

Interview with Victor Wolf Jr.

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

VICTOR WOLF, JR.

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy

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[Note: Mr. Wolf was killed in an accident on December 16, 1986 and did not have the chance to edit this transcript.]

Q: Today I am interviewing Victor Wolf, Jr., who is managing director of the Foreign Service History Center of George Washington University. Our subject is the movement of peoples which refers to immigration and refugees as done by the United States Government over the past 30-odd years since Victor Wolf has been an officer and a participant in it.

Mr. Wolf—I'll call you Vic—I note that you entered the Foreign Service in 1952, after having taken both an undergraduate program at City College of New York and government and history, and at Columbia University, where you got your Master's in Central European politics. It appears that you had the Foreign Service on your mind in your academic preparation.

WOLF: Yes, actually that's right. The way I got interested in the Foreign Service was, I went into the Army in 1944, where the Army decided they were going to train me in engineering at Princeton University. I would have told them that was a mistake, but Privates didn't argue with Captains and Majors and Lieutenant Colonels. You did what you

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were told. So I staggered through nine months of engineering training and got something out of it, but it was perfectly obvious I was not making any large engineering contributions to the U.S. fight against the Axis.

At any rate, the war ended just as I was ending basic training, which followed engineering training which happened at Princeton University. My basic training occurred at Fort McClellan, Alabama, and the last day, as I said, was just at the end of the war; in fact, the day that the atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima.

I went on home leave or on what they called in those days “delay in route,” and reported to Fort Meade, Maryland, just about V-J Day. And then because they at that time were not sending any more troops to Europe, the German war having ended four or five months before, we were sent out to the Pacific, and I was then shipped to Japan. I was on the first transport that arrived in Japan directly from the United States, rather than coming up from some of the islands in the South Pacific.

When they were looking at my record, my files, as to where I should be assigned, they discovered that I spoke German. The reason I spoke German as well as I did was that both of my parents had been born in Germany, and we were essentially a bilingual household. So because I spoke a foreign language, I was assigned to military government in Japan, which may sound curious unless you know something about how the military works.

Q: Sounds very normal.

WOLF: Anyhow, in the course of my duties in military government in Japan from '45 to '46, I encountered something called the diplomatic section of SCAP. SCAP stood for Supreme Commander Allied Powers—that is to say, General MacArthur. The diplomatic section of SCAP was, basically speaking, manned by American Foreign Service officers who were the channel through which foreign policy instructions were passed to the Japanese Government by the Allied powers, which, in effect, really meant, basically speaking, the

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United States and the other U.N. powers, with the exception of the Soviet Union. Needless to say, SCAP did not pass on any particular instructions that the Soviet Union agreed with. It was very much slanted to what the Western United Nations powers wanted, rather than the Soviet Union.

The head of that organization was, if I remember, a Foreign Service officer named George Atcheson. Not Dean Acheson. I think it would have been spelled Atcheson. Anyhow, George Atcheson, in the course of his duties, encountered a rather young, eager staff sergeant—that is to say, me. I had occasion to go to the diplomatic section quite frequently. I asked him, “What is the Foreign Service? What is it all about?” And over the course of the year, he very patiently and with great kindness gave me a lot of details about the American Foreign Service. Knowing that I was not interested in technical things, I wasn't particularly good in technical things, I was more interested in the social sciences, I decided that that was for me. It is for that reason that I sort of developed my college educational plan to equip me to pass the Foreign Service exam. That obviously had to be the first step.

Q: I see you entered the Foreign Service in 1952. Did they ask you what you wanted to do? Did you have any career goal at the time in any areas?

WOLF: I was very interested in political work. I was also interested in, I guess, what would now be called human rights, although as a separate term or a separate concept of work inside the Foreign Service, human rights as such didn't have that label. But the content of that issue was certainly in U.S. foreign policy.

I also said that I was interested in the Near East, although it is true I had taken my university training basically on Central Europe and NATO affairs. So in the mysterious ways of personnel, I was assigned to Baghdad in Iraq.

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Q: In your training, before you went to Baghdad, did they touch on immigration or refugees policy? Or was this more or less discounted as being an importance?

WOLF: No, I won't say it was discounted. It was touched on—a little more than touched on. They gave a certain amount of attention to the mechanics of how visas would be issued and should be issued and various types of visas.

In those days, the McCarran-Walter Act, the Immigration Nationality Act of 1952, had just passed. Actually, as you may remember, that Act didn't go into effect until the first half of 1953. Before that, they had other laws that govern visas and passports and nationality. The McCarran-Walter Act, although it had many features which I think we now recognize were discriminatory and had certain obnoxious characteristics to it, had the virtue of pulling together a whole number of other laws that previously had governed visas. Before the McCarran-Walter Act, consular work and particularly visa work for the United States was governed by as many as 15, 20, 30 pieces of legislation and their related regulations. This, of course, made it extraordinarily cumbersome to do visa work overseas in those days.

Q: Particularly, I would imagine that most of this type of work was often handed to a rather junior officer at an embassy, who would have little time to master all these laws before moving on.

WOLF: Not only that, but he would have comparatively few people to refer to, to give him guidance and counsel among his more senior colleagues at his post of assignment, because all of these laws came into operation successively over a 15-year period, roughly just before the McCarran-Walter Act was passed.

Q: Speaking of the McCarran-Walter Act, I note that when it came into effect, you had then moved from essentially a position as special assistant.

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WOLF: I was special assistant to the AID director in Iraq. I then moved on to head the consular section, which was not a very large one. It was basically me and two Iraqi local employees.

Q: This was 1953-1954.

WOLF: Yes, it was. It was a normal little consular section, some visa work, passport work, protection work, and the like, even consular invoices, where that was in the days when it was still necessary for consular officers to accept and process the certifications of exporters of products to the United States as to what was in the shipment.

Q: Turning to the problems of movements of people, in the first place, was there any regular migration from Iraq to the United States in those days, what I'd call normal Iraqis going to the United States?

WOLF: There was a small number of Iraqis who were immigrating, not very many, and a somewhat larger number of people going to the United States principally as students or to visit their relatives in the United States. And there was a very interesting third category. This was the category of Iraqi Jews. This was 1952. This was rather shortly after the coming into existence of the state of Israel.

Q: That was in 1948.

WOLF: That was in 1948. The Iraqi felt very, very strongly about this. They had the typical Arab position that you would expect on anything having to do with Jews, Israel, Zionism, and the like. I would even go so far as to say that the way Iraqis discussed this question was unusually hysterical. I suppose that meant because they were far away from the borders. They were not what now is called front-line states.

Q: They had sent a military contingent during the 1948 war.

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WOLF: They had sent a military contingent during the 1948 war, which was done unusually badly. As a consequence, I think they were more than unusually neurotic or psychotic on the subject of Israel and the like. They had, to be perfectly frank, treated their own Jewish population rather badly. According to all of the information available, the small Iraqi Jewish community wasn't the least bit interested in Zionism and Israel, except what I would call a certain normal sympathy with their co-religionists. But there was no evidence at all, at least that I ever heard of, that there was any truth in the claims of the Iraqis that the Jewish community represented a massive fifth column in Iraq and that they were engaged in spying and the like.

In 1948, there had been some rather nasty lynching going on, in which prominent Jewish merchants were lynched, literally lynched. Their enterprises were taken over by the organizers of the lynch mobs.

Q: Did the British have any control in Iraq in those days?

WOLF: No. By that time, the British mandate had really ended before World War I, although the British influence was, comparatively speaking, still high. But the Iraqi, as so many Middle Eastern countries, always credited foreigners with more influence than the foreigners always had. Middle Easterners, Arabs sometimes have a tendency to be much less introspective than is warranted or is necessary.

Anyhow, as a consequence of the mistreatment of the Iraqi Jewish community, the Iraqi Jewish community was extremely insecure. The newspapers were full of anti-Semitic and anti-Zionist statements and articles, and Jews in Iraqi were very prudent, very careful, and really kept a very, very low profile.

Q: Do you have any idea of the approximate number and where they were located?

WOLF: Most of them were located in Baghdad itself. I don't know, there might have been as many as—well, by that time, it had been considerably reduced, because in 1948, there

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had been an airlift to take a large number of Iraqi Jews out of Iraq and relocate them in Israel. That had been arranged somehow. So what you had in the Iraqi Jewish community was a considerably smaller number than had been in existence before the founding of the state of Israel in 1948.

Q: Are we talking about several thousand?

WOLF: Oh, yes.

Q: Tens of thousands?

WOLF: I would say we're probably talking perhaps 5,000 to 10,000 in those days. It's much, much less now in 1986, because everything that has happened since that time has made it even more difficult for Jews to stay in Iraq.

Q: What was the embassy's role in helping these people?

WOLF: We didn't have a role as such, but we had a terrible dilemma. The dilemma arose from the fact that large numbers of Iraqi Jews tried to visit the United States, and we, normally speaking, found that very many of them qualified as non-immigrant visitors or as non-immigrant students. They went to the United States.

At that point, a curiosity in Iraqi nationality law came into existence. Iraqi nationality law had a provision which I guess you would call blatantly discriminatory. It said that any Iraqi Jew who did not renew his nationality specifically before an Iraqi consul abroad by going to that consul and saying, "I wish to remain an Iraqi citizen," was immediately denationalized, and that meant he could not return to Iraq. If he couldn't return to Iraq, and he was in the United States, he was in the United States, and there he would stay.

The result was, as this pattern became more and more visible to us, we began to have real qualms as to whether, in fact, Iraqi Jews who were going to the United States or were

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proposing to go to the United States to visit or to study or what have you, were simply using this as a device for disguised immigration.

Q: Were you finding any of these students or visitors going to Iraqi consuls and making an attempt to stay nationalized?

WOLF: A small number were, but the largest number were not. On the other hand, we were receiving a significant amount of pressure from university administrations, from Jewish communities in the United States, and from congressmen who said, "We don't want you to discriminate against Jews by issuing them an unduly low proportion of visas and denying their applications in an unduly high number of cases." It was a very, very complicated thing.

The additional problem was that from time to time, the Immigration and Naturalization Service would come to us, would ask the embassy to get the authority of the Iraqi Government to receive as deportees some of these overstaying Iraqi Jews. The Iraqi, in every instance, refused to accept them. The dilemma was that there was a section of the Immigration and Nationality Act which said that if a foreign state refused to accept U.S. deportees, it was possible to deny all visa facilities to all citizens of that state. About the time I was leaving, the United States was grappling with whether it would bring that section of the Immigration and Nationality Act into operation or not.

Q: What about these Iraqi Jews? They did have another nationality, which was Israeli, and the law of return. Were they taking this into account?

WOLF: Not really, because the law of return only applied if you were in Israel and made specific application before an Israeli authority or an Israeli officer, a person authorized to receive applications for the law of return. And it would have been anomalous for us to say that an Iraqi Jew in the United States, in the jurisdiction of the United States, simply because he was a Jew and had not gone to Israel and applied, was therefore an Israeli citizen under the Israeli law of return. I think the United States has always been unwilling

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to act as an agent to enforce the laws of another state. That's a very dangerous precedent to start.

Q: You were mentioning the pressure on you. How did the pressure come? There you were issuing visas. What did the ambassador tell you or recommend to you? What sort of instructions did you get from the Department? How did you get these instructions?

WOLF: With regard to visa applications as such, the Department did not instruct. The people who ran the visa office in those days availed themselves of that section of the law, the Immigration and Nationality Act by that time, which said that the consular officer is responsible, not the Department. The Department can only give guidance and interpretations. So the Department of State basically stayed out of the whole issue. They didn't want to get involved in the issue.

As far as the ambassador, Berton Y. Barry, was concerned, the ambassador said, "If you find a person qualified to issue a visa, you issue it to him. If you find a person not qualified, you do not issue it to him. You have to make that decision yourself, but I will support you in whatever decisions you make on individual cases."

The deputy chief of mission was a man named Philip W. Ireland. I never got very much counsel and guidance from Philip Ireland, because I think he was not really interested in consular work. I think he took the view that consular work was non-substantive. Now, anyone who's done consular work for the United States Government understands what the words "substantive" and "non-substantive" mean and how, in some instances, non-substantive is pejorative. Philip Ireland was interested in political work; that's all he was interested in. He wasn't interested in anything else. In some respects, that was good, because although he was interested in political work, he made political officers very unhappy by getting involved in details which DCMs should not get involved in.

Q: Did you get a lot of congressional correspondence?

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WOLF: We got a fair amount of congressional correspondence. Curiously, the member of Congress who was most interested in this and who basically wanted us to virtually automatically issue non-immigrant visas to any Iraqi Jew who applied was John J. Rooney. John J. Rooney, among other things, was the Chairman of the House Subcommittee of the Ways and Means Committee, I guess it was, that handled the State Department appropriations.

Q: He was considered the most powerful man as far as the State Department was concerned, because he controlled the State Department's purse strings.

WOLF: That's correct. I, fortunately, never had a real crisis or run-in with him, because for whatever reason, I never had very much in the way of kickbacks on my decisions. In some cases I issued, in some cases I did not issue. But this was an ongoing problem.

The one other element with regard to this was the question of the reaction of the Iraqi Government whenever we asked them to accept an Iraqi Jew who we wished to deport. Because they were not citizens, we asked them, nevertheless, to accept them. As I said, in every instance they refused to accept them.

The problem that we had was, every time I would go down to the Foreign Ministry and talk to an Iraqi official, who usually was the under secretary who, among other things, dealt with consular matters, the reaction I got from him was not what I would call a very adult or disciplined one. The reaction was about 15 or 20 minutes of an anti-Jewish, anti-Semitic, anti-Zionist tirade, attacks on the United States for helping the Jews against the Arabs, anger that we were even concerning ourselves with people like this, and then he would say, "We refuse your request." But I always had to go through this temper tantrum of about 15 minutes to half an hour. I knew what the result was going to be. And so finally, I simply would go down, hand over the note, in effect shut my ears, contemplate my navel, and think of something else. When I heard them say no, I would get up, go out. I would go back to the Department of State, and I'd do the reporting message on it.

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Q: Besides this rather unfruitful business, did you have any other specific types of problems dealing with the movement of peoples?

WOLF: Yes, we had one other. In 1953 or '54, I believe, the United States Congress passed the Refugees Relief Act. Now, the largest proportion of the operations of the Refugees Relief Act had to do with refugees and other categories of people principally in Europe, but there were several small programs involving persons outside of Europe.

Among those programs was a provision that 2,000 Palestine Arabs displaced from their homes could be admitted to the United States as refugees. Now, there were a comparatively small number of Palestine refugees in Iraq. There were, I think, 400 or 500 of them in a not particularly attractive suburb outside of Baghdad, principally. And we thought it wouldn't be a bad idea to use the 2,000 numbers to move that whole group to the United States and get this irritation out of Iraq.

Now, the problem was that the Congress had said that the country where they were sojourning had to issue a readmission certificate. That was a certificate that said if after all the refugee processing was finished, within six months after their arrival in the United States as refugees, it developed that there was some ineligibility, the country that had issued the readmission certificate would let them come back if they were found ineligible to stay. And no one at the time thought that this would be any problem at all. Here it was simply a pro forma document, because the investigations were going to be so careful and so detailed that there wouldn't be any slip-ups. This was long before the days of the Palestine Liberation Organization or Arab terrorism or anything like that. This was just a mechanical procedure, because, if I'm not mistaken, this requirement was laid down for all persons admitted under the Refugees Relief Act.

Q: Yes.

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WOLF: Now, the problem was that many of the Arab governments were unwilling to issue such things, and the reason was they didn't want the Palestine refugee question settled. They refused to issue these. I remember I was struggling with the Iraqi Foreign Ministry for about a year, trying to get this. It must have been in September or October of 1954, shortly before I left Baghdad, that I finally received an instruction from the Department saying, in effect, "Look, you've been doing this now for a year with the Iraqis. Let's have them fish or cut bait. Let's really get a position from them. Will they or won't they issue a readmission certificate?"

So I called on the under secretary of the Foreign Ministry who dealt with consular affairs, and he told me, quite candidly, that they would not issue it simply because they did not want the Palestine refugees resettled anywhere else. He said something like, "We want this running sore to continue. This running sore is a good way of keeping the Palestine question alive, and ultimately we hope that this will serve to destroy the Zionist state."

When I went back and I reported that, I remember there was some discussion in the embassy as to whether such a telegram reporting such a thing should even be sent out.

Q: . . . to send out a rather straightforward informational-type telegram such as this?

WOLF: Because isn't it true that many embassies do not like to report things that make their host government look not very constructive and helpful? There is always pressure on an embassy to make the government to which it is accredited, if at all possible, look good rather than bad. And also, no one likes to report an inability to follow instructions from the Department.

Q: Moving from the rather unprofitable, uncomfortable time in Iraq, I notice that you became an Iranian specialist, having taken language training and serving in political positions for the most part in Tehran, Khorramshahr, and Tehran again. Your next

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significant consular assignment was as a vice consul in Istanbul from 1957 to 1959. Could you describe the position of the consul general in Istanbul and what you were doing there?

WOLF: First of all, you must always bear in mind that the people in Istanbul never really were pleased with the idea that from the time of the republic, the capital became Ankara. Istanbul was and still is, really, an imperial city, and there was always an underlying resentment on the part of the people in Istanbul that they were no longer at the place where decisions were made about Turkish life—real decisions made about Turkish life. This is, of course, quite correct. The political headquarters of the country was Ankara. Now, a lot of the economic control and a lot of the economic decisions were still made in Istanbul, because that's where the banks were, that's where the money was, that's where, I guess you'd call it, the sophisticated management structures and staffing were located. But as far as political decisions, as far as political power was concerned, this, by that time, had all been shifted very largely up to Ankara.

This being the case, the people in Istanbul were always looking for ways, if you will, to make themselves bigger than the political reality was. We, in a sense, acknowledged that position, because in those days we had a rather large staff in our consulate general in Istanbul. The consul general was a very senior officer, he was usually an old FSO-1.

Q: When you were there, who was the consul general?

WOLF: Robert G. Minor.

Q: You were doing what?

WOLF: I was the head of the consular section.

Q: How large was the consular section?

WOLF: One officer, myself, plus some part-time help from another section in the consulate general. That was usually one of the CIA officers assigned there, who did actual consular

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work when I had a real glut of work. Then I had an American administrative assistant and eight local employees, eight non-American employees, because they were not all Turkish citizens. One of them happened to be an Austrian citizen who had lived virtually all of her life in Istanbul, and another one was a Greek citizen who had lived all her life in Istanbul.

Q: What were the main areas that you were dealing with in the time you were in Istanbul concerned with movement of people, refugees, visas, and the like?

WOLF: The real problem that we faced were really immigration or disguised immigration problems. These were centered almost exclusively on two of the three minority communities in Turkey. One was the Greek community, the other was the Armenian community. The Jewish community was the third community, but there wasn't much immigration there, and the Jewish community was, frankly, quite content in Turkey. There was no enormous pressure on the part of Turkish Jews to leave. They were in a pretty good situation.

The situation with Armenians and Greeks was quite different. The Armenian attitude toward living in Turkey had been largely shaped by the massacres and deportations of the Armenian community during World War I, when, as you know, many hundreds of thousands died, were displaced, what have you. From that time on, the Armenians loathed the Turks, the Armenians loathed Turkey, and they were quite willing to express their detestation of Turks and Turkey. The fact that this exacerbated an already difficult situation was not considered by the Armenians. They were so distressed and angry and full of hate for Turks that they did not bridle their tongues and exercise a certain sensible discretion. We've seen this pattern continue and expand, so that now you have Armenian terrorist organizations going around, blowing up, and shooting Turkish diplomats and consuls all over the world, including the United States.

Q: Where did the Armenians fit in the community of Istanbul?

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WOLF: They were shopkeepers, small merchants. They treasured, as much as they could, any kind of a link with a foreign community, with the British community, with the American community, with the French community, and the like.

Q: How did your organization, as head of the consular section, become involved?

WOLF: Because they all wanted to immigrate to the United States, but there weren't enough numbers available.

Q: When you say numbers, what do you mean?

WOLF: Immigration numbers. In those days, we had a certain number of immigrant visas that would be issued per country based on place of birth. This is the so-called national quota.

Q: So they would come under the Turkish quota, but no Armenian quota.

WOLF: They would come under the Turkish quota. I think the numbers were 500 or 1,000; I don't recall. Something like that. So what the obvious solution was to go as a non-immigrant and figure out a way of staying once you got there. In those days, the rule was that if a person was registered for immigration, he could not get a non-immigrant visa, because registration for immigration indicated that the intent was to immigrate. You had to demonstrate that when you got a non-immigrant visa, that you would return from that trip. It became extremely difficult for Armenians to show that this was the case, because in actual fact, it wasn't the case. We had all sorts of problems.

The classic way this problem worked itself out was, I would have to deny a non-immigrant visa, and there would be an immediate appeal to the consul general. The reason why that was done was that Bob Minor, the consul general, had lived many years in Istanbul as a teacher at Roberts College, and was married to an English-Italian woman whose family had lived in Turkey for many, many years as members of one of these foreign Levantine

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communities. So the Minors, Bob and Nettie Minor, were very well known to all of the people of Istanbul. So when this young punk of a vice consul would turn the visa down, they would immediately have recourse to the Minors, husband and wife.

So almost as soon as I got to Istanbul, when I was invited to dinner with the Minors, they both said to me ahead of time, "Look, we are not going to get involved in these cases, if at all possible, but from time to time, we may ask you. That doesn't mean we want you to change your mind if your judgment tells you you shouldn't. It's simply because of our relationships with all of these various people in Istanbul, we have to go through some motions." And I must say, Bob Minor not once put any kind of pressure on me to change a decision in these cases.

Q: Were you getting much pressure from the United States?

WOLF: Well, a little bit in Armenian cases, but rather more in Greek cases. The Greek situation was, again, different. The Greek situation stemmed from the fact that relations between Greece and Turkey had never been all that good, of course. There was the memory of the Greek adventure in Asia Minor in the early 1920s.

Q: The burning of Smyrna.

WOLF: The burning of Smyrna and all of that, the massive invasion by the Greek Army into Asia Minor. But the real problem came over Cyprus. The curiosity about Cyprus was that in those days the Turks had a sense that for once they were on the right side of a minority issue. The Turks have had a certain reputation in the world as being very bad in their treatment of minorities. In Cyprus, it is the Turkish community that is in the minority, and the Turkish Cypriots were frightened that if there was a union with Greece, which is what many in the majority Greek Cypriot community wanted, they would be discriminated against and persecuted by the Greek majority in a province of a Greek state. So they

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appealed to their brothers on the Turkish mainland to protect them, and the Turks were very glad, for once being on the right side of a minority issue, as it were.

The problem culminated in 1956, when Greeks in Salonika burned the birthplace of Atatürk in Salonika as an anti-Turkish protest. The result was almost immediately widespread anti-Greek manifestations principally in Istanbul. Now, there are all sorts of stories about how many Greeks were killed, whether Greek women were raped, and all that sort of business, in Istanbul. The fact of the matter is that there was no real recorded case of killing or raping. There was a lot of burning, there was a lot of looting, and there was a fair amount of disorder, and there is some evidence that the then-Turkish Government was behind some of these anti-Greek manifestations.

Q: Was the burning of Atatürk's place, was the Greek Government involved in that, do you think?

WOLF: I don't know the answer to that question, but I wouldn't be surprised. I wouldn't be at all surprised, because my impression is that neither of the two governments were beyond staging things that would be useful for their particular purposes, whatever those purposes.

Q: Given these riots and all, what happened to the consulate?

WOLF: Then the Greeks wanted to get out.

Q: How many are we talking about, the ones who wanted to get out?

WOLF: It's difficult to tell. The whole Greek community probably was between 50,000 and 100,000.

Q: So it was a sizable community.

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WOLF: That was approximately the size of the community. I could be wrong, but my impression was 50,000 to 100,000. And a significant number of those Greek Turks, meaning citizens of Greek extraction, were also registered for immigration, and we had the same kind of problem that we had with Armenians, that they wanted non-immigrant visas, we weren't able to give them non-immigrant visas if they were registered, unless they showed that they really were not intending to stay behind in the United States on that trip in a permanent way.

We had much more pressure from the state because there were a number of states or constituencies, districts within the United States where there was a large Greek community, and the Greek lobby, the Greek community, was very well organized in the United States, in many respects much more organized, at least at that time than the Armenian community. You have a Greek-American organization called AHEPA, I believe. I don't know what that stands for.

Q: I think it's American Hellenic . . .

WOLF: Ethnic Protective Association?

Q: Something like that.

WOLF: At any rate, AHEPA. They were very interested in seeing that as many visa applications of Greek ethnics in Istanbul were approved, and we got a fair amount of attention from AHEPA. The congressman who was very interested in this was John Brademas, a Democrat of Indiana.

Q: Who is of Greek extraction.

WOLF: Who is of Greek extraction. There were also some districts in Massachusetts where there was a lot of interest. In Maryland there was a lot of interest, in Delaware.

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Q: We're really talking about places where there was a large American-Greek community.

WOLF: Yes. This was the kind of pressure that went on, and there was a fair amount of that. I would say those were the movement of peoples issues that I had to deal with.

Q: How did you resolve the Greek problem?

WOLF: You didn't resolve the Greek problem. All that you could do was deal with it on a case-by-case basis. I always took the position if there was any possible explanation, if in an individual case one could plausibly assert that a person was coming back, I tended to issue the visa, simply because why look for trouble? It's going to come anyhow on cases where you can't, really can't issue the visa. So if there was any possible justification in coming to the conclusion that the person would come back from a non-immigrant trip, I would issue the visa.

I have to say, in fairness, that a significant number of Greek ethnics to whom I did issue non-immigrant visas did, in fact return, and many of them would call me up at the consulate general or come to see me at the consulate general and say, "See? You weren't sure whether I would return. Here I am. I want to prove to you that I was an honorable man." Because I would always ask them to swear the oath, the oath that the statements they made on their visa application were true.

Q: Which you included the statement that they were returning.

WOLF: Which you would include a statement that they were returning or the period that they were going to be there or the purpose of the visit. My own impression, frankly, is that one of the reasons why a number of these people did come back was that they were very impressed in those days by the concept of an oath before God.

Q: Turning from Istanbul, you had a series of assignments which had little relation to movement of peoples, until you became the principal officer, the counsel in Cebu in the

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Philippines. The Philippines, within the last few decades, has been a major source—in fact, the major source of migration from the country to the United States. You were in Cebu from 1968 to 1971. Did you have much in the way of migration from that particular area of the Philippines?

WOLF: Yes, we did. We had a fair amount. The problems that we encountered involving movement of peoples were two, and this is where the whole issue of fraud really began to arrive, at least in my experience. The first category of problem in movement of peoples that we faced in the Philippines was the movement of very large numbers of people with medical training—physicians, nurses, medical technologists—to the United States for training, exchange visitor visas, training in the United States, and then that which we learned from statistics, that many of them were trying to figure out ways of staying on in the United States.

Q: One thing that interests me here is Cebu is far removed from the capital of Manila and Luzon Island, it doesn't look like a very wealthy area. To have trained medical personnel coming out of not a very rich country, from a provincial area, seems rather surprising. Why were you getting so many?

WOLF: First of all, you must understand that Cebu is the second city of the Philippines. Greater metropolitan Cebu had half a million people. Secondly, although it is a poor country, it is a country that places a great store on education, so very large numbers of people have university degrees. Many of those degrees are not really worth very much, because many universities in the Philippines were—I do not know about now—run as family businesses. So we had three or four large family business-type universities in Cebu city, the University of the Southern Philippines, the University of Visayan State University, and so on and so on and so on. These were run by families, fairly prominent well-to-do families, and this was a large income. This was a large income source for these families. I mentioned the word Visayan. I should say the Visayan are the central island group in the

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Philippine Archipelago, that island group between Mindanao in the south and Luzon in the north.

Because these universities ran as businesses of families, and because the concept of educational standards is not as strong in the Philippines as it is in other countries, what that meant was if you had the money, you would be admitted. If you had the money, you would get your degree. That meant large numbers of people were processing through these diploma mills and they came out as physicians, they came out as nurses, they came out as medical technologists. Now, it is true they also had to go through a licensing procedure by the Philippine Government. You will not be surprised if I tell you that corruption is also a significant characteristic of Filipino society. And so many people were able to get certified as physicians, nurses, medical technologists when, frankly, they were unqualified. How did they do it? They paid bribes.

Q: How did you deal with this problem, both unqualified people and people who wanted to go to the United States as non-immigrants, but actually were, in fact, immigrants?

WOLF: The question of dealing with the unqualified medical technologists was really sort of a difficult one. We were not in a position in those days to challenge a physician, a nurse, a medical technologist who came in with a degree and who came in with an appointment from an American hospital as an intern, as a nurse intern, as a medical technologist trainee. If they produced the documentation indicating that they had completed the education, if they came in with a Philippine Government license or registration to practice their profession, and if they came in with the appropriate form that was issued by the hospital, I believe it was the form—I don't recall what the number was—it was authorized by the Immigration and Nationalization Service. There was nothing we could really do.

What we did was, we went to the Department and asked the Department of State to begin to investigate the qualifications of these people by going to the hospitals and acquainting the hospitals with what the educational situation in the Philippines was, that many of these

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people were not adequately trained. The curious thing was that many of the hospitals said, in effect, "We know that. We'll train them ourselves. The problem is we are so short staffed," because medical training institutions were not producing enough people in the United States to fill all of the positions of nurse and medical technologist spaces that were available. It was really, while I was there, a losing battle.

Sometime thereafter, there was an act passed by the Congress that tried to address the whole question of medical standards and the whole ECFMG examination process was considerably tightened.

Q: ECFMG?

WOLF: The Examination for the Certification of Foreign Medical Graduates. All of these people, at least the physicians, had to pass the ECFMG, but that whole procedure had been fairly loose. One of the things that I think was done by the act of Congress, which happened after I left the Philippines, was to tighten up the whole certification process. You had to meet much stiffer standards if you were going to be admitted as an exchange visitor physician, exchange visitor nurse, exchange visitor medical technologist. But that was the first issue we had.

The other issue was the issue of wives, foreign marriages. There were in California, particularly, a large number of American citizens of Filipino extraction, Filipino ethnicity, living. These were people who, when the Philippines achieved its independence in 1946, had been able through certain aspects of the treaty between the Philippines and the United States and the laws that were passed and enforced to implement the treaty, were able to become American citizens.

What happened with many of these people was they went to the United States, the men would go to the United States, work hard, make a lot of money, and then when they were in their fifties or sixties, they wanted to get married. What they did was send back to their

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home village, and there was a certain amount of fraud going on in the matching up of the men in the United States and the young women in the Philippines.

Q: What was the fraud?

WOLF: The fraud was that in some instances, a man would have his first wife come in, not for a wife, but to facilitate her immigration. It was a marriage in name only, and after a period of time, the divorce would occur, the guy would get something because he had gone . . .

Q: He would be paid.

WOLF: He would be paid, and the broker got a percentage. He got a percentage from the man and he got a percentage from the woman.

Q: The broker being somebody in the Philippines or in the United States?

WOLF: Usually in the Philippines. We were constantly trying to find out how this fraudulent matching of phony brides with phony husbands was going forward. It was a very, very difficult thing to do. My guess is that for every ring that was broken, another two came into existence.

Q: Moving from the Philippines to what would seem a much more benign consulate situation, you were assigned to Copenhagen as the consul general there. Did you have any problems there in the movement of people?

WOLF: We had two kinds of problems. One of them was the problem of the Asian and African visa shopper. Copenhagen is off the normal travel routings when you come from the Third World into Europe. Usually when you come from Africa, you come from the Middle East, you come from the Far East, you enter Europe at Rome or at Paris or London or Frankfurt. You don't get up to Copenhagen very much.

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In the period that I was in Copenhagen in '71 to '74, a number of things were going on. You had the expelling of Asians from Uganda by Idi Amin. You had the Nigerian civil war or one of the periods of civil strife in Nigeria. So you had a large number of these people fleeing, and they were displaced. Now, the first problem that we encountered was the Asians from Uganda. For a variety of reasons having to do with British politics and British nationality law, the Asians did not have British nationality, neither did they have Indian nationality or Pakistani nationality, which would have been the two countries in Asia where naturally one would have thought returned to. But many of these people had no idea about India or Pakistan. They'd never been there, they knew very little about it; they were simply part of the Asian community in Uganda. They were then expelled. So they couldn't go to England, they couldn't or wouldn't go to Pakistan or India. They wanted to go elsewhere, and what more natural destination than the United States?

These people would then arrive with a Ugandan passport, which was still valid, and they would shop all over Europe trying to get a visa into the United States. And we had literally hundreds of these people rotating through all the different posts in Europe, and we received a very large number of these.

Interview Number Two with Victor Wolf Date: August 5, 1986 Interviewer: Charles Stuart Kennedy

Q: How did you handle this Ugandan problem?

WOLF: Unfortunately, it was a very difficult problem, because large numbers of them simply could not show that they were qualified to enter the United States as non-immigrants. They had been expelled from their home country, even though in many instances they were still carrying these Ugandan passports. The British wouldn't accept them. The Indians and the Pakistanis either wouldn't accept them or were very reluctant to accept them. And yet they would come in and say, "I'm simply going temporarily to

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the United States.” Well, on the face of the situation, it wasn't very credible. So the visa officers were required to deny the visas. It was not a very happy situation.

Q: By any chance did any of these qualify for visas to go to Spartanburg, South Carolina? I know that South Carolina had a minor program trying to help these people. They took about 50 families in.

WOLF: No, they did not. I'm frankly not aware of the Spartanburg program. That would have been somewhere between 1973-74. I don't know when you encountered that program. When would that have been?

Q: I heard about it when I visited Spartanburg in about 1974. Moving on, did you have any other refugee types, particularly from behind the Iron Curtain countries?

WOLF: Yes, there was a trickle then. The largest number were Poles. There were two kinds of Polish refugees or potential refugees. The first were Polish Jews who were expelled from Poland or placed under very harsh pressures to leave by the Poles. I suppose that would have been in the very, very late Sixties. Many of these Poles were members of the Communist Party who had been fairly loyal to the regime, but about that time, the Polish authorities required scapegoats, and Polish Jews are very convenient to be scapegoats in Eastern Europe.

So many of them finally got the message that there was simply no future for them in Poland, and they were permitted to go out illegally. The Poles did not actually issue them exit visas, because they didn't want to really get involved in the handling of Polish-Jewish documentation, but they facilitated, in effect, the illegal flight of Polish Jews.

Among the more notable ones was a man named Julius Katuski. Julius Katuski was the Polish U.N. representative in the very late forties and very early fifties, and he was a loyal member of the party, and he was one of the more vitriolic anti-American orators in the

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Security Council in the General Assembly. I saw him there when he was teaching at one of the Danish universities, and he was still in shock that the regime had turned on him.

We didn't get involved with those very much, because the Danes simply accepted them and they ultimately became Danish citizens.

The other category were people who, one way or another, found an occasion to get out. For example, cruise ships. The Stefan Batory was a cruise ship that periodically stopped at Copenhagen for tourism, and every time that ship stopped, maybe 30, 40 of these people would jump off. So we always had braced ourselves for the influx of these people.

Q: How did this work? Were many given visas to the United States?

WOLF: No, none of them were given visas to the United States there. The arrangement was the following. One of two things happened to them. The Danes accepted them, or whatever country they jumped off accepted them. The other procedure was that we would contact our mission in Geneva, and our mission in Geneva would, in effect, introduce them into the refugee processing system, which was based on a series of refugee camps in West Germany, in Austria, and I think there was one in Belgium. The only task we had was to get transit or temporary visas from the Germans, the Austrians, or the Belgians, to permit them to go to that country, enter the camp, and in effect, be processed by the refugee voluntary agencies, the Immigration and Nationalization Service, and the other refugee resettlement countries.

Q: Moving from Denmark, very much a friendly country, I note that your next assignment was as consul general in East Berlin, in which you were there when the post was opened. I wonder if you could tell us something about opening a post in a hard-line Communist country.

WOLF: Well, it ain't easy. The East Germans were pretty much on their good behavior as far as we ourselves were concerned. We were treated with courtesy and politeness and

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all of that. When it came, however, for me to do my official duties, which were such things as negotiating a consular agreement, starting the process on claims by Americans against the East Germans, and most particularly uniting divided families so that members in East Germany could emigrate to their relatives in the United States, I cannot describe the East Germans as cooperative. They were anything but.

Just getting a consular operation started was very, very difficult, because the East Germans didn't really understand that. They didn't understand the idea that one of the things a consul does is to provide services to citizens of his own country and citizens of other countries that wish to visit his country for whatever purpose. This is something that is really quite alien to the East Germans in any sort of deep philosophical sense.

So one of the things that we had an enormous difficulty with was establishing a medical examination process. If a person is supposed to emigrate to the United States, he's got to get a medical examination to see that he doesn't have an infectious disease. Usually, in most countries, you go to private physicians, you contract out with them, and the procedure runs, and the government isn't really the least bit interested in that. East German—nuh-huh. You couldn't go to a private doctor; there were no private doctors. You had to go to the state. So I wrote a note to the East German Foreign Ministry, explaining what it was that we needed, and they didn't understand. They simply didn't understand really what it was I wanted. So I had to explain this several times to them in personal conversations, where I'd go in myself and talk about it. Finally, they understood that this had to do with emigration. Emigration was something they were completely disinterested in, so they were disinclined to be very cooperative.

Finally, it went to the point that Washington was getting after us to get an immigrant visa processing capability established, and I went to the ambassador. At that time the ambassador was John Sherman Cooper. I asked the ambassador to go and talk to the foreign minister about getting a consular department, the main consular department, as the bigger administration was called, to establish a procedure for medical examinations,

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with our being told who the doctors were, making arrangements for the appropriate forms to be delivered, making arrangement for a German-language translation of the medical manual to be delivered to all of these doctors, and then, in due course, the people would go there, the examination would occur, and the results would be sent to us. Simply getting started as a consular operation was a great difficulty.

Q: How many people are you talking about for emigrating from East Germany?

WOLF: The only emigrants you could get were people who had reached the age of retirement and pensioning. The East Germans were indifferent as to whether they left or not. And specific divided family cases where, with great pain and agony, we persuaded the East Germans to let this person go to emigrate to a relative in the United States.

Q: About how many people were getting immigrant visas, approximately?

WOLF: I can't give you a precise number at this time. I do know that on the initial representation list which we insisted on presenting to the East Germans, there were about 84 people, possibly divided into about 55 or 60 cases. We had made it a condition of establishing relations with the East Germans that, one, we would give them the initial representation list; two, we insisted on the right to discuss these in a continuing way; and three, we insisted on the right to present and discuss with them any new divided family cases that arose.

Q: How successful were you on divided family cases?

WOLF: In the three years that I was there, which was the first three years of the post, or less than three years, we resolved, I think, all but two of the cases that were on the initial representation list.

Q: Talking about 80-ish.

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WOLF: Eighty people.

Q: Yes.

WOLF: In addition to that, we resolved about, I think, one-third or so of a new 100 cases that arose after we opened.

Q: How did you resolve the cases? What was the process in resolving the case?

WOLF: The process of resolving the case was when we were informed that a case existed, usually we learned of it because an immigration and nationalization petition approved would arrive. Thus for one of the preferences, a fianc# visa, an immediate relative petition, and the like. We would contact the person and call them in, ask them to come in, and they would immediately be worried could they walk into the American Embassy without getting into trouble. We had an assurance that they would not be hassled if they came into the American Embassy, but we could not, of course, assure them that that was really going to happen when they returned to their homes.

In effect, we always had to say to these people, "Look, if you want to leave, you're going to have to have contact with us, and you're going to have to decide are you prepared, do you want to leave that much and join your loved-one overseas to take whatever risks are involved in doing something that this regime doesn't want." They all, of course, ultimately agreed, but you had to talk them through it. They would come in, we'd explain to them what the procedure was, and, in effect, say, "The next step is for you to apply for exit permission, and when that happens, the chances are pretty good that your life will begin to be difficult, changing all the way from dismissal to a job, to hassling, to pressure on leaving your housing, to abuse on the street, to abuse in the police offices where you applied for this, to all sorts of trouble. You'd better reconcile yourself. And you should also reconcile yourself," we told them, "to the fact that this is not going to go quickly," although in some instances, curiously enough, it did.

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They would go back, they'd do their application, and we told them that they should just keep us in touch, write us a letter, call us up, and then when the first refusal for inordinate delay, we decided that eight weeks was an inordinate delay, I would go in and say, "Now, Mr. So-and-so, about the case of Hans Schmidt, for example, he came to see us. He has advised us that he has applied for application. He's heard nothing, and he's been denied. I want to tell you the embassy is interested in the case. We are prepared to process him for an immigrant visa," and so on and so on.

Their response, inevitably, would be, "It's none of your business. This is the internal affairs of the German Democratic Republic," and so on and so on and so on. We would always say, "We beg your pardon. It is our business. One, when we established relations with you, we said—and you agreed—that we would be discussing these cases as cases that involved your citizens and involved our citizens. And we assume that you intend to live up to the communique that accompanied the establishment of relations between the two countries." Secondly, we said to them, "Additionally, you signed the Helsinki Accords in the summer of 1975, in which the signatories agreed that they would process, consider cases of humanitarian concern involving immigration movement, what have you, in a charitable and helpful way. We think you are obligated, one, to get involved in these cases, to process these cases in a decent way, and we think it establishes our right to discuss it with you." We'd go back and forth and back and forth on this, on again, off again, on again, off again.

Usually cases were resolved for a number of reasons. One, they simply got tired of the case, it had lasted long enough, and they decided they had made the point they wanted to make, and they would grudgingly give the person the exit permit. We would then process them for an emigrant visa out.

Another way something would happen would be if they were getting ready to a particular political or economic thing that was really important for them, there would always be a certain resolution on a certain number of cases shortly before. Thus, before the Leipzig

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fairs which occurred in spring and autumn, there always were several of these cases resolved. Whenever a fairly important American visited, there were several cases resolved. Whenever they were going to send someone to Washington, several of these cases were resolved. If a particularly significant congressman and senator had made an intervention in Washington with the ambassador or the deputy chief of mission, we would be notified about that, because the arrangement was that Congress would always let the Department of State know. It would be reported to us, and from time to time, there seemed to be a correlation within a few weeks after such an intervention, they would break a case loose.

Finally, there were what I call the curiosity cases. We had from time to time, when the East Germans wanted to do something that we wanted, but at the same time do it in a way that created problems and difficulties for us, they would release them in a curious way. Once, for example, they took a person who was on a list, who we had been trying to get out, and instead of giving them an exit permit so they could come and get an immigrant visa for us, they simply drove them to one of the borders with West Berlin and pushed them across into West Berlin. Suddenly, we would get a telephone call from our mission in West Berlin, "Hey, we have So-and-so from your office. Is he one of yours?" I'd check my list and I'd say, "Yes, he is one of ours. What happened?"

Another time someone was pushed across the border into West Germany, and I got a call from our embassy in Bonn saying, "This has happened. Does this mean anything to you?" And I'd say, "Yes, you will be receiving our telegram." And we would make the reporting on that.

One other reason why they sometimes sent people over into West Berlin was they perhaps thought of this as a way of asserting some sort of four-power rights over the Western sectors of Berlin, and they figured this did something like that. I think that's really all that I could usefully say about these divided families cases.

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Q: I note that after language training, you went as consul general to Warsaw, where you served from 1977 to '79. Could you contrast dealing with the East Germans with the Poles, both being rather hard-line Communist regimes?

WOLF: Well, it was in many respects easier to deal with the Poles than it was with the East Germans. The reason for that is that although the problem was of greater magnitude in Poland, 1,000 cases involving perhaps 3,000 people in Poland, as I mentioned, we only had maybe at the most 120-odd cases at any one time in East Berlin. Nevertheless, the Poles were smoother, they were not so hard-linish, they were not so, if you will Stalinist as the East Germans were, who, every time Moscow had a cold, East Berlin sneezed. This was not the case as far as Warsaw was concerned.

One of the other problems was that there was a certain amount of movement of Poles out to Western Europe and the United States that was quite acceptable to the Polish authorities. Indeed, there were some that was acceptable to them and not particularly acceptable to us.

Q: What types were these?

WOLF: For example, large farm families in southern Poland, where traditionally much of the emigration to the United States originated from, would visit relatives or want to visit relatives in the United States, in Buffalo and Detroit and Chicago and Pittsburgh, wherever there were large Polish communities, and they simply said they wanted to visit their auntie or their cousin. The Polish-American community is 10 million people. The Polish population at that time was probably 35 to 37 million people. So you could say every three, three and a half Poles had one Polish relative in the United States. That's an enormous proportion between a national population and what I would call an expatriate emigrated community. Then if you add to that how many Poles there were in Germany, in Canada, in England, in Australia, in South Africa and the like, you would say that every Pole had a relative outside. It was a huge expatriate community.

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Some people who were related to Americans of Polish extraction would go to the United States on visitors visas, work in menial jobs for two, three, four years, which was illegal under the Immigration and Nationality Act, save up \$10,000, \$20,000, bring that money back into Poland. In a certain sense, that money was available to the Polish community, to Poland. They could live very, very well on these savings. The Polish Government condoned that, assisted that sort of emigration, that sort of movement of peoples.

Q: Since our laws prohibit the issuing of tourist visas to potential immigrants, how did you deal with this problem?

WOLF: We had to refuse a significant number of them. But at that point, we ran across concerns of the American-Polish community, which was represented in Congress by numbers of Polish Americans. I would point out to you that there are congressmen named Rostenkowski, there was a congressman named Nedzi, there was a congressman named Derwinski. All of these men were, of course, representing the interests of the Polish American community. Right now you have a senatorial candidate in Maryland, Barbara Mikulski. There's a large Polish American community in Baltimore. All of these people would be quite concerned, at least they had to appear concerned to their constituents, if it was thought that the refusal rate, as it's called, was too high.

Now, there is no such thing as a formal refusal rate. No consular officer says, "Okay, we're not going to issue more than 67% of applicants." You issue on the basis of whether a person is eligible to go, or whether a person is not eligible. Nevertheless, many people try to calculate what the refusal rate is by looking at statistics, and the statistics require reporting of applications, reporting of issuances and reporting of refusals. These statistics are generally public knowledge. On the basis of these published statistics, as statistics that become available to the public, they calculate a refusal rate. What is the refusal rate? Simply by doing the appropriate numerical calculations.

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If they perceive that the refusal rate was too high, then you'd hear about it. Now, I found myself that most of these congressmen were really quite understanding. I even had congressmen say to me, "From what I know in my district," they would say, "aren't you being too permissive as far as issuances are concerned?" And they would immediately explain, "The reason I'm asking that question is that I've got, comparatively speaking, a high unemployment rate in my district, and these people who are not American citizens are coming in and taking jobs away from American citizens, even though they both may be Polish Americans." So they were fairly understanding about that.

Q: This is in person, not in their correspondence?

WOLF: Well, one or two of them even put it in their correspondence. Let me see. I think Lucien Nedzi said it to me personally, but I think he alluded to what he had said in correspondence to me. In effect, what he said was, "Look, you are here. I know you have no prejudices. You're going to have to enforce the law the way you see it." Now, mind you, this was in '77, '79, when things were comparatively easy—comparatively. A Pole had just been elected Pope, all Poles felt good about it, even members of the regime. It was before Solidarity came into existence, and obviously before solidarity was suppressed and marshal law was declared. So the atmosphere was a lot easier. What the atmosphere would be now if you had a high refusal rate, I do not know the answer to that question, because I don't know the way American Polonia would react to that sort of thing.

Q: Was there much in the way of visa fraud other than a Pole saying they were going to visit, when they actually intended to stay? But beyond that?

WOLF: No. Poles did not do that sort of thing. The only thing that would happen would be what you described. He would dissemble about what his essential purpose was.

Another interesting curiosity about Polish movement distinct from the situation in other countries in Eastern Europe, comparatively few Poles who went to the United States to

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work for a couple of years, earn \$10,000 and \$20,000 and go back, ever even considered staying in the United States. No matter how rough things are in Poland, that's home. Poles abroad have an enormously strong sense of identification with their country. So they don't abandon their country all that easily once they have a country. The tendency more is to figure out clever ways of resisting the system or transforming the system, but the Poles do not leave. At least while I was there, they didn't do that. I have a feeling, comparatively speaking, large numbers of them still go back, even if they go overseas.

Q: How many visa offices did you have?

WOLF: I had one full-time immigrant visa officer, I had one full-time non-immigrant visa officer, I had one full-time American services officer. I had the services of about three-quarters of another officer from other sections of the embassy if we had a problem, and myself.

Q: Did you have any difficulty with these officers, whom I assume were relatively junior officers, in how they handled this rather difficult problem with sorting out the tourist from the immigrant?

WOLF: And even from the genuine immigrant and how to handle the whole question of divided family cases, which was another issue that I'll get to in a moment. Not too much. I tried to rotate officers off the non-immigrant visa line. The hardest duty was non-immigrant visa duty, and I made it a practice to rotate officers out of the non-immigrant visa job every four, four and a half months, because I think if you kept an officer there too long, there was a tendency to burn out, and there was a tendency to be really rather harsh, and a tendency to become so terribly cynical that they were unable to credit any explanation at all. I didn't really want that to happen.

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We did have a necessary task of establishing and maintaining good relations with the American-Polish community, and if you had a non-immigrant visa officer who was burned out or made excessively cynical or . . .

[End Tape I, Side A. Begin Tape I, Side B]

WOLF: As I said, if you left a young visa officer doing non-immigrant visa in Warsaw for too long a period, then he might burn out or he would get too hard or too tough or too cynical. Then he might find himself interacting with the applicant in a way, when it was reported to the American relative or the American-Polish community, incredibly complicated and detailed contact between Poles in Poland and Polish Americans in the United States, then the embassy would be perceived as being unsympathetic, hard, and all that sort of business. Frankly, we didn't want that. So I tried to deal with it by rotation and by ongoing process of monitoring to see that these people kept a sense of proportion as to what they were dealing with, people coming out of a very complicated and difficult situation in that country.

Q: What were some of the other movement of people problems that you had in Poland?

WOLF: The big one, the one that I spent, I would say, the largest majority of my time on was the Polish counterpart to the East German problem of divided families. In Poland, as I think I mentioned earlier, the problem was much, much bigger. There in Poland you had at that time, in the latter part of 1977, 1,000 cases on our representation lists. That was the total of all the cases we sent in that were unresolved when I arrived, were about 1,000. You averaged three people per case, you're talking about 3,000 people who were the beneficiaries of approved petitions from American citizens or legal permanent residents of the United States who came within the appropriate priority category—fathers, mothers, sisters, brothers, husbands, wives, sons, daughters.

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In every one of these cases there was a congressman or a senator, or sometimes both, interested. They had to be kept apprized of what was happening. We had to massage the Poles to release these. They had the same objection to our inquiries that the East Germans did—namely, “It’s none of your business. This is our internal affair. Emigration is traditionally a domestic matter.” We used the same arguments to them, their signature of the Helsinki Accords, a certain tradition of dialogue between the United States and Poland on these cases. And they having made their point and my having answered that point, we then got down to business.

It was possible to be much more businesslike with Poles. The Poles had a series of things that they were very specifically interested in. They were not uptight about their national identity the way the East Germans were. They were generally more interested in doing whatever they could to maintaining a certain distance between themselves and the Soviet Union. This is not to say that the people that we dealt with were not members of the Communist Party, were not loyal to the principles of Marxism and Leninism. Nevertheless, they were Poles, and that affected the way they handled carrying out what they perceived to be the requirements of the state and the party.

There was a certain amount of flexibility. It was really possible to negotiate with the Poles about these kinds of things. The whole thing was done in a more traditional diplomatic sense. There were more traditional diplomatic exchanges with the Poles on this issue than there were with the Germans. The Poles never did anything to interfere with what I would call traditional diplomatic or consular practices of a foreign mission in Poland. The Poles never would have dreamed of obstructing the creation of a medical panel the way the East Germans do. The Poles didn’t care about that. The key issue to them was not whether there was going to be a medical panel; the key issue was whether they gave exit permission. And if they gave exit permission, they had no problem if the person took a medical examination or not. If they didn’t give exit permission, there was no point in taking

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a medical exam. So I sensed the Poles were rather pragmatic, and they were much easier to deal with.

We resolved a relatively large number of those 1,000 cases while I was there, although on the other hand, it is also true that new cases came into existence subsequent to the time I arrived, or during the time that I was there.

A comparatively large number of cases were solved in the autumn of 1977 as a prelude and, in a certain sense, a postlude to the visit of President Carter at the very end of December in 1977. That was a pretty good visit from the standpoint of movement of peoples, except for one gaffe that was made, and that was a senior American official said to a senior Polish official, in effect, "We're basically satisfied with the Polish performance in living up to the obligations of the Helsinki Accords." Well, we were not satisfied. So we had a problem of about six months to straighten it out, because after the three-day visit, the Poles kept saying to us, when we would go in and complain that we wanted more cases released or we wanted this case released, they'd say, "But we're confused, because So-and-so said to us."

Q: Who was So-and-so?

WOLF: I don't remember who it was, but it was one of the very senior officials. We said, "He wasn't fully briefed on the subject, but we're here to tell you we keep getting word from Washington that they're not satisfied with what's been done."

Then there were a series of other sort of batches of people who were released. Frankly, I think we were successful in getting this comparatively large number of people out for one other reason, and that was we had really first-class ambassadors while I was there. The first ambassador we had who was there for the first four or five months of my stay in Poland was Richard T. Davies, who was just winding up a five-year tour in Poland, spoke Polish perfectly, knew Poland, the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe intimately, and really was very, very good as far as dealing with these kinds of topics. He personally devoted a lot

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of time to the whole divided families question, because it was a principal irritant in Polish-American relations.

He was succeeded by William Schaufele. Bill Schaufele had originally been assigned to go to Greece, but there was a problem in his confirmation hearings. The Greeks chose to misinterpret something that he said, and then, in effect, he wasn't sent to Greece, because a lot of Greeks made a lot of complaint about whether he was anti-Greek or pro-Turkish or something like that. He was sent to Poland. For someone who had comparatively little professional contact with Eastern Europe, he was a remarkably quick study. He mastered the complexities of Polish-American relations and the Polish situation as speedily as I think anyone could have. He was personally also very, very interested in the whole divided families issue, among other reasons, I think, because he found personally offensive anything that separated families. He had a very strong and good family life, it was a very warm, close family, and he didn't like the idea of relatives being kept apart artificially by regimes. So he personally involved himself.

I have to say that there may be consular officers who didn't get ambassadors and DCMs very interested in consular problems of this type, because sometimes ambassadors considered them as non-substantive. Any consular officer has heard that phrase. Both Dick Davies and Bill Schaufele clearly understood that when it came to Poland, divided families, movements of peoples, this was as substantive as anything could possibly be. The fact that they were with me every step of the way, and all I had to do was ask them to do something, and when I could explain to them why I wanted to do something, they would weigh in at the ambassadorial foreign ministry level. I think that contributed significantly to success.

Q: When you left Warsaw, you continued to be dealing with problems of movement of people. You became the Director of the Office of European and Near Eastern Refugee Affairs, where you were there from 1979 to 1980. What sort of organization was this? Was this a new one?

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WOLF: This was a new one. You may remember that in the middle Seventies, the Bureau of Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs came into existence, and one of its components was the Office of Refugees and Migration. The Office of Refugees and Migration had a rather large amount of money, indeed, had the lion's share of the money that was appropriated for that bureau, and was very operationally involved in moving people around and assisting people in place and all of that. This also was just at the time of the initial outflow from Vietnam in the mid-Seventies was occurring, and refugees was very much on the forefront of the mind. I suppose by the end of 1978 it was recognized that the refugee function, frankly, was being shortchanged, at least in terms of administrative attention span, executive attention span, by being part of this other bureau.

So they broke it out and created a new bureau which ultimately was called the Bureau for Refugee Programs. That bureau was headed by someone who for reasons I've never quite understood, was not called Assistant Secretary for Refugee Programs, but the Director for Refugee Programs. The deputies of that director were called, however, deputy assistant secretaries. I cannot explain to you the reason for such an irrational choice of nomenclature, but I do think it was irrational, because it simply didn't accurately represent the chain of command.

Above that senior State Department official, however, was a U.S. Coordinator for Refugees, who really was supposed to be part of the executive office of the President. The first such man was defeated Democratic Senator Dick Clark from Iowa, the man who introduced the Clark Amendment.

Q: What was the Clark Amendment?

WOLF: The Clark Amendment had something to do with what would be provided racist regimes or what should not be provided racist regimes in Africa, primarily, I think, directed against South Africa.

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Q: What type of work were you doing?

WOLF: I was organizing the Office of European and Near Eastern Refugees, which meant primarily the following programs: the outflow of Soviet Jews from the Soviet Union, the outflow of Soviet Armenians from the Soviet Union, the outflow of Poles and Czechs into Western Europe and their resettlement, the small program to deal with Syrian Jews, the feeding in place of Afghan refugees, the struggle about what to do about Iranians after the revolution. The Congress wanted and some of the religious minority communities in the United States very much wanted to have a refugee program, but the Department of State felt that a refugee program for Iranians would sort of function as a self-fulfilling prophecy. It would simply stimulate the Khomeini regime to persecute the very people we wanted to help, and that was not our intention.

Indeed, at that time we began to hear from members of the Jewish community in Iran—we're now talking summer of 1979, before the hostages—that they didn't want at that time a refugee program, because they were afraid that that would kick over into more intense, more organized persecution of members of the religious community, minority religious communities in Iraq.

Then when the hostages were taken in November of 1979, that confirmed us that we were not going to do anything about Iranian refugees, because obviously the first priority then for this government had to be to get our people out. And anything which was going to irritate the religious authorities in Iran was going to hurt the prospects of getting our people out and certainly not help them.

It was a difficult program to organize for a variety of reasons. I mean, all of these things that I was talking about that came under my office's purview. One reason was that a few months after I arrived, Dick Clark left. Dick Clark left because he decided he was going to back Teddy Kennedy for the presidency in 1980, and he couldn't do that if he was a Carter appointee. So he walked out, basically, on three or four days' notice, which was really not

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very good. So the job of acting coordinator was taken over for a short period of time by the director of the bureau, who was John Baker, who was a first-class career officer with a lot of experience in Eastern Europe.

Then a month or so later, two new personalities came on the scene. The U.S. refugee coordinator was a man named Victor Palmieri, and the director of the refugee bureau in the Department of State was Frank Loy. Now, Palmieri came out of the private sector. He was a man experienced in pulling troubled companies that had gone into receivership out of difficulties. I suppose they figured what they needed was a Democrat who was pretty good at damage control, because the whole refugee program was in great difficulty at that time. Frank Loy was a close friend and legal associate of Victor Palmieri. He had been Assistant Secretary for Economic Affairs, I think, in either the Kennedy or the Johnson period. So he came back seconding Palmieri directly in State.

The final complication was all of the work that was done on the new Refugee Act of 1980. Up until the Refugee Act of 1980, refugees were brought into this country, as you know, under a variety of programs, the Displaced Persons Act, Refugee Relief Act, Hungarian Refugee Acts, special provisions, parole provisions for Vietnamese and so on and so on and so on. It was a very complicated mixed-up procedure. The Refugee Act of 1980 proposed to unify all of these various procedures under a single act of legislation which would operate, essentially, as follows. Each year the President and the Congress would consult on the numbers to be admitted into the United States as refugees of different categories, and then once those categories were agreed to and the numbers were agreed to under the process called consultation, the refugee bureau, together with the Immigration and Naturalization Service and other concerned entities of the United States Government would develop procedures and regulations to actually carry it out.

We were therefore functioning under the old mix of laws and regulations while, at the same time, trying to participate in the creation of new legislation and prepare ourselves for the first round of consultations which were going to take place within 45 days after

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the legislation was passed. So we, in effect, had two processes going simultaneously. We were understaffed. While I was there, the bureau was not adequately staffed, it did not have all of its table of organization filled, and the money position was quite indefinite because no one knew whether they should appropriate money for the old group of laws or whether they should appropriate as if the program was going to be run under the single new law, because no one knew when the new law was coming in.

Then just about that time, I retired.

Q: Thank you very much. I appreciate this interview.

End of interview