

Oral History Interview
with
NICHOLAS G. THACHER

Foreign Service Officer, 1947-73; third secretary American Embassy, Karachi, Pakistan, 1947-49; vice consul American consulate general Calcutta, India, 1950-51, consul, 1952; Indian affairs officer, Department of State, Washington, 1953-54, officer charge Afghanistan-Pakistan affairs, 1954-56; 1st secretary American embassy, Baghdad, Iraq, 1956-58; assigned National War College, 1958-59; deputy director, Office Near Eastern Affairs, Department of State, 1955-62; Consular of embassy American embassy, Jidda, Saudi Arabia, 1962-65; Minister, counselor American embassy, Tehran, 1965-70; Ambassador to Saudi Arabia, 1970-73, retired 1973.

Independence, Missouri
May 28, 1992

by Niel M. Johnson, Harry S. Truman Library

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Summary Description:

Topics discussed by Mr. Thacher include his father's relationship with President Harry S. Truman as well as his own foreign service career; Rozelle Court; the Mexican expedition of 1915; Truman's haberdashery; Battery D; World War I; World War II; Pakistan; Kashmir; Iraq; Iran; China; India; Afghanistan; Russia; Baghdad Pact; SEATO; Egypt; Yemen, and Saudi Arabia.

Names mentioned include Frank Rozelle, Eddie Jacobson, Ted Marks, Harry Vaughan, John Snyder, Mohammed Jimah, John Foster Dulles, Chester Bowles, George C. Marshall, Henry F. Grady, William L.S. Williams, V.K. Krishna Menon, Nuri Said, Clark Clifford, Adnan Menderes, the Shaw of Iran, Abdul Karim Qassim, Loy Henderson, George Marshall, Dean Acheson.

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JOHNSON: I'm going to start, as I usually do, by asking you to give us your name, place of birth, date of birth and your parents names. Perhaps you could add the names of your brothers and sisters to this too.

THACHER: Sure. I'm Nicholas G. Thacher, spelled without a t in the middle, and I was born in Kansas City on August 20th, 1915. My brother is John H. Thacher, Jr.; he was born November 19, 1908, and he has been deceased since September 1990. My sister is Edith Thacher Hurd. She was born September 14, 1910, and she is still living.

JOHNSON: And your parents' names?

THACHER: My parents' names are John H. Thacher and Edith Gilman Thacher.

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JOHNSON: Was your father born in Kansas City?

THACHER: He was born in Kansas City; my mother was born in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

JOHNSON: How long did your father live in Kansas City?

THACHER: He lived there much of his life. He was a continuous resident of Kansas City, until 1930. Then he moved away for a couple of years and came back for maybe two years. Then in the fall of 1940, my mother's health was quite poor and he wanted an easier climate so they moved to San Francisco. Then, for a short time they lived down south of San Francisco; there my mother died, and he continued to live in Los Gatos, California, between Palo Alto and San Jose. He continued to live there until the time of his death in 1960.

JOHNSON: I see. Was it your father's father who was a Civil War soldier?

THACHER: That's right.

JOHNSON: And fought in the Battle of Westport?

THACHER: He fought in the Battle of Westport. He was a major in a New York cavalry regiment.

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JOHNSON: Did he ever write letters about his Civil War experiences?

THACHER: Not that I'm aware of.

JOHNSON: There's no record at all.

THACHER: No, I've never heard of anything.

JOHNSON: We have a Westport Historical Society, and I'm sure they'd be interested in anything that he had.

THACHER: No, I've never seen anything turn up.

JOHNSON: I notice in the papers you have brought with you that you wrote a rather lengthy letter to Alonzo Hamby on October 20, 1988, describing your father, his career, and his personality.

THACHER: Yes.

JOHNSON: So that will be useful information and I don't think we'll need to duplicate it. Do you have any additions or amendments that you might want to make to the information that you had in that letter? Is there anything we'd need to add?

THACHER: Oh, I don't think so. I think it was a pretty comprehensive little sketch.

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JOHNSON: I see that you have reflected, too, on your father's literary interests and the flavor of his writing. And I certainly noticed those traits when I read those letters home from France. Were most of those letters to his law partners?

THACHER: Yes, I think they were. I thumbed through them quickly, and it's conceivable there was a letter to my mother in there. I know that she kept those letters for a while, but I've been unable to find them. I haven't seen them.

JOHNSON: Oh, you mean you have some letters in addition to what you have here?

THACHER: I know that he wrote her a lot of letters during the war, but I have been unable to discover them. I don't know where they are now.

JOHNSON: So the letters that you are turning over to the Library are primarily the letters that he wrote to his law partners?

THACHER: That's right.

JOHNSON: He calls them "Pards." "Dear Pard" -- meaning "partners."

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THACHER: That's right. Yes.

JOHNSON: Of course, if you do find these other letters, we'll certainly be interested.

THACHER: One member of the firm was Rozelle, and Rozelle was the man who worked very closely with Colonel Nelson in setting up the museum.

JOHNSON: There is a Rozelle Court, isn't there, in the middle of the gallery?

THACHER: Yes. That's right, there is Rozelle Court there which is in memory of Frank Rozelle.

JOHNSON: So your father was a lawyer. In fact, he had a Harvard degree.

THACHER: Had a Harvard Law degree, that's right. He went to Harvard Law School.

JOHNSON: Apparently he never enjoyed the practice of law.

THACHER: He didn't enjoy it very much. He was an active individual and [did not enjoy] sitting down and grinding through law books, looking up precedents, and he didn't have much confidence in the laws of institutions. He said, "It's a good way of settling

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disputes, but, I don't think it's necessarily a perfect way of reaching justice." I remember hearing him make that comment on several occasions.

JOHNSON: Was he a bit of an idealist?

THACHER: I really don't think that's quite the right description.

JOHNSON: A romantic?

THACHER: No. Well, he was a man who loved friendly, personal relations. In his old age when he didn't have very much to do -- he lived to be 87 -- why he kept himself sort of going by writing letters to a lot of his old friends. He kept up friendships going back many years with a wide variety of people. He kept them alive with this letter writing, and he had a great sense of the drama of things, you know.

He traveled in Morocco and he was fascinated by the different customs and architecture. I guess he visited Morocco three times, because he had a good friend who was a consul there. I guess this is in the letter to Hamby, but one summer when he was at Harvard Law School, he went down to Puerto Rico to write stories on the Black Hand, which was a terrorist organization there. He went back up in the mountains

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on a little mule to discover this; then he wrote a couple of articles for *Harpers Weekly*, which were published. But in everyday things, it always seemed to me he was quite down to earth, you know. He left little maxims to us, "Not only avoid evil, but avoid the appearance of evil."

JOHNSON: He was kind of a moralist maybe too?

THACHER: And a practical man about personal relationships. He used to talk to us about himself. He had a distaste for people who laughed too loudly and he would say, "The loud laugh laughs the vacant mind." [He had a distaste] for people who were too garrulous, and also for people who were personally unresponsive. He used to talk about one friend who was afflicted, he said, "With the ungrinned grin," who refused to sort of respond to a spirit of good will and amiability. And there were a lot of other things.

He worried about one cousin, a woman who had a very high rather nasal voice, and he really wanted to send her to a voice specialist, because he felt that was such a personal handicap. If you let your hands wander up to your face too much when you were talking to anybody, he'd get after you for that. Well, he also said, "In life, if you don't make a couple of first-rate

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enemies, you probably don't have any character. You've got to know how to be vigorous in your attitude with other people and firm, and you'll probably have some people that you don't get along with. You'll dislike them and they'll dislike you."

JOHNSON: Did he do much public speaking?

THACHER: I don't know.

JOHNSON: He wasn't called on?

THACHER: No, I can't recall that he did much public speaking.

JOHNSON: I guess he was down in Mexico for that 1915 expedition.

THACHER: That's right. His unit was called up, and he went to the Mexican border for -- I've forgotten how long -- several months.

JOHNSON: Now, was this mainly for adventure, or was this...

THACHER: Oh, no; he was part of the National Guard.

JOHNSON: So he was acquainted with Truman perhaps in the Guard, or did he ever say anything about...

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THACHER: No, he never mentioned that.

I had the impression that Truman went into the National Guard much later, but...

JOHNSON: Well, he went in in 1905, but then resigned in 1911, and then came back in in '17.

THACHER: Yes, I see.

JOHNSON: So maybe in that gap there was when your father went in.

THACHER: That's right. He went to the Mexican border in 1915.

JOHNSON: And, of course, Truman was still farming at that time.

THACHER: Yes.

JOHNSON: Did your father ever talk to you about his impressions of Harry Truman as a commander of Battery D?

THACHER: No.

JOHNSON: Harry Truman succeeded your father as commander of Battery D, and your father never commented about him?

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THACHER: He never uttered any criticism of any kind.

JOHNSON: Anything positive or negative, either one?

THACHER: Not as a commander. I don't know if it's in the thing I wrote to Hamby or not, but I can remember comments made after one of those dinners which they had, for several years. For several years in the '20s they had a gathering of the officers at his house, and at our house, and after the dinner I remember two specific comments in which he said, "Golly, Harry was so charming last night. He played the piano and we all sang the old songs and we had such a good time. He was a wonderful guy and I just wish he could get started in something."

Then my mother would say, "And when is he going to pay you back that \$500 you put into the haberdashery store?"

JOHNSON: You have said you have stock certificates, \$500 worth, and he never tried to cash these in or liquidate them.

THACHER: Oh, no, not so far as I know. You know, he was a shareholder; he wasn't a creditor. I think he just chalked it up to goodwill, and ignored my mother's comments.

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JOHNSON: I wonder how many shareholders there were. You know, we hear about the creditors, but we don't hear about the shareholders.

THACHER: There may well have been other people, other shareholders, who had been in the battery.

JOHNSON: Was your father acquainted with Eddie Jacobson?

THACHER: I've heard him mention that name, yes.

JOHNSON: And their haberdashery. Did he patronize the haberdashery, do you think after...

THACHER: I don't know. I know that he did go for his clothes, his suits, to Ted Marks, who was also one of the officers.

JOHNSON: In some of the oral histories; for instance, in the Vere Leigh interview, he mentions your father.

THACHER: Yes.

JOHNSON: McKinley Wooden mentions your father more, I think than any of the others. When he was asked specifically about your father by Andrew Dunar, who was one of the interviewers, as I recall, Wooden said your father was a good man but he was too old -- that is, in 1917-18.

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THACHER: Well, he was.

JOHNSON: I think Wooden, and perhaps others, felt it was time for a younger man like Harry Truman to take over Battery D. Now, also, in one of these letters, your father said that he was battery commander for five months, which apparently was Battery D. He also commanded a battalion for three months. Was there a second battalion? I saw that in there somewhere. Do you know what battalion he was referring to?

THACHER: No.

JOHNSON: Then he was commander of a regiment for one week. Well, the 129th Field Artillery of course was a regiment. So, he maybe was in charge of that for a week or so.

THACHER: He never mentioned anything except Battery D. I mean that's where his heart was, with these boys he went in with from Kansas City.

JOHNSON: Did he ever tell you war stories, so to speak, when you were growing up?

THACHER: Well, yes, he did. I can remember things he talked about. Well, let's see if I can remember

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specific incidents. He used to mention the places, and I can't remember too much detail.

JOHNSON: Where he served in France?

THACHER: In France. I know he told me some specific stories. Well, he did mention, for example, one thing. This was nothing to do with a battle but it was sort of a vivid thing. He took several hundred men down, on some leave for a week, somewhere well behind the lines, fairly far south. These kids were so rambunctious and were running around the place. The train would stop and they'd get off and they'd run around the countryside, get out and walk around and then he had to see that they all got back on. He and the non-coms I guess, had to do this. I don't know how many non-coms he had. That was quite a challenge.

He also mentioned, on another occasion, that he was gassed slightly and knocked out and was then put in the hospital for about three or four days; and then he returned to duty. But he said the great thing was he got a chance to catch up on his sleep in the hospital.

The other thing he used to complain about was horses, oh how he hated horses. I don't think he ever had any taste for them before he went into the service, and he said they were so difficult to manage. He

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thought the Army was so slow in mechanizing, and it presented lots of problems.

Well, he mentioned being under fire, and I know they were in the Vosges Mountains. That was mentioned. And he mentioned Verdun.

JOHNSON: Yes, in his letters.

THACHER: And Charpentry, he mentioned that.

JOHNSON: He was at Balny with the...

THACHER: No, I don't remember that name. It's too bad you couldn't have talked to my brother, who passed away. In 1922 my father took my brother and sister and my mother back to Europe and they went all over the battlefields. They walked all over them and he showed them all the places they were. But I was left at home. I was too young to appreciate it.

JOHNSON: Vere Leigh does refer to your father as an emotional type guy. Does that seem accurate?

THACHER: I think that's not unfair. He did have kind of a sense of the dramatic, and I guess sometimes that may have overtaken him a little bit.

JOHNSON: Well, if he could have been what he wanted to be,

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would he have been a playwright for instance?

THACHER: He would have been a journalist.

JOHNSON: He was kind of a roving journalist to some extent. Did Hemingway affect him at all? Ernest Hemingway?

THACHER: Well, he didn't like Hemingway because Hemingway was a little too graphic. He put Hemingway and John Dos Passos in what he called the "grunt and grovel school" of literature. He may have had some tolerance for Hemingway, but my father came from a sort of more elegant era. Richard Harding Davis was his favorite author.

JOHNSON: Was Davis a "Victorian" era author?

THACHER: Yes, very much. He wrote at the end of the nineties around the turn of the century, and some of the stories were adventure stories, but a lot of them were sort of stories about life around New York, like those O'Henry wrote. He had a great respect for playwrights. He was interested in playwriting. I don't think he ever attempted a full-length play himself. So, he used to write little skits for his neighbors, and sometimes they'd put on some sort of a comical Christmas play with music stolen from something

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or other, from Gilbert and Sullivan, and they'd sing these words.

When he was in college, at Princeton, they had a thing called the Triangle Club, which produced a musical show every year. He was the second president of the Triangle Club. The first president was Booth Tarkington, a writer whose novels in the early decades of this century gave a kind of benign image of American life.

JOHNSON: Booth Tarkington?

THACHER: Yes. He succeeded Tarkington as president. He would have put on the show one year, but his father died and then he had to take a month out of college to come home, and he couldn't do it. But he liked that kind of thing.

JOHNSON: To jump ahead a bit. I notice your father met with Truman three times while Truman was President, according to our records.

THACHER: Is that right?

JOHNSON: He met with him at the Fairmount Hotel in San Francisco on June 26, 1945. That was during the U.N. Charter Conference.

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THACHER: Oh, yes.

JOHNSON: And a Mr. Doucornau was with your father.

THACHER: That's right.

JOHNSON: Now do you know who this fellow was?

THACHER: I don't know too much about him. I know he was a vice-president of the Wells Fargo Bank.

JOHNSON: At that time?

THACHER: Yes, at that time. There was a connection with Kansas City, I'm sure I was told, or with Truman, but I can't recall it.

JOHNSON: So there was a Kansas City connection. Did your father ever talk to you about that meeting at all, with Truman?

THACHER: Oh, just very briefly. I think it was a brief courtesy call, and very typical of Truman.

JOHNSON: Well, he had only fifteen minutes because at 11:30 Chester Nimitz was coming in to talk to him.

THACHER: Oh, I see. Truman was certainly kind, my goodness. It's just amazing the times he responded to

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letters and so on.

JOHNSON: Your father probably saw Admiral Nimitz on his way out then.

THACHER: He may have.

JOHNSON: On May 2nd, 1947 your father met with the President at 11:30 in the Oval Office. We don't have anything about that.

THACHER: Then I think they went to lunch together.

JOHNSON: No, that was later.

THACHER: That was later, was it.

JOHNSON: They went to lunch on November 8, 1949 at the Blair House. In '47, he had an 11:30 appointment. We don't have a record of what they talked about.

THACHER: On May 2nd, 1947, I was still working in New York.

JOHNSON: I suppose it was just a social call.

THACHER: I guess so. I don't know.

JOHNSON: And then, thirdly, on November 8, 1949, your father was with Harry Vaughan and a Colonel Condon. Do you know a Colonel Condon?

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THACHER: No.

JOHNSON: And also with Secretary of the Treasury, John Snyder.

THACHER: Yes.

JOHNSON: Had lunch together at the Blair House.

THACHER: That's right, yes.

JOHNSON: I don't think we have any details on that either.

THACHER: No. He was very much struck by that. Truman was very friendly, but I think these gentlemen had more important business than to entertain an old friend from Kansas City. I think they got into business matters right away, and father said, "Well, I really didn't know what the hell they were talking about. But I could see the President thought it was very important." Your files show I guess the exchanges of letters with Truman and we have quite a few of those letters. Father was very genuinely fond of Truman and admired him. Certainly Truman was very kind in always responding to Father's letters. After Truman retired, he would always ask Father to call on him whenever Truman passed through San Francisco and they would

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reminisce about people and places in their wartime experiences. In the early forties, while Truman was still a Senator, he helped a great deal in arranging the re-entry to this country of Father's sister who had married a Canadian and had gone to live for 25 years or so in Canada. Father deeply appreciated the Senator's assistance and mentioned it several times.

JOHNSON: How about the campaigns in '44 and '48? Did your father have any involvement at all with those two campaigns.

THACHER: No, he was Republican.

JOHNSON: He remained Republican, a Republican loyalist all through the years?

THACHER: Oh, absolutely, yes.

JOHNSON: Born and bred?

THACHER: That's right, yes.

JOHNSON: Died a Republican.

THACHER: And always very critical of Roosevelt. He was a typical old-style businessman, Republican, anti-Rooseveltian.

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JOHNSON: I understand your father got into the oil business in Oklahoma.

THACHER: That's right. He went into the oil business down there. He became really, well, a lease and a drilling promoter. He followed developments all over Oklahoma.

JOHNSON: Did he ever strike it rich?

THACHER: He never struck it very rich. He made some very comfortable deals which helped in my education, the education of my sister and brother, but he never made, you know, a couple million. I'm sure he always hoped he would. I remember he had one old friend who was a driller, who had just drilled everywhere, all over Oklahoma and Texas, and he said, "You know, Tex just never struck anything. He never did." So, I think he felt that he made small deals, and two or three fairly good sized ones, I don't know, perhaps around a hundred thousand dollars each.

JOHNSON: Hit a lot of dry holes I guess.

THACHER: A lot of dry holes. I think his idea was to go out and find properties that had a potential, you see, where developments might give value to the lease and it would go up just because there were oil properties

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adjoining it. He didn't necessarily aim to go through all the detail of getting a drilling enterprise going, but to get hold of properties that would tend to go up in value and could then be sold before there was actually a drilling deal.

JOHNSON: Sort of on speculation.

THACHER: Yes. So, this meant that he got, you know, a modest, steady income instead of just waiting, having to wait every time, until he hit a gusher.

JOHNSON: So he wasn't a wildcatter.

THACHER: That's right. It was a very careful following of all the developments. He and his partners had a huge map on the wall which went on rollers, where they had all the activity in the whole state sketched out.

JOHNSON: And it gave him time to travel some. He apparently liked to travel.

THACHER: Well he did. They went to Europe in 1922 and that's the last time he ever felt he could go to Europe.

JOHNSON: Now, getting to your own career. You are a Princeton graduate.

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THACHER: That's right.

JOHNSON: And you got your law degree from Fordham.

THACHER: That's right. I went to night law school, when I was working in New York.

JOHNSON: What was your occupation there?

THACHER: Well, I was with Banker's Trust Company. I worked in what's known as their corporate trust department which is where you handle corporate mortgages, huge legal documents.

JOHNSON: This is in the late '30s, early '40s?

THACHER: That's right, late '30s, four years out for World War II in the Navy, and then back to Bankers Trust for about a year and a half, till I entered the Foreign Service.

JOHNSON: In New York City?

THACHER: In New York City, yes; 16 Wall Street.

JOHNSON: What was your service in the Navy? Where did you serve?

THACHER: Well, in the Navy I was on a heavy cruiser.

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JOHNSON: What was the name of it.

THACHER: The U.S.S. *Pensacola*. I went to see the recruiting officer in an old boat they had tied up in the East River, and I thought maybe since I was studying law and I was in a banking profession, I could get a job in Naval intelligence or even into the Naval air service. They turned me down on the basis of my eyes and being underweight, for the air service.

JOHNSON: Underweight?

THACHER: Underweight, yes. Well, I weigh about 155 now and I weighed about 131 then. So the guy said, "If you want to get in the Navy, I suggest you take a vacation and go somewhere and eat bananas and cream for a week." So I came back. They said, "What's your education?" I said, "Well, my father thought I ought to be an engineer, so I took some science the first two years in college. I took some calculus and physics and chemistry and some other more basic engineering." The guy looked at me and he said, "As far as the Navy is concerned, you are an

engineer." They were so desperate for people you know, with any sort of scientific or engineering background, that I went to Annapolis for four months and then off to sea on this

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ship. I spent most of the war on that ship. At the end of the war I had been designated for new construction, but it never got launched.

JOHNSON: The *Pensacola* served in the Pacific?

THACHER: Entirely, yes.

JOHNSON: You didn't face kamikazes did you, or did you?

THACHER: Oh yes, we had very serious battles. The ship had four engines and four screws. At the end of 1942 three propellers were knocked out of action by one of those highly accurate torpedoes from a Japanese submarine. We had about 200 men killed. We limped back to Pearl Harbor, and it took about six or seven months to patch us up.

JOHNSON: Was that around Guadalcanal?

THACHER: Yes, it was in the "slot," as they used to call it.

JOHNSON: They called it "iron bottom sound," so many ships got sunk there.

THACHER: I guess that's right. It was not a terribly glamorous war for me, but we did our jobs every day.

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JOHNSON: How about the U.S.S. *Missouri*? Did you ever get to see it?

THACHER: I never got aboard and I never saw it.

JOHNSON: When were you discharged?

THACHER: I was discharged in January '46.

JOHNSON: And back to your job.

THACHER: Back to Wall Street, while I took the Foreign Service examinations.

JOHNSON: What motivated you to take that exam?

THACHER: Well, I suppose that for a lot of people in my generation, the war made us a bit restless, and I inherited some of the family interest in travel. But before the war, the Foreign Service was very small, only about 800 officers. To get into it, to take the exams, you really had to go to a tutoring school in Washington, and learn international commercial law, and a lot of

technical stuff. When I got out of college in 1937 I didn't have the money for tutoring school. Then after the war they needed people in a hurry, so they changed the exam. If you had a good general education you could pass it. They were taking in quite a lot of

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people, and this looked like my opportunity. I thought it's more fun to wander around the world than to take the 8:05 every morning from Westchester down to Wall Street.

JOHNSON: I took that exam in '57, but didn't follow up with the oral. That was one of the toughest exams I have ever taken.

THACHER: It was a tough exam. Now the exam is given to about 17,000 people a year, and they accept between 150 and 200.

JOHNSON: Then your first assignment was 3rd Secretary in the American Embassy in Karachi, Pakistan.

THACHER: Yes.

JOHNSON: From '47 to '49.

THACHER: Yes.

JOHNSON: And what were your duties there?

THACHER: I did both consular work and some political reporting.

JOHNSON: You got in on the ground floor, so to speak, because Pakistan had just become an independent state.

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THACHER: It was a new United States Embassy. Yes, we established an Embassy in Pakistan on its independence day, which was August 14, 1947.

JOHNSON: There was quite a bit of turmoil yet with India wasn't there?

THACHER: In Pakistan too. There was the slaughter of Muslims in India and of Hindus in Pakistan. There were a couple of bad instances in Karachi. We had a very tight curfew for a week. We had a diplomatic pass and could move around but the streets were almost empty.

JOHNSON: Were you supposed to kind of be an observer? Go out and observe and report back?

THACHER: We did observe, yes. We did go and look around. My wife went into the hospitals. She had been in the Red Cross and observed many, many wounded individuals lying in the hospital in Karachi.

JOHNSON: What's your wife's name?

THACHER: Jean Louise.

JOHNSON: Naffziger.

THACHER: Naffziger. The Embassy was never attacked. We

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had some parades outside of it because the Pakistanis were upset about our policy in Palestine.

JOHNSON: But no Americans wounded, or casualties?

THACHER: No Americans were hurt in all those incidents.

JOHNSON: Did that mean a lot of Hindus, Pakistanis...

THACHER: Hindus were killed in Pakistan, and Muslims were killed in India.

JOHNSON: So, they had refugees both...

THACHER: There were trains carrying people back and forth, and when the train carrying Hindus was going toward India from Pakistan then the Muslims would turn out and stop the trains and kill a lot of them. The Hindus were working the same way, in the same way with the trains coming in the other direction.

JOHNSON: But now Hindus, by reputation, are trained to be, I guess, gentle types?

THACHER: Well, yes, but communal antagonism between the two communities was so intense that whoever started it, the violence quickly escalated and frightful slaughter followed.

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JOHNSON: That's universal; the desire for revenge.

THACHER: It was revenge yes, but minor incidents could trigger immediate violence.

JOHNSON: The first leader of Pakistan was Mohammed Jinnah, I believe.

THACHER: He was the first. He had the title at the outset of Governor General. In other words, they continued to be members of the British Commonwealth. I don't know just when that terminated. Then they had a parliamentary form of government with a Prime Minister.

JOHNSON: But could they have drawn any borders between the two new states of India and Pakistan that would have been acceptable to both sides?

THACHER: I think it would have been very difficult. There were two little enclaves not far away over on the Indian side which were Muslim, and there was a lot of fussing from the Pakistanis about that. These were tiny little states, ruled by princes, and they made a gesture to join Pakistan. The Indians ignored that and overruled them. Of course, the place about which there was the biggest argument was Kashmir. You had a Hindu Maharajah who acceded Kashmir to India, and yet it was

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a Muslim majority state.

JOHNSON: So the Maharajah had the final decision.

THACHER: Well, the way the whole thing was set up was that the existing ruler could accede his state to whichever side he wanted.

JOHNSON: Now, what's your interpretation of the reasons that apparently a U.N supervised plebiscite in Kashmir has never been held.

THACHER: Well, the Indians would never have allowed it, because they know it would go for Pakistan. You see, Nehru was a Kashmiri Brahmin. His family were Brahmins that came from Kashmir. Nehru was emotionally attached to Kashmir.

JOHNSON: Didn't he stand up for the principle, though, of a plebescite? Didn't he go on record as accepting the idea of a plebescite?

THACHER: Well, he may have accepted the idea.

JOHNSON: But not U.N. supervised. He wanted it to be Indian supervised.

THACHER: I don't remember the details of that.

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JOHNSON: Was that much of a problem for the Embassy in Karachi, the Kashmir dispute at the time that you were there? Was that one of your main issues?

THACHER: We didn't take any leading role in it. There was a U.N. commission that came to Karachi, and I think it was probably the Charge d 'Affaires [that dealt with them]. The Ambassador came for a little while and was ill and went home and subsequently died of cancer. I'm sure we talked with the commission a certain amount, but the United States didn't play a key role at all in trying to resolve the dispute at that time.

JOHNSON: Who was our Ambassador?

THACHER: Well, it was a man named Alling -- Paul Alling. He was a Foreign Service officer with a distinguished career, and he had had some other posts. His previous post had been, I think, as consul general in Casablanca, or maybe it was Tangier. But he had had tours in the

[State] Department dealing with this part of the world. He was a very decent gentleman and very much respected, and just had bad luck. I think he was in his middle or late fifties.

JOHNSON: Who did he report to?

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THACHER: Well, he would have been reporting at that time, I think, to the Assistant Secretary of State for that part of the world who was Loy Henderson.

JOHNSON: In your opinion, was Henderson the one who was the most influential on our policy in that part of the world?

THACHER: Yes, there was no doubt Henderson was a very able man and very influential. India and Pakistan didn't present as many problems to the United States at that time. We had taken, you see, in the years leading up to Indian and Pakistani independence, a position favorable to Indian independence, somewhat to the annoyance of the British. We didn't meddle in British affairs, and I can't quote you the specific instances, but I think there was no doubt that the United States had made clear to the British that we thought that the time had come when India had to be given its freedom and British rule had to come to an end in India.

I think probably it happened more quickly than we expected. But when Mountbatten got out in early 1947 he looked around and said, "This situation is uncontrollable; we just have to get out of here as fast as we can." So, within a space of about five months, you know, they set up a new government in Pakistan.

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This whole thing was rushed to a conclusion. I think we viewed that satisfactorily, but as the years went by we followed a policy under [John Foster] Dulles of trying to get everybody to stand up and be counted on the side of the free world. It was Henderson's job when he was Ambassador to India to try to persuade Nehru, who wanted to be non-aligned in the cold war, to stand with the U.S.

JOHNSON: Did we follow Britain's lead as far as policy toward Pakistan and India was concerned?

THACHER: Not particularly, no. The British had a natural and certainly observable inclination to be pro-Pakistan. The British officers, who had been in the old British-Indian Government, would tell you that they felt more at home with Muslims than they did with Hindus. So there was a good deal of sympathy for Pakistan among the British officers, who had been in the old Indian Government. A number of them went to work for the Pakistani Government at very high levels, extraordinarily high levels. The head secretary, the sort of chief civil service figure in the Pakistani Foreign Ministry, was British, and other Britishers, scattered around, were kept on for quite a while. But they helped Pakistan to get things going. Whereas I

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don't think the Indians kept any British. They were glad to have them go on home.

JOHNSON: Did both the Pakistani and the Indian civil service, so to speak, adopt English, or use English, as their official language?

THACHER: Well, English is still an official language in India. It's still very, very widely spoken in Pakistan. I don't believe it's still an official language in Pakistan though.

JOHNSON: Was it, then, when you were there?

THACHER: Well, you see, it was de facto. Whether it was official or not.

JOHNSON: The Government reports were all in English?

THACHER: Oh, yes. We could walk into any office of any seniority and talk English, and with anybody in the military; they always spoke English. And anybody with any experience in the old regime spoke English. I think, today, it's pretty much the same thing, that you can walk into a lot of offices in Pakistan -- not all of them now and not to the degree we used to be able to -- and you will find English spoken.

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JOHNSON: Then, you went to Calcutta. In 1950 to '52 you were Vice Consul and then Consul of the American Consulate General in Calcutta.

THACHER: Yes.

JOHNSON: Then you went back to the State Department.

And so you gained another perspective, I suppose, a perspective from the Indian side.

THACHER: Yes.

JOHNSON: What are your impressions of that service there, that experience that you had in Calcutta? What kind of duties did you have?

THACHER: I had general supervision of the consular section. There was a young woman who ran most of it. I had occasionally to do assistance cases, to help Americans in trouble. Then I did political reporting. Some six months or so before we arrived, along in the spring of 1950, there were anti-Muslim riots in Calcutta. I can't remember what set them off, but Muslims were killed and there was communal tension. But when we were there, there were no more incidents of that kind during our stay in Calcutta.

There were still some Muslims in Bengal and around

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Calcutta, but largely they had migrated eastward into what was then East Pakistan, which is now Bangladesh. We were particularly concerned with the very active Communist party that was in

Bengal, West Bengal they called it. We tried to follow the activities of these parties and other parties. We stayed in touch with some of the Socialists. We talked to senior party officials in the Congress Party and we had contact with government officials and I knew a couple of the Communists. But the ironic thing is that the Communists did get into power in the state of West Bengal, and they gave it one of the best governments of any state. And Jaoti Basu, the Communist leader who was on the scene when I was there, that was 40 years ago, up until about four or five years ago, he was still on the scene. The government had gone Communist, I guess, sometime along in the 1960s. They were reputed to run a tight and honest ship, giving consideration to business interests and to farmers and to trying to improve life in the villages.

There was a Chinese Communist party, a Maoist party, and it's hard to realize now, but in the middle fifties there was intense international competition between the Russians and the Chinese. This was played out by the existence of a couple of different elements

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in the Communist Party in Bengal. There was one that was Chinese Marxist, and the other was a Russian Marxist party.

JOHNSON: So there were two factions of the one party.

THACHER: Two factions, and a third faction, which claimed to be Indian, you know, purely an Indian communist activity. Money was passed out, and so on, by all these people at the time, to get adherents.

JOHNSON: That weakened the movement, I suppose.

THACHER: It did. Yes, it weakened the movement, but the West Bengal Communist Party, led by the Indians themselves, was by far the strongest.

JOHNSON: You did political reporting, and these political reports were then forwarded on to the Embassy in New Delhi?

THACHER: We sent copies to the Embassy but we also sent them directly to Washington.

JOHNSON: Directly to the State Department.

THACHER: Yes.

JOHNSON: So they should be in the National Archives, these

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reports?

THACHER: They should be, yes.

JOHNSON: In late '48, Loy Henderson replaced [Henry F.] Grady as U.S. Ambassador in India, and then Henderson was replaced by Chester Bowles. He became Ambassador in October of '51.

THACHER: That sounds about right.

JOHNSON: Yes, October of '51 and then he was succeeded, I believe, by George Allen.

THACHER: That's right.

JOHNSON: Dennis Merrill, who by the way is teaching at UMKC as sort of the Truman scholar over there, has a dissertation on U.S.-Indian relations during the Truman years and after. In fact, we might as well mention the title of it: *Bread and the Ballot: United States and India's Economic Development 1947-61*. He says on page 46, "No evidence exists that this practical Missouri politician," -- that is, President Truman -- "ever reserved time for penetrating thought on India."

What impression did you have regarding Truman's attitude and policies toward India at that time?

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THACHER: Well, I can't recall what was the basis of the personal relationship between Bowles and Truman. I guess it went back to the days when Bowles was in Washington in the Office of Price Administration, the OPA. That may have brought them into contact. But he went to India with the view that he would have direct access to the President and we were aware that he wrote long personal letters directly to the President. I can remember somebody saying, "Well, we really doubt that the President has read those things very closely." I think that he was just interested in too many other things. I can't think of anything where we felt, you know, the White House had really moved in on this or that and changed the policy.

Henderson was very strongly anti-Communist. I guess you might call him a "cold warrior". He had served in Russia; his wife came from one of the Baltic states. So he would talk to Nehru to influence him to guide India's foreign policy toward support of the free world and the West. Henderson would point out the dangers of India's policies of neutralism and of close ties with the USSR. In fact, of course, India did become very close to the Russians. When I was in India in 1980, we went to the Foreign Office for a briefing with a group from San Francisco. The man who gave us

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the briefing, one of the senior Under Secretaries, said, "Well, you know, really, whenever we have a problem and we need some help, we can always count on the Russians. They're always there when we need them."

Despite this, we had very large aid programs for India. Though a lot of it was simply food grains. But Bowles had a lot of imagination. He was fascinated with the aid programs and what we might be able to do with them. That suited his very activist nature, whereas the sort of

watchful waiting and talking that went on in more traditional diplomacy, he regarded as less interesting and less important.

An important problem in our relations with India was our close relationship with Pakistan. The Pakistanis, up until a certain time, always thought that this relationship was going to help defend them against India. But Secretary of State John Foster Dulles had in mind having relationships that would protect Pakistan from the Russians. So, in '61 there was war between India and Pakistan, and the Pakistanis had a brutal awakening when we issued an order which cut off military supplies from both India and Pakistan. The Pakistanis had hoped, you know, that we were going to go to war with them, and protect them from the Indians on the ground. Of course, we never had any

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such intention at all.

JOHNSON: Well, Merrill also says that Secretary Marshall, Secretary of State George C. Marshall, did not take a "deep interest in India," either. "Consequently," according to Merrill, "responsibility for policy tended to fall upon lower echelon officials such as regional experts in the Department of State, and officials in the American Embassy in New Delhi headed by Ambassador Henry F. Grady," I wonder if you're in that category here -- one of these lower echelon officials. Did you ever feel that you had much input into our policy, U.S. policy toward India, by the time you were in Calcutta? and then later you had moved into the State Department itself, and so I suppose that meant you had more influence on policy, I would imagine.

THACHER: Yes. Well, when I was on the India desk I was still pretty junior. I was low man on the totem pole. This question of the Indians drifting off over into the Soviet orbit was of concern to all of us. I favored material aid, economic assistance to India, and we did begin to come forth with a good deal of it in spite of our critical attitude towards Nehru's neutralist or non-aligned policies. Frequently there was quite vocal opposition in Congress to aid programs for India but we

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got them approved.

Sometimes I felt that under the policies of Eisenhower and Dulles in pursuit of countries that would "stand up and be counted" on our side in the cold war contest, we failed to give enough weight to the desires of the newly independent countries to assert their nationalism and their independent spirit. However, despite our disagreements with Nehru we always maintained many strong ties with India, recognizing our many strong common institutions such as prevalence of the use of English language, common judicial and democratic principles.

There was a period of strain in our relations with Pakistan. The Pakistanis tried to compensate for this by strengthening their relations with China and they were partially successful. But eventually things got better and in recent years our ties with Pakistan have gotten stronger as we worked with them to help the Afghans fight against the Russians.

But the Indians were particularly incensed by our policy of giving and selling substantial quantities of military equipment to Pakistan. When our first sizeable program of military assistance to Pakistan was announced in 1954, I well remember the bitter comments of the Charge' d' Affaires at the Indian Embassy in

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Washington. He asked us why we thought we had a right to interfere in the affairs of the South Asian countries in a manner to change the balance of power between the countries there.

JOHNSON: Now, if you were the number 2 man, who was the number one?

THACHER: A man named Williams, William L. S. Williams was my immediate superior. He passed away a number of years ago. The top policy maker on South Asian Affairs was Henry Byroade, Assistant Secretary of State for the Bureau of Near Eastern, South Asian and African Affairs. Byroade was a protege of General Marshall. Byroade was a brilliant West Point graduate, a Brigadier at about 34. Byroade had come to Marshall's attention when Byroade was on duty in postwar Germany. Byroade was later Ambassador to Egypt, to South Africa, to Burma, the Philippines and Afghanistan. His deputy for the whole Bureau was John Jernegan, a career Foreign Service Officer who later became first, Ambassador to Iraq (about 1959) and later to Algeria. Under him was the director of South Asian Affairs, Donald Kennedy and his deputy Henry Smith. Then came Williams, Officer-in-Charge, India, Ceylon, Nepal. I later on became Officer-in-Charge, Pakistan and

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Afghanistan.

JOHNSON: You were on the same "wave length" with them.

THACHER: Oh, yes, yes. We had no serious disagreements with general department policies. I think that in general we went along with the company line, that we should be warning the Indians about Soviet aggression, and about coming under too much Soviet influence, and that it would be a good thing for Nehru to take a position which was favorable to the West in the East-West antagonism. Well, I don't think we were terribly concerned about the possibility of direct Communist aggression, but the evolution of the Indian Communist party was something that we always followed very closely, to see if it was getting or increasing its leverage to the point where it could be really influential.

JOHNSON: In other words, you were never consistently critical of so-called non-alignment, the non-alignment policy of Nehru?

THACHER: Well, we were. In the official relationship with Nehru, this was brought to his attention by a series of Ambassadors. Over the years, in dealing with those parts of the world, I'd always had sort of an undertow

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feeling that we could go too far in encouraging these countries to snuggle up in our embrace, and that was proven in the case of a country I later served in, which was Iraq. There, I think the fact that the Iraqis were so closely allied with us was a very important factor in bringing about the July 1958 revolution in Iraq which led to the death of the Prime Minister and the King and his family.

So, I guess that was my personal reservation, but I never got to the point of sitting down and saying, "Oh, I think this is where we should say to the Iraqis or the Indians that we're perfectly prepared to see them stay neutral." I never felt that; I just wished that somehow we could pursue a policy of close relations without emphasizing this necessity for having India publicly take a position that was favorable to the West, and that was contrary to the Communists.

And I think that policy of trying to get that kind of relationship was one of the things that caused the first revolution in Iraq. The fact that Iraq was allied in a treaty, the Baghdad Pact, with the Western powers was a major factor used by cliques and enemies of the Royalist regime to bring it down.

So I guess to sum it up, I never had, you know, a feeling of really sharp disappointment, so I'd set down

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and wanted to really argue with anybody about our policy.

JOHNSON: Did you ever consult with, or talk to, your counterparts in the British Foreign Office?

THACHER: Oh, we used to see them a great deal. The British had a man in their Embassy in Washington assigned to deal with South Asian Affairs and to deal with Middle Eastern Affairs.

JOHNSON: What was his name, do you remember?

THACHER: Mr. Belcher was assigned to deal with South Asian matters and Willie Morris for the Middle East. I think it was more an exchange of information than any particular discussion of policy. On the whole, we were pleased with British policy in India and Pakistan because they really picked up and got out promptly after World War II. By August 15 [1947] the British were marching down the gangplank and really getting out of India.

JOHNSON: Did they want India in a military alliance? Of course, later on Pakistan became part an alliance.

THACHER: We would have liked to have seen India as a part of that. I don't think we ever assumed that Nehru

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would even listen to such a proposal. We may have talked about it.

JOHNSON: So you never would have broached it?

THACHER: No, I don't think so. The whole idea of a Middle Eastern Pact was something that stewed and steamed and fussed along from about 1951 to 1955 before anything really materialized.

JOHNSON: In other words, does this idea and the effort start in the Truman administration?

THACHER: Yes, indeed. George McGhee [Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern, South Asian and African Affairs, 1949-51] focused much less on India and Pakistan (South Asia) than he did on the Middle East. We focused on Egypt in particular since we felt if the Egyptians would take the lead in a Middle East defense arrangement, then several Arab countries might follow. McGhee made a trip when he was Assistant Secretary and discussed this and found the Egyptians very cold on the whole idea. Dulles tried it again, when he went around on a trip to the Middle East, in the spring of '53, and he found no support in Egypt, which was the most important Arab country. There was very tepid interest in Jordan, and almost no interest in Saudi Arabia. The

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only people who were susceptible was the Iraqi monarchy. And that's how it came about.

JOHNSON: Did the Korean war trigger this effort to get the military alliances there in Southeast Asia, or was it maybe NATO?

THACHER: It was a series of events. The Korean war, as naked Communist aggression, was certainly a very important event, but the Berlin blockade, the conquest of China by Mao Tse-tung, expansion of Communist control in Eastern Europe and Southeast Europe and other events contributed to our sense that something must be done to strengthen Middle East defenses against possible Communist encroachment.

JOHNSON: Did NATO serve as a pattern, or as a possible prototype for the later alliances in Asia?

THACHER: Yes, that's right. NATO did. The idea was that we would provide a NATO-type barrier, you see, what they called the "northern tier." The northern tier which would be Pakistan, Iran, Turkey, and then Iraq. We tried very hard to get other people to come into it. We tried to get Jordan. I think it would have been fatal to Jordan if Jordan had come in. I'm sure we told India about it, and probably expressed hope. I

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can imagine that it got hardly to first base, or anywhere with Nehru. This would have been completely contrary to his view of things, to have his country laced into an agreement with the Western powers. In fact, of course, you had in 1955 the first Bandung conference, at which many of the newly independent countries reaffirmed their independence and their commitment to neutrality in the non-alignment in the East-West conflict.

JOHNSON: During the Korean war you were in Calcutta, I believe, in '53.

THACHER: Yes. Well, I came back while it was still going on. I came back in the beginning of '53, and we didn't get the peace until about the fall of '53, in Korea.

JOHNSON: Did you have any communications with [V.K.] Krishna Menon?

THACHER: No, not personally. Well, at that time, you know, Krishna Menon was the great propagator of the Panch Shila, and the Five Principals. This was the basis on which the Indians and the Chinese were getting along. The Indian-Chinese relationship was a very happy one until the Indo-Chinese war over differences over the location of a common border in 1962.

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Evolution of the Middle East defense effort got into the hands of one man who was terribly eager to bring this about, make it materialize, and that was the Prime Minister of Turkey, Adnan Menderes. He was on the front line, you see, in the cold war. And he wanted to get some more support. Also they all, Pakistan, Iran, Turkey, and Iraq, joined in hoping that this would lead to greater U.S. military assistance for them.

JOHNSON: A Middle East Treaty Organization?

THACHER: Yes. But it was called the Baghdad Pact. However, a Middle East treaty organization was given active consideration in '51. Truman was still in office.

JOHNSON: There was an effort in '51?

THACHER: Yes. Assistant Secretary for the Middle East George McGhee came back saying, "This is a no-go as far as the Arabs are concerned." Dulles came back saying the same thing in '53 that the only way we could do it was to have an agreement among the northern tier countries Turkey, Iran and Pakistan supported by the U.S. and Britain. He was somewhat doubtful about having Iraq get into it. But then the Iraqis heard

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about it and wanted to come in, and then the Turks began to push the Iraqis. Menderes came to Baghdad and talked with them, and so then Iraq came in. That was the undoing of the whole thing. That was the mistake. We could have worked out much more tentative and less public defense relations with Iraq, which would have given them just as much protection as they needed and would have avoided putting Iraq in a posture of close ties with Britain and the U.S. but which was disliked by most of the rest of the Arab world.

JOHNSON: What is your opinion of the emphasis on alliances under President Eisenhower and Secretary of State Dulles?

THACHER: You know, as they said about John Foster Dulles, he had "pactomania."

JOHNSON: So you would agree with that.

THACHER: Well, I'll tell you what my own feeling about it was: that this ran risks of running into nationalist feeling. That anti-Western feeling ran high; still we were just out of the age of colonialism, and the distinctive thing for these governments to do was what Nehru did, to say, "I'm non-aligned. I'm not about to join up with my former colonial masters in some sort of

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treaty organization against the Soviet Union. I see a lack of merit in both the Western and the Russian positions."

So when we pressed these countries into big ballyhood treaty arrangements we stirred up -- and this was particularly true of Iraq -- we stirred up anti-government nationalist feeling. In thinking about it years later, and I say, "We could have had close relationships with these countries, if we'd done it quietly." This is what we did with Saudi Arabia and Jordan.

JOHNSON: Without formal alliances.

THACHER: Yes, exactly. Correspondence between the Saudi Government and the United States Government is full of affirmations by the President, Presidential letters, statements made during royal visits. "We are deeply concerned with the security of Saudi Arabia. We will always feel this close friendship and an important interest in the safety and security of Saudi Arabia." And that was enough for the Saudis.

But in the case of Iraq, they established a Baghdad Pact headquarters in Iraq with big signs all over it, and lots of people had misgivings about this, including John Foster Dulles, I found out.

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JOHNSON: You were the First Secretary there in the American Embassy from 1956 to 1958.

THACHER: That's right.

JOHNSON: But this alliance policy, which you say Dulles had a lot to do with, was based kind of on the domino theory, wasn't it?

THACHER: Well, not so much the domino theory. As somebody said, Mr. Dulles got off the plane in Karachi, Pakistan with a "tear in his eye," a "northern tier." This was the idea of having a tier, a barrier of these states to protect the Middle East from Soviet aggression. It was an intervention kind of diplomacy.

JOHNSON: "Real politik" [policy of realism and power].

THACHER: Exactly. "Real politik."

But what we did didn't take into account was the latent, popular anti-Western feeling, particularly at the time when Gamal Nasser, president of Egypt, was leading the world in

strongly anti-Western posture. So it was not so much that the policy of assisting these countries with their defenses was wrong, it was how we did it.

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JOHNSON: Well, of course, we got more and more into military aid, versus economic aid. Did you feel that when you were on the India desk that we were doing enough to provide economic aid, say for India, which took this neutralist position. Did you feel that we had done enough under Point 4, or whatever program?

THACHER: Yes. I think we had a very estimable record with regard to economic aid to India, particularly in things like the Green Revolution.

JOHNSON: Well, that comes later, of course.

THACHER: But the beginnings of it were when Bowles was Ambassador. He was intensely interested.

JOHNSON: He wanted more money though, didn't he?

THACHER: Well, he wanted more money, but on the other hand, he had a very imaginative approach to these things. He had all kinds of ideas.

JOHNSON: Community development.

THACHER: Community development programs in India were very imaginative.

JOHNSON: He had to scale it down though somewhat because our assistance under Point Four wasn't as much as many

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expected.

THACHER: Well, I'm sure that's true, but then the Ford Foundation came in and did some very imaginative things. We sold enormous amounts of wheat for counterpart funds in India, funds which we largely gave away to them or canceled in later years. We did a lot of good things in a lot of those countries, in Iran, and India and no doubt they could have used more money. No doubt, some serious mistakes were made, but then, of course, the trouble with the Baghdad pact was that we were worried about the Russians, but what the Pakistanis were worried about was the Indians. They thought that they, through the Baghdad Pact, if they joined the Baghdad Pact, then they'd get military aid from the United States which would help to protect them against the Indians. Our Mr. Dulles, of course, was thinking the other way. He just wanted to build the Pakistanis up so they'd be a strong barrier, or at least a deterrent against the Russians.

JOHNSON: Are you concluding that the two alliances -- SEATO and the Baghdad Pack -- were probably counterproductive?

THACHER: I won't give an opinion on SEATO. I know the Pakistanis were drawn into it; they were miles away you

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know. SEATO had only one significance for them; they were doing what Uncle Sam wanted them to to make this SEATO alliance look as though it had more genuine indigenous roots, but what the Pakistanis really wanted was more military aid.

When I was on the Pakistan desk we did come through with quite a lot of military aid.

JOHNSON: You were the Pakistan-Afghanistan officer. So were these two countries sort of dealt with as a unit?

THACHER: They were. That's right, you see, there was the Office of South Asian Affairs and within that there was a principal desk officer for India, Ceylon and Nepal, and then there was another principal desk officer, an officer in charge of Pakistan-Afghanistan.

JOHNSON: Of course, bad things have happened in both Afghanistan and Iraq, and also in Iran. Did you serve in Iran at any time?

THACHER: Yes, I served later as the number two in Iran. From '65 to '70 I was Minister-Counselor.

JOHNSON: In Tehran. So unfortunately in these states where we had what we thought were good relations at the time -- in Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and in Iraq -- all

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those governments were overthrown later. In the case of Iran, of course, the overthrow was by Islamic fundamentalism.

THACHER: Well, that came years later. But it's true, I think our policy certainly in Iran, the fact that Iran and the Shah were so close to the United States offered very significant ammunition for Khomeini and the anti-Shah people to use against the Shah's government.

JOHNSON: How about Afghanistan? Was there anything that we could have done there?

THACHER: We never got into such a close relationship with Afghanistan. The Afghans made it quite clear that they had to give a great deal more consideration to their relations with the Soviet Union right along their north border, and that they had to work out a modus vivendi with the Russians. In 1954, about 1954, they began to accept large amounts of Soviet aid.

JOHNSON: But it was kind of a feudal monarchy.

THACHER: Yes it was. That's right.

JOHNSON: Which made it vulnerable to some of these more modern movements and forces.

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THACHER: Yes, that's right.

JOHNSON: Marxism, for instance.

THACHER: There wasn't much Marxism, but there were pro-Russian elements in Afghanistan. Of course, it culminated with the Russian invasion of the country in September or October of 1979.

JOHNSON: When you were in Iraq was that a kind of a feudal monarchy too?

THACHER: Yes, it was a kind of an oligarchy, with the royal family and a kind of a mixed government. The parliament was a blend of Sheiks, landed people, business people, and professional bureaucrats. It was patterned a bit on the old Ottoman model and the Ottomans termed it "government by the notables." The notables ran the government in these places. The Ottomans gave a good deal of leeway in government matters to the dominant local elements.

JOHNSON: But there was not any local self-government, isn't that true?

THACHER: The British and the French left behind them the forms and procedures of democracy. There were parliaments, there were political parties that met.

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There was a controlling figure in Iraq, a guy named Nuri Said, who was a very shrewd politician, very pro-West in his outlook. Officially, the United States liked Nuri very much, because he saw things our way, and he supported the Royal family, which the British had put in power in Iraq. So the Iraqi regime was quite strongly pro-Western, pro-British, and in that sense very vulnerable to nationalist sentiment, and anti-Western sentiment.

JOHNSON: So the royal family of Iraq didn't go back centuries or generations.

THACHER: No, the royal family in Iraq was created out of the Hashemite family who claimed to be descendants of the Prophet Mohammed and they had been rulers or Sherifs of Mecca under the Turks. One of the sons of the Sherif was Prince Faisal and the British made him King of Iraq.

JOHNSON: The Baathist party in Iraq gained power, did it not?

THACHER: Well, not for some time. There was a military coup in 1958.

JOHNSON: So it was a military group that overthrew the

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royal family with the assassination...

THACHER: They pulled a surprise attack and one early morning they marched a division of the army into Baghdad and killed all the royal family in the palace. They killed Nuri Said and dragged him through the streets of the city. That was on July 14, 1958.

JOHNSON: So there was a military dictatorship.

THACHER: A military governor, a military dictator, a man named Abdul Karim Qassim. It was a very unruly and difficult country, and there were a whole lot of cross currents. The Baath got control in about 1961, I guess, or '63. In '63 I guess it was the Baath got control, and then lost it. Then they got it back again about '68 and have ruled ever since.

JOHNSON: So our influence pretty much ended in Iraq with that coup?

THACHER: The revolution in '58 yes. That was when Iraq immediately recognized Communist China, brought in Russian technicians, enacted a very stringent form of land reform, taking land ownership away from the Sheiks. Many of the Iraqis of the old regime got out of Iraq to save themselves.

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JOHNSON: Point IV was in place, though.

THACHER: It was in place with the Iraqis. The Iraqi ruler Abdul Karim Qassim said he wanted to maintain reasonably good relations with the United States. His subordinates down the line, many of them, were so consumed with nationalist feeling and dislike of the West that they were not very enthusiastic about cooperating with the United States. The Iraqis, left all the Point IV people in their offices and never spoke to them. They didn't send the Americans home they just didn't do anything with them. So, after awhile we folded up.

JOHNSON: In other words, were we blinded to the threat of nationalism, by an obsession about communism?

THACHER: That's right. We were so concerned with the Communist threat to the world that we were prepared to accept anybody as allies, often not realizing the extent to which this might be a threat to the ally who was rushing into our arms.

JOHNSON: Of course, hindsight's easier than foresight.

What were your recommendations at that time?

THACHER: I would say, so far as the Baghdad Pact was

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concerned, I thought it was artificial. I felt there were risks to it, that it was pulling Iraq in a way against Arab nationalist sentiment.

JOHNSON: Did you bring this to the attention of...

THACHER: It was too late. These things were all decided up on the seventh floor. No, we just got the instructions to go ahead. And we were never consulted.

JOHNSON: Did you ever have a chance to express your views, what might be skeptical views?

THACHER: We used to talk about it at our level. But we were there, you know, to implement this whole thing. The United States assumed a kind of odd position vis-a-vis the Baghdad Pact. We participated in it, but we were never formally a treaty signer. The reason that we took that position was that we felt that if we signed a treaty with the four powers, the four on-site powers, that then we would come under pressure from other countries, particularly Israel, to sign a treaty with them, a defense treaty, and we didn't want to that. We knew that that would upset the Arabs a lot. So, we avoided doing that. But as Dulles himself put it one time, "You know, we're members of the House Committee, the Admissions Committee, and the Finance

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Committee, but we don't belong to the club." And that was really it. We had a special delegation in Baghdad which worked with Baghdad Pact officials. One or two officers in the Embassy were assigned to do nothing but work with the Baghdad Pact people.

JOHNSON: But the United States was kind of the power behind the throne?

THACHER: We had Americans in the Baghdad Pact organization, and we had a military coordinating committee, the chairman of which was an American Air Force brigadier general who lived there. You know, it had our finger marks all over it, the Baghdad Pact did, but there was always this plea from the other powers, particularly the Turks for us to formally and fully adhere to the Pact. The Turks were really gung-ho for this. The Turks were perpetually saying, "Why don't you join the pact, join the pact." And our Ambassador Wally Gallman, a wonderful guy, I was very fond of him, constantly urged this also.

JOHNSON: Who was that?

THACHER: His name was Waldemar Gallman. I hate to say anything even faintly in criticism of him, because he was such a fine man. Gallman would get off a telegram

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every so often saying, "We ought to join the Baghdad Pact." I guess I just didn't feel I was qualified to disagree with him since I was entirely new to the Arab world and he'd been there for several years. In Washington, they paid no attention to these suggestions that we formally adhere to and become signatories to the treaty.

I looked into this a couple of years ago and really, it was surprising how many misgivings Dulles had about having Iraq in the Pact. Dulles did however very much want a Middle East defense agreement and one can guess that he felt raising objections about Iraq's membership could derail the whole project.

JOHNSON: Well, first of all, Gallman. What was his title?

THACHER: He was the U.S. Ambassador in Baghdad.

JOHNSON: What was his first name?

THACHER: Waldemar. Anybody who is interested in his role should see his book. He wrote a book of personal reminiscences which is quite interesting and revealing.

JOHNSON: But you're saying that he was more of a "pactomaniac" than Dulles?

THACHER: Than Dulles, yes.

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JOHNSON: And Turkey was the most fanatic of all?

THACHER: Turkey was the most fanatic, I think. I thought [Prime Minister] Menderes was just -- well, you see the Turks were on the front lines with the USSR. They really felt the Russian threat. Of course, there was a long history of Turkish-Russian battles and wars, you know.

JOHNSON: Were the Soviets still claiming land in Turkey? Still claiming a part of Turkey?

THACHER: Yes. And of course, what they wanted were greatly increased rights through the Straits.

JOHNSON: Okay, the Straits.

THACHER: The Soviets wanted to revise the treaty that had to do with the Straits. That's why the Turks were so eager to join NATO, and they thought, "If we could get some of our neighbors in the developing countries to join the Pact, this will give us additional strength, and, of course, additional claims on the United States."

JOHNSON: Yes, a lot of military aid.

THACHER: Menderes was a terribly activist guy; he was a man

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with a huge ego and enormous energy.

JOHNSON: They got a lot of aid, didn't they, beginning with the Truman Doctrine?

THACHER: Oh, yes, they got a lot of aid, and then of course, they performed heroically in Korea. Turkish troops went to Korea and performed extremely well. The Turks were very high on our favorite lists. So, Menderes had a lot of influence.

JOHNSON: Did you notice any difference that you could tell between the foreign policy of Harry Truman and Dwight Eisenhower? Was there any change that you could detect?

THACHER: I would say that the Truman administration generally was more sympathetic to Israel. I wasn't involved actively. I was off working in South Asia in India and Pakistan in the early years of Israel's existence. I came back to Washington just at the beginning of the Eisenhower administration. But Dulles was more inclined to see things in terms of what were our interests and what was in Israel's interest. The Israelis weren't shut out all together at all, but it was a position, I think, of keeping the Israelis somewhat more at arm's length. But of course, the

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Truman administration had been very actively involved in the creation of Israel and continued to show interest in it.

JOHNSON: Loy Henderson, Henry Byroade, and Edwin Wright, for instance; all three of these important diplomats were critical of a policy that seemed to be too pro-Israel and too anti-Arab.

THACHER: That's right, they were. And they were in the Truman administration.

JOHNSON: So their view got more of a hearing under Eisenhower.

THACHER: Yes.

JOHNSON: And Dulles. Was Dulles really...

THACHER: They got quite a hearing under Truman also, because those were pretty much the views of Acheson and Acheson carried tremendous influence with Truman even before he was Secretary of State. Marshall, Henderson, Acheson -- they were a very powerful trio as far as Truman was concerned. All had a lot of misgivings about it, and I don't know how much you've read the details, but they switched the U.S. position at the United Nations right at the last minute and went back

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to the idea of trying to have a unified state, unified Arab-Jewish state instead of the partition plan. There was a misunderstanding there, and Truman was furious.

JOHNSON: I think Clark Clifford was...

THACHER: Clark Clifford persuaded Truman to accept the partition of Palestine into a Jewish and an Arab state, and in retrospect I respect Henderson, Marshall and Acheson for their views and could see their point of view. But it just looked to me as though they changed the policy at the last minute, when nobody was prepared for policy change. In other words, we had accepted the idea of partition three or four months earlier. Everybody expected us to do that, but they had gone -- you may be familiar with this -- they had gone to Truman with a stand-by plan saying, "If we think it's going to be unworkable, that partition's going to be unworkable, are we authorized

to go back to the idea of a unitary state, under U.N. supervision, or implementation?" Truman gave kind of a tentative okay to that, and then when they saw the situation changing, without notifying Truman they changed the policy, and Truman was furious at this. Even though they felt that they had been authorized to do it on their own, still he was very angry with them and we stuck finally to the partition

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plan.

As to trying to enforce the unitary state -- the British had been trying to do that for ever since the war, and all they had had was bloodshed and terrorism -- the British couldn't do it. It wouldn't have worked unless somebody was prepared to put military forces into Palestine. The United States would not have been willing to in that era, so soon after we had finished World War II. So a lot of us who understood a good deal of the Arab point of view were always very sympathetic to the ideas of Henderson and Acheson and Marshall. But in retrospect I think probably it was wrong to try to reverse course, you know, when the whole Palestine thing had been going in the direction of partition for so long.

If a year earlier they had stuck to the idea of a unitary state year earlier and had gone about exploring carefully all the possibilities of making it work carefully, and the mechanics of it, perhaps that would have been possible.

JOHNSON: If Truman had been elected, or decided to run, and had been elected President in 1952, do you think there would have been a SEATO and a Middle East Treaty Organization? Do you think that regardless of who was

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President, whether it was Republican or Democratic, there would have been these alliances, these two alliances in Asia and the Middle East?

THACHER: I think we would have done something. I think because of these factors I've mentioned two or three times. The collective impact of those factors, that there would undoubtedly have been some sort of effort to establish a Middle East defense organization under either a Democratic or a Republican administration. Perhaps it might have been just an understanding among the Western powers that this was a problem and we must plan for it or it could have been was the kind of thing we had with Jordan and Saudi Arabia and Morocco. These were quiet understandings that we were on their side, if they might need our help. We gave them military assistance. People don't know it, but during the Yemen civil war the Egyptians were attacking Yemen and overflying Saudi Arabia in 1964 and we sent a squadron of 12 U.S. Air Force F-100 aircraft to Saudi Arabia. We put six of them in Dhahran, the Persian Gulf side and we put six over on the Red Sea side at Jidda. When I was Charge' d 'Affaires at Jidda I had my own air force, you might say, of six planes.

JOHNSON: Who was that under?

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THACHER: President Kennedy. It was along in the spring of '64, and the Saudis were deathly afraid of Nasser and deathly afraid of having him establish a strong foothold in Yemen to the south of them. They said, "Come on, do something for us."

We had a destroyer visit Jidda every month, and then we had these six planes come in. They [Saudi Arabian officials] came to me one day, and said, "They're overflying us, and they've dropped bombs along our border with Yemen, the Egyptians have. What will you do for us? Send some of your planes down there."

So, I sent a message to Washington concerning the limits that we had set as to where the F-100s would go. I got no answer, and the Minister of Defense kept calling me up and saying, "When are you going to do something?" So, finally I got together with the Navy commander. They were Air Force planes, but they were under the charge of a Naval Air Officer. I said, "Well, what can we do?" He said, "Well, let's just put them in the air and send them down in that direction without letting them get very close to the Yemen-Saudi border."

Then I informed Washington, and I never got any answer; I never got any criticism. So, this military

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maneuver was successful and it satisfied the Saudis. You know, they were looking for some gesture of support by the United States, and putting these planes in the air and having them go down and fly around no closer than 150 miles to the Yemen border and come back seemed to be adequate. I never had any confirmation that the Egyptians noticed the flight of our planes or were deterred by it.

JOHNSON: Was that the most important policy decision that you ever made?

THACHER: Well, I don't know.

JOHNSON: It sounds like it was.

As a final question, or two, when you were in Teheran, did the American Embassy, or the State Department people who were supposed to be keeping tabs on that part of the world, did they see the potential for this Islamic fundamentalism that eventually, of course, produced a revolution in Iran? Did they see a threat there at all? The political threat of the Mullahs and the Islamic establishment?

THACHER: Well, you know, I left in 1970 when the Shah was still riding pretty high. There was criticism and dislike of him in many circles. The empress, I think,

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was popular. She's a marvelous, bright woman, with great charm and savvy. He was doing a lot of benign things, building things. The country was quite prosperous; business was booming. The land reform program had some popular, favorable popular impact; not an enormous amount, but some. People who were professional people -- business men, engineers, doctors -- in general

saw the Shah's regime as beneficial. Iran was stable. It had a lot of money. They were building universities and roads; and industrial plants were being developed. New things sprung up. We had had some good economic aid programs in Iran that were working well, but there was still a lot of nationalist feeling against the Shah, and against us among the nationalists, because we had aided in the overthrow of Mossadegh.

As regards the religious people, you see in 1963 there was an outburst of riots and demonstrations against the regime, instigated out of the mosques. The Shah applied very repressive measures against the students who participated in it, and against the religious figures and he had a lot of them locked up for awhile. So we had the feeling that, regarding the religious elements, the Shah had kind of driven them back into the Mosques, and that they would not be very

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actively engaged in political activity.

Politics, for the religious element, was a tradition in Iran, much more so than in any of the Arab countries. But it was my feeling that the Iranian authorities had gotten the religious people pretty well suppressed. By that time, of course, Khomeini had been driven out of the country; he had gone to Iraq, but and he was beginning to circulate those incendiary religious tapes. There were people in the religious community who came to us and said, "You don't realize quite what's going on. There's more political activity in the religious community than you recognize." I know some religious people came to the Agency representatives and told them this.

Personally I accepted the view that the religious element and the Communists, of course, had been really destroyed as a political force. The Tudeh (Communist) Party had been deprived of its power and had gone underground. There was no terrorism. We lived in the Embassy compound, and we'd come back in our car at night; the big gates would open and we'd drive in. No security checks, nothing. We could have been anybody's car that came in the gate. You know, we felt perfectly secure in 1970.

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JOHNSON: You did have a feudal society there still, didn't you, with landlords actually owning whole villages, and so on.

THACHER: But you have to look at the Shah in the light of what we thought. He was progressive, and he had an organization, a Plan Organization, to direct spending the oil money in good ways for the development of Iran. He was strongly anti-Communist, and right along that border [with the Soviet Union]. He allowed us some important communications intercept facilities in northern Iran. I know the ambassador that we had there then was concerned about his military appetite. He found occasions to let the Shah know that he didn't think that he needed another dozen or so 100 F-104s or whatever it was he wanted. The Shah said, "Okay, if you don't want to sell them to me, I'll get them from somebody else." And of course, he had the money to do it.

JOHNSON: He wasn't spending it on the villages, I don't think.

THACHER: Yes, yes he was. The villages had improvements. There were little village health clinics, there were village schools being spread. He had a literacy corps,

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and he would take kids into the Army who were not very literate themselves and train them for a while and then send them out into the villages to teach reading, writing or good health habits.

My wife used to go out and see these people working and she was very impressed by the devotion of these youngsters, who really felt they had a worthwhile mission in health and literacy classes for the peasants. And there was a bank. Bank Saderat. There were almost as many little Bank Saderat offices around the country as there were post offices. They were all over the place, one-man banks. Roads were improved and there was some agricultural extension service, and universities were founded. They were inadequate in many respects, but at least these were steps in the right direction. It was the kind of thing that appealed to Americans, and we thought so much in economic terms those days, you know. We thought get out the economic aid, get the economic machine going and that's the best barrier against discontent. We loved to see these tangible accomplishments, the new dam that our aid helped build and created the water supply for Teheran. Here was a modern monarch who wanted these things, who tried to develop his country, trying to raise up his people.

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JOHNSON: But wasn't he democratizing the government?

THACHER: Well, he used to fool around with this. He would create different kinds of parties in the parliament, but the trouble was that he didn't really understand that he had to give up some power himself to make democracy work. He was a superb world statesman, and a very poor domestic politician in understanding his own country.

JOHNSON: Well, it must have been a terrific shock for you to see what happened in the American compound in 1980.

THACHER: Our house was right there. We lived right in that compound, right behind where the hostages were held, and some of them were held in our house.

JOHNSON: They were held in your house, some of the hostages?

THACHER: Yes, and so many of these Iranians that we knew came to this country and they said to me, "If we'd had 15 more years of the Shah we'd have been all right." That's the way they felt about it. They were doing big business, building things. But not everything was a success. There was inadequate follow-up to their land reform program. They had grandiose agricultural

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programs which were mostly failures. Planless urbanization was getting out of hand.

JOHNSON: There were students in this country when I was in Washington, D.C., in '78, and they were having this noisy demonstration against the Shah.

THACHER: The Shah always said, "They're all communists, just communists, so don't pay any attention to them." Whenever the Shah came to this country he was greeted with hostile demonstrations by Iranian students. Once Bobby Kennedy invited some of these demonstrators to come up to his office for a chat. The Shah was furious and forever after distrusted the Kennedys.

JOHNSON: So you ended your career, at least your diplomatic career, in Saudi Arabia, during the years 1970 to '73 as Ambassador there. Were those fairly tranquil years?

THACHER: Compared to what came after, yes, they were. Saudi Arabia was just a little off stage, until the '73 war came and the price of oil went up, and the Saudis joined in the embargo. Of course, when they began to get such enormous amounts of money, then they were perceived as one of the big players in the Middle East scene.

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JOHNSON: Was that a real watershed, the year 1973?

THACHER: '73 was a real watershed and I would attribute it to the fact that the price of oil went from \$4 to \$14 a barrel, plus the fact that the Saudis were very resolute in observing the oil embargo, which, of course, was not really terribly effective. Oil was so fungible that you could get it somewhere else.

JOHNSON: This was an Israeli attack?

THACHER: No, no, it was an Egyptian attack on Israel in '73. They crossed the Suez Canal, which was a great achievement for the Egyptian military.

JOHNSON: But then there was the counterattack, and Egypt was thrown back.

THACHER: The counterattack, and then [Henry] Kissinger decided he didn't want to let the Israelis win too much. He wanted the Egyptians to go away from that war feeling that they had made a major accomplishment, which they did. Because of the crossing [of the Suez Canal] there was a slogan in Cairo. "The crossing, the crossing, we got across and defeated the Israelis." But that was only true for a while.

JOHNSON: Well, I appreciate the time you have given me, and

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the information.

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