the separatist conflict in Moldova over Transnistria was unresolved. Several of our client countries were either in an armed conflict or in a cease-fire from a conflict that could turn hot again. We were very conscious that nothing we did should contribute either to resumption of conflict or to make these situations worse. Unfortunately, a few years later in the case of Georgia, that sense of restraint was lost on the American side. We became part of the problem leading to the August 2008 war between Georgia and Russia. In the time I was in the Department of Defense, our ground rules were to make sure we did no harm.

The one exception in this pattern of activity was Russia. The Russians, not surprisingly, considered themselves to stand apart from the other countries. We understood they were in a category of their own and not just because of nuclear weapons. The Russians were simply not interested in the kinds of things that a defense ministry in Kyrgyzstan or Moldova or Armenia would care about; they were not establishing a new force structure but trying to manage the old one with inadequate resources. That was the real problem, the question of funding. All these countries were broke at this time. None had money to finance participation in either Partnership for Peace or bilateral programs. Through a variety of mechanisms, the Pentagon paid for both sides. We picked up the tab for our guests to participate. For 11 countries, that was just fine, they were quite happy to do it that way. The 12th country, Russia, was not. The Russian view was that if they could not pay their own way or reciprocate, or at least make a credible effort to reciprocate, they would not participate. They would not take part on the basis of American charity.

This became a problem of incomprehension among some fairly senior people in the Pentagon, who couldn't understand why the Russians were not willing to take our charity. After all, they said, everybody else did. I tried to explain that, from a Russian point of view, the behavior of others was no argument at all, that the Russians did not consider themselves, militarily or otherwise, to be the equivalent of the other countries, and they simply were not going to become a charity case for the U.S. Department of Defense. I had no difficulty understanding this, but considerable difficulty explaining that the Russians were not holding out for a better offer. They were not haggling. They were genuinely not going to do things if they couldn't pay their own way. The result was we did many more things, say, with Ukraine than we did with Russia. Not only were the Ukrainians willing to take our charity, they usually padded the bill rather extensively as well. Since the Russians were not willing to do that and didn't have the money themselves, the number of our programmatic interchanges with the Russians was fewer.

There was also on the Russian side a good deal of defensiveness about being in a subordinate role to the United States, even if only perceived as such. This required a lot of sensitivity on the American side. Sometimes that sensitivity was forthcoming and sometimes it was not. It was difficult for people in the Defense Department not to condescend to the Russians. I argued that the Russians would have long memories and wouldn't be broke forever, that treating them with respect and with dignity would pay dividends in the long run. Unfortunately, our habit of talking down to people from a position of superpower supremacy often won out.

Perry was quite good at dealing with the Russians, but sometimes the problem on the other side was hard to overcome. I would listen in on the phone when Secretary Perry spoke with his Russian counterpart, as a note taker, listening both in Russian and in English. The topic was often Russian involvement in peacekeeping in Bosnia. There were two Russian defense ministers during these years. The first was Pavel Grachev, a tough guy promoted far beyond his capability for political reasons. He really had no business being defense minister. A conversation between Grachev and Perry was very asymmetrical just in the quality of the minds engaged. Grachev was replaced by Igor Rodionov, who was one of the more sophisticated, intelligent and educated of all the Russian generals. The quality of the conversation improved dramatically. The quality of the tangible cooperation didn't necessarily change that much, but that had to do with genuine policy concerns on the Russian side. For several years, our defense cooperation with Russia depended a great deal on the personal involvement of the secretary of defense. When Perry left, and was replaced by Secretary William Cohen, our engagement with Moscow and the other post-Soviet states lost its priority and hence a good deal of its momentum. Thankfully, much had already been fairly well established institutionally.

Many of our problems lay in the vast and inchoate entity that is the Department of Defense. Parts of the bureaucracy simply didn't know which country in our region was which, particularly in Central Asia. People didn't know which "Stan" was which. They couldn't pronounce a name like Kyrgyzstan or they would confuse Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan. They would mix up the names of the capital cities, or they would mix up the defense ministers who, rather confusingly, did sometimes share the same last name. I once prevented another office from giving a substantial financial grant to a paramilitary organization in Georgia which had tried to kill President Shevardnadze; our colleagues thought this outfit was a civil defense organization rather than a political militia. The ignorance level in the Defense Department about the former Soviet Union was still quite high, but we were trying to move it up a learning curve. In our office I worked closely with a number of Army Russia area officers. We often had served together over the years, and knew the territory because of extensive travel in the Soviet Union.

The ability of the United States to conduct successful interchange with these countries rested a lot on the shoulders of our Army Russia area specialists, who were the Army's diplomats for dealing with former Soviet militaries. Many had worked for years, not just on language and area specialization, but in Moscow and in other jobs where they dealt with the Soviet military and then the post-Soviet militaries. They really proved their worth during this period, because without them the Pentagon would have been pretty clueless; without them our ability to communicate would have been, I think, rather primitive.

There were some significant cultural disconnects between the American system and the others, particularly the Russians. During one session in Moscow at the Russian Ministry of Defense, their side of the table was all uniformed, all male, and mostly in their 50s. Our side of the table was all civilian, mostly female and mostly young enough to be the daughters of the guys on their side of the table. Getting them to take us seriously was just not on. They sat through the meetings because they'd been ordered to. That was their job

for these two days. But there wasn't much communication because these Russian male generals simply could not accept as an interlocutor a 35-year-old civilian female on the American side. It just didn't work. I co-chaired a subcommittee, a working group, on Partnership for Peace. It worked pretty well, but I found out from my Russian counterpart why it worked: one of my U.S. Army friends, then the defense attaché in Moscow, had taken this Russian officer aside and said, about me, "He's a civilian, but it's OK. He thinks like us." The Russian officer was willing to do business with me only because he'd been assuaged by another uniformed officer, albeit an American. It took that kind of thing to achieve any kind of serious communication.

Q: You alluded to the noncommissioned side. There are some real, structural problems in the Russian army, and that is too old, too many senior officers, a lack of a noncommissioned corps, rather rigid and all. Were you seeing any side of trying to get a leaner, meaner, more effective military?

MERRY: At that time, the mid-1990s, there wasn't very much movement at all. Everybody was holding on to his position, because the position provided not only his salary but also housing and a car and a dacha and access to shops and everything else. Everybody was holding on to his official position like grim death. It was really only 15 and 20 years later that significant reform within the officer corps and in the structure of the Russian military started to take place, and that was in part because enough old guys had finally been pensioned off. It was also because of money. Russia simply cannot support the kind of bloated force structure it once had. You cannot sustain a million man army with a shrinking population. In the mid-'90s, it was still a very conservative, very rigid and inflexible structure, particularly among its senior officers, though we dealt with some very talented people. There were some younger generals who were very bright, very capable who, in the American system, would have gone to the top quickly. In the Russian system they were held down by the weight of all the senior officers sitting on top. I said a number of times that what the Russian army really needed was golf courses, so these guys could get pensioned off to play golf and permit upward mobility in the force structure. The Russian generals we dealt with were anywhere from five to 15 years older than their American counterparts, and anywhere from 30 to 60 pounds heavier.

Q: Well, I would think, by the time we're talking, we were beginning to flesh out the "defend of the Fulda Gap" boys in our military.

MERRY: Oh, yes.

Q: But the Russians still had tank guys looking at the Fulda Gap going west.

MERRY: Oh, yes. A number of times I pointed out how many thousands of surplus officers they had, surplus to the needs of the force structure, and posed the question, what are these guys doing with their time? My answer was that they spent their days fantasizing about the Battle of Kursk.

Q: The great tank battle of the Second World War.

MERRY: These officers may have been appropriate for the kind of force structure the Soviet Union had in its declining years, but their utility had been passed over by the course of events. It would take time for the system to begin to move them out.

The other countries had a good deal more upward mobility, because they had new force structures, at least newly constituted in terms of their officer corps. They had people who, while trained in the Soviet military, had made a choice to serve with their national militaries rather than in the central military of Russia. As such, they could occupy a more senior position at a younger age. The then-defense minister in Moldova we hosted had been a two-star general. That would have been utterly unthinkable in Moscow.

There were painful realities for Russia as a million-man force structure, which was too large and inert even with the entire Soviet Union to support, now struggled into the future but instinctively resisted all efforts at change. Russia had naval vessels that hadn't been to sea for years. They had air force pilots who, due to fuel limitations, could fly maybe an hour a month if they were lucky, and army units that survived by growing their own vegetables and potatoes.

Q: Well, I've had an interesting set of interviews with Jane Floyd.

MERRY: I know Jane very well from my first Moscow tour.

Q: The disarmament of missiles and all—was that coming under your purview, too, or not?

MERRY: No. That was called the "Cooperative Threat Reduction Program," sometimes better known as the "Nunn-Lugar Program" for the two senators that sponsored it. It had its own structure in the Pentagon. We worked with them, as a matter of course, but the programs under which missiles were destroyed, bombers destroyed, ballistic missile launching sites destroyed and then the sites restored—this was a huge job. That was a multi-billion dollar job which is actually, in some parts, still going on. It definitely required its own full-time staff, there's no question about that. We got involved on the policy side, and it was interesting to see how some of this was done. For example, how do you remove a long-range bomber from operational status? In the Russian case, they built a gigantic guillotine, an open framework with a huge steel blade. They would bring a bomber underneath this thing to its midpoint and then drop the blade and literally chop the bomber in half. They would pull one half of the bomber over to one side and the other half of the bomber some place else. Our people were on site to verify the procedure. That was how they removed the bomber from the force structure.

Q: Sounds very effective.

MERRY: It was very effective.

Q: For the transcriber and anybody reading this, as we're conducting this, we have three

interns out of colleges sitting in on this. I'm going to turn it over to you for a minute, because this is getting rather technical and it's an extremely important period piece, you might say, of when our two militaries, which had been dominating everything for 50 years, all of a sudden are trying to figure out how to work together and do this. Do you have any questions?

Q (Intern): I guess, when people talk about the end of the Cold War and the militaries, especially about Russia, one of the things that always comes up is the inability of the Russians to account for all of their weapons, including nuclear materials, and that going into the wrong hands. I was wondering if you experienced that at that point already?

MERRY: We gave a lot of attention to this question. We were confident they could account for all of the weapons. The problem was nuclear-related materials and technologies, and people with technical skills. The actual weapons were not the problem, they knew where those were and they all were very much under lock and key. One of the things we did help them do was improve the physical security of facilities where these things were stored, because during the Soviet era the principal security had been the external frontier of the Soviet Union itself. There wasn't enough in-depth security at actual facilities where things were kept, storage bunkers and things like that. We helped them with technology and some funding, to improve that security.

The real problem was not somebody waltzing off with a nuclear weapon. The problem was the related technologies and fissile materials. This stuff was scattered all over the Soviet Union in the most capricious manner imaginable. We found weapons-grade uranium in a filing cabinet in Georgia. I mean, literally, in a filing cabinet. There were chemical weapons scattered all over the countryside in parts of Central Asia with nobody around, no security on it at all. There were thousands of drums of chemical weapons in storage, sitting out in the middle of nowhere.

Two problems with the Soviet military was they never felt they had enough of anything and they never threw anything away. Their stockpiles were just unbelievably large, whether of conventional weapons or chemical weapons or biological weapons or nuclear weapons. The industries to support the military were gigantic and had very little security other than in terms of controlling people. The Soviet Union was very good at controlling people. But once the Soviet Union fell apart and it's external frontiers were more or less permeable, there was then a problem that a lot of people didn't have any money, didn't have jobs that paid them anything, and there were foreign customers, places like Iran, interested in obtaining technical people with relevant skills—and things like fissile materials—and the relevant technical equipment to develop these kinds of weapons.

That was a problem, and it's still a problem, partly because there was just so much of this stuff that you couldn't control and put adequate security on all of it or even enough of it in any reasonable period of time. Much of our focus was on making sure that the most immediately dangerous things were adequately protected. Not surprisingly, the Russians were extremely sensitive about Americans sticking their noses into what, for them, were among the most secret and sensitive facilities they had. They had a hard time believing

that American motives were in any way benign in doing this.

The denuclearization efforts in Russia, Ukraine, Belarus and Kazakhstan reflects a broader long-term problem, that the two sides in the Cold War built up such gargantuan arsenals of weapons of mass destruction—particularly nuclear weapons—that it's going to take longer to dismantle these arsenals safely, and it's going to cost a lot more money to do so, than it took to build them up in the first place. I will be surprised if the job is complete in my lifetime. The nasty thing about nuclear weapons is that, unlike a traditional battleship, you can't just take it out to sea and sink it. Dismantling nuclear weapons and chemical weapons is not only damned dangerous, it's extremely complex and expensive. Ultimately, the taxpayers on both sides—certainly the American taxpayers—are going to spend more money tearing down our Cold War arsenal than we spent building the thing in the first place. In retrospect, the size of the two arsenals—the Soviet arsenal was always much bigger than ours; it was grotesque—but ours had reached levels that defy comprehension, we had over 30,000 nuclear weapons at one point. We had so many nuclear weapons that in the Single, Integrated Operational Plan, the SIOP, we once had nuclear weapons targeted on wooden bridges, which seems ludicrous. We had so many weapons that we ran out of targets. I'm sure on the Soviet side, the situation was as bad, if not worse.

Q (Intern): I certainly had a follow-up to that question. When the Soviet Union broke up, it broke up into a number of different independent states. How many of these states found themselves in control of Soviet nuclear weapons and how did the U.S. deal with these countries in trying to get them to disarm?

MERRY: The answer is four. In terms of actual weaponry, Russia, Ukraine, Belarus and Kazakhstan were successor states that inherited parts of the Soviet strategic arsenal. The U.S. made it a condition with Ukraine, Belarus and Kazakhstan when we established diplomatic relations, that they would agree to become non-nuclear, that they would give up their nuclear arsenals, that the nuclear weapons and most of the delivery systems, which is to say, missiles and bombers, would go back to Russia. We wanted Russia to be the single custodian of the former Soviet strategic arsenal. In exchange, the United States undertook to fund, with Belarus, Ukraine and Kazakhstan, not only their denuclearization but things like environmental cleanup of these facilities. In the case of Kazakhstan, that proved to be an enormously complex task, because Kazakhstan was where most of the nuclear, chemical and biological testing had taken place. The United States became involved in environmental cleanup of not just weapons sites but testing sites. For nuclear weapons there was a place called Degelen Mountain, where there had been hundreds of underground nuclear tests. We spent years working on its environmental cleanup.

Initially, of the three, the country where we had the best cooperation, curiously enough, with Belarus. The country that gave us the most trouble was Ukraine. Kazakhstan, for the most part, was cooperative, but it was a much bigger job, because of testing facilities as well as deployment facilities. Eventually, and this took time and a lot of money, all three countries became certified non-nuclear weapons states. Then we dealt with a broader problem, which was that not just those four countries but pretty much all of the successor

states of the Soviet Union had inherited on their territory related materials, fissile materials, nuclear reactors, laboratories, sometimes testing sites. For example, I mentioned that we found highly enriched uranium in a filing cabinet in Georgia. This involved a lot of very sensitive work, some of it highly classified. Some of it has been reported publicly. An interesting book on this subject by a former Washington Post reporter is called The Dead Hand. It is about the leftover Soviet chemical, biological and nuclear weapons and what happened to them.

The principle focus of American policy in the region, in the immediate aftermath of the breakup of the Soviet Union, was precisely this question: nuclear weapons, delivery systems, other weapons of mass destruction, related materials, technologies and personnel. It was such a huge problem that there was never any hope that we would be able to deal with it adequately. It's like trying to deal with an oil spill. No matter how quickly you react, you're not going to get it all. We didn't react as quickly as we might have, partly because it was hard to get the Congress to appropriate money. There were a lot of people in Congress who didn't want to spend money in these countries. Spending money in the former Soviet Union to help them lock down their nuclear arsenal might seem like an obvious thing to do now, but there were senators and congressmen who didn't want to do it, who thought that we shouldn't be spending our money there. Ultimately, most of the job did get done. But it is still an ongoing process.

Q: OK, well, why don't we go back to your time with the Pentagon? You seem to have a certain reservation about Secretary of Defense Bill Cohen. Did you or not? Compared to Perry…

MERRY: I would say I did, partly because Perry was an impossibly tough act to follow, not just because of Perry's particular interest in the areas I was involved in—it's always nice to have the secretary engaged when you need help in getting things done—but also because of his human qualities, which were extraordinary. He's one of the three or four senior U.S. Government officials I ever saw close up that gained my highest admiration. Our office worked very directly with Perry. This allowed us policy-level exposure of a kind you should not expect in normal times. Cohen wasn't really much interested in our issues and, heaven knows, the secretary of defense has a lot of things competing for his time and attention. During this period, it was the wars of Yugoslavia and the containment of Saddam Hussein in Iraq among other issues. There were plenty of things to occupy the secretary's time.

In retrospect, I should have left the Pentagon when Perry did. I stayed on for much of another year because of one project I was involved in, which took on a scale I did not anticipate. We essentially bought the Moldovan air force. At the beginning of 1997, we learned that Iran was interested in buying a number of MiG-29s that had been left behind in Moldova with the Soviet breakup. Our concern was considerable. I quickly traveled to Moldova to meet the brand-new civilian defense minister, to express our concern that these airplanes not go to Iran. The Moldovan government had just changed after an election, and this issue became the most important immediate foreign topic they faced. If these military aircraft went to Iran, the United States would have terminated all defense

programs as well as economic assistance; our domestic law required this. The new Moldovan government was shocked to find itself in this situation, which it had inherited rather than initiated, and certainly was not looking for a fight with Washington. The two countries had developed quite good, though modest, bilateral ties, of which the defense component was quite significant. The previous defense minister had conducted a very successful official visit to the U.S., which led to a broadening of our assistance. I had played a direct role in this process, and had something of a soft spot for this little country which I had first visited in 1982. At the same time, Moldova had no use for the MiGs, which it could not afford to operate, and wanted to turn them into money for other pressing domestic needs.

The Moldovans quickly posed the question whether the United States would be interested in buying the MiGs, because they needed money badly and had, in the MiGs, a valuable but wasting asset. Normally, the United States would not even have considered buying surplus former Soviet weaponry, which was sitting around eastern Europe in heaps. MiGs were surplus aircraft, except for an illicit buyer like Iran. However, some of our initial skepticism was altered when we got a close look at the aircraft. On a second trip, I was accompanied by a team of experts from Wright-Patterson Air Force Base. We went to the base in northern Moldova where the planes were stationed. It turned out these were not normal export model MiG-29s. These were not the kind of fighters the Warsaw Pact countries had, but the kind the Soviet air force had kept for itself. They looked the same on the outside but were very different under the hood.

At the base we learned that, in addition to the airplanes, there were other military assets—I will not say what. We were in a position to monitor the aircraft, which were parked outside and viewable by satellite. We also had legal authority, under the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe, to monitor the airplanes and make sure they didn't go somewhere they shouldn't. We had no rights to check on other things. There was minimal security at this base, just a wire fence a child could get through. Given the potential for weapons proliferation without our knowledge, I became convinced that the only way to keep this stuff out of the wrong hands was to acquire it ourselves.

I presented the idea in the Pentagon as achieving multiple purposes, including getting the weaponry off the global market, giving new impetus to our defense cooperation with Moldova and, incidentally, assisting that poor country financially in a very difficult period. In the Pentagon, the idea quickly earned support, though we spent a fair amount of time looking for alternate buyers among other governments, without success. The whole process required a good deal of internal politicking in Washington, not just within the Defense Department but with the State Department, which was rather hostile to this proposal, at least in part because the author was a State Department officer in the Pentagon. I got some nasty comments about my role.

We conducted consultations with Congress, of course. Ultimately, it came to a matter of $40-plus million to acquire two dozen, top-of-the-line MiG-29s and related weaponry and equipment from Moldova, basically to take it off the market. The complications of this scheme grew and grew. There were questions, obviously, of U.S. law. Could the United

States legally buy weapons from a country like this? These were not production-line weapons. We tried to get the Russians to take the weapons, in the same way they had taken nuclear weapons from other former Soviet countries. Moscow would have been happy to do so, but didn't have any money to pay for them. The Moldovans wanted payment, and we certainly were not going to pay Moldova to send the planes to Russia. If we were going to pay for the planes, we were going to take them ourselves.

There was a question whether these planes could be used for operational training purposes by the U.S. Air Force. I was disabused of that notion fairly quickly by an Air Force general friend of mine who, among other things, was a fighter pilot and very expert in these matters. To maintain a squadron of airplanes without a support system of spare parts, maintenance equipment and skilled technicians is not only incredibly expensive but dangerous. It is easier, cheaper and more reliable to modify an F-16 to mimic a MiG-29 for training purposes than to maintain MiG-29s. The Air Force was not interested in that.

Finally, enough people in enough places were interested in this scheme that we got approval and the money. I traveled to Moldova again to negotiate a deal. Then the real headaches started. The problem was the Moldovans believed the planes were worth a lot more money. They had what you might call a blue-book idea of what a MiG should be worth, and multiplied that by the number of airplanes, and came up with a figure more like $100 million. I tried to explain that we were not interested in these airplanes to use them; we were buying them so that they not be used. We were not interested in an individual unit price. We wanted to remove them from the market, rather than use them for training, let alone for operational purposes.

I spent a lot of time persuading the Moldovan defense minister that we were their only viable customer. Selling to Iran would cost them much more in terms of what they would lose in American assistance than anything they would get. They understood that point. I also pointed out that the Iranians had a tendency of talking big about money but delivering small, of promising large sums and then not actually paying. Between my various trips, our embassy in Chisinau carried on the discussions; indeed, the embassy was a full partner with the Pentagon all the way.

I thought we made a very reasonable and even generous proposal, but the Moldovans imagined the United States must have unlimited money so surely they can pay more. The answer was, no, actually we can't and even coming up with $40 million was just about breaking the bank in terms of available resources. We experienced a failure of communication with this little country with its infinitesimal military which looked at our defense budget and imagined we had big pots of gold sitting around the corridors of the Pentagon. They didn't realize that in the Department of Defense there's somebody grasping every nickel in that budget and that getting the money we were offering had taken months of effort. As I was not able to persuade them, Deputy Secretary of Defense White agreed to visit Moldova as part of a European trip to try to complete the deal. I accompanied him starting in Prague, but even that kind of high-level intervention failed, including a meeting with Moldova's president. From the Deputy Secretary, they wanted agricultural equipment! The only thing we got out of that trip was an evening in

Moldova's great wine caves.

This was my initiative but I had imagined it would consume weeks or a few months. After eight months, I was already overdue to leave the Department of Defense. My assignment had expired two months before, and it was time to go. My successor, an old friend, finally brought the thing to fruition, so that in early October the planes had their wings stripped off and were put into U.S. Air Force cargo planes and shipped to the United States. Most of them are sitting in the desert in Nevada. The parameters of the final deal were different from the straightforward cash-and-carry concept I had put forward. The Moldovans got less money but some surplus equipment. Frankly, they would have been better off with the original offer, but they were terrified the Americans were somehow taking advantage of them, which we were not. The deal was supposed to remain confidential, but Secretary Cohen decided to trumpet it at a press conference, so I read about my previously hush-hush project on the front page of The New York Times.

This episode was a demonstration of an old but valid principle, that no good deed goes unpunished. My motivation was in part to help Moldova, to help a little country I knew something about and had first visited 15 years before. I had some sense how arduous their circumstances were, and knew the money would be used not for military purposes but for social relief and keeping people alive, though that was not a motive I emphasized in the Defense Department. I saw the MiG deal as forestalling Iran from adding high-performance fighters and missiles to its air force, while helping Moldova. If I had foreseen how much time, trouble and frustration would be involved, both in Washington and in dealing with Moldova, I probably would have kept my mouth shut at the beginning. This was my one and only foray as an arms merchant, and it will be my last.

The MiG deal proved to be a real tar baby. Years later a Communist government in Moldova imprisoned the defense minister, Valeriu Pasat, with whom I had negotiated about the MiGs on entirely bogus charges of having conspired with the U.S. to defraud his own country in the deal. This was completely a political case without substance in fact or law, but the man was in prison and in some danger to his life. In the various trials and appeals, Pasat had the support of his former president who publicly affirmed that the decision to sell the planes to the Pentagon had been his own against the minister's contrary advice. Obviously, the charges were bogus. However, Pasat needed a witness from the American side. Sadly, a new U.S. administration could not be bothered to come to the aid of a foreign official who had been a partner of the previous administration. This was really shameful, in my view.

I took on the task in retirement. I published a number of opinion pieces in this country and in Europe defending Pasat, and I provided written testimony for his defense in court in Moldova. The State Department told me not to go to Moldova to testify in person, as I no longer had diplomatic status and the Communist government might arrest me. My testimony, which was quite extensive, was in written form and cleared by lawyers in both Defense and State. However, the Moldovan courts were not influenced by facts, even testimony from the former president of their country, let alone that of a former Pentagon official. The communist president told the judges to convict Pasat, and they did. The real

political pressure on behalf of Pasat came from Europe, whereas Washington was shamefully silent. The accusation against Pasat was, after all, an accusation that the Pentagon had swindled Moldova, which was a total lie. By this point, the Pentagon was too engaged in Afghanistan and Iraq even to issue a simple press statement about Pasat. In time, the man was released due to pressure from Brussels. I got a nice note of thanks from Pasat who, speaking candidly, I had never really liked. My role in his defense was based on the civic notion that a person in possession of evidence in a criminal case should come forward. Others could have done so, but did not.

Q: Did you get it all involved in the various permutations of the Soviet brigade—I guess it was a brigade—in the Balkans?

MERRY: Oh, God, yes. Getting the Russians, and also the Ukrainians, involved in the multilateral peacekeeping force in Bosnia was a very big part of our job. I thought it was probably not a good idea. I actually argued in writing that it would not work, that the Russians would not take part. I would have been right except that Secretary Perry was determined to make it happen. It was his personal interventions with Russian defense ministers that made it happen. There was really not that much support at the White House. The State Department was at least neutral, if not negative. But Perry wanted to make it happen. He thought it would be a very positive thing, to have the Russians directly involved in a multilateral peacekeeping activity along with NATO countries and other former Warsaw Pact countries.

Ultimately, the involvement of the Russians in the multilateral peacekeeping effort in Bosnia worked very well. A number of my Army Russia area officer friends were liaison officers with them. It was difficult for the Russians to pull together the unit, because they had to cobble together personnel and equipment from different units in order to deploy into the Balkans. In the end, it actually worked quite well. This was a case where my judgment was wrong, because I had thought it was not a good idea and couldn't be done.

Q: Were you there when the Russian brigade switched from Bosnia into Kosovo?

MERRY: No. I was gone by then. Kosovo was a very different issue from Bosnia, from the Russian perspective. To Moscow, Kosovo was an effort to change the borders of post-war Europe against the wishes of a sovereign state, in this case, Serbia. The Russians argued, and they were not the only ones who argued, this was a very dangerous thing to do. They also argued that, between the Kosovars and the Serbians on the ground, there was plenty of villainy and blame on both sides. The Kosovo Liberation Army, which the United States supported, was on the U.S. Government's list of declared international terrorists organizations.

The Russians were not at all persuaded by one of the main motives of U.S. policy, which was to remove Slobodan Milosevic. The Russian government, for the most part, didn't think very highly of Milosevic, but they did feel that a Serbian government, under international law, had legitimacy of claim to the territory of Kosovo, even though the population of Kosovo, by that point, was overwhelmingly ethnically Albanian. Rather

few Serbs actually wanted to live in the place. It was, from a Russian point of view, not only illegitimate but illegal under international law and under the UN Charter, to move around state frontiers by external military means. From their point of view, Kosovo and Bosnia were two very different things, not just in juridical terms but in terms of their own perceived national interests. They felt very strongly in the case of Kosovo, that the United States and NATO were proceeding without sanction from the United Nations, were proceeding against international law, and, above all, without taking into account Russia's concerns and Russia's interests. In a turning of the tables, the Russians pointed to international agreements, the Helsinki Final Act and other OSCE documents, which were the core agreements under which the Cold War came to an end. Obviously, nobody had thought in terms of civil war in Yugoslavia. But from the Russian perspective, when Yugoslavia broke up into separate countries, one of those countries, Serbia, had a province called Kosovo. Kosovo did not have the same status within the Yugoslav federation that Serbia or Croatia or Slovenia or Bosnia or Macedonia or Montenegro had.

Q: Autonomous province.

MERRY: Yes. At the same time, the Russians didn't have any creative solutions for the problem of Kosovo. After the U.S. bombing campaign proved to be somewhat less effective than had been promised, either by Secretary Albright or by General Clark, the Russians proved to be diplomatically very helpful, because President Yeltsin sent Viktor Chernomyrdin, the former prime minister, to Belgrade to tell Milosevic that the game was over, that Russia had decided its higher national purposes required that this conflict be brought to an end. Milosevic was going to have to agree to a settlement with NATO. But the Russians felt Kosovo was an extremely humiliating experience. It really was the watershed event between Russia and the West in the post-Cold War period, not the later Georgia war. The Kosovo War was, from their point of view, the experience which proved that genuine cooperation with the West was simply not on, that the future relationship would be adversarial and competitive.

Q: You had already left when Kosovo broke up?

MERRY: Yes.

Q: Where did you go?

MERRY: My last assignment with the State Department and the Foreign Service was, again, not in the Department of State. I was still not much welcome in the Department. I went to the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe on Capitol Hill, better known as the Helsinki Commission. This is a congressional body that monitors human rights commitments of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). It is something like a Congressional joint committee, but quite unique, with its own professional staff. I knew a few people there and they knew me, mostly from Moscow. They have a position called Senior Advisor, for a Foreign Service Officer on loan. Quite a few FSOs have been assigned to the Commission over the decades. The position was vacant, and they asked if I would be interested. I had a little over a year to go in the

Foreign Service and, as an alternative to doing document declassification or some kind of filler position, this sounded extremely interesting.

Then, of course, the State Department fought it. State again didn't want me for anything in particular, but once again, it did not want anyone else to do so. State didn't want somebody else to tell them where one of their own personnel would be assigned. I suspect they just wanted me to twist slowly, slowly in the wind for the remaining months, as has happened to a number of FSOs. The Department dragged its heels, which was foolish, because any other U.S. government agency, like one of the military services, would jump at the opportunity to assign one of its officers to a Hill body which, in this case, had 12 members of the Congress—six from the Senate, six from the House of Representatives. At that time, six were members of their respective appropriations committees. No other agency in the U.S. government would hesitate for a nanosecond to fill the position. Only the State Department would quibble.

Quibble the personnel system did, until the Commission chief of staff went to the chairman of the Commission, then-Senator Alfonse D'Amato of New York, a man very much accustomed to getting his own way. D'Amato sent a letter to Secretary of State Albright. I later saw a copy, and I think it's fair to say it was a threatening letter. It basically said, "You give me this guy or you're going to regret it." I was told by a State insider that Albright's reaction was, "Why do I get letters like this? Give D'Amato what he wants!" That settled the issue, as Albright had more political sense than to get into an arm-wrestling match with Alfonse D'Amato. That's a battle in which, even if you win, you lose, and you're not going to win anyway. For the second time, my assignment outside of State had gone all the way to the secretary for resolution. Pitiful.

On my way from the Pentagon to Capitol Hill I made a couple of detours. First, I went to Norway on the Norwegian Foreign Ministry's international visitor program, which was very sweet. The Norwegians, as you might imagine, are always interested in what the Americans think about Russia, their near neighbor. That was why I was invited. In Oslo I had a number of official meetings and gave a couple of presentations, and then traveled north. I had been in the country before and absolutely loved it, so a return trip as their guest was pure pleasure. In the far north, in the town of Kirkenes, they have a bilateral commission with the Russians to deal with border and trade issues, plus the headquarters of an institution called the Barents Cooperation Program, which links the northern counties of Norway, Sweden and Finland with their counterpart regions of Russia for purposes of mutual cooperation. I was very impressed how the Norwegians went about their Russia ties: no ideology or nonsense, just do what can be done and try to figure out ways to make things work which do not. I then traveled with their consul-general across the Russian frontier to Murmansk, where I got a look at the deterioration of the Russian Northern Fleet. One nuclear attack submarine was literally sunk at its moorings. Back in Washington, I asked a Navy friend about this, which he said they knew about from satellite imagery. Even more sobering was the landscape between the Norwegian border and Murmansk, which is mostly downwind from a ghastly Soviet-era nickel-processing plant. For over a hundred kilometers, the region is a moonscape, totally devoid of vegetation. I think this was the worst environmental damage I had ever seen and, after

years of travel in the Soviet Union and East Germany, I had already see quite a lot.

Then, I did another stint in New York at USUN as a senior advisor. I really did not want to and initially refused. However, a friend put the arm on me to help out for at least part of the General Assembly, so I agreed to cover the job for half the normal time. While I always enjoy New York and do like the work of the UN, this was pretty much a waste of time. There was new leadership at the Mission, with former Governor Bill Richardson in charge. He was a breath of fresh air for USUN, but I was not there long enough to make any difference.

In early November 1997, I went to the Helsinki Commission to an absolutely wonderful experience. This was the perfect swan-song assignment for a Foreign Service Officer because I could basically write my own ticket. The Commission staff was happy to have me involved in anything I wanted to do within the European area and within their remit, which was fairly broad. I had the most collegial working environment you could ask for, with great colleagues who really knew their areas and were highly motivated. Top-flight people. The staff director, Dorothy Taft, was especially hospitable and supportive of my role. I didn't have to clear anything with the State Department. We had a lot of travel money and, because we were congressional staff, we even traveled business class, which was nice. For a year, I did things like election monitoring in Armenia, Slovakia, Moldova, Bosnia and Montenegro. I went to international human rights conferences, as part of the United States delegation. I traveled with members of Congress to a variety of interesting places. I spent a fair amount of time in the former Yugoslavia, including seeing the devastation of Bosnia, visited European capitals on human rights issues and, all in all, had perhaps the most enjoyable final year I could have wished for.

I am a believer in moving on before you become soured on an assignment, to depart while you still feel good about things. The Helsinki Commission allowed me to do this with my Foreign Service career. While some busywork assignment would no doubt have left me with a sour attitude, this final assignment ended my 26 years on a very positive note and in a cheerful frame of mind. Also, because I had been in the Pentagon and on Capitol Hill, I went out into the Washington world with a much broader contact list than I otherwise would have had. Far too many people retire from the State Department not knowing anybody outside that building; they get lost in the so-called real world. My final years had prepared me admirably, so my post-Foreign Service transition was painless. When I retired, I had not actually worked in State for 11 years. I had been abroad or in the Pentagon or on the Hill, so I didn't have much sense of psychological separation. I know some people become emotionally attached to their involvement at the State Department. With only three years out of my 26 working in the Department, I did not.

During that final period in Washington, I finally served on a promotion panel, which I had long wanted to do. It was a promotion panel for Foreign Service secretaries. I had long known that the Foreign Service treated its secretaries rather shabbily. It wasn't until I was on this panel and read all those files that I came to understand just how badly, indeed, the Foreign Service had been treating its secretarial corps. At the end of six weeks, I felt genuinely ashamed as a member of the Foreign Service officer corps. I hope

I had not myself been part of the condescension and disrespect which I saw in those files. The lack of professional regard and courtesy from the officers writing the reports was depressing. I hope I had treated secretaries better. It was a painful eye-opener, to see how class-stratified my own service was. This particular panel did some very good work, as we went outside our normal role to intervene, in one case, with the office of medical services for a person who clearly deserved a disability retirement, and in another case to get a grievance procedure going to correct a blatant injustice. I felt pride in that panel, because we helped rectify some particularly egregious cases. I still emerged with a very bad feeling about the way our secretaries have been treated.

I concluded my Foreign Service career at the Helsinki Commission on an election-monitoring trip in Slovakia, and had my 50th birthday party in Vienna, among Austrian and American friends. Then, on my very last day of government service, I traveled back to the United States on British Airways, a foreign-flag carrier, in business class, which is a double violation of State Department rules. As a congressional staffer, those rules did not apply. So, on my last day of service I enjoyed a bit of the high life that State Department personnel are routinely denied, which gave me a rather good feeling.

The next day I went into the State Department, surrendered my diplomatic passport and building pass, and was, after 26 years, at liberty with, for the most part, positive memories. I had some loss of illusions about the nature and conduct of American foreign relations, but predominately good feelings about the people I'd worked with, not just in the State Department but in other parts of the government as well. There were a few exceptions, but fewer than one might imagine. I still had the motivations which took me into the Foreign Service in the first place, the desire to serve my country in the area of foreign affairs. The formalities of State Department retirement are fairly chintzy below the ambassadorial level. I received a cheap plaque with my name and years of service engraved wrong. Typical. However, my colleagues at the Helsinki Commission gave me a flag which had briefly flown over the Capitol, which was a very welcome gesture. It would not bankrupt the State Department to give each of its retiring personnel a flag, including the support personnel.

One of my colleagues at the Helsinki Commission said several times there were two things about me he could not understand: first, how I had put up with the State Department for so long; second, how the State Department had put up with me for so long. I think that was a perceptive observation. State and I had always had a somewhat conflicted relationship, though I remain very grateful for the overall collegiality of the Foreign Service and for the fantastic variety of human experiences the Service gave me. However, even the rather accommodating nature of the Foreign Service was not going to be overly rewarding to someone as individualistic and difficult as I could be and often was. I was just never a good cultural fit with the diplomatic service, though I believe I contributed more than my fair share over the years. Fortunately, I never wanted the brass ring of the Foreign Service, to be an ambassador. I made up my mind on that point at my first embassy. This is not to say I do not regard the role of ambassador as important; I understand better than most why good people should be given the job. It is simply not a role for me. For my purposes and interests, the finest position in the Service was chief of

Political/Internal in Moscow. I had that job at the best possible time, during the end of the Soviet Union, so my professional fantasy life was largely fulfilled.

I took a couple of months to think things through and considered a number of offers, in those prosperous days before the various economic meltdowns. I was offered the head of mission job in the OSCE field missions in Moldova and Crimea and a deputy head of mission post with the UN mission in Abkhazia in Georgia. Any of these would have been fascinating, fulfilling and rather lucrative. However, due to family obligations, I decided not to accept any overseas jobs. So, I became a program director at the Atlantic Council of the United States, to start a new program focused on the problems of the former socialist countries. We called it the Program on European Societies in Transition. I was in that job for a year and a half. I think we were able to do a few good programs. The Atlantic Council at that time was a fairly moribund organization. It has since improved a lot. The traditional funding sources for such programs had changed their focus. The foundations that previously would have funded this kind of thing were no longer interested in Europe. Even though I was able to raise reasonable amounts, a few hundred thousand dollars, during this time, I felt it was pretty clear the long-term viability of this program was going to be very hand-to-mouth.

I also found I was spending so much time doing fundraising and administrative work that I wasn't doing what I really wanted to do, which was to exercise my newly restored First Amendment rights. In the State Department, you don't have freedom of speech, at least in public – that is the price you pay for the privilege of serving your country in a diplomatic capacity. You can speak freely within the system, albeit sometimes at your peril. But you can't speak freely outside. However, one very good thing about the Foreign Service, unlike the intelligence agencies, is that you have no obligation to clear things after you leave, except for ambassadors. You can publish or state, based on your experience, any opinion you want. That's what I really wanted to do, to continue writing about the issues I had followed within the Foreign Service. As an insider, I had been a bit notorious for writing analyses which were anything but neutral, and sometimes expressions of my own opinion. Now I wanted to continue that same kind of thing but no longer within a classified, restricted, U.S. government environment.

At the Atlantic Council, I publishing a number of articles, gave television and radio interviews, did public speaking and some congressional testimony, but much of my time was consumed by fundraising and program management. I discovered that fundraising is certainly not something I wanted to do for the rest of my life. It's a special kind of talent and I don't have it. In any case, I certainly didn't enjoy it and decided to move on.

I arranged to join another organization, the American Foreign Policy Council, which is a small, very independent foreign affairs institute in Washington, which has given me a home and a platform where I can do pretty much whatever I want in terms of writing and speaking and some consulting. They have been very supportive and, after more than 10 years, I have almost a hundred published articles, plus doing many public speaking events, university lecturing and occasional consulting. In public speaking I have been able to visit many parts of my own country I never saw before. In the Foreign Service, I

visited about 60 countries, but was better traveled in Russia than in America. I have now rectified that imbalance by seeing much more of America.

In the Washington foreign affairs community, I regularly encounter people with whom I have been associated for years, particularly concerning Russia and other former Soviet countries. I finding as collegial an environment, working as an independent person, as I had in the official system. The difference is I don't have to do the bureaucratic stuff anymore: no staff meetings or clearances or bureaucratic tasks that kill so much otherwise creative time.

My writings have been centered on Russia, but have covered a range of other topics as well. I published a series of articles about the continuing problem of domestic terrorism in Greece and worked with several television programs, including the BBC and CBS 60 Minutes, to draw attention to the problem. My first op-ed on the subject was misread in Athens as a trial balloon from the Clinton White House, which was nonsense. A senior member of the White House staff invited me in for a long conversation about Greece, and told me the Greek reaction to my op-ed had briefly endangered the president's trip to Athens, which shows you never can tell the impact of the printed word. When Bush became president, the chance appearance in a short period of three of my articles about Greek terrorism caused people in Athens to presume the new administration in Washington was ganging up on them. Not surprisingly, the Greek government was not happy, and denounced me in pretty vicious terms. One Greek tabloid even accused me of being the mastermind behind "November 17." A Greek-American group even took out a quarter-page ad in the Washington Post to attack me. Greece is a society where the idea of a truly independent voice on public issues is not credited; they thought I must be reflecting other forces within American politics. I like to think those efforts, including briefing a major Senate delegation before it went to Athens, added to the pressure which led the Greeks to move on their domestic terrorism problem before the 2004 Summer Olympics in Athens. They could have done so many years earlier and saved lives.

As I mentioned earlier, I wrote articles about the Pasat case in Moldova. They had zero visible impact in Washington, but helped motivate a number of members of the European Parliament to compel the European Commission to put pressure on the Moldovan Government to release Pasat, so it did some good, more than did my written testimony in his trial which was pure Soviet-style jurisprudence.

After 9/11 I wrote some articles and testified on the Hill about aspects of visa policy I thought should be tightened up. I have repeatedly advocated in print and in speeches that it is long overdue for the Europeans to take full responsibility for their continent's security. Decades after the end of the Cold War, it is preposterous for the American taxpayer still to be subsidizing European security. In this vein, I lectured for some years at a NATO staff school on why NATO need no longer exist. The NATO higher command eventually put a stop to that, though most of the students seemed to enjoy encountering a different perspective. I wrote several articles disagreeing with the second Iraq war, but without engaging in ad hominem attacks on policymakers. I have written reflective pieces about eastern Germany, where I still have close friends, in an effort to explain why that

part of Germany remains so distinct years after unification. Some of my articles have been about Central Asia and the Caucasus. For example, recently I have been occupied with the problem of Nagorno-Karabakh, publishing articles, giving presentations, and attending conferences. I tend to stay away from topics on which I have little personal experience or where I think I have little value to add, such as the Middle East. It is not that I do not have views, just that I prefer my published or media opinions to have a basis in direct knowledge. Given a background across much of Eurasia, I have plenty of topics to choose from.

During these years I have also served as a non-resident senior fellow of the Pearson Peacekeeping Training Center in Nova Scotia. I was asked by the president of the Pearson Center – an old friend from the UN – to represent it in Washington, which was quite enjoyable, until the place more or less went out of business. For a number of years, I consulted on a volunteer basis for Amnesty International USA about Russia and other former Soviet countries. I found that work gratifying, but AI then moved away from its traditional focus on civil liberties toward a broader agenda I did not entirely share.

I keep a hand in with some consulting and serve on a couple of advisory boards. A role of special personal interest is as a board member of the Kolodzei Art Foundation. Tanya and Natasha Kolodzei are friends from the early '80s in Moscow and run one of the world's largest collections of so-called “non-conformist” art from the Soviet period and from post-Soviet Russia. The collection is split between Russia and America, with exhibitions and programs in both. I recently became godfather to Natasha's daughter, so I am very personally linked to three generations of this Russian artistic family.

In a very real way, I feel the continuities with what I did in the Foreign Service and what I’m doing now are fairly strong on the positives and absent on the negatives. In conversations with other ex-Foreign Service Officers, we’ve rather agreed that, while being a member of the Foreign Service was, for the most part, a very good thing, being an ex-Foreign Service Officer, in many respects, can be even better. Nothing could prepare a person for public debate on foreign policy issues better than a career in the Foreign Service. What you learn, the mental discipline of the profession, and the experience and the information you acquire, are ideal preparation for what comes after.

Q: My problem is that I begin to drift off, obviously. I take these damn pills.

MERRY: Oh, I understand the problem.

Q: I don’t get to talk.

MERRY: Well, talking is more interesting than listening.

Q: Oh, well, no, I mean it’s really a physical thing. It just creeps up on me. So, what are you up to now?

MERRY: I’m continuing as a senior fellow with the American Foreign Policy Council,

writing and speaking, but I can do as much or as little as I want to. One place where I am a regular is here at the Foreign Service Institute, where I lecture to area studies classes. I also travel around the United States a good deal, lecturing on international issues. I am very much enjoying semi-retirement, with the flexibility and independence it provides. I get more sleep each night than during that quarter century in the Foreign Service, eat a better breakfast, and exercise more regularly. I actually have better cardiovascular health in my mid-60s than when I retired at age 50. The orthopedic problems from my New York injury are with me all the time, but I tend to count my blessings, and have a horror of becoming a stereotypical grumpy old man. Life is good.

Q: How do you see developments in Russia now? It's obviously not a return to Stalinism. But is this a transitional time? Or is this going to be a hard-core authoritarian issue?

MERRY: I don't think Russia is in transition any more. The transitional period was Gorbachev and Yeltsin, out of and beyond the Soviet Union. The realities of Russia today are the likely realities there for quite a while to come, but I think it will face unmanageable problems in the years ahead. The place is not neo-Soviet as many people think; it is post-Soviet but with elements of the pre-Soviet. There is something of a return to pre-Soviet norms, a cultural reversion to the mean. It is no coincidence that Putin models himself on Stolypin and imagines he can succeed in this century in areas where Stolypin failed a hundred years earlier. Russia as a society has always, at least since Peter the Great, suffered from a very severe alienation between its ruling elites and the mass of its people. This was true under the czars. It was certainly true under the Soviets, and it's again true today. One Russian study I saw estimated that the political ruling elite of Russia is about 6,000 people, which strikes me as about right. Certainly the great mass of the Russian people play little or no role in determining public policy.

On the other hand, many Russians distinguish between political freedoms and personal freedoms. They understand, as I do having lived in the Soviet Union in the Brezhnev era, that personal freedoms for Russians today are extraordinarily broad by any reasonable historical comparison, not just with the Soviet period but with the pre-Soviet period. The average Russian citizen today has personal freedoms which would not have been enjoyed by almost anybody in his society in any previous period. One of the most important is the freedom to travel abroad. Even under the czars, this was restricted very tightly and was limited mostly to aristocrats and officials.

Most Americans would say it's false to distinguish between political freedoms and personal freedoms. Most Americans would say they're basically a unity. I think for most Russians that's not true. Their view often is that the political freedoms they experienced in the 1990s were a fraud, that democracy as they experienced it was a fraud. It was a license for a bunch of ruthless people to steal the economy blind. Many of them would argue that democracy in the Western sense is not appropriate for Russia, or at least not for Russia yet. This is, in part but a real part, the legacy of our own policies toward Russia during those transitional years. Many Russians tend to focus more on the glass half full than the glass half empty. They can remember, if they are my age, when Russia was a truly non-free place, when Soviet Russia was a very authoritarian, non-free place.

I perceive the core problem for most peoples' lives in Russia as not lack of freedom but lack of opportunity within their own society. The economy of most of the country, outside of Moscow, St. Petersburg and a few other places, is hopelessly mired in the massive mis-investment of capital made in the Soviet era. There are 450 cities across Russia each of which depends on a single economic enterprise for its survival, and most of these are not viable. Thousands of Russian villages and small towns have become depopulated – the census takers have found – as people have moved from the northern and eastern parts of the country. I think for most Russians today, their lives and futures are not centered on democracy or lack of democracy. It's about livelihood and prosperity. Democracy is something of a luxury, of interest to the well-to-do and educated elites of large cities, and certainly is important to young people wondering what their future will be like, but it hardly moves the blue-collar proletariat stuck in ghastly industrial holes spread across this vast landscape. You really need to visit some of those places to begin to comprehend how dismal and empty life there can be. I visited a city west of Murmansk where adult life expectancy is in the mid-40s. If I was forced to live in the place, I would drink myself to death within a couple of years.

There is a very sharp contrast between the livelihoods of most people and the comparatively small number who are doing really quite well. By that I don't mean oligarchs or billionaires, who are especially resented, but people who are doing reasonably well, who travel abroad, have a good education, whose kids have good educational prospects abroad. The great mass of the Russian people do not enjoy this level of success, as reflected in the huge health and demographic crises. Fertility rates have been very low since the beginning of the 1980s, so the country is in a slow downward population spiral, as each new generation of potential parents is smaller than the one before it. Then there's the problem of premature mortality, particularly among men, from heart attack and stroke, which is largely lifestyle related, based on alcohol consumption, smoking, bad diet, too much salt, no exercise, and widespread mental depression, which contributes to all aspects of the health problem. It's a profoundly unhealthy country that's run by a small elite who are really more interested in Russia as a great state and Russia as a great power than in Russia as a healthy nation. Between the ruling elite and the mass of the disadvantaged is a growing new middle class of educated people with worldly perspectives and worldly ambitions. Most of the anti-regime turmoil comes from this group, but they are still small in terms of the population as a whole. The talented younger people have the option of going abroad, because they have skills the outside world wants. Most Russians are stuck with their own country, for better or worse.

I think that Russia's intrinsic weaknesses as a society and as a political culture will again produce a fundamental political and societal crisis. I cannot say when, but not in the distant future. The components are all there: the low fertility rate, the very high premature mortality rates, the myriad health and social problems, the very low productivity rates in agriculture and industry, ecological problems on a huge scale, the massive increase in corruption that makes any kind of small or medium-sized business either prohibitive or very difficult, the lack of effective rule of law, and the increasing concentration of economic power in the hands of large, parastatal entities that are, for practical purposes,

re-nationalization by the governing elite. The new oligarchs are, in large measure, filthy-rich state officials; they are like pre-Soviet aristocrats occupying high offices and vast estates. The country will continue to depend critically on its ability to earn money as a commodity exporter, not just in energy but in other commodities. High-profile efforts to develop innovation centers are going to be largely ineffectual.

It's not that Russia doesn't still produce a lot of very talented and, in fact, world class young people, particularly in the so-called blackboard sciences, mathematics and physics and computer sciences, where they produce very talented people. But far too many of those talented people see their future outside of Russia. I think that Russia's future is, for the most part, one of continuing deterioration and decline behind a facade of state greatness and flashy displays of grandeur, like the Winter Olympics in Sochi.

Where all this will lead is a subject of a great deal of debate. I don't think it will be just a slow, steady decline over decades. I think the decline will result in at least a crisis if not a series of crises. There's a real question whether, by mid-century, Russia will be able to hold on to the territorial mass it currently governs. The potential for significant disruptive violence in the northern Caucasus is going to increase and, effectively, much of that area will be ungoverned and ungovernable for Moscow. In the northern Caucasus the Russian state is already more suzerain than sovereign. Much of the Russian Far East and north are increasingly depopulated, because people don't want to live there and they no longer can be forced to. Much of the best talent of the country, much of its real top-flight human capital, will go outside of the country, it will be in Western and Central Europe, it will be in North America. Indeed, much of it already is.

I judge that a core problem of the current ruling establishment in Russia is not so much that it is democratic versus undemocratic or authoritarian versus non-authoritarian. It's that they have their priorities wrong. They tend to compare themselves, as Putin has sometimes, with Charles De Gaulle, and say that France after the Second World War, with the loss of Indochina, the Suez crisis, and the loss of Algeria, could only restore itself economically because De Gaulle made France great again. That set the stage for France again to become prosperous and successful, they say. They've got it backwards. The restoration of the French economy was not based on Gaullist policy. It started under the Fourth Republic and the so-called “trente glorieuses”, the thirty years of economic development that were well underway before De Gaulle's return to power. De Gaulle's policy of restoring French greatness was built on a successful France, not a successful France built on greatness. The Russian ruling elites have inverted priorities. By pursuing great-power and great-state status at enormous expense, they are allowing the Russian nation to deteriorate and causing many of its best people to emigrate. They are allowing the Russian nation itself, which ultimately must be the basis for Russian greatness as a state, to deteriorate without understanding that this must produce a reaction, a crisis.

However that crisis plays out, the results will be bad, I think, bad for Russia and bad for the outside world. I do not see Russia shifting back into a Leninist mode, a shift to the left. Rather I foresee an increasing nationalist tendency in the country, something we have seen under Putin but which could go far beyond his rather controlled form of Great

Russia rhetoric and policies. Russia could go brown in a big way, as it turns inward on itself and rejects the world outside in all directions. Russia is not a failed state by a long shot, nor a failed economy or society, but it is a comparative failure in its Eurasian context. Between the resurgent, prosperous, albeit troubled China and the other modern east Asian states, and the prosperous, although relatively aging and declining Europe, Russia is a comparative failure. By the middle of the century, Russia may be a comparative failure when ranked with India, Turkey or even Iran. Even if things are not that bad, I anticipate either that Russia will have experienced another crisis of the scale of the 1910s or the 1980s, or it will have degenerated into a dysfunctional semi-empire like Spain in the late 19th Century. Those are ugly and worrisome alternatives. It has happened to other empires and great powers, and it can happen to Russia.

Q: OK, well, on that note, I thank you.

ENDNOTE: In editing this oral history I have added material and revised some of what I said in the actual interviews. I have not removed any topics. There are, however, many topics I have not addressed at all either for reasons of confidentiality or to respect the privacy of others. As this is an oral history, I have relied exclusively on memory, fallible as I know it to be, rather than consult old desk calendars and other documents to confirm things like the sequence of events. All errors of fact are, of course, entirely mine, while the opinionated nature of this text speaks for itself. In my detailed discussion of the Soviet collapse and its aftermath, I have tried to identify specific messages I wrote which may be of interest to future scholars of that period, but my recollections of those messages are of necessity incomplete and may be somewhat self-serving. I deliberately have not had recourse to Wikileaks to review those messages or even to learn if they are in that archive, as I hope they will in time become available for historical scholarship either through FOIA or routine document declassification in the series Foreign Relations of the United States. EWM

End of interview