

Interview with Armin H. Meyer

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

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Q: First of all, Mr. Ambassador, I wonder if you would give us some sort of overview or review of your early life. Could you tell us where you were born, a bit about your parents, a bit about the environment in which you were raised, where you went to school; and then leading into your higher education, why you chose the particular school that you went to, why you chose your particular course of study, and then lead on into how you happened to be interested in the Foreign Service and eventually joined it?

Now for those who don't know, Ambassador Meyer served as ambassador to Japan, to Iran and to Lebanon. He also served, other than ambassador, in Lebanon, as well, and also in Afghanistan, in Cairo and in Baghdad for a number of years. He, of course, served the Department of State primarily in the Bureau of Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs.

Now, Mr. Ambassador, if you wouldn't mind taking over the microphone and telling us about your early life. I may stop you now and again to ask questions which I think might add to our understanding of your early career. But, basically, I'll try to let you go your own way.

I wonder if we could discuss now, Mr. Ambassador, your years in Iraq, particularly giving me some idea of the embassy or legation set up there. Who was Prime Minister of the

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country? What was the relationship between the British and Iraqis at that time and how you dealt with those people?

MEYER: My tour in Iraq was from December 1944 until August of 1948. That was the period when World War II was coming to an end. We celebrated May 8, 1945, when the war in Europe finished, and then V-J Day, when the Japanese war was over. It was a relatively small community compared with Cairo, of course, where I'd been before.

As far as the embassy was concerned, it was called a legation in those days. That was in a period when we didn't have all that many embassies—in that part of the world, at least. Furthermore, in Iraq, at that time, by treaty the British were the only ones allowed to have an ambassador. Thanks to our minister, Loy Henderson, that, eventually, gave way and we had an ambassador there in 1947. We elevated the rank of our chief of mission.

In any case, while I served there the embassy was quite small. It was in a lovely, little building that was built as sort of a model of the White House here in Washington. But we had very few people. We had the minister and a deputy chief of mission, and then maybe one or two people in the political, economic, and other sections. My office, I was then the public affairs officer in charge of USIA, was located down on Rasheed Street. Rasheed Street was the main street. Our office was above the Thomas Cook company in the downtown area. We had quite a few people coming in to read our books and magazines. We had various movies from time to time. It was quite an active little organization.

Throughout that period, however, you had the overriding Palestine question, whether or not there would be a Jewish state. That was the big political issue that preoccupied our attention for most of that period.

Q: Mr. Ambassador, what was the attitude of the Iraqis at that time toward the United States, before the Arab-Israel problem came up?

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MEYER: Oh, the attitude of the Iraqis was excellent. The Prime Minister was Nuri as-Said. I don't like to call people pro-West or pro anything except their own country, but certainly his orientation was toward the West and he was a great friend of the United States.

The country was a kingdom but youthful King Ghazi had died in an automobile accident. His son, King Faisal, was a very young fellow who was, in effect, under the custody of his uncle, the Regent. That was the general political setup. The population was roughly half Sunni and half Shiite Moslems, the former dominant. Nuri as-Said, a Sunni, was Prime Minister most of the time while I was there, but during one period we had a Shiite Prime Minister. His name was Saleh Jabr, an excellent person.

As a matter of fact, Saleh Jabr was Prime Minister when the United Nations passed the famous resolution in November, 1947 which partitioned Palestine into a Jewish and Arab state. I remember staying in touch with him throughout that U.N. debate. We were staying up all night listening to the radio and reporting to him. On a Wednesday it looked, from the speeches that were being given, that the resolution wouldn't pass. But the next day was American Thanksgiving Day and the U.N. organized a delay of one day. During that delay, apparently, some pressures were exercised, at least that's what the Arabs claim, and a number of countries that on Wednesday had said they couldn't vote for the partition of Palestine, on Friday, when a vote was taken, voted for it. So there was a great change in Iraq's attitude toward the United States from before to after.

Q: To carry on a little bit about our relations before, what were our main points of interest with Iraq at that time? Was it trade or was it political? What did we discuss when we discussed things with the Iraqis?

MEYER: There was some trade but it was rather minimal, Iraq's exports to the United States being mostly dates. One of the largest operations was bringing Turkish coffee down from Turkey by railroad to Baghdad and transferring it at Baghdad to the smaller gauged

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rail line that went down to Basra and getting it out during the war period. But trade was not really a major problem as far as we were concerned.

My interest, as head of the US OWI and then the USIS, was to try to keep Iraq friendly to the United States, particularly during the war effort. As you may remember, early in the war there was concern that the whole Middle East might fall to the Germans. It didn't, although early during the war period there was a movement in Iraq led by Rashid Ali al-Gailani that was pro-German. It was overcome. But, during the last years of the war when I was there, the attitude of the Iraqis was very good. We had the "Why We Fight" series of movies produced by OWI and showed them every Thursday night on the terrace of the Regent Palace Hotel. There was great interest. The Prime Minister would come; cabinet ministers would come. It was a very friendly country to the United States in those days.

Q: Thank you. Now I think we ought to go on to the Arab-Israel conflict.

MEYER: I might mention that after the UN resolution was passed, four days later, my office was sacked.

Q: Could you go into that a bit more, Iraqis feeling about us and about the general problem of Israel?

MEYER: When I came from Cairo, Loy Henderson, the minister, asked me, "What do they think about this Palestine issue down there?" I thought a minute and said, "Oh, yes, they're against the idea of a Jewish state." He said, "Is that all? Up here they're all excited and vehement on the subject." And that was true. The Iraqis are very emotional people. They can be like Jekyll and Hyde. They can be very, very friendly and, on the other hand, they can really get very angry and tear up things and create violence.

After the passage of the UN resolution in 1947, the Iraqi students started demonstrations. They would walk up and down Rasheed Street shaking their fists at my office and saying, "Long live Palestine and down with partition," or similar outcries. For three or four days

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these mobs went peacefully by. We realized it was a dangerous situation so, obviously, the place was closed and we weren't operating. On the fourth day, I think they got a little tired of just walking up and down the street so they bashed the door down, stormed upstairs, tore out all the books and typewriters, and threw them out the window onto Rasheed street. They had a big bonfire out there in what was for them quite an enjoyable occasion.

I never felt that their feelings were quite as deep as, for example, about the British, who were in charge, in effect, of Iraq. A short time later there were demonstrations over a new treaty which the British were trying to put through. Those demonstrations were more violent than the Palestine demonstrations, mostly because the government tried to suppress them. In what later was called "the Battle of the Bridge," the students tried to cross the Tigris River to the British Embassy. Iraqi troops tried to stop them and killed 27 people. That didn't happen with the Palestine demonstrations which the government did not try to control. But the feeling was strong. In my view, throughout this period until today, you can always consider the Iraqis as much more excitable and emotional on the Palestine issue than the Egyptians ever would be.

Q: In looking back on that period, is there anything that you think we should have done, or you could have done, or the ambassador could have done differently than what he did? I'm not speaking of the U.S. Government, I'm speaking of locally, on the spot. Or was it completely out of our hands?

MEYER: There wasn't anything any of us could do, the ambassador or anybody else, except what I called, "hold the fort" until better days might come. Once the Palestine issue broke out into the open, people boycotted the American embassy for any kind of an invitation. They simply would not come to it for any reason. There was not much that anybody could have done until time could heal things a bit, which they did. But to this day, of course, that is still the key issue between our countries.

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Q: Now should we move on to Washington? I think that was your next assignment. Could you tell us what that was?

MEYER: Yes. After being in Baghdad four years with OWI and as the head of the USIS office there, I was brought back to Washington in 1948 to work in the USIS headquarters. It was then located at Pennsylvania Avenue and 18th Street, right near where it is now except it was the corner building. I was in charge of the management and guidance of our USIA missions in the Arab states and Israel.

Our work was to determine what would be the best way of handling our broadcasts to that region through the VOA and, also, what could be done best via the other media that we were using, libraries, films, and so on. Of course, one of the main features of that work was finding the proper people to be assigned to our various USIS missions, as they were then called.

As you may remember, at the end of the war OWI ceased to exist, but President Truman felt that it was important that, what he called, "a full and fair picture" of the United States be presented abroad. In effect, he continued what was OWI under a different name and called it the United States Information Service. He envisaged it as a peacetime operation which would be supportive of American Government policies throughout the world.

Q: I notice on your resume here that you received a Commendable Service Award in 1951. What was that for? What did you do?

MEYER: I can't remember anything sensational that I did, except follow the dictum which Loy Henderson, my first chief of mission, had prescribed; that was to do the best job I knew how to do every day and let the promotions and honors take care of themselves.

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Q: And next I believe you were assigned to Beirut. Can you tell us a bit about that, how you happened to get assigned there and the situation in Beirut at the legation or embassy, whichever it was, the political situation?

MEYER: My work until then had been with OWI and USIS in the dissemination of information. But I'd always, of course, been very conscious of the fact that we were not working on our own, that we were working in an environment where I always felt that the political actions of the United States Government were about 90 percent of the ball game and the Information Agency was about 10 percent. We could not punch the Arabs in the nose and tell them we loved them. So that when the time came for my overseas assignment—usually, you were in Washington three or four years, which I was at that time—someone in the Near Eastern Division of the State Department came to me and asked me how I would like to go to Beirut as political officer at the embassy there. It was Sam Kopper, who, at that time, was the deputy chief of the Near Eastern Division. Having entered the ranks of the career Foreign Service in 1948, I was quite delighted that they were considering shifting me over into the political field. A fellow named Dick Sanger had been out there and had done a very, very good job. So I said, “Of course, I'd be pleased to go.” So we transferred to Beirut in 1952.

When I arrived in Beirut the situation was fairly stable, although there was one issue that was very active. That issue was the question of the presidency. The president at the time was a man named Sheikh Bishara al-Khuri. He had become the first president when Lebanon got full independence in 1943. The constitution prescribed that a president should be in power for six years only and then would have to retire. When his six years were up, everybody said that he was such a fine man—the George Washington of Lebanon, in effect—that he should continue in his work.

So a big political division developed, most of the people feeling that when a chief is doing a good job, you keep him in there unless he dies or somebody else knocks him off. I call it the tribal mentality. So that was what happened. In 1949, the parliament had voted to

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keep Sheikh Bishara in power for another term. But there was a minority of the people who didn't like the idea, eight members of parliament in particular who opposed the ad hoc revision of Lebanon's constitution.

Those were eight rather prominent politicians, one of them being Camille Chamoun, another being Pierre Edde, another Ghassan Tweini, and five others. Keeping up an unrelenting campaign, they got considerable play in the newspapers, stressing that this was all illegal. Furthermore, they attacked what they considered some corruptive practices within the Sheikh Bishara regime.

Q: Were these people all candidates themselves for president?

MEYER: No, but one of them, Camille Chamoun, did become president in September of 1952 when, thanks to the opposition's constant agitation, they were able to stir up the bulk of the Lebanese people and to close all the shops and close down Beirut. At that time Sheikh Bishara called in General Fuad Chehab, head of the army, and asked, "Can we put this down?" General Chehab said, "Sure, we can put it down." Bishara said, "Will it cost any blood?" The general said, "Certainly, some people will get hurt." The President concluded, "Well, if it costs blood, this chair is not worth my sitting in it."

Q: I think all of those people you mentioned were Christians. What about the Moslem elements?

MEYER: Oh, no. They were not all Christians. I don't recall all eight of them, but one of them was Abdullah Haj, a Shiite member of the parliament. There were also a Greek Orthodox and an Armenian Orthodox. So they weren't all candidates because you had to be a Maronite Christian to be president. That requirement had been established in an unwritten agreement in 1943, called "The National Covenant."

Q: Right. How did the Moslems feel about Bishara al-Khoury? Were they happy to have him continue?

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MEYER: Some were and some weren't. Some were quite ambitious, particularly the Sunni Moslems, who according to The National Covenant were the only ones entitled to be Prime Minister. Saeb Salam was one of those with aspirations. He was a very bright and talented person, a great friend of all of us. Sheikh Bishara, at the last minute, called him in to be Prime Minister, but it only lasted three days before the shops were closed down. The President then called in General Chehab to serve as interim head of the government. Chehab promptly conducted the election in which only members of parliament vote and Camille Chamoun came out the winner.

But that was a precedent that, I'm afraid, has foreshadowed trouble in Lebanon every time a new president is supposed to be elected. There are always those who feel the old one is a good one and why throw him out. Others say no, the constitution says six years, let's get a new one in. It's a problem that blew up at that time and Sheikh Bishara did lose his job, but he went down calmly and, I think, with a great deal of distinction.

Q: Who were the major influences as far as foreign countries were concerned? France? Britain? U.S.? Egypt?

MEYER: I would say that the United States had some influence at that time, although the French probably had a little bit more, the British a little bit. But, actually, the Lebanese were mostly concentrating on their own internal problems. You must remember that Lebanon is a collection of religious minorities. All those minorities have both centrifugal forces and centripetal forces. They have a chronic tendency to fight with each other, but when the chips are down, they have increased determination to keep the country going because each minority has a vested interest in not being taken over by some strong power from outside. So I think, as far as influence is concerned at that time, it was mostly the Lebanese handling their own problems. I don't think anybody told them what to do as such. Our ambassador, when I was there, was Harold Minor. I don't recall that he made any

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strong interventions. The French, of course, had a traditional influence, due to cultural institutions and their having been the mandatory power after World War I and until 1943.

An interesting point in connection with your question was that, at that time, we had just started an AID program. It was called Point Four, "Nochte Rubah." That became quite a political issue because of questions such as who was going to get the money, where would it be spent, and for what kinds of projects. In the meantime, our AID people came out in droves. They overwhelmed the housing situation in Beirut to the consternation even of some Lebanese, let alone foreigners who were seeking housing.

Q: As I recall, we had something like two or three ambassadors out there at one time, didn't we?

MEYER: That's right. I forget which president it was, whether it was Truman or Eisenhower, but a special man was sent out to be ambassador for the region. His mission was to coordinate our AID programs and see that everything was being done properly. Eddie Lock was his name and he was based in Beirut. This produced some jealousy and problems as to who would sit at the right of the president and so on, protocol problems. It was not a very good way to handle business. The ambassador in the country should be the one in charge.

Q: What was your role, Mr. Ambassador, at that point?

MEYER: I was head of the political section at that time and, as such, was following the political scene very carefully. A great deal of time was spent visiting with the various politicians and religious leaders, representatives of the wide array of minorities in Lebanon. It seems to me, and did at that time, that Lebanon is like a fishbowl. All the political and religious leaders are swimming around and you've got to know them all, know their colors, know which way they're going, and develop good relations with all of them.

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I think one of the great mistakes we have made in times past is we have tended to side with the Christian half of Lebanon. Quite frequently our ambassadors do that. The French-speaking, elite Christian group is naturally attractive.

I made quite a point, thanks to a young man we had in our political section, a local named Haleem Mamari, to work the Moslem side of the street even more than the Christian side. I figured the Christians would be with us in any case, but the Moslems were the ones who were usually unhappy and restive. I tried to stay in touch and develop trust and confidence with them, as well as with the Christian elements.

Q: That meant for a pretty active life, I should think, trying to cover all of these bases?

MEYER: It did. And we'd be going out every afternoon or morning visiting somebody, as well as, occasionally, government people. We had some rather interesting events happen. Once a French ship broke down off shore near the beach, a couple of hundred meters off shore. It was a horrifying experience with some loss of life. During that time we worked closely with the French and tried to provide what little American military help we could.

A more exciting occasion was when Middle East Airlines had sold too many tickets for the Hajj down in Saudi Arabia. For the first time in many years the Turkish Government was allowing its Moslems to go to Mecca. Middle East Airlines saw a wonderful market. It brought hundreds of these Hajjis from Turkey down to Beirut but couldn't get them into Jeddah.

We came up with a beautiful idea. We said, "Hey, these people are all stuck here and they won't get down to Saudi Arabia by the time the Hajj really starts. Can't we do something about it?" So we sent a telegram to the American military in Germany. Within 24 hours, 14 American C-54 aircraft had arrived at Beirut Airport. They would fly off to Jeddah, one every hour on the hour, taking a plane load of Hajjis down there. That made a great hit

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with the Moslems. It was called the Mecca Airlift. It was the kind of effort that, in diplomacy, can score a lot of points sometimes.

Q: That was a clever idea. Whose idea was that?

MEYER: Oh, we generated it in the embassy.

Q: At that time, did we have any intelligence operations there? Any CIA? Or was it a base for that later on?

MEYER: Oh, of course, we had CIA representation there. My memory is a little hazy, but they were not all that active. Whether Lebanon was a regional base or not, I don't know. I wasn't very much involved, as I recall, with what they were up to. Later on, on my second tour, I got more acquainted with their activities.

Q: Did we have fleet visits at that time?

MEYER: Oh, yes. I'm glad you mentioned that. That was one of the nicest things we had in Lebanon in those days. The Sixth Fleet would come to visit Lebanon periodically. It would be an occasion when we could pull the whole American community together. Remember, there were many Americans living there. It was such a delightful place to live that many companies had their regional offices there so we had a very large American community. Many of our government regional offices were in Beirut so we had many government people there.

We'd get the whole American community together to sponsor a canteen at the Phoenicia Hotel. Daughters would come to the evenings and they'd be properly chaperoned and the sailors would come from the Fleet on leave. It was a wonderful occasion and all the Navy boys looked forward to it. Of course, we at the embassy also looked forward to it because of the opportunity to bring the American community together. Also to demonstrate the presence or the nearness of American military support in case it should ever be needed.

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Q: So you think they had some political effect and benefit?

MEYER: Yes. There were those who criticized it by saying America was trying to throw its weight around. But I think most Lebanese, realizing that Lebanon is a very vulnerable country, were pleased to have the Sixth Fleet off shore. We would take President Chamoun and the Prime Ministers to visit the battleships and carriers. It was a thrill for them particularly the gun salutes and other honors which the Navy does so well.

Q: Did the Lebanese at that time look upon the Sixth Fleet and the United States as a protector at all, or were they still looking to France or someone else?

MEYER: Oh, no. That was in 1952. Later on in 1958 we did actually land in Lebanon when there was a civil war at that time. In 1952 it hadn't quite reached the point where they sought support from the Sixth Fleet, no.

Q: At the time you were in Beirut, was it a financial center or did that develop later?

MEYER: It's always been a financial center for the Middle East. I think ever since the Phoenicians invented money people on those rocky hills have known how to deal with it and to take advantage of it. At that time, to my recollection, there was considerable money in Beirut, it being a regional center. Many of the sheikhs and people from the Arab states on the gulf, the oil countries, would come to Lebanon for the summer and visit. Actually, quite a number of marriages would take place there, and so on. So there was much money coming into Lebanon from the oil wealthy states and the banking system flourished. So it was a regional center, fiscally, yes. One day I asked my good friend, George Hakim, then Foreign Minister, whether Lebanon was not worried as oil rich Arabs came to Lebanon and bought its properties, from villas, to land, to hotels and banks. He smiled, "They can't carry it away." Lebanon in those days was a capitalistic citadel.

Q: We're nearing the end of this little bit on the first tour in Lebanon. Would you give any advice to someone going out to Lebanon? Not now because, as we know, the situation is

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rather unattractive, but normally, what would you advise the young diplomat to do when he goes out to Beirut? How should he conduct himself? What should be his main focus when he goes out there? Do you have any advice to give him?

MEYER: My advice would be, as I indicated earlier, to maintain contact with every, every element of the Lebanese society. Later on, I'm getting ahead of myself, when President Kennedy sent me to Lebanon, I emphasized publicly that he had sent me as ambassador to all of Lebanon, not just one section of it. I think the important thing is to maintain contact with all elements of the Lebanese society so America can have their respect, their confidence, and can play a role when the time is needed.

Q: Mr. Ambassador, after Lebanon I see you went on to Kabul as political officer and deputy chief of mission. Could you give us some ideas about how you happened to go there and what you did when you got there? What did it look like? Who was there?

MEYER: I went there somewhat under protest. When I was assigned to Beirut I thought I had an agreement with the people in NEA and the Department that when my assignment would be concluded, I would go to the War College. Everybody seemed to want to go to the War College and I was planning on it.

But in the spring of 1955 I received a letter from Bob Ryan, who was then the Executive Director for NEA. Bob said, "Armin, we're going to assign you as Deputy Chief of Mission in Kabul." That floored me. I had filled out the usual forms as to what I wanted for my next assignment and the first choice was National War College. If not, I wanted to go to Vienna or some nice European post. To have this letter come out saying you're going to Kabul sort of stunned me. I wrote a mild protest that I didn't think my health was all that good and so on. But they said, "You are going."

The last four to six months of my tour in Beirut (1954-55), I was Deputy Chief of Mission and Charg# d'Affaires. Our ambassador, Raymond Hare, who had followed Ambassador Minor, had been there only a year when he was called back in 1954 to be Director General

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of the Foreign Service. He suggested to the Department that I serve as Charg# d'Affaires until the new ambassador came. The interim was about six months; so I was actually in charge of the embassy for all that period.

In any case, the letter came and I was asked to go to Afghanistan. I did not, at the time, know the background which, subsequently, was made known to me. Our ambassador in Afghanistan at that time was a celebrated man named Angus Ward. He had become a national household word some years earlier when he was in Mukden, China, and the Chinese held him in house custody. The Scripps Howard papers had launched a major campaign across the country to get him out, branding China as a terrible country. One of his colleagues later conjectured to me how that one incident affected our China policy for a quarter of a century.

After Mukden, Ward was sent as Consul General to Kenya. Scripps Howard again was unhappy. It charged that this great anti-communist warrior was being sent into exile in Kenya. The Eisenhower Administration then decided to send him to Afghanistan, which, of course, is right on the border of the Soviet Union. This blunted accusations that this anti-communist specialist was not being effectively deployed.

Angus Ward was a delightful old codger. He was of Scottish ancestry, born in Canada, married to a Latvian wife. He had become an American Foreign Service officer, spending all his career abroad.

But he had certain other interests in life. His main interest seemed to be traveling. In Kabul, he had a safari wagon, a sort of a overgrown camper. Most of his time was spent traveling around the countryside. The roads weren't all that good, but he enjoyed exploring the geography of the country, taking mileages from point zero to the first bridge outside of Kabul, etc. He was also an outstanding linguist; he did a dictionary on Central Asian languages. So he wasn't in Kabul much of the time.

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In the meantime, there had been an incident between Pakistan and Afghanistan during which the Pak flag had been torn down at the embassy in Kabul because of an issue called Pushtunistan. The issue centered on the Afghan contention that their brother Pushtuns, on the Pak side of the border, were not being properly treated. The Afghans would like to have had that territory added to Afghanistan. It's a long story. In any case, it's a horse that any Prime Minister in Afghanistan found useful to ride. Prince Daud, who in 1955 was the dynamic Prime Minister, tried to ride it.

The Paks got very angry. After the flag incident, they closed the border between Pakistan and Afghanistan completely. That meant that landlocked Afghanistan had only one major source of entry, and that was the Soviet Union. Almost everything that was imported, either from Europe, or any place else, had to come through the Soviet Union. The Soviets took advantage of this opportunity and came up with an assistance program. Among other projects, they paved the streets of Kabul and this received quite a bit of publicity in America. The perception was that while the Americans were stuck in the Helmand Valley where we'd had an aid program for some time and it wasn't very successful, the Russians were in Kabul scoring points by paving the streets. Well, it was under those conditions that I was asked to go out there to try to help rescue American prestige, or whatever you might want to call it.

In any case, to Kabul I went. I got along reasonably well with Ambassador Ward, but he wasn't in town very much of the time. The border was closed and my first big job was to work on that. I did so by getting to know, not only Mohammed Maiwandwal, who was the Deputy Foreign Minister, and working through him most frequently, but also seeing Prince Naim, the Foreign Minister, the brother of the Prime Minister. Prince Naim leaned toward the West. His brother, Daud, was more neutralist minded.

In any case, during my first month, I worked closely with them and with the Pakistan Ambassador. We finally came up with what we called a "gentlemen's agreement" on how the border would be opened under certain circumstances. One of the points in that

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agreement was that the Pakistan flag would be restored over the Pakistan Embassy in Kabul, to which Naim agreed.

About that time, after a month of my dealing with the people involved, Ambassador Ward came back from one of his long travels and went to see Prince Naim. Upon his return, he informed me, "Great news." I said, "What's that?" He said, "Naim has called off the gentlemen's agreement." I said, "Why?" He said, "Well, he's unhappy about the flag raising ceremony." I said, "What did you tell him?" He said, "I didn't tell him anything. That's his decision to make."

Well, I was pretty blue about it, having worked a month on the project. When I got home, lo and behold, the Pakistan Ambassador came to see me. He was, literally, in tears. He said his whole career was on the line. He had gotten his government in Karachi to go along with this agreement and now the Afghans were reneging. He was very unhappy. When he left, I told my wife I was going to do something that I had never done before in the Foreign Service (nor ever did afterwards); that is to do something of which my ambassador was not aware.

I went over to Prince Naim's home. In those days, not many foreigners ever saw the inside of an Afghan's home. But I tapped at the door and a servant came. I gave him my card and in about five minutes he came back and said to come in. Naim who was in informal attire came in from gardening. We discussed the whole project. He was very upset about the flag raising ceremony. The Pakistanis had sent out formal invitations to the whole diplomatic corps to appear in white tie to see Prince Naim himself pull up the flag over the Pakistan Embassy. He considered this an unacceptable humiliation and was understandably angry. He said that at least the Pakistanis could have told him what they were going to do, and the Afghans could have arranged a similar ceremony in Pakistan (where the Afghan flag had been torn down). But given the way it was, Naim said he couldn't go ahead. His people wouldn't understand this humiliation. We had quite a talk.

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When he talked about what his people would think, I said, "Look, you and your brother, Daud, control what your people think. That's not a valid excuse. The crucial problem is to get that border open and give yourself an alternative. In the eyes of Washington, you've exercised great statesmanship and I'd like to see that reputation of yours continue for the mutual benefit in the relationship between our two countries."

When I left I didn't know what the answer would be but I felt something had clicked. The next day, Sunday, I was at my office in the Embassy looking at telegrams, which was my usual habit. Unexpectedly, I received a telephone call from the Foreign Ministry. It was the Chief of Protocol, a man named Tarzi. He said he wanted to come over to see me. Well, this was highly unusual. Never did an Afghan come to a foreign embassy. But I said, fine, come on over.

I waited and waited. An hour or so later, I saw his car drive out of the embassy compound. Going out into the reception area, I asked the Marine whether an Afghan had been there named Tarzi. He said, "Oh, yes. He came in the same time Ambassador Ward came in." So I went in and saw Ambassador Ward. I said, "Did I see Tarzi's car go out of here?" And he said, "Yes. You know what? He came to tell us that Prince Naim has changed his mind. He's going to put that flag up on Tuesday." Ambassador Ward never did know the background as to how this came about.

On Tuesday, the ceremony took place. It was a very embarrassing one for Prince Naim. He hardly talked to anybody, but he did talk to me, as though I was the only friend he had in the place. So we did finally get that Pakistan-Afghan border opened. We followed it up with a transit agreement so that Afghanistan wasn't totally dependent on the Russians.

Q: Well, that was a fascinating story. I gather from what you say that the Afghans, both officially and otherwise, are not terribly open and not very friendly to foreigners. Could you expand on that a bit? Did you have any contacts, say, with the local business community,

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other than Prince Naim and Maiwandwal, and a few others? Incidentally, who was king then? Did you ever see him and what did he do?

MEYER: Well, the king was King Zahir Shah. We would call on him once in awhile on some state occasion. The court protocol was interesting. The whole embassy staff or you and your two or three associates would come in at one end of a large room, and the king would be standing on the other. The rule was that when you came into the room, you made a bow. As one rank, the group walked halfway and made another bow. Then you'd walk up to where the king was and make another bow. You could never turn your back on the king. Going out, the group had to walk backwards. This was ludicrous. Americans are not very good at this kind of thing. I remember Prince Naim himself snickering when he saw us Americans going through this exercise.

King Zahir Shah was not really that active politically. The dominant force was Prince Daud, the Prime Minister. He was the strong man, no question about it. Everybody recognized him as such. His brother, Prince Naim, had some effect on Daud and was quite a good man.

As to your question about Afghans in general, yes, they are a people who have a shell. They've been living for centuries in those mountains. Hindu Kush means Hindu killer. Any foreigners invading the country get thrown out. The Russians have now learned that, just as the British learned it over a hundred years ago. The Afghans may not have many resources or much military power or strength, but they do have their pride and they do value their independence. They suspect foreigners of having ulterior motives. The general attitude is one of resisting foreigners, not becoming too friendly with them. I found that to be true with all levels of Afghan society.

But once you break through that shell, as I did with Prince Naim and with Pashwak and Maiwandwal—we'd have the latter two to play bridge, for example, on Fridays—they are

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really, really friendly people. But the shell is there and it's not easy to break it. However once you do, you have a trusted friend, indeed.

Q: How about the Afghans among themselves? Are they very tribal and fighting all the time, or do they have some cohesiveness?

MEYER: That's one of the main problems, of course. It is a tribal society, very much so. There are different tribes in various parts of the country; up north are Tajiks and Uzbeks and so on. On one occasion when we were there, Prince Daud called what they term a Loya Jirga. It is their form of a national decision-making body, but rarely used. The issue was "Pushtunistan." All the tribal chieftains and their spear carriers are brought in to Kabul for one big session, theoretically to make decisions, but in fact to ratify top governmental policies. They do have a parliament, but the parliament is tame. The real political power in my days rested with the Prime Minister.

Q: You told us how you would advise someone to deal with the Lebanese, in other words, touch base with every element in the country. How would you deal with the Afghans?

MEYER: Obviously, it is not nearly as easy in Afghanistan as it was in Lebanon to meet with people. The Lebanese society is an open society. In Afghanistan there is just a small group of people which is politically active. It is with those people that one must remain in contact. During my days at the embassy it was very useful to have our various sections, our economic section, our political section, be in touch with some of the lower levels of government. And it was possible to do that. Contacts were maintained with the economic people, the Ministry of Finance people, and in the lower levels of the Foreign Ministry. Dick Davies was the Political Section Chief. He had excellent contacts with people in the foreign office. But all of the information that you're going to get comes through a very small group of people who, in Afghanistan, at least at that time, were in charge of political affairs.

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Q: I would assume that the Russians, being neighbors, you had a great deal of tension related to them and what they were doing. Could you go into that a bit?

MEYER: Oh, yes. As I mentioned, when I arrived there the border was closed and it was a field day for the Russians. They were paving the streets. Virtually all of the imports to Afghanistan had to come through Russia. That didn't mean the Russians loved the Afghans, but Daud was a very shrewd fellow. He believed that, living on the border of the Soviet Union, he couldn't thumb his nose at them. For many years, the Afghans had played the "Great Game," pitting off one imperial power against another.

It's very interesting that, when Eisenhower was President, he initiated what was called the Eisenhower Doctrine. He secured a congressional resolution supporting it and appointed Congressman James Richards to head a delegation to visit Middle Eastern countries to determine whether they'd like to be covered by the Eisenhower Doctrine. The Eisenhower Doctrine simply said that the United States would support any country that was threatened by international communism.

By the time this effort of Eisenhower's was initiated, Angus Ward had been replaced by Ambassador Sheldon Mills. Very few countries stood up and said, "Hey, come on over and see us." The Lebanese did. Foreign Minister Charles Malik and President Chamoun were in trouble and they were the first ones to welcome Richards who carried with him the availability of substantial aid funding. Other countries were more negative. He visited some but with meager results. The amazing thing, about which very few Americans are aware, is that the Afghans invited Richards to come to Afghanistan. It was undoubtedly due to Prince Naim, the Foreign Minister, who had been ambassador in Washington and was more oriented toward Western interests than was his brother, who tried to maintain a strict neutrality and was more inclined to play the "Great Game."

In any case, Congressman Richards came to Kabul while I was there. Before going to see Prime Minister Daud, we had a meeting which included Congressman Richards and his

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State Department advisors, Bill Burdett and Jack Jernegan, as well as Ambassador Mills and his key embassy advisors. During that briefing both the State Department officials said, "Look, there's no way that we can commit American prestige to Afghanistan. We're already overextended by American commitments to Iran. We cannot tell the Afghans we'll support them if they get attacked by the Russians or by international communism." Congressman Richards, with his South Carolina drawl, came forth with the comment, "If I'd a known I couldn't get them covered by the Eisenhower Doctrine, I wouldn't a come here."

Anyhow, we went to see Daud. Daud, the shrewd game player, did not want to make any clear commitments either. So it was a very interesting discussion. We produced a communique, which Pashwak and I worked out. Pashwak was one of the chief aides in the Foreign Ministry and a very dynamic fellow who sided more with Daud than Naim. He kept insisting on the word "neutrality." I wasn't too happy about it, but the word was incorporated. In the end, it was probably better that way. When the Eisenhower Doctrine mission left, nobody knew whether Afghanistan was committed or not committed, or whether America was committed or not committed. Sometimes in diplomacy it's better to leave answers fuzzy, and we left that one fuzzy, indeed. But it is very interesting that the Afghans did want to be associated with the Eisenhower Doctrine, however indirectly.

In general, the Russians were very active. Bulganin and Khrushchev made a visit to India and stopped in Afghanistan on the way back. We all figured that they would leave some goodies behind. Our own aid program, which was about \$25 million a year, was invested primarily in the Helmand Valley, which was an albatross around our neck for many years. Facetiously, I proposed a theory that our aid would be \$50 million less whatever they got from the Soviets.

On the morning of the Bulganin-Khrushchev departure, I was listening to Moscow radio and heard the astonishing news that the Soviet leaders were leaving \$100 million in aid to Afghanistan. The diplomatic corps at the airport to say good-bye had not heard Moscow radio and my report thereof created quite a stir. It is ironic that the roads built pursuant to

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this \$100 million aid package, and the Salang Pass tunnel would three decades later be utilized by Russian forces as they retreated from an ill-fated sojourn in Afghanistan.

What concerned us most about the huge aid program which Bulganin and Khrushchev bequeathed the Afghans was the inclusion of a component for the military training of the Afghans in the USSR. Our topnotch economic section chief, Leon Poullada, coined the theme which we often conveyed, in one form or another, to Daud and his closest advisors, "Be careful; you may think you can ride the tiger but you must be sure you will not wind up inside." Of course, Daud and his people ignored these warnings as typical American propaganda. In retrospect, these concerns were clairvoyant. It was the very officers who were trained in Moscow who supported Daud when in 1973 he overthrew the regime of his cousin King Zahir Shah but, more importantly, they were the ones who later staged the bloody Communist revolution against Daud himself. They dispatched Daud and the entire ruling family as the Leninists had obliterated the Romanovs; i.e., complete extinction of Daud, Naim and their families. Only King Zahir Shah survived because he was already in exile in Rome, thanks to Daud's earlier revolution against him.

After the Bulganin-Khrushchev departure a debate started as to the appropriate American response. Do we try to compete? Do we pull out? Leon Poullada, for example, said, "Why should we furnish a house that's mortgaged to somebody else?" We finally decided on what we called the beachhead theory. We would maintain our position in Afghanistan with a small amount of new aid. Subsequently, a mission came out to discuss what we might do. In discussions with Prince Daud and his people, we came up with a package which included helping Afghanistan to improve its internal Ariana Airline. The package included a little more work on the Helmand Valley and also some beefing up of Afghan airports.

What we were not happy about was the big airport at Kandahar. A Polish national who was from ICAO advising the Afghan Government strongly urged Daud to build up Kandahar Airport. The ICAO man predicted planes flying from the Mediterranean to India would stop and would put Afghanistan on the map. Daud bought that idea and insisted on building that

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airport. None of us wanted it, but gradually went along with five or six million dollars for that project, which eventually became a white elephant. In any case, the package that we developed totaled about \$15 million.

When we finally announced it, I happened to meet Soviet Ambassador Degtyar at a cocktail party. He was a very kindly Ukrainian fellow whom I had gotten to know quite well. Teasing him, I said, "For many years, if you did something, there would be somebody on the other side of Afghanistan that would do something. If they did something, you would react on your side. Now you pumped \$100 million into Afghanistan with your aid program. We've responded with \$15 million worth of aid. You put in another \$100 million and we'll put in another \$15 million. I think, at this game, we're ahead of you."

Ambassador Degtyar smiled and said, "Well, it's up to the Afghans to make the decision." Then, he added, "You wouldn't like it, if we did things like you're doing in Afghanistan, if we did them down in Mexico." The old codger's comment was not without substance.

The Soviets had a number two man at the embassy, Spitsky, who was obviously KGB. In 1956, the Soviets organized a celebration marking the 35th anniversary of the Soviet-Afghan treaty of 1921. Via that treaty, Afghanistan became one of the first countries to recognize the Soviet Union. The Soviets went all out in celebrating this anniversary, heralded it well in advance. The highlight was a massive reception at the Soviet Embassy. At that occasion, when I encountered Spitsky, I needled him, "It is an honor to be in Afghanistan for this great occasion. However, I find one curious anomaly. During all this celebrating, no one has actually printed the text of the treaty that is being commemorated." He was taken aback when I said, "You know, Article 8 of that treaty is particularly interesting." He glowered, "It seems that you've been doing some studying. We can do some studying, too."

Article 8 of the 1921 Soviet-Afghan treaty says that the Soviet Union will forever honor the independence of the central Asian Kingdoms of Bukhara and Khiva. The two kingdoms

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were, in fact, being absorbed by the USSR when the treaty was signed. I told Spitsky, "You know, since your other preoccupations precluded your printing the text, perhaps our USIS could find occasion to help you by printing it." He got angry. He growled, "We can take care of ourselves and we can take care of you, too, if we have to." He was very bitter about the whole thing.

Q: I should think so. That's fascinating. Tell me, at this particular time, was this the time of the Baghdad Pact or was that before the Baghdad Pact idea came up?

MEYER: The Baghdad Pact was earlier than that, as I recall. 1954 was when the Baghdad Pact really got organized.

Q: But there was no idea of their joining that?

MEYER: No, there wasn't, except that from time to time, I would mention to Prince Naim that there was an old Saadabad Pact that dated back to the time of Persia's Reza Shah (1937). It linked Persia, Turkey, Iraq, and Afghanistan. It never had been canceled. In effect, it still could be considered a treaty in force. But it was never revived.

The Afghans have great respect for the Turks. During my tour there one of my major projects was to get the Prime Minister of Turkey, Adnan Menderes, a very dynamic leader, to visit Afghanistan. I pushed this particularly after we got the Pakistan border open. Meanwhile, I had visited Karachi where Ambassador Hildreth who was close to President Mirza cooperated effectively in persuading Mirza to visit Afghanistan. Our aim was to refurbish Afghanistan's traditional ties with both Pakistan and Turkey.

Menderes did come to Kabul for a highly successful visit. During the occasion, Prince Naim confided to me at the main reception, "We know who is responsible for arranging all this." He was very pleased to have the Turks come and show the Afghan people they had other friends besides the Soviets.

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In the meantime, Mirza, himself, came up. My wife and I had gone to Karachi via our air attach# plane to pick up some supplies. The purpose was not to meet with President Mirza. When talking about the Afghan situation Ambassador Hildreth said, "The President told me he wants to see you while you're here." Remonstrating that I had not come (remember, I was only DCM) for any political discussions, Hildreth said, "When the President makes such a request, it is a command performance." So the three of us—President Mirza, Ambassador Hildreth, and I—had drinks for an hour or two on the terrace of the Presidential palace. We talked about Afghanistan and I told Mirza how useful it would be if he felt it possible to make a Kabul visit. A leader of great confidence, Mirza explained how he'd been on the frontier where he first got to know Daud. Sure, he'd be glad to come up. So he did come. This was after the border was open. The Paks put on a good show in coming up there. The only trouble was that Daud slipped in his bathtub in preparation for a dinner one night and was out of commission. But, be that as it may, Mirza and Daud visited each other in Daud's bedroom. In effect, they made peace between the two countries, and plans for a much more productive relationship.

Q: Daud, as I remember, was about your size, wasn't he, except skinny?

MEYER: He was shorter than I am.

Q: Was he short?

MEYER: Oh, yes.

Q: I thought he was very tall.

MEYER: Oh, no. He was short. I'd say about 5'8". Naim was my size, about 6 feet.

Q: The Afghans, I gather, are basically Moslem. Did they have any thoughts at all or any emotions about the Arab-Israel problem while you were there?

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MEYER: Not really too much. Obviously, being Moslems, they were on the side of the Arabs, but there was no fanaticism on that subject, no.

Q: They didn't storm our embassy or anything?

MEYER: No. As a matter of fact, it was at that time that the Suez Canal issue was active. The Egyptian Ambassador was the only one trying to stir up interest. When Dulles set up his Suez Canal Users Association, the Egyptian Ambassador had all of Kabul talking about the Suez Canal Losers Association.

Q: Well, Ambassador, the next thing I see is that you were Deputy Assistant Secretary for NEA.

MEYER: Yes, that was sometime later. I came back and I was Deputy Director of South Asian Affairs for one year and then Deputy Director of Near Eastern for one year.

Q: What about South Asian affairs? Do you remember your particular problems that you had to deal with during that year?

MEYER: The usual ones that you had in South Asia. The Kashmir problem was still alive but it was dying fast. Above all there were the aid problems. The Indians were always in need of aid. They were trying to build a big dam in India and the World Bank was involved in it and our office was very much involved in trying to get that project squared away. Those were the main issues at the time that occur to me. The Indians and Pakistanis were always at each others' throats, it seemed, but nothing untoward happened that I can recall.

Q: Did you have any difficulty with our policies toward that area?

MEYER: A little bit. I was always concerned as to why, in our aid programs, we provided India with so very, very much money. The Pakistanis were always complaining that we were contributing more to neutralist India than we were to our ally Pakistan. We often

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asked what prompted such great American support for India. One theory I heard is that all of us grew up in Sunday School and we learned about the need to care for the poor heathen in India, a cause to which churches gave substantial contributions. There's sort of a congenital desire to help the poor heathen in India.

This issue, incidentally, came up during this period when I accompanied Secretary Dulles on a trip to Manila for the conference of SEATO, the Southeast Asian Treaty Organization. You know, Pakistan was a member, as well as a member of CENTO. I went over as Dulles' Middle East advisor. The Paks were very upset at that time about the magnitude of American aid going to India in contrast to the lesser amounts received by Pakistan. At the opening SEATO meeting, the Pakistani Foreign Minister made a big speech about how it doesn't pay to be an ally of the United States. You get short shrift and the neutrals get all the money.

In a conversation that evening with that Foreign Minister at a Pak cocktail party, I said, "You made this big speech today. Just how much money is Pakistan getting from the United States these days? Can you tell me?" He didn't have a clue as to how much money America was providing Pakistan, nor India, for that matter. I said, "But you made a big speech about the difference, and you don't even know?" He didn't know and it was very embarrassing to him. I didn't do it in a vicious way; I did it in a kindly way. From then on this ballyhoo stopped as far as the Pakistanis were concerned.

To Secretary Dulles I proposed that in the plenary sessions he ought to put this issue in per capita terms. On a per capita basis, the Pakistanis were getting much more than the Indians were getting. As a matter of fact, I developed a whole new theory that never got off the ground; I knew it wouldn't. On the Fourth of July we should line up all foreign aid ambassadors at the State Department and pay them a check according to their population, 25 cents per capita for every neutral country and a dollar for every ally of ours. That never flew, but the total outlays of foreign aid would remain as about heretofore.

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At the SEATO conference, in spite of my suggestion to Dulles that per capita consideration might be one way to answer the Paks, Dulles came up with one of his usual speeches. In it he said, "You know, as far as our foreign aid is concerned, our resources are not unlimited. There is in effect a war going on between the Free World and the slave world." He pointed out that when in conflict, you must deploy your resources where they can do the most good. That's what governs how the U.S. dispenses its foreign aid funds. Dulles added that there is value in supplying some money to India in this context; it is a democracy which has to stave off the waves coming from the USSR and China. Anti-communism was always Mr. Dulles's number one priority.

Q: I understand he was a very religious man. I would have thought he would have taken a more humanitarian point of view than a political point of view. That wasn't entirely the case?

MEYER: You would have thought so, but he put that in the terms of a war effort. Incidentally, another interesting feature happened during my days as South Asian Director. Daud, being the strong man that he was, it occurred to me it would be useful to bring him for a visit to this country. He visited Washington and then made a trip around the country with Maiwandwal, Pashwak, and the usual small coterie of his assistants. When he came to Washington we did the normal briefing book. About a day before his arrival, Dulles called us in saying, "Now, you've done this very nice thick briefing book. Let's push this ritual aside. What am I going to tell the Prime Minister when he comes?" That was typical of Dulles.

Another footnote during that occasion was the toast, which he gave at the dinner in honor of Daud. It was my responsibility to draft it. Having just come from Afghanistan, I felt that I knew what would be the right things to say because most Afghans thought of Dulles as a warmonger and gung ho to shoot up things.

Q: Dulles?

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MEYER: Dulles, yes. My clear impression was that he really was seriously interested in peace and I was trying to get that image through in this talk. I made up a toast and sent it up to Dulles' office. It started out with, "Not since the days of Marco Polo, when he had gone through Afghanistan," and so on. It got up to the Secretariat and was sent right back down by the staff, which said, "This is nonsense. This is not the kind of toast that the Secretary gives." I said, "Now wait a minute. I've just come from Afghanistan. I want that toast given." It went back and forth two or three times. Finally, it went in. They said, "All right, if you insist. But he'll never give it." That night at the Pan American Union, when Dulles got up and gave his toast, he recited my draft almost word for word.

The next day there was a call down from Dulles' office by Jerry Green, who was his chief aide. Jerry said, "The Secretary wants to know who wrote that toast last night." Our concern was that Dulles was pretty upset. With some trepidation on my part, my name was sent up. Word came back, "The Secretary wants his congratulations conveyed. He thought it was an exceptionally good toast."

But the best story of the Daud visit occurred during the post-Washington tour of the country. California was to be one of our stops. It had always been my belief that our movie colony was one of our real national assets. Eric Johnston had been President Eisenhower's special emissary in the Middle East dealing with the Jordan Waters Plan. I had gotten to know him quite well during those days. So I had called him. He was now head of the Motion Picture Association. I said, "Eric, could you arrange something in Hollywood for this group when they come?" Sure, he'd be glad to. So sure enough, we had a memorable dinner in Hollywood. The hostess, drafted by Eric Johnston, was a Hollywood veteran named Cobina Wright. She had a beautiful home in Hollywood Hills overlooking the vast expanse of flickering lights in Los Angeles. Some 40 of Hollywood's top stars were there—John Wayne, Ronald Reagan, Irene Dunne, Zsa Zsa Gabor, Eva Gabor, Esther Williams, you name them, 40 really top stars. And the guest was Daud, dour—looked like Yul Brynner—a bald fellow, with his small entourage. It was a fabulous

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evening. Daud was seated next to Zsa Zsa Gabor because he didn't speak English but both of them spoke French. Zsa Zsa nattered at Daud all evening about her problems with her Haitian boyfriend, Trujillo. Problems in their romance had been in the headlines of the paper that evening. She was telling how he was such a nice boy and all this bad news was being published which wasn't true.

Anyhow, at the end of the dinner Eric Johnston got up and made a cordial toast and Daud made one equally responsive. Then others started popping up. One of the first was Ronald Reagan. He was then head of the Screen Actors Guild. Boy, it was fantastic. He wound up with, "You know, Mr. Prime Minister, you come from a far off land. Your people don't know much about our country and our people don't know much about yours. I hope when you go back, if there is one message that you carry with you, it is that wherever there are free people in the world, they have friends in America." Does that sound like Ronald Reagan? It's the same speech he's been making for eight years as President. I was so impressed by it that afterward I went up to him—this was 1958—I went up to him and said, "What are you doing in the movie business? You ought to be in diplomacy." Later on, when he ran for governor, I was not surprised that he won. That was a rather interesting sidebar in my relations with Afghanistan, how I met Ronald Reagan for the first time.

Q: That's nice. After your tour of duty as head of the South Asian part of the Bureau, I see you went on to the Near East part and then became Deputy Director of the Bureau. Could you go into that a bit, tell us how you happened to leave as head of South Asia?

MEYER: I was in South Asian affairs for about a year, during which time one of my other big problems was forgiving a three billion dollar debt to India. I had to go down to Capitol Hill and fight for that because our ambassador to India, Moynihan, was pushing for that—Moynihan who, later as our ambassador to the UN, was livid with the Indians because they didn't behave the way Americans wanted them to behave at the UN

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I was in the South Asian Division for one year. The Director, Fred Bartlett, had come in at the same time I did. He'd been DCM in New Delhi. One day I received a call from Assistant Secretary Rountree. He noted that because of Fred's seniority, there wasn't much chance for me to move upward in South Asian Affairs. However, in the Near Eastern Affairs Division, Director Stuart Rockwell would be leaving within a year. Rountree would like to move me in to that Division as Deputy and then as Director. His reasoning was that I had had much more experience with Near Eastern affairs; i.e., Arab-Israeli affairs, than I had had with South Asia. So my move to Near Eastern Affairs was designed to groom me to be Near East Office Director. These plans materialized, and I was Near East Director for two years until the Kennedy Administration came in.

Q: What were some of the problems you had to deal with there? Certainly you had to deal with President Nasser in Egypt.

MEYER: Yes. It was after Suez, of course, and our policy with respect to Egypt was very much in flux. Ambassador Raymond Hare had been in Egypt through the whole Suez crisis and had come back to Washington to become Deputy Under Secretary of State. He had certain ideas including, "quiet diplomacy," as over against confrontation. Even though Nasser didn't seem to appreciate what we had done for him in the 1956 crisis, and made speeches and caused trouble in Lebanon in 1958, he was a reality and had tremendous influence. As we all know, the Egyptian radio was listened to by millions and millions of Moslems and Arabs all over, from North Africa to India. Nasser was a tremendously charismatic figure.

After 1956 and 1958, we decided on a policy to get Nasser off our back by reducing opportunities for him to make of us the target or the horse on which he could heroically ride. This developed into what we eventually called the "normalization" process, normalizing our relationship. Ambassador Hare adroitly initiated it by getting Nasser to ask for PL 480 assistance to Egypt. That was only the first step in a process which included opening the canal, and so on. It was a series of carefully planned steps that our State

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Department's Egypt country director, Bill Brewer, had organized. If one step would work, then we'd go on to the next one, and so on.

Nasser, at that time, had a pragmatic ambassador in Washington, with whom I dealt very frequently. His name was Mustafa Kamel, and we lunched together at least once a month. He was a delightful fellow and very close to Nasser. He was using expressions that Ambassador Raymond Hare later told me Nasser was using with him. For example, Kamel indicated that Egyptians are less excited than other Arabs, including with regard to the Palestine issue. This being true, he stressed time and again that we get on with our direct relations and “put the Palestine issue in the icebox.”

Well, that was essentially what we tried to do. Lewis Jones, the Assistant Secretary at that time, and also very much involved in this, emphasized “quiet diplomacy.” Instead of standing up and shouting against Nasser or rebutting things he might say from time to time, we would quietly, behind the scenes, get things done so that Nasser would have to pay attention to his own problems in the area rather than riding the horse of anti-Americanism. That was our policy and, in fact, it worked very nicely. During that period (1958-61), there were no breakouts of hostilities of any kind out in the Middle East.

Not surprisingly, many of Israel's American supporters criticized us for being too pro-Nasser. We weren't pro-Nasser, we were pro-United States. We were trying to keep Nasser from exploiting issues against the United States, thus diminishing his opportunities to play the role of a hero in the Third World. In short, I think the policy of “quiet diplomacy” and “normalization of relations” with Nasser was a good one. The Mideast was not on the front pages of the newspapers. There was quiet in that area. I must note that Lebanon's Charles Malik was among our critics. When I explained to him our policy of quiet diplomacy, he said, “Yes, they have quiet diplomacy in Siberia, too.”

Q: It was about that time, wasn't it, when Lebanon blew up and we had problems with Syria?

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MEYER: As a matter of fact, Lebanon blew up earlier (1958). The crisis was ending just about the time I was moving from South Asia to Near East. I remember drafting a letter that Assistant Secretary Rountree thought was excellent. The letter was to Nasser. The activities he was practicing were criticized in a diplomatic way. I never liked to be extreme in praise or in condemnation, but the message was there and Nasser wasn't very happy about it at that time. We knew that he and his people were very much involved in that Lebanese affair.

Q: Could you go into it a bit? What happened in Lebanon?

MEYER: In 1958?

Q: 1958, yes.

MEYER: Well, as mentioned, I wasn't in the NE division at the time but what happened was the typical strife among the sects in Lebanon, agitated by forces from outside, notably by Egypt, which was then, as you may remember, tied up with Syria in what was called the United Arab Republic. The UAR caused all sorts of trouble in Lebanon which erupted into civil war there. It came to the point where—this was before I was involved in it—Dulles decided to send armed forces to Beirut aboard the Sixth Fleet. As you may remember, upon landing they didn't have to fire a shot in anger, thank goodness. It did have a stabilizing effect. McClintock was our ambassador but Dulles dispatched Robert Murphy, our Deputy Under Secretary of State at that time, to help solve the problem politically. He was able to persuade General Chehab to accept the Presidency, thus ending the strife as to whether Chamoun should renew or not. Every six years in Lebanon there's a problem as to whether the President should renew or not renew, as had happened in the case of Sheikh Bishara. Chamoun was wanting to renew, but there were forces against that. That's what triggered the outbreak in 1958. We sent in our fleet and that helped stabilize the situation. Bob Murphy was then able to put a political solution into effect in the form of the Chief of the Army, General Chehab, being made President.

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The only event I remember personally occurred near the conclusion of this affair, just following my transfer to the Near East division. Assistant Secretary Rountree, NE Office Director Rockwell, and I were called to Secretary Dulles' office one day. He said, "We indicated when we sent our troops to Lebanon that we were responding to a Lebanese government request and we'd be there only long enough to do whatever had to be done. I think our mission has been accomplished; the time has come to pull our troops out." He called in his secretary, Phyllis Bernauer (later Bill Macomber's wife), and he dictated a statement for public announcement to the effect that we had been invited into Lebanon and now that our job was done, American forces were coming out. It was really a dramatic moment because it's so easy, once you get into a place, to stay there. There is always a fear that the withdrawal may be premature. But Dulles said, "We've done our job. Let's get out before we get hurt." I think it was a very wise decision on his part. We pulled out and the country continued to go on without any further trouble.

Q: Do you recall any other major problems while you were in NEA there? North Africa, I believe, was part of your domain then, wasn't it?

MEYER: No. I think that was still part of the African Bureau.

Q: It was? How about Saudi Arabia? Do you recall any problems with Saudi Arabia that you had to deal with?

MEYER: King Faisal, of course, had his problems with Nasser. He did not like Nasser, as you know, and vice versa. But I'm not sure that came up during that period. It really came up a little later. There was the Yemen problem that developed.

Q: That was Egypt?

MEYER: That was all a little later.

Q: Okay. Could you give me some other projects?

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MEYER: Well, one of the most important projects, as far as I was concerned, during this whole period was dealing with the refugees. When I was Director of Near Eastern Affairs, I made a trip to the Middle East and the refugee camps made a particular impact on me. At one of them, the Indian Director of UNEF made the comment, "As long as these refugee camps exist, they are like cesspools. Poison abounds and nothing but demoralized and deformed human mentalities will emerge from them." This really made an impression on me. When I came back to Washington, I cooked up the idea that we must do something about the refugees because these people would never become productive members of society if things went on as they were.

In the meantime, at the United Nations all during my period in NE (1958-60), every time there was a General Assembly meeting I would have to go to New York because the issue of refugee relief would come up. And each time there would be unacceptable resolutions proposed. The Arabs would insist on custodianship for their properties in Israel, and the Israelis would counter with a proposal for direct negotiations. I'd go to New York and try behind the scenes to prevent such blowups from occurring. My efforts were difficult but usually successful.

But the Arabs big cry at the UN always was that there must be a carrying out of Resolution 194, paragraph 11. That paragraph says that those refugees who wish to return to their former homes and live at peace with their neighbors should be allowed to do so. The alternate being, if they want to live elsewhere, they should be compensated. I said, "Why don't we blow the whistle? They're always screaming for this resolution. Why don't we call them because I'm convinced that not many would want to go back and live in their former homes at peace with their neighbors. That means living in Israel." It was my conviction that only a very small fraction would take that option. We could start by offering the opportunity to Ahmed Shoukairi, who was the most loud-mouthed and troublesome. Although technically the Saudi representative, he was a Palestinian and a firebrand. He'd never dream of going back and living in peace with his neighbors in Israel.

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In any case, I developed this idea during the latter years of the Eisenhower Administration. Dulles had died and Christian Herter was Secretary of State. There really wasn't much happening. But the idea was there when Kennedy became President. During the campaign, Kennedy had made speeches as to how he would force the Arabs and Israelis into peace discussions, in effect beat their heads together and there would be peace in the Middle East.

When the Kennedy Administration came in, I was made Deputy Assistant Secretary for Near Eastern Affairs. Word came from the White House that, just because 90 percent of the Jewish vote had gone to Kennedy, didn't mean he was in their pocket. What should we really do in the Middle East that would be constructive and Kennedy would back it? Out comes my idea of the refugee project. It took two months to sell it to Harlan Cleveland, the new Assistant Secretary for UN Affairs, and others involved. Eventually, the White House approved it.

Partly to offset concerns almost universal in the Middle East that Kennedy's policies would be very one-sided, but also as opening gambit in the refugee project, it occurred to me that a useful exercise would be letters from the President to all Mideast leaders. They would emphasize Kennedy's dedication to peace in that area and his intention to try to do something about the refugees. Working with the UN Bureau, we crafted these carefully. They went out in May 1961.

In each letter, we included a paragraph specifically directed to the recipient leader's country. It referred to our bilateral relationship and summarized various types of assistance which that country had received from the U.S. This inclusion made it awkward for the recipients to disclose the contents of the letters, but eventually the fact that they were sent and their substance did find their way into the media.

Eventually, responses were received from all. Since they, too, would become public, it was not surprising that most of those from Arab leaders included criticism of what

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they considered America's excessive pro-Zionist proclivities. The Saudi reply, which Ahmed Shoukairi undoubtedly had a hand in drafting, was particularly repulsive, a matter which was still annoying the President months later when I met with him prior to going as Ambassador to Lebanon. The last reply to come in was from Nasser. It was relatively moderate and constructive. In fact, it prompted several other exchanges between the two leaders in the months ahead.

In my judgment, no doubt prejudiced, the project was a very good one. There would be no referendum or poll or anything of that kind. We would do what we had done with blocked bank accounts many years earlier—have a quiet survey via a confidential questionnaire. The Israelis had in 1948 blocked Arab bank accounts and the Arabs wanted their money out. The PCC, the UN Palestine Conciliation Commission, made arrangements in 1952 for them to get their money but they had to fill out a form that mentioned Israel in it. At first they didn't want to sign it because it implied recognition of Israel. But it was done quietly and confidentially. Eventually, they got their money out. So using that sort of scenario, our idea was that the refugees should be given an opportunity to express their preferences in confidence.

There would be PCC operated stations where refugees could come. They would be given three options. One, do you want to go back to your former home and live in peace with your neighbors? Two, do you want to resettle in an Arab country and, if so, name the country in order of preference? Three, would you like to emigrate elsewhere in the world? If so, name countries in order of preference. In sum, it would be a quiet, confidential questionnaire which any refugee who so wished could fill out. And the PCC would undertake to carry out to the extent possible the refugees preferences.

Using the PCC as the agency, we deemed it necessary to have a special representative in charge of the program, preferably from a neutral country. We tried for two months to get August Lindt, who was the Swiss Ambassador in Washington. He had had a lot of experience with refugee affairs at the United Nations. Harlan Cleveland and I went to

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see him at least twice. Finally, we gave up. He said he had to get permission from his government. He never seemed to answer us, from which it was clear he was less than enthusiastic.

Finally, one day, George McGhee, who was then head of the Policy Planning Staff and knew about the project, phoned. "Armin, I know you're not getting anywhere with August Lindt. I just had lunch with Joe Johnson (who was then President of the Carnegie Institute for Peace). I think he'd be an excellent man for that project." I said, "I'd rather not have an American, but we've got to get going on this project." So after a personal appeal from Secretary Rusk, Joseph Johnson agreed to serve as Special Representative. Johnson was dedicated and resourceful. He worked for two years and produced a brilliant program. He had a very fine Jewish advisor, who worked out the details in optimal fashion.

Unfortunately, as the program neared completion and was being made ready for announcement, it started leaking. Some New York Israeli supporters became worried and contacted Kennedy. Kennedy called a conference to review the whole project.

Q: That was the so-called Johnson Plan?

MEYER: The Johnson Plan. There were two Johnson Plans. One was the Johnston Water Plan in 1954. This one was in 1962-63. So President Kennedy called in Joe Johnson and Phil Talbot, who was Assistant Secretary for NEA, Harlan Cleveland, and others. After hearing Johnson's full explanation, Kennedy said, "This seems to be such a good idea even Ben-Gurion should appreciate it. Mike—Myer Feldman, his Jewish advisor—you go out and talk to BG and see if he won't agree to this." Our original ground rules were that neither side would accept anything you'd do and you'd have to expect some noise, but they'd be delighted to see something happen.

Mike went out and talked to BG and BG said, no. He wanted no part of it. His main reason was he didn't like UN organizations and this would require UN involvement. He didn't have much use for any of the UN mechanisms dealing with Israeli affairs. And obviously he

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was worried about a stampede effect and coping with world opinion. The fact was that the program had been carefully crafted. The Israelis would have veto power over every single Arab who considered returning.

When Ben-Gurion vetoed the Johnson refugee plan, the White House decided to drop its support. About the same time, as expected, Arab criticism was heard, particularly from Syria. This permitted the administration publicly to withdraw its support, citing the opposition of both sides.

To this day, the collapse of the refugee project makes me very unhappy. Less than two years later (1964), the PLO (Palestine Liberation Organization) was founded, by none other than Ahmed Shoukairi. If we could have gotten those refugees out of those camps and made them productive members of society, we would have, to use Joe Johnson's phraseology, "dissolved" the refugee problem, thus thwarting what has since become the formidable "Palestinian problem."

It has always been my conviction that in the Arab-Israel controversy the key factor is the Jewish community in the United States. In that first year of the Kennedy Administration, every month I would have Label Katz, who was then the President of the Major Jewish Organizations Conference, come by and we would talk about the progress on the refugee project. I would explain why it was essential to get those refugees out of the camps emphasizing that they were going to be nothing but trouble for Israel. Label would come in and say, "Armin, the boys in New York are getting a little worried." I'd say, "You go back and tell them I don't give a damn about America's interests, but it's in Israel's interest to get those people out of those camps and get them away from this continuing warping of their minds."

As long as I was in Washington, Label Katz was aboard. But then I went out as Ambassador to Lebanon at the end of 1961 and I don't think the same kind of attention was addressed to Israel's supporters to keep them informed. Jewish people are

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exceptionally intelligent but some of their organization leaders, like labor leaders, have a vested interest in stirring things up. But if you talk to the rank and file of Israel's supporters directly and explain that this is a better road to go than that one, they'll understand. I think they could have understood the value of the refugee program if it had been properly presented to them. But, unfortunately, the whole thing went down the drain. To this day, Joe Johnson is very sad about it. It broke his heart and mine, too, because I think we could have been spared all this terrorism business and other unhappiness if we had gone ahead with that project at that time.

Q: Besides the refugee problem, were there other aspects of the Arab-Israel controversy on which you focused similar attention during the Eisenhower-Kennedy transition?

MEYER: Obviously, there was always the military dimension. Throughout the Eisenhower years, our government maintained a firm policy of “not being a major supplier of military equipment” to any of the countries in the Mideast. President Truman had initiated the policy and, in 1952, bolstered it via a Tripartite Declaration in which the British and French agreed to limit arms supplies.

Perhaps that policy was unrealistic. No Mideast nation, particularly Israel, wished to be inadequately equipped for defensive purposes. In the waning Eisenhower years, we were subjected to increasing pressures from Israel and its friends centering on the purchase of Hawk missiles. It is possible to contend that this one issue cost Richard Nixon the 1960 election.

During the campaign, Ben-Gurion showed up in Washington. Nixon, pressed personally by the Israeli Prime Minister, phoned Secretary Herter urging a change in State Department policy, so as to permit Hawks to Israel.

In what proved to be a historic meeting, Herter called in Acting Assistant Secretary Hart of NEA, Under Secretary Dillon, Deputy Under Secretary Merchant and myself. Herter said he had seen JCS Chief Arleigh Burke the previous evening. Burke had told

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him that security considerations were no obstacle. Therefore, unless we in NEA had better reasons, Israel would get Hawks. Ambassador Hart's oral opposition was about to be overridden when the Secretary was handed a memo prepared in our NE division listing five reasons why it was not a good idea. The memo argued that this would mark the beginning of the end of our traditional arms policy and questioned the wisdom of escalating the Mideast arms race with missilery. Within five minutes it was not a question of whether but which was the most important reason why not.

The Israelis did not get the Hawks. Kennedy garnered 90% of the Jewish vote (Nixon pared that down to under 70% in his winning elections later). Given Kennedy's incredibly close electoral college margin, one can conjecture that, if the Israelis had gotten the missiles, Nixon would have gained the votes, notably the 10,000 additional in Illinois, needed for victory.

But the story did not end there. Two years after his entering the White House, Kennedy sent word to a meeting of Mideast Chiefs of Mission in Athens that it was necessary for him to do something special for Israel, even though any of the four options he proposed would have adverse effects in the Arab world. The assembled Ambassadors decided that, of the four, least damaging would be the supply of Hawk missiles.

That opened the door and in ensuing years, especially during the Johnson and Nixon administrations, American policy shifted from reluctance to selling arms to any Mideast nation to assuring Israel would be provided with overwhelming military superiority. This enabled Israel at will to bomb Baghdad and Tunis, invade Lebanon and take regular punitive actions, not all of them necessarily in the interest of Mideast peace.

Q: From the vantage point of Middle Eastern interests, how would you assess Kennedy's policies?

MEYER: As we all know, Kennedy while in Congress had intense interest in foreign affairs, including, for example, the Algerian question. In a number of areas, our foreign policy

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is a projection of domestic policies. Inevitably, the Mideast falls into that category. In his campaign, Kennedy's rhetoric gained, as mentioned earlier, 90% of the Jewish vote. But as soon as he occupied the Presidential chair, he asked for recommendations on foreign policy merits. Secretary Rusk underscored this by an instruction to the whole State Department to provide our best advice and let him and the President worry about domestic politics.

Probably my greatest shock was to be called in two weeks after the inauguration by Roger Jones, the new Deputy Under Secretary of State for Administration. He informed me that the President wished to appoint me as Ambassador to Israel. The following day, my response was that as a soldier I would be pleased to undertake the Israel Ambassadorship, even though the confidences built up in seventeen years dealing with the Arab world would go down the drain. It was suggested that the nomination should be discussed with my Assistant Secretary, G. Lewis Jones.

As it happened, the latter, knowing that all Eisenhower Assistant Secretaries were being ousted, longed to return as Minister to London, where he had served earlier. That job was currently held by Walworth Barbour. Noting that Barbour had been offered the Ambassadorship to Turkey but had to decline because of asthma, Lewis suggested to me and then to the new administration that Barbour go to Tel Aviv, and I be held in Washington to provide continuity in Mideast affairs. That opened the door for his assignment to London. Barbour held the Ambassadorship in Israel for a record number of twelve years. It is interesting how the wheel of fortune turns when Ambassadorial appointments are made.

What was not made clear to me when the Israel nomination was proposed was that what Kennedy had in mind was to send a professional diplomat well versed in Arab world affairs to emphasize regional realities to the Israelis. This sound approach was realized later when Thomas Pickering, who had served as Ambassador to Jordan, was appointed as Ambassador to Israel. In this connection, it is worth noting that, at least in my days,

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the Israelis preferred career Ambassadors rather than political appointees. In earlier years, they found that recommendations of the politicians are normally discounted by the Washington foreign affairs establishment.

As for my own fate, I stayed on as NEA Deputy Assistant Secretary, working happily with the new Assistant Secretary, Phil Talbot. In mid-summer 1961, Ambassador John Kenneth Galbraith asked me to serve as his deputy in India, but I stressed the need to stay in Washington to backstop the Joseph Johnson refugee project. In December, I was asked to serve as Ambassador to Lebanon. Having deep roots there from my earlier service as Chief of the Political Section, my response was affirmative, without any reluctance.

End of interview