

Interview with Isa K. Sabbagh

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

ISA K. SABBAGH

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy

Initial interview date: November 9, 1989

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Note: This transcript was not edited by Mr. Sabbagh.

Q: I might add here that Isa had a certain supervisory role over me at one point when I was in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia. He was the public affairs officer and I had modest public affairs responsibilities as part of —I wore that hat as well as being an economic officer. Isa, I wonder if you could give something of your background before we move into the heart of the interview, where you came from and early career.

SABBAGH: I was born in Palestine. My father was Arab, my mother was Brazilian. I studied in Palestine, I graduated from the Government Arab College and then went to England and specialized in geography and history and I had my own private interests in American and Arabic literature, especially with emphasis on Arabic, which is the start of my career, as it turned out.

War broke out September 3, 1939. I had just finished, or graduated, and when a circular came around and among seven students or graduates I was the one person who submitted something for the BBC, at the request of the dean of the university, because BBC had wanted people who either knew how to translate or speak or write or so on and

Library of Congress

so forth in Arabic. They were increasing their Arabic service of the BBC which had stopped three years before.

So, I went to the BBC. It was like getting into broadcasting by accident, so to speak, and they liked what I had sent them.

They had an interview, something like this, and then they said, “ Righto, you're going to broadcast it tonight.”

I said, “what do you mean broadcast it tonight. I thought I was going to record it and then you broadcast it any time you want it.”

They said, “No, no, no.”

Anyway, to shorten the story, they liked what they heard when I did broadcast it. When I emerged from the studio, apparently they were listening in a room without any glass partition, and they wondered how I had told them during that initial interview that I had never seen a studio, that I had never seen a microphone, etc. I told them that I am a person who values truth and this is what I told and it is true. So, I was asked what was I thinking of when I was reading the script.

And I said, “Frankly, now that you've mentioned reading, I wasn't reading.”

I was just speaking out the script which I had known by heart, of course, and I was just thinking of my friends, my family, tandem things. In fact, the script was strange things in the West. Here is an Arab young man, transplanted into a new society, and of course one observes the comparisons, similarities, differences, etc., and that's what the script was all about.

And one fellow shouted, “By Jove, you're a born broadcaster!”

I said, “Why, how?”

Library of Congress

And he said, “Because exactly people insist on reading the script, and you say you were speaking it.”

I said, “Exactly, that's what it, presumably, broadcasting is all about.”

So from there there was nothing I didn't do during the war, including going to the Western front as a war correspondent for the BBC, and I gave a few dispatches about the progress of the war and things like that. And I even—that is all irrelevant, you may cut it out—discovered that, this was in 1944, I discovered that the Germans were using ammunition or some segment of the ammunition on which was stamped 1943. And the British censor, to whom I had conveyed this in English, he said, “do you mind if I use my blue pencil to censor it?”

I said, “I don't mind. It's your job, but why?”

He said, “Because you don't know, we don't want to tell our enemy that we know that he is short of ammunition.”

Okay, fine. So you pick up these pieces of learning on the way. An airplane, another time, was taking me to the Western front. It crashed. It was a brand new Liberator, if you please, American Liberator, yet. And the Lord saved me. I discovered the fire in the plane.

Q: We were having a lot trouble with fires and Liberators, if I recall at that time.

SABBAGH: It must have been brand new.

Q: They were a dangerous airplane because of that.

SABBAGH: I saw the sparks and thought, “Good God, common sense would tell me that there's no place for sparks inside an airplane after take-off.” It was a beefy American fellow, the pilot—very nice, he turned out to be. The sky in England was beautiful,

Library of Congress

unusually blue and everything. And his co-pilot apparently was whistling away through the window, and I went and tapped him at the back of the neck.

“Yeah?,” he said.

I said—I used to speak with a British accent—“This may not be any of my business, but are sparks actually necessary in an airplane?”

He said, “Sparks! Where?”

I said, “Down by your right foot.”

He looked and then he started screaming, “Jack, get that God-damned extinguisher.” And that was the first time I heard that word, 'God-damned'. Anyway, we learn. And before I knew it, smoke was filling the whole place. I had three colleagues from BBC also. The plane went down and all I know is that when I was revived, I was all wet, etc, along side the plane. Thank God I was alive.

Anyhow, so this is my background. I, by dent of, I guess, industry, loving the thing, it grew like part of me: broadcasting, writing, criticizing, correcting, and so on. This is personal, this is subjective, etc., but because I was meticulous about Arabic, and the rendering of English into Arabic and the other way around, I became like a fault, finding genius or idiot or something, with the result that I had a big thing with a group of my colleagues.

I was the only non-Egyptian, by the way, too, so that may have had something to do with it, and I asked the director of the whole department to send a notebook I had prepared, a black notebook, after the first six times of squabbling. And I had it filled in two months: time, date, name of broadcaster, subject matter. Then, two major columns: mistake, correction, mistake, correction, mistake, correction.

And I said to Donald Stevenson, “Don't take my word for it, this is it. Please send it to their own university, Al-Azhar, in Cairo, and I would abide by the ruling. If I am wrong, I'll

Library of Congress

apologize, I'll learn, if not, I need to be told." And again, within two months during the war—it was slow—he called for a meeting. He announced without even telling me beforehand, that what he had done, and this is the verdict, from Al-Azhar, as you called it, "I'm pleased to mention that our cherished colleague, Isa K. Sabbagh, has spotted the mistakes. Al-Azhar said they were mistakes, Al-Azhar congratulated the author—they didn't mention my name—on the correction and therefore, I hereby announce that Mister Sabbagh is at this moment being promoted to the senior most rank of the foreign language services of the BBC."

That was, of course, a historic day for me. I did not gloat of anything like that. In fact, I even became slightly modest.

Before leaving, of course, war was over and everything, I started giving commentaries—United Nations commentaries. One session was in London.

And then, all of a sudden, I received a telephone call from the Telecommunications Officer or Attach# of the American embassy in London. I had had no contact with the embassy in London, and then he announces that—with pleasure, as he put it—that, "the State Department is happy to offer you this and that, grade GS-12."

They wanted to start an Arabic service for the Voice of America and somebody had given them my name, and then I remembered, yes I had been interviewed by two people. One Sidney Glazer and the other fellow, whose name I always forget, but he was a very good Arabist. So, "would you therefore make your response prompt and definitive."

That was the letter. So I sent him a reply: "as to promptness, here is the proof, as to the definitiveness you requested, I'm afraid I cannot oblige until I have somebody analyze for me—my long-winded style—the significance of that algebraic form, GS-12." What does that mean? The bureaucratic jargon of narcissists, the State Department still.

I didn't know, so he said, "You have a point."

Library of Congress

So he communicated with the State Department and then after the '48 General Assembly session in Paris, which I also enjoyed and I gave daily commentaries and interviews and all sorts of things. That session was not finished within three months. It had to have a recess for Christmas, New Years and it was to be resumed in the United States at Lake Success.

So, apparently the response of the listeners was so great that BBC, Neville Barber, God rest his soul, my very best friend at that time, who was also an Arabist and Arab scholar/historian suggested that I go to America.

I said, "What for?"

He said, "Well, the listeners want you to continue the commentaries," and this is how the dialogue was resumed between the State Department representatives and myself. I was given Form 52 something, whatever the form was to fill then and I did. Therefore, I had to wait for that clearance which was a long winded thing as everybody knows.

In the meantime, the United Nations Department of Information asked if I would record a few commentaries on the United Nations, my observations, etc., etc., and to go to Beirut if you please, to attend a regional session symposium on social welfare or something of the area. I kept myself busy, in other words, and I came back.

Finally, clearance came. We were in New York at the Fisk Building, 57th Street, 16th floor and I started training the staff they had gathered and also writing in some further qualifications required for broadcasting in Arabic.

Q: The United States had not had an Arabic service prior to that?

SABBAGH: No, no. During the war, OWI had somebody giving some news or summary of news occasionally. That somebody happened to be, God rest his soul too,—he's dead

Library of Congress

—Ismail al-Halladi[?]. His son is a brilliant professor at the University of Chicago. He even taught my son here at Georgetown.

Anyway, so as you know the regulations had it that when you recruit, you have to—for a foreign language like this—you have to place announcements in various newspapers, etc. for people might be interested to send in a letter of response and only if you could not find Americans or persons who were American citizens, were you allowed to get from outside.

So, on January 1st, 1950 we started broadcasting in Arabic in New York still. We had a famous Arab-American poet, Ilya Abdul Mahdi compose a poem for the occasion of the inauguration of an Arabic service. And we had a few members from the Arab delegation to the United Nations, we had the Secretary General then of the Arab League, namely Abdel Rahman Azzam Pasha[?]. They came and gave each little messages of congratulations, etc., etc. and we started in earnest.

We stayed there until late '53 which means we were saddled with the responsibility of doubling our output, etc. because of the Suez War and the Hungarian Revolution, this and that.

Q: That was in the fall of '56.

SABBAGH: Fall of '56, that's right. By then we had moved into Washington. I'm glad you spotted that one because we moved in late '53. That's right. And I had, for what it's worth, a little altercation with the so-called high brains of the Voice in those days. Because during the Suez War, as a fellow who was the editor of the Arabic service (they called you an editor in those days, so I would attend policy meeting, policy guidance, whatever, because by then I had become a U.S. citizen—in 1954 I became a citizen) all of a sudden I'm subjected to a third degree kind of thing. All sorts of stupid questions, focused on the fact, which I never denied, I acknowledged that I permitted the term tripartite aggression to be used in connection with what we called “police action.”

Library of Congress

Q: The tripartite would be France, Great Britain and Israel.

SABBAGH: So I was aghast, you are wasting your time, and more importantly, my time. I have programs to keep up with. Is that what you are accusing me of? Of having gone contrary to policy. What policy, this is ridiculous. I gave them a hell of a lecture about the rudimentary necessities for, call it propaganda, call it information. I said, look here are three countries attacking Egypt, Egypt therefore having become like a prostate victim bleeding, with a couple of teeth knocked out, and we are to tell them that it was no aggression, it was just somebody coming by you, gently passing his hand across your mouth to see if you are wearing lipstick. What kind of police action? You can tell this to the Chileans, the South Africans, to the Alaskans, etc.? I really let go. You do not, unless you are stupid, tell the person immediately concerned with the bloody thing that, no, it was not an aggression.

Number two, the term tripartite aggression was a quotation, because we have a regular thing called "From the World Press", a program. On that day, I chose that editorial, summarized, from a Greek paper. Greece being a friend and ally, and quoted it. In Arabic they say "the conveyor of blasphemy is not necessarily blasphemous," but you do not know Arabic and would not understand this. In case you have not heard, our dear friend, President Eisenhower used that term. Then somebody, I should not mention his name but he is an ass, said, yes, but the President used that term three days after you permitted its use on the Arabic service. I said, now you are going to penalize me because I was three days ahead of our brilliant president? Gentlemen, if that is all you have to say I am sorry I have to go to my work, and I got out. These were annoyances that I had.

Q: What were the politics of the Voice of America. The Voice is, understandably, full of various ethnic politics. You have exiled Hungarians, Ukrainians, you name any group and it is there. What were the politics that you felt? You were from Palestine, there were Egyptian politics, there were Syrian politics, and of course the overwhelming influence of the supporters of Israel, not only Jews but also people who considered themselves

Library of Congress

strong supporters of Israel. Can you give a little feel of how it was to work in that particular atmosphere?

SABBAGH: I can indeed. I would do it with mixed pleasure and pain. When I first started I was like an one-eyed man among the blind. I was aware of it, I did my best to open the eyes of the blind people, and we had the head of Near Eastern Services, a bright person, Jerry Dooher, he was apparently an old Iranian hand. He understood and spoke Farsi. Therefore he had more than a modest notion of the Islamic world, the extent of it, and everything. I was told when I was confirmed as the editor of the Arabic Service, you are it. You have carte blanche and that loomed large within me. I was not a citizen then, but having committed myself to this responsibility I was as conscious of the U. S. interests as anybody could have claimed to have been at that time. I was the Voice of America, not the Voice of Israel or Palestine or Egypt. I was basing myself on the basic things. I had all that training and experience at the BBC. I was named commentator, popular, if I may add, with the Arab world. Therefore, I did not want my name attached to an output which reflected ignorance in that specific sense. Namely, you base your approach to a problem on the psychology of the people you are talking to, on your knowledge of how they would react, whether they would believe you or not believe you. That is why I blew up at that thing.

When we moved down to Washington we had a few guys who had never heard a word of Arabic or seen an Arab or left New Jersey, for that matter. So that is when clashes began to occur. The Suez canal, and believe it or not, the Hungarian revolution, got into the act here with me because I was wanting to use, as an anti-communist thing, the revolution. For heaven's sake, it was a historic thing. An important event, so I asked our embassies to find out if they could get a hold of anybody who could enroll the Arab world, or was an Arab himself who could give a little spiel. I was lucky because apparently a Lebanese journalist was at that time in Hungary when the thing happened and wanted to get the hell out. He remembered that he had an American friend who was then at our embassy in Vienna. He went to Austria and looked up that fellow and the embassy had received a copy of that request by the Voice of America, so this is what happened. This Lebanese

Library of Congress

fellow recorded a very nice, moving, in fact, description of how pained he was to see those armies of civilian men, women and children trying to get out from the path of Soviet tanks. Now the fly in that ointment, if you please, in the opinion of one less than brilliant assistant editor who had himself come from Poland, said he was not going to permit the broadcasting of that tape because from the transcription that he had seen the Arab guy said he remembered the plight of the Palestinians as they left their homes in 1948. Because of that he was not going to permit the broadcasting.

I said "To hell with you," and again I blew up. I said, "Look, you have no authority to dictate to us what we broadcast. I am the editor. That means I look at every damn thing that goes and I decide what goes and what does not. It either goes in toto, with every comma kept, or I do not permit it to be broadcast just half way." I am giving you the impression that I am difficult to get along with. As one person put in my yearly efficiency report "...but he is difficult to get along with". Thank the Lord for Jim Akins who was our ambassador in Saudi Arabia when I went back there. He had written something like he was aware that some people had described the reviewed officer as being difficult to get along with, "I do not agree. We had been together for about fourteen months, but I detected within him which I share with him, the indifference to the criticism by mediocrities," something like that. We are not very fond of mediocre people.

One or two things like this and by the end of 1957 I had had just about enough. I left one day having left my resignation. I went home. I was, of course, full of thoughts, full of anger. In the middle of the night I had a telephone call. The call came from the head of USIA, we had by that time become a separate agency. "This is your friend Hunt Damon". He said to me, "Isa, sorry to wake you up. What is this you have done. I understand that you have finally blown your top." I said, "My dear Hunt, the key expression in your statement is 'finally'. Do you remember how many times I told you what was wrong with the services of the Voice of America, not just the Arabic one? You promised every time you would look into it." He said, "Yes, but won't you reconsider?" I said, "You know my temperament, I don't rush into decisions like a stupid ass. But if you were to pave the path from my door in

Library of Congress

Arlington, Virginia to the HEW [VOA] building with gold and diamonds I would not take one step in that direction, are you satisfied?"

He said, "Well that's my Isa. Would this prevent you from having coffee with me?" I said, "Not at all". The next day we were having coffee. He was asking me what qualifications they should have for the person they would appoint on a regional basis in Africa to be the media and broadcasting counselor to various radio stations in that area. To me that was a one, two, three question and answer. In the middle of the conversation, he hit his forehead, saying "stupid, I am looking at the man!" He wanted me to move to the Foreign Service. I said, "After what you know of me and heard about me, you still think I am the right material for the Foreign Service?" He said, "Yes." I said, "Look, if I were to join and if I were to encounter certain things that I did with the Voice of America maybe I would last for three hours and seventeen minutes." (Why I pulled out that figure I do not know.) He laughed and said, "No, I know you better than you know yourself, and you would come in as a fresh breeze. We need somebody like you, who is a fearless son-of-a-bitch, who does not care. But as long as you know what you are saying has your full conviction and your full interest and that of the U.S." I had become a citizen by then. "We need you to say yes." I said I agreed in principle, and that is how I joined the Foreign Service.

Q: You were sent to Jeddah rather than Africa, weren't you?

SABBAGH: That is another story. I was first, after Foreign Service training, assigned to Tripoli, Libya and then they changed it to Tunis, Tunisia because they said, "It is more central and you know more people, so if you have no objection...?" I said all right. I was finishing the routine things of processing out, getting a diplomatic passport and this and that, having been confirmed, I bumped into an old friend, Donald R. Heath, who had been U. S. ambassador to Lebanon and he was on a direct transfer to Jeddah. He said, "Mon ami (he spoke French fluently), what are you doing." I said I had joined the Foreign Service. He said he knew and had been spending the last three days trying to get in touch with me. I asked what for, and he said he wanted to congratulate me and to ask me for a

Library of Congress

favor. He asked if I knew where I was being assigned and I said Tunis. "Tunis" he said, "this is the favor I want. If I can swing it, George V. Allen is an old friend of mine.."

Q: He was the head of USIA

SABBAGH: "Yes," he said, "If I can have him assign you to Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, would you accept?" I said I would not object. I had been in Saudi Arabia. I had the honor of being whisked out of an airplane to go and meet the king in 1952.

Q: This was Ibn Saud.

SABBAGH: Yes, Abdul Aziz Ibn Saud. Heath said, "Good, let me see what I can do." I said all right, but don't tell Allen that I have accepted so readily. Two days later George V. Allen summons me to his office. I had met him before. He said some kind words of how the Foreign Service was richer for having me, etc. "Now our mutual friend, Ambassador Heath, has presented a very good case for having you with him in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia." I said "Oh." Allen said Heath said he did not want to fall into so many pitfalls in that new cultural society because while he knew Lebanon and the Lebanese and their French veneer, he had never been to Saudi Arabia, he did not know anybody there, and Heath said "I know that my friend, Isa Sabbagh, has a good standing with the Saudis. They like him, he likes them. He would not arrive as a stranger. They listened to him throughout the war. I want somebody like that to be m right-hand man, constantly at my side to help me avoid those pitfalls." "Well, you present a very logical case", said George V. Allen, "and I will see if Isa has no objections, and that is why I am asking you now. Do you have any strenuous objections?" (He used that adjective.) I said "Frankly no. I know Ambassador Heath, and it would be a privilege to be his right hand." Allen said, "We want you also as the first country public affairs officer to establish USIS in Saudi Arabia" I said ok and that is how it started, and for about two and a half years I worked in Saudi Arabia solo. They did not send me any assistants. The secretaries of the embassy were all very kind (not only because I was

Library of Congress

a bachelor) but I said “Look, it is your government, not just mine, I want to send these messages to Washington, to my agency.”

When Ed Murrow became head of the agency he held a regional PAO conference on Cyprus and I attended. When my turn came for the meeting with him, I went in, “Good afternoon Mr. Director”. “You must be Isa Sabbagh”. “Yes I am, I have been for some time”. He said, “I have heard a lot about you”. I said “I do not need to reciprocate the same sentiment because it is taken for granted.” He was proceeding with those pleasantries. I said, “Excuse me, Mr. Director, really I appreciate your time and mine. Number one, I have arrived here with hesitation as I did not know if you would have the mood or ability to listen to the spiel I am going to give you. If you are willing I will stay here until tomorrow, but if you're not, don't waste your breath or my time”. He said, “That's the kind of person I like, the kind of approach I like. Sit down, tell me all you want”. I told him how I was running the USIS kind of things as one solitary person. Finally I got a hold of two locals, two very good ones, and all USIS activities rested on their shoulders and mine.

Q: I know this well because I was at the other end of the peninsula and in my spare time as a vice consul distributing books supplied by USIA with no real support.

SABBAGH: Thank God for your remark. That is exactly what the case was about. We started sending films, educational films, to Mecca, yet, regularly every Thursday. So I was mentioning all this to the late Edward R. Murrow, and I showed him that the cost of what I was allotted for all these activities was something like \$3,000, something ridiculous. An ambassador later on said openly that Isa spends out of pocket more than all of us put together. Ok, I did not see anything wrong with that as long as I had a penny in my pocket. So, this was my start in a) diplomacy, b) USIS Saudi Arabia. Finally they sent me some chap who fancied himself as the CIA's chief operator - and he was not with them at all.

Q: I would like to concentrate on the situation, as you saw it, in Saudi Arabia. Let's talk first about your initial assignment was 1957-1964. This was a very interesting period because

Library of Congress

you had King Saud, and Faisal and their difficulties, and then Faisal was assassinated about the time you left, I think.

SABBAGH: No, Faisal was assassinated during my second term in Saudi Arabia in 1975.

Q: You are absolutely right. Could you talk about the relationship and how you dealt with the House of Saud and the problems therein?

SABBAGH: When King Abdul Aziz died in 1953 I was with the Voice of America I gave a moving elegy, quoting Arabic poetry and all that kind of thing. In fact, later on Mohammed Abdul Aziz when I met him said, "You made us cry". I was moved, of course, and when I went there, as you know, the bedouins, the Saudis do not hang on to moments of sadness. Moving on to 1975 when Faisal died, you did not see many shedding tears. That is their nature, back to earth, so to speak.

King Saud had become king before I went there in 1958. I was due in 1957 but a smozzel about my diplomatic passport held me up. I said "Look, I don't want to waste Uncle Sam's money. With one word in my passport, I would not be able to enter Saudi Arabia or go into any other country." I had indicated my country of birth as Palestine. One brilliant person at the Passport Office insisted in putting Israel as the place of birth. I said, "Look, when I was born there was no such a thing as Israel". The person said, "No, we can't change it, this is it, the town of Safad is now in Israel. I said, "Good God", and took it. I had left a message before leaving for the head of all heads of the Passport Division, Mrs. Knight.

Q: Frances Knight.

SABBAGH: God rest her soul, I understand she died recently.

Q: I think she is still alive, in an unconscious state.

SABBAGH: What a shame. She took my side. I said, "Look, the previous documents, in fact one of which I made by extending my travel document by extending it by scotch taping

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an insert, is an Ottoman decree, and I traveled on it. One of the data I inscribed was the place of birth, Palestine.” She said to the person who was causing the trouble, “But Mr. Sabbagh traveled on documents in which every one said Palestine.” “But Mrs. Knight” said that fellow, “that was a mistake.” She said, “Joe, we all make mistakes, let's make another one”. I swear this is how it happened. She said, “I want this corrected and on my desk in forty minutes as Mr. Sabbagh and I are invited out to lunch at the Department.” Bang!

So I went to Saudi Arabia, as I say without too much modesty, as a known person. Isa Sabbagh, they used to listen to him every night on the BBC, they could not believe he was here. In fact one fellow spread the rumor that Isa Sabbagh has an air-conditioned “Sahfar.” Sahfar was their name for a Chevrolet. I had asked for an air-conditioner to be installed because I was going to be going to they tropics, so to speak. And they used to come to the embassy to look at that thing and perchance to see me. So it was all nice and warm.

I became very friendly with Abdullah Bel Hare who was the personal secretary to Saud, when Saud was crown prince. Saud retained Abdullah Bel Hare when he became king. We continued with that friendship; he had the responsibility of providing the reports of the daily news to the king, monitoring various stations, BBC, Voice of America and that sort of thing. He was discreet enough not to say much about the criticism I would hear, anyone could hear of Saud, in the business of squandering money, in the business of thinking the oil revenue was his own, for his own pocket, for his children, etc. Also the fact that he had started to be too authoritarian, listening to no counsel of note. Then he had started drinking. One fellow who was chief of the royal garages, Ali (somebody), got into the act, for whatever purpose I don't know. Saud at one point had gotten influenza, a very bad cold, and Ali suggested some cognac, brandy, “That will warm up your insides”. Saud liked it and asked for more. One story has it that he did very well by what we call his harem, this is only a foot note. He used to love to engage in that act in a freezing room. In fact I was told later on that that palace in Riyadh, Nausari, a new and lovely place, was the second

Library of Congress

in the world as far as air-conditioning was concerned. In those days air-conditioning was new. I asked which was the first and was told, the Pentagon.

Anyway, all these blemishes aside, poor King Saud, was a nice man, a genuine bedouin type. Yes, short on knowledge of the outside world. He had traveled a bit, but how much would you get to know when you are surrounded by, overwhelmed by, favor seekers, derriere-licking idiots and all this kind of thing. So that was the start of his downfall in the minds of the populace. Added to which was the fact that his brother, Faisal had begun to loom larger than ever in personality, knowledge, diplomacy and everything. He was the one person who stood up to Nasser, so that Nasser had to go all the way to Jeddah to patch things up. Mea culpa stuff. Faisal was hesitant, they are so disciplined, those sons of Abul Aziz, until now that when they enter a place you can tell who is senior to whom. I have been in somebody's office who happened to be a prince when in would walk the prince's uncle, who was like a straggling bedouin, who had no job, nothing in government or anywhere, so this prince, the minister, gets up and kisses his uncle on the nose, and gives him a seat. This is the type of manifestation one gathered and, of course, people from the West do not have a chance of knowing or explaining why it is.

Parker T. Hart was our ambassador there; a very able person, a professional person, I had known him for years too, here and when he went to Cairo as DCM I had given him a long list of friends over there and then when he became our ambassador to Saudi Arabia [1961-1965] I was very pleased and delighted. We would compare notes, Pete Hart and myself, and the rest of us on things, like the barometer, who is up, who is down, and what is happening. There was a time when Nasser's stars went way up there and a lot of Saudis began to look in the direction of that rising sun and bow and scrape. Some of them even went to Cairo, Talal was one of them. I was disappointed in those types, because I had, myself, met Mr. Nasser and had an interview with him in the past, in his office in Cairo. Anyway, Faisal was hesitant to do anything that might be interpreted as knifing his brother or maligning his brother or speaking out of school, out of turn, whatever. He was one person who really liked me and trusted me because a) he used to listen to the BBC, b)

Library of Congress

because in '43 he and some of his brothers were on their way back from the United States and stopped off in London, and I interviewed him and them and gave them tea. I had grown my beard to surprise him. During one other visit in '47 at the Dorchester Hotel I went to pay my respects and our really solid friendship started. (I am mentioning this in a book I am writing). One thing he said, after praising me and my program, on how I somehow inculcated into minds of the young Arab generations all over the place love for literature, history and so forth, but he said, "What a shame you are not Muslim." I think I must have counted to four or five before saying, "Amir, I have no place being here with you, this is the last time you will see me." I went to the door. Two people came to help me go out, Faisal stood up and said, "What have I done? Please come back." He proceeded in my direction, stretching out his arm. Of course out of politeness I moved in his direction and he sat me down. "You did not understand me." I said, "I beg your pardon. I pride my self on understanding something of Arabic and English, I assumed that you spoke in Arabic quite eloquently, but I do not like the spirit". He said, "But that is just it, you do not understand my spirit in not understanding my motive in what I said". I said, "Okay, suppose you tell me." He said, "What I meant to convey to you was that I wish that there were thousands of people like you in the Islamic nation." Look at that beautiful, fantastic reconciling and we became the best of friends.

Q: How did you see the relationship between Saud and Faisal during the time you were there?

SABBAGH: Correct, strict. In non-public, in small circles, if you knew who belonged to the circle of Faisal and circle of Saud you could get a synthesis of the situation. I loved doing that. So much so that when Faisal (I was told) was determined to prick that balloon, it had to come to an end, some of his friends and associates were encouraging on going on an electioneering speechmaking tour, myself included. He said, "What is that, there are no elections here." I said, "I know you don't." Putting it in my own vernacular, "You know enough about the United States for me to make sense to you, in the elections prospective candidates go around making speeches and presenting platforms of this and that parties.

Library of Congress

In short you must, if I say so as a friend, make yourself available to your people.” He said, “I am available to my people, my house is always open.”

I said, “Your house may be always open, both gates on both sides may be open, but you did not realize obviously the awe that you engender in people. You are an awesome person. They love you, they respect you, certainly. I have seen people who have almost trembled when approaching you. Now, your brother, and I don't want to enter into family businesses, in fact squanders a lot of money to make friends and to have people around him when you can do it with one of your charming smiles.” He said, “I am not an orator like you”. I said, “Who is asking you to be an orator, speak in your own, lovely, Saudi language, Nedji, who cares”. Then I started giving him, not needles, but encouragement, namely that President Roosevelt was in the habit, he is still remembered for it, for making fireside chats and things like that, regularly. The American people loved him even more because he told them the truth, where the country was going and that sort of thing. Your friend, Habib Bourguiba, the president of Tunisia, used to make a weekly speech on Fridays for that same purpose. It was your's truly, if I may gloat, who suggested that he make it on Thursdays so that it could be picked up on Fridays during the noon prayers and the Imam could reflect on what the president had said, and what the policy was. Faisal listened, and then he said, “Let me think about it” with some glee in his tone. In a week he started in Jeddah. I remember attending that thing.

Q: This would be about 1963? King Saud left the scene in 1964.

SABBAGH: That's right. Oh my God, he made speeches in Jeddah, in Mena near Mecca, Riyadh, in Dhahran. I even went to attend the thing in Dhahran. And God rest his soul, what a marvelous, friendly gesture, every time, whether he met with American diplomats or whenever I was there, he would end the thing when I bid him goodbye with the following question, “How did I do?” Or, “What grade would you give me?”

Library of Congress

Q: Let me ask this. You are the Public Affairs Officer of the American embassy during this time. Here is an obvious rivalry between Saud and Faisal, Faisal being the half-brother of King Saud, but obviously far more competent. Were we thinking in terms of Saud leaving the scene, were we passive bystanders - how did we look on this whole situation?

SABBAGH: We were, I think, passive bystanders, but we had had it up to the tips of our noses with what we kept hearing with what Saud was doing or not doing, with his turning in the direction of Cairo and the Voice of the Arabs, and this and that. Starting with the time when Prince Talal was Finance Minister telephoned and ordered us out of our base in Dhahran in 1962. I think it was at the tail end of the time of Ambassador Donald R. Heath, just before Parker Hart got there. Heath called me in and said, "Isa, explain this to me. This is the Finance Minister telling me this. What right did he have?" I said, "Well, in this society he can always claim to have been instructed by his sovereign to do this." It was then that we began to smell something and people like me started to follow through in collecting those impressions. Talal went to somebody who now I think is now deputy head of the National Guard, Prince Badhr, also went and a few non-princely types went [to Cairo], and this is what galled Faisal. And this is what encouraged Faisal, finally, to flex his muscles and begin to want to have something done. At that point we were not doing anything, to my knowledge, openly enthusiastically to have the cleavage widened between the two. No. But I think down deep we exchanged this sentiment, "that man's days are numbered."

Q: We also felt he was weakening the whole structure with his squandering?

SABBAGH: Absolutely. Maybe we knew our psychology better than people give us credit for. If we had been the Russians we would have been more vocal, more determined in our attitude. I suggested we be seen more frequently calling on Faisal or on Faisal's friends, deputies and that sort of thing. I kept up with Faisal's chief of office in Jeddah, Ahmed Abdul Sahbar, who is now their ambassador in Geneva; he was an old friend. We renewed our friendship when I was assigned to Jeddah, we had already gone back to

Library of Congress

becoming Faisal's chief of office and from him I got a lot of sentiments from Faisal through Ahmed. In fact I got a direct answer from Faisal through Ahmed to this question, "I hear tell that a lot of people think I have been sent here as a spy, as a CIA-man," I said this to Ahmed, "please convey this to his Royal Highness, because if that is what he thinks too, I can assure you that my suitcases are not all unpacked. I can repack them and go out, because, what the hell, if I were a spy I would change my character, my behavior and so forth. I had read enough stories about them. I want an answer." Back came an answer the same day, "Tell Isa, brother, he is in his second country so to speak, to let the dogs bark as long as the caravan moves along." "Besides," he said, "what can he or anybody spy on us for, our destinies are in the hands of our friends the Americans, they know all about our armed forces etc."

Q: What was your impression of how King Saud looked upon the Americans and the American presence at that point?

SABBAGH: The American presence, he welcomed. I think he shared that view with the rest of the family, namely that America is our best shield, Americans are benevolent and they are nice people, good people. Faisal even said that to me, as I note in the book I am writing, in my first long session with him in Jeddah, two and a half hours. He made a distinction between the American people, of whom, as he put it, "We have thousands in this country, and thank the Lord for that", and the American policy which he tore into. Saud did not have this sharp distinction between the American people and the policy.

Q: When you say policy, you are really talking about Israel?

SABBAGH: Yes.

Q: How did you, at the embassy, deal with this thing. Here we were with extremely strong ties and the major supporter of Israel and at the same time really the major supporter of

Library of Congress

Saudi Arabia, two - I can't really say mortal enemies, but there was just no communication between the two. How did you all deal with this?

SABBAGH: It was a very strenuous period. I personally felt it, but being a Public Affairs Officer I had to be in constant touch with editors and column writers and analysts and I had to say "I am telling you the truth, I am representing the United States of America, the United States policy is as follows... Whether I like it or not or you like it or not, the United States is committed to the security of Israel." I will tell you how the responses came. You can be friendly with Israel at the same time with somebody who is not enamored with Israel. I picked this up later on from Dean Rusk, who said it in front of me to Faisal at the Waldorf in New York. And Faisal gave a bored reply. "Well you are speaking, of course, in your own capacity as representing the Western concept on things, maybe specifically America's outlook on Israel. But in the Arab mind we cannot believe in this triangular theory of yours. You are not convincing me, but you have the privilege of voicing it the way you want."

It was tough, but I said in every dispute, which was the thrust of my daily talking to them, "You can never prove that right is a hundred percent on one side and wrong a hundred percent on the other. Look at the background of Israel, look at what they have done throughout the years, they have been doing it for fifty years, they were smashed about by Hitler, whose praises you were singing who butchered them by the thousands, they have learned how to survive and therefore they designed their approaches to the Western world, and certainly to the United States of America and are still at it. What have you done to prove that you can be, not only respected but that they can have confidence in you. The American people do not know much about Saudi Arabia except when they see signs of dollars. What have you done? Your information to the outside world, from my limited knowledge, is not effective. I have attended some of your parties and dinners in here in Saudi Arabia and my Americans would say upon emerging, 'My God, Isa, what a bash, some of those guys have more money than sense!' What for for having these affairs? You think that the only way you can attract friends is by stuffing them so that the following day

Library of Congress

they will have to go to a hospital. "The Saudis would take all this from me, as a person who had proven to have Arab blood in my head, in my veins, but not to the extent of being a lackey or treacherous to my responsibility as an American citizen, for God's sake. And they understood all of this. I got into a verbal fight with a fellow guest of at Ahmed Abdul Jabbar. This guy, a Saudi, had come back from the United States of America and was claiming that, by God, he could have any American woman he wanted. I listened to him and then said, "Look, I am sorry, I am even not approaching you as an American versus an Arab, but you noticed the utter quiet here, when subjects like this are entered into by our fellow male cronies. But I don't think that you have convinced anybody, certainly not me. In fact, as far as I am concerned, you have annoyed the hell out of me and if we were not in the home of a respectable friend I would, despite the fact you are twenty years younger, would have bashed your bloody head." He responded, "Why, I am not attacking your sister?" I said, "Every American woman in this context is my sister. Besides, on what would they be attracted to you for, for God's sake, you can't even speak English properly, you don't even dress properly and you are not even handsome. What qualifications would you have for an American woman to rush up to you? You have been pub-crawling, as we used to say in England. That is all". Thank God I was inspired to be true to my self and second to have that fearless son-of-a-bitch quality, that they called me in the Department.

Q: Now, there are a couple of important meetings that went on, the first was in September of 1962 when Parker Hart sent you, because King Saud had gone to Boston to the hospital. President Kennedy and Saud wanted to get together. This was particularly important on Kennedy's part to sound out and see what Saud was like. There was first a luncheon at Miami.

SABBAGH: I wasn't there.

Q: But you were with Kennedy and Faisal, when was that?

Library of Congress

SABBAGH: That was 1962 after the Yemeni thing. Faisal had already come to the United States for the UN and then by quick arrangements Kennedy invited him to the White House for a working luncheon.

Q: Faisal at this time was Foreign Minister?

SABBAGH: Yes, Foreign Minister and Crown Prince.

Q: How did this work? What were the subjects discussed?

SABBAGH: It worked very well. The post-luncheon discussion concerned elements that were touched on during the luncheon, including even Gamal Abdel Nasser's raving and ranting. The Voice of the Arabs and the verbal attacks on the Saudis, the maligning of members of the Saudi royal family, including Faisal and his father, because of Saud. Pete Hart was kind enough to suggest in those circumstances that Isa Sabbagh be there at that visit because he knew all the sides and is trusted by Faisal. I happened to be here. Talcott Seelye can tell you a story about how I almost did not attend the luncheon because they wanted me to stand behind the two principals or lean over and say this and say that. I said, "Look, I am a Foreign Service Officer, I was higher ranking than Talcott Seelye was (we are still very good friends) and this servile attitude would not do." Seelye said, "What should I do?" I said, "Get somebody else, drag them in from the street. I am not going to find myself in this position, specifically because the guest of honor happens to be my own personal friend, or he considers me as his own personal friend." This was conveyed to the arrangers of the luncheon and I was seated on the right hand of Faisal.

We went upstairs at the White House, after lunch. During luncheon Kennedy was nice, he even showed some knowledge of the area, he had been well-briefed about the Yemen. He knew there were Zaydis and Shafi'is, as they call them, he said he would look further into the matter. He really impressed me, John F. Kennedy. At one point I made Kennedy laugh when I said, "His Royal Highness says, it is all very well, I do not know to what extent Mr.

Library of Congress

President, you will have the occasion to hear all the details. But Nasser has been doing all sorts of things, verbal attacks and all sorts of shenanigans". I was going to continue when Kennedy said, "What is that Isa?" I said, "I beg your pardon?" "What was that last word you used?" I said, "That was a good Irish word, shenanigans". He laughed and said, "I thought so." I had known Kennedy before when he was senator, a lovely person.

Kennedy promised that we would look into the situation in more detail, make studies. I don't know if we should say this, but it is past history now. That within nine months if the situation does not improve we will have to rethink our policies towards the area. Faisal was the gentleman he always was, he did not really call Nasser names, just with more pain than venom. He said, at one point later, that the United States had decided to withhold any assistance to Egypt, and we were at that time sending cereals, oil, wheat and whatever was needed by the people so they would not starve. This was when Faisal, again, showed some strong feelings. He said, "Your people think they are pleasing me with this announcement? I haven't requested you to starve the Egyptian people, all I have said and pleaded with you President, is to look in detail into what that man was doing. Because, to me, the one thing I would love for my country and my area is not just calm and peace and good living, no, I want stability. That is all. As long as there is somebody who is upsetting things, then we will not have stability and we won't progress with your help, yes. But without stability neither we nor you can succeed."

So, Kennedy passed the word around that here was a guy you can depend on. So that after Kennedy's death there was a half a day of Saudis' personal mourning. There was an 80-year-old man who was practically carried into the embassy to register in the condolence register in Jeddah. That touched me. So when Faisal was visiting again in 1966, I think, dear LBJ (Faisal was king by that time), kept saying, "Your Majesty this, Your Majesty that, it is mighty fine etc." Faisal, at the request of LBJ, was giving him the benefit of what they had been doing in the field of education in Saudi Arabia. Actually when Faisal finished with that visit in 1962, he went back and said to me, that "I started feeling my lungs again." In other words the pressure had been relieved by those things conveyed

Library of Congress

to him by Kennedy. In 1963 when Faisal made a famous speech as to what he planned for the country including a proper budget, no donations to people who do not have any responsibilities, the justice system, teaching in schools, male, female. It was fantastic. Things started moving. He came here with LBJ. At one point LBJ said, "Why don't you tell that guy to go to hell? (to Nasser)." Faisal took a double-take, (he understood English). "What was that? I can't say that." I said that you can tell him something in Arabic like, "why doesn't he disappear from my sight or that sort of thing". At the end, after that tete-a-tete with LBJ, LBJ said, "As a person who started out teaching school, that is really mighty fine, Lady Bird, that is my wife you know, she is working to beautify America, she is planting flowers all over the dammed place."

[end of tape]

Tape Two, side one

Q: You were talking about Lady Bird Johnson.

SABBAGH: That's right. LBJ said, "She is sewing seeds all over the place and now we see blossoms, perhaps like, you, Your Majesty, I have the following ambition for my fellow Americans, I want every American, man, woman and child, to have a Ph.D." So Faisal, at that point, looked at his watch, everything has to come to an end, and said to me in Arabic, "Brother Halleb, give him of the same coinage that he has been flinging at me: I knew exactly what he meant, so I said, "Mr. President, his Majesty has charged me with the pleasant task of responding to your kind accolade in kind, namely that he understood what you explained about your background, your ambition for this country and what you want for your fellow Americans and what you want Lady Bird to do. All he can say is to convey his heartfelt appreciation by telling you that in your own words, that is 'mighty fine,' Mr. President". LBJ laughed loudly and slapped his knee.

Back to the Kennedy-Faisal meeting. It was two things, one Kennedy asked Faisal to convey Jackie's thanks to King Saud for the beautiful golden dress he had sent to her. So

Library of Congress

Faisal said he would make sure that the thanks would be conveyed, and then they started talking again about the peace and quiet and the need for cooperation. Faisal expressed appreciation for the way ARAMCO conducted itself, how ARAMCO people had done marvelous things outside the realm of their immediate interest of oil, digging and sending it out. He mentioned things in agriculture and other such things. He referred to me several times as being the witness to the warmth that Saudis have towards Americans.

The night before I had attended a meeting at the State Department, Bob Stone was there, he became ambassador to Iraq later. We were preparing for the President's talking points. The late Rodger P. Davies was there, a dear old friend, God rest his soul. What positive thing can we have the President give Faisal to take back with him so that he will not go back empty handed? From my sense, because of my profession, and because of my knowledge of that country, I said, "Why don't we get the Army Corps of Engineers to continue to help Saudi Arabia plus one additional item, namely to help them establish a TV station or two?" "What?" said Stone. Rodger P. Davies, who was a former colleague and knew my background, said, "Isa, that is a brilliant idea." I said that it had just occurred to me. Everyone else agreed except Mr. Stone, who was the one brilliant expert who did not see any merit to it. But we decided that it be put on the agenda anyway. So it was sent to the White House with the result that Kennedy had a folded piece of paper with him and went through the points one after the other, "continued cooperation," "joint ventures," "economic mutual interests," financial this and that, bonds and whatnot, education. "We welcomed Saudis to come over so they would get to know us better and acquire specialization and all these things. Nice, but where is the final proposal? Kennedy put the paper away. So I said, "Mr. President I think you had better take that paper out again". "What?" "I think that you would find something very interesting at the end of it. So he took it out and looked. Then he asked, "How about TV, this is the thing of the present, everyone has TV sets. Do you think we can help you with a TV station or a chain of stations so you can talk directly to the people, so they can see you?" I will never forget what Faisal said. He said, "What would a blind person want more than a pair of eyes". (This is an

Library of Congress

old Arabic saying.) Kennedy said, "I will talk to my people, and I promise you that we will do our best and it will be done." So after the visit we went back and I don't know if Pete Hart remembers this, because he was not in on the thing, he had forgotten although there was a memo. During one session with Faisal, Pete Hart and I, six months after the meeting with Kennedy, and there had been no reaction from the Army Corps of Engineers or Washington. Faisal asked about this, "What happened to the idea of a TV station?" Poor Pete Hart said, "I beg your pardon?" Faisal replied, "When I was in Washington with Kennedy he mentioned that you would be willing to help us with the establishment of a TV chain or station." Pete Hart said, I think genuinely, "I will have to look into this as I don't remember this." Faisal raised himself and said, "I am surprised, Your Excellency, your colleague and my brother Isa was there himself, do you remember?" "Yes, I do" I said, "of course, I do." I suggested in Arabic to Pete Hart that he really look into it and ask Washington for a copy of memo which I had drafted. Things started moving after that.

Q: I realize you are under time restraints, but did you get involved in any of Nixon or Kissinger's talking or doing business when they were in Saudi Arabia? Can you give me an idea of how these went?

SABBAGH: I can give you an idea of how I was roped into it. Number one, I was in Beirut at that time at the start of the Shuttle Diplomacy thing by Kissinger. Jim Akins, who was an old friend, calls me up and says, "Isa, guess what? You know the Secretary is going to be coming out and talking about the preparations, schedules with King Faisal. He made one remark, I am not surprised, and I am conveying it to you. He wants you here." I said, "Which man?" "Your friend, King Faisal." "What did he say?" He said he took it for granted that Professor Haleeb, (that's me) would be here to attend. "Where is he?" he said. Akin said I was in Beirut getting packed to go back to Washington. "Washington" said Faisal, "what for? Now is the time and this is the place for Isa to be." In fact, I was reluctant to come back to Washington to join what I called "the corridor corps" in those days.

Q: Yes, those were the people temporarily without any jobs.

Library of Congress

SABBAGH: Anyway, this is how it happened. Of course Akins communicated with the Department, got the Secretary to talk to USIA and all that sort of thing and so I went back to Saudi Arabia for my next stretch of seven years. That is when I started attending the things with Nixon, and before that with Kissinger.

Q: From your point of view, how did Kissinger and Faisal deal with each other?

SABBAGH: They got along correctly, with some warmth on the part of Faisal, generated by his innate sense of hospitality with a visitor, whoever he happens to be. Again, if I may take a little bit of credit; before Kissinger went into that meeting with Faisal, I had suggested a little meeting without Kissinger, with the staff of embassy who knew how to deal with Kissinger, his temperament. The do's and don'ts to present, one little sheet, items to Kissinger. One of them was the business of when in doubt don't hesitate to say, "Your Majesty, you may find yourself in the position of a senior student listening to a professor. I knew that you are a professor yourself. But Faisal, as far as the area is concerned and as far as Saudi-American relations are concerned, I think you will find knows as least as much as you do, Mr. Secretary." I elaborated on this sort of thing in my meeting with Kissinger. Faisal is not giving to kissing, certainly not by strangers. He is not Anwar Sadat so don't indulge in levities and jokes, etc. If he even starts exhibiting some humor just appreciate it, not guffawing." I swear to God how I had the nerve to address the Secretary that way, but it was my job. When you want to cross your knees don't do it violently showing your voluminous thighs, Mr. Secretary". I swear I said that. "Our colleagues were sort of shriveling when I was saying this. They obviously were thinking of how dare this bearded guy say this. I was saying for his own good, for our own good. And Kissinger was a fantastic pupil, he really went through the things one by one and acted accordingly.

There was one fly in the ointment later on, when he was with Hafiz el Asad he was saying with tongue in cheek that Faisal did me the honor of treating me as a human being. Christ, I was there, what did he mean? He wanted Hafiz and Khadam to laugh, but they didn't.

Library of Congress

When I sensed this hesitation on their part to swallow this line, I said, "Mr. Secretary, I am sorry, I was there I think either you did not hear properly or I, and I am not willing to admit it easily or readily, did not interpret properly, what he said was as follows, namely, 'You are welcome, I hope you will stay longer on this visit, and I hope you will repeat your visits to us, and we certainly pray to God to grant you success in your noble venture, bringing peace. I do not know how much you know about Islam, but about our attitude, but you are here as the honored representative of a friendly nation. We love the Americans, the people, the business of whether you are a Jew or not does not enter into our discussions, and should not. You are here and we respect you as a fellow human being.' This is what he said, Mr. Secretary. Not he is granting you the honor of giving you a medal for being a human being as you implied here." He said, "Oh, I was joking". You don't joke. You asked me about Kissinger, I could give you a book.

Q: What was the substance of the Kissinger-Faisal meeting and when was it?

SABBAGH: 1974. It was the approach to the Egyptians to have the separation of the forces with Egypt and Israeli in the Sinai. Sinai and also the Canal, the Egyptians had crossed the Canal. And Faisal at that time made the point of urging us not to ignore Syria. To include Syria in the discussions and the debriefings and the like.

Q: Despite the fact that Syria was not being very nice, at least publicly, to Saudi Arabia.

SABBAGH: Exactly. That is to the nobility of Faisal, as I keep saying. That is when he said, I don't remember if I said it, "did they think they were pleasing me when they were withholding their help from Egypt?" "Kings and presidents come and go", added Faisal then and his behavior indicated now, at this juncture that people stay, they are brothers, cousins, we don't want them starved. Now in the case of Syria, he knew the value of Syria, you could split aside the ranting on one side and the genuine attitude on the other. He knew the area. As you say in Arabic, "The people of Mecca are better informed than others of their labyrinthine side streets." So we know when you ask us about Syria, Lebanon or

Library of Congress

other parts of the Middle East. Faisal said, "I encourage you very strongly not to ignore Syria." And I think he did. I think that Mr. Kissinger did flatter Asad after that.

Q: So you left the meeting, from your point of view, with the feeling that it was a positive one?

SABBAGH: Yes. There was a good exchange.

Q: Do you think Faisal had the impression that this was a real effort on our part to bring about peace?

SABBAGH: At that time yes. But the disappointment comes later when you read the expectations of people and, as you know, the Arabs, when they want something they want it last month. When they promise something, ok, give them two, three or four months. But because we did not follow up immediately with that kind of thing, keeping up the dialogue. I mentioned to Kissinger in Syria the story of the hair of Moawiya, he was one of the caliphs, he said, "Should there be but one hair between me and the people that I need to deal with, I would not allow it to be cut, for should they pull I would slacken somewhat and should they slacken then I would pull." This is the essence of keeping up the dialogue. I mentioned this to Hafez Assad, I reminded him that, "Here in your capitol, your excellency Hafez Assad, Shawat Moawiya started Arab diplomacy." Kissinger later on said, "I caught you having your own conferences with Assad, and, if things had not gone right, I was ready to blame you." I think that Kissinger won the minds of those he met through his brilliance, the man is brilliant. He lines up his thoughts before he enters into something and he has a good memory, obviously and uses logic a lot. He uses world history to a great extent and flattery and jokes. What I call the "ventilation humor" that he had, in my book I call it that. When things tighten up he cracks a joke.

Q: Well, what about this book?

SABBAGH: Yes, I am writing a book called Names I Could Drop.

Library of Congress

Q: When do you think this will be ready?

SABBAGH: When I find a good publisher. Archie Roosevelt, when he knew what I was doing asked for a synopsis of what the book is designed to contain, including these experiences of mine, including my time at the BBC, Saudi Arabia and all that. And Archie - he and Lucky [his wife] were going away - before leaving sent me a letter saying, "You, of all people, understand the reaction I had from my own publisher to publishing your book, the idea which I had encouraged and, without giving any more details, here is a copy of what the head of the publishing firm said. He said, 'Thank you for sending us a copy of Isa Sabbagh's proposal, but you know why we can't publish this sort of thing.'" Why, because in the course of the thing I analyze our policy towards Israel, with the Arabs lurking in the aisle, and how we could have done better and how we promised some things and did not come up with them." So they could not publish that kind of stuff.

Q: When you get this published this transcript will be sort of the first glimpse of what you will be presenting. I want to thank you very much.

End of interview