



GEORGE H. W. BUSH ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

TRANSCRIPT

INTERVIEW WITH THOMAS PICKERING

December 14, 2010
Washington, D.C.

Interviewers

University of Virginia

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Riley: This is the Thomas Pickering interview as a part of the George H.W. Bush Oral History Project. Thank you very much for your time. We had a conversation before the tape began running about the ground rules and specifically the confidentiality of the interview.

I ought to mention for anybody interested in your career coming to this interview you've done an extensive series of interviews with—

Pickering: —the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training. Actually we did the last one this morning.

Riley: No kidding.

Pickering: So this is my second interview today. There's probably forty or fifty or sixty hours.

Riley: My goodness, I'm envious of that. You're good to allow us to talk with you about this as a supplement. But clearly anybody who comes to this will need to know that that exists. So we also talked off tape about how we would proceed, and you said the first thing we ought to talk about is how you come to know—

Pickering: Vice President, then President Bush.

Riley: George Bush. So I'll just open it up there.

Pickering: Let me say that beginning when I was in Jordan in the '70s, I think it was the first time I got to know him at all well, and he visited—in fact he visited me in most of my diplomatic posts right up until the UN [United Nations].

We got to know him fairly well. We had several opportunities to see him at dinners and things of that sort, so we got to know him and got to know Barbara [Bush], who came with him. I think the next most interesting one, he visited me in Nigeria. He stayed with us because there wasn't an adequate place elsewhere. We got to know them. We talked. He was called away. Either [Yuri] Andropov or [Konstantin] Chernenko, I forget which—maybe [Leonid] Brezhnev—died. He and Barbara had to get on their plane, go to Moscow, and arrange to have somebody meet them there. So it was cut short, but it was interesting, and I got a sense of a lot of his views on a

lot of questions just from chatting together and at times when we shared meals together, which were not big productions.

Riley: This was before he was Vice President?

Pickering: He was Vice President then, it was under [Ronald] Reagan. The next time was more interesting because it was planned and more studied.

When I was in El Salvador it became clear that we had a significant problem in El Salvador with both army misbehavior and close links to people involved in death squads. In December, I think it was '84, I got word that Vice President Bush was going to go to the swearing in later that month, or maybe I got word earlier, of then-President [Raul] Alfonsín in Argentina. We talked about it, we had a couple of ideas both in my staff and from my own ideas that jelled that we should have him stop off on the way home if he would do it and in effect read the riot act to the military. I talked to Danny Murphy, who was an old friend who was his chief of staff at the time, Admiral Dan Murphy, and we set it up. He said that he would agree to do this. We obviously had State Department on board for the whole thing, and he came.

We prepared it and we had several pieces of the action that took place centered around him. The major piece was that he would meet privately with thirty or forty of the key colonels and general officers in the Salvadoran armed forces and in effect tell them—I sat in on the meeting with his Spanish interpreter—that, in effect, if death squad activity kept up there was nothing that either he or President Reagan could do to preserve American assistance to El Salvador. It would go away and they had to stop it.

At the same time we arranged with President [Alvaro] Magaña whom I had worked with very closely. He was an appointed President before the election of [José] Duarte but he agreed to do this. We would ask to have six Salvadorans that we could identify as being involved in bad things sent overseas as military attachés, which was the usual way they had of moving people away. They did that. We gave them some sense that we were concerned about other activities that were going on, but that was essentially what happened. He did an absolutely perfect job, splendid job.

Riley: Were you involved in briefing him for this?

Pickering: Absolutely.

Riley: Do you have any recollections?

Pickering: We talked ahead of time. I talked with Dan Murphy, and we sent messages. So we knew pretty well, but I didn't know at the end how far he would go with the scenario. You never do. A Vice President is a Vice President. He has to make his own judgments.

Riley: Right.

Pickering: But he went much further than I would have expected somebody in his position would go, given the long arguments that had taken place inside the administration over whether we were going to protect, in fact, the administration in El Salvador, including the warts, in order

to achieve the effort that we wanted against the guerrillas. In effect it became very clear to me very early on that the two were in direct contradiction to each other and that we had to work hard to help Salvadorians clean up their act as well as deal with the question of violence from the extreme left. That was essentially the central thesis of what we were doing. That worked out very well. It made for a sea change; this kind of killing stopped. It became, I think— *[interruption]* We in effect had a big hand and this helped lead into elections in El Salvador and a certain amount of tranquility; not all of it took place at once. But it was extremely interesting from that point of view. I think after that I was in Israel. He made a visit there.

[BREAK]

Riley: We're back on. Can I ask you a question about this episode?

Pickering: Of course you can.

Riley: The Vice President's toughness was on display at this meeting, an interesting feature for him, because he takes hits later on as somebody who wasn't terribly tough. I wonder if you could elaborate on it.

Pickering: Every time I saw him he was unfailingly polite. He never lost that and that may have been deceptive to people thinking that basically an unfailingly polite guy will obviously be an easy move. But he did it very well, calmly, straightforwardly. The punch line was really, "Neither President Reagan or I can stop this. This is the train that is going to run against you in the Congress if you don't clean up your own act." That was the major leverage that made the difference.

Riley: Okay.

Perry: Can I go back to Nigeria where you said you saw his views and presumably his personality there and his relationship with Mrs. Bush? Can you talk about—

Pickering: It was what everybody had come to expect, what I had seen in Jordan; very interested in a wide range of international relations questions. He was very interested in Nigeria, which is not a country people are enormously interested in. He was interested in what was going on, how we were faring, what our relationships were. I thought that the times that we had alone—my wife had more time with Barbara—we sat down and talked. We discussed a lot of questions that were directly relevant to the visit; he wasn't talking about a lot of things outside of school.

I had the impression that I had developed earlier, that he was enormously knowledgeable, very interested in foreign relations, was going to spend a lot of his life dealing with those, particularly if he had a future. When we were in Jordan he announced that he was going to run for President. That was a little premature, but nevertheless it happened. All of that came through. I think that was the centerpiece of that.

There was an interesting incident in Israel. He sent a very large advance team. I had been used to large advance teams. They worked away. We got a lot of stuff done; we got a lot of stuff settled. At the last minute, without telling me, they had canceled a tree planting ceremony in an Israeli forest park nearby Jerusalem in memory of Mr. [Leon] Klinghoffer, who was killed in the *Achille Lauro*. The next day the *Jerusalem Post* has a headline, at the bottom of the page, happily, as he arrived, “No Bush in the Forest,” which they couldn’t resist.

Alice [Pickering], my wife, was riding with Barbara, and Barbara said, “That’s our people,” which I thought was interesting. I don’t think I’m betraying Barbara’s confidence. I thought it reflected well on her. So it was those kinds of things.

Then when I was in Israel later on, my wife and I, as we often do, took a camping vacation in Egypt. We were camping in a remote area along the Nile opposite an archeological site, in fact next to it. Egyptian police knew we were there. They woke us up at seven o’clock in the morning. Just as we were getting up, an Egyptian policeman came over and we said, “We’re not ready yet.” They were going to take us to the next town, to Asyut, and he said, “No, no, you have an important phone call.”

I said, “Where can I return it?” He said, “We can do it in Asyut at the railroad station.” I said, “Fine, let’s do that.” So we got to Asyut in the middle of the day and went to the railroad station and put money in the pay phone. I called the American Embassy in Cairo. They said, “Vice President Bush wants to talk to you.” It was right after the election. I said, “Fine, what do we do?” They said, “He’ll be available at five o’clock tonight our time.”

I said, “I’ll be in Nag Hammadi,” another town up the line. “We’ll be staying there and I’ll call you then.” They said fine. So we got to Nag Hammadi and it was a Russian-built hotel at an aluminum plant, but was open to the public. It was kind of strange. It was a sort of Hollywood-style hotel with balcony sleeping places in the rooms, and the phones didn’t work. I went down to the desk. Here was the desk in the lobby, quite a modern hotel and I said, “Is there a phone here where I can call Cairo?” He said, “Yes, right here,” so I made the call there. It was a red phone. I called the Embassy and they put me through to his secretary, who said, “Just a minute, he wants to talk to you.” We got started on the call and he said, “How are you?” and everything. Then he said, “I’m thinking about New York.”

I said, “Oh, that’s interesting.” Then he started talking about New York and some details and we went off the line. I called back again. This time they said, “This is a secure call, isn’t it?” I said, “Absolutely not.” In the middle of Egypt, every intelligence service in the world if they have any interest is probably on it. He started out again and we got cut off again.

On the third call I said, “Mr. Vice President, I think I know where you’re going, but why don’t we go there, because I may get cut off again.” He said, “We’d like to have you come to New York. We’re not going to make it a Cabinet position.” I said, “That’s perfectly okay with me.” I had always thought that if anybody ever offered me that job, the Cabinet thing would be a distraction. He said, “No, we’ll have you down to meetings and that sort of thing.”

That went on and I said I’d be delighted to accept. He said, “Well, we’ll keep this quiet for a while.” I said, “I can do that. I’m in the middle of Egypt. I don’t have anybody to talk to anyway

other than your phone call.” So we agreed. The next night we were in Luxor and we stayed at a very nice Swiss hotel on an island in the Nile. At midnight I got a call and the operator said, “It’s Jim Baker.” I said to my wife, “Well, Jimmy is on the phone, they’re going to take it back.” He said, “No, no, no. It’s okay. I just wanted to be sure that we will tell you we will communicate with you in Tel Aviv next through private channels.” I said, “Fine, that’s perfectly okay, very happy to do that.” So we did. Then there were all kinds of rumors running around the world about who was going to be there. Happily my name didn’t figure among them. But we got a nice call in the end and they said, “We’re going to announce it tomorrow.” So that’s how it all got started.

Riley: Great.

Pickering: Then I went—

Riley: Were you informed at this point about who the other key pieces of the puzzle would be in the foreign policy apparatus, or had those decisions already been publicly announced?

Pickering: Well I knew that Baker was going to be Secretary of State by then. I don’t think I knew a lot about other appointments; some of it may have filtered through, but mine was a fairly early appointment.

Riley: You’d known Baker from?

Pickering: I knew him only by reputation. Was he Chief of Staff at the White House?

Riley: Exactly.

Pickering: Of course, which is where I knew him by reputation. Then when I went back we had an interesting—of course the Bushes were more than generous and very open. I got confirmed and they had the swearing-in ceremony over at the White House, which was very nice and very helpful for me, to be in New York, to be sworn in there. Then along about then I had several chats with the President over at the White House. He was still Vice President for part of it and then after he was—I think while he was still Vice President he called me one day and obviously somebody had given him a piece of paper that said, “Call Pickering and arrange to see who his deputies are.” It was a White House personnel operation.

He said to me, “You have four deputies, I’d like to appoint three.” I said, “Mr. Vice President, how about two and two?” He said two and two was okay. So we did. The first thing I did was I got on the phone to White House personnel and I said, “I’ve got two wonderful appointments for you,” and they accepted one of them who was a very interesting guy that I had known for a long time who had done a lot of work in economic policy, actually still teaching at Harvard—Jonathan Moore. He said he would be happy to do it. Then I picked two people that I had known. One is sitting right down here on the aisle. I hadn’t known him at all but by reputation, but he was Ambassador in Peru. Everybody said if you want a really good guy, and he knows economics as well as politics, look at Alex Watson. So I did. We had a good conversation on the phone. He agreed to come and he turned out to be splendid.

Then I chose another guy in the Foreign Service that I had worked with over the years who could come in as well and he stayed with me for about a year and a half or two years. Then he wanted to go. I had another fellow, George Moose, who was then in Africa. In the meantime the second political appointment—they said, “We have this wonderful guy; he’s a preacher in Washington but he’s very good and he’s international.” So I said fine. I met him and he looked okay. I thought he’d be fine. Well, he had clearance problems along the line, unfortunately.

So immediately I jumped because I had gotten to know a lady who worked on his staff who was of Indian-Pakistani origin, Shirin Tahir-Kheli, and I thought Shirin would be terrific and it gave us a lot of diversity. We had never had an Asian woman Ambassador. We hadn’t had many women on the staff in New York. So she came up and then Jim Wilkinson, the second guy I picked, wanted to leave, so I got George Moose, who was a black American. So we had a very diverse, very professional group. It worked out fabulously; they all stayed with me.

So that worked. It was an interesting thing because in the end I got to choose his two people as well as my two. But it worked out very well. He had known Shirin, and it was very clear to me that she and the Vice President, then President, got along very well. There was a lot of mutual esteem between them; she was very capable.

Riley: You had mentioned that you thought that the Cabinet appointment would be a distraction for you. Why not elaborate on that and let us know why.

Pickering: I think it is, and in retrospect I think that those who have done it that way and spend a lot of their time at Cabinet meetings in Washington convey the impression to their UN colleagues that they have a higher calling.

Riley: Right.

Pickering: Secondly, they’re out of town a lot. I was out of town a lot, anyway. Thirdly, it sends the message to them that they’re really interested in a lot of domestic policy issues and a lot of other questions which aren’t, in my view, entirely appropriate. So all of that was there. Now the positive is it says you’re a member of the Cabinet. Obviously you’ve got this wonderful relationship with the President. Some of that I did by swearing in at the White House and some of that the President did for me when he visited. I went with him to meetings and that sort of thing and he was very generous in his praise. I don’t think I ever lacked for that.

Riley: Okay.

Pickering: Obviously in New York as you move ahead, how you deal with questions and how you can get things done inside the U.S. bureaucracy is often reflected to what you do.

Riley: So you were able to get the gravitas without having—

Pickering: I think as much as I needed, you can always use more, but the balance was there. I had thought for a long time it’s nice to have the New York person a member of the Cabinet, but it’s not easy to do that. Now I have to tell you that the Cabinet is essentially a show-and-tell organization, as we all know. Very useful for the President, it touches base. It rallies the people around. He can talk about his policy questions and his issues. And I was invited fairly frequently

by President Bush to the Cabinet meetings. He always wanted me to say what's going on at the UN. It was a time when things were going on at the UN, so it was an interesting opportunity to report, and in some cases he had me to meetings where he would have the Cabinet for social events and things of that sort. So I got to meet members of the Cabinet and talk to them.

I don't think it was entirely comfortable for Secretary Baker necessarily to have another member of his department because I took my instructions from Secretary Baker. But I think it worked out okay.

Riley: Were there any—this is an unusual situation in a sense that you've got a President who had at one time the position that you're moving into. In your preliminary conversation presumably once you got a decent telephone line or in person, did the President express to you in some detail what he expected you to do there? Did he have a sense by his own experience of what worked well and what didn't work well and therefore did he try to—

Pickering: He was very strong in delegating.

Riley: Okay.

Pickering: I asked him for his thoughts on questions and he didn't want to tell me how to suck eggs. If I didn't know I'd find out or he would find somebody else. That's the way things usually work at that level.

I spent a lot of time with people who had been in New York and I spent a lot of time with people who had some experience at the UN to figure out what my trajectory would be and how I would handle things. I saw that New York had, in a sense, many of the attributes and many of the demands of a state legislature. Relationships were important, personal relationships were important, backed up by my previous time there. Many countries that are very small have very influential representatives—I had been at the UN working on disarmament and other subjects from time to time and I saw this. When you needed votes it didn't matter the size of the country. You could be very effective because we were the host country. We had a special cachet, particularly in New York.

You could be very effective in reaching out to people, so I did it. I made it a point, one, to try to call on everybody, and if I couldn't call on everybody when I arrived, which is traditional in bilateral diplomatic posts, but I had 180 people to deal with or something, I would have small groups of people from the same area in for drinks at my apartment. I paid attention to the smaller countries when I could, the Caribbean states, the small islands of the Pacific and others, because they represented votes, and if I needed them at some point it was nice to have them feel that I had a relationship.

When I walked across the street I spoke to people, chatted with them whenever I could whenever there was time permitting, listened to their concerns. I had a special section at the mission, as everybody does. Mine was run by Bob Mueller, a former New York policeman, essentially to deal with protocol problems, with problems with the New York police department, with any issues they had. Bob was very responsive and inordinately helpful. We tried to help people, almost in a patronage sense. But it was important. They had to feel that New York was

welcoming them, not rejecting them, and that this mission was a useful channel to do that. So there was a fair amount of that.

I would go and speak to UN regional groups when they asked, to talk to them about what was going on. But this was a way of building rapport and relationships that I thought made a huge difference. So personal relationships, vote counting, finding ways to talk to people, reaching out before you had to, to be in touch with people. All of those are skills that you learn anyway, as a bilateral ambassador, but they play a much bigger role in New York as you went through the question. We couldn't turn to people on every issue and we didn't try. But on critical questions where we needed help it was important to be able to follow through.

Riley: The fact that the President had had the position didn't put him in a position of trying to micromanage?

Pickering: No, he knew what to do and I found out very quickly what to do. It was extremely interesting that the Assistant Secretary for International Organization Affairs at the time was John Bolton. That presented its own challenges.

Riley: Okay.

Pickering: I don't think I ever had an angry or nasty word with John or from John. There was never any—but it was very clear that his policy perceptions and mine were at wide variance and that, at the same time, particularly because after my first year we were deep in the middle of the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, that he was not in a position, I think, to propound or support the view that the UN was irrelevant or should be made more irrelevant or was a drag or was a problem. That was certainly—none of that I got from the President's perspective.

Riley: Right.

Pickering: So it was interesting. In dealing with John, particularly in the Iraq question, my view—and we can talk about this—was we needed to stay ahead of the game and move the process as quickly as we could and that in many ways where to go next was as much something that I worked on as Washington, we stayed in close touch. I worked very closely with the British and they and I with the French to keep it moving so that those independent channels to Washington also fed in and we were able to operate quite extensively that way. I never felt, except on rare occasions, that there was some serious roadblock or problem, but we can talk about those.

Riley: Good. Bolton's appointment was an exercise in party balancing? Do you know?

Pickering: Maybe, and maybe they thought I was going to be too much of a liberal and a wild man up there so they wanted somebody holding things back. Those are all possible things; I was never told. But I reached out to him very early through mutual friends who'd offered to help, but didn't make much of a dent.

Riley: Okay, let me ask a question about the early transitional period. Historically, the end of the Reagan years, Iran-Contra gummed up the works a lot. There is early activity in the Bush

administration that manages to get that righted and to set the country I think on a more productive path. How much of an Iran-Contra hangover was there in the early Bush—

Pickering: I didn't feel a lot. I had had in El Salvador an Iran-Contra issue that came up, which was that somebody had given me—an El Salvadoran Ambassador to Nicaragua, I think—gave me a piece of paper that said this list of supplies is going to be given to the Contras by a foreign country. It wasn't clear who it was. I could guess. I gave it to Ollie [Oliver] North and didn't give it to the State Department, which was dumb. But Ollie was the guy handling all of this and that I had known. Later happily it was a piece of paper that also fell in the hands of CIA [Central Intelligence Agency] and was produced as an intelligence document so the State Department wasn't completely blindsided.

I think it was in these hearings in New York, maybe it was later when I went to India, but the Senator from Maryland—

Perry: [Charles] Mathias?

Riley: [Paul] Sarbanes?

Pickering: Paul Sarbanes asked me about it and I said, "Sure." Obviously you make mistakes. This was one. But there was nothing there. Then of course I was in Israel and it was very clear as the whole thing unfolded that people in Israel that I was in touch with were not talking to me about it. But that was as close as I came to it. I didn't feel there was any huge hangover in what I was dealing with and I spent most of my time in New York but came down occasionally for meetings.

Perry: You said you were working very closely with Secretary Baker. Talk about your relationship with him and your work with him prior to Iraq.

Pickering: Prior to Iraq almost nothing. In Iraq it got more intense and we can talk about that when we get to Iraq. Maybe we should shift gears and go to Iraq.

Riley: Okay.

Pickering: Then we can pick up on other things as you want.

Riley: Okay, that will be fine, let's do that.

Pickering: I think that they're more second-order things in terms of the UN.

Riley: Great.

Pickering: I would only say this, that I had been in Africa, Ethiopia, and in Saudi Arabia and in Kuwait on the last day of June 1990 and talked to the Kuwaitis, particularly the oil minister, because they were engaged in negotiations with Iraq at the time and I asked if they thought there was any possibility the Iraqis would resort to use of force. They said no, absolutely not, that everything is okay, that the Iraqis just want to get more money because they owe everybody all

this money from the Iran war and we're going to help them but not as much as they want. That's what the negotiation is all about.

Well, I wasn't surprised on August the first, but to some extent the scope of it was fairly devastating. We had seen some intelligence reporting of build-up and we were a little concerned. I had been in New York with Henry Kissinger when the Yom Kippur war came, 1973, and had him begin to ask some serious questions on an Arab build up on the Friday before the war started on Saturday, so I had a little bit of this experience. But it wasn't obvious or clear. I was at a farewell dinner for the British Ambassador who was leaving, given by Tom [Enders], who was an old friend who had been in the department for many years and now was in banking. There were just six of us at the dinner, the Enders, Sir Crispin and Penelope and my wife and I. I got called about ten o'clock at night to talk to Bob Kimmitt, who was Under Secretary, and Bob said, "We've had the Iraqis invade Kuwait and we'd like to have you call a Security Council meeting right away."

I said, "Bob, I'll do that." We talked over a resolution and he said, "We've already started working." I said, "I think it should be simple and straightforward." He said, "Yes, we think we have the same ideas. I'll send you the resolution right away."

It was the first day of August so we had a new President of the Security Council. It was the Rumanian, who was a good friend. He had never been the President before, he was barely into the Security Council. I said, "Would you please call a meeting of the Council right away? This is how you do it, you call the Secretariat and get a meeting."

By eleven I had picked up the resolution. We'd looked at it. I don't think we had any comments on it, maybe had a few. By midnight we started discussion and the debate. The principal problem was not that the Council didn't want to act—it is that a lot of people couldn't raise voices in their country to see whether they could get instructions or not. So by four o'clock or four-thirty in the morning we had enough people with instructions to get the resolution passed and it got going. That morning I went to bed and got awakened about six and it was Brent [Scowcroft]. He said could I come down to a meeting of the National Security Council that day. I said, "Sure, of course I'll be down." It was an interesting meeting.

At the meeting it was interesting because it was very clear that—Colin Powell was Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and General [Norman] Schwarzkopf was there and they briefed. The principal, indeed almost the exclusive preoccupation at that time was how do we prevent the Iraqis from invading Saudi Arabia. I said near the end of the meeting, "I think you've got another problem, that is, what are we going to do about Kuwait? The credibility of your foreign policy rests on your commitments to countries where we have close relationships and not seeing them overrun by somebody else. I think it's a very important question. You're going to have to reinforce Saudi Arabia anyway, but you should begin to think about that."

If anyone else commented. I didn't pick it up. The President then went out to Aspen and in Henry Catto's house met with Maggie Thatcher, and out of that came the answer on Kuwait, which I thought was very helpful at the time, in any event. But it was an interesting discussion.

Riley: So from your perspective the meeting with Thatcher was an important force to get—

Pickering: It was a very important meeting, yes, to put it in the broader perspective.

Riley: He didn't go wobbly?

Pickering: No, not at all. I think they understood the question. But it was enormously helpful that she carried that message as well. We went back to New York. From then on we followed the progression of events. It was early on my view that we should use the Security Council. We should not have in the foreseeable future a day when the Security Council isn't discussing Iraq. That once we complete a resolution we should in fact have follow-on actions to take further resolutions. That it was going to be successful as long as we could deal with the Security Council and the fact that it had these important responsibilities. The way to do that is to make it feel, for the moment at least, it is the most important club in the world.

The way to do that is to focus a lot of press attention, which was coming automatically anyway, on the Security Council and what it was going to do next. It was extremely important to keep the United States engaged in the Security Council, to in effect continue to move it and not let it wash away. It was a very important attribute for us, particularly if we had to go to the use of force to legitimate what we were doing because nobody had questioned in a sense either the authority of the Council or indeed the obligation of countries under the charter to treat seriously with Council decisions. Almost all of the decisions we made in connection with Iraq were under the mandatory provisions of the charter as they'd been interpreted. Every country was bound by the decisions we made.

As you know we ended up having 12 resolutions, then went on to the use of force. It's interesting because we quickly developed a pattern of dealing with resolutions. Essentially what would happen, perhaps even before one resolution was done I would talk principally with the British. They changed during that period, but a new British Ambassador came in, whom I'm still very close to, David Hannay. We would early on discuss, often on the phone, sometimes after discussion with our staffs, sometimes just on the basis of what's going on, where we ought to go next. It wasn't hard. We didn't have to confect a lot of things to go to next, because Saddam [Hussein] was the perfect opponent. He gave us problems that led to resolutions.

The next stage was that we would work, he with London, I with Washington. He'd often work with the French. Occasionally I would speak with the French too. They were not difficult to deal with on these questions. We would scope out a resolution text with the State Department and then the three of us in New York would pretty much agree what the text was.

About a year and a half before that, or two years before that, the former British Ambassador to New York, Crispin Tickell, led an effort to get the five permanent members of the Security Council to work more closely together. He had organized a set of meetings among the five permanent members of the Security Council to start to deal with negotiations on Cambodia and ending the fighting in Cambodia and introducing a UN peacekeeping force. That worked out fairly well because we had a lot of common interests. It then shifted over to Afghanistan, which was more divisive.

When I arrived in New York, we had several desultory conversations on Afghanistan, but the value of all of that was that the P5 were willing to meet. So we turned it, in Iraq, to a series of

operational sessions to negotiate resolutions. As soon as the three were satisfied with the resolution, we'd have a meeting of the five, and the five had a rotating chairmanship, so we'd work through whoever had that then. The Chinese and the Russians were usually willing to meet. We tried to brief them a little bit ahead of time as to where things were going so they weren't surprised.

Generally speaking, of the dozen resolutions we got their agreement fairly quickly. Sometimes we changed wording, sometimes we had to sit and explain what it was we were aiming at and why we were doing it that way. The Chinese were more quiescent, the Russians were quite seminal. We had a Russian deputy because the former Russian Ambassador had gone. The deputy was quite heroic. He did things I didn't expect he would do. Then the new Russian Ambassador came who was somebody I had actually known but he hadn't known me. I was a very junior officer and I worked on the test ban and he was the Russian principal deputy. But we got close.

Riley: Who was the deputy?

Pickering: [Edward] Lozansky. Then [Yuli] Vorontsov came. Vorontsov had spent a lot of time in Washington, knew Washington very well, had been deputy to [Anatoly] Dobrynin, who had been here for a long time. Vorontsov was fine to work with. He was a very senior guy, had spent a lot of time in Afghanistan, spent a lot of time dealing with questions as a Vice Foreign Minister. We were moving in that year toward the breakdown of communism and he saw a lot of that.

At that time Baker had a superb relationship with [Eduard] Shevardnadze too. So a lot of things that otherwise could have caused problems were smoothed over by that set of relationships. We didn't do all this work in New York by ourselves, but we did a lot of the detailed work and then we got a lot of reinforcement from the top. But we went through this process.

As soon as the five were agreed, we then set up a process, again at our instigation, where we had already briefed the elected members who were our friends and allies, what we called the non non-aligned. There are ten elected members and probably three or so were close to us, people like Canada and Belgium. So we knew that they were fine and we factored their thinking into the process. But we had to meet with the non-aligned seven or eight: India, Cuba, and others, Malaysia, Colombia, Venezuela were amongst them and several Africans—Ethiopia, Ivory Coast, and others.

Often I would meet with the Africans first. There were several French speakers. We would brief them in French as to what was going on and tell them about the next resolution and solicit their input, so they got special attention. Then we would have this next meeting with the text and we would use the informal meeting room of the Security Council. The UN would provide us with interpretation services if anybody needed it. We would lay out the resolution. I always insisted that four of the five permanent members come. It was always the Russians, never the Chinese. But the non-permanent knew that if four of us were there, that it was bought by the five. So it made it clear—we were all on board.

We would negotiate with them over text when we needed to. Then subsequently if they had to get approval in capitals we would negotiate changes in the text from capitals. But by the time that process was over, we knew we had them or we knew who was going to vote against. Usually by then I could count on 12 or 13 out of the 15 votes and sometimes more. So I was very confident at going ahead in the Security Council meeting and proposing the text formally and voting on it.

We had several hiccups. One was that we had two Iraqi tankers coming down the Persian Gulf and the Pentagon wanted to intercept them. They were in violation of their export rules, but we hadn't gotten a direct resolution on the subject. The Yemeni who was in the Council said they would accept them in Aden if they came in and lock them up there. So rather than us forget a resolution, we went ahead with the resolution and I said to Baker, I think through Kimmitt at the time, "I can get a resolution in 24 hours, but you've got to give me a little time, and it's not time for us to back out because we'll stop the whole process and we won't be able to recover it." They agreed and they fully supported it.

We got the resolution. I can remember I had one of the early small cell phones and I asked the Yemeni Ambassador what was he doing on this, where were his instructions. He said, "I have to talk to my Foreign Minister." I said, "Here's my phone, give him a call," which he did and got instructions, so it was helpful.

We had a second problem. It appeared as if we wanted in this resolution to be able to use naval vessels to intercept tankers and other Iraqi ships at sea in violation of the embargo. The Chinese were very concerned. They had a principled position; they wouldn't authorize the use of force. I talked to the Chinese Ambassador several times; we had good relations. I said to him, "You know, in the end, what you say about this can be very helpful to your position." We talked a little bit about it and we worked out a scheme where he would abstain. I said, "I don't have to have your vote, I just don't want your veto on this." He understood that. I said, "You can abstain on this resolution if you can't support it, but you can also explain, in your explanation of vote after the vote, that you don't believe this constitutes the use of force."

I said, "I'll arrange with the President of the Security Council," I forget who it was, but they were amenable, "that you speak last, and nobody will speak after you so nobody will say anything that is any different."

He said, "I think I can work that out with Beijing." He did and we worked it out. But it was interesting because it got him part way over the line on the use of force question in a kind of backhanded way in an early stage in the process.

There was a time when we brought in Kuwaitis who had left Kuwait after the Iraqi invasion and explained to the Council what the Iraqis were doing with respect to their treatment of Kuwaitis and all of the things that had happened, including basically arresting Kuwaitis and treating them harshly, emptying the national museum, taking the money and the airplanes and all of that stuff. That was extremely helpful to energize the Council onto the next steps.

We got down toward the end of November and it was very clear that the sanctions were not going to have the kind of instant miracle effect that everybody hoped, but most of us were

skeptical about anyway and we were working toward a use-of-force resolution. It was very clear that in New York, Ambassadors are not going to design methods to take their country to war without instructions. By then the President and Secretary Baker had been intensively involved in working up this resolution and Baker did a fantastic job; so did the President. They talked frequently on the phone with heads of state and Foreign Ministers of council members. Baker visited most capitals and talked to every Foreign Minister. He actually, to complete his rounds, saw the Cuban Foreign Minister in New York ahead of time. We had the Cubans on the Council then. We didn't move him, but his vote didn't make any difference for us. We weren't going to lose the resolution because we voted "no."

To pass the resolution on use of force at the end of November 1990, the U.S. decided to have the meeting at the level of the Foreign Ministers, so Baker came. The U.S. was President of the Council at the time and he took the chair as President of the Council for that particular meeting. We had an extremely good session. It passed easily. He was disappointed that the Yemenis didn't vote in favor of it. I was not surprised. Neither was he, but he told the Yemenis it would be very expensive; they weren't going to get U.S. assistance anymore. But at the same time, and quite a surprise to me, he proposed in the meeting that he would go to wherever he could to meet with the Iraqis to see if there could be a negotiating process.

In New York we did a few things, a few minor tweaks in the resolution to put it in form for UN practice and to avoid some minor kind of question, but essentially the resolution was very simple. It was very well drafted. We got it from Washington and it was an interesting resolution because it had two salient provisions. One was that the countries cooperating in liberating Kuwait, the coalition so-called, were authorized to use all necessary means to achieve the objective of expelling Iraq from Kuwait, which is what got all the attention. But it also authorized the coalition to deal with threats to peace and security in the region. This was put in obviously to guard against any recidivism or a return to the use of force on Iraq's part.

It was too bad that later on when we went into Iraq again we didn't use this. There were big debates about it. Some thought that the authorities had outlived its time. I think of course that Security Council resolutions live forever, so I had a different view.

Riley: Sure.

Pickering: But it was interesting that we had foreseen the possibility, included in that resolution.

Riley: Just to put a fine point on this, the argument about later is that there were sufficient grounds for doing something based in the violation of the previous UN resolutions.

Pickering: Yes.

Riley: Okay.

Pickering: On the other hand, we were unable to persuade some of the principal parties in 2003 that that was true. The value of the preexisting resolution was that they had to overturn it. We didn't have to get their vote. There is always a huge advantage in New York to having, in a sense, the resolution on your side already passed and in hand. So that was the principal value of the continuing application of the use of force resolution.

Riley: Okay.

Pickering: I think that there were a couple of other things that went on that followed. Essentially the strategy was to do the resolution, put a time/date in it, the 15th of January 1991. Then wait out and see whether in fact sanctions would work, meetings with Iraqis would work, and so on. Before the resolution was passed there was a big problem in Jerusalem, that Palestinians on the Temple Mount had thrown stones on people praying at the Western Wall. The Israelis had sent their police up on top and nine people had been shot. So there was an immediate effort, particularly on the part of Saddam, but also from the Arab community, to try to take all the heat off Iraq and bring the Arab-Israeli question into the Council.

With the combination of help from the Russians and others we held off holding a meeting of the Security Council until after about a week after we passed the use-of-force resolution, which got some bitterness, but as long as the Russians were prepared to support us in those days, and they did, I didn't ask for the support, they did it gratuitously. Maybe somebody else did, but I didn't have to. We were able to hold it off.

Then there were more problems in Lebanon. We had a follow-on resolution that Israel was involved in. I was extremely concerned that if we vetoed we would lose the Council and we might need the Council, even though it was then quiescent in Iraq, down the road. We negotiated over a very long and difficult text and we had to go back and use language Israel didn't like that had been used some years before in Jerusalem.

Israelis were unhappy. I went up to call on my old friends. I had been Ambassador to Israel before this, so I knew all this was coming, to call on the Conference of Presidents and explain to them exactly what we had done and why. It was a very interesting session. They were not happy, but in a sense they also understood what was at stake here, so that was an interesting point.

Also, at the same time, four of the non-aligned members of the Council—I think it was Malaysia, Yemen, Cuba, and Colombia, started a process of agitating for a negotiated solution with Iraq. There was no way we were going to oppose this in principle, but it was very clear there was deep concern that this particular set of negotiations might lead to a stalemate or to a situation in which Saddam would achieve gains at Kuwait's expense as a result of his invasion, which was certainly not in our interests at all or in anybody else's interest as far as we could see.

I talked frequently with people who were advising the gang of four about the process and where they were going. What stood very strongly on our side was that the previous resolutions—all 12 of them—of the Security Council defined the scope of agreement that had to be achieved. There was no way that members of the Security Council could negotiate away the resolutions of the Security Council even if they wanted to. So that was extremely important and that was very helpful.

The Secretary-General, who was then Javier Pérez de Cuéllar, felt that he had also to make an effort to see if, before conflict started, he had exerted all efforts to see whether there was a peaceful solution. Baker met with Tariq Aziz in Geneva. There was no move on the Iraqis' part; they were obdurate and deeply dug in and failed to exploit opportunities they might have to divide us or to divide the Council and move the question in their favor at least publicly.

At that time, since it was not apparent to me that there was any agreement on what the U.S. position should be if a negotiation started, I sat down with our policy planner in New York, Peter Fromuth, who worked for me and who was extremely helpful and had a lot of experience with the UN and through the UN association. Peter and I sat down and we put together what the U.S. position might be in any negotiation. Essentially it was based on several principles. We based it on Kissinger's proposals for Israeli redeployment from the Sinai in 1973, Iraq had to cede temporarily to UN territory 200 km north of the Saudi border until the line hit populated areas along the rivers. The line would run just outside the populated areas down to the Gulf, then that line had to be evacuated by all Iraqi military. Behind that line, using the Kissinger disengagement arrangements, there were to be zones of limited armament. We proposed this to Washington. Washington said they liked it. It never came up as a real possibility in the negotiating process because Iraq was not interested, but it was interesting, because after the air war was over and the ground war was over, I was frankly aghast that we were meeting with the Iraqis with no political presence at the table.

It was very clear, because I had talked to Bob Kimmitt, that nobody in Washington had any ideas about what to do. So I dusted off this proposal and said, "This is what our war termination demand should be, to create this zone, and these zones of limited armament." I talked to the British and the French in New York. It looked like we could get UN forces to do all the work on the ground.

It was entirely possible. There were a lot of UN forces on the ground, coalition forces. The U.S. wouldn't have to do that, but we would have to do the air part. Unfortunately it was rejected over at the Pentagon. It's too complicated, we can't do it, we don't have time, or it's going to keep us here too long. We all know that all of those were excuses and I think it was too bad because I think we could have avoided a lot of long-term future problems in Iraq had we been able to do that.

In essence, right at the same time, the French, because of Mme. [Danielle] Mitterrand's close relationship with the Kurds and her deep concern about what the Iraqis were doing with the Kurds, proposed a similar zone in northern Iraq in the area under Kurdish control more or less as a result of the fighting, and that became a part of a UNSC resolution. So we would have had in fact two zones rather than one and in the south been in touch with the Shi'a.

Riley: Why does that one work and the other one doesn't?

Pickering: That worked because the Kurds were already there. I believe the other one would have worked had we decided to push for it because most of the Iraqi military were north of the zone.

Riley: Right.

Pickering: They were dealing with the Shi'a revolt. It would have given us an extremely easy way to stay in touch with the Shi'a had we wanted to, for whatever purposes we wanted to make of that, and maybe would have prevented a large number of the Iraqi massacres of the Shi'a that took place during their effort to put down the Shi'a revolt.

I think that I should go back a little bit and say we had instructions to keep the Iraq subject out of the Security Council, which we did very ably while the war was going on. But two things happened at the end of the war—three things happened.

I think that all of us were a little doubtful about the timing of the end of the war. I think in retrospect, from what I know, if we had been able to wait for a day or so more, we probably would have been able to disarm significant additional amounts of several Revolutionary Guard divisions that were moving out of the Basra area and to the north and got away from us as we stood still at the end of the war.

Riley: But you say the question of timing was our decision to stop the hostilities.

Pickering: Yes, and it was in large measure influenced I think through all the publicity about the “Road of Death” and those kinds of things. The President obviously felt very much the pressure.

Riley: Sure.

Pickering: I’ve never talked to him about it, but it would seem to me that in the end we might have been able to do that a little better. I think we also made a mistake, purely accidentally, in giving permission for the Iraqis to use helicopters. I think we thought we were giving permission to use the helicopters to fly in and out of the air base to have further discussions about war termination. But they took it as having permission to use helicopters anywhere over Iraq. That was another difficult problem.

At the same time that these conversations started, the night the war stopped, I again talked to Bob Kimmitt and said to Bob, “I think we need another channel to the Iraqis. I have worked with [Abdul Amir] al-Anbari up here in the past. We know he has good access: people read his cables in Baghdad, obviously. Can you authorize me to start talking to al-Anbari so we get the channel open? He called me back in about 15 minutes and said, “Yes, let’s go ahead.”

Riley: Okay.

Pickering: So I did. I called him and he said, “I’ve been waiting to hear from you for a long time.” I said, “I want to come up.” So I went uptown and visited him at his residence. I said, “We want to establish this channel to you. We think it’s a very important one. We’ll be delivering a lot of messages. I have nothing for you now, but we’ll keep it open.” We kept it open for about four months. We delivered some very tough messages and we got some very rapid and positive responses. It was very clear that they were feeling the pressure and would do what we said. We brought the French and the British into it from time to time so we could deliver joint messages, but it was a very useful way to communicate with the Iraqis in a more direct fashion on the political stuff that had to go on.

The most interesting thing we did at the end of the war was to, in fact, put together in New York, Washington, London, Paris, a resolution on war termination, the first time it had ever been done. It was a long and very complicated resolution. Washington had some very useful ideas. I was most disappointed that they in effect didn’t go for a much larger UN zone as I had proposed inside Iraq, which we could have. So we went for a very small one. But we set up a Compensation Commission to pay for the war damages. We spent a lot of time, and the first time

we mandated in effect nuclear disarmament and an inspection mechanism inside Iraq that played a very important role for a long time in the future.

We of course required the return of prisoners and Iraqi and Kuwait property and all of those kinds of things, so it was very extensive. We spent a lot of time working it and thinking it out. We took it through our regular resolution process and passed it.

During the period leading up to the use of force there were a few occasions where in the negotiation of resolutions and sometimes on the attendant question of dealing with Israel, there were problems between New York and Washington. Essentially I had a suspicion between myself and John, although he never got on the phone. In the end when there was a serious problem what I did was—that's when I was working closely with Secretary Baker. I'd call Secretary Baker and I'd say, "Here's where we are, here's the problem, here are the differences that I see. I can get you, I think, to here." He would say, "You've got to go further," or, "I can take something like that, see what you can do."

We would do that and I would say, "Okay, I've got this far and I think I can go a little more." He would say yes or no or, "See what you can do." We worked it out pretty quickly. He was always available on the phone. There was no question at all. I phoned him as little as possible because he had plenty else to do, but when I did he knew that I had something serious and he was always very helpful and very understanding. I told him where the problems were. But essentially they were more often with us than they were with the other members of the Council. They had a view that was pretty much unified and I knew what it was. I had to find a clever way to get there. Often we would figure out ways to do that and he was very helpful on doing those kinds of things. So I think that that takes you more or less—more than you wanted to hear—

Riley: No, no.

Pickering: —through basically the pieces that we were engaged in. Then subsequently, and for the rest of my time there, and I stayed until May of 1992, we dealt with the operations of UNSCOM [United Nations Special Commission on Iraq], the inspection mechanism, and when the Iraqis were pushing, I felt very comfortable in telling the UNSCOM people that we were fully behind them, that we would, in fact, do all that we could possibly do to make sure that it was working out, and we used the channel with the Iraqis to reinforce that.

Generally speaking, they were responsive in a pinch but then continued to find new ways to throw roadblocks in, so it went on that way, cat and mouse, for a long time. But as long as I was there, and I think part of the time for my successor, we were able pretty much to push that on. I came back to all of this in the [William J.] Clinton administration when I was Under Secretary, so I got thrown back into the same stew. But it worked reasonably well.

A final couple of pieces and then why don't we go to your questions. At the same time, with the great success in the Security Council, the major point of it was, domestically, that the President was able to get the reluctant Democrats in the Senate to vote for the resolution on authorizing U.S. force in large measure because we had the 12 resolutions in the Security Council. So it turned out that my premonition about the value of the Security Council without actually knowing how it would be worked, but the sense that it would add a significant amount of legitimacy to

where we were, and that we had an extremely strong case to deal with, made that particular process very useful.

Riley: Were you engaged or drawn into that process at the beginning?

Pickering: No, because it was purely Washington and the Senate, although at the end it was very heavily related to what we had done. There had been a lot of publicity about this, obviously people knew it. I think the Democrats in the Senate were very chary about going to war, probably when they shouldn't have been; they should have been in 2003 but were looking around for what they could point to that would give it a sense of legitimacy. I think that for the first time we had the international community leading on this with our obvious efforts to push them in that direction rather than the other way around. I think 2003 was unfortunately the reverse of that, so there were differences. But there were clear differences in 2003. In 1990 Iraq invaded Kuwait. In 2003 that was not present.

Riley: Okay.

Pickering: I would say finally that we spent a lot of time after that on the former Yugoslavia and Somalia. To some extent the Council was led to overreach in those periods because we had neither the clear-cut enemy (Saddam)—we had instead a very messy and complex internal political situation which was hard to deal with, not easy to fathom. I can remember saying to Washington we should vote for a small UN presence in the former Yugoslavia because it would be a travesty not to use our efforts to prevent humanitarian damage. Similarly in Somalia. But I said, “We don’t have a clear idea of what it is we want as the way of an objective,” and we never did. Without that, obviously our presence and our authorization for that kind of presence on the UN side was going to be very difficult without a clear endgame. We had a clear endgame in the Iraq situation, for the Iraqis to get out of Kuwait.

Riley: In the Somalia case were you getting pressure from Washington to help them think this through?

Pickering: Yes, I think that in Washington it was a fear that if we let the travesty continue where there was in effect a very damaging, multifaceted, multi-player civil war going on—we in effect put in a lot of UN forces and then they got into trouble so we went in. By then I was in India.

Riley: I’ve got all kinds of random things.

Pickering: How are we doing on time? I talk fast. There’s an enormous amount.

Riley: There’s going to be a 60-page transcript before the question gets in. You had said that a lot of your conversations had been with Secretary Baker during the Iraq interval.

Pickering: Not a lot, some.

Riley: Is the President contacting you at critical points in time here?

Pickering: No, I went down several times and I could remember he had meetings. Once or twice I would go in a little early and sit and talk with him and tell him what was going on, where we

were, and talk a little bit about where he thought things ought to go. So I had some context, but not huge. He was an enormously busy guy.

Riley: Of course. Scowcroft?

Pickering: Brent yes, and on the phone. We did some things on prisoners, American hostages, and things like that that I was generally aware of.

Riley: Did you have any comments about the President's working relationship with these other critical members of the team?

Pickering: No. I went to meetings. I thought the working relationship with Brent and with Secretary Baker was very close. I thought it was a strong team. I used to see Richard Haass from time to time about various pieces. I talked to Colin Powell about things. I thought it was a strong team. I didn't get the notion that there were fissures and fractures and things going on.

I had a very interesting conversation in September of 1990 with Colin. I went to see him, as I often did. I saw him three or four times and said, "This is what is going on. This is where we are." I said, "You know, Colin, a few years ago I did a long trip and I went to Oman and then drove back and I camped out in the desert west of Kuwait and in northern Saudi Arabia off the Tapline road. That area is very trafficable." And I said, "Have you ever thought of going around that way?" It's almost too much. He said, "We looked at it, it's logistically too hard." [*laughter*] It was interesting.

Riley: So that was your sole—

Pickering: Strategic contribution.

Riley: I did want to ask you too about your perceptions. You're dealing with an awful lot of people who do not have the diplomatic experience that you have.

Pickering: The idea was the President understood this intrinsically. I never tried to call him or anything, but if I ever needed help, I thought I had a listening ear and a strong—and I think that Secretary Baker understood this too, and so did Bob Kimmitt. I worked principally through Bob, occasionally with the Secretary directly on things. But I think they understood what this could produce.

Riley: I guess my broader question was about the perceptiveness of the foreign-policy making community of what was going on in the Middle East generally and Iraq in particular. You had spent a fair amount of your career focusing on this. Did you get the sense that we had blind spots there, biases that were in some ways skewing our decision making or our ability to act?

Pickering: Not too much. I thought that Brent had had long experience. Baker had less, but he was an inordinately strong political analyst, had a very good sense of balance, and he had seen some of this in the White House and that the President was very balanced. Richard Haass, with whom I dealt with frequently, certainly knew the area well. I didn't think there were a lot of misconceptions. Dennis [Ross], who was working on Arab-Israeli stuff—Dennis wanted to be very careful that we didn't shift the locus of negotiations to the Security Council and I had no

interest in doing that. He knew that. I worked very closely with Dennis on resolution texts wherever they became a problem so we didn't step on his process, where it was going. It wasn't going anywhere either.

I think everybody had skepticism in the Security Council purely for the sanctions exercise could produce risk. I did too. But I said you've got to go through that in order to get to where you're going; you have to exhaust the other remedies. It was quite remarkable in retrospect that we were able to move quickly to the use of force, although the prospective date was very helpful in giving people the sense that we weren't trying to push it down their throat, we were giving breathing space to work. We had what the British call a "wheeze," an explanation, that didn't hold much water for me, but I think some people accepted it that we couldn't fight in Kuwait in the summer. Of course we've learned that that's not a block at all.

Riley: Right.

Pickering: But that was out there. I think that had to do in part with our not wanting to be endlessly bogged down waiting while we built up the military with some longer, expensive process before we got engaged, quite rightly so. We didn't want him to be able to reinforce or to strengthen Saddam's position politically while we were waiting for the sanctions process, and it was pretty clear we were dealing with a very determined guy. From that prospect it didn't look like he was going to move for sanctions.

Riley: Let me ask you another general question about the entire period, and that is, at least in the secondary accounts, and I guess this is true even in the principal accounts, Baker's and the President's and Scowcroft's, there is a lot of discussion in Washington at the time about taking effectively unilateral action under the appropriate provisions of UN governance. Did you—how—

Pickering: Well, I said that on a number of occasions, but principally on the tanker question, there were points made to me that the Pentagon didn't want to wait any longer. It was put on their back; I don't know whether it was entirely theirs or not. They wanted to get going. I said, "You know, you're going to in effect lose the prospect of what the Security Council can offer, and I think I can deliver something to you in a fairly short period, 24 to 48 hours." We were able to do it. So that helped us; that helped in the process.

They understood that dealing in the Security Council and keeping it together was part of a process that we had to engage in, particularly as we were building up. It was also true that their own timing for the use of force, which I had nothing to do with—that was their problem and their issue and their decision—put us in a position to be able to use the Security Council effectively as a way of continuing to keep both public attention and pressure, whatever it was worth, on Iraq while that was going ahead, and it was running out the clock on sanctions as part of the process of going ahead. So I said it had all the advantages and none of the disadvantages.

Since we were not in a physical position to move—as you remember we did an additional reinforcement later on because we felt we had to get a more preponderant element of force on the ground at the time. All of that made the play on the diplomatic side useful, in some cases even productive.

Riley: But you never felt you were at risk of losing the President—

Pickering: I never felt I was at risk of losing the President. I felt that there was enough—I didn't get a lot of reflection of this, but I got some of it—of a unilateralist impulse at this stage. I think in part it may have been still some of the right—why are we fooling around with the UN—

Riley: Right.

Pickering: And it may well have been the military. Are we going to have forever to, in effect, have our actions determined by this international body? Both were terrible misreadings of the reality, in my view, and misjudgments in an analytical sense of what we were after.

Riley: Dick Cheney's role in all of this?

Pickering: I observed it off and on from time to time and he was in a sense the consummate Secretary of Defense, at a couple of times very early on when we had fears that the Saudis were not going to be with us or fall off the wagon or not be helpful, or not become the host nation for a large force, he went over and I thought dealt with those difficulties very well from what I could see from the distance. I never felt there was any serious pressure or pullback. This was a very collegial bunch.

Riley: Sure.

Pickering: From my perspective; I spent my time in New York. I went down to a few meetings, but—

Riley: But you're obviously patched in very closely.

Pickering: Sure. People would tell me what was going on or where they wanted to go. In a sense I felt very happy operating on my own in many ways because I thought I knew what the brief was and where to go and where we're moving. We consistently told Washington where we were headed. But we often did that on the basis of saying, "This train has started."

Riley: Right, and again, to revisit our earlier question, you never felt like you were being micro-managed out of Washington.

Pickering: I felt a lot of people wanted to and occasionally we got advice and instruction; almost all of it was helpful. Occasionally it wouldn't be, but we would then figure out okay, we can't get there from here that way, how about doing it this way? Then I'd been around a lot. You know how to work with Washington.

Riley: Those communications, were they coming to you through an authorized channel, or is there a lot of ex-parte communication, people talking—

Pickering: Both. Often it would come from—I had a lot of conversations with John Wolf, who was John Bolton's deputy, about things. John would get on the phone, put poor John Wolf on, and talk to John about it and that kind of thing. Frankly if I had problems there I'd go to Bob Kimmitt or to the Secretary if I needed to.

Riley: In the region, was Israel a problem for you to deal with, or an issue for somebody else to deal with?

Pickering: It was only a problem when in fact the set of events allowed Saddam Hussein to seek to change the objective of the UN from dealing with Kuwait, and his invasion of Kuwait, to what he increasingly tried to portray was the first step on the road to liberating Jerusalem, which was a very poor kind of effort on his part. Nobody ever really jumped on board this seriously, but there was a problem of verisimilitude when we got into a difficulty with Israel sufficient that Arabs were killed and we had to deal with that.

Riley: Barbara, do you have any questions you want to pursue on this?

Perry: I have a question about Secretary Baker's speech or statement that began with a Haile Selassie quote from 1936 because it seems to be so along the lines that you are expressing to us, not only about the need to free Kuwait on a moral basis, but the need to have a strong international rule of law through the United Nations. Did you have any contributions to that speech?

Pickering: No, only indirectly that it was inspired by a statement that had been made by the Ethiopians some time before in which he said quite movingly in the Council what we're doing is exactly the opposite of what was done to us by the League of Nations Council when the Italians invaded in 1936. He said, "This is where we ought to be and this is important to us, and it makes a great deal of sense." This was of course the regime of Haile Mengistu, which was not, in my view, an ideal regime in Ethiopia either. But everything falls into its own bracket. *[laughter]*

Perry: He didn't raise the Eritrea issue.

Pickering: No, they owned Eritrea at the time.

Perry: So you had passed that on, had you, to—

Pickering: Well, we always report speeches and we singled this one out as I remember, the reporting being a very effective, helpful, defense.

Perry: It was a very moving opening.

Pickering: A moving opening from his point of view, but it keyed right off what the Ethiopians themselves had been saying, so it was very helpful.

Riley: There was a fundraising effort internationally to support the cost of the military intervention. Were you at all involved?

Pickering: Happily no.

Riley: Worth asking.

Pickering: All the people he was raising money from I was trying to get to vote; he was too. So he had a double burden.

Riley: But there was no direct coordination then between—

Pickering: No, we had—

Riley: Was Larry Eagleburger there?

Pickering: Larry must have been doing a lot of that, and of course Larry went to Israel to assure them that the missiles weren't going to hit them hard. If they came they were not going to be lethal. No, we had several sessions with the Kuwaitis and with friends of the Kuwaitis on their own publicity. They had hired a public relations firm. We talked over how to push these questions into the Council in a kind of show-and-tell session in the Council and we worked very closely with them on those kinds of things. The Kuwaiti Ambassador was smart and capable. The Kuwaiti Foreign Minister, who is now the Emir, Sheikh [Jabir al-] Sabah, would come fairly frequently and we'd have sessions with him as he would in Washington. But I think the New York piece was pretty seamless and a lot of these things went through.

Riley: I want to, if I can, step back from this, because I do want to be mindful of the clock, and ask you a kind of global question. I have a number of specifics here. We may just go through some of these and riff on whatever we want to pick up.

You're in New York at historically a very important period of time, basically the Cold War; if it's not ending it's very close to ending. I'm wondering what that looks like from your perch in New York as the U.S. Ambassador there, if you could reflect a little bit on the importance of that. In the instant case, I think it has got to be very important.

Pickering: If you take the conversation now and take it up another 10,000 feet.

Riley: Yes.

Pickering: My feeling was that we had a chance for the first time, perhaps in its entire existence, to use the Security Council the way it was designed to be used. We I think in general achieved that, which was unusual. Some of that was aided by what one saw was a shifting Soviet position. There was no question at all that [Mikhail] Gorbachev, Shevardnadze, saw these as opportunities to cooperate together to achieve a common objective, and they had very little brief for the Iraqis, at that time for Saddam. So they weren't doing in a major point of Soviet foreign policy despite the fact that off and on through the Soviet years they had a much closer relationship with Saddam than we had ever had, particularly at the time of the Iraq-Iranian war.

In that sense we couldn't have done it had they opposed it. They were clearly not of a mind to oppose it, and indeed I was surprised as the process went along that they were in general quite prepared to come along with what we wanted to do, not just in general but in detail. Some of that obviously had been—we discussed with them so they were aware of it. Some of it they had to take home as we went ahead with dealing with the presses, but they usually came back pretty clearly as to what they wanted to do and where.

I can remember a side issue, and I think at this time it may have been in '91, but it was not unrelated to the change, probably in '91. We wanted to bring in the U.S. Trust Territories as UN members, except Northern Marianas, which had already gotten commonwealth status as part of

the U.S. So we were pursuing that in the Security Council. I think it was the Russians who said, “Oh, we have huge problems. This is going to add to the legitimacy of the potential change in our country.”

So we said, “It has nothing to do with it. These places were never part of the United States and they have no intention of doing so.” But they were very afraid of that. Of course I was there the whole time and all of the constituent republics, the Baltics and then the others came in as full members of the United Nations.

The other interesting thing in the Cold War was that by Christmas of 1991 it became clear that the Soviet Union was going to go through major changes. We had the August problem, Gorbachev was marginalized, [Boris] Yeltsin was in power, and sooner rather than later, probably before the end of the year, communism would disappear and Yeltsin would in effect give the constituent republics his blessing for their independence. I talked to Vorontsov a couple of times and I said, “You know, Yuli, there’s no inclination on the part of the United States to see you move off the Council. You should stay as Russia and I’ll bring up a lawyer from Washington to sit with you over this period to work with you to see how and in what way we do the transformation with the Secretariat.”

I think everybody in the Council was agreed. We were not trying to take advantage in some malign way and we don’t know who we would have put in as a permanent member anyway, and fooling around with permanent member status has its own difficulties as we know. So it fit very well. And we did it up and essentially what happened was—

Riley: Do you remember who the lawyer was?

Pickering: I forget who it was. The Security Council went on vacation on the 23rd or 24th of December with the Soviet Union, and when we came back after the first of January the seats were all rearranged in new alphabetical order with Russia. *[laughter]* We were all very comfortable. So it was kind of done in the dark of night.

Riley: Wonderfully, metaphorically rich.

Pickering: It sure is. It was very interesting.

Perry: Were you bowled over? You saw it coming, but even so, you had spent your whole career with this one paradigm, and talk about a paradigm shift—

Pickering: Well, it was, but it was clear that things were changing. My first month in New York we had no meetings of the Security Council. Then suddenly, because of this event, we were thrown into the midst of things that were much more serious.

The other stuff we did was we approved the prolongation of peacekeeping operations and other things. But if you look at the whole—there were some resolutions. We had a very nasty debate on the Middle East at one point, but it didn’t go anywhere. We dealt with Panama as you noted. We dealt with a Cuban ship that was picked up for narcotics trading and stuff like that, but nothing that you and I would consider to be first-order issues. Panama probably got close to that.

Riley: Yes, I wanted to ask you about that. In some of the retrospectives you look at there is a return to emphasizing Panama as critical to the development of states of mind that are important later on, particularly in the George W. Bush administration. I don't know whether it is—I wouldn't necessarily say it was seminal in the rise of neo-conservatism, but there is an argument to be made that it was—

Pickering: Well, there was Panama and Grenada—

Riley: Right.

Pickering: Both added to the notion that a military force can be used to solve diplomatic problems in a much more efficient and effective way, and that was the paradigm.

Riley: Right.

Pickering: I think that that has proven to be disastrously bad in two ways. One, you didn't use diplomacy in the lead-up and you didn't use the potential effectiveness of military force to buttress diplomacy to avoid conflict. Then after you have a conflict, particularly on a very broad basis, you have all the picking up the pieces to do, the so-called "nation building" and the messes to deal with. So I think that we should have been certainly much more alert to that when we had Bosnia and then in the Clinton administration, Kosovo, Somalia, and Congo, which has been an interminable problem in terms of the attempt to use military force as peacekeeping and then enforce peacekeeping and then local failures for all kinds of reasons. It gets to be an interminable and impossible kind of operation. It was reversing peacekeeping in the sense that you had no peace to keep and you had no effective way of using military force in the jungles of eastern Congo to make sure that it was going to take place.

Riley: But how did Panama present itself to you? Did you have—

Pickering: Panama presented itself as an operation we were going to undertake because we had decided that in the end that [Manuel] Noriega and his administration were going to be negative influences for the long term, particularly with respect to the Canal and with other activities. I was on for the rollercoaster ride because I had no control over what we were doing or where we were going, but in essence it got into the Council.

The Cubans brought it in. It was very interesting that the Cubans were President of the Council and took themselves out of the seat so the Yemenis took over; Democratic Yemen was right after Cuba. In fact a Yemeni was President of the Council three times that year. He was President in place of Cuba and then his turn was next as Democratic Yemen, and then they united with Yemen so he came in under Y at the end of the year. *[laughter]* So he was Mr. President forever. But it was very interesting because the atmosphere was Cold War-ish. The Cubans were working it very hard. There was no question at all that we had a lot of sympathy.

In the end it was very interesting because when they took the vote, whoever was President of the Council, and I forget who it was, misspoke on the basis of a note from the UN saying, "Owing to the negative vote of a permanent member," which was me, "to the condemnatory resolution, it has failed to pass." The truth was, and we corrected it immediately, it didn't get enough votes, so

my negative vote was not a veto but only one of a number of opposing votes. I had a real moral victory.

Riley: Was there any residue from that?

Pickering: Not much.

Riley: So to speak in New York?

Pickering: No, the Cuban thing is interesting. In '89 when I went there it was clear the Cubans were headed for a successful vote for their quest for a seat in the Security Council. There was not any way we were going to block them. They had a very successful black Cuban Ambassador, Oscar Romero, and I just took it upon myself, nobody said don't do it, to talk to him and spend some time with him. He was a congenial guy, an interesting guy, and we talked quite a bit, mostly after they were elected.

Then the Cubans, in my view, made a fundamental mistake. He had been very effective. It was clear how effective he was when I talked to him, particularly with Africans, with other nonaligned, and was what everyone could say was a rational, logical gentleman. They took him out and they brought my friend Ricardo [Alarcon], who had been in New York before, was a white man. He currently runs the Cuban parliament, notably a Cold War zealot type. So Ricardo came on the Council and of course Panama was grist for the mill.

Riley: Sure.

Pickering: But we worked our way through that, then we had the errant—we caught a Cuban ship carrying narcotics or something and took it away, and he was upset by that. We didn't get anywhere. But I used in the informal meetings of the Council—because we would discuss issues pretty broadly, any time that there was something Ricardo said in a conversation that I could agree with, I would say in Spanish, in the informal meeting, “Another example of Cuban-American agreement.” *[laughter]*

As a result, I think everybody knew I was pulling his leg a little, but it was true. There were things—I wouldn't say it for things that I couldn't agree with, but it kind of diffused the thing. It was then clear that you couldn't use essentially polemic in the informal meetings of the Council. People talk fairly straight; you could use humor but you couldn't use polemic. So it kind of diffused the effectiveness of the Cubans. They voted essentially for six of the twelve resolutions in Iraq.

Riley: Was it your sense that in some respects the U.S. position on Cuba had become anachronistic by the time you were in New York?

Pickering: It was as anachronistic as it is now. That never stopped. The U.S. just didn't want to deal with it. And you know, every once in a while there is going to be a calamity. We had Cuba, we had Yemen, Malaysia sometimes was difficult to deal with, but you could do it. Actually, the Yemeni was quite helpful. During that period I negotiated with him the resumption of relations with South Yemen and then within six weeks Yemen was united, so it all went for naught. Shows you how smart we were. But he was a good guy and easy to work with.

Riley: The dues issue was on its way to being resolved?

Pickering: No, we had paid up enough so that it wasn't a big hangover question. I think President Bush worked hard to do that. So we were not in egregious arrears the way we ended up being when poor Dick Holbrooke had to go and try to move the whole world off its axis to get it done.

Riley: But that was not something you were deeply involved with?

Pickering: Only peripherally. People would complain every once in a while. We had reservations in the dues issues. We wouldn't pay for support to the PLO [Palestine Liberation Organization] or other liberation organizations. We wouldn't pay money that was equivalent to what the UN paid to top up American salaries so that Americans in effect would end up not having to pay effectively taxes on their salaries, those kinds of things. We had a few of those kinds of reserves. Everybody understood that, that was never a serious issue.

Riley: I'm just going to go down—

Perry: Haiti—the elections and then the coup.

Pickering: Well, the most we had was, we had [Jean-Bertrand] Aristide up. I had talked to him beforehand. He was extremely nervous. He gave a good speech and that was our introduction to the issue and I don't think it ever hung on very long. If I had known then what I know about Aristide now, it would have been—

Riley: That's curious, because the interviews for the Clinton project that we've been doing, you get much more there.

Pickering: It was the beginning; it was the end of [Francois Duvalier] Papa Doc, [Jean-Claude Duvalier] Baby Doc era. We thought things were going to work out and Aristide looked okay. It would be fine. What former priest can be all bad?

Perry: We won't go there. We won't answer that question.

Riley: There was a moment when [J. Danforth] Dan Quayle was pressing for a resolution on Zionism and—

Perry: Racism, repeal—

Pickering: It took a lot of our time, yes.

Riley: How did that come to you and—

Pickering: It was very clear when I went up that this was something that by all rights we should deal with and there was no question at all that it had huge bipartisan support. I had been Ambassador in Israel, so it wasn't a mystery to me. [Daniel Patrick] Moynihan had been chagrined that it happened on his watch. So there was a lot of work on it.

There were a lot of people who claimed to be the fathers of repeal. I don't. On the other hand, I did a lot of work on it like a lot of other people. Much help from Washington. I think it was a joint effort. But essentially what we did in New York was to work with delegations, and we helped with Washington to put together the text. There had never been a UNGA resolution repealed. We put together the text and checked with everybody. Then we quickly decided in New York that our strategy had to be we would not introduce the resolution until we had enough co-sponsors to win, because we weren't going to go through another crisis, and the way to do that was to do that. That was the obvious tactic, and we did and we worked on that. When we got it to that point to introduce I went to the Arabs whom I had known. A lot of them were old friends.

I said you can take two tacks here. We can have a long, messy, nasty, unhappy debate, or, in effect, you can shut up and I'll do my best with the U.S. side that we'll be responsible and talk about this in a way that isn't invidious or nasty and I'll do my best with [Benjamin] Netanyahu, with Bibi, with whom I know to do that. So they said, "Fine, but we can't control Sudan or Libya." I said okay. So in effect we had this deal on the debate. They were, I think, in the main responsible, so we had a debate that was not deleterious and divisive in the end and it came at a time when we didn't want the UN to be pulling itself apart over this kind of issue.

Larry Eagleburger came up and I think Larry spoke if I'm not mistaken. It was very good. It was a solid speech, and we told him what we were doing. I think Netanyahu was reasonably good, which was surprising, because he's not often—

I wrote a letter to President [Chaim] Herzog, who had been the UN Ambassador when the resolution was passed and who publicly tore it up. I sent him a copy of the resolution and I said, "This one's not for tearing."

Riley: Do you know how this became associated with Vice President Quayle in the press?

Pickering: Everybody likes to claim a winner, I guess.

Riley: Oh, well.

Pickering: I wasn't in Washington at the time. John Bolton likes to believe he was the author of this success, and of course every success has lots of fathers.

Perry: Defeat is an orphan.

Riley: The Canadians were giving you trouble at one point on Iraq?

Pickering: No, I was out at Aspen for the strategy seminar in a week in August and this thing started. Alex was running the show. It was at a time when the U.S. was in one of its foot-dragging modes. I think it was more severe then. Alex called me and I said, "Okay, I'm on my way back and we'll work with it." The Canadians were upset that we were going to duck out. I think that may have given more rise to that. When we came back we told the Canadians, "No, we're staying, of course. Don't worry." But it was Yves Fortier, who was the Canadian. He gave a speech that said Americans can't duck out, or whatever it was. I said, "We have no intention, Yves."

Riley: [Nelson] Mandela is released in 1990. Is there a story?

Pickering: Came to New York, yes. We didn't have a lot to do with that, but we had a lot to do with Namibia. Namibia blew up in my first couple of months there.

Riley: Tell us about that.

Pickering: It was just a question that everybody put things together. The real problem was that neither the South Africans nor the SWAPO [South West African People's Organization] entirely abided by the letter of the law or the rules of the deal but we got through it, and I think in part it was because we were all prepared to weigh in at various times and people were prepared to ignore nonegregious but not insignificant lapses in what they were supposed to do. Then Martti Ahtisaari went out and I think added a note of stability and good sense. So in a sense it went from a war to controversy over how to get out of the war and set things up to a situation where that then became minimized by activity on the ground with a strong UN guide to supervise it and with a military presence and with people doing eventually what they were supposed to have done at the beginning.

Riley: Okay.

Pickering: Anyway, that's encompassing a lot of headaches and messiness and stuff, but that was the progression.

Riley: I've got you. I'm trying to recall my chronology. You leave the UN—

Pickering: May of '92.

Riley: And what were the circumstances surrounding your—

Pickering: Very interesting. There appeared one day in probably January or February in the *Washington Post* unbeknownst to me or anybody else that I knew a dope story I was leaving. [laughter]

Riley: And you'd been around long enough to know.

Pickering: Sure. I said, "Fine, that's what Washington wants to do. Nobody owes me a job, I don't have a hammerlock on a job." I thought I was doing a good job. Not everybody said so. There was a lot of negative press in New York about this. So I called Larry and Larry said come on down. He said they'd like to have me go to India and I said fine, I'd always wanted to go to India. India was perfectly okay. But it was very clear—it was combination, I still don't understand all of the insides of this. There was a certain amount of attention paid to the fact that I got a lot of publicity, but that all had been a year before. As I had said to folks, I need publicity to get my job done—which I did, I had most to tell the UN folks where we were going and what we were doing, but also to deal with the international community.

I think it helped to solidify stuff. But it helped as well that people on the Security Council had a clear idea of where we were going, but the rest of the UN folks were sitting on the side watching the Security Council. In any event there was, I think, some concern about that. I don't doubt that

John Bolton was unhappy, but I never asked him. In the end it all worked out. I went to India, stayed there nine months, and then went to Russia.

Riley: Right.

Pickering: As I said, the United States doesn't owe particular Foreign Service officers jobs. If they want to make a change they make a change. I've been around long enough to know that that was the case.

I think that the publicity—in my view was enormously pleasant to me, not, unfortunately, very pleasant to the folks in Washington. I didn't talk to the press about leaving. When asked, I said that Washington makes its decisions and that's what we do.

Riley: Do you feel you had reasonably good press relations through most of your tenure in New York?

Pickering: Yes. You can see some of the press stuff. Occasionally people would snipe a little bit. You can't avoid that. But I thought, no, great press relations. I had a very good senior USIS [United States Information Services] officer who had good relations. I saw the press frequently. I thought it was part of my job.

Riley: Okay, so that wasn't a piece of it that you were averse to?

Pickering: No, I think it was the Washington reaction to my press relations. Maybe I should have had worse press relations.

Riley: Or just manage a lower profile. Is that something that a UN Ambassador has to make a conscious decision on?

Pickering: Of course. After the Iraq stuff was over I don't think my profile was particularly—

Riley: No, I wouldn't have thought so. I would have thought—almost impossible for you to—

Pickering: Partly it was impossible to escape and partly it was part of getting the job done in New York. I'll defend that, if at any point people want to discuss—and I don't know why they waited so long, that was the problem. It was fine with me. I enjoyed New York, it was a great assignment, and I was there at a time when, perhaps, it was as interesting as any place I've ever been.

Riley: Of course. Was there anything that happened about the time—

Pickering: Well, in India.

Riley: In India.

Pickering: Yes. I was nine months in India, but it was very clear very quickly that in India, particularly a group of Congress Party people, were trying to move India ahead economically and trying to get rid of some of the old barnacles and restrictions. Preeminent among them was

the Finance Minister, Manmohan Singh, who is currently Prime Minister. [P.] Chidambaram, who is now Home Affairs Minister, was Minister of Commerce and he later became Minister of Finance in the Manmohan Singh government, and Montek Singh Ahluwalia, who was the Finance Secretary who is now effectively head of the Indian Planning Commission, which is a very important, influential body.

To work with those guys, talk to them, and see where they were going was very interesting. We began very slowly to have military relations on a more formal basis than currently anything that existed previously. It's much more open. But one could see the beginnings of a change. While India, I used to say, is always at the back of every American globe, it was a very interesting time to be there and in part, unlike some other posts, you had relative freedom as an Ambassador to pick and choose what you wanted to do, where you wanted to go, and how you wanted to organize things, which was extremely interesting. India was fascinating, an interesting place to travel, a fairly different culture in many ways.

I got to know and meet and talk to and work with a lot of very interesting people. I still have great contacts in India. I go there often. In nine months in India I had many more contacts, and many more—put it this way—social connections than I ever did in three and a half years in Russia.

Riley: Interesting.

Perry: Just a different culture.

Pickering: Very different. My wife and I both liked India. We were very sorry to leave.

Riley: How did that happen?

Pickering: It was very interesting. That was of course the new administration and I was very happy to be in India, wasn't rocking any boats in Washington to change and suddenly, somewhere along the line, after the administration came in, Peter Tarnoff, who was then Under Secretary, called me at three o'clock in the morning in India, barely awake, and he said, "How would you like to go to FSU?" We had a program of sending diplomats to universities.

I said, "Peter, why the hell would I want to go to Florida State University? I love it here, unless you want to get rid of me, and if you want to get rid of me, I'm gone, not to Florida State." He said, "No, no, no, you don't understand." I said, "Well, what is it, Peter?" He said, "The former Soviet Union." I said, "Sure, Peter, I can't refuse that."

Riley: And you'd known Peter?

Pickering: I'd known Peter off and on for years.

Riley: Had you had concern before then that your greater visibility, shall we say, in the Bush administration would have impaired your ability to take on high-profile assignments for a Democratic President?

Pickering: No, I don't think so. As you know, I was—some people say the second, but I was the third. There was Charlie Yost, who was Foreign Service, Don McHenry, who had I think left the Foreign Service but was clearly Foreign Service, and then I was the Foreign Service person there. I don't think people in that sense necessarily associated me politically. I had been a Foreign Service officer since 1959 and I served in Jordan first with [Richard] Nixon, then [Gerald] Ford, then [Jimmy] Carter kept me on. It was interesting.

I don't think I became—some people may have associated me with the administration—I had a lot of publicity in El Salvador and that tended to say, okay, he's a Reagan appointee. But I think people knew the difference between Foreign Service appointees and straight political appointees. So I never felt that there was a political—in fact, I think New York had helped me in some ways because of the focus and the publicity and everything else. Certainly I became more known. I used to walk around New York years later and have people say hello to me on the street that I didn't know.

Riley: Not a common occurrence for a Foreign Service officer.

Pickering: No, not a common occurrence at all. From that point of view I think that's my take on it.

Riley: I think we're drawing to a conclusion—

Perry: Can I circle back one time now, back to Iraq? You're not engaged in it as you were at the UN, but you're in other areas of the world. You must be watching and reading what we're reading at that time. What were your thoughts about the nuclear weapons, the inspections, and Saddam, and what did you think was going to happen to Saddam ultimately?

Pickering: I had a great deal of focused time and attention on Iraq from '97, when I started as Under Secretary, until I left at the end of 2000 and worked closely—of course Madeleine [Albright] had been one of my successors, so we both knew the UN very well. I spent a lot of time and attention on Iraq. There was no question at all that at the end of the Clinton administration, on the basis of what I knew, I had serious doubts that they had any kind of a nuclear program. But you can't prove a negative.

There was no question at all in my mind that they had a chemical program and possibly could still have it, and that there was a question mark over biologicals. They had bought a lot of medium to culture materials in the period before 1990-91, but we never found it. But we also by then had known that he carried out a significant destruction program. We didn't know how complete it was. So there were some unknowns. But in the end if people had said, "Does he have weapons of mass destruction?" Well, certainly chemicals, if you want to include them. Uncertainty about biologicals, more certainty about not having nuclear. That was my feeling. I think that was the consensus in the intelligence community.

Perry: What did you think would happen to him ultimately, to Saddam?

Pickering: My view was that if we didn't shake the trees we would have some success in constraining him. We would have a continuing problem with the inspections and with access to Iraq. If you want to read a weird speech, when we approved Resolution 687 on the limitations,

paragraph 22 says in effect that he won't get out from under the sanctions until he shows that he is following all the resolutions.

I had negotiated that and written that as what it says. Washington wanted to say, in fact, that what that means is he's gone. So I said, "I'm going to say what I did and if you want to send me your language I'll say that." The resolution says, my speech says two things. Madeleine came to me years later and said, "I never understood what you said in that speech." I said, "Madeleine, let me tell you why. That's how we got here."

So we had, and I think it was true in the Clinton administration as well, a concern that as long as he was there there was going to be a problem and therefore we shouldn't take the sanctions off. There was no question at all that oil for food, which we prefigured in 687, but which came later, added to the problems as well as to the solutions. We were under enormous pressure, even as late as '97, '98, and '99, to help the poor, starving Iraqi kids who were being killed by our sanctions. In effect, of course, there was never a sanction on food or medicine. It was Saddam who controlled those, and for a while failed to use and then never used in a very humane way his oil income to provide that material to Iraqi citizens and others.

Now if the question had been would we be prepared to provide humanitarian relief for Iraq when they were making all this oil income, that would have been a harder question for us to address, but it never came up that way. But I felt we were very badly handled by the international community. A large part of that was Iraqi importunings. We also saw the development of a significant amount of corruption, as you know, around the use of oil for food. It was ready-made for him to in fact use those financial pressures to carry out whatever he wanted to do. So he remained a serious problem, which by my view was not one that you would treat with invasion.

In 1991, I was totally with the President and with Brent and I think Baker at the time, not to march on beyond where we were in southern Iraq to Baghdad in some quest to remove him. I foresaw everything happening that unfortunately happened in spades. I said, "Why would we want to get involved in street fighting in Baghdad?"

Riley: There are three broad questions that I'd like to ask in wrapping this up. One is, having spent the time that you spent at the UN, could you talk a little bit about your overall assessment of the value of the United Nations and its role, whether it is fulfilling its mission, whether we're closer now than we were before? The second question—

Pickering: Why don't I do that and then we'll do each one.

Riley: Okay.

Pickering: I'll try to be telegraphic here, but I think it's interesting. Having been at the UN I see all of its mistakes and foibles. I'm not a defender of the difficulties. I think that we lose sight in fact that a primary and effective activity and part of the UN is the specialized agencies who in effect make it possible for us in the world of economics and commerce and anything else to function. If we didn't have them, we'd have to organize treaties to develop them. So everything from postal and telecommunications to medicine and meteorology and maritime and civil aviation all run and operate on the basis of the effectiveness of the specialized agencies. They're not perfect, but they're an enormously important resource, and people neglect that.

At the other end of the spectrum is the Security Council, and when the Security Council works well, which is rarely—because I know, I was there—it can be quite effective. We are in effect now struggling with the problem, the answer to which in my view is not enlargement, but enlargement may be part of the answer. The answer is is there an effective way to coordinate the views of the five permanent members and the ten elected members on a regular basis about how to work and resolve critical questions? I think we are moving in the direction where legitimacy for the use of force either is going to depend on Article 51 or essentially on Chapter VII, and that it is becoming increasingly more difficult to use military force outside of the ambit of the charter.

We're not there and people will do it, but it increasingly becomes a serious question that people will address. There are no easy dodges around that. I think that essentially you can use regional organizations. On the other hand the charter is written the other way around—the Security Council has to approve the use of force by regional organizations under Chapter VIII of the Charter after regional organizations decide to use force—and sooner or later people will push on that. I think in the end it is somewhat harder, but in the end I think our lesson in the use of military force is that you need to be cautious about what you do unless it is clearly self defense. We will see some enlargement of the ambit of use of force in self defense. Up until about ten years ago the U.S. traditional answer was you actually have to be attacked to invoke Article 51. Now I think there is some perspective that there is a way of dealing with those kinds of problems with the use of military force that is more akin to police work in an enlarged sense, but you don't have to sustain an attack, either minor or devastating, before you can do so.

I see that going on. The Council will be, therefore, extremely important. If the Council doesn't work, then you're thrown back obviously on a set of situations in which it becomes increasingly controversial and more difficult to deal with these kinds of problems. I think the Council plays an important role. I think there are other areas which are difficult. I think the U.S. has, in many ways, a leg up still on the UN, despite all the difficulties we've had over the last decade or so, not uniquely to one administration or the other, but it takes a lot of hard work and a lot of time to get it back. I think there are a lot of problems that go to the UN that are not necessarily resolvable in the UN context, but we like to push them there in hopes that somebody will come forward with a solution.

So there are all those up- and downsides. It's a far from perfect organization, but I think we'd be in deep trouble without it and we need to find ways to make it function more effectively and to use it better. We seem at the moment to be in effect in a situation where we're so highly distracted by the preeminence of domestic problems that we're not able to lavish the kind of time and attention we have to in dealing with all these foreign affairs questions, in or out of the UN.

Riley: Thanks. The second general question is a sort of overall assessment of President Bush's leadership. This is a President who sought reelection but wasn't reelected. That, by terms of history, is usually a sign of not being successful.

Pickering: I'll talk about the foreign affairs side that I know best.

Riley: That's what I want.

Pickering: It was exemplary on the foreign affairs side, he had a very strong leadership, in part based on his knowledge and his wisdom and experience and the team around him and it's hard to fault that. Now events came in a way that was helpful; luck does play a role, but he had the collapse of communism. He had the reuniting of Germany. We had to deal with the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. There were a lot of things that went on. He certainly stood his ground as much as he could in the Arab-Israeli thing in a way that I thought was heroic if not necessarily totally successful in his reelection, but those were important questions that he had to dig in, and he dug in and held on principle, perhaps more than others have when the time comes.

My feeling is that Presidential leadership matters, but it also matters when a President is prepared in those occasions when he or she believes it is necessary to do so to stand up and be counted on a tough issue that involves risk, which is not necessarily a sure thing. We have a lot of governance by polling as we all know. But to some extent a President can make his or her mark on the basis of their willingness to perhaps once in a while stand against the lowest common denominator solution to achieve an objective that is very important, and is prepared to take the risk. I think the President who is prepared to do that, explain it well and mobilize to do that then exhibits another advantage, which is very important—the ability to get things done that aren't necessarily foregone conclusions and change parameters.

Riley: Sure.

Pickering: I think on a number of questions, and I mentioned them, President Bush did. Sometimes because events broke his way, sometimes because he was prepared to stay up, and sometimes because he stood up and didn't get there.

Riley: One of the things that you mentioned was the unification of Germany. That was not a foregone—

Pickering: No, it was not, and it was an enormously important piece. Also the development of a policy toward Russia, where I think he stumbled a bit with Yeltsin but nevertheless at the end we had a pretty good relationship started and going and handed off to the Clinton administration.

Riley: Sure, which brings me to my final question, which is having served in very high level positions in two successive administrations, the project on the Clinton Presidency is apart from this, but I wonder if you could give us your own comparisons about what you saw as the leadership style of these two Presidents, particularly the way that they approached foreign policy issues.

Pickering: Comparisons are always odious.

Riley: I didn't know that, but I will take your word for it.

Perry: We'll make a note of that.

Pickering: Let me say the following. It is remarkable. They're very different personalities, very different styles. I have to say I never saw anybody deal as effectively with foreigners firsthand as Clinton. He was remarkable. He had eight years to do it. He had this combination of youth, brightness, sympathy, and analytical personality. In many ways he loved political analysis and

also had this ability to combine empathy and generosity and basically sort of a “Trust me, we’ll help you” kind of approach to foreign leaders that caught their attention. He was able over a period of time to deliver.

I watched poor Henry Kissinger at times in the Middle East when he hoped to deliver and wasn’t able to at the end of the day and I watched him when he could. It was the time when he was kind of untouchable.

But I think that President Bush was steadier. He didn’t have the same amount of time to develop it. I thought that he dealt well with foreign leaders, but there was a charismatic quality about Clinton that was not replicated in Bush, even though Bush and Clinton probably were very close together. Now the most remarkable thing is that Bush and Clinton have an alliance today that is quite unusual, to do good things together. That whole thing went away.

There was a very interesting speech a year after he lost to Clinton in which Bush said something like, “We’re working together. You defeated me and I understand now why” kind of thing. A nice, gracious statement.

Riley: It was the NAFTA [North American Free Trade Agreement] speech.

Pickering: Yes, the NAFTA speech. I thought that was emblematic. In no way did I see Clinton ever try to take unusual advantage of that. It was a mutual respect despite the fact that they had a tough race and it was hard fought and all the rest. I would suspect that against other candidates Bush would have won.

Riley: Okay.

Pickering: I think it’s very interesting. I think the differences, as the British say, are chalk and cheese in many ways, in their personalities, in their way of doing things. Their visions on foreign affairs are not widely different. Their approach to foreign affairs is not widely different. They brought their personalities to bear in different ways, and in that sense I think that Clinton was more independent of his State Department and his bureaucracy and Bush was much more able to mobilize it and had more of a team approach to things.

Riley: But it worked for each of them.

Pickering: Oh, yes. I would give them very high marks on foreign affairs and I think history will.

Riley: Okay, Barbara, anything else?

Perry: I think that’s a beautiful way to end.

Riley: You’ve been most generous with your time.

Pickering: Not at all, happy to do it. Good luck, and I look forward to seeing what I said.

Riley: The fact that you contributed so much to this other project—we are missionaries for this kind of work.

Pickering: I agree with you. I think it's important. I've always thought about writing, but I'm so busy and I have not really gotten down to it. I've always thought if you write something it had better be better than a memoir. I've thought about writing about foreign affairs and how to do it, but I constantly learn more about it. Being able to gab with you all about it maybe will jog my memory, which gets increasingly difficult to jog.