

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

AMBASSADOR MALCOLM TOON

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INTERVIEW

Q: Ambassador Toon, let me start off this one, as I do on occasion, by asking you how it was that you came to be interested in a Foreign Service career.

TOON: Well, I think primarily because I'm a first-generation American. My mother and father were graduates of Ellis Island. They came from Scotland in 1912, I think it was. And then we went back to Scotland when I was six years old. I started my schooling over there, primarily because my folks discovered that things were a little bit tougher here than they had anticipated. So the plan was to move back completely, but then they discovered things were even tougher back there, so they came back to this country. But while I was there--and I was a very young person--I traveled quite a bit with my family and became interested in foreign cultures and languages. Then I started my schooling at Tufts University, and my interest in becoming a career diplomat intensified at that time.

I passed my Foreign Service examinations just prior to World War II, but decided that it was not really acceptable to go into the diplomatic service when we were at war. So I went into the Navy for five years, mostly as a PT boat Skipper in the south and southwest Pacific and then joined the diplomatic service right after World War II when I was demobilized.

At that time, unless you were a complete idiot, you had to recognize that the real problem of the post-World War period was going to be the Soviet Union. So after I joined the diplomatic service, I quickly opted for the Soviet specialist program and then wound up, as you know, as ambassador in Moscow.

Q: Did you ever have occasion to run into that other famous PT boat skipper in the South Pacific?

TOON: You mean Jack Kennedy?

Q: Yes.

TOON: Yes, I met him in Rendova just after I joined my squadron and just after he had lost his boat. And then I met him again after he became President when I was stationed in London. He came through after his meeting with Khrushchev in Vienna. Since I was the Soviet specialist in the political section in the embassy, I was assigned as his note-taker for his meetings with Macmillan, who was then prime minister. But because of the way Kennedy operated, I never took any notes. Kennedy and Macmillan met together alone. But I did have a chance to chat with him again. I must say, to his credit and to my surprise, he remembered our meeting during the war.

Q: Good. He didn't have any occasion to say anything at that time about his experience with Khrushchev in which common perception is that he came out second best by far?

TOON: I don't agree with that. I think that if anybody misinterpreted the other, it was Khrushchev who misinterpreted Kennedy. Khrushchev came away from that meeting convinced that Kennedy was a lot softer than, in fact, he was. Not, I think, primarily because of what went on at the meeting itself, but what had gone on before the meeting--for example, the Bay of Pigs fiasco. Khrushchev had read that as an indication of

weakness on Kennedy's part. And, of course, that was a mistake in judgment on his part, as we know, when the Cuban missile crisis materialized.

Q: I've had occasion recently--this is just a sidelight--to interview yet another PT boat skipper in the South Pacific at that time, a fellow named Mike Holovak, who had been an all-American football player. Did you ever run across him?

TOON: I think I did. Certainly the name is familiar to me. I don't know whether I met him in the South Pacific or back at Newport, Rhode Island, which was the PT training base. Most of us came back from the Pacific to be what we call underway instructors. I did meet him somewhere, yes.

Q: In 1945, he organized the Melville, Rhode Island, base football team.

TOON: Oh, yes, that's right.

Q: They had occasion to play that powerful Army team that year; got slaughtered.

TOON: I remember it very well, yes. That's correct.

Q: It was in connection with that, not foreign affairs, that I interviewed Holovak.

Part of your fairly long career included a senior assignment as counselor for political affairs in Moscow in the '60s and then shortly thereafter, four ambassadorships to Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Israel, and the Soviet Union. It seems fairly obvious that the training for appointment as ambassador to the Soviet Union--your training suited you and aimed you in that direction, it was only logical that you became, eventually, ambassador to the Soviet Union. How is it, however, that you became ambassador in Tel Aviv? How did that come about?

TOON: Well, that's an interesting story. Primarily because of Henry Kissinger, who was Secretary of State, of course, when I went to Israel as ambassador. Henry had become very upset with the Israelis, because he claimed that they had sabotaged and ruined his diplomatic shuttle exercise. So he wanted to send, as he put it, I think, rather crudely, "a tough-minded S.O.B." to Israel as ambassador in order to put the Israelis in their place.

I had gained a reputation, whether justified or not--it depends on your own point of view--of being rather blunt, outspoken, tough, in dealing, primarily, with eastern Europeans and the Soviets. So Henry decided it would be a good idea to send me there.

Let me finish the story, because it is very interesting. Shortly after I arrived in Israel, Henry wanted to resume his meetings with Rabin, who was then the prime minister. Rabin was going to Germany on a state visit. Henry was coming over for talks with the Germans. It was arranged that he would meet with Rabin in Germany to resume, he

hoped, the shuttle diplomacy exercise. I was summoned to Germany, of course, as the new ambassador to Israel.

When I was there, Kissinger said, "Now, I want to have a private word with you." And so we did. We had a long conversation before a formal dinner with the Germans. He said, "Now, what I want you to do, as the American ambassador to Israel, is get yourself out on the streets, meet the people, hold press conferences, get yourself on television, meet all the members of the Knesset, if necessary go behind the backs of the government to get the message across that we have a new policy." That policy, he said, was "to establish a good relationship with the moderate Arab states, if necessary, by supplying them with arms."

I said, "You want me, as the American ambassador, to behave this way in Israel?" I pointed out, "No American ambassador has ever said, 'Boo,' has never uttered a statement of substance. He has always been, more or less, in the Israeli pocket."

He said, "Yes, that's what I want you to do."

I've known Dr. Kissinger for many years. I knew him at Harvard and later in the White House. We had always called each other Henry and Mac. But now he was Secretary of State, and I addressed him as Mr. Secretary. I said, "Mr. Secretary, I am going to ask you something that will probably make you really mad, but I've got to know the answer. Does the President approve of this?"

He got mad. He said, "Are you questioning my integrity? Are you questioning my authority?"

I said, "No. I just want to know if the President is behind this or not, because, you know, this is a very tricky business that you are mandating."

He said, "Yes, he's behind it."

I said, "Okay."

So I went to Israel, and Kissinger's prescription was basically the pattern of behavior that I had to assume as ambassador. And it produced, frankly, a rather abrasive relationship with the Israelis. They were not used to that sort of behavior by the American ambassador. But I think, ultimately, what they decided was that what I was telling them was for their own good. Because if, in fact, we had a differently nuanced policy toward the Middle East that had developed, we had to back our relations with the emerging moderate Arab states with heavy equipment.

Q: Were they convinced that the changed policy was going to remain changed?

TOON: I think they, ultimately, were convinced of that, not only on the basis of what I was saying publicly in Israel, but also on the basis of their own understanding as to what was going on inside Washington. And, ultimately, of course, we did resume the diplomatic shuttle exercise with the end result of winding up with the Sinai agreement--Sinai II, as it was called.

Q: You were there in September '75, then, when Kissinger made his last shuttle run, and the Sinai withdrawal began.

TOON: That's right.

Q: You then, I guess, personified this new policy. You were hand-picked to go and be abrasive.

TOON: Well, that's the way it turned out. I think, initially, Dr. Kissinger simply wanted to punish the Israelis by having a relatively unfriendly ambassador in Tel Aviv.

Q: Was there no consideration, as far as you knew, about U.S. domestic voting questions and problems in this new, revised Israeli policy?

TOON: Well, yes, consideration was given to that. Of course, there was a good deal of consternation--more than that, disagreement--on the part of the American Jewish community with what we were doing. Of course, they expressed their point of view in no uncertain terms when they would come to see me in Israel. They didn't like what I was saying. They felt that I was being unduly abrasive. I tried to explain to them what I was telling the Israelis in my television appearances and my talks with members of the Knesset was something that they had to know.

And, secondly, I said, "They've got to understand that you will help me, you as members of the American Jewish community, in getting the message across that I am not talking off the top of my head. I'm talking under instructions. And they've got to understand that this change is going on back home. And I think, frankly, it is a change for the better." And I think, ultimately, the American Jewish community came around to that point of view. Initially, it was not easy.

Q: There was an imbroglio in April '76 over the aid program. It had to do, especially, with the transitional quarter, and how much was going to be appropriated for the Israeli aid program in that unique transitional quarter. You were heavily criticized at that time by the Israeli press. Do you recall what that was all about?

TOON: Well, let me give you the background. I recall it very well. I had for a long time after I arrived in Tel Aviv, resisted pressure, primarily by the foreign correspondents, to hold press conferences. They knew that I had done this sort of thing in my previous posts. They thought it would be a marvelous opportunity to tap the most productive source of

information in Israel, the American ambassador. Well, finally, I agreed to meet with not only the foreign press, but also the Israeli press on a background basis.

Now the Israelis simply don't understand background rules. As you know, one is not supposed to name the source, and one is not supposed to quote directly. But one of the first questions that came up in this first backgrounder I had was what did I think of the Israeli insistence on dealing directly with the Congress on increasing the aid package, which the President had already reduced, because he was facing very stringent fiscal problems at home.

And I said, "Well, I think that is what I would call dirty pool. I think it is wrong for the Israeli Embassy to go behind the back of the administration in order to thwart the President's desire to give a reasonable, but a reduced, aid package to the Israelis." Well, that night on television, I was quoted directly, and I was named as accusing the Israeli Government of violating the law by going behind the back of the administration and seeking the agreement of the Congress to an increased aid package. This made the Israeli Government furious, and it made me furious, too. I never again had another background press conference in Israel.

Now, the Israelis who were there at the press conference claimed that they abided by the rules. But they had briefed some of their colleagues, particularly on television news programs, on the meeting with me, and it was they who had violated the rules. And that's when the fat really hit the fire. For a long time afterwards--I'd say about two or three months at least--my relations with the Israeli public were very seriously strained. Not with the government necessarily. The government was pressured, primarily by Begin, who was head of the opposition, to demand an apology from me. Allon, who was the foreign minister, said, "No, we are not going to do that."

But, in any case, the Israeli press reacted in a very angry way. Basically, their line was, "Who is this Gentile to be preaching to us? We have been preached to by Gentiles for centuries. We took care of them; we'll take care of him." That, basically, was the line carried by the press. So I had a very difficult time in Israel for the first six months.

Q: It's not a great deal of fun to be unpopular in a position like that where you live in a goldfish bowl. And this is triply so, of course, in Israel, which is such a small country. The Israelis ended up getting not much more than about 10% of what the original proposals were for that transitional quarter, so your word must have had some effect. Can you give me a word portrait of Rabin, Begin? Who was it that you dealt with primarily?

TOON: Well, I dealt primarily with Rabin, the prime minister; Allon, the foreign minister; and Peres, who was the defense minister. These were the three top officials in the Labor government. But I also had a good relationship with Menachem Begin, who was head of the opposition. And this came about through purely personal reasons. I played a lot of tennis when I was in Israel. And most of my tennis playing partners were

members of Begin's party, the Likud. They brought me together with Begin for lunches and dinners and so forth. I got to know him very well. He didn't agree with anything I said, but he did admire my spirit--and he said this publicly. He felt that I was honest. I felt basically the same way about him.

Now let me just wind up the story of my relationship with Begin, because it puts me in the position of really not being much of an expert on the Middle East. When I was appointed to Moscow in late 1976, and the Soviets finally accepted me, Begin--still head of the opposition--asked to have a private lunch with me down at the Knesset--the Israeli Parliament. I accepted and we had a very pleasant lunch. In the course of the luncheon conversation, he said, "Now, I would like to have a private word with you. I know you are going back to Washington before you go on to Moscow. You will be seeing the Secretary of State, of course, and the President." So he took me over to the window of the Knesset, which broadly overlooks the West Bank, and he said, "I want you to tell the President when you get back that those lands out there, which you call the West Bank--I will never call them the West Bank, I call them Judea and Samaria--those lands have always been Jewish. They are Jewish today. And they always will be Jewish."

I said, "Well, I'll carry this message back, but I'm sure it is not going to be embraced warmly by President Ford." But I said, "You know, we are being very frank with each other. Consistent with our relationship, which you very accurately described--open and straight forward--let me give you some advice. Why don't you get out of politics, because you don't really have a chance." Three months later, he became the prime minister.

Then I went off to Moscow. And regularly, at least once a month, there would be some emissary, usually a foreign diplomat, coming through Moscow with a message for Ambassador Toon from Prime Minister Begin. That message, in effect, was, "Tell the ambassador that I am the prime minister of Israel today, and I am going to be the prime minister for many years to come." That was my relationship with Begin.

Q: An unexpected sense of humor on the part of Begin.

TOON: Well, he was a rather complex and interesting guy. I think in his later years, he became a little bit too serious about events and a little bit too insistent that his point of view was absolutely right, and nobody else had anything to say.

Q: I have a friend in Jerusalem or Tel Aviv, I don't remember which, who called his house trying to get his wife before she died--and this is an indication of what kind of country it is. It is really quite remarkable to me. He answered the phone. The friend had to get through him to get to the wife. There were no layers of bureaucracy.

TOON: Very informal.

Q: Peres? If something came in of a fair degree of importance, and you were instructed to go to the foreign ministry--let's assume it was something that you would handle yourself--who would you call up to go see?

TOON: I usually called up Eppie Evron, who was then a deputy foreign minister. He would immediately arrange an appointment. I could see these people any time I wanted to. They recognized that the American ambassador is a person of some authority. And they also knew that when I wanted to see them, it was not to have a chatty exchange of views, but to convey to them a message from Washington. So I had no problem at all in seeing any of these people.

Now they were three totally different guys. Rabin was deadly serious. He was a military man primarily. He headed up the armed forces during the wars of liberation. He had not much of a sense of humor. I got to know him very well, primarily because we were both tennis players. He and his wife and I and my wife used to play doubles on his court. I got to know him well, primarily because I dealt one-on-one with him. He never had anyone with him, no note-takers. Nor did I. But he was a serious guy and tough. Very tough, indeed. But I always felt that he was completely honest. If he told me something, then I could rely upon it.

Allon was a much gentler guy, in the sense that he was much more personable and friendly and outgoing and so forth. He was also a man of complete integrity, but much more emotional than Rabin was. For example, he would react in a much more emotional way to some of the things I would say than Rabin would.

Peres was much more outgoing than either Rabin or Allon. When I would meet with him, it would usually be late in the afternoon. He would always produce a bottle of Scotch. And we had a little drink or two; a completely informal discussion. But I always had the impression--and this may not sit very well today--that he was a little bit slippery. I wasn't entirely sure that the point of view he was conveying was going to be the point of view that he would convey to me tomorrow. I may be wrong in my judgment of the guy, but that was my gut reaction during the time.

But, in any case, my relationship with all three was very good and close.

Q: Allon. You said something about his reaction would be--did you use the word, emotional?

TOON: Emotional, yes. Well, let me give you an example of that. I met with Allon, together with a group of Congressmen, the day after we had taken a vote in the United Nations which the Israelis didn't like. I think we had abstained on a resolution condemning the Israelis for, as I recall, their settlement policy in the West Bank. And when I met Allon the next day down in Jerusalem with the congressional group, I said, "Good morning, Mr. Minister."

He said: "It may be a good morning to you, but it's not to me after what happened yesterday in the United Nations."

I said, "Let's talk about that later." This was on television. The press were there and so forth. And that's what I mean by acting in an emotional way. He got over it before the day was out, but he and his colleagues were pretty mad about the stance we had taken in the United Nations the day before.

But, you know, Rabin would never show that sort of emotion. And Peres would just sort of laugh it off under similar conditions. But Allon would always act in an emotional way.

Q: As an example of how an ambassador copes with a problem in a country that he is assigned to, how did you cope with the remarks of Chief of Staff General Brown about Israel being a burden rather than a defensive asset? You were still in the country then, were you not?

TOON: You are talking about the head of the armed forces Brown? Which Brown are you talking about?

Q: General Brown, the chief of the--

TOON: You don't mean Harold Brown, who was later on Secretary of Defense. You are not talking about him. You are talking about General Brown?

Q: Yes. Mid-October 1976.

TOON: Yes, I remember that remark. I tend to agree that Brown's assessment is correct. We tend to overdo the idea that the Israelis are a great strategic bastion for us in the Middle East. I think, frankly, they are a very serious burden for us. Now don't misunderstand me. I believe in our policy vis à vis Israel. I think that we should be committed to Israel's survival. It is not only a moral commitment on our part, but it is one that seems to be totally understandable after what happened to the Jews in World War II. Therefore, I think that we should do everything in our power to make sure that Israel survives. But to call the Israelis, as members of the American Jewish community do frequently, a strong strategic asset in the Middle East, I think simply overstates the case.

Q: In my experience, much more limited than yours, of course, the Israelis react immediately to any hint of criticism. And they react very strongly. They must have reacted to this particular criticism. You had to go deal with it in some fashion.

TOON: Well, in the first place, they don't like to be told what to do. They don't like somebody looking over their shoulder on their internal policies and activities--for example, the settlement policy in the West Bank. And they don't like to be told that they are not terribly important strategically. So this was a problem that I had to smooth over.

But at the same time, I think I did it in such a way as not to negate what General Brown had said, because, as I said before, I agree with that sort of assessment.

Q: I can guess what you did to smooth it over, but let me ask you to make it explicit. What did you do? Did you go to see Rabin? Did Rabin call you in?

TOON: No, I think this was a question that I discussed with Peres, the minister of defense. And as I recall, I did not ask to see him specifically. I was down there in his office. His office was in Tel Aviv. It was much easier for me to see him than it was to see Allon or Rabin, whose offices were in Jerusalem, which was quite a long way off. And I think I was down there on some other issue, probably it was with regard to what was going on in Lebanon. That statement by General Brown came up, and I tried to put the proper gloss on it without, as I say, negating what he said.

Q: Did you ever discuss U.S.-Israeli affairs with President Ford?

TOON: Yes, a number of times, as a matter of fact. I came back on consultation, I would say, about five or six times while I was ambassador in Israel usually with other ambassadors from the Middle East, who were summoned back to meet with Kissinger. When we met with Kissinger, we would also meet with President Ford.

Now because of the relationship at that time between the Arab states and Israel, which was nonexistent, of course, I, at the insistence of some of the Middle East ambassadors, would meet separately with President Ford rather than together with them. This, I think, gave me a leg up on all the other ambassadors, because I got to know the President quite well. I think not only was he a very fine guy, but a guy that showed very good understanding of the problems in the Middle East.

Q: Ambassadors other than Ambassador Eilts insisted that you meet separately with the President?

TOON: It was primarily Eilts that took this position, but I think he was aided and abetted by other Arabists, and certainly nobody else took the opposite side.

Q: You had, then, an unusual role for an American ambassador. The stock question might be what were the policy questions facing you when you arrived at your post in Tel Aviv. In your case, it would be far different. It would not be run-of-the-mill policy questions at all. You were instructed specifically by the Secretary of State that 180-degree or 90-degree turn in American policy was about to take place or was taking place.

TOON: I wouldn't say it was a 180 degree shift. It was a slightly different emphasis in our policy in the Middle East. There was no attempt by anybody to diminish our commitment to Israel's survival. No question about that. What we were doing was trying to work out an arrangement so that Israel's survival could be assured, not militarily, but politically, by a different set of relationships in the Middle East.

Now that was a nuanced policy which was not easy to get across to the hard-headed Israelis who had participated in the struggle for survival. First of all, they felt they had become independent and had survived exclusively through military means. It was also not easy to convince them that through supply of arms to the moderate Arab states that this would advance the Israeli interests. That was a very difficult point to get across. They could understand, and they admitted this to me several times, why we felt it was necessary to establish a good relationship with the moderate Arab states. What they could not understand was why we had to support this policy with a supply of arms. They did not believe me or Henry Kissinger when we said, "Look, under no conditions will this supply of arms be extensive. And, certainly, we will not supply them with any arms that you would regard as being offensive and dangerous to your survival." But they simply didn't believe that.

They said, "Once you start down this road--in the first place, what is the difference between an offensive and a defensive weapon? But once you start down this road, their appetite will increase, and you will find yourselves supplying them with all kinds of arms, which in the long run will represent a threat to us." That was their position. Because it was strongly held, it was not easy for us to get the point across.

Q: Well, it was after you left, two or three or four years later, but one might be able to say they were right, because we developed a military relationship with Egypt that was, and is, quite extensive.

TOON: Well, there the problem, it seems to me, was that if in fact we wanted to completely wean Egypt away from Soviet influence, we had to agree to substitute for the Soviets in their arms supply role. Egyptians felt strongly that they could not be left naked. If they were to break relations with the Soviets, as happened, of course, and, therefore, cut off their arms supply, they had to protect themselves. They had to be able to defend themselves. Therefore, they insisted that we take the Soviets' place in this respect. But we did it not on the Soviet scale. We did it, I think, in a very restrained way.

But I think, frankly, the policy has worked out, not only to our advantage, but ultimately to the Israeli advantage. You now have a situation--and this came about shortly after I left Israel--in which really no substantial war is possible, because Egypt was pulled out of the picture completely. And I think that has been a great plus, not only from our position, but also from the standpoint of Israel. Now it is not easy for them to swallow.

Q: I saw some of that from the other end.

Your staff there, your political officers and your DCMs and your economic officers, were they all, in your opinion, then first-rate? Did you have really almost the pick of the Foreign Service?

TOON: I would say that certainly my DCM, whom I personally selected, was very good. Some of the other senior officers were not that good, in my opinion. I had one junior

officer who was fluent in Hebrew, and he was very helpful to me. But the others were, I would say, no more than average.

Q: Well, an average FSO was an accomplished kind of person. How is it that they fell down? The lack of writing ability, or lack of ability to develop information out on the streets, or what?

TOON: Well, I think primarily because they had operated under entirely different leadership prior to my arrival. Their two previous bosses had been Ken Keating, a political appointee who spent most of his time attending socials and that sort of thing and did not really participate in the formulation of policy vis à vis Israel. And, of course, his predecessor was Wally Barbour, who had been there altogether too long. He had been there almost, I think it was, thirteen years as ambassador. No ambassador should remain in any country for more than three years, in my view, and certainly not something like thirteen in a country like Israel. It is difficult to avoid localitis in dealing with the Israelis.

The result was that these younger officers of the staff had felt that they were not participating in the process under my predecessors. They felt cut out completely, because the embassy was cut out. And Kissinger was wheeling and dealing on his own. In many cases, Keating wouldn't even be told what was going on. Now that changed completely when I came, primarily because Kissinger knew that I wouldn't tolerate that sort of treatment. I would resign rather than be handled the way my predecessors were. So they found themselves working in a totally different milieu--and they weren't used to it.

Now, the other problem was that a good many of the things I did, I had to do alone, primarily because Dr. Kissinger was the sort of guy that wanted to keep things very close to his chest. I think he would have been pretty mad if I had briefed my staff completely on what was going on. I did tell the senior officers basically what we were doing, but not in complete detail about my conversations with the Israeli leadership. I think that came about primarily because I didn't have the sort of confidence in them that I had, for example, in my staff in Moscow later on. Now there you had really good professionals, most of whom were in the Soviet Union on a second tour of duty, most of whom knew the language thoroughly. This was not the case in Tel Aviv. Most of them were there for, you know, a first-and-only tour of duty. None of them, except for one officer that I mentioned, knew the language.

Q: Who was this first-rate DCM that you had?

TOON: Dunnigan. Tom Dunnigan.

Q: Thomas Dunnigan, yes. I've heard, somewhere along the line, of an officer or two who took language specialization in Hebrew and Arabic, trying to get themselves totally qualified for the area. That must be mind-boggling to try to deal with those two languages.

TOON: Nobody in my experience did that sort of thing.

Q: You lasted there a year or so, a year and a half, something of that sort. Then you were picked by President Ford to go to the Soviet Union. Moscow would not accept you at first, is that correct?

TOON: Yes, but let me tell you a little about what I call the saga of my appointment to Moscow. I was first appointed ambassador to Moscow by Nixon in 1973 when I was serving as ambassador in Belgrade. I received a telegram over the weekend in what we call the agreement channel, which pertains to ambassadorial appointments, from the Under Secretary of Management, who said that President Nixon had decided to send me to Moscow as ambassador, that they were updating my FBI check, but that the Department wanted to know now if this gave me any personal problems before going further down the road.

Well, it did give me a really serious personal problem. That was my wife's attitude. We had spent, I would say, at that point, about five years in the Soviet Union under very difficult conditions. I was there first as a third secretary when Stalin was running the show. We had no maid. The tap had been turned off by Stalin. Since my wife spoke no Russian then, I had to do the shopping. It was a very unpleasant time. It was a little bit better when I was counselor of embassy in the '60s, but not much. One still felt one was surrounded by the enemy. So that I knew that I would have a problem with my wife.

Well, when I received this telegram, I gave my wife a ring at home--it was a Saturday. I said, "Look, I am coming home for lunch, since we have a very serious problem to discuss. Why don't you crank up a few martinis, and we will get to it." So I went home for lunch.

She said, after a martini or two, "What is the problem you want to discuss with me?"

I said, "Well, President Nixon wants us to go to Moscow as ambassador."

And she said, "Over my dead body."

I said, "Well, I am not willing to pay that price." I finally convinced her that it was very difficult for an ambassador to say no to the White House. If the President wants you to go somewhere, you go. I said, "After all, you and I have been partners in this difficult diplomatic business for years now. I don't think you should say no."

Well, she said, "All right, but only for two years."

I sent a message back to Washington that weekend saying, "Flattered, honored, and so forth. Let me know as soon as possible when I can tell Tito," I had a very good relationship with Tito and I felt he should know as soon as possible that I would be leaving. I said, "He is going to be pretty mad if he learns first from the press that I am

going to Moscow as ambassador, so make sure that I can tell him before this is publicized."

And I got word back on Monday saying that they understood my relationship with Tito, and they would get word to me as soon as possible. That afternoon, I got another cable from Washington saying, "There has been an apparent change of signals at the White House. It is doubly important that you tell no one about this appointment. We will clarify the situation and get word to you, as soon as possible."

I called in my secretary, and I dictated what undoubtedly would be regarded as a very irascible message to Washington saying that, in effect, "If, as I suspect, the Soviets have tried to muck-up this appointment, I want my day in court before the final decision is taken." And I said to my secretary, "Send it off. I don't want to see it in draft. Just send it, I don't want to change it." And the message went as dictated.

Then I got a telegram back the next morning, which was Tuesday, saying in effect: "You are wrong. The Soviets have nothing to do with this. Understand your concern, will clarify the situation as soon as possible and let you know." I received no further word from Washington about that appointment. And we went without an ambassador for a whole year in Moscow. Spike Dubs was chargé for the most part. And then Walt Stoessel, who was then Assistant Secretary of State, was appointed in December as ambassador in Moscow.

Now I tried to find out from Bill Rogers, who was the Secretary of State, and Walt Stoessel, who was his Assistant Secretary to European Affairs, what had happened to my appointment. They couldn't find out. They just kept putting my name before the White House, and the answer was dead silence from the Oval Office. I finally discovered from correspondents, whom I knew well and who were covering the Washington scene, what had happened.

Henry Kissinger was then National Security Advisor in the White House. When Nixon had decided to send me to Moscow as ambassador, he had a drink with the Soviet ambassador, Dobrynin. Kissinger said, you know, "The President has decided to send Mac Toon to Moscow as ambassador."

Q: So to continue. Kissinger had a drink with Dobrynin.

TOON: And Kissinger said to Dobrynin, "The President has decided to send Mac Toon to Moscow as ambassador."

Dobrynin said, "That's the end of détente," which was nonsense. No matter how powerful an ambassador you are, you don't carry out your own policy. The policy at that time happened to be détente. Therefore, obviously, I would carry it out.

But Kissinger sent a back channel message to Moscow, "Don't ask for agreement for Ambassador Toon until you hear further from me." And that was the end of it. When Kissinger became Secretary of State, he revived the whole idea of sending me to Moscow.

Q: He must have had a bad conscience.

TOON: No, I think he probably recognized that it was time to send somebody there who, in the first place, could report back accurately what the Soviet positions were and, secondly, who could be tough and outspoken with the Soviets, if necessary.

In any case, you are right. What happened was that the Soviets sat on my appointment, my agreement, for almost three months. That's unprecedented, as you know. In fact, it is almost unprecedented for any host government to turn down an ambassadorial appointee unless he happens to be a convicted felon or something like that. But they didn't turn me down; they just did not act on it. The assumption was that if they just sat on their hands and quietly passed the word that Toon was not really the ideal man for the Moscow job from their point of view, that President Ford would change his mind. And Kissinger would change his mind. But to their credit, the President and the Secretary of State stood firm. They said, "Under no conditions will we change the appointment."

Then it was assumed that what the Soviets were doing was waiting until the election. As you know, Carter beat Ford. So it seemed likely that the Soviets would just wait it out, and Carter would appoint somebody else.

What happened was--again I behaved in my usual cantankerous and irascible way--I called in my secretary in November to send a personal message to Kissinger. "What the Soviets are doing is absolutely unacceptable conduct. Don't misunderstand this message. It has nothing to do with me personally. I've had a good career. I've headed three embassies, important missions, and I have no complaint. But what is at stake is the good name of the United States. You simply cannot tolerate Soviet refusal to accept an appointment by the President of the United States. My advice to you is to call in Ambassador Dobrynin--he was then, I think, in his twenty-third year as ambassador--and tell him that unless we, the United States, receive positive word on Toon's appointment within forty-eight hours, you, Mr. Ambassador, will pack your bags and go home and we will get along without ambassadors."

Well, within forty-eight hours, I received a telephone call from Washington at 4:00 in the morning--Washington never has had a clear understanding of time differentials--saying that the Soviets had accepted me. The President and Kissinger wanted me back in Washington in time to arrive in Moscow before the end of the year.

Q: This was late '76?

TOON: Late '76. And so when I got back to Washington, I was met at the airport by a junior officer who said, "The Secretary wants to see you right away."

I said, "Sure." I went in to Mr. Kissinger's office, and I said, "What happened?"

"What happened? We followed your advice."

This is a very interesting development, because it meant that the Soviet Union attached great importance to having Dobrynin stay on in Washington. After all, he was a very effective guy. As I have said publicly, he snookered so many Presidents and Secretaries of State down through the years, that the Soviets felt they could not, you know, pay the price of having him leave. They were willing to accept me in exchange for keeping Dobrynin down in Washington.

Q: I dare say Dobrynin sent a very persuasive cable back.

TOON: Probably.

Q: You were appointed in January. The Senate confirmed you, oddly, in June, because the Congress was out of session for a while. When did you actually go to Moscow?

TOON: Well, that's not quite accurate. I went to Moscow in December of '76. I presented my credentials to Podgorny, who was then head of state, in January, and I was then the ambassador.

Now when Carter came in--well, before Carter came in, when he was trying to arrange his administration, he was advised--I found this out later--by people I thought were good friends of mine but who turned out not to be--to like Governor Harriman--dump me as the ambassador and replace me with a businessman in order to convey a positive gesture to the Brezhnev leadership. I heard about this through the grapevine--again mostly from correspondents.

Then shortly after Carter was inaugurated and entered on duty as President, the brains from Plains around Carter--as I have described the President's staff--discovered that there were fifty-six interim appointments about to be confirmed by the Senate. As you know, interim appointees had to be confirmed within five days of the reconvened Senate, or the appointments lapse. So the people around Carter decided that they better pull these names back. And they did.

Of these interim appointees, there were four ambassadors; all the rest of them were purely political appointees for domestic jobs. But there were four ambassadors. One was a purely political appointee; I think he was ambassador to Jamaica. Another was the ambassador to Botswana--another was the ambassador to Malta--neither was an important post. And the other one was myself.

Overnight, there were headlines all around the world, "Carter cancels Toon's appointment." I began receiving phone calls from my Ambassadorial colleagues in Moscow saying, "Gee, sorry, old man, that you have to go. We are just establishing a good relationship."

I said, "What a minute. I'm not going anywhere. As far as I'm concerned, this is a pure technicality, but we will have to wait and see." But it took Carter, I would say, at least two months to decide to keep me on.

Meanwhile, I was in limbo in Moscow. I had not met the President--I hadn't really ever heard of him before he became President. I knew some of the members of the Cabinet, Harold Brown and Vance in particular, but I had not met them as members of his Cabinet. I had not been privy to the formulation, for example, of our arms-control package, which later turned out to be a complete fiasco. I felt out of things and somewhat in limbo. I kept saying to Vance in my cables: "Look, I would like to come back and talk to you and give you the Moscow ambassador's point of view on what the nuances of our policy should be toward Brezhnev and his regime."

"No, it would be very awkward at this time until the President decides what to do," Vance replied.

Well, Carter finally decided to keep me on, but later I found out--primarily from Jody Powell--that the only reason he decided to keep me on was that he was told through Jody Powell by the American press that if he dumped me, he would be accused of being soft on the Soviets.

Q: How long before you came back to meet him?

TOON: I think it was in early June of '77. Meanwhile, Vance had come to Moscow. And I had about forty minutes with the President--a private conversation in the Oval Office. I found him to be a very warm, decent human being, but a man with some rather strange ideas about the Soviet Union. I came out of that conversation and went right to Brzezinski's office--I had known Brzezinski for years--and I said, "You've got a big problem on your hands. You've got to teach this man the facts of political life. He thinks that there is a warm bond of friendship between Brezhnev and himself. And he thinks that he and Brezhnev are pursuing basically the same political objectives: peace and stability throughout the world." I said, "That's not true." So I said, "You've got a big job ahead of you." Frankly, I had to deal with this problem in my relationship with President Carter, and to a lesser extent, with Cy Vance throughout my entire stewardship.

Q: Well, the two were known for opposing views--Brzezinski and Vance--on the Soviet Union and on U.S.-Soviet relationships. Therefore, you would, I gather, come down on the side of Brzezinski on these conflicts.

TOON: Philosophically, I think Brzezinski and I were much closer soulmates than Cy Vance and I were. I am very fond of Cy Vance. He is a great human being. But, again,

really a Pole has a much better understanding of the Soviet Union than a Brahmin from Yale--and that is Brzezinski's background. But Cy and I simply didn't see eye to eye on a lot of things. And Carter and I didn't agree on a number of issues. Finally, I decided that I was not really getting through to Washington the way I thought I should. Furthermore, I had had almost three years of ambassador to Moscow. My wife and I had spent almost eight years in that benighted capital. I decided that it was time to move on to retirement.

Q: I can't let this go. You spoke of arms-control fiasco. Is that SALT II?

TOON: No, I thought the SALT II agreement was a good agreement. I had in mind the first arms-control package that Vance brought to Moscow in March 1977. As I told you before, Vance had told me by cable and by telephone that it would be awkward for me to come back to Washington, but he did want to get my slant before coming in to Moscow. Would I meet him in Brussels where he was going to brief the North Atlantic Council before meeting with the Soviet leadership?

So I went out to Brussels, and Vance and I sat together on the plane on the way to Moscow. He said, "Well, what do you think of the arms-control package that I am bringing to Moscow?"

I said, "I would be in a better position to answer that question if I knew what was in the package."

He was shocked. He said, "Didn't Brzezinski send it to you?"

I said, "No, I don't have a clue." Well, then he described it in great detail. And I said, "Now, Mr. Secretary"--even an Ambassador doesn't call the Secretary of State by his first name--I said, "This is not going to fly. The Soviets are going to reject this out of hand. Frankly, I think what you are doing is what your predecessor once said was a very dangerous thing to do to the Soviets, you'll spook them."

Vance was shocked to hear this. He presented it to the Soviets in Moscow, and they did exactly what I told Vance they would do. So then my credibility, I think, went up somewhat in Washington after that happened.

Q: It certainly would help. I am not going to take much more of your time. I would like to get, though, for the record, your impressions of Brezhnev.

TOON: Well, you have to understand that throughout my stewardship as ambassador, Brezhnev was not in good shape. He was seriously ailing to the point where, at the end, his colleagues had to sort of prop him up in order to permit him to make a speech. I saw him eight times, which is more than any other American ambassador in Moscow had seen the top man in the Soviet leadership for years. But I can't say that I ever had a good give and take with the guy, and I speak fluent Russian, of course. He always read from a position paper. Half the time, he didn't make any sense. Half the time, the interpreter, who

was usually Sukhodrev, would interpret something which didn't come out of Brezhnev's lips at all. That was one of the advantages of knowing the language. There were times when he seemed to be in reasonably good shape, but I would say that, basically, he was not a very healthy man while I was ambassador.

Gromyko, of course, I dealt with regularly. Gromyko I could see within an hour's notice. He knew that I was not going to waste his time. He knew that I would be speaking under instructions. I have great respect for Gromyko as a professional diplomat. I disagree with everything he has said and done down through the years, but he was a real professional. He would tell you, in no uncertain terms, that "I was there. I attended that conference. And I know what went on." Usually we didn't even have an adequate record of what went on. So he had a leg up on certainly every ambassador in Moscow, and a leg up on, I think, every Secretary of State or every foreign minister in the Western world because of his vast experience and his involvement in principal policy issues for over forty years.

But with Brezhnev, it was, you know, a good formal relationship in the sense that I could see him frequently, but I never felt confident that he was really on top of things.

Q: By the time you got there in '76, détente of previous years had pretty well collapsed anyway, had it not? Perhaps in the final days of the Vietnam War.

TOON: Well, certainly, we did not have the sort of chummy relationship that had existed between the Nixon-Kissinger team on our side and the Brezhnev-Kosygin-Podgorny group on the other side. But if you mean by détente a continuing dialogue with the Soviets, a continuing attempt on the part of both sides to bring about increased stability in our relationship, I think détente continued. And after all, we did, during my years in Moscow, negotiate the SALT II treaty, which, of course, was never ratified, primarily because of Soviet misbehavior. I would think that down through the Ford and Carter years we had a relationship which I think is absolutely essential in Moscow. That is, a relationship which would provide for a continuing dialogue with the Soviet Union primarily to make sure that they don't make a mistake in judgment and get our two countries in a position of military confrontation, which in my view would inevitably result in a nuclear exchange and the end of civilization.

Now we did have that sort of relationship under Ford and Carter when I served as ambassador, but not the sort of chummy relationship that existed under Nixon-Kissinger, which I think, frankly, was misguided. The problem with the relationship when Nixon and Kissinger were in office was that détente was oversold to the American public. I think Henry Kissinger today would admit this. The idea got across to our fellow Americans that, we were dealing with a basically changed Soviet Union. That was not the case at all. So what happened was, I think, a much more sensible and sensitive assessment of the Soviet threat in the Ford-Carter years than we had under toward the end of the Nixon-Kissinger regime.

Q: I am not, even by implication, trying to be critical of your stewardship. I am raising it because détente really, as I think of it anyway, is an aura, an atmosphere, a feeling. It was chummy, as you said, at one time. It became less chummy. Now it is chummy in spades again. What is your opinion, now in 1989, of the Soviets?

TOON: Well, I would agree it became chummy in spades again under Mr. Reagan. I think Mr. Reagan never really understood what was going on. Gorbachev was on top of Reagan at all the summit conferences, and I think, frankly, most of us who know something about the Soviet problem were very uneasy with Mr. Reagan at the helm in dealing one-on-one with Gorbachev.

Now I don't feel that way with George Bush. I've known George Bush for many years. I know that this is a guy that does his homework well. He doesn't have laid-back weekends at Camp David the way Mr. Reagan did. He doesn't spend his evenings watching class-B movies. He is a very serious guy. Therefore, I feel reasonably confident--don't misunderstand me--I don't agree with many one-on-one meetings with the Soviet leadership, but I am not uneasy about Mr. Bush meeting with Gorbachev. I think we probably have a safer relationship now. I would hope we would not revert to the sort of chummy relationship that we had under Mr. Reagan.

Q: In October 1978, you made a speech in Atlanta in which you called the Soviets paranoid about China, and you brought up the radiation question, bombarding the American Embassy with radiation. You had words to the effect that the Soviet Union is a highly racial society.

TOON: Racist.

Q: Racist. You brought up the problems of the African students. You were criticized for this. This is something for which we were criticized in the Soviet press, I guess. Acknowledging that it may all be correct or true, is it terribly wise, diplomatically, to make such a frank speech when you are still ambassador in a given country?

TOON: Probably not. And perhaps with the benefit of hindsight, I would have said different things, or least said them differently than I did. But I think it is important to make clear that most of these points that I made and you cited, I made in response to questions, not in my formal remarks.

Now with regard to the racist question, I was asked by one of the correspondents if I agreed with President Carter's assessment, which he made in a speech, I think, in the state of Washington just a week before, about the racist attitude of the Soviet regime. Well, I found myself in the position of either rebutting the President or speaking the truth. I knew there would be problems back in Moscow. I think the same thing is true of some of the other things I said. But they were in response to questions primarily. I have always felt that it is an ambassador's responsibility, particularly the American ambassador in Moscow, to be perfectly straight with his own countrymen as to what is going on inside

the Soviet Union and not to cover-up in an effort to promote détente, if you want to call it that, or, in any case, a chummy relationship between ourselves and the Soviets.

Now, perhaps it would have been wiser if I had been less abrasive in my remarks. But if you look carefully at the speech that I made in Atlanta, you will find that it is a very strong endorsement of a continuing close relationship with the Moscow leadership. When I got back to Moscow--I had been blasted by Pravda the day before I arrived--I held a press conference in which I said that I'm just sorry that the Soviet leadership and the Soviet media did not choose to read the entire text of my remarks, because I think inevitably they would have concluded that I was trying to endorse what I think is the sort of thing that they want to see happen. That is, a good, close relationship with Washington.

Q: You recall, I'm sure, that the same thing happened with George Kennan at one stage.

TOON: I was there when that happened. I was a third secretary in the embassy under George Kennan. Let me if I may, give you the nature of the relationship between myself and George Kennan. I, together with another junior officer, wrote a paper called, "After Containment, What?" Now, we wrote this paper before we knew that Kennan was to be our ambassador. I may have been brash, but I wasn't stupid. I certainly would never have written this paper if I had known he was going to be our ambassador. The paper was submitted to the serious essay contest in the Foreign Service Journal.

Kennan was then named the ambassador. This other young officer and I were just quaking in our boots as to what would happen to us. "Friends" of ours in Washington gave the paper to Kennan to read during his briefings. Kennan's reaction was, in effect: Get the scorpions off the premises. He started the wheels turning for our transfers. I was transferred before my term was up. I was transferred after eighteen months. But I stayed there a lot longer than George Kennan, because he was booted out, as you know.

But the interesting thing is that the only time that I was in the foreign office was when I went down with the Chargé d'affaires, who I think was Jack McSweeney at the time, to receive the note from Vyshinsky, who was then foreign minister--he was a terrible character who presided over the purge trials in the late 1930s--declaring George Kennan persona non grata. That was the only time I was in the foreign office in my first tour of duty in Moscow.

Now since then, Kennan and I have developed a very good, close relationship. We don't agree on a number of issues, but we see each other frequently. As he told me in Berlin after he had retired--you will recall that he was ticked off, he was finished, and he went to Princeton. He came to Berlin, when I was stationed there, to deliver the Ernst Reuter memorial lectures, which he did beautifully in fluent German. I was sort of his escort officer. He asked to see me privately. He said, "You know, Mac, some of us who think we are adults, behave like children. I want to apologize to you for my behavior toward you in Moscow."

Instead of having the grace to say, "Gosh, that's great, Mr. Kennan," I said, "Well, I'm just sorry you didn't feel that way in Moscow, because my career is just about ruined." There is no question that I had a very difficult time recovering from my transfer from Moscow and from the efficiency reports that were written on me at Kennan's instigation. I finally was reasonably successful. But since then, we have developed a good personal relationship, and all the sordid past is forgotten.

Q: That's a fascinating sidelight. Even way back then, I think Kennan was declaring that large elements of what we had known as containment was not really what he meant, and he disagreed with certain NSC 68 conclusions and that sort of thing.

TOON: Well, he felt--I have never been entirely sure that he was right about this--that his views were misinterpreted by people back in Washington who wanted to translate them into the need for building up a strong military posture and developing a military alliance such as NATO. He claims that he never had that in mind at all. If you go back and read the Mr. X article or the long telegram from Moscow, it seems to be more or less inevitable that you could come to that interpretation of what he said.

Q: I have read them many times, and I was puzzled about that myself.

You left. Thomas Watson, Jr. succeeded you in Moscow. You criticized the appointment of a nonprofessional. You criticized, at that time, the Washington practice of using Dobrynin as a major channel of communication with Moscow. This is similar to what happens, I understand, all the time in our relations with London. The British Embassy in Washington is used as a channel for communications.

TOON: But there, there is a good reason for it. Usually we don't have a very competent man serving as ambassador to London.

But let me just say a word about, as you correctly pointed out, my criticism of the Watson appointment. I made clear that this was not directed at Watson personally. I knew the guy well. He was head of the Arms Control Advisory Committee when I was ambassador in Moscow. I would see him every time I came back to Washington. I had known him in other capacities. He is a very decent human being and a terribly nice guy. But not a guy with any obvious qualifications for the Moscow job. I felt strongly that this job, which had been in career hands for something like twenty years, ought to remain in career hands, because it was terribly important, I felt, from Washington's point of view to know or to have an expert's assessment as to what was going on inside the Soviet Union, what the views of the Soviet leadership were. You cannot do this without knowing the language. You have to be able to read what the Soviets are telling their own people and so forth. It was for that reason that I felt it was a misguided appointment.

Now Watson, in fairness to him, never really had a chance to demonstrate that a businessman could run a good mission in Moscow, because shortly after he got there, the Soviets invaded Afghanistan, and our relationship went down the drain. But I still feel

strongly that our interests are far better served, frankly and speaking completely subjectively, if we had a career man serving in every mission overseas. Now that is totally unrealistic, I recognize, given the nature of our political process. But at least in those sensitive posts where it is terribly important for us to try to know exactly what is going on, we ought to have a real professional. I think, frankly, we made a mistake by sending Watson to Moscow.

Now as far as my criticism of Washington's dealing with Dobrynin is concerned, I have always felt that if you are speaking to a government which doesn't have a really good understanding as to your political process, which is true of Moscow--less true now under Gorbachev, but certainly true under Brezhnev--who don't really understand how Washington operates, then you are far better off if you speak through your ambassador to make sure that your point of view gets across without any embellishment or distortion. You are in a position, as the American ambassador, to explain what your policies and your positions are. Now, as for speaking through Dobrynin, I can't prove that he distorted what he heard or was told, because we don't have access to that sort of information in Moscow. But I do know, on the basis of my many conversations with Gromyko, that he didn't understand some of the finer points involved in the SALT II negotiations, primarily because Dobrynin himself didn't understand.

Now Dobrynin, as you know, never had any note-taker with him. He always liked to be one-on-one with the American Secretary of State and with whomever else he was dealing. Now, that is a big mistake on our part.

Q: Sure. And it's an art to remembering what is said and jotting it down and getting off an accurate cable. It takes years of practice, which he had, of course, but also, still, there is an art to it.

TOON: Absolutely. I told Bill Rogers when he came in as Secretary of State--I was then Deputy Assistant Secretary handling eastern Europe--that he should never meet one on one with the Soviet ambassador. He should always have with him somebody who understands what is going on inside the Soviet Union. He said, "You have given me good advice. Of course, you will always be here when I meet with Dobrynin."

Then I went off to Prague as Ambassador. I came back on consultation six months later, and Mr. Rogers was behaving exactly the same way as his predecessors had.

Q: Some little time ago, I said I wasn't going to take much more of your time. Let me ask you two points, just quick views, that which gave you the greatest sense of accomplishment and your greatest disappointment in your career.

TOON: I think the greatest sense of accomplishment I had was in Belgrade, where I was very lucky. My first official act as ambassador, one week after I arrived, was to take Tito around the United States on his first state visit. I lived check by Jove with Tito around the

country, so I got to know him very well. The result was a very close, personal relationship with Tito when I returned to Belgrade.

Let me tell you a funny story about that. When we were traveling between Houston and Long Beach, California, in a White House aircraft, Tito invited me up to his quarters to have a conversation. He spoke Russian, primarily because he was a sergeant in the Austria-Hungarian Imperial Army in World War I and was captured and was a POW in Moscow. He learned the language, became a communist, and married a communist gal. But in any case, he spoke fluent Russian, so we had a long conversation in Russian. At the end of it, he said to me, "Mr. Ambassador, you speak very good Russian." But he said, "Now you are the ambassador in my country, and you better learn our language."

I went back to Belgrade. Shortly after I returned, I had a long meeting with the foreign minister, who was then Tepovac, who was on the trip, of course, with Tito, but who was not privy to this conversation I had had with him. He said to me, "You know, Mr. Ambassador, you've got a leg up on every ambassador in town. You know the two great world languages very well, English and Russian. There is no need for you to know Serbo-Croatian." Then I told him the story. He cleared his throat and said, "Maybe you better learn Serbo-Croatian and follow the president's advice." This gave me a clear understanding as to the tremendous power that this guy had.

In any case, while I was there--I don't say it was primarily because of my efforts--we did develop a very good, close, personal relationship with Tito and with the Yugoslav people.

My greatest disappointment, I guess, probably was in Moscow. At first I thought I had a really good chance of getting our relationship back on what I call a safe and reliable keel; this is, by addressing the Soviet leadership through the American Embassy, through the American ambassador, taking advantage of the very highly-trained professional staff that we had in Moscow in those days rather than relying exclusively on Dobrynin and his channel. Toward the end of my stay, as you indicated earlier, Vance started dealing almost exclusively with Dobrynin primarily on SALT II issues. At least I managed to have Vance double-track everything through Moscow in order to avoid misunderstandings. I made it clear to him that it was obvious from my conversations with Gromyko that Dobrynin was not reporting accurately. Whether he was deliberately distorting what he had been told, I don't know, but he was not getting the message across. So at least we made that achievement. But I did not succeed in persuading Washington to deal primarily through the American ambassador. That, I think, is my greatest disappointment.

Q: Well, I am not going to take any more of your time, but I certainly appreciate having the chance for this conversation. Unless there is something you want to add now, something you want to remind me of that I forgot to ask . . .

TOON: No, I think you've covered the scene very well, indeed.

I would like to strike one final personal note. As you know, I was very outspoken, very vocal, after I retired about nine years ago, on the whole question of career appointments versus political appointments as ambassadors. I was a consultant at that time to the State Department and to the White House. The word clearly went out from Mr. Reagan that they--the State Department and the White House--should stop consulting me on all issues, primarily because of the points that I was making about political appointees.

What I was trying to get across was that we do not necessarily have to rely only on the career service, but we must, if we insist on appointing ambassadors to important posts from the outside, we must make sure that they are qualified. That was the only point I was making.

Frankly, I thought that when George Bush came into office, we would see an end to that sort of thing, because George Bush, in a very real sense, is a professional himself. He knows the value of having a good professional ambassador. But I was told in Washington just recently that the record so far on ambassadorial appointments is thirty-five political appointees versus twelve career. Now I think that is depressing.

Q: The overall ratio, did anybody tell you? Was it sixty professional, forty nonprofessional?

TOON: Yes.

Q: That's about what it was under Reagan. Is it going even further under Bush?

TOON: Apparently so. As I understand the situation from colleagues in the State Department, the appointment process is in Baker's hands. Baker managed the campaign. I guess he is under great pressure from all kinds of people who handled bits and pieces of the campaign to reward them with jobs. But again, we are sending--let me make my point perfectly clear. It is not that we draw people from the outside that I object to. I recognize the imperatives of the American political process; you've got to do that. But just make sure that they are highly qualified people. In some cases, they are turkeys. They are not even distinguished in their own line of work.

I just made a trip recently to New Zealand. I spent two and a half years out there--the South and Southwest Pacific--as a PT boat Skipper. I never saw Hawaii. I never saw Australia. I never saw New Zealand. But I can tell you all about those bleak little islands out there. Finally, my wife and I decided to visit Australia and New Zealand. The Australian High Commissioner in New Zealand is an old friend of ours. I asked him who the American ambassador was. He said, "She's not here yet. But I understand she's an obscure fund-raiser from the state of Washington." It is just awfully depressing to realize that we were appointing that sort of person to an important Embassy.

Q: Well, that's an apt comment to depart. We are five months into the administration. You know, better than I perhaps, the historical meaning over the past two or three decades.

The ratio has been about two-thirds professional to one-third amateur among the ambassadors. Under Reagan, it got to be about sixty-forty.

TOON: I am a student of this sort of thing, as you must know from my many speeches on the subject and appearances on television. The worst was under Kennedy.

Q: Yes. I've read that somewhere.

TOON: Then the best it has been was under Carter. Toward the end of the Carter Administration, it got up to about 75%. Then it deteriorated under Reagan. And now, I think, frankly, it is worse so far under Mr. Bush.

Q: Would this affect your advice to a young or reasonably young person seeking a career as an FSO?

TOON: Yes, and I have given this advice on a number of college campuses in recent years. I have told them that I had a singularly interesting and, I think, useful career as a professional diplomat. But I could not, on the basis of what has happened in recent years, conscientiously recommend the Foreign Service as a career for a young, bright person if, in fact, that person felt that for a successful career, he had to become an ambassador. The reason is that the chances of becoming an ambassador these days are, I would say, one in a thousand. The chances of having four embassies, such as I had, are absolutely nil. So I don't think it is the same sort of career that perhaps you and I knew when we came into the Service.

I never felt, for example, that I would be blocked by this great flood of political appointees from aspiring to the top jobs in the diplomatic service. I never thought also that Washington would rely on the advice of totally uninitiated people rather than the advice of professionals. But that is the case today, and it has been the case in recent years. For that reason, I do not recommend a diplomatic career for a bright, young college graduate.

I do recommend that all take the Foreign Service examination, primarily because if you pass it, you have in your hands a great credential. It is a tough examination, as you know, and it is recognized as tough by the corporate community. If you want a job with multi-national corporations, and most of them are turning that way now, then you should take and pass the Foreign Service examination. That will give you a credential that will be respected by a prospective employer.

I am a trustee at the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy and have been for a number of years now on the Board of Trustees of Tufts University. It is depressing to me, and I think it also reinforces what I have been saying about the lack of attractiveness of the Foreign Service as a career, that only three out of the entire graduating class of the Fletcher School in the past year have opted for public service.

Q: The rest have gone to business?

TOON: Yes.

Q: Well, I appreciate your remarks once again. I think I will stop it here.

End of interview