

Oral History Interview

with

FRASER WILKINS

Foreign Service Officer, 1940---, in Canada, Iraq, Morocco, Palestine, and India; director, Near East Affairs, Department of State, 1955-57; American Minister-Counselor, Tehran, Iran, 1957-60; ambassador to Cyprus, 1960-64; inspector general of Foreign Service, 1964---.

Washington, D.C.

June 20, 1975

by Richard D. McKinzie

The Harry S. Truman Library

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by Richard D. McKinzie, Harry S. Truman Library

MCKINZIE: Ambassador Wilkins, I think a lot of historians are interested in why people go into Foreign Service. I wonder if you could explain something about your education and why you went into the Government service in the first place?

WILKINS: I'd always been interested in Foreign Service when I was an undergraduate at Yale. But when I finished there in 1931 it was the middle of the depression, and it was very

[2]

difficult to go on studying, and, in fact, because of my father's death I had to go to work right away; I had three younger brothers. And so, living in Chicago, and then in Louisville, and later in Baltimore, I was hardpressed to continue working, rather than thinking about Foreign Service. But about 1937 they resumed the Foreign Service examinations. In my spare time I studied the exams and took them several times. I passed the Foreign Service exams in '39, and was taken into the Foreign Service in 1940. The main reason I was anxious to do it was that I'd always been interested, for one thing, and two, I was dissatisfied with what I was doing.

MCKINZIE: You were in advertising for a while.

WILKINS: Yes, advertising. Then I worked for Frankfort Distilleries Incorporated. They had distilleries in Kentucky and in Maryland. But

[3]

I wasn't on the distillery side, I was on the production, bottling, side--in charge of supplies and stuff like that. And I didn't want to spend the rest of my life doing that. So then I passed the oral exams and was taken into the Foreign Service in August of 1940; my first post was at Halifax in Nova Scotia, Canada.

MCKINZIE: When did you first get interested in the Near East?

WILKINS: The Near East was rather by chance, after coming back from Halifax, which was a probationary post. It was the eve of the American entry into the Second World War, and we were kept here in Washington working in the Visa Division, where there was a tremendous

increase in the number of visas because of so many people coming from Europe to Canada, and then to the U.S. And after a brief month in the Foreign Service School--ordinarily that course lasts about a

[4]

year, but they cut it down to a month because they needed young officers overseas--I was unexpectedly assigned to Bagdad, Iraq, and that's how I got into the Near East.

MCKINZIE: You spent most of the war then in . . .

WILKINS: I stayed in Iraq almost three years and then went to Tangier, Morocco for another three years. And once you get into the Near East it's very difficult to get out of it, because in those days the Near East Division of the State Department ran all the way from Burma to Morocco and from Greece to the Sudan. Although it was called Near East, it really covered quite a diverse area.

MCKINZIE: In that wartime experience, were you aware that there were people in the State Department--some of whom worked under Leo Pasvolsky and Sumner Welles--who were drawing up contingency plans for the period after the war?

[5]

WILKINS: Not so much at my level, because when I started out I was only a vice-consul and also I was away from Washington until 1946. So, I really wasn't aware of what work of that type was going on here.

MCKINZIE: But certainly you had input in that?

WILKINS: No. We were, in the posts in the field, preoccupied with the acceleration of Foreign Service work. For example, in Bagdad, my principal responsibility was lend-lease, which increased because of assistance to Iraq during the war. And then later on in Morocco, I was doing economic work. At that time I was the only economic officer on the staff and we were required to report for all of Morocco. The mission itself was in Tangier. We were busy, and we didn't have time to do anything else; so there wasn't any input by us into postwar planning.

[6]

MCKINZIE: Well, you must have had some feeling about how the end of the war was going to affect the area.

WILKINS: Yes, I suppose that's the case. When I was in Bagdad we used to hear a lot about what would happen in the Palestine mandate after the war, because there had been increasing Jewish immigration from Europe since 1933 because of Hitler. But this had been more or less called off, or a moratorium placed on it, during the war, because of the overriding urgency of winning it. And the British were able to persuade the Zionists not to press the issue then, to let it rest until the end of the war, in '45 as it turned out. So when I talked to Englishmen in Iraq at

that time, they used to talk about the difficulties in Palestine. Fortunately, they were not pressing during the war years.

MCKINZIE: The postwar years seemed to concern three

[7]

major issues of problems with the Near East: oil, communism, and the Jewish problem. During the war, from the observation post or reporting post in Iraq, did you anticipate there would be any kind of Communist problem in the area? That came to the fore, first of all, in Iran, but was there any anticipation of this going to be a U.S. problem?

WILKINS: In those years we didn't worry about communism at all; the principal discussion which took place between the American legation and the government of Iraq was related to oil. I remember that the United States had, through the American oil companies, slightly over 25 percent of the Iraqi petroleum. And we only gained that earlier because of great pressure by American oil companies on the government to persuade the British to let us have a part of it. And I was told that some of the most

[8]

acrimonious correspondence in the files of the State Department related to the American interest in taking part in the Near East-Middle East.

MCKINZIE: In the middle of the war you were moved to Morocco?

WILKINS: Right.

MCKINZIE: Were you there in the postwar period when there was a large problem with U.S. businessmen in the area who wanted exemptions from import-export quotas that were imposed on . . .

WILKINS: This developed very rapidly after 1945, because a number of American servicemen who had been in Morocco during the war years stayed on there afterward or returned, and they expected preferential treatment for doing business in Morocco.

MCKINZIE: Did you have any dealings with those people? They had a small organization, as I recall.

[9]

WILKINS: Yes, we did. There was a man named Rhodes. But I think most of the discussions took place in Washington rather than Morocco, because it was getting the State Department to do something about their rights. Even at that late date we had extraterritorial privileges in Morocco dating from the nineteenth century. Also, we were interested in establishing radio stations in Tangier, because it's a good place for a radio station. As I recall, Rhodes was being hardfaced on

this. I've forgotten the name now, but there was a commercial station developed there in 1945-1946; it continued on thereafter. I don't know what's happened to that.

MCKINZIE: You were there at the time the American troops were?

WILKINS: Yes, but they were mainly in French Morocco, because, you see, Morocco was divided in three parts, the restored international zone, Spanish

[10]

Morocco, and French Morocco. American troops were, generally speaking, in French Morocco. They used to come to Tangier on occasion; Tangier had a free money market and you could change your dollars there for two hundred francs to the dollar, and you could only get 50 in Casablanca. You'd get a lot of troops coming up for that reason. And then, too, the Germans left the international zone area late in 1944

[11]

or early in 1945, but they didn't actually leave Spanish Morocco until the end of the war. So, we had that problem there, getting rid of the Germans from parts of Morocco.

You see, when the Germans were moving ahead on the Continent they persuaded the Spanish, who had occupied the international zone--to let them come in and have consulates there. They had a German network of officers and intelligence officers in the international zone and Spanish Morocco, and that was still in existence in 1944 when I went there and didn't disappear until 1945. That was one of the big problems at that time.

MCKINZIE: Yes. From your position in Morocco, were you apprised always of what was going on at the other end of the Mediterranean?

WILKINS: No we weren't, other than general circulars. I mean, we were so preoccupied with the events of North Africa that we didn't pay much attention to the Near East. We were more interested in what was going on in Spain and Europe. This is an interesting thing about North Africa. It's so far removed from the rest of the Near East; in fact, the local Arabic was different. If you spoke the local Arabic dialect in Morocco, they wouldn't understand you in Syria; the only way they could correspond or talk to each other would be in classical Arabic. And, my impression at that time was that North Africa was more interested

[12]

in Spain and in France because they were the metropolitan powers--and in Great Britain, because of its interest in Tangier.

MCKINZIE: When you were in that post there was a lot going on--not only in the State Department, but through some international conferences--in the way of trying to set up some sort of postwar economic arrangements between countries, an arrangement which was pretty much

authored, I think, by Will Clayton, or people around him, which was a kind of free trade thing. It called for a kind of mutual interdependence, on integration of economies. And there was supposed to be, after a couple of years, a kind of reconstruction at the end of the war, an upward spiral of living standards as a result of the implementation of this open world idea. Was that at all in the minds of people who were on posts in places like Morocco?

[13]

WILKINS: It certainly didn't come to the fore in Tangier; the principal thing I remember being interested in at that time was, first, the economy of Morocco itself, which was tied into that of France, and, secondly, with tracking down looted property, works of art and things like that that had been taken by the Germans and possibly had found refuge in Spain. And the third thing was relief for refugees, the UNRRA in Europe. Those were the principal things that we discussed in Tangier.

MCKINZIE: Now, how did UNRRA figure into this?

WILKINS: Well, just because of the relationship between Morocco and France and plans for a relief agency in Europe, and subsequently for the Marshall plan--because you see, this was primarily in 1945 and '46.

MCKINZIE: Franklin Roosevelt had taken a very anti-

[14]

colonialist position with the British and also with the French. Did that anti-colonial position permeate the State Department, or were they more willing to accept the reality of the situation?

WILKINS: We accepted the situation as it was in Morocco. You see, the Sultan was not there; he had been taken away and he didn't return until 1956. So you had a completely French administration in French Morocco and Spanish in Spanish Morocco. They were, for all intents and purposes, parts of those two countries on the Continent. It's amazing to see the change that's taken place now; they're not there. In fact, Spain is in the process of giving up the remaining colony south of French Morocco. I don't think they've done it yet. I've been down to Ifni, it's just a barren desert waste, but still, it's something that the Spaniards held onto for years and was always a thorn in the side of the French in French Morocco.

[15]

MCKINZIE: When that tour was completed, what did they tell you you would be doing when you came back to . . .

WILKINS: They surprised me one day by sending me a telegram saying I was assigned to Ponta Delgada in the Azores. I was horrified at that. I didn't even know how to get there, much less want to go there. But that was shortly thereafter canceled, and I was transferred back to the State Department. I was on the Palestine desk of the Near East Division. I think one of the

reasons I was selected was because while I was in Bagdad, Iraq, Loy Henderson was sent as American minister in 1943 to Bagdad. He was transferred back to Washington as director for Near Eastern and South African affairs in 1945, so when my time was up in 1946, I imagine that he picked me for the Palestine desk because of his knowledge of my work in Iraq.

[16]

MCKINZIE: But you had some catching up to do, I take it, when you came back in 1946.

WILKINS: Right.

MCKINZIE: Because there had already been . . .

WILKINS: The Anglo-American Committee had already been to the field and come back with a report, so that the pace of affairs was beginning to accelerate in the Near East, with respect to Palestine, in the fall of 1946.

MCKINZIE: Who controlled events as they began to unfold?

WILKINS: At that time there was little doubt in my mind that the British were in control of the events in the Palestine mandate, because they controlled immigration and they controlled the situation on the ground in Palestine--the British troops that were there, some 70 to 80 thousand

[17]

troops. Developments were affected, secondly, by the attitude of the American administration, President Truman, and public statements he made with respect to immigration into Palestine apart from the Anglo-American Committee report.

MCKINZIE: Did you have the feeling, then, in the fall of 1946, when you assumed the Palestine desk, that the President had a particular interest in this question?

WILKINS: There's no doubt about it. He would speak on the subject rather than the Secretary of State, James Byrnes. Although it was the affair of the Secretary, he was preoccupied with Eastern Europe and peace treaties with Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Rumania. But the President was playing a leading role in Palestine at that time.

MCKINZIE: Well, being on the Palestine desk, then, did this bring you into contact with the higher structure

[18]

in the State Department immediately, or did they just leave you alone to deal with day-to-day problems?

WILKINS: The way the Department functioned; the custom there is that the desk officers would receive the action copies of any telegram or dispatches that came in and had the responsibility for preparing action, either written or oral, although other high officials in the Department might take steps of their own to get in touch with you before you had done anything. But ordinarily you would prepare an action for response and send it on up to, first, the Director or Assistant Secretary of the area, then on up to the Under Secretary--and in those days the Assistant Secretary for Political Affairs, also--then to the Secretary. So, you were aware of what was happening at high levels, but not everything, because there might, for example, be discussions

[19]

between the Secretary and the President about what to do about certain situations you wouldn't ever know about. But at that time Dean Acheson was Under Secretary, and he would frequently telephone, having seen a copy of an incoming cable, and ask about it, make suggestions about it. It was his practice always to have a desk officer come to his office when he was seeing a foreign visitor.

For example, if a Near Eastern Ambassador or someone from the Jewish Agency came in to see him, he would ask a desk officer to come and be there during their conversation. We were not allowed to take any notes; it was just that you would be present. Later on, after the interview, you'd go back to your office, dictate a memorandum of what was said, and send a draft up to the Under Secretary. He would approve it, and it would become part of the file. This is opposite of the practice of John Foster Dulles when he was

[20]

Secretary. I also happened to be Director of Near Eastern Affairs in that day. He would permit you to take notes of the discussion from which you could later dictate a memo and send it up to him for approval. The result of these two different methods of taking notes was that the memos of the conversations of Mr. Acheson were always very short, concentrated on the principal points of the discussion, whereas those for Mr. Dulles were rather long and detailed. Mr. Acheson's might be one page, and Mr. Dulles' might be three--and they were filled with lots of irrelevant material. It was just the different way in which people operate.

After a while, it wasn't too difficult to make a report of a conversation like that, because ordinarily, when somebody like Rabbi [Abba Hillel] Silver or Moshe Shertok would come in, they would usually have their presentation arranged in logical order. If you concentrated on what they

[21]

were saying and what the Secretary replied, it wasn't too difficult to make an accurate report of the conversation.

MCKINZIE: I wonder if I could get you to describe what happened in 1947--the events with which you personally dealt, which consumed most of your time as that year unfolded?

WILKINS: I'd like to go back as early as April 1947. The date exactly was about April 17, and the British left with us a memorandum. I believe they gave it to Mr. Acheson, but he immediately passed it on to Loy Henderson. In it they said that they no longer could carry the burden of the Palestine mandate because of the cost and the number of troops out there, and they wished to consult the United Nations with respect to what to do about it, primarily because the Arabs and the Jews couldn't reach agreement on any plans for the future of Palestine.

[22]

As a result, in the spring of '47 there was called a special session of the General Assembly of the United Nations in which they considered what to do. The result of that was, after much maneuvering at Lake Success in New York, another committee was set up called the United Nations Special Committee for Palestine. This consisted of about eleven members, including Guatemala, India, Canada, Yugoslavia--I've forgotten the rest--which went to Palestine and reported back in the late summer of 1947, with two plans: a majority proposal for partition of Palestine with economic union (this latter aspect is often forgotten), and a minority report for an Arab-Jewish federal state in Palestine. These two reports were to be considered by the General Assembly meeting in August or September of 1947. But most of the work of the State Department that spring and summer and fall, dealt with the activities of the Committee in

[23]

Palestine, and the receipt of the report itself. The United States had nothing to do with the committee and in no way tried to influence its work. But there was an American on the staff of the United Nations in the person of Ralph Bunche, who, although not an official of the State Department, played a major role in the development of the UNSCOP report.

MCKINZIE: Did you have contact with him?

WILKINS: I had known Ralph Bunche earlier, because he had been in the State Department. He told an interesting story, after the report had been completed--and this was when he was the acting mediator after the assassination of Count Bernadotte. He told me that the Committee had talked to lots of people out in Palestine about what to do, but it had been

[24]

somewhat dilatory in getting down to the actual discussion and writing of a report. So, as the deadline for the submission of the report approached in late summer, he was rather concerned about how to set it up. He knew the main lines of thinking in the Committee, that they favored partition with some form of economic union, and he knew that some of the members were not in favor of this and preferred a federal state. But they hadn't gotten down to the details of what partition should be.

There was, he told me, a Swedish member of the U.N. secretariat, something like Niels Bohr, who always had a lot of colored pencils in his pocket. He and Ralph Bunche, after dinner one night, sat down and partitioned Palestine with these colored pencils. The time was so

[25]

short that they didn't have to go into all of the effects of this type of partition, so that, as it turned out, the line, when drawn, in many cases separated the villages from the land which they tilled. It's a custom in the Near East for the villagers to live in a little town and to go out to surrounding fields during the day to till it. So that later on, during the partition debate in New York, one of the arguments against the partition plan was that it separated the towns from their fields. For the Arabs and the Jews, both, there'd be rectifications of the frontiers to take into account this matter. This is especially true in the west bank around the north of Jerusalem, in that area.

MCKINZIE: Do you recall the discussions in the Department when those two plans came back?

WILKINS: Yes, I do. I mean, we naturally studied both plans and prepared a number of position

[26]

papers for the U.S. delegation to the General Assembly of the United Nations in New York, so that we would be prepared to speak to it, at least with respect to the details such as I mentioned. Now, as far as a decision in the Department is concerned with respect to the majority or the minority report, that was not decided until a later time. I remember that General [George C.] Marshall, who had replaced Secretary Byrnes as Secretary of State, made the argument one day in the Department--or perhaps it was in New York, because he used to go up to New York for meetings of the delegations. He said, "There were three principal reasons why I think the United States should favor the majority report, and they are, one, that every President since Wilson in 1917 has come out in favor for a Jewish National Home in Palestine." He said, "It is to be a cultural and religious home for the Jews, not necessarily a political state. The second

[27]

thing is that since the 19th century, especially since 1933, 500,000 Jews from all over the world, primarily from Eastern Europe, have accumulated in Palestine, so there is a substantial minority." At that time there were perhaps another million and a half Arabs in the mandate, altogether about two million of which 500,000 were Jews. "And the third reason is that the United Nations, as a result of a special session of the General Assembly, decided to set up a special committee to study the situation, and they now come back with a majority report in favor of partition and of economic union, and a minority report in favor of a federal state." He said, "For all these reasons, I think the United States should be ready to give the majority report great weight." And he selected those words purposely to show that while that we attached great weight to it, we meanwhile wished to hear the views of other members of the United Nations about it.

[28]

So, this was sort of the atmosphere of the State Department and the delegation in New York with respect to the UNSCOP report, early on in the General Assembly, in the fall of '47.

MCKINZIE: Did the Jewish refugee problem have anything to do with those discussions? There was, as you know, almost parallel to that, an attempt to revise the immigration laws in the country to allow large numbers of Jewish refugees caught in Germany and who had fled from Eastern Europe to come to the United States, and the United States indeed put a lot of pressure on other nations to do that. And there have been some people who have said that the whole problem arose because of the inability to accommodate refugees. How did that figure in these discussions?

WILKINS: There was some discussion about immigration to the United States, but it was considered unlikely. The principal discussion in the State

[29]

Department was with respect to immigration--so-called illegal immigration--to Palestine, and efforts by the British to intercept it, take the refugees from Europe to Cyprus and so on, and in one case to return a whole shipload to Southern France. So, the approaches we used to get from American Zionists and the Jewish Agency and others dealt with their trying to persuade us to bring pressure on the British to allow a greater number of refugees to go into Palestine. So, we talked more about that aspect than we did about immigration into this country.

MCKINZIE: You said "the approaches we used to get." That's very rare in the State Department, for certainly a desk officer, to have any contact at all, really with groups within the country. I wonder if you could talk about your early contact with these groups.

WILKINS: There are all sorts of American groups that

[30]

would come in at every level in the State Department, from the Secretary on down: religious groups, the American Jewish Committee, Judge [Joseph M.] Proskauer, the American Zionist organization itself, Bob [Robert] Nathan, Oscar Ganz. American Jews and pro-Israeli groups were very well-organized, very accurate in seeing everybody they possibly could--not only in the State Department but in every Government department. And they would also be, I have no doubt, in close touch with the White House, because they were very well-organized and they always had a beautiful case to present. So, as desk officer, I would either receive some of these men myself, or else I would be present in conversations with the Secretary and others when they would come in, and subsequently would write memos of conversations. Furthermore, we would receive round-robin letters from American Congressmen with respect to various aspects of our policy

[31]

towards Palestine. And, there again, we would always be responsible for preparing the replies to these letters with signature by the Secretary or others.

MCKINZIE: What happened, so far as you were concerned, after the two reports had been made by the U.N. Commission and it was brought before the General Assembly?

WILKINS: There was the usual lengthy debate. They set up a Special Committee for Palestine in the General Assembly, to consider this case alone instead of referring it to the political committee, which had a lot of other matters on its agenda. All the members had to agree, and the Jewish agencies spoke, as I recall, and I believe the Arab higher committee did, too. I think they gave the two parties a right to be heard. Dr. [Chaim] Weizmann came over. Dr. Silver also spoke; I don't know in what capacity he could have

[32]

done so, but I believe he did.

The session, which began in late August or early September, dragged on until late November. Toward the end, as the various members made their views known, the tension mounted rapidly. There was one point in which it appeared that the Arabs were making some headway and might be able to get the whole issue referred back to the Committee after it had reached the General Assembly. The Committee made a move in favor of the majority plan, but there was disagreement at the General Assembly. And it looked like it might be referred back to the Special Committee on Palestine for further consideration, which, from the parliamentary point of view, would have meant that it was dead until something was proposed to take its place. But toward the end of November, great pressure was brought on various other governments, on the United States Government, and on delegates in New York to support the majority plan. So, in the

[33]

final vote, the majority proposal, for which the United States and the Soviet Union voted, was passed 33 to--I forget the exact figure. But this caused great indignation among the Arab delegation in New York and in the Arab world itself. And there were many charges that unfair tactics had been used in persuading some of the delegates in some of the countries to support the majority plan.

MCKINZIE: Did you have any evidence that that was true?

WILKINS: No, although there's no doubt that interested Congressmen and interested Government officials, knowing many of the delegates and knowing many of the officials of other governments, perhaps heard from them that this was probably the only way to solve the thing, and that now is the time to do it, and strike while the iron was hot.

MCKINZIE: To your knowledge, did President Truman

[34]

have anything to do with this first important voting?

WILKINS: I know that the President followed it with great interest, because on one occasion I recall General [John H.] Hilldring, who was serving in the capacity of a special assistant to General Marshall on Palestine at the General Assembly--the White House called General Hilldring to speak with him and to inquire what the parliamentary situation was in New York at that point, and General Hilldring asked me to be present during the telephone conversation and to listen in on it. And I remember the President as saying, after hearing General Hilldring's report, "Well, don't upset the apple cart," which indicated to me that the President supported General Marshall's earlier statement of attaching great weight to the UNSCOP majority report and was in favor of its passage. At least, he showed his personal interest

[35]

in the matter by getting in touch with General Hilldring on the matter.

MCKINZIE: Subsequently, there were a number of discussions, as I understand it, between General Marshall and President Truman. Were you knowledgeable about those discussions?

WILKINS: About the voting in New York? No, I was not.

MCKINZIE: Well, this was in November; after that time the British then complicated the issue. There were discussions between Truman and Marshall about what general stance the U.S. should take. Were you involved in any of that?

WILKINS: I really wasn't involved in that; our main concern all during this period was that there'd be an outbreak of hostilities in Palestine as a result of the vote in favor of partition, and economic union. I stress economic union because it was an integral part of the plan. It was

[36]

the hope of the Committee that this would be the means by which the Israelis and the Arabs could be brought together. But events didn't turn out that way. The British were under deadline of about mid-1948 to withdraw from Palestine, and they indicated that they would do so. In the spring of 1948, the British announced that they'd moved up this date to May 15, 1948. And the British also adopted the policy of not having anything to do with the termination of the mandate, nor of facilitating either the establishment of the Jewish state or the proposed Arab state--which very much complicated the situation. Meanwhile, what I would call irregular units of the armies of the various Arab states were under a fellow named Kawakji, who moved into Palestine and there was sporadic warfare everywhere--Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, and Egypt. But, this is an important point: there was no real coordination of the Arab military effort; that's why I

[37]

described it as sporadic, somewhat irregular, very disorganized. So, when the British finally put through this three-point plan, May 15th, the Israelis declared their independence and had occupied perhaps 10 percent more of the former Palestine mandate than had been given to them under the partition plan. Then these irregular Arab forces agreed to a cease-fire and truce for a period of one month.

After the expiration of that 30 days, the Arabs renewed the hostilities against the Israelis, the result of which was that the Israelis were again successful and ended up with 30 percent more of the Palestine mandate than originally was planned in the majority plan. The Arabs again agreed to a cease-fire and truce. I don't exactly remember when the mediator took office. Count Bernadotte was appointed truce supervisor/mediator in Palestine about that time, and it was his responsibility to see that

[38]

the second cease-fire and truce was maintained and to find ways of mediating between the Arabs and the Jews.

MCKINZIE: In the period when the British pulled back and the situation deteriorated into chaos, and it was seemingly clear that there was going to be an announcement of Israeli independence (which everyone, I assume, anticipated was going to happen), were you privy to any of the discussions about how the United States would handle this?

WILKINS: Yes, there were two things of interest. During the week before May 15th, Secretary Marshall received a call from the White House that President Truman would like to discuss Palestine with him. Being the desk officer I was asked to accompany the Secretary and the Under Secretary, Robert Lovett, to the White House. Robert McClintock, who was responsible for Palestine in the Bureau of United Nations Affairs,

[39]

was also asked to come. The Secretary and Under Secretary apparently wanted McClintock and myself, rather than Dean Rusk, who was director of that bureau at that time, and Loy Henderson, because they didn't wish to take part in the discussion other than for technical advice.

Now, there may have been some desire on the part of the White House not to have Rusk and Henderson present at this discussion. In any event, when we arrived at the White House, General Marshall said he would leave the presentation of the State Department views to Mr. Lovett. But first he called on Clark Clifford and David Niles to argue the case for the immediate recognition of Israel, prior to the announcement of its independence. As I recall, it was on grounds that if the United States did not act today or the day following, the Soviet Union, which had also supported a majority plan for the partition of Palestine, would come out with a

[40]

prior announcement of independence that would thus gain favor with Israel in the Near East. Toward the close of the discussions, the President asked General Marshall what he thought, and if he went ahead with the proposal, would he vote for him in the coming election. I don't remember his exact words, but the substance of General Marshall's reply wasn't in favor. It seemed like a trick to give prior recognition to a country which had not declared its independence. General Marshall jokingly said that it wouldn't cause him to vote for President Truman if he took that action. The President laughed at this remark and said, "Well, we'll put it off," and signed some paper on his desk, apparently relating to the subject. But it was my impression that the President had put off a decision with respect to direct recognition of the State of Israel for the time being.

Consequently, it was some surprise when a

[41]

few days later, on May 15th, eleven minutes or so after Israel announced its independence, the United States announced its recognition. Because as far as we knew at my level of the State Department, no decision had been taken within the administration with respect to recognition. Now, this is not to say that the President or the Secretary or anybody else had decided against recognition, but what they had in mind at that time was that because of the high state of tension in the area it might be unwise for the United States to take action at that moment.

The second thing I remember about the period preceding the announcement of independence of Israel was that I was called into General Marshall's office before his weekly press conference. He asked me to sit down in a chair in the corner, as though I were a schoolboy. He had been talking--was still talking--with Chip [Charles Eustis] Bohlen and Mike [Michael James] McDermott,

[42]

the press secretary, preparing other items for an upcoming press conference. They were both scribbling on the corners of General Marshall's desk while he sat in his red leather chair. After a while he dismissed them, and he turned to me and said, "What am I going to tell 150 reporters downstairs the United States is going to do about the recognition of Israel tomorrow?"

I said, "Well, I would think that in view of the military situation in Palestine," or words to this effect, "that the United States is waiting to see what Israel does, first. And secondly, we would have to take into account the military situation there at the time, that it would be unwise to speculate in advance of these events."

"Okay, okay." He later went downstairs and said something along those lines. I only mention this point to illustrate the way in which General Marshall sometimes questioned his subordinates and

[43]

asked them, at my level, for advice. Ordinarily, one would think that he would discuss this matter--in fact he did--with Mr. Lovett, Mr. Henderson, and others.

MCKINZIE: Shortly thereafter, he left the State Department and, in fact, he . . .

WILKINS: Well, then he went to Defense. But as you know, he was a great favorite of President Truman who regarded him as the greatest man he'd ever known.

MCKINZIE: Once Israeli independence had been declared and been recognized, I take it then your chief problems came with dealing with the Arabs rather than the Israelis.

WILKINS: Well, we still had problems with the Israelis, though, and with the United Nations, because we had to set up an Embassy in Tel Aviv, and there was a question about whether it should be in Tel

[44]

Aviv or Jerusalem. And there was also a question about what kind of representative would it be; would it be an Ambassador or what? And so because we regarded it as a de facto recognition, we sent a special representative. First we had a charge´ there, and then we sent a special representative in the person of James G. McDonald; later he was made an Ambassador when it became de jure.

The problem with the United Nations was American participation in the Truce Commission, of which Count Bernadotte was the head before his assassination later that year. So, we had many things to do with respect to providing American military personnel and logistical support to the Truce Commission. And then we had all sorts of explaining to do with the Arab states about the manner in which partition had come about and independence had come about and things of that sort. And I remember General

[45]

Hilldring said after the vote, as early as 1947, "Well, we've done the right thing now about the Palestine mandate, but it's going to be the job of the State Department to pick up the pieces." And that was really what we had to do from then on, to try to pick up the pieces, persuade the Arab states this would be the best type of solution under the circumstances and to argue in favor of the establishment of the Arab state and of this economic union. However, the Arabs seemed as unable politically, as they had militarily, before the independence of Israel, to organize a state. There didn't seem any likelihood of any kind of economic union between the two entities.

MCKINZIE: How much policy was dominated by policy? By this, I mean how much State Department position was generated by feelings that any slip would give the Soviets advantages in the area? How

[46]

much policy was dominated by a fear that the United States would lose needed oil resources? The reason I raise it is that there are a number of historians, now, who have gone so far as to say that those were guiding it, that those issues were preeminent.

WILKINS: In the Department we were always concerned that the Soviet Union would wangle its way in one way or another onto the various committees. For example, they tried very hard to become members of the Truce Commission, as a means of having their observers in Palestine. We avoided this by suggesting in the United Nations, as was finally adopted, that the members of the Truce Commission be drawn from countries that had consular representatives in Jerusalem. This was a device to keep the Russians out. But at the same time, I must say that although we had been concerned about Communist activities in Greece and Turkey--which

[47]

resulted in the Truman Doctrine and assistance to those two countries--we'd never been overly preoccupied with Soviet activities in the Near East itself, other than what I mentioned. Because in those days, neither the Soviet Union nor the Eastern Europeans were giving any military assistance to those countries. It wasn't until 1955-56 that the Russians changed their policy in this respect, and I only mentioned this to show that we were not as concerned about the Soviet Union in the Near East in 1948 and '49 as we were later. Now, this is not to say that there wasn't always a fear of a Communist encroachment in the Near East; it had always been known that they were interested in that area, but it wasn't an active sort of thing at this point. I would say that the United States was more concerned about a continuation of its interest in the oil in the area and in the communications in the area, not to mention the interest of many Americans in Jerusalem as a

[48]

religious center. And by "communications" I mean by land and sea and air, so that all these things contribute to American preoccupation in the Near East.

MCKINZIE: James Forrestal is alleged to have said that the United States couldn't fight more than two years in a new world war without the oil reserves of the Middle East. Was that something that was on the minds of people in your office?

WILKINS: Yes. And I remember very well Secretary Forrestal's attitude, because, on occasion, I accompanied Loy Henderson to the Pentagon for discussions with him, usually late in the evening. I remember one time Secretary Forrestal was due at some reception; he was dressed in evening clothes, and we stayed there in the Pentagon at least until midnight in sort of a general discussion with Secretary Forrestal about the situation in the area. So, generally speaking,

[49]

in the Government, not only in the State Department, they were greatly concerned about the availability of petroleum supplies--going back, as I said in the beginning, to our interest in the oil of Iraq, not long after the First World War, and the desire of American companies to participate

in the supplies of that country. Of course, we had more favorable arrangements in Saudi Arabia, and also in Kuwait, so all of this added up to a tremendous economic interest of the United States and also a strategic one.

MCKINZIE: To your knowledge, did any Arab nation ever threaten to cut off oil?

WILKINS: No, not to my knowledge. It was mentioned in the Arab press, of course, and you'd hear it said sometime, but not as a realistic step, because primarily they were dependent upon that oil; Iraq was, and so was Saudi Arabia.

MCKINZIE: If we might pursue the subject of oil just

[50]

a little further, Truman is said to have felt that the English acted very foolishly a year or two years later, when [Mohammed] Mossadegh decided to nationalize the oil of Iran. There were proposals negotiated by Paul Nitze and George McGhee which would have lessened British influence but would still have given them a place in the old Anglo-Iranian oil combine. The British foolishly refused to concede to that. What was your opinion of that?

WILKINS: There's no doubt about it, and it's incredible to me that the British, who pursued such a statesman-like policy immediately after the war, after [Clement] Attlee withdrew from Burma, Pakistan, India, Ceylon, and from Iran, and finally from Greece, Turkey, and Palestine, should have been so sticky about Iran with respect to the oil company and Mossadegh. But there again, I think they were under tremendous pressure from

[51]

British commercial interests and thought that they could control the situation because of Iran's need for revenue from oil, not realizing that they were hurting themselves as much as they were Iran.

MCKINZIE: Not only Nitze and McGhee were involved in that, but Harriman also went on a mission to try to soothe those feathers. Were you in . . .

WILKINS: I wasn't present in the State Department in 1953; I had just come back from India, where I had been stationed for almost three years. And I was not placed in NEA again, but up in the Policy Planning Staff, and so I wasn't aware of the detailed work that was going on in England and the United States with respect to Iran. I was asked by Robert Bowie, who was the head of the Policy Planning Staff, in July 1953, if I would write a paper--my first task--with respect to a solution for the Anglo-Iranian dispute concerning

[52]

oil. And he asked me if I could have it ready in a month. "Well," I said, "Mr. Bowie, I've been in India for three years and I haven't had any leave." I said, "If you don't mind, I'd like to take at least two weeks."

He said, "Okay, I'll give you six weeks to prepare the paper. You can take what leave you want in that time, but you have to prepare the paper."

So, I went away for a brief period, and I came back and I started consulting everybody in the Department and elsewhere, about what had been happening in Iran, about Mossadegh, and so on. I wrote a paper recommending a solution for ending the dispute. The day I handed it to Mr. Bowie, Mossadegh was overthrown. As you know, the CIA, it is widely said, was responsible for Mossadegh's overthrow. But it is interesting that no one alluded to this during my preparation for this report. It was quite clear to me, however,

[53]

that something was going on from the type of responses that I got from the other departments of government.

MCKINZIE: But that wasn't the conclusion of your report.

WILKINS: Not to overthrow Mossadegh. But going back to your earlier statement, it is lamentable I think that the British were not as statesmanlike about the Anglo-Iranian dispute as they had been about their withdrawal from these other countries. If they had, why they would be in a better position in the Middle East today.

MCKINZIE: After the war which followed all this, one of the big issues which came up was the subject of aid, and I wonder if you could talk about your involvement with that?

WILKINS: Well, after Israel became independent and the truce arrangements were made by Ralph Bunche

[54]

in '48 between Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, and Egypt, the principal efforts of the Department were to approach the situation in Palestine in an economic way. You may remember that George McGhee, by this time, had become Assistant Secretary--I think it must have been in late 1948 or early '49--and he persuaded Gordon Clapp to go out to the Near East and write reports. And all of this had a lot of substance. At that time, there were about six hundred thousand, maybe a million Arab refugees, and arrangements had been made to take care of them through UNRRA, the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration. This was costing the United States about 20 million dollars a year, about roughly 50 or 60 percent of the amount needed. Later on, it's gone up to perhaps 40 million. They've spent as much on refugees through this organization, and the cost of resettling all of them now has increased to about

[55]

two billion. Anyway, there were about 100,000 refugees in Lebanon, more or less the same amount in Syria, about 500,000 in Jordan, and about 200,000 in the Gaza strip of Egypt, near Jaffa. There's a large tract of Syria up in the northeast, highly arable, but it has no water. But water could be brought to it from the river systems up there, primarily the Tigris, and it was George McGhee's thought and Gordon Clapp's thought that, with the expenditures of, say, some 500,000 dollars, water could be brought to this area, and that all the Arab refugees could be settled there. That's one thought that came to naught.

Another one, later on, was the plan of Eric Johnston to develop the Jordan River; that came to naught through delaying tactics on the part of Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan. They were afraid that with the development of the Jordan River Beirut would be sidetracked, so that all

[56]

the business would go through Haifa in Israel rather than the Arab port in Beirut. So they brought great pressure to bear on [Gamel Abdel] Nasser, and Nasser knifed the plan and nothing ever came of it. But I only mention the Clapp mission, George McGhee's thoughts with respect to Syria, and the Johnston plan for the Jordan River to show that this Department made really strenuous efforts to bring the Arabs and Israelis together through some sort of economic arrangement. But the continued existence of the refugees and the political fear of Arab governments that if they signed an agreement they would be assassinated, overthrown, prevented any rapprochement. In fact, I think that it would have been easier to make an agreement between Israel and the Arab states in 1949, the year immediately following partition, than it is today. I used to argue with the Israeli diplomats here in Washington and say, "Well,

[57]

you really ought to do this, because it's to your longrange advantage to be on friendly relations with the Arab states, which outnumber you." Their usual reply was, "It's just impossible to do this, because for psychological and emotional reasons we couldn't make a deal with the Arab states now." But I wonder if this is really as true as they said, because before the Second World War, although there was an Arab boycott against the Jews in Palestine, still there was all sorts of trade going on under the counter. This indicates to me that the Near Eastern people are highly pragmatic, and that if you give them an opportunity to work together they will do it. But I think now, today, it's probably much more difficult, because of subsequent wars, because of emotional psychological factors on both sides.

MCKINZIE: What about the program that was originally set up, Point IV, to stabilize populations in

[58]

the Arab countries? In 1949, in Truman's inaugural address, he talked about sharing America's technological abundance. And while it wasn't directly related to the Arab-Israeli dispute, it was related to the sort of unrest in the area which might have been called susceptibility to further

Russian agitations, or it might have been an effort to make people feel they had some stake in a locale so they wouldn't be so concerned about Israeli usurpations of what they considered to be Arab territory.

Were you at all enthusiastic about the Point IV program?

WILKINS: Yes, we were. We in the State Department were. I remember, for example, I was a political adviser, in 1949, to Mark Ethridge, who was the American representative on the Palestine Conciliation Commission, which consisted of Americans, Turks, and French. And I remember Mark Ethridge saying, after hearing President Truman's speech

[59]

in which Point IV was enunciated, that this will be very helpful to us in our work between Israel and the Arab states. So, you can say importance was attached to this concept.

MCKINZIE: Now, you went to India in 1949, isn't that correct?

WILKINS: A little later, in the fall of 1950. I stayed on in Near Eastern Affairs as director of the office, so I was present during all of the debates that took place in '49 and '50. But after 1950, I did not go to New York as often as I had before. In those days, the Palestine desk officer was usually made a member of the U. S. delegation in New York, but the work became increasingly heavy; as I had a higher position in the Division of Near Eastern Affairs, I had to stay in Washington and they had to send others to New York. And in those years after Israel became independent, and in addition to all our efforts

[60]

on the economic front, we were increasingly preoccupied over the status of Jerusalem and the establishment of a corpus separatum, as they described it in the UNSCOP report. I didn't mention that earlier, but that was a very vital part of the settlement, and of course, that has never come to pass either.

MCKINZIE: Where did the idea of that come from?

WILKINS: Well, they just had to do something about Jerusalem as a religious center, and it was shoved aside because both Israel and Jordan, during military activities in that area after 1948, had occupied the city of Jerusalem. And it wasn't until later, when in 1967 Jordan withdrew from Jerusalem, that it was now fully occupied by Israel. So, today, you still hear talks about what to do about the Holy places, and they run all the way from the Vatican's interest in a completely separate entity for Jerusalem to the

[61]

Israeli theory that there should be some sort of a United Nations regime for the Holy places themselves. But the issue is greatly complicated now because Israel's capital is in Jerusalem, and it's in occupation of the whole city.

MCKINZIE: Could you address yourself to the charge that President Truman made that the people in the State Department were anti-Semitic, not only before but after the independence of Israel?

WILKINS: I wouldn't agree with that.

MCKINZIE: Well, were there old Arab hands, let's put it that way?

WILKINS: No, I wouldn't agree with that either, because I worked on Palestine affairs off and on for ten years, once as director for four years, another time as director for two years, and then on the Policy Planning Staff I worked on it. And I sincerely believe the attitude of the average

[62]

Foreign Service officer, in the State Department working on these matters, was one of that trite phrase "even handed justice," and real efforts to try to bring about some agreement between the Arabs and the Israelis. We naturally thought of American interests in, as we mentioned earlier, oil, communications, in the religious--Holy places. And to advocate measures to protect those American interests could not be said to be anti-Semitic, although those of, say, the extreme Zionist persuasion might have so regarded them.

MCKINZIE: Okay. Did you ever feel at the time that you suffered from what might be called Secretarial neglect? There was, after all, the Berlin airlift going on in the middle of all of this; China was falling on the one hand; there was the domestic business with Alger Hiss; and everyone talked about the "Europe first" foreign policy of the

[63]

United States. Did you feel that the top members of the Department abandoned you in moments of crisis?

WILKINS: Well, there was a common belief that the Palestine question was a terrible one, and nobody ever wanted to be on the desk or have anything to do with it. But I never saw any lack of interest on the part of high officials of the Government, with the exception of one man, and that was Dean Acheson. He didn't want to have anything to do with it unless he had to, primarily because it was a difficult problem, and he was interested in Europe and other matters. But still, when he was Acting Secretary, he would handle himself very well in discussion with Arabs and Israelis in my own personal experience. As I explained earlier, I used to be a reporter for conversations between the Secretary and the representatives of the Jewish Agency, Zionist groups, Arab Ambassadors, and so on. I suppose

[64]

extremists would say that people in the State Department were anti-Semitic, sometimes to make us support their cause.

Later on, when I was Ambassador in Cyprus, we were often accused of being pro-Turkish, and I thought the Greek Cypriots said that to make us support their arguments, their causes. And I think the same thing is true in Zionist propaganda. If you accuse a man in the State Department of being anti-Semitic, why, he'll have to do something to prove he's not. But in my experience, the Foreign Service officers are not trained that way; they think first of what American interests are and how it could be best protected. And in order to protect communications and oil and so on, you would have to show some interest in Arab states and favor relations, good relations, between the United States and those countries.

By the same token, we had American groups in

[65]

Israel; we had a large group of Americans interested in the fate of Israel. But there, I think it's only fair to add that they were rather emotional on the subject.

On the other hand, there are American-Jewish groups, like the American Council for Judaism, who are very much opposed to the Zionist position. They claimed that the Zionists tried to have the best of the American world and the Jewish world as well, that they ought to be Americans first. And these groups used to come into the State Department.

MCKINZIE: Was there as much contact with these partisan groups after Israeli independence as there had been in that period before then?

WILKINS: Yes, there was just as much, because, for instance, the American Council for Judaism was represented by Rabbi Burger. I never saw Lessing Rosenwald but Burger used to come in quite often,

[66]

and visit and assist us. And then there was a lot of contact with men like Oscar Goss and Robert Nathan with respect to American economic assistance for Israel. They would bring in projects, detailed projects of things relating to Point IV and things relating to the Clapp mission and Eric Johnston and so on.

MCKINZIE: Did those get serious discussion in the Department?

WILKINS: Definitely. They'd be in touch not only with the political section, like the Near Eastern Division, but also the economic section and Point IV administration and so on. The Israelis were always well-prepared; they had briefed themselves thoroughly and documented themselves to the nth degree, and the Arabs were never quite so prepared.

MCKINZIE: But yet Israel got very little economic assistance through the years.

[67]

WILKINS: I don't know about that. I remember Ralph Bunche saying how it arose when he was doing truce agreements. He said, "I'm in a very embarrassing position here. The Israelis always come in well-prepared with respect to what they want in a truce agreement; the Arabs never do, which forces me, as the truce supervisor and mediator to make arguments on behalf of the Arabs. I don't want to be in that position. I'm supposed to decide where the line should be." I explained about the villages being separated from their fields. Well, he said, "In drawing truce lines we have to take such things into account. I don't want to appear to be arguing the Arab case, but to get a fair agreement I sometimes have to."

MCKINZIE: Before you left for India, was military assistance to individual countries like Iran an issue?

[68]

WILKINS: I don't remember that it was in 1949-50.

MCKINZIE: You left in the fall of '50; the Korean war had already started, and there was all at once, in Turkey and the whole area, a large amount of military assistance programs, which really exceeded, in terms of dollars, the economic assistance program.

WILKINS: I don't have any recollection about that, primarily because I was in the Near East Division--those were the Arab states--and the GTI, Greece, Turkey, and Iran, were separate. But I do remember when I came back from India, and when I was again in the Near East Division in 1955, '56, and '57, that we were preoccupied with military assistance everywhere in the Middle East--Turkey, Iran, and Pakistan--because of John Foster Dulles' northern tier concept. And there were also all of the efforts to develop some sort of an alternative military organization to the Suez Canal

[69]

and Dulles' concept of the Bagdad pact and CENTO [Central Treaty Organization]. This created an entirely different military picture in the Middle East than had existed heretofore. The British had been in Egypt, and the defense of the area had been based on the Suez Canal, but as they were forced out it became necessary to think of some alternatives. And I remember when John Foster Dulles came to India in 1952 on his tour through the Near East and the Middle East, during the time when he offered Nasser a revolver; he was talking about the northern tier then. And the next year when I returned to Washington, 1953, why, the concept of the Bagdad pact was very much to the fore.

MCKINZIE: But in this earlier period, before you left, so far as military affairs in the area were concerned they didn't seem to be . . .

WILKINS: They didn't seem to impinge upon my work

[70]

with the Israel and Arab states, in my recollection.

MCKINZIE: You don't recall either any formal or informal request for huge amounts of money to bring rapid industrial development in Israel before 1950?

WILKINS: Well, my general recollection is that Nathan and Gass and others were bringing in all sorts of plans to develop Israel, but most of this was referred to the economic section, Point IV. The Israelis always had some extensive development scheme in mind. Much earlier there were plans for digging a canal to the Dead Sea and all that sort of thing. But I myself did not handle the details of this.

MCKINZIE: Somebody once told me they thought that, in those years, the economic people and the political people didn't often talk enough together, that sometimes it had one hand not knowing what

[71]

the other was doing. Is that . . .

WILKINS: Well, I'll tell you we were terribly busy--the hours, just to mention that: I used to go in an hour early to read the telegrams, because there were so many. There are nine Arab states, and I'd have to read them before the Secretary and the Assistant Secretary read them, so in case they called me I would have an oral response. And we would stay until 7 at night, sometimes later. I would be called down to the Department five times during the night to read urgent messages. I finally developed a code with the watch officer. He would tell me with circumlocutions what the telegram said--couldn't repeat it directly on the telephone. And he would in effect say, "Well, there is nothing you can do about this tonight; you can do it just as well tomorrow morning." Or I'd have to go down, and I've been down five times in one night. But the day would run from 8 to 7 and sometimes later, and would

[72]

always include Saturday and Sunday, and this was just mainly on processing all the papers that came in. During the day you'd be called to so many places--the Secretary's office, the Assistant Secretary's office, urgent matters, attending group meetings. But you wouldn't have time to sit down and think or read any background material until after 5:30 when most people went home. In fact, I've never been through such a regime in my life, and that's one reason that I was glad to go to Iran in 1957 after a second tour as Director of Near Eastern Affairs, because I was number two in the Embassy there and I would have a normal Foreign Service post, be able to return home occasionally. It's hard to convey the atmosphere and the tension that existed in those years.

MCKINZIE: How did you happen to get assigned to India? Were you in a position to get another . . .

[73]

WILKINS: There again, Loy Henderson was sent out as Ambassador, and he asked me one day if I would like to go to India as Political Counselor. And he said, "I suppose you won't want to go, because it's a pretty rough climate, and I'd just been married a year and we had a young child.

I said, "No, I'd like to go to India." And, in fact, I did like it. It's pretty hot country, with a very difficult political problem in those days, not long after partition there.

MCKINZIE: There's one question I wanted to ask concerning neutrals. India was a neutral, and John Foster Dulles ultimately took the position that to be neutral was to be immoral. He saw the world as dividing between two ideologies. Was that an evolutionary thing, or was it something you injected into the situation with Dulles? When you were there dealing with political affairs,

[74]

the Korean war was going on. Was there any representation to the Indians that their stance on things represented some abdication there?

WILKINS: I think that was something new on the part of Secretary Dulles. Our relations with India weren't too bad. Loy Henderson went there in 1949, I guess, and they weren't too bad because Mr. Henderson, in the beginning, I'm told, got along pretty well with [Jawaharlal] Nehru and even persuaded him to go along with American intervention through the United Nations in Korea. But later on, toward the end of Mr. Henderson's tour there in 1951, he got along less and less well with Nehru. Nehru became more and more difficult, primarily because we were using the manganese ore and other rare earths in nuclear production, and Nehru always as has his daughter, tried to take rather moralistic positions about these things. And in spite of all the American grain assistance

[75]

going to India in those years, Nehru made one public speech after another that caused political difficulties with the United States Government with respect to one thing or another.

So, I wouldn't say that Truman took any special attitude with the Government of India at that time. In fact, wasn't it during this period that Nehru visited the United States, and Truman is alleged to have made the remark about him, that he didn't seem to think that man liked white folks?

MCKINZIE: Yes.

WILKINS: And I remember that when Loy Henderson left India in 1951 and went to Iran, Chester Bowles followed him. Bowles was very successful in the beginning, but he told me the

story that Truman had said to him one day, "Where would you like to go as ambassador? I'd like to send you as an ambassador somewhere."

[76]

And Bowles said, "Well, I don't like to mention it, because there's a man already in a country in which I'd be most interested; that's India." He said, "But if that post should ever open up, I would be glad to go there." Well, subsequently he did.

MCKINZIE: It may have opened up for that reason; is that the implication?

WILKINS: Well, Henderson's time was up, and he was having more and more difficulty with Nehru, so maybe it was a strategic time to shift him to Iran.

MCKINZIE: Well, didn't Bowles make some huge proposals of U.S. aid to India and . . .

WILKINS: Yes.

MCKINZIE: Were you helping him with those?

WILKINS: Well, I was political counselor, but Bowles

[77]

was very much his own man in India, and he had definite ideas about what we ought to do. And one was that we ought to provide tremendous assistance to the Government of India and that was the way to get along with this burgeoning democracy.

MCKINZIE: In your contacts with Indian officials, did they make that kind of proposal to you, that that was the key to their success and to successful U.S.-Indian relations?

WILKINS: No, they did not. They were rather taken aback by Bowles. Whereas he had been extremely successful at the outset--he used to ride bicycles and send his children to India schools--toward the end the Indians rather considered him in their pocket. And they felt this was the attitude in Washington, that what Bowles said was just pro-Indian, and so it was consequently disregarded. So Bowles was, I would say, less effective towards

[78]

the end of his tour. And I was there all throughout his tour, actually; I was there when George Allen came as his successor. So, Bowles was riding high in the beginning and was very popular with the Indians and got along extremely well with Nehru. But later on, there just was a shift, I think, in the Indians' opinion about him, mainly because they felt that he was too pro-Indian and we would disregard it in Washington. The same thing was always true in Tel Aviv; the Israelis never were anxious to have an American Zionist as an ambassador. They would prefer a Foreign

Service officer because they thought, "Well, people back in Washington won't believe anything the Ambassador says unless he is an objective reporter."

MCKINZIE: How much of your time was taken up with the Kashmir dispute when you were in India?

WILKINS: What a problem! That had been going since

[79]

'47 under Frank Graham and others. It had reached a state of constant irritation between the United States and India; you just couldn't talk to the government of India. Nehru was so emotional about Kashmir it was impossible to discuss any of this with him. Admiral Nimitz tried everything and Frank Graham tried everything. In fact, the dispute is still pending.

MCKINZIE: But I understand, from talking with a few other people, that the matter of even-handed justice was less important than keeping the lid on in the case of Kashmir.

WILKINS: I don't know. It must have reached a level of some sorts now. For example, the lion of Kashmir has been released.

MCKINZIE: Was that a quieter post after having been in Washington, as far as your career was concerned?

[80]

WILKINS: Yes, it was. The difference is that there's no limit to the amount of political reporting in India, and if you're a political counselor you have plenty to do. We had an extremely small staff, so we were pretty busy, especially after Ambassador Bowles came in. The scope of the activities in the Embassy was greatly increased, including USIS and AID. Bowles also was a great encourager of business on the part of Americans, so that we had quite a lot to do under his ambassadorship.

MCKINZIE: How did this involve the political officer?

WILKINS: Well, just care and feeding of important visitors, and also sending in reports, drafting telegrams, and so on. Although, to be honest, Mr. Bowles did a tremendous amount of work himself; he's very articulate, both verbally and on paper.

MCKINZIE: May I come back to one other thing and

[81]

then more or less conclude? Did the United States make a mistake in its Near Eastern policy in 1946 through 1949, particularly in regard to Israel, looking back on it and looking now on subsequent developments?

WILKINS: Well, I don't think we made a mistake in taking the stand we did in the United Nations, because I think the time had come for some sort of resolution of the situation between the Arabs and the Jews. But I think where we made a mistake is that we didn't weigh in with the British to a greater extent in 1946 and 1947. I think the United States was sufficiently strong to have done so. Maybe it was impossible for the British in those days, because they hadn't yet given up in Greece and Turkey and Iran, and they had only recently withdrawn from the subcontinent, South Asia. But I would have thought we could have said something more to the British than we did.

[82]

In fact, when the British referred the Palestine question to the United Nations in the spring of '47, they asked them for advice on what to do. They didn't say anything about terminating the mandate, and it wasn't until November, after the partition vote, that they said, "Well, we're not going to stay on there now; we don't like this solution, so we're going to withdraw." But they had no right thus, unilaterally, to terminate the mandate. They left it to the United Nations, in effect. They didn't like what UNSCOP said, so they said, "We're going to quit." If UNSCOP had said something else, they might have stayed on. My thought is the United States could have prevented the course of events that developed in the spring of '47 by taking a stronger stand with the British before they referred it to the United Nations. I don't know what would have come out of it; it's like when we had to take over in Greece and

[83]

Turkey. The British might say, "Okay, you take it over." But there were still groups of moderate opinion in those days, represented by men like Judah Magnes of Israel and Azzam Pasha of Egypt, through whom it might have been possible to work out an agreed solution. I realize how difficult it was and how hard everybody tried, but it was only through big committees like the Anglo-American Committee Inquiry and the United Nations Special Committee on Palestine. I think that a strong President and a strong Secretary of State could have gone to the British Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary and told him, "Now, look, we're in a tough spot; we're all in a tough spot on this, and it's to our mutual advantage to settle it somehow." That's where I think the mistake was made, in preventing something from happening--a type of preventive medicine. If you go to your doctor every year for an annual physical, you might prevent

[84]

yourself getting a serious illness. I think you could have done the same thing in Palestine; you could do it with Cyprus today. I had some experience with that later. I think if Makarios had been statesman enough to reach an agreement with the Turkish Cypriots in 1963, we wouldn't have had the problem there today. And I told Makarios this when I was Ambassador there; I said, "If you go to the United Nations and ask them to do something about this, they'll still be here forever." And I said, "They're still in Kashmir; they're still in Palestine, it's partitioned; they're still in Korea; they're still in Germany, and Germany is partitioned. The minute you go to the United Nations you're going to get in trouble."

"Oh," he said, "no. The United Nations can pass a resolution saying that democracy shall prevail and Cyprus shall be a Greek Cypriot state."

[85]

I said, "Well, Your Beatitude, if there had been a United Nations or something like it during the time of the American Civil War, they would have intervened in the War Between the States and the United States would be partitioned along the Mason and Dixon line. And the dispute would not be settled yet."

He said, "No, no, these are later days."

MCKINZIE: Well, Mr. Ambassador, thank you very much.

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[86]

INDEX

- Acheson, Dean, 63
 - and memoranda of conversations, 19-21
- American Council for Judaism, 65
- Baghdad Pact, 69
- Bohlen, Charles E., 41, 42
- Bowles, Chester, 75-78, 80
- Bunche, Ralph, 23-24, 67
- Clapp, Gordon, 54, 55, 56
- Clifford, Clark, 39
- Dulles, John Foster, 68, 69
 - and memoranda of conversations, 19-20
- Ethridge, Mark, 58
- Forrestal, James, 48
- Great Britain:
 - and Iranian oil dispute in 1953, 50-53
 - and Palestinian issue, 81-83
- Henderson, Loy, 39, 48, 73, 74
- Hilldring, General John H., 34, 35, 45
- India, and relations with United States, 74-75, 76-80
- Iran, and oil issue, 50-53
- Israel:
 - and Arab-state policy, 56-57
 - U.S. policy toward, 81
 - U.S. recognition of, 38-44
- Israel (Zionist) lobby, in the United States, 30, 65-66
- Jerusalem, status of, 60-61
- Jewish refugees, issue of, 28-29
- Johnston, Eric, and Jordan River development proposal, 55-56
- Kashmir dispute, 78-79
- Lovett, Robert, 38

[87]

McClintock, Robert, 38-39
McDermott, Michael J., 41, 42
McDonald, Ambassador James G., 44
McGhee, George, 54, 55, 56
Makarios, Archbishop, 84-85
Marshall, George C., and Palestinian issue, 26-27, 38-40, 41-43
Middle East, and U. S. military aid, 68-69
Morocco, 8-14
Mossadegh, Mohammed, 50, 52

Nathan, Robert, 30, 66
Near East Division of U.S. State Department, jurisdiction of, 4
Nehru, Prime Minister Jawaharlal, 74, 75
Niles, David, 39

Oil issue, in Mideast, 7-8, 49-53

Palestinian issue:
 and Arab-Israeli war in 1948, 36-38
 and oil policy, 48
 and the United Nations, 6, 16-17, 21-36
 and U.S. aid, 54-56
 and U.S. policy, 44-47, 82-84
 and United States-Soviet Union relations, 46-48
Point IV program, in Near East, 57-59, 70

Refugees, Palestinian, 54
Rusk, Dean, 39

Soviet Union-United States relations in the Near East, 46-48

Truman, Harry S.:
 India, policy toward, 75-76
 Palestinian issue, role in, 17, 34-35, 38-40

United Nations, role of, in settling disputes, 84-85
United Nations Special Committee for Palestine, 22-24, 31
United Nations Truce Commission for Palestine, 44
U.S. State Department:
 and attitudes toward Israel, 61-62, 64-65
 internal procedures of, 18-19

Wilkins, Fraser:

background of, 1-3

India, assignment to, 72-73

Iraq, assignment to, 4

Morocco, economic officer in, 5, 8-14

[88]

Wilkins, Fraser (continued)

Palestine desk in State Department, assignment to, 15

State Department, work routine in, 71-72

U.S. recognition of Israel, role in, 39-43

Zionist lobby, in the United States, 30, 65-66