

HARRIMAN INSTITUTE  
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

The Reminiscences of  
Jack Foust Matlock Jr.

Columbia Center for Oral History

Columbia University

2017

## PREFACE

The following oral history is the result of a recorded interview with Jack Foust Matlock Jr. conducted by Mary Marshall Clark on February 2, and on February 3, 2017. This interview is part of the Harriman Institute Oral History Project.

The reader is asked to bear in mind that s/he is reading a verbatim transcript of the spoken word, rather than written prose.

ATC

Session: 1

Interviewee: Jack Foust Matlock Jr.

Location: Durham, NC

Interviewer: Mary Marshall Clark

Date: February 2, 2017

Matlock: —which is, I think, one of the most useful books for—

Q: What's the name of the book again?

Matlock: I'm sorry. *Thinking in Time: [The Uses of History for Decision Makers]*. It was by Richard Neustadt and Ernest May—let's see. I've got it right up here on the shelf, because it has a number of case studies illustrating, I would say, policy making, and what is necessary to do it. One of the cases they had was how one of the directors of one of the divisions in the Labor department [United State Department of Labor] had written a memo to Frances Perkins [Wilson]. Which did not achieve its purpose, largely because she approached Frances Perkins as a woman rather than an official. The whole point here is when you are writing policy recommendations, you better know to whom it is directed and what the recipient's attitudes are. And they have checklists on how to do that. But one of the examples was Frances Perkins.

Q: Oh, what a great story to start with. So, let me say for the record this is Mary Marshall Clark. I am with Ambassador Jack [Foust] Matlock [Jr.]—what a great name, by the way—and I am so thrilled to be here on February 2, 2017, conducting the first session with Ambassador Matlock on the Harriman [Institute, Columbia University] oral history project. Thank you again for letting me come to see you.

Matlock: Certainly, yes.

Q: I'll begin as we always begin in oral history: with you, and where you were born, and where you were raised, and some of the influences on your life that led you to go to Duke [University], and then eventually go to Columbia [University], and do the work you are doing.

Matlock: Well, I was born in Greensboro, North Carolina. I lived there until I finished high school and came to Duke. My parents were schoolteachers. My father had been a principal of an elementary school, and my mother a teacher. My father died of pneumonia in 1938, when I was just seven years old. So, actually, my younger brother and I had a single parent much of our lives. My mother was both father and mother to me from the time I was eight years old.

Q: What were their names?

Matlock: Her name was Nellie McSwain Matlock. She was born in North Carolina, and her father was a Methodist minister. My father's father was born in North Carolina, maybe Caswell County, but they were living in Greensboro a good bit of the time, until—just after World War I—they bought a farm in Virginia. And so my father did high school in Virginia and started college at [College of] William and Mary. His father didn't want to pay the tuition. My grandfather had two children by his first wife, who died, and then four children by his second wife, and my father was the first child and first son with the second wife. My paternal grandfather felt that they just couldn't afford a college education.

My grandfather had been a policeman, and also worked as a plasterer, but then he ran a grocery store in Greensboro before he went to the farm. The farm was a tobacco farm for income, but they grew a little bit of everything, and grew most of the things that they used. They had pigs and they ate ham, and so on. They had chickens, and on Sunday, you had chicken. My grandmother was a confirmed, I would say, farm woman. As she would say, with a farm, you always have something to eat. And although they had a house in Greensboro, they were then on the farm. That's where I spent my summers when I was a small child, usually. So I had that exposure to the farm, and it was in the Piedmont region of Virginia, in Prince Edward County, about six miles from Meherrin.

I might say, in general, the Matlocks have been in Piedmont, North Carolina and Virginia, for a long time. One of my sons has traced the family history, and found that the first Matlocks came over in the late seventeenth century, and—

Q: Came over from where?

Matlock: I'm sorry?

Q: Came over from where?

Matlock: From Derbyshire, England. In fact, there are town names there. There is Matlock Bath, Matlock—they call the area The Matlocks because there are at least three towns or villages

named Matlock. Once, when we were visiting there and approaching it, there was a road sign for what we would call a bypass, but the sign said, “Avoid Matlock.” My wife was very careful to take my picture next to it [laughter].

But anyway, actually, a Matlock was sheriff of Guilford County during the Revolutionary War. And so the Matlocks had come about a century before the Declaration of Independence. One of the relatives, who also spelled his name “Matlack,” actually inscribed the Declaration of Independence—Nicolas Matlack. But in any event, the family was one which very early moved into the piedmont in North Carolina, where most of the population was Scotch-Irish. My mother’s family was Scotch-Irish, McSwain.

Anyway, probably enough [laughs] of the family history. To get more to the point on why I studied what I did: during the war, I think I was in high school, and I was intensely interested in what was going on. I remember following very carefully the fighting and where the front was, learning a good bit about the geography at least: where Ukraine is; why it was important; where the oil was when the Germans took Grozny in the North Caucasus; and so on. So even in high school, I became familiar with at least the geography of the area.

I also had an intense interest in foreign languages, but not that much possibility of studying them formally. I took Latin in high school and found it fascinating, and started teaching myself ancient Greek. I wanted to learn Russian and took a book out of the city library. I learned some of the alphabet, but I couldn’t figure out how to pronounce Russian letters. And there was nobody who

knew any Russian. Plus, *on* is he, and then *ona* is she. Except it's *ona*.<sup>1</sup> And how do you—? I wasn't accustomed to shifting the accent to the end of a word, and so on. That sort of thing. Not being able to hear how it was said—but I was very curious.

I recall that when there was a radio broadcast of speeches at the San Francisco Conference that formed the United Nations [United Nations Conference on International Organization], [Andrey Yanuarevich] Vyshinsky was the Soviet representative, and they put him on the radio for several minutes before the interpreter came in. I thought, that noise is—? I couldn't understand it. I mean, I couldn't understand how anybody could. If I could ever learn that language, that would be an achievement [laughs]. It was sort of a challenge to me.

When I came to Duke, Duke didn't teach Russian. Duke was a fairly new university then. They really were trying to establish a national reputation. They were building this campus in the late '20s, early '30s. Actually, this building we are in now is where Richard [M.] Nixon studied law. This was the law school at Durham [Duke University School of Law]. Yes, he was class of '38, I think, in the law school.

Q: How did he do?

Matlock: But what they did when they built this campus, they hired, I would say, one of the great faculties in the world [laughs]. They went around and brought in, in every field, the specialists they could. But Russian wasn't one of them [laughs]. But I started studying, first, French my

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<sup>1</sup> Editor's note: *Stress falls on the final syllable.*

freshman year. The second year, I took French and German—second-year French, first-year German. When I came for the third year—I had pre-registered for six courses, and as I came in, there was a handwritten sign: they were offering Russian for the first time. I immediately dropped a sociology course and started first-year Russian. So that year, I had third-year French, second-year German, first-year Russian.

But it was not just my curiosity. When I was a freshman, I had read Constance [C.] Garnett's translation of *Crime and Punishment*, not because it was assigned to me. When I was in high school, I didn't take that much interest in literature. But I picked it up, and it just bowled me over. I thought, this is a world that is so alien to anything I'd known, and yet fascinating, and insights into human psychology that somehow I had never been exposed to. I thought I really wanted to read more. I continued on my own to read translated Russian literature, but that was another reason. So I developed really [a] curiosity about Russian culture, and very early on, found myself almost hooked by it

At the same time, politically, we were particularly worried about the atomic age. After all, the first atomic bombs had been dropped in '45. That was the year before I graduated from high school. How were we going to survive in this world of nuclear weapons? So both my wife and I were founding members of United World Federalists organization here at Duke. Actually, one of our friends, Ralph Fleming [Jr.], who was a divinity student, we went to the national organization and got him elected national director of the student organization. Took off a year. Because we felt that without a world government, we were going to destroy ourselves with nuclear weapons.



Q: Can I just ask you a question there?

Matlock: Yes.

Q: Were you reading what [Albert] Einstein was writing about that? Are you talking about an official world government? Or are you talking about—?

Matlock: Yes. Well, there was the organization, United World Federalists. I know there were books like *Peace or Anarchy* that were written at that time. But in any event, this was one of our larger political activities.

We were in one of the delegations that went to a student legislature [North Carolina Student Legislature] in Raleigh in nineteen—this must have been '48. Either '47 or '48, because I was either a freshman or a—I must have been a sophomore. At that time, this student legislature was all white. In that year, we voted—what we then called the colored college—they should have representatives also. And so the next year—that would have been '49—we did. Actually, at that time, the North Carolina Senate did not let us use the senate hall. The senate had to meet in a church next to the capitol. The House met in the official legislative hall, and the sergeant at arms we elected was black. When the *Raleigh Times* published a picture, they cut him off. He was sitting at the edge. Those were those days [laughs].

Actually, the big debate was how we would desegregate the schools. There was no question we were going to desegregate the schools. But there was a big question of how you do it. Do you do it all at once? Or do you do it grade by grade? That was one where actually, the black students were divided. Some of them said, “Look, we are not as well trained. We can’t compete if we are transferred immediately into the higher grades—let’s start at the first grade and move up gradually.” Others would say [pounds table], “I’m perfectly well prepared, and why shouldn’t we do it all at once?” But anyway, that was at a time when this was considered the sheerest radicalism in North Carolina. But I would say when you got the students, starting with just the white students, there was never any question that we were going to desegregate.

But what I really concentrated on much more was the nuclear issue. As I learned more about the world and learned more about the Soviet Union, and learned more about the differences in culture, I began to realize that, number one, there is not going to be a world government; number two, it’s a very bad idea [laughs], because that’s not the way to bring peace. If we’re going to deal with this nuclear issue, we have got to do it through diplomacy. And what did that mean then? Well, that meant dealing with the Soviet Union. So that sort of fused with my interest in the language and the culture. By the time I was a senior at Duke, in the ‘49-’50 academic year, I decided I really wanted to deal with the Soviet Union, either in academia or in the [United States] Foreign Service. Therefore, I want to make that my specialty and go to graduate school.

I applied for Columbia to go to the Harriman Institute and major in literature—well, it was not the Harriman Institute then—it was the Russian Institute. It didn’t yet have [William Averell] Harriman’s name—and also applied to go to Harvard for history, and as a back-up, I applied to

Duke, to continue in history. I got in all three, but chose Columbia, mainly because I wanted to live in New York [laughter]. But also, at that time, the Russian Institute had a stronger faculty than Harvard. I think honestly, Harvard later developed one that was at least equally strong. But initially, you couldn't really match Columbia's faculty, with [Abram] Bergson in economics, and [John N.] Hazard in government, and Philip Mosely in International Relations. Columbia really had the best faculty for Russian studies in the early 1950s.

Now, why did I do literature rather than history? Actually, that was partly the result of Tom Winner's [phonetic] advice. He was my Russian teacher here. He got his PhD at Columbia, and he said, "You know, it's awfully hard to get a PhD in history because Professor Robinson, who had the history chair at Columbia, is so demanding that people work years on it and don't quite finish." Actually, unless I am mistaken, John Curtiss, who taught me Russian history at Duke, was the only person who, at that time, had actually completed a PhD under Robinson.<sup>2</sup>

Matlock: Professor Robinson was a very good lecturer, by the way, and had written things, and had spent a lot of time in the '30s in the Soviet Union. But he was just very demanding with his PhD candidates.

But there was a second reason for majoring in literature rather than history. I thought, if I go into academia, if I am a historian, it may be decades before I can teach a course in Russian history. I mean, not every university even taught a course in Russian history. When they did, it was by a

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<sup>2</sup> Editor's note: When he was teaching at Duke, Thomas Winner spelled his surname Wiener. Subsequently, he officially changed it to Winner, and most of his publications were with that spelling of his surname.

senior professor. I said, well, I'll spend several years teaching American and European history—and that's okay, except that's not really where my interest is. If I do Russian literature and language, well, I'm going to be teaching about Russia regardless.

Q: That is so interesting to get that context. That was when Geroid [T.] Robinson was head of Harriman?

Matlock: Yes, Robinson. Robinson was the history professor, right. But, if I'm not mistaken, Philip Mosely was director of the Russian Institute. What was it? George Tanqueray Robinson. As I said, he wrote excellent books, and actually, my history professor here, John Curtiss, had gotten his PhD from him. I think at the time I graduated, he may have been the only one who had finished [laughter]. But in any event, all of those things went into my thinking. But I had only had two years of Russian.

My wife and I were married between our junior and senior year. We had met in the United World Federalists and so on. I would say from even before our graduation, we have been partners in whatever we did. That has been one of my greatest strengths. When I was at Columbia, she worked, and sort of put me through. Also took graduate courses in comparative literature. But we have planned—I call it our career—together even from the time we were undergraduates. And, well, we just celebrated our sixty-seventh wedding anniversary.

Q: I'm so glad I will get to meet her tonight.

Matlock: [Laughs] Anyway, these things all began to come together. We graduated in 1950, and we went to New York for summer school, because I needed a third year of Russian in order to qualify for the graduate courses. So we spent the summer, and I was taking third-year Russian. The Russian Institute course at that time was a two-year course to the master's, which included a certificate of the Russian Institute. We had to have courses in all the disciplines that were taught. I know at one point, I think I was the only literature major that got an A in economics [laughter]. I was fascinated by the Soviet Union. I also got As in international relations and government. So actually, I probably got my poorest grades in literature, because it took me a while to get my language up to snuff. But the fact is that it was an excellent course.

But the curriculum was such—and this is true of all of the courses at that time—that each professor taught something in, in this case, *his* own discipline. The integration that occurred had to be in the student's mind. The course itself was not integrated. And the reason I mention this is that—and there's nothing wrong with that—but later, when I was deputy director of the Foreign Service Institute [FSI] and responsible for curriculum, I really tried to develop for the government a more integrated approach to area studies. A Foreign Service Officer does not work in a single discipline but has to take all relevant factors in mind in analyzing and reporting on events.

Say, if you are going to Israel or Jordan, you darn well better know a lot about religion [laughs]. You've got to know things about water resources. You know about economics, and you know, on and on. You need to know about everything that affects the country in the area where you are

to interpret what's going on in that country. This is something that academia *still* does not do very well. But anyway, I'm getting off our topic.

Q: No, that's not off the topic. That's right on the topic. The big question here is how well did it prepare you for the Foreign Service? How well did that degree prepare you?

Matlock: Well, first of all, I think the Foreign Service, probably like any other specialty, you can never come in totally prepared. You have got to come in with an attitude of lifelong learning, because many of the things you learn, you learn on the spot. Some of the things that are most important you don't learn in courses, particularly the human relations part of it. I am not even sure you can teach management skills. I know that supposedly business schools teach them, but basically, again, a lot of that comes from a person's ability, character, and ability to learn as one goes along.

Now, how well did it prepare me? Well [laughs], it prepared me well enough that when I took the Foreign Service exam, I got an extremely high grade on what was then the written test, which in those days was three-and-a-half days of testing. To pass that test, however, you really had to know the United States well. It was a plus if you knew something about the rest of the world [laughs]. But the testing was, as much as anything else, on the United States. But in passing the written exam, certainly my training was adequate for it. But I would say probably my specialized training was not what prepared me. As a matter of fact, on the oral exam—in those days, after the written, you went into a three-man-panel oral exam, sort of back and forth. I learned later that they had voted two to one in my favor. The one voting against me said that I was already too

specialized for the Foreign Service. Too specialized in Russian studies [laughs]. See, they were looking for people who could serve anywhere in the world. Actually, it turned out I was pretty versatile, and I laugh about it now. But the fact is that that training was very good.

In a broader sense, I would say that my specialty in Russian literature served me better in serving in the Soviet Union than any other specialty could have. That's because the legal aspects—well, and history also. Also the fact that we studied Marxism and philosophy, and all of those things. Certainly it was necessary for me to understand how the Soviet economy operated, and we got that from Bergson. But before I went to my first tour in the Soviet Union, I also had a year at the U.S. Army Russian advanced training school [U.S. Army Institute for Advanced Russian and East European Studies] in Garmisch, where all the professors were Russian émigrés. Everything was in Russian. It was like going to a Russian university, all the work. So I got accustomed actually to using Russian there, much more so than I was able to at Columbia.

Other training went in, but eventually, the fact that I had a pretty thorough knowledge of Russian history, of the culture, gave me insights that those with a more superficial knowledge didn't have. Even more important, the interest in the culture gave me an entrée into the only segment of Soviet society which a foreign diplomat—particularly an American diplomat—had a certain ability to enter, and that was the cultural sphere. So when I was there, not only did I make friends among the writers and theater people and so on, but even later, when I was ambassador and we finally were given access to the media, what interested Russians most was not debating political issues, but, “Who is your favorite poet? Which ones have you translated, and why?” And when

they heard I was interested in [Nikolai S.] Leskov, for example—I wrote my dissertation on Leskov—was, you know, “What attracts you to Leskov?”

The interesting thing about Leskov was he is a deeply Russian writer, in the sense that, well, you could say Mark Twain [Samuel Langhorne Clemens] was an American writer. In other words, his use of language and so on is very, very Russian, very hard to translate. And I wasn't pretending any of this, but somehow being interested in some of their most typical writers and understanding them established almost immediate rapport, of a sort. I simply could not have had a better specialty.

But did I rely on just what I learned at Columbia? Well, no, of course not! I kept reading. I kept interested. I kept interacting. In other words, it prepared me, I would say, one thing, to appreciate Russian culture; to read the literature not as a duty, but [laughs] because that's what I wanted to do. It was important to me. And once my Russian was good enough that I could read it just as rapidly in Russian as in English, and I began to look at translation and so on—particularly at difficult texts—this carried over, in that when I was finally able to do speeches, interviews—throughout my stay in the Soviet Union, I always had a Russian teacher. At least three hours a week, we would meet. She would help me, for example, if I were preparing a speech. She was really very good. She also had Ukrainian, so she could write speeches for me in Ukrainian when I was going to Kiev. But the thing is that we could go through a text, and she could suggest phrases and things that really—

Q: Had meaning?



Matlock: —strike home. So I never learned enough Russian to do without the help of an advisor and teacher. But the same is true of English. I don't like to publish things that somebody else hasn't edited and corrected the stuff. So it's not that. But I would say, obviously, coming out of any training program, you are not fully equipped to do a professional job in *any* profession. But certainly, the training I had I think was, by all odds, the best available, in the United States, and probably in the Western world at the time we had it. It certainly equipped me, along with the additional training that I got as a Foreign Service officer, to be pretty successful in my work.

Q: Exciting. And so then Philip [E.] Mosely came after Robinson, when you first came?

Matlock: No, no. Mosely was there. Mosely was director then.

Q: Oh, Mosely was director?

Matlock: Yes. I studied under [Ernest J.] Simmons, but I took all of Mosely's courses.

Q: And what was he like?

Matlock: A great professor.

Q: What did he teach?

Matlock: International relations. Oh, I learned so much from him. But more than just learning. I mean, he took a real interest in you. He would write the recommendations that got me my Ford Foundation grant to work on my dissertation. He made contacts where I got a contract with the State Department [U.S. Department of State] to do an index of [Joseph Vissarionovich] Stalin's works, which paid for our first child [laughter].

No, he was really great. Both what he taught—he would read your papers very carefully, comment, and so on. I did one on, I think, the Chinese communists and the Wuhan government [Wuhan National Government], and he critiqued it and so on. And he would advise you. I went to him for advice as to whether I should go in the Foreign Service or continue teaching, and he strongly advised me to go in the Foreign Service. I could always come back and teach, for example. He died *so* young. He was truly great, I think, as a teacher, as a leader, as an advisor.

Hazard was also—as I said, I liked all of them [laughs]. Though I was majoring in literature, I took everything else they offered regarding Russia. Hazard was then the editor of what now is the *Slavic Review*, and published my first article. It was an article based on my master's thesis on the governing organs of the Union of Soviet Writers. He was a great, I think, encouragement and promoter of things. I was so happy that he—just after I left Moscow as ambassador, came back and made a talk on breakup of the Soviet Union. I know Hazard was there. We were able to interact, and was so happy he lived to that point, where we could—

Q: So in '91? Or '92?

Matlock: That would have been in, yes, the early '90s. I left in '91, so I forget what year it was, but one of the first places—well, I did Columbia for the first five years.

Q: Right. You were a senior research scholar.

Matlock: I'm sorry, what?

Q: You were a senior research scholar.

Matlock: Yes, for two years. Then Kathryn and Shelby Collum Davis Professor in the Practice of International Diplomacy for the next three. So I was there for five years, until I was offered the [George F.] Kennan Chair at the Institute of Advanced Study in Princeton, which I couldn't refuse.

Q: No [laughter]. Well, that's great. I love hearing about the early days. I think you are the only person—

Matlock: Simmons was my major professor and also helped me a lot. At one point, I was about to be drafted, and he wrote a letter to the draft board saying that I would be more use as a Russian scholar than in the military. My local draft board deferred me on that basis, but—I was still at the draft board in Greensboro, because it's where you grew up is where you are registered. But then the state director reversed it. I came within an ace of getting drafted, but not quite.

But Simmons, he was vilified during the [Joseph R.] McCarthy period. I think it was quite unfair. He was not at all pro-Communist, but he was not outspoken [laughs], also, in criticizing them. But publicly, he got a bit controversial. Then at Columbia—I never knew the full story—there was some conflict with Jacques [M.] Barzun, who I think was dean then, and I think there were charges of plagiarism in some of his writings [sighs].

Q: They were trying to get rid of him?

Matlock: Anyway, he retired, I think, prematurely. But all I can say is he was good to me, and he was a good instructor. I very much deplored what happened. Again, I don't know all the details. I do know that there are a few passages in his books that read pretty similar to some in others, but [laughter]—it could have been inadvertent—though he probably should have footnoted the source. [laughter]. But whether it was more than trivial inadvertence, I really don't know. All I know was that he certainly supported me and my studies, and was the chairman of the panel that approved my matriculation for the PhD. He maintained good personal relations with me and his other students. He had my wife and me for lunch after I did my matriculation exam for the PhD, and rendered other personal rendered other personal courtesies on appropriate occasions.

But all of professors, I think, were very supportive. The most distant personally was Robinson, although I got along fine with him. I think I got probably an A in his course. But he didn't take the sort of direct interest in the students that some of the others did. I got an A in Bergson's course, but I didn't really know him that well. I actually got to know him later more than I did as a student there, after he moved to Harvard, I think.

Q: I wanted to ask another question about—in those days, was there a real network of scholars who were doing Russian studies, and did you stay in touch with each other after you left?

Matlock: Yes, we did, yes, to a—

Q: Who were some of your—?

Matlock: —to a great extent, yes. As a matter of fact, my first job, which actually Simmons had recommended me for, was at Dartmouth [College]. I went to Dartmouth to teach Russian language and Soviet literature. Dimitri von Mohrenschildt was head of the Russian department at Dartmouth, and did nineteenth-century literature, and also edited the *Russian Review*. I had the elementary and intermediate language courses, and taught Soviet literature. But I taught the Soviet literature course like an area studies course. At that time, there wasn't enough really good Soviet literature translated, but you could read it from the standpoint of learning about the Soviet Union. I mean, [Mikhail A.] Bulgakov had not yet been published, for example, while we had *The Master and Margarita*, from which that—

Q: I just finished reading that a year ago. It was a delightful book.

Matlock: Yes, yes. There is a scene pictured here. [Refers engraving of a scene from Master and Margarita on the office wall]—

Q: That's great! What a beautiful illustration. I'll have to take a picture and put it in the transcript.

Matlock: Yes, yes.

Q: Oh! That's fantastic!

Matlock: But I developed the Soviet literature course: we are going to learn about the Soviet Union, and we'll read a collective farm novel, or we'll read an industrialization novel. Of course, there was also good literature of the '20s, but—We had [Ilya] Ilf and [Yevgeny] Petrov, and of course we had [Vladimir V.] Mayakovsky, but of course, a lot of Mayakovsky is poetry, and poetry in translation never—you know, it's hard to appreciate it as literature without the original. But in any event, we had excellent students there. One of them later was the head of the *Times* bureau in Moscow when I was there, and at least three of my students at Dartmouth later turned up in very significant positions.

But the point here is that actually, it was Simmons who had recommended me for that. Now, when I thought I was going to be drafted—and the Dartmouth administration thought I was going to be drafted [laughs]—after my first year there, they wanted someone to take my place. I recommend Ed Lehrman, who was a fellow student at Columbia in the literature department. So Ed came to Dartmouth for a year. And then when I didn't get drafted [laughs], Dartmouth kept me one more year [1955-56], but that was the year that I passed the Foreign Service exam and decided not to stay in academia.

Actually, at that point, the conditions at Dartmouth were so good for teaching. They really concentrated on undergraduate teaching. They made it clear, “Look, if you do research and publish, that is going to make you marketable in the academic labor market. But as far as Dartmouth is concerned, what matters is your teaching. If you are a good teacher, you can stay here forever, but if you don’t publish, well, you may not be able to move around very easily in the academic world.” That was sort of their attitude, but I was interested really in both teaching and research. I thought, the world is bigger than Hanover, New Hampshire, and somehow I’d like to spend more of my time out there. I didn’t think I would ever find a better academic environment than the one I had at Dartmouth. It would have been very easy to say, look, I never want to leave Hanover except for visits elsewhere.

But obviously, at that time, also, there was really no way—when I was both an undergraduate and a graduate student—even to visit the Soviet Union temporarily. Stalin was alive, of course, until ‘53, and then for several years after that, there were no students; there were not even tourists for a while. So I figured I either have to be a journalist or a Foreign Service Officer to get to Moscow. For the journalist, it was sort of like teaching history, there are six or seven American journalists, and they are all senior journalists—how long do I have to work before they’ll send me there? But the Foreign Service, maybe I can get there sooner. It still took a while.

I really was interested in spending time there, and again, increasingly, we were focused on the dangers of the Cold War, the whole nuclear issue, and how to deal with that. Obviously, it

became the professional thing. I finally got through the Foreign Service exam and was approved, and I had them delay my entry so I could finish the year of teaching at Dartmouth.

Q: What a great story. Wonderful. Thank you, you answered my first question so well.

Matlock: Well, yes.

Q: How did you come to do what you—?

Matlock: I'm sorry I keep going off on these tangents.

Q: There are no tangents in oral history. Just more roads to more stories. So don't worry about that. So that was my next question, is when was your first trip to Russia—USSR [Union of Soviet Socialist Republics]?

Matlock: The first trip actually occurred in nineteen-sixty—wait a minute. The first trip was after my tour in Vienna. I'll have to think about the year.

Q: Why don't you sketch out what you did in Foreign—?

Matlock: I'm sorry, what?



Q: Go ahead and talk about the first things you did in Foreign Service, and then we can get to Russia.

Matlock: Yes. Well, I entered the Foreign Service—I had never been to the Soviet Union—and one of the things that I was eager to do was to get an assignment there. That's the reason I went in the Foreign Service. Much to my dismay, in a sense, instead of getting an overseas assignment in my first tour, they assigned me to the Bureau of Intelligence and Research [INR] in Washington [D.C.]. By that time, we already had three children [laughter], and it was hard to make do financially in Washington on junior Foreign Service pay. If you go overseas, you get a little extra pay and that can be important to a junior officer with a family.

But it was a good job, because as a new Foreign Service officer in the research division, I had a better background than most of the Foreign Service officers who were senior to me. I had a better academic background, particularly on Soviet internal affairs, which was my first assignment: the internal politics in the Soviet Union. And so that assignment meant that the first couple of promotions came almost lightning fast. In those days, we had to start at the bottom—sort of the military equivalent of second lieutenant. Everybody came in at the bottom, and normally, it took at least two or three years for each rung in the ladder. The first couple of promotions I got in one or two years faster, I think largely because, as I said, for the research I was doing, I was really ahead of more senior officers. At the time, however, I was disappointed I wasn't assigned overseas.

Then the first assignment was to Vienna, to deal with the Hungarian refugee problem. So I came in the Foreign Service in 1956, served in Washington until '58, and in '58, was assigned to Vienna. I worked first as a consular officer. My first job was to interview Hungarian refugees who had been turned down by the immigration service [United States Citizenship and Immigration Services] for immediate entry into the United States, to make sure they had not been members of the Communist Party, or if they were, they had broken with it, and so on. We had very complicated rules. But it meant in-depth interviews, and then recommendations regarding entry to the United States. Austria still had tens of thousands of Hungarian refugees still in camps, and we were trying to help relieve that to the degree we could.

So I worked for a year largely with Hungarian refugees, and then I did sort of general consular work the second year. What I was able to achieve mainly in Vienna was my German became virtually bilingual, because I was doing—particularly when I was working with Austrians, and with our local employees, well, we spoke German in the office. In fact, there was a time, then, that I could more easily explain U.S. immigration law in German than in English [laughter], because I just didn't use the English that much, at least orally.

With the Hungarians, my Hungarian interpreter was Admiral [Miklós] Horthy's granddaughter. Horthy had been sort of the fascist leader, and she had married an Austrian baron, a young man who was Princeton [University] '52, so he had studied in the States. They still moved in the old aristocratic circles, even though some were cabdrivers and whatnot. But when we went to parties that they hosted, it would be *Baronin* [baroness] this, and *Gräfin* [countess] that, and whatnot—the aristocratic titles. So this was a fascinating world of the former Austro-Hungarian empire,

and many of the things also dealing with refugees from Hungary, and learning a lot about how the communist system worked there in the interviews. Those two years in Vienna were fascinating.

My first trip to the Soviet Union occurred the summer after that, when I was assigned to Detachment, which was the Army advanced Russian training school, located in Oberammergau, Germany. Our housing was in Garmisch-Partenkirchen. We were in Bavaria. The thing is, I had been trying to get an assignment to Moscow all along, and I was told finally when I talked to officials, “Look, every position in Moscow is encumbered by a training position.” They assumed that nobody came in with Russian. So in order to be assigned to Moscow, you had to be trained by the State Department. So I said, okay, I’ll apply for Oberammergau. And so we were transferred from Vienna to this school in Oberammergau, with the housing in Garmisch.

That summer, [1960], before the formal academic year began, all of us in our class did a tourist trip to the Soviet Union. We flew from Vienna to Kiev, and then to Moscow, and then to Leningrad, and then back. Just a few weeks. This was a trip with a group trained for U.S. intelligence, mainly military, but we had three Foreign Service officers in the class, that particular class. So my first trip was as a tourist. It was interesting, though, because we visited factories, we visited schools. They were trying to show outsiders life, and of course, what we saw were probably the best they had. But it was certainly very interesting. All of us had Russian. The military, in that school, had done two years of full-time Russian training, in California, and then the second two years were like going to a Russian-speaking university. Because all the lectures, all the papers, all the exams, were in Russian. So that was the year—

[INTERRUPTION]

Q: We were just discussing your first trip to the Soviet Union, with the delegation.

Matlock: One of the interesting things was we went to the theater almost every night. They let you take pictures in the theater, or at least they did then. I suppose they still do. But I had a Leica, and a long-focus lens, and I still have those slides I took, really, of scenes in the theater.

Q: And the theater was wonderful in those days, right?

Matlock: Yes. The theater is great. It really is. They have a tradition. It's repertory theater. I would say it's almost a religion [laughs] with Russian intellectuals going to the theater. Of course, the [Konstantin] Stanislavski technique has become so central.

So that was certainly one of the things we did, and we did also the usual tourist things—seeing the Petrodvorets. The Peterhof [Palace] just outside what was then Leningrad had just been, I would say, rebuilt—because the Germans had occupied it and destroyed much of the thing—had just been rebuilt with all the fountains and things when we did that visit. I remember going out there. Of course, the Hermitage [Museum] is always a great thing. The museums also are great.

So, yes. I think we came out with the feeling that this regime is more solidly entrenched than our émigré teachers had implied. Of course, they had fled during the war, and so on, and they were

very good about teaching us about the Soviet Union. I mean, the former KGB [Komitet gosudastvennoy bezopasnosti] guy even gave us lists of all the unprintable cuss words and sexually and scatalogically-oriented phrases so that you could cuss like a Russian [laughter].

Matlock: But they did leave an impression that the regime was not all that solid, although they described all the things that were used—

Q: So tell me more what you mean by that. I mean, when you say you were there and you saw how entrenched it was—how entrenched it was, you said?

Matlock: Yes.

Q: Could you explain it?

Matlock: In the sense that there wasn't going to be a rebellion anytime soon [laughs]. We were right about that. Most of us would have said, "I don't think they are going to be able to evolve very rapidly because of the type of controls." When I was a graduate student—I mentioned this—that there was a great attention given to an article that Professor [George S.] Counts—who, I guess, a professor at Teachers College—wrote, and he argued that since the party controlled education and the press, and, along with the instruments of compulsion, this would create a system which was virtually unchangeable. I'm wondering now, but one of the things—this was very much debated when I was a student, and I guess I was always one to say, "You know, that may be true, but let's don't assume that it's inevitable." Even later, when we were told they

won't do this, they won't do that, I would say, let's test it. Let's push the envelope a little bit and see how far they are willing to go in opening up.

But I remember the debate over that began, particularly over that—I think it was Counts that wrote that article. I think he wrote it in *The American Scholar*, the Phi Beta Kappa [Society] magazine, if I remember. So this was one of the issues that we would discuss among ourselves, and particularly among the military officers. They would say this system is probably here to stay for a while [laughs]. In other words, it's not going to collapse in our day.

By the way, I know I'm wandering, but following that theme, I recall that when I was interviewing [Mikhail S.] Gorbachev for my book on [Ronald W.] Reagan and Gorbachev [*Reagan and Gorbachev: How the Cold War Ended*—obviously after the Soviet Union collapsed—I was interviewing, and I told him I was going to be writing a book, and he approved that. He said, "That's great. You knew us both, and I'm glad you're writing it." I said, "Well, before you approve it, let me tell you what my conclusions are going to be. I'd say the first is that it took both you and Reagan to end the Cold War. Neither of you could have done it alone." He said, "You're absolutely right." But I said, "The second is that the collapse of Communist control over the Soviet Union was your doing—"

Q: Absolutely.

Matlock: "—and that it had nothing to do with American pressure." He grabbed me and he said, "Jack, you're right. And you know what?" I mean, we were speaking Russian, but—I said, "I

think I do. You were the only person who could have done it.” He said, “You’re right. That was a system that could not be changed from the bottom up. It had to be top down, and by god [pounds on table], I did it.”

Q: What a great story! That’s incredible.

Matlock: As I say, it goes back to the debates we had. I would say, of the Counts article—is it changeable? But nobody, [laughs] including myself at that point, would have dreamed that the general secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union would do it!

Q: Wow. I now want to go on a tangent, too [laughter]. Why? What do you think motivated him? I mean, there are some obvious external factors, but what motivated him to want to make that change?

Matlock: Well, I think—more than one thing, obviously. When things like that happen, you can’t just say a single one. But to simplify—I think to be basically correct, he had decided even before he was general secretary the country had to change. It was on the wrong track. The first thing he had to do was to end the arms race and the competition with the U.S. in order to do anything internally. But at the same time, he realized they really needed to go in a more democratic direction. They needed to open up the country, and they needed competition of ideas, and many of these things. When he started doing it—

Well, at first, when he became general secretary, he genuinely thought he could lead the Communist Party to implement these things. But by '87, '88, he began to run into resistance all up and down the party hierarchy, pushback on what he was trying to do. I think step by step, he realized he was going to have to take the party out of control to bring about these reforms. So I'd say, for the first time in Russian history—and for something rare in any country—you had a political leader that put his assessment of what was good for the country above his own staying in power.

Q: It's remarkable.

Matlock: In fact, one of the most satisfying things about my career—that by the time I was ambassador, I was well enough equipped to actually become personal friends of all these people, on both sides. We were all completely loyal to our countries and the policies, and yet, I think we did recognize that [laughs] if this world is going to survive, we have got to get away from this ideological struggle, and particularly the arms competition. They realized as well as we did, and the way was to find a way there. I was always very strongly anti-communist, and a hardliner for many of our policies. And yet, somehow, I seemed to be able to develop a rapport, even with the people we were arguing with, I think often because I didn't go out of my way to embarrass them publicly.

I recall that shortly after I came to Moscow as ambassador, one of the fairly junior members in the foreign ministry [Ministry of Foreign Affairs] came through the line of guests for a reception that we were having. It was a big one. He said as I shook his hand, "Mr. Ambassador, I wonder,



if you have got a minute later, if I could have a word with you?” I said, “Well, sure.” And when the guests had come in, I took him aside and I said, “What’s on your mind?” He said, “Look, I have a question, and don’t be offended, but you know, you can come in and say things”—he had been a note-taker in some of our meetings— “and say things that if anybody else said them, our people would climb the walls. They take it from you! What’s your secret?” Nobody had asked me that before [laughs]. I thought a minute; he had sort of surprised me. I said, “Well, I really don’t know. I guess they sense that I really love this country.”

Q: We interviewed—

Matlock: “Which means that when you do things that are not in your interest, I have to tell them about it.” He said, “You know, I thought so, and I wondered if you realized it.”

Q: I have a beautiful story for you. We interviewed Deana Arsenian yesterday, and my interviewer sent me the summary. She said of everyone that she had ever worked with, that you really understood the soul of the Soviet Union, and that’s why you were able to do what you did.

Matlock: Yes. Well, in a certain sense. As I said, it’s not just specializing in the literature, it’s a whole lot of things. But it’s also grasping something that many Americans don’t grasp—and it’s something that President [Barack H.] Obama seemed to be totally oblivious to—is that for a Russian in particular—but not just Russians—to criticize them publicly, particularly if it’s something that’s true, is considered a grave insult. I have a lot of personal stories on this. In

writing memos to President Reagan, who was mainly interested in how they tick. He was more interested in this sort of thing, and I would explain things like this.

George Kennan, at one point in his memoirs, tells about being there in the '30s, and he had a lot of Soviet friends. Once in their presence, when some Americans came and asked him about certain things, he told them what he had heard from the friends. And when the Americans left, the Russians said to him, "George, we thought you were our friend." He said, "Well, I am. What makes you think I'm not?" "Well, those things you told your compatriots." He said, "Well, weren't they true?" And the answer was, "Well, yes, they're true. But if you're a friend, you wouldn't tell the truth about us."

And this goes down on a personal level. One of my closest friends, Tatiana Kudriavtseva, who translated my books, translated my wife's book—but more importantly, she translated American literature. She did [John H.] Updike, and she did [Norman K.] Mailer, and she also did *Gone with the Wind*. Her specialty was really translating American literature. She told me once that she was visiting—I think it was—well, one of the American writers in Connecticut, and Arthur [A.] Miller came to dinner the evening with them. She was planning to take the train back into New York the next morning, and Miller said, "Look, I'm driving in. Do you want to go with me?" She said, frankly, she didn't want to, but on the other hand, she didn't want to turn him down. I said, "Well, why didn't you want to?" She said, "I didn't like what he did to Marilyn [Monroe] in *After the Fall*. Then she told me later that, "As we drove in," she said that, "I guess he could see that I was sort of not in a good mood." And he asked her, "What's troubling you?" She said, "Well, I didn't like the way you treated Marilyn in *After the Fall*. I thought that was not good."

He said, “Well, that’s the way it was.” She said, “Well, didn’t you love her?” He said, “Well, yes, I did, but that’s the way it was.” She said, “Well, if you loved her, you wouldn’t tell it like it was.”

Q: I love that so much.

Matlock: Such a Russian attitude [laughs].

Q: My god, it’s just breathtaking. So that poses such a challenge to diplomacy.

Matlock: So when you have the president of the United States saying in his State of the Union address how he’s costing [pounds on table] Vladimir [V.] Putin because of his actions in Ukraine—I said, “What in the world do you think you’re doing?” First of all, you are not costing him anything, except making him popular at home, and convincing Russians that their economic problems, which are mainly because of low oil prices, are caused by our sanctions. I mean, how can a man as smart as Obama—and his assistants, as smart as they were, well educated, fine people—how can they be so oblivious to what—I mean, this may be an exaggerated Russian trait, but when you think about it, we react the same way; we just don’t admit it.

Q: This reminds me of when Mark [L.] von Hagen was—I had a long, wonderful interview with him. He visited the USSR in ‘74, and really kind of went underground and became—he looked Russian, and he would pass for Russian. But there is a certain point in his academic career when he realized it was empire studying empire, and neither one realized that. And then suddenly it

came through to him that they had to relate more personally. He had to understand the soul of Russian culture, and not look through the lens of empire.

Matlock: Well, that's right. In my own case, one of the reasons I changed my dissertation and it took so long to write it—I was first going to write about the Soviet Writers Union. But once I got to Moscow and began to meet them, I thought, I cannot write something publicly and maintain these relationships. So that's why I went into a nineteenth-century topic, and a totally non-political one, translating Leskov's language.

Q: Well, back to Obama, clearly, by the end of his administration, relations were very bad. What difference would it make if he had listened to the right people, in terms of what we're—?

Matlock: You are going back to the Reagan administration?

Q: Obama. Then we're going to go to Reagan.

Matlock: Oh, Obama.

Q: Then we're going to go to Reagan.

Matlock: Oh, on this.

Q: What should he have done?

Matlock: Oh! First of all, I think that our relation with Russia began to get off-track in the [William J.] Clinton administration. I have written in detail about that in my book *Superpower Illusions* [*How Myths and False Ideologies Led America Astray—and How to Return to Reality*].

Q: I just read that book. Yes.

Matlock: First, it started with the expansion of NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization]. It got a lot worse with [George W.] Bush the forty-third with the withdrawal from the ABM [Anti-Ballistic Missile] Treaty, with the continual expansion of NATO, and particularly with plans for missile defenses in Eastern Europe. Now, none of those things was necessary for our security. All of them were bad ideas. I used less strong language than George Kennan, but I gave exactly the same advice to the Senate when it was considering a NATO expansion. It's "Don't do it." Because one thing: at some point, you are going to have to stop, because no Russian government is going to permit Ukraine and Georgia to come into NATO. Where are you going to stop? You probably can't stop with the Baltic States. But that's one thing.

Second, this is a step, really, to divide Europe again. You can't keep a Europe whole, free, and at peace if it is divided by a military alliance that doesn't include everybody. Particularly that alliance which only represented half of it before. We had certainly given Gorbachev the strong impression that we would not expand NATO if he allowed the two German states to unify, and the united Germany to stay in NATO. At one point, Secretary of State [James A.] Baker had

said, “Assuming there is no expansion of NATO jurisdiction to the east not one inch, wouldn’t it be better—?” then he explained why it was better to have a united Germany in NATO than out.

This was in the context of an agreement that Bush and Gorbachev made at Malta [the Malta Summit] that if they did not interfere in the democratization of Eastern Europe—that is, no more military intervention—that we would not take advantage of their withdrawal. But how can expanding NATO into countries that had been in the Warsaw Pact [Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation, and Mutual Assistance] anything but taking advantage? Though, of course, that was a different administration.

But frankly, I think that starting with the Clinton administration, we misinterpreted the whole meaning of the end of the Cold War and the breakup of the Soviet Union, and bought onto this idea that it was a victory, comparable to a military victory; that Russia was, in effect, a defeated nation; and that our victory in the Cold War meant that not only was our system better than theirs, but that it was suitable for everybody. Now, none of these things are true. Not a one of them. We negotiated the end of the Cold War, and the terms we had were in their interest. It allowed Gorbachev to begin internal reforms. Now, these failed eventually to keep the country together, but it didn’t break up because we demanded it, and that was not the end of the Cold War. The Cold War had ended before the break up.

But the whole triumphalism, which actually began with [George H. W.] Bush—when he saw he might lose reelection, he started saying we won the Cold War. Gorbachev cannot forgive him for that. Reagan, by the way, never said we won the Cold War. In fact, before his first meeting with

Gorbachev, he wrote in a memo—sort of to himself and the rest of us—the next-to-the-last sentence was, “Whatever we achieve, we must not call it victory,” because that would just make the next one more difficult.

Q: He understood.

Matlock: And he didn’t say we won the Cold War. He wrote in his memoirs the last time he met Gorbachev when he was president, “We parted as partners to make a better world.” Not, “We won; they lost.”

That’s part of it. But it was more than this. It was, I would say, the assumption that we can spread democracy in other countries, and that democracies are not only what *they* want, but [what] would make them friends of the U.S. Again, all of these, when you look at them, are just simply—I would say it’s sort of like putting a slab of dry ice out in the sun in a July day. It’s going to sort of disappear before your eyes as you examine it. First of all, what is a democracy? How do you define it? Are we a democracy? Twice in the last sixteen years, we have installed a president who got fewer votes—most recently, substantially fewer votes—than the other, then the opponent. Is that democracy? Well, if others did it, we would say no [laughs].

But there is a basic assumption there that the form of government somehow determines not only their behavior domestically, but their international behavior. I see no evidence whatsoever for that. In fact, I think that it is an unconscious adoption of what we used to call the Brezhnev Doctrine: the idea that it was in the Soviet Union’s interest for other countries to become

socialist in their definition, and if they became socialist, they should intervene to make sure that the socialists stay in power. That's what brought on the invasions of Czechoslovakia, Hungary, the pressures on Poland during the rise of Solidarity in 1981. So the idea that you spread democracy, if you send people into a country that's fairly authoritarian and start campaigning for elections. But people there are going to assume—well, not only are you interfering in their internal politics, but you are telling the government that you are the enemies of that government. And if you do encourage people to think that you can help them, and then they are crushed because they exaggerate your own power, then you bear a little bit of responsibility for that.

So this whole idea of democratization—that we have a duty, and that our allies—we'll find it in articles just this past week. “[Donald J.] Trump shouldn't trash our alliances because we share values of democracy and this, that, and the other with our allies,” which we don't share with Russia and China. I have to say, “Wait a minute. How is Turkey more democratic or has more common values with us than Russia?” I can make a case that Russia has more of our values than Turkey. But Turkey is a NATO ally. What the hell does that have to do with it?

Again, I'll get into a rant if I get into too much of this.

Q: That's fine.

Matlock: But what Obama—you know, he tried to change some things, and he certainly kept us from getting *deeply* involved in invading Syria, and so on. But the whole idea that we could give active support to the opposition in Russia and help them bring about a democracy, and then



actually publicly criticize President Putin for running for a third term when, under their constitution, he could—frankly, these charges that they interfered in ours would be ludicrous if it wasn't so pathetic.

But the reason I have to mention this is that it's not that Putin hasn't done a lot of bad things. I think many of the things have not been in Russia's interest. But I think to a very great extent, these are reactions to what they see as provocations. After all, why did he insist on a referendum in Crimea and then take it? Because he was afraid that the government in Kiev, which came to power in an unconstitutional way, would join NATO and he would lose his naval base. What he had going for him was the fact that most of the people in Crimea actually prefer to be in Russia. That's something people forget.

And what people forget is that we set the precedent. When we bombed Serbia without U.N. [United Nations] approval—and Serbia had not attacked any NATO member, our having said this is a purely defensive alliance—we made war against Serbia, and then recognized Kosovo as independent. The Helsinki agreement [Helsinki Accords] says there can be no change of borders without mutual agreement. And there was not even a referendum in this case, in Kosovo. Nor were they truly independent when we recognized them in 2008. So we set that precedent. When Putin mentioned it as a precedent, I think President Obama said, “Oh, well, there had been a human rights crisis there, and there was a referendum in Kosovo, and they chose independence.” Actually, there wasn't. There was a referendum in Crimea—

Q: Right. I remember that.

Matlock: —and true, they sent in these little green men; there was no violence. I’ve pointed out—

I’m not defending what Putin did. It was illegal, and we shouldn’t recognize it as legal until they straighten out that. But aside from that, what he did was less outrageous than what we did in regard to Kosovo. We killed a lot of people. We bombed a lot of infrastructure in Serbia. And there wasn’t a referendum. There was only a vote of the parliament there for it. So we achieved what we did with a lot of loss of life. There was no loss of life in the Crimea. Was there a humanitarian tragedy? Well, there could have been.

Putin was also reacting to the fact that when things started going violent in Ukraine, one of the horrible things that happened was in Odessa—which is a largely Russian-speaking city on the Black Sea, as you know—where a group demonstrating for the Russian language and recognition were chased into a building, and then the building burned. Over thirty of them burned in the building. All they were demonstrating for was the recognition of the Russian language as an official language. So to say, well, there wasn’t a human rights problem—Putin’s excuse was, “Look, if they start this in Crimea, there is going to be a lot of loss of life.” I say I don’t think we should recognize the annexation, but let’s recognize the fundamentals. One is that Crimea traditionally was not part of Ukraine until [Nikita S.] Khrushchev administratively moved it to Ukraine, out of the Russian Federated Socialist Republic in the 1950s. That was done when it had no practical significance, because everything was run out of Moscow.

Second, that politically, it has been a burden to Ukraine. They have very narrow votes between, you might say, the more pro—they are not exactly pro-Russian. The people in the east want the Russian culture to be recognized, along with Ukrainian culture. Whereas those in the extreme west, the extreme nationalists who control the present government, want to make Ukrainian the only obligatory language. And this gets to be a very emotional issue. Well, [Viktor F.]

Yanukovich, the corrupt president, who was elected in reasonably fair elections, would never have been elected without those votes in Crimea. In other words, without Crimea, the nationalists would have a more cohesive country. After all, these are areas that had autonomous status earlier, and the autonomy was taken away. That's what Serbia did to Kosovo, and we backed the Kosovars. When it came to Georgia, it was Georgia that first attacked Abkhazia and South Ossetia. This time, we took the Georgians' side. As the Russians say, "Where are your principles here?" It's just sheer anti-Russianism.

I guess I could go on with issue after issue. Even though President Obama started out saying they wanted a reset, there was a total misunderstanding of what that would require, including what it means in Russian. Secretary of State [Hilary R.] Clinton shows up with a badge with, in Latin letters, a Russian word, *peregruzka*. Well, it happens that *peregruzka* means "overload." "Reset" is *perezagruzka*. If there ever was a Freudian slip! Now, I'll say this. I thought my Russian is pretty good, but I would *never* have permitted—when I was an advisor—that either the secretary of state or the president to use a foreign word that I hadn't thoroughly vetted with native speakers. And is it hard to print things in Cyrillic? I mean, right now, you can get it in Microsoft Word or almost any word processor! Why print it out in Latin letters?

It showed, in a way, you might say, the incompetence of it. But the concept that we could have extensive cooperation when it is in *our* interest, but at the same time actively support what we considered the democratic factions, which at that time were actually developing an opposition to Putin. Meanwhile, when [Dimitry A.] Medvedev was president, Secretary Clinton made clear publicly how she preferred to deal with Medvedev rather than Putin. Well, he was the power behind the scenes, for heaven's sakes! You need to recognize that, but you don't say that publicly [laughs]. So when there were demonstrations against Putin running a third term—although I don't think we were fundamentally involved, I suspect that our people were out there with the demonstrators. And Putin really thinks the CIA [Central Intelligence Agency] was trying to organize the coup against him. That's one thing.

In the case of Ukraine, when there were demonstrations over the fact that corruption—and they wanted an agreement with the E.U. [European Union], under the mistaken notion that that agreement was going to solve their problems. It wouldn't have, and that's sort of a tragedy—we not only actively supported the, then, anti-Russian demonstrators, the assistant secretary of state, Victoria [J.] Nuland, was down in Kiev passing out cookies and cheering them on. And then talking on a cell phone with our ambassador about who should be the Ukrainian prime minister. [Laughs] And we say they have interfered in our election! We were trying to directly overthrow an elected government in a country right next to Russia, which for most of its history had been part of it. How can smart people do such things?

Q: It does boggle the mind. I mean, even a—

Matlock: And when you say, oh, well, we have an obligation to support democracy, and we have to support the people that share our values—my gosh!

I am one who—I was a strong Obama supporter. I deplored the policy of the Republican leadership of not cooperating with him. On every domestic issue, I am with him a hundred percent. And also, his refusal to actually send troops into Syria, and so on. I think he was absolutely right. But I cannot understand how he could be so wrong about Russia.

Q: Or why he could let Hilary dominate the—

Matlock: I'm sorry, what? Yes?

Q: Why he could let Hilary Clinton dominate with her own ideas in the way that she did. Maybe they agreed.

Matlock: Well, she was secretary of state, and I think that—the thing is, when we look at our recent election, well, obviously the Russians preferred Trump to Clinton. I mean, Clinton had compared Putin to [Adolf] Hitler, publicly. Obama was pushing very painful sanctions on them. She actually, during the campaign, when asked about Syria, she said, well, she'd put in a no-fly zone. Well, the military had been telling them all along you don't want to do that. I mean, that takes suppressing anti-aircraft—and actually, right now, the Syrians have some pretty sophisticated anti-aircraft. That was really a crazy idea. So, sure, when Trump says, I think it's

better to cooperate with Russia, and she is making those statements, of course they wanted Trump to win!

I don't think they thought Trump could win any more than we did. My theory is, yes, I think they were behind the hacking into the DNC [Democratic National Committee], and things. Whether Putin personally authorized it, I don't think we have any way to know. But my theory is that that was meant as a signal to Clinton, whom they thought was going to win, "Stop calling us a merely regional power, dammit! We got nukes! We got space capabilities you don't even have. And don't forget the possibility of cyber-warfare. We are not a banana republic!" That was the message.

I can't imagine it changed a vote. Why would anybody vote for Trump because the DNC was trying to fix the nomination for Clinton? I mean, I don't see the logic. Did the Russians produce false evidence? Or did they expose something that, at least in theory, our political process should be more transparent?

Q: Well, yes.

Matlock: So, yes, part of it was, you keep saying you are so much better than we are; you are exceptional; the rules don't apply to you; we don't share your great values. Damn it all, you're not perfect. So it gets back to the other thing I was talking about, do friends even expose the weaknesses of friends, if you're a friend? If you're an enemy—even if it's true, if it's being used to put you down, or—it's very much resented, and you are going to get pushback.

But the idea that, “Well, they spread a lot of disinformation, and this is our problem, and they probably elected Donald Trump,” I think that is almost despicable, because—god knows I didn’t vote for Trump. I didn’t think he could be elected. I am appalled that he has been. But that was an election the Democrats lost.

Q: Absolutely.

Matlock: And they may as well recognize it, and not blame the Russians. I mean, it’s—[laughter]

Q: That’s a great line! That should be published! Oh, no, I think we should blame the Russians for everything!

Matlock: Oh, yes, yes.

Q: My dishwasher is not working; it must be the Russians.

Matlock: Somebody sent me a cartoon that somebody wrote, and it had dogs rushing to the front door. And the caption was, “I’m glad you came home finally! The Russians pooped in the hall.”

[Laughter]

Q: Well, this leads to all kinds of interesting—I mean, I think we should probably start with Reagan now, but I am just—I want to talk to you also about, of course, [Robert] Legvold and—

Matlock: Yes. I'll try not to get on so long. Let's get on with it.

Q: No, no, no, no! That was great. That was great [laughter]. We have to talk about what's going on today. It must be talked about. But anyway, I also want to get your thought on Legvold's new book. Because there are so many perceptions about the Cold War. When did it end? Did it end? Did it really ever end? There are all kinds of questions hanging in the air that are largely unexamined, and I wondered what you thought of Legvold's new book. Have you read it?

Matlock: I'm sorry, what? If you could say—

Q: Legvold's new book, *Return [to] Cold War*?

Matlock: Yes.

Q: Have you read it?

Matlock: I have it, but I have not read it. I just got it two days ago. It's on the table next to my wife's reading. She reads them first and tells me if I need to [laughter].

Q: Well, maybe I should ask her at dinner what she thinks.

Matlock: But it's next in line with hers [laughter].



Q: All right. We won't be able to talk about that this time. Okay. So you became the ambassador in 1987. Is that right, or earlier? When were you Reagan's ambassador?

Matlock: Yes, '87.

Q: And what was your position before that?

Matlock: I was Special Assistant to the President for National Security, and Senior Director for Europe and the USSR.

Q: Well, tell me a little bit about those years, because I think that's very important to understand before we get to your ambassadorship.

Matlock: Yes. Well, first of all, I would say that when Reagan was elected—and by the way, I didn't vote for him the first time [laughs]—when Reagan was elected, I had been nominated by [James E.] Carter [Jr.] to go to Prague as ambassador to Czechoslovakia. But that nomination went up in October, and the Senate hearings didn't occur until Reagan was elected. The transition team asked me if I would go to Moscow and take temporary charge of the embassy [Embassy of the United States]. Now, what had happened was that [Thomas J.] Watson [Jr.], the former president of IBM [International Business Machines Corporation], had been Carter's ambassador. He didn't want to stay even a day under Reagan, and his DCM [deputy chief of mission], who had been my successor as DCM—deputy chief of mission—Mark Garrison,

Watson was hiring to go and head the Watson Institute [for International and Public Affairs] at Brown [University]. So they were going to lose the ambassador and the DCM, and I had been DCM—in fact, for a little over four years—and had been in charge of the embassy. They said, well, would you go and take charge? And I agreed, on condition that Rebecca could go with me—this was going to be a temporary duty.

It turned out that I was there about nine months, until September. Subsequently, Reagan renewed my nomination as ambassador to Czechoslovakia. He did that in March, but because of disputes with Senator [Jesse A.] Helms [Jr.], there weren't any hearings until September. So I was actually in charge of the embassy from the day Reagan was inaugurated to early September, in Moscow. [Alexander M.] Haig [Jr.] was then secretary of state, and was very impressed with my reporting at that time. In fact, they have just published in *The Foreign Relations of the United States* some of my cables, and they show the annotations that Haig made, "Brilliant argument. I like this guy," and so on. So at least with the new administration, I, in effect, made my name.

Then in September, I had gone on to Prague after I was confirmed. Within a few months, they started feeling me out if I would come to the White House and take [Richard E.] Pipes' job. Richard Pipes, the Harvard professor, had been the Soviet advisor. I resisted it. One thing, [laughs] I really enjoyed Prague. We have a great residence there. I like the Czechs. Czech had been my second Slavic language I studied at Columbia. I was able to do all of my speeches in Czech and Slovak, and my business in Czech. So we really liked the country, although the politics were tough. But at that time, there didn't seem to be much going on in the Soviet thing.

Well, by early '83, I got a call from, then, [Richard A.] Clarke—who was the national security advisor, asking me to come to Washington and discuss a job—that they were reorganizing the NSC [National Security Council]. I told him, well, I'll come and talk about it, but I am really not eager to come back to Washington. And I wasn't. Because there had been reports of all this infighting and whatnot. But I did go back, and then they explained to me that, one thing—they were reorganizing, so that it wasn't just a Soviet advisor, it was the counterpart of the assistant secretary for European affairs in the State Department. The portfolio was everything Vancouver to Vladivostok, the long way around. That is, Canada, Europe, Soviet Union.

And the second thing was, the reason they wanted me was—well, [George P.] Shultz had recommended me—because up until then, the NSC was vetoing virtually everything they wanted to do with the Soviet Union. But I was told by [Robert] McFarlane, who was then the deputy national security advisor, “The president has decided it's time to negotiate with the Soviets, for better or worse. When he took office, he thought we were too weak to negotiate, but now that he has our defense built up, he thinks he's got enough chips to start negotiating, to put on the table. But,” he said, “nobody here has any experience dealing with them. You are our most experienced officer, and George Shultz has recommended you. What we want you to do is come and tell us how to do these negotiations.” [Laughs]

I called my wife—and I had not wanted to leave Prague—and I said, “Rebecca, I have got to accept.” So I did, on condition—we had a lot of plans for the spring and summer, and I said, “Okay. I'll come back two or three weeks a month if you'll leave me as ambassador—formally

ambassador. I can do the work there in a week every month, spend most of the time here, but then my family doesn't leave until September." And they said, "Okay, it's a deal." [Laughs]

Q: Good for you.

Matlock: So I came back and started. The first paper they wanted was on summitry, the pros and cons. Most of Reagan's advisors had been against a summit meeting. It was an interesting thing that—I know just after I came on the job, within the first couple of months, Dick Pipes came down from Harvard. He stayed just two years, because he would have lost his tenure at Harvard if he stayed more than two years. So he had gone back to Harvard, but he came to Washington at times to visit. We had lunch, and he was telling me how he was sure the president did not want to meet the Soviet leaders, he hated them, and the State Department was pushing him to meet the Soviet leaders, but he was sure Reagan didn't want to. I didn't have the heart to tell Dick, "You know, this morning, I was in a meeting with the president—" an unannounced meeting, not in the West Wing, but in the [Executive] Residence—where he told six of us, including the secretary of state, secretary of defense, national security advisor, chief of staff, chairman of the Joint Chiefs [of Staff], and myself, "I need to meet the Soviet leader. Let's get ready to do it."

But that was one of the most secret meetings we held. So in effect, I was being brought on and given carte blanche—as long as Reagan approved it [laughs]—to write the script. It took us a few months. One thing, we had for this the full support of George Shultz. He had been pushing—

Q: Tell me about George Shultz. What were your first impressions of him?

Matlock: Well, the first time I met Shultz, he was secretary of Treasury, and I think I was briefing him. This must have been in the Nixon administration, when I was director of Soviet Affairs in the State Department. He didn't have much to say, and he would sit there with a fairly somber face—some people would call him “the Great Sphinx,” because one of the things he did, before he expressed his opinion was to listen to what other people had to say. He struck me at that time as—well, I didn't know what to think, because he didn't really have much to say. He was listening to us, but not much light talk or banter.

Later, in coming to work with him, I think he was one of our great secretaries of state of the entire twentieth century. In fact, I can't think of any I would put above him, in terms—of every term: management of people, selection of people—and it wasn't just that I worked together with him. It was just his ability to get the best out of people; he was a team leader. Again, on many things, he really wanted to know what you thought before he made up his mind. He would never say, “Well, this is what we are going to do.” It was always, “Okay, fill me in on what's going on. Now, what do you recommend we do, and why?” He would listen, and sometimes he would give you immediate answer, and other times, he would say, “Look, I am going to have to think about it.” But if he didn't take your advice, he would find some way to let you know that he appreciated it, and he wanted you to keep telling him your mind. In other words, he never held it against you if he had to make a decision against your advice. His attitude was, We're all on the same team. It's a team effort.

Q: Anyway, I took you away from your story. I just wanted to know your evolving impression.

Yes. Go ahead.

Matlock: Yes, it's easy to get me on tangents, as you have already learned.

Q: So we were talking about that meeting that you sat down—

Matlock: Yes. Oh, right. Yes. There was that meeting, where Reagan didn't tell us how to do it, but it was clear that he wanted a meeting with the Soviet leader. Reagan said, "I have got to show them that I am not one that would eat his grandchildren." Reagan, for a long time, really couldn't believe the Soviet leaders were afraid of us. He was just beginning to realize that they had taken his rhetoric, and certain other things that had happened, and they might really be afraid. And therefore, he really had to meet them and set them straight. He wrote a handwritten letter when he was still in the hospital after the assassination attempt to [Leonid I.] Brezhnev, which Haig didn't want to send, Pipes didn't want to send, and they finally sent a fairly bureaucratic letter drafted by the State Department, but Reagan insisted on sending his personal one, too. And Brezhnev really didn't give him an answer; it was just a cold, bureaucratic answer. Even the Soviet ambassador, Dobrynin, says, in his memoirs, this was a big mistake. But the fact was that Reagan himself was trying to make this contact even earlier, and his staff was doing everything they could to prevent it.

The first thing I needed was to first of all, reassure the president that this was the right thing. But instead of writing a memo saying we needed a summit, I wrote one, as they asked me, the pros

and cons. I tried to be totally fair about it, but come down on what you could achieve at a summit if it was properly prepared. But then the question was, well, what's the substance? And then things kept happening. September first [1983], the—or was it maybe August thirty-first? —they shot down the Korean airliner [Korean Air Lines Flight 007], the 260-odd people killed, including a congressman [Lawrence P. McDonald]. At first, the Russians denied it.

I was in Prague, actually, when that happened. Again, a personal tangent. Our wedding anniversary is September second. We came down to breakfast and planning what we were going to do for our anniversary. Voice of America said the Korean airline had been shot down, and the president was coming back to Washington from California. Rebecca turned to me and said, “Jack, you have got to go.” [Laughs] So sure enough, five-thirty that evening Washington time, I came into the White House and I was told, “You're late for the meeting.” I said, “Well, you know, sorry about that.” [Laughter]

Anyway, these things kept happening, and we had a real brouhaha over that. And then [Yuri V.] Andropov came about with the statement, public statement, that they made a lot of, that if there had ever been any illusion they could deal with the Reagan administration, these illusions were now dispelled; obviously, there could be no significant business with the Reagan administration. The reason he did that was we started the deployments of intermediate-range missiles in Germany, in accord with the NATO plan to do so. So actually, things were tightening more and more.

Then Shultz said, “We have really got to get our act together.” He invited [William J.] Casey and Casey’s deputy, Bob [Robert M.] Gates, [Caspar W.] Weinberger and Weinberger’s deputy, Will [William H.] Taft [IV], and the national security advisor, who then was Bud McFarlane, and then members of his own staff, to a very small breakfast meeting on Saturdays. These were not announced; weren’t on anybody’s calendar. They were considered secret. So we went over to the State Department, and he named me executive secretary, to prepare the discussions and prepare the minutes. That way, I was able to start putting together an agenda that I hoped everybody could agree on.

But it was not only an agenda. What eventually came out of this discussion was what we called our four-part agenda. But I also felt that we had to drop certain things that had been very popular in the Reagan White House. And so I also got agreement that, number one, we are not going to challenge the legitimacy of the Soviet regime. We have to deal with them as equals. The second was, we are not seeking military superiority. It was going to be hard enough to define parity, but everything was going to be parity. Third, we are not trying to change the Soviet system. We would like it to change, but the Soviet system itself is their business. We later put it in writing, and I developed these in what we called the “national security decision memorandum,” which, the president agreed and signed. I remember at some of these meetings—[Edwin] Ed Meese [III] was also in those meetings, and he said at one point, “Well, this matter of not challenging legitimacy,” he said, “many of the president’s conservative friends don’t agree with that.” I said, “I know that, but I think the president will.” And he said, “You’re right.” [Laughter]



So what we got, then, was the basis of an approach which, to be frank and fundamentally, is the opposite of the approach we began to take after the end of the Cold War: no regime change, no saying we won. What we were going after, then, we put in four categories. This came out in a speech that eventually Reagan gave in January '84. The four items on the agenda were to reduce arms, particularly nuclear weapons, to the lowest possible level—and as far as nuclear is concerned, ideally, to zero—to withdraw from indirect conflict in third areas. Later, we explained that that we don't blame the Soviet Union for those conflicts, but we blamed them for taking sides and exacerbating them. Let's try to solve them. The third was let's cooperate to improve respect for human rights. The fourth was we must build a better working relationship. Now, that was my euphemism for "bring down the Iron Curtain." Again, if you want them to do it, you don't say, "Bring down the Iron Curtain." You say something positive.

Q: Well, this was the idea of "reciprocity," too.

Matlock: Yes. Yes. That's right. Reciprocity. But basically, opening up the media, having more travel, having broader educational and other exchanges. The Carter administration had not renewed our exchanges agreement. We had terminated almost everything except diplomatic relations themselves, over Afghanistan. So getting these things back was one of the things we had to try to do. But the seeds of the four-part agenda were really in that speech, [of] which I was the main drafter—we had to go back and forth on that a long time, but I did most of the drafting, to the dismay of the speech writers. We got into a lot of fights over that [laughs]. But—

Q: And the quote by John [F.] Kennedy.

Matlock: I'm sorry, what?

Q: The quote by John Kennedy that Reagan wanted in there, was that part of that speech?

Matlock: Oh, the quote from Kennedy? Yes, I put that in.

Q: You put that in? Yes.

Matlock: I put that in, yes. Actually, that's Teddy [Edward M.] Kennedy that signed that one. But anyway, yes, I put the quote in from the American University speech. I had it longer, and when the president looked at it, he said, "Do we have to have the Kennedy quote?" I said, "Yes, we do." He said, "Why?" I said, "You know, that quote occurred just after the Cuban Missile Crisis, and he is saying that we must cooperate. Now, isn't that what we are doing now? We have been in great conflict, but we are saying we want to cooperate and find a way to cooperate." He said, "Well, does anybody remember that?" I said, "Well, most people don't. But in the Soviet foreign ministry, they do. They'll get the point." He said, "Well, okay. Make it as short as possible." So I cut it down a little bit [laughter]. But yes, I am the one that put the Kennedy quote in.

But what we were trying to do was to draft what became the four-part agenda, and what we did was to couch every one of our aims as the result of cooperation. It wasn't that "You must have a better respect for human rights"; it is "We must cooperate to improve respect for human rights."

And then we also decided we are going to handle that largely privately. Reagan himself said, “Look, we can beat on them publicly, and we’ll get cheers from the bleachers. But it’s not going to help those that we want to help. It can hurt them. We have really got to start doing this privately.” So here again, what were we doing with Putin, except shouting to the world about how bad he is?

So we worded everything cooperatively, and in their first meeting—Shultz would always bring up human rights cases in a private meeting first. And when he brought it up with [Eduard A.] Shevardnadze, the new Soviet foreign minister that Gorbachev had brought in, Shevardnadze said, “Okay, can we talk about the condition of women and blacks in the United States?” And Shultz said, “Of course. I think we’re making progress, but we have got a ways to go, and we can use all the help we can get.”

Q: Wow. Now that’s a diplomat.

Matlock: That’s right. Actually, within two years, we had regular consultations between the assistant secretary for Human Rights [Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor], and a deputy foreign minister going over precise cases. They met regularly, and they had a formal task to improve human rights protection in both countries.

Q: Was there any documentation—?

Matlock: And Shevardnadze actually took on the KGB. Again, there are so many stories connected with this, but the one that sticks in my mind most and hit me most there: Shultz and Shevardnadze were meeting in New York. Shevardnadze had come to a U.N. session, and they always had meetings. I know we were meeting in the Waldorf Astoria. And Shultz starting the meeting by handing him a list of human rights cases. Shevardnadze took it and looked at it, and he said, “George, I’ll take this back to Moscow, and if what you say is true, I’ll do everything I can to see that it’s corrected. But I want you to know one thing: I’m not doing this because you ask me to. I’m doing this because it’s what my country needs to do.” Shultz stood up, put out his hand. Shevardnadze stood up, put out his hand. And Shultz said, “Eduard, let me assure you I will never ask you to do something I do not think is in your country’s interest.” I thought tears would come to my eyes as I was sitting there. Cold War was over!

Q: Oh, that’s so beautiful. What moments. What amazing moments.

Matlock: [Laughs] Well, sorry. Well, anyway, I guess the point is that we didn’t change what we wanted in any of these things. And [for] people to say we made no concessions—and in a certain sense, that’s right, except that having Reagan’s imprimatur that we are not going to seek superiority, we could look at solutions which actually were as fair to them as they were to us. And fair to both because it was reducing—and it was freeing them up to meet some of their domestic problems, because the fact was that most of their policies were really not consistent with their domestic problems. And you had to find a way, without looking like he was backing down to foreign pressure, that Gorbachev could do what he really needed to do in his agenda. So

that was partly it. And part of it was that we never publicly said, oh, this is our agenda that we are pushing on them.

I later asked [Alexander Alexandrovich] Bessmertnykh—who for a long time was the principal deputy in the foreign ministry, and then was Gorbachev’s final foreign minister, and at one point, ambassador to the United States—I said, “Sasha—” I’ve known him for years, because I was director of Soviet Affairs, he was counselor in the Soviet embassy in Washington “—Sasha, did you guys realize you were operating off our agenda?” And he said, “Of course!” He said, “No professional couldn’t see that.” I said, “How the hell did we get by with it?” He said, “You never called it yours. You called it ‘ours’.”

Q: Language. Language! Literature! [Laughter]

Matlock: Well, of course, I knew the answer to that, too, but it was interesting that—because as we said—and Reagan, without any prompting, had said, “We don’t call it victory, because that will just make it impossible to improve things further.”

Q: One of the things you talked about in your book was the misunderstandings, misperceptions of Reagan, on both sides of the water. In the USSR, the belief that he was an imperialist and harsh, and hawkish, and the view here, on the part of progressives, that he was the same. So how did you work with that? And what was your own learning cycle with that?

Matlock: Well, you mean as far as the rhetoric was concerned?

Q: Yes.

Matlock: Well, once he started dealing directly with the Soviet leaders, you didn't get any more of that. One of the things when they weren't meeting him—he was very anti-communist and so on, but he was also a nuclear abolitionist. He really wanted to get rid of those things. And though he hated communism, his attitude was, “If that's what they want, that's their business. It's not up to us to change it. What we object to is their forcing it on other people.” In other words, we were trying to change behavior. Though communism was a lousy system, and it had been an evil empire, if you look at Stalin and so on, but when they began changing, he was willing to recognize that.

But he started on the nuclear issue fairly early on, and he had made at least two public speeches—in, I think, London [England] and Tokyo [Japan]—with the phrase, “A nuclear war cannot be won, and must never be fought.” And that's what he and Gorbachev agreed to in their first meeting, with the addition, “Which means there can be no war between us.” It was that basic understanding that Shultz was able to go to the Soviet leaders with charts as to how much they were spending on arms, how much we were spending, and how slow our growth rate was, and how little the Japanese and the Germans—who at that time were growing much faster—were spending, and would say, “We're saps! Why are we doing this? We can't use these arms. We won't use them; it would be suicidal. Why are we doing this? We are robbing our people.”

It was the most powerful argument, and it's one that I'm afraid we have forgotten today in dealing with Russia, which still has enough nuclear weapons to wipe us out. And we call them "just a regional power." [Laughs]

Well, anyway, so, yes. In Europe particularly, they had the feeling that he was aggressive. Now, obviously, he had said strong words about communism, and when he was talking about the Soviet leaders collectively—in one of his first press conferences, he said, well, they would lie and cheat—but he didn't say we can't deal with them. He said we have to remember that, even in a détente. In other words, then, later, he came up with the "trust, but verify," using the Russian proverb for that. That was directed primarily at the right-wingers in the United States, not so much at Gorbachev.

[INTERRUPTION]

Q: Let me just close, then, with this question. What were your first meetings with Reagan like? Your own personal relationship with him? Did you get along well with him? What were your political views?

Matlock: Oh, yes. He, of course, has a great charm in dealing with individuals. He really gets along with everybody. If there were problems with the Democrats, Tip [Thomas Phillip] O'Neill [Jr.] would come over, and they would usually work out. Reagan was not one to push—

Q: He was not combative?

Matlock: Well, he would say if you can get eighty percent of what you want, don't go running off the cliff—

Q: Don't go nuclear [laughs].

Matlock: —or something. Yes. In other words, he was a compromiser in the end. And one thing people forget or don't recognize, he was a New Dealer in the '30s, and he never forgot that. He never said we were wrong. What he would say was, "I didn't leave the Democratic party—the Democratic party left me." So he was never in favor of dismantling what had happened. He argued against expanding them. Now, obviously, some of the things that got in the rhetoric could be read a way, and they've done a lot of damage. But the fact was that he was not that far right in a lot of his feelings, and he was a compromiser at the end.

He was also one that didn't spend a lot of time going into a lot of detail on complicated issues. And the issues he thought most strongly about—there are only two or three of them, and one of them was dealing with the Soviet Union and getting rid of nuclear weapons. He would watch that like a hawk. He would be very careful—the letters we sent and so on, he would read, revise. That January speech, the whole story of the Ivan and Anya story at the end was his. I've got it in his handwriting, as he added it to my first draft. He had scrawled it out in his handwriting.

But the thing is, he was not a manager; he didn't try to manage. But what he concentrated on was the interpersonal relationships. What he was most interested in is, where is this fellow Gorbachev



coming from—? I mean when he was meeting him. He recognized from the word “go” that Gorbachev is not a dictator; he’s going to have to defend what he does to the Politburo [Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union] back home. In other words, he understood instinctively, “I can’t make him look bad publicly, or we are not going to get what we want.” So all of those things. And then it was Shultz that added a lot of the substance.

In fact, Reagan didn’t mind—another thing about Reagan is he didn’t know a lot of things, and he was comfortable with that. He was happy to be corrected and to be educated, in effect.

Obviously, you didn’t want to do it in a condescending way, but more often than not, when I would send him memos, he would write things like, “Thanks, Jack. I didn’t know enough to be sure about this. I appreciate your explanation.”

Q: That goes with the story you told in the book about how your first memo, you said, “Should it be just two pages on each side?” And Bruce [phonetic] said, “No, make it long. He’s going to Camp David this weekend; he’ll read the whole thing.” That’s interesting.

Matlock: Yes, he did a lot of reading.

Q: All right—

Matlock: I guess I—

Q: —we should stop now.

Matlock: —should go and pick up Rebecca.

Q: Sure.

[END OF SESSION]

ATC

Session: 2

Interviewee: Jack Foust Matlock Jr.

Location: Durham, NC

Interviewer: Mary Marshall Clark

Date: February 3, 2017

Q: This is our second session. Mary Marshall Clark and Jack Matlock, talking about the Cold War.

Matlock: I think the Cold War was about communism. It was not about Russia qua Russia. The fundamental problem was once the Bolshevik Revolution brought a communist regime to what had been the Russian empire, the goal of that was worldwide revolution—the Marxist proletarian revolution—and they were going to create so-called “socialism” in one country, but do all they could to spread it to others. Now, obviously, that put them at odds with every country with an un-communist government; it made them a danger. After World War II, it took on a geopolitical struggle which resulted in an arms race between the Soviet Union and what we call the West, led by the United States.

But what was behind that, it would seem to me, was the difference in the philosophy behind them. In other words, the arms race and the geopolitical competition was a symptom of a deeper struggle, and not initially the cause. That’s why I say that it was not over Russia, and it was not primarily a contest over control of territory—that is, the sort of things that brought on World War I and World War II—but a much broader ideological struggle. It ended, in my mind, when the leader of the Soviet Union officially renounced the Marxist theory of class struggle as a basis of foreign policy, which Gorbachev did on December 7, 1987. In a sense, in effect, about seventy

years after the Bolshevik Revolution. So that removed the ideological basis of the Cold War. The rest was, in effect, clean-up diplomacy; cleaning up the debris that had occurred.

I would say, in addition, that what we're seeing today is not a replay of the Cold War, but creating conditions which are much more similar to the sort of competition that brought on World War I. Because we don't have a fundamental ideological difference as to how the world should be raised.

Q: Can you say more about how it's like the conflict that led to World War I?

Matlock: Yes. I think World War I was essentially over competition over who controls what territory, and that brought the conflict. The irony there is that if you take over a territory with people that don't want to be in your state, it weakens you; it doesn't strengthen you. And the idea that the stronger you are, the safer you are, beyond on a certain point, can be entirely wrong.

That's why today, I warn, let's not get into the mentality that brought on two world wars in the twentieth century. There is no reason to look at the world as an East-West struggle, as a struggle between democracy and autocracy, for example. I don't think that is the case, and this leads to, I think, a number of misperceptions. Most basically, I think that the future is going to be determined about, number one, whether we can control and avoid using the weapons of mass destruction or nuclear weapons. I think the greatest threat to humanity today is the existence of nuclear weapons in the quantity they exist, because if they are ever used—and if they exist, you can't exclude their use—it's going to destroy not just civilization, but humanity. Now, if we

could get the numbers drastically down, they can still do a lot of damage, but you are not going to destroy everything, even if they are used. So that's one thought.

The second, I think, existential threat to us, with civilization as we know it, is global warming. And that, obviously, we have got to do more to turn that off, or in another forty, fifty years, there may actually be a tipping point when you can no longer do anything. If you get on a course where you cannot turn back the amount of warming—obviously, unless mankind can evolve to live in an entirely different environment—it's going to make the planet unlivable.

Other issues that are important to us now? Terrorism? Well, terrorism is something that is not an existential threat to us. It's an important one we need to deal with. The spread of disease? Well, we, so far, have been comparatively lucky in stopping the Ebola before it spread, and some of the other potential pandemics. But who knows about the next one? And particularly, if some crazy scientist [laughs] produces a disease which we don't have means of combating. In other words, the real threats to us require international cooperation, and are not going to be resolved around precisely where lines are drawn.

Q: So this is—

Matlock: And to fight over that, and to avoid cooperation on these bigger issues, I think is not merely a distraction, it becomes actually dangerous to our future.

Q: That's just excellent. Thank you. So I know you haven't read Bob Legvold's book yet, *Return to Cold War*, but I just wanted to say that one of his theses—he has five reasons that he thinks we have returned to Cold War. One of them is that both countries, USSR and U.S., operate with the idea that conflict can only end with a fundamental change in the other side, or a collapse of ideology. So he is still writing as though the ideology of communism still exists.

Matlock: Well, if he claims the ideology of communism still exists—

Q: He didn't claim that. He is just saying—

Matlock: —I think he is wrong. Before I came this morning, at breakfast, it occurred to me a title of an article I want to write. And it is how the Brezhnev Doctrine morphed into the Clinton/Bush II/Obama doctrine. In effect, what we are doing in our democratization program, and our pushing of what—we say, “Okay, we have got to create democracies in the world, because if we do, it's not only good for those countries, they are going to be friends”—that is a direct analogy of what the Soviet was doing with the Brezhnev Doctrine. And it is fundamentally incorrect, because, I would argue, there is absolutely no pragmatic reason to believe there is any connection between the degree of democracy—if you could determine that, which you can't—and what their foreign policy is. Sometimes a more democratic country is actually more aggressive.

The basic premises of the democratization program—it's first of all questionable at best, probably mistaken—but even if it that is true, it is clearly impossible for one country to create

democracy in another. If democracy is government by, for, and of the people, as [Abraham] Lincoln said, then how can somebody else do it for you? Is there a single case in history where other people have done it? Or is there any example that a single model is appropriate for everybody? All the pragmatic evidence is to the contrary. So the idea that we serve the world and our own interests by trying to spread democracy by using methods that, in fact, destabilize governments—and, pragmatically, have brought about more chaos than they had before—I think is wrong.

I think is the direct analogy of the Soviet failed Brezhnev Doctrine. I mean, if you replace the crusade, you might say, for democracy with the Marxist-Leninist idea that the world is destined to have a proletarian revolution that creates a socialist government, which then evolves into communism, and the other one is, well, the world is served by democracy as we define it—these are direct analogies—they are fundamentally mistaken in both cases. What happened at the end of the Cold War is that starting with the Clinton administration, we misinterpreted the meaning of the Cold War, and in effect, in adopting, you might say, the mission of spreading democracy in the world, we have ourselves actually created many of the current problems. And in a nuclear age, this is fundamentally extremely dangerous. This is what I would say.

Now, the thing is that the spreading of democracy, and the methods we use, could only be interpreted by both Russia—and, in the future, China—as directed at them, as trying to create a worldwide hegemony. During the second Bush administration, we actually had doctrines that we were going to maintain dominance of space. Now, I happen to believe that monopolies are bad, including for the monopolists, first of all, for a whole lot of reasons. One is that it leads you to

over-commit, and it leads others, who are not going to accept this, to go after you in ways that you are vulnerable. How else can you define terrorism, for example?

It would seem to me that, as I said, the whole democratization—which sounds good, but simply doesn't work, and is actually damaging when you go after it, because any time you go into an authoritarian system and start campaigning for elections or for changes, you are going to be supporting the opposition. And no government I've ever worked with has a higher priority than staying in power [laughter]. If you make yourself the enemy of their staying in power—and then you combine this with the attitude that anybody who tries to do to us what we routinely do to others is an enemy and this impermissible, you get the absurd lengths, such as we are seeing today, in accusing the Russians of, in effect, electing Donald Trump.

I think definitely, we, by misinterpreting the Cold War—by treating it as a victory, by also buying onto the teleology that it was the end of history—history had decided what was the best system—okay [laughs], certainly, the Soviet system turned out to be less viable than ours. And if we hadn't had the Cold War, they would have found that out much sooner, probably.

Q: Say more about that.

Matlock: So, yes, their system turned out to be not too—but there was not any overall proof that our system was applicable elsewhere. I go back, frankly, to the thinking that actually is best expressed by John Quincy Adams in his famous July fourth address, and then repeated in a somewhat different way by Senator [James William] Fulbright. People remember the sentence



about “America goes not abroad in search of monsters to destroy”—the John Quincy Adams—but if you read that whole paragraph, he goes on to say, “For if we join others, even in defense of liberty elsewhere, we will become an imperialist power and rejected by the others.” He said it in beautiful language. That is as true today as it was in 1821, whenever he gave that address.

And then Fulbright—who was right about Vietnam when I was wrong [laughs], and most of the rest—he pointed out, I think obviously borrowing the phrase from Lord [John Dalberg-] Acton, that power tends—of course, Acton says, “Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.” But what Fulbright said was “A powerful nation tends to associate its power with its virtue,” and that this is a fundamental mistake. He went on to say that, yes, we would like to see democracies elsewhere, but the only way to spread them is by invitation. In other words—and he quoted [Edmund] Burke on this, if you are thinking this is neither liberal nor—it’s conservative, if anything, thinking—that if we want democracy to spread, we must show how it works at home. Frankly, I think it is no coincidence that our attempts to spread democracy, often by force, abroad have coincidentally—or not coincidentally—have brought us less democracy at home.

Q: Can you—?

Matlock: The use of our military force and so on—although that hasn’t been an issue in the campaign—the feedback from that, all of this thing spent on the military and intervention in various places has not been spent on our infrastructure. This is one of the things. And when people, particularly in the Rust Belt and in the South, see us constantly at war, never seemingly winning anything, they may say, well, we have got to be more forceful. I think that’s wrong, but

basically, it is a malaise feeling, we are not achieving in the world what we should. In that sense, that's what the Trump victory was on. It wasn't that the Russians interfered and all of this stuff like that.

If Bob was arguing—about Legvold—that, in effect, the current cold war is as difficult to solve as the previous one, then I think he is incorrect, though I would say that the current so-called “cold war” with Russia is actually a result of our adaptation of the Brezhnev Doctrine, just as the Brezhnev Doctrine was one of the main things that brought down them. That's what we need to change. And if we change that, then we'll be much better able to cooperate with Russia and China in these bigger issues that we have really got to solve.

After all, who is going to care a hundred years from now whether China has an island in the South China Sea that Vietnam and the Philippines were claiming? Well, if they continue and harm their relationship with Vietnam and the Philippines, that's something for them to deal with. We shouldn't make it our issue, and we shouldn't militarize, because when we do, we are diverting resources from the things we need for other things. End of rant.

Q: Wonderful. And I probably misstated Bob Legvold's thesis [laughs].

Matlock: Yes. That's the reason I said, I haven't read—I'm not sure Bob is really arguing that.

Q: I think I misstated it.

Matlock: So I was directed at that argument, not at, necessarily, what Bob wrote [laughs].

Q: Yes. What he is basically saying is we can use the framework of the original Cold War to understand what's happening now. And you would probably disagree with that, so here is an offer: read his book, and I'll do another interview, even if it's on the telephone.

Matlock: Fine.

Q: You'll have a chance to state it on the record. But it's a provocative book, and people are talking about it, and trying to understand—I mean, what you are offering is a different framework for understanding where we are now, so that's where I'm coming from.

Matlock: Yes. I don't know whether Bob buys the democratization argument or not.

Q: I don't know.

Matlock: I think it is fundamentally a dangerous one, because I think it's fundamentally wrong. But I really don't know. I haven't discussed it that way with him. I've been in many discussions with him, and Russians. But that hasn't come up in that form.

Q: Well, I'll look forward to discussing it with you after you've read it [laughter]. A bit unfair of me to put you on the spot about it now. The principles that you just articulated, is your interpretation an accepted interpretation among your peers, or are you unique in interpreting the

extension of the Brezhnev Doctrine? Are you and the philosophy you just gave about what's wrong now and whether—is that—I don't know the field well enough to know. Is that a common interpretation, or are you unique in making this interpretation?

Matlock: Well, it's certainly not common in what we call the mainstream media now.

Q: That I know, yes.

Matlock: But it is very close, I would say, to Kennan's thinking, and to the thinking of the current realists. Although I think I'm a realist and a pragmatist, and I don't buy some of the current realist recommendations that we have to balance Chinese power. I think that, for example, with both Russia and China—and for that matter, India—we need to be working out a matter of strategic cooperation on the important things, and avoiding at all costs militarizing and encouraging a buildup of more military forces on all sides, which is diverting us from the real issues, in my opinion.

So I don't buy the basic realist concept that relations between countries are sort of like billiard balls—to put it much simply—because I think all countries are very complex, and that the psychology of the human relations among the leaders is an important influence. It doesn't determine everything, but it is a very important influence, and if you start out competing for who is going to be influential where, it diverts you from the real issues. This would be my approach.

Certainly, on practical issues, the sort of thinking one can get in *The National Interest*, for example; they have a lot of articles of that sort. I think there are quite a few scholars—Rob [Robert D.] English at UCLA [University of California, Los Angeles], and—well, I could name quite a few others. Well, Steve [Stephen F.] Cohen—except Steve, I would say, is less critical of the Russian leadership than I would be. I think they have made serious mistakes, too. Steve tends to imply that it's all our fault; I don't agree with that. But basically, his observations, I think, are sounder than those of his critics, and so on. So, yes, they are people, and I think [John J.] Mearsheimer and [Stephen M.] Walt, among the philosophers, though I don't go all the way with their realism analysis, because I do give more attention on what I consider both a realistic and pragmatic basis to how you handle things psychologically.

One of the things that allowed us really to negotiate an end to the Cold War was to avoid, as I had mentioned earlier, regime change, and pushing democracy or internal things inside qua democracy. What we were doing was saying, “Let's cooperate to get better cooperation of human rights. Let's cooperate to bring down the barriers to understanding.” When you put it that way, and not saying, “Our system is the one you must adopt,” you get a lot further. Particularly since we don't know whether our system is one they ought to adopt. Let's face it, Putin pulled them out of near chaos—helped by high oil prices—by essentially authoritarian methods. Who cares that they have total freedom of speech and the media is free of government interference if you can't eat? Or if crime is making your life impossible and endangering it? I mean, the idea that you have to start with some absolutist political freedom, or economic freedom, I think is just absurd. But there are certain things mankind needs before these things become important.

Okay, the Chinese, I'm sorry that they handled Tiananmen Square the way they did, but they brought a country that for two centuries had been in decline into a remarkable and almost unprecedented turnaround. They must be doing something right! Just to hammer at them because they don't have all the individual freedoms that we consider valuable I think just shows a great deal of arrogance. I mean, I am sympathetic, too, of those Chinese that want more individual freedom, but I know that if they get it, it's because the Chinese society produces it eventually, not because we are hammering on the government over these issues.

I really increasingly have very basic problems with the idea that we are, first of all, an exceptional nation. Now, of course, when Obama and others use it, he means, well, we will do things that are not strictly in our economic interest to help other people, but that's not the way it comes off abroad. Abroad, it sounds like the rules don't apply to us, particularly when we have acted as if they don't. Then this whole matter that—the demands that, “We must show leadership!” Well, what does that mean? You translate it into German, and a leader is “de Führer.” You translate it into Korean, and it's—what? — “our dear leader,” so on. Is that what we mean? But that's the way it comes across elsewhere.

I think one of the most profound lines of poetry is Robbie [Robert] Burns, “*O wad some pow'r the giftie gie us to see oursels as ithers see us* [And would some power give us the gift to see ourselves as others see us].” And our politicians just seem to be totally oblivious to the way this stuff comes across to other people. I would say the whole democratization problem has become simply an excuse for imperialism; something that traditionally, the United States has stood

against. How that has, I would say, morphed from what was the traditional view in the nineteenth century to now a very much minority view would be a very interesting study.

Q: Wow. Lots of dissertations here [laughter]. You need ten or twelve students to help you with all that.

Matlock: Yes. And some are being written! They just don't get that much attention. I mean, I wrote *Superpower Illusions*. Now, my original title was *Distorting History*. Which the publisher wanted to change, and I still am disappointed with that, because it made it sound like other analyses—which I respect, like [Andrew J.] Bacevich and several others—about the perils of imperialism. But I was going specifically to the misunderstanding of how we ended the Cold War, and, in effect, adopting a variant of one of the things that caused the Soviet Union eventually to break up. But anyway, let's go on to your other questions.

Q: Oh, no. I have a little more questions about what you are talking about now [laughter]. What do you see as the turning point in American history of diplomacy towards imperialism?

Matlock: Oh, I think it happened in the second half of the Clinton administration, with two major things. One, starting the expansion of NATO rather than using the Partnership for Peace. And second, with the bombing of Serbia without U.N. [United Nations] approval. And then the subsequent recognition of Kosovo as independent, which was done by the Bush administration, not the Clinton administration. But I think those were fundamental mistakes, combined with the very heavy triumphalism, the American century—you know, we do it all—and combined with

that, which—and treating Russia, well, as I think Strobe [Nelson Strobridge] Talbott [III] put it, we'll give them the spinach treatment. “Eat your spinach. You don't really count anymore. You have got to do these things in your own interests.” How infuriating that was.

I remember being in some meetings where, actually, one of our senior State Department people I had asked to come was explaining why it's in Russia's interests for us to expand NATO: because then, it will so reassure the East Europeans that they will be more friendly with Russia.

Therefore, it's in Russia's interests for us to do this. And I know one of the Russians who was actually very friendly to us otherwise—a specialist in arms control—came out just absolutely furious. He turned to me and said, “Can't you explain to them we don't like to be lectured about what is in our interest? We know very well what is in our interest, and your expanding NATO is not!” You know? [Laughs] So this was in the late '90s. So yes, I think that happened.

Now, there were people in the first Bush administration who pushed in that direction, but I don't think Bush himself would have. I am very sure that probably Reagan wouldn't have. One thing, I think in partly the influence—he liked to read about Russian history—and he clearly understood you have to separate Russia and its interests from the Cold War and communism; that our problem is communism, and the way it's imposed abroad. Basically, those of us who negotiated the end of the Cold War were appalled at the direction that it took under Clinton.

Anyway, the idea was that the name of the game was creating a so-called “democratic Russia” which would share our values. And then when Putin began to go more autocratic—combined also [laughs] with a more effective rule and a better life for most Russians, which made him



popular in Russia—he is backtracking on democracy, which is something Russia never had. And therefore, their values are different from ours. So what you are conveying to them is we are better than you, precisely what Fulbright had warned us against.

And yet, you look at the world, and what American of the twentieth century has had the most influence in the world? Fulbright? Or shall we say Lyndon Johnson? Who had great influence in the United States with human rights, but he's known in history because of the Vietnam War, of course, which was a great failure. Look at the impact of the Fulbright Programs, and the number of people who have—that has done more to spread democracy abroad than any of our democracy programs. But how do we expect it to spread when it deteriorates in the United States? To the point that twice in sixteen years, we installed a president who got fewer votes—in one case, substantially fewer—than others? That we have a Supreme Court that votes along politically partisan lines—is that something to advise to other countries? I mean, it's just amazed to me how a number of people whom I respect, and like, and I know they're smart and well informed, could be so deluded by this whole democratization argument.

Q: Well, thank you for that powerful, as you would put it, rant, but I considered it history [laughs].

[INTERRUPTION]

Q: Since you brought up the issue of the Fulbright, the scholarship exchanges, I want to move a little bit to the nonprofit world, including foundations that support those kinds of things, which are—

Matlock: Oh, I think that support has been absolutely crucial. For area studies—

Q: Let's talk about that.

Matlock: —you had asked about that—the Ford Foundation and Carnegie [Foundation] particularly—I mean, I got a Ford Foundation grant for my third year of graduate study. It was to write my dissertation. It took me longer to write that dissertation, but it kept me afloat until I got in the Foreign Service, and it gave me a chance to continue specializing on Russian. So I think that's been extremely important, and as federal funding cuts back, the foundation funding is now the most of it. I hope we can soon get more federal funding back.

Now, on area studies in general, yes, I thought that the training we got at the Russian Institute then—the institute that later became the Harriman Institute—was absolutely essential for the career that I had, because it allowed me, at a graduate level, to deal with the politics, economy, history, as well as the literature and culture, of the country I was looking at. If I had just gotten my degree in Slavic languages and Russian literature, I would have not been able to do the job I later did. I mean, I'm glad that's where my major was, but obviously, without the other, that would have been extremely narrow. It would have left me without a solid feel in dealing with economic and a lot of the political and ideological issues that I needed to deal with.

But as I mentioned yesterday, this was a matter of people in each discipline presenting their discipline's view. It was not an integrated view of someone who could come in and talk about

society as a whole in every respect, and maybe then bringing in a lecture of some details on this or that. Now, what has happened to academia over time has been we have lost for most countries and areas whatever capabilities were developed in the '50s and '60s, because the area studies was put together by a representative from each department. Let's say in the economics department, if the fellow retires who was a specialist in Soviet—or now Russian—economics, probably he's not going to be replaced by a specialist in it. He is probably going to be replaced by a quantitative economist, or someone who is more a theoretician. But there is no market in academia for people who, I would say, are able to integrate and assimilate a full understanding of a society. There is just no market for it. Each discipline puts up barriers, and they begin to dig deeper and deeper into less and less.

Q: That may be the quote of the day! [Laughter]

Matlock: And often, confusing understanding reality with the integrity of a theory. It turned out that the only place you could take a knowledge of a society and make a profession out of it was with the government. The only market, true market, for a truly balanced training in a country is the Foreign Service or the CIA, where you analyze it. Academia doesn't provide that, and therefore, most of these area studies programs are falling apart. You don't have people coming out of academia now with a balanced thing, and you don't have as much federal support for these area studies. This is an inherent problem, and it's going to plague us in the future.

Now, I think the Harriman Institute has been able to maintain a pretty good balance, but when we look nationally—and I think also at Harvard, you have the Davis Institute [Davis Center for

Russian and Eurasian Studies, and Indiana [University] continues, I think, with area studies. Stanford [University] is pretty good with the Hoover Institution. But even there, you will find sometimes—actually increasingly, the economists in most institutions—I know when I was teaching at Princeton [University], Princeton really didn't have anybody in the economics department who dealt with Russia or the Soviet Union.

Q: Well, that fell apart after '91.

Matlock: I mean, it went almost entirely quantitative. As a matter of fact, when I was teaching an undergraduate seminar-style course on U.S. foreign policy, I asked the economics department to supply a speaker about foreign trade, and they said, "Gee, we don't have anybody that specializes in that." [Laughs] They're quantitative economists, and most of them based upon the theory, fundamentally, of rational choice. Which I say I think is faulty, whether it's economics or politics. Many of our choices are not rational. You've got to go to psychology! Anyway—

So I really worry about the inability of academia as a whole to come to grips with the need to train people who understand a country. Because if you really want to understand it, you have got to have more than just a basic knowledge of economics. Financial translations are so important, and, well, you don't have to be a CFA—a certified financial analyst—but you really have to understand how capital flows, how the various things impact upon it, how it impacts your country that you're in.

But just to continue this, I was trying to set this up when I was deputy director of the Foreign Service Institute [FSI], and instead of getting—I found out that our area studies were a matter of having a specialist in each of these things coming in and giving a lecture or two. I said, okay, it's find to have a couple of outside lecturers on special topics, but I want somebody who can integrate it and start in an integrated way looking at it, and integrating it also with the language training, so you're learning the language you need for your professional deeds, and you can start that from the beginning. You don't start necessarily saying "*la plume de ma tante* [my aunt's quill]," [laughs] if you are studying French, for example.

It turned out when I spoke to the deans of the schools, they said, "You know, for most countries, we can't find people in academia to do it. The only people we can find are Foreign Service officers who have time in those countries and also have done subsequent things." So increasingly, we were using fewer and fewer people—even though the Washington area is full of fine universities and fine academics. Actually, we were better off with the Soviet Union and Russia than we were with many other areas of the world.

I don't know what the future is going to hold, particularly if you get sort of an anti-intellectual group, as we now seem to have, at the top of the government that is probably not going to listen to much advice elsewhere. But the fact is that academia right now as a whole is really poorly equipped to give the sort of training that we need for our foreign policy and intelligence organizations. Therefore, more and more of the training has to rest with the agencies themselves. And this is very expensive, because when you're training people in the Foreign Service—for Chinese, they go two years full time studying Chinese. You are paying their salaries, and you are

paying the salaries of the teachers. [Laughs] Often, the student is paid more than the teacher—very often. This is a very expensive way to train, but we have to do it if it's not coming out of your education system.

Q: Do you mind if I ask you another hypothetical?

Matlock: Yes.

Q: This is not at all speaking about the current leadership of the Harriman Institute, because I actually think it's very good, but if you were suddenly to become the head of the Harriman Institute and were to take that job for ten years, what would you do?

Matlock: That would never happen, because I wouldn't accept it [laughter].

Matlock: I haven't really given that much thought to it. The thing is, when I retired from the Foreign Service, I was determined not to take another, you might say, administrative or executive job. I mean, running an embassy, which I had done more as a deputy than as an ambassador, I had my fill of that. The last thing I wanted to do was to try to run an educational institution.

I was really impressed by—and now I'm off the—I'll get back to your question [laughs] in a minute, but somebody once asked George Shultz that, "I know you have been head of a business firm. You have been a dean in academia. You have had Cabinet-level positions in the

government. What's the difference in leadership in business, in government, and in academia?"

He said, "In business, you have to be very careful what you tell your people to do, because they'll do their damndest to do it." He said, "In government, you don't have to worry so much, because if they think it's a bad idea, they'll do their damndest not to do it." Now, he said, "In academia, the question doesn't arise, because nobody thinks you have the right to tell them anything." [Laughs]

Q: Especially at Columbia [laughs].

Matlock: That's why I said, looking at the *Chronicle [of Higher Education]* this morning, thank god I am not in educational administration, and all the problems you have to deal with.

Now, frankly, I haven't looked at what the whole curriculum is at the Harriman Institute now. When Columbia began to shut down their various area institutes and sort of amalgamate them either in SIPA [School of International and Public Affairs] or, in some cases, the Harriman Institute, I thought that was really too bad. Because to try to cover Russia, all of the former Soviet countries, plus Eastern Europe in the same institute, you are really getting away from what you need and the specificity of real area studies. First of all, that's not necessarily something that the director of the Harriman Institute did, but the president or provost of the university did, along with the director of SIPA.

I think that the co-location with SIPA—which I have no problem with that, except that it does put things much more concentrated on, I would say, contemporary politics, although obviously,

they have good people. Other than the people I worked with and my own courses, I didn't really look that closely at what the whole thing is. Now, in my day, one thing we didn't have was a sociologist—and I don't know whether there is a sociologist now at the Harriman Institute—but that's very important. Obviously, now the study of ideology, of Marxism, is not particularly important, except for historical purposes. It was very important in my day.

But I would just say, in answer to your question, I don't know, because I don't know enough about what they are doing now. I think some of the changes that have occurred since my time, which are not necessarily changes brought about by the Harriman Institute leadership, have been unfortunate. I think it's unfortunate that we're not training more people; that we don't have a West European institute, for example; that we don't have one that's Eastern Europe. But I can understand, if you don't have the students and you don't have a market for their skills, why the university can't support this. It's quite understandable.

What I would do as an administrator, I don't know, because [laughs] I don't think it's very responsible for a university to train people when there are no jobs for them, and to encourage them. Therefore, if there is not a market out there, you really have to take that into account. And as I said, the only market for area studies in effect was the government. Although, if a person really went on and got the PhD in their discipline, they could teach in that discipline. But the focus was not really so much on the area as the discipline for their future.

I don't think any individual university administrator is responsible for this, but I do worry about the fact that we don't seem to have a self-perpetuating way of training the sort of people who we



need to carry out a foreign policy. But having said that, unless our political leaders have [laughs] an appropriate approach to foreign policy, even the most expertise in the area is not going to be able to help them much if they ignore this.

Q: That's the conundrum, right? I mean, in some ways, the potential for the Harriman Institute's influence to rise is greater now in some ways because of the obvious lack of knowledge and expertise in Washington. I've noticed that many of them have been on television, and their articles are getting published at a certain level. So scholarship itself has become more important. Whether it can have influence is a question. Whether or not anybody can have influence is a question.

Matlock: Yes. Again, as I taught my courses and when I was—but my actual office was over in the [Saltzman] Institute of War and Peace Studies [SIWPS] when I was teaching at Columbia. I taught courses on practice of diplomacy. I didn't at that point teach courses specifically related to Russia or the Soviet Union; it was only later. But I was teaching a course on the practice of diplomacy, which was really trying to train them to do what a Foreign Service officer does, which is also what certain other professions do, such as journalists. I had the foreign affairs fellows, where we would—I had mainly outside speakers come in on the various regions and areas, so that my focus was not, strictly speaking, area studies at that time.

So that's why I'm really not in a position to give an informed evaluation of the Harriman Institute today. Certainly, I think there are no better ones in the country, and what they are doing is essential in the training. But whether it meets all the criteria that, in theory, the ideal training

would be, I really don't know. But I think even there, the problem is more the market for graduates than it is a problem of designing instruction.

Q: Yes. Thank you for that. It's extremely helpful. Yes.

[INTERRUPTION]

Q: Okay. Going to go back into the nuclear deterrent work. So my question is really—we touched on it yesterday, but having read your *Superpowers* book, I really want to get you to tell the story again of your work with Reagan to bring about the nuclear agreements, and who on the outside was helpful, and who was not helpful, and how you managed it.

Matlock: Yes. Well, as we were working out the American agenda, one section of that was how we restore—and if possible, expand—some of the contacts we had before. After the invasion of Afghanistan, Carter had terminated virtually all of our agreements. They didn't even renew the cultural exchange agreement, which was the only mechanism we had for contacts in educational and athletic and other exchanges. The athletic exchanges had gone by the wayside when we boycotted the Moscow Olympics and so on—something that, by the way, Reagan had been against. He had criticized it at the time.

But in any event, in developing our four-part agenda, it was apparent to me that one of the most likely areas that we could move ahead quickly would be in reestablishing the cultural and other contacts. And that also, once Gorbachev was general secretary, it would be a test of whether he is

willing to start opening up the country. Therefore, after Reagan gave his January sixteenth speech in 1984, we had him do a series of speeches, and one—I think during the summer—was specifically on cultural exchanges. Now, for that, we had the sponsorship of—I think David [A.] Hamburg helped us sponsor it, along with the Kennan Institute. No, actually, it was not the Kennan Institute as such, but their umbrella organization, the one that Jim [James H.] Billington was then heading, before he became librarian of Congress [Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars].

Q: I'm blocking the name, but we'll fill it in.

Matlock: You'll have to put that name in. They are now located in the Reagan Building, but at that time, it was the—

Well, I think there were three sponsors, but one of them was Carnegie, and the others—and we set it up—he actually gave the speech at the White House. Actually, Mrs. Reagan didn't like for him to give speeches outside, for security reasons after the assassination attempt. So some of these key speeches were actually given in the White House to a select audience. But essentially, what he said was a speech which proposed much more intensive contacts. He explained it by saying when we are cut off from each other, we all suffer; that they don't understand our point of view, and we are deprived of the great contributions their culture has made to our lives. And I made sure we make it both ways. And he proposed a vast expansion of our cultural things.

Then, before he made that speech, I made sure that we quietly proposed to them a number of cooperative projects. In the spirit of, we said, “Look, we are thinking about these things. Tell us if you think they would work. Maybe you have some ideas. We would like to expand it. What are your ideas?” So before we ever put anything out there, we consulted them privately and got their feedback, and then added several things that they had. This was everything from educational exchanges that would include high school and undergraduate exchanges. Up until then, we had only had graduate students. Sort of an expansion in many respects. And as a matter of fact, that was the principal concrete agreement that Reagan and Gorbachev signed in their first meeting. But I was trying to establish the idea that cooperation is to our mutual benefit; that separation is not only a matter that they don’t understand us, but we are deprived of their great contributions that they make to our cultural world.

Then when Gorbachev accepted virtually everything, then the question was, can he deliver? And of course he did, rapidly. We got these exchanges back in, and we even got homestays for high school students. Before, they didn’t even allow undergraduates in the cultural exchanges. So this was one of the things that began to tell us Gorbachev *is* different. He really does want to open up the country. But that’s on the cultural exchanges side, and that was one where I think Carnegie and the Kennan Institute in Washington were directly involved in putting that together, along with Jim Billington—or he may have been already Library of Congress then. Before that, he was the director of the center of which the Kennan Institute is a part, in Washington. No, the Woodrow Wilson Center.

Q: Oh, of course.

Matlock: The Woodrow Wilson Center. Yes.

So that was very important, and as a matter of fact, Billington wrote several memos about how we use the cultural exchanges, in a sense, to try to open up the Soviet Union. But by going about it the way we did rather than in challenging them—to saying you've got to open up—we defined this as let's build a better working relationship by cooperating to meet our common ends. We were then defining things that way. Eventually, we were able to get these principles installed in the other areas. The big problem with the arms control was each side was making these big announcements in order to put the other side, you might say, at a political disadvantage, saying, well, who was for peace and who was not? And we had to get off that. We had to get off this zero-sum mentality to achieve anything. Eventually, we were able to achieve the arms control by also going off that, by going more private in testing, okay, what do you really want here? What can we do to make it acceptable? Our bottom line has to include the following.

Now, on SDI [Strategic Defense Initiative], to get over to that, yes, I think David Hamburg and others wanted to convince him that it was a bad idea and it wouldn't work. There was no way we could convince him of that. He was a true believer that—

Q: "Him," you mean Reagan?

Matlock: Reagan. Psychologically, Reagan thought that—this was his psychological conviction, and one which, for various reasons, you really didn't want [laughs] to disabuse him, because

other things came from it—he thought that it’s very important for the world to eliminate nuclear weapons. It won’t do it if there is no defense against them. If we could devise a defense that would work, it would make it possible to eliminate them. Therefore, it is our responsibility to determine whether we can do so. And he would tell Gorbachev, “I can’t be sure it’s possible. I can’t be sure that it’s financially and economically feasible, even if it’s possible. But we’ve got to find out. Because I don’t see how mankind is going to agree to eliminate these if there is no defense, because some future Hitler can build them again. We can’t take the knowledge out of it.”

Now, there were several faults in this reasoning. One is that a defense against a ballistic missile doesn’t prevent you, say, from a terrorist using a nuclear device that comes in a different way. It would be defense against what we feared most, which was a disarming first strike. Because all you have to do is to create enough uncertainty that a disarming first strike would destroy the retaliatory capability to make a disarming first strike impossible. So when you get into this whole theology of how these things work, the fact *also* was that we almost certainly would not develop a system that would not be fatally vulnerable; that, in fact, could effectively defend against missiles.

For many of us, SDI became, in effect, a scam to persuade Gorbachev to reduce the heaviest missiles. That was their heavy ICBMs [Intercontinental Ballistic Missile]. Up until then, they had been unwilling to reduce anything unless we had something to trade for it. Now, they began to deploy—I think it was the SS-16 [Sinner]. It was a missile which was mobile, had ten warheads, and accurate enough to take out our silos. And they had enough of them to take them all out in

one strike. And this was the nightmare for [unclear]. They said, “Look, they can take out our land-based missiles because they’re in silos. They’re not mobile. You know where they are, precisely. We can’t take out theirs because they are mobile.”

To get something to trade, we proposed to build a mobile ICBM. Actually, our lift capacity was less than theirs, so ours is going to have only three warheads. This was the one that Reagan called “the Peacekeeper” [LGM-118 Peacekeeper]. Congress first authorized the development of it, but then when it came to developing a deployment mode, we ran into problems. How are you going to deploy a mobile missile? Are you going to put it on a railroad, the way the Soviets were doing theirs? And there’s a not a senator or a congressman that is going to vote for something that’s going to be rolling through the backyard of their constituents. Or are you going to heavily reinforce certain interstates, and have it rolling up and down those? No way! You could never get Congress to agree on a basic mode.

So we thought, Geez, we’re never going to get this really improved to have something to trade off. So we’ll tell them, “Okay, we’ll build a defense against yours. We’ll put SDI and they’ll be useless to you,” because it’ll prevent any first strike. And so to that degree, for people like Bud McFarlane, our national security advisor, SDI became one great scam to convince them to reduce their heavy ICBMs by at least fifty percent. If they reduced by at least fifty percent, they wouldn’t have enough, even theoretically, to wipe out our land-based mode. It was reasoning of that sort that was ours.

But meanwhile, we had people, including Reagan, who really felt that it was essential to try to find a way, because it would allow us actually to reduce. Now, once Gorbachev agreed, as he finally did at Reykjavík [the Reykjavík Summit, Iceland], that all right, they would reduce the heavy missiles by fifty percent, the heavy ICBMs—like McFarlane, when we got back from Reykjavík—he was not there; he was no longer national security advisor. But he called us and said, “How did you let the president turn down that offer?” The one to keep SDI in laboratories for ten years. Now it’s been in laboratories for how many years? Thirty? Forty? And we still don’t have a system. So actually, politically, if we could have convinced him after Reykjavík to accept the ten years, we could have gone ahead on that basis. But we were unable to do that because of Iran-Contra, which took out of the administration the very people that you needed to convince him. So this totally extraneous issue removed the people in the administration.

Meanwhile, the fact that they had tentatively agreed, if we could agree on other things, to go to a total abolition of nuclear weapons met fierce resistance, not only from our military, but from Margaret [H.] Thatcher and other allies, so that we had a lot of public perceptions to deal with, which I think Reagan would have been willing to deal with if he had not been weakened by Iran-Contra. So this is one of these ironies of history, that we probably could have gotten a much quicker and much more drastic arms reduction agreement than we actually eventually got if Iran-Contra had not occurred. Iran has been the joker [laughs], or you might say the third rail, of our politics now for decades, and apparently continues to be.

Q: Wow. I guess—wow.



Matlock: I don't know whether I'm getting at—

Q: No, no, this is—

Matlock: —the question you asked, but—

Q: No, it is.

Matlock: —I did want to distinguish Reagan's idea. He could not conceive of why anybody else would consider this an offensive strategy. Gorbachev would say, "Yes, but if you had a defense, it would allow *you* to do the first strike, and then prevent a second one." Reagan would say, "That's true, but I'm not arguing that we could deploy this while we still have ballistic missiles! We should abolish them before we deploy! That's the whole point." That's one thing that Gorbachev never quite understood.

I think here again, politically, he was faced with a situation—he had to come back and tell his people that he had dealt with the threat of SDI, because many of the Soviet leaders thought that this was a cover to put nuclear weapons in space. They totally misunderstood. And even though his scientists were saying, "They can't do that. Don't worry about it," the military and others were saying, "Look, it can't be what they say. It's got to be an offensive strategy. We have got to get rid of it, because we can't afford to keep up with their technology." So you had in this case the political perceptions of both sides actually misrepresenting the reality. So much, frankly, of

the problem was this during the Cold War, and now. It's simply a projection of what is incorrect on your understanding of the intentions of the other side.

Q: But that's been a ubiquitous problem, even in area studies, for some time.

Matlock: Right.

Q: I mean, this was something Mark von Hagen was trying to address. Fascinating. Just fascinating. Going a little bit ahead in time, you wrote in your book about the impact of Chernobyl [nuclear disaster in Chernobyl, Ukraine].

Matlock: I'm sorry, what?

Q: The impact of Chernobyl.

Matlock: Oh! Tremendous impact, of course.

Q: Could you talk a little bit about it, and also—?

Matlock: Yes. Well, I think that the impact within the Soviet Union was probably the most important single factor in convincing them the Cold War had to end. Now, in a strictly military sense, later, General [Dmitry T.] Yazov, their head of the General Staff [of the Soviet Armed Forces], I've heard him say in at least two meetings with us that until Chernobyl, he was

convinced they could prevail in a nuclear war. He said, “We weren’t going to start it, but if it went nuclear, I really thought we could prevail.” He said, “Chernobyl taught me, no way.” He said, “One thing it should have taught us is that you don’t have to use nuclear weapons to suffer from the nuclear effect of war.” He said, “If you bomb power plants with World War II bombs, you can wipe out a country.”

Q: True enough.

Matlock: He says, “That’s what Chernobyl taught us.” And that’s why, then, Gorbachev, though there was jockeying over just how you do it, he basically had the military support in bringing an end to the arms race. Now, they didn’t want to look like they lost it, but they sure didn’t want it to come to a confrontation. Because they understood, as well as our more insightful people, that it would be a disaster. So in effect, you had increasingly true believers on both sides that we were going to be better off if we get rid of these damn things! And it’s interesting, in the peace movements today, you will find the former Soviet commanders of their nuclear forces joining the others to say, “Yes, get rid of them! They are unusable! Don’t you understand that?” But we don’t [laughs].

Q: Yes. Such a tragedy also, because it showed the lack of Russian strength—

Matlock: Now, as far as on us, we first began to get the reports of the accident from the Scandinavians. They had picked up the fallout. And of course, the Soviets first weren’t admitting what happened. So we were under more and more pressure to provide information. Gorbachev

apparently, though he was furious at their own people for what had happened, he was fed at least enough of what we said to think that we were beginning to use it against him, and he made some public statements along those lines. Actually, we were trying our best not to use it against him. When we got the news, the president was actually in Japan, and the word came, “Look, let’s don’t make a big political issue of this.” Because Reagan didn’t want a big move against the nuclear energy here and in Europe, because at that time, about the only way you were going to get away from fossil fuels was with the nuclear ones, and for a lot of reasons, we didn’t want a lot of hysteria, particularly since we were assured that our plants didn’t have the fault that theirs did.

So he didn’t want us to make a political issue. But when they didn’t announce what was happening, we did have our people begin to announce what our readings were, and to give advice to people in those areas. Actually, we offered what help we could, and I know one of our oncologists who dealt with these issues—I forget his name—went there to give them advice while they were wrestling, of course, with the problems. I think that, more than any other incident, convinced Gorbachev we have got to change this system. So it was not only very crucial in changing their attitudes towards foreign policy and the arms race, but toward their own system.

Q: Why? Why, do you think?

Matlock: I think Chernobyl more than anything else—and you will find that in his memoirs. When people say, “Well, you can’t tell me the leader of the Communist party is going to

diminish Communist control of the country,” well, that’s what happened. And if you want the most powerful reason why it happened, it was Chernobyl. There were others, of course; a lot of others. These things tend to be overdetermined. But if you want to put your finger on *one* thing that probably was the most important precipitating reason. Both in their foreign policy and in their domestic policy, it’s Chernobyl.

Q: So, though I think I know the answer to the question, why did Chernobyl convince him to end the influence of the Communist party?

Matlock: Well, first of all, the system had produced a plant that was very vulnerable to human error. Second, the system had not been able to enforce even the most rudimentary worker safety and other things. And third, worst of all, the system tried to cover it up when it happened. When all of that became clear to Gorbachev and the top leadership, it told them something they had suspected before: the system itself was rotten, and at fault. If the country was going to cope with its problems, it had to change. And it wasn’t going to be able to do that if it was racing with the United States for military superiority. It certainly wasn’t going to do that if you continued the nuclear arms race.

Q: Thank you.

[END OF SESSION]

ATC

Session: 3

Interviewee: Jack Foust Matlock Jr.

Location: Durham, NC

Interviewer: Mary Marshall Clark

Date: February 3, 2017

Q: Okay. Session three.

Matlock: Well, starting with people who were in my class in what was then the Russian Institute, virtually all of them actually became very active in the various aspects of relations with the Soviet Union, and with Russia. [Pause] I'm going to have to write down some of these names. I've reached the age that my senior moments come more and more fast.

Well, you have mentioned Jeri Laber. Well, of course, Jeri was very active in human rights promotion, and she was one who I think certainly used her training, and played a very active role in quite a number of issues that were eventually resolved. That was certainly true, and notable throughout her career.

I mentioned Ed Luhrmann, who was a student in literature, who then—he taught one year at Dartmouth, but later did research in Moscow when I was there in the embassy. Married a Russian woman, and then spent the rest of career teaching at Washington University, St. Louis. [He] was a specialist on [Ivan S.] Turgenev, and wrote some very fine books and studies of Turgenev.

Then there was Franklin [D'Olier] Reeve. Frank Reeve. Another of my colleagues with literature, who came on a visit by Robert [L.] Frost. It was during my first tour in Moscow; it must have been around 1962. Frost came at a time of considerable tension, and yet, this was part of our cultural exchange. Reeve was his interpreter, and I was assigned by the embassy to be the embassy officer assigning them. That was during the Robert Frost visit that I met the poets Vosasinski [phonetic] and [Yevgeniy] Yevtushenko, several others. We actually visited and met Anna [A.] Akhmatova, in what was then Leningrad, and made a lot of contacts with Russian literary specialists. And then later, Frank wrote a book about it called *Robert Frost in Russia*.

That was all very memorable for a number of points of view. One was that Frost came also at the same time that Stewart [L.] Udall came. Udall, I think, was secretary of the Interior, and a friend of Kennedy's. Then, Kennedy was president. Frost and Udall both had asked if they could see Krushchev. Well, Krushchev was on his vacation in Gagra, in the Black Sea, in the Caucasus. At first, they said it wouldn't be possible, and then Udall went down to see them without Frost. Frost was absolutely crushed. Then Reeve called me to say, "Look, we have canceled everything this evening, on grounds that Frost isn't feeling well. Could you have us over for dinner? We need to cheer him up." I said, "Well, of course." We had a fairly tight apartment—three small children then.

So Frost came, and while he was actually there, I got a call from the writers union [Union of Soviet Writers] saying that if he would be available at six-thirty the next morning, there would be a special flight to take him to Gagra and to see Krushchev. Well, when I broke the news to Frost [laughs], instead of being despondent, oh, he was very—well, he clearly was just

absolutely delighted. He said, “I think I’ll have a martini!” Well, he was also traveling with the man who was the director of the Morgan Library [& Museum] in New York, who came back—I went to the kitchen to mix a martini, and he said, “Make it weak! He hasn’t had a drink in three years.” [Laughs] I like that. So I took him the martini, and we took pictures of him with our three children, still very young. We had really a very nice evening. He was in the best of spirits.

Q: [Laughs] Literally.

Matlock: Well, he got up the next morning; he was so excited, he couldn’t sleep. By the time he got to the Caucasus, they had to put him in the hospital. And Krushchev actually came to his bedside, and they had their interchange.

Q: What an incredible story.

Matlock: But anyway, during that visit, Reeve was the one who insisted that when we went to Leningrad, Frost really wanted to meet Anna Akhmatova. It was still when they weren’t actually carrying out a campaign against her, but she was being treated almost as an unperson. They said, “Well, that’s going to be very difficult.” And he said, “Well, Mr. Frost is really insisting upon it. He loves her poetry, and he really wants to meet her.” Actually, Frost didn’t know who she was, but anyway, that’s another story [laughs]. But Reeve negotiated this, and sure enough, one of their academicians—I believe it was the one who edited the academy edition of Turgenev—invited her and Frost to have lunch at his dacha outside Saint Petersburg. So that’s where he was able to meet, and of course, Reeve was doing the translating on both sides.



But on the way to Leningrad, Reeve ran into one of the literary scholars that he had known, who came to our compartment, and we started discussing various writers that were then being ignored. I remember we started talking about [Fyodor M.] Dostoevsky, and for several years, they didn't publish much Dostoevsky, and several other things. This scholar at one point, talking to Reeve and me when we had talked about our research, before we parted, as we were coming into Leningrad—this was the all-night train, the Red Arrow—he embraced us both, saying, “Russian culture really depends upon you now, because we can not do the full range here in Russia”—in the Soviet Union, as it was then.

But the funny thing about it, and the story I often tell about that trip, is that I had along with me a bottle of Jack Daniel's, and we started out sipping, as is usually the Russian style. We had been maybe an hour out of Moscow when the male conductor—not the usual woman who sits at the samovar—came back and knocked on the door, and told the Russian, “Your wife is calling for you.” He was in a different compartment, and he was in ours; the one with Reeve and me. And the fellow said, “Well, never mind.” He told us, “She is not calling for me. He is just trying to get me out of here.”

So we continued talking. And about a half an hour later, the attendant came back, and rather more insistently says, “Your wife insisted you come back to the compartment.” He turned to us and sort of shrugged, and said, “I guess I'll have to go.” It occurred to me, we had our glasses with the Jack Daniel's. I called to the person, I said, “Come in and have a drink with us. Try some American whiskey.” He said, “Oh, I am on duty now.” I said, “My friend, when you cross

that threshold, you are not on duty; you're our guest." And he said, "Impeccable logic." So he steps over, and I pour him about an inch and a half, and he looked at it and he said, "Is that American hospitality?" We, of course, were speaking Russian. I said, "Oh, forgive me, my friend." And I filled the glass almost full. He drank it in, "Bottoms up" chugged it down, sort of sucked it a bit and said, "[unclear] *viski slabovata*," It's a little weak. But then, sort of staggered out, and we never saw him again [laughter].

Q: That's a great story.

Matlock: But as I say, Reeve was with me, and Reeve had said all of these things. He was one of my colleagues in literature at the Russian Institute.

I remember Elizabeth [Kridl] Valkenier, who was Professor [Manfred] Kridl's daughter, and she has been a friend for a long time. I think she did, I believe, government, but then later, of course, she got very interested in the history of art and so on, and of course has been, I think, one of the great teachers and professors there since then. We would make a presentation on the basis of our research project, and I remember attending hers. Now, at the time, she was Elizabeth Kridl then, but later, we got to know them very well, when I was teaching at Columbia.

Another of my friends was Frank—I guess his Lithuanian name would have been [Pranas Rimvydas] Šilbajoris. It was Pranas, I think, Šilbajoris, but we called him Frank Silbajoris. He was Lithuanian, and liked to write Lithuanian poetry. But as he pointed out, he really couldn't

make a living as a Lithuanian poet in the United States, so he got his PhD in Russian literature, and taught, I think, at Michigan, until he retired. He also came to Moscow at times.

As I think through, there were a number of these students. They all really made a difference, and I can't think of any that drifted off into totally different areas.

Q: Well, that's what's remarkable, is how—

Matlock: Yes, how many—

Q: —much people stayed—

Matlock: As I said, if I—

Q: —in their own disciplines.

Matlock: —really had a list in front of me of the ones I knew, I could probably go on and on with this—just being reminded of the names. But it was remarkable, the number that did continue, and it was also true when I started teaching at Dartmouth. At least three or four of the few majors that we had ended up in very influential positions.

Q: Yes. So that's one way to look at the question of influence. Not necessarily of the Harriman Institute itself as an institution, but the impact of the alumni in the world.

Matlock: Yes, absolutely.

Q: So, good. Jeri Laber told us the story of how you helped her get to the border in Czechoslovakia when she was kicked out. Do you remember that?

Matlock: You know, now that you mention it, yes. Again, I would have to be reminded of the details. I knew that there were times that we helped out when she was in the Soviet Union. I had forgotten the Czechoslovak side [laughter]! Yes. But—

Q: She just mentioned your name, and said you were incredibly helpful to her.

Matlock: Yes. Yes. I think her expulsion occurred about the time they planted drugs on one of our employees. She had been the one we used to contact the dissidents in Czechoslovakia, and she was a good Czech speaker. She had gone out to Germany driving her Volkswagen, and they had actually planted drugs in the car and then stopped her at the border, and so on. They didn't expel her, but they made those charges. Then they stopped giving her appointments. And so she decided that she didn't want to put up with that.

In retaliation, I convinced the department to close the Czech airline office in Chicago, which we knew was their equivalent of the KGB's listening office on the Czech immigration in Chicago, in the Midwest. We had no airline office in Czechoslovakia, so there was no way they could retaliate on us. But I think what happened with Jeri, and our employee—we did that, and—I

guess I can mention it now—we learned in our intercepts that their internal security and their external security got into a real fight over this. External security is saying, “You stupid guys! We lost a slot that was necessary for us! What did you achieve?” [Laughter]

Q: I can see that. I can see it. It’s almost a television show. Well, that’s great. I knew you knew them personally. How about Kimberly [J.] Marten? Do you have anything to say about her?

Matlock: Yes?

Q: I just thought you might want to say something about your relationship with her, or how—

Matlock: Oh! Well, actually, she was not at the institute—

Q: No, I know.

Matlock: She is a later generation, I would say.

Q: No, I understand.

Matlock: No, it’s just that we discuss things on the Internet. She was teaching there when I was also lecturing. I had a course at the institute.

Q: Yes, I knew that.

Matlock: But basically, she interviewed me last year. They have a series of interviews that they put on the Internet, and so I came up to New York, and Kimberly interviewed me in those two interviews. She asked really excellent questions, and so on. But as I say, we are of a different generation of scholars. But she certainly has been an important part of the institute.

Well, Cathy [Catharine Theimer] Nepomnyashchy, she may have been the only director of the institute who was a specialist in literature. I think Cathy was very active. She brought Gorbachev there, she brought Putin. The annual lectures they sponsor, she really got some very important writers. I think she had [Ismail] Kadare, the Albanian—I never would have met him—I had heard of him—without that. So I think Cathy was a very active director.

Of course, Marshall [D.] Shulman was legendary, and we all knew Marshall. I knew him when he was in the government. But he wasn't there when I was a student. And then, of course, Bob Legvold has been—Bob and I go back a long way. I was in Ghana when he came as a graduate student researching his dissertation, and I introduced him to people who were looking at what the Soviets were doing. Which was my job there. So we go back to the early '60s, even before—then, when I was there in the early '90s, [Mikheil] Saakashvili was a student in the law school [Columbia Law School], and I have pictures of him with Marshall Shulman and myself at one of the reunions for the Harriman Institute. So there are all sorts of connections with the various people. Tim [Timothy M.] Frye, I think, is doing an excellent job. We've had, I think, a series of really excellent directors. You mentioned [Richard E.] Ericson at one point, and von Hagen.

But I think Shulman was there so long, he almost personified—and of course, it was Shulman that brought on the Harriman bequest. I used to see him a good bit when he was working in Washington at the State department. He actually lived in an apartment at the Harriman residence in Georgetown. We had a house in Georgetown then, too, so we saw Marshall a lot when he was in the government, and a number of my colleagues—Jack [Richard] Perry, who worked for me when I was in the Office of Soviet Union Affairs, later was ambassador to Bulgaria, he was a Marshall Shulman student. Came through the institute; did his PhD under Marshall, and later taught at Davidson College.

If I start thinking through just name after name, it's going to come out, because this has been really—a number of people have been really central to our relationship. I think there's just no question about that.

Q: Thank you. Well, you're one of the most influential alums in terms of what you have been able to do. I'd love to spend the rest of our session today hearing about some stories that you might give us that are about the importance of human relations and diplomacy. You talked earlier at lunch about the tearing down the Berlin Wall story. If you could tell that again, and then maybe a few others, that would be great.

Matlock: Yes. So many people now, including in our secondary school textbooks, there is a reference to President Reagan's statement which he made in a visit to Berlin in November in 1987, "Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall." That got a lot of publicity, and you find at the [Ronald] Reagan [Presidential] Library [and Center for Public Affairs] that passage from the

speech, along with remains of the wall, the implication being that speech brought the wall down. That simplifies history, and actually distorts it, because in fact, Gorbachev was facilitated in encouraging the Germans to tear down the wall by the fact that President Bush avoided making such a statement publicly in 1989.

The way that came about was that, at a time when they had delayed a direct meeting in 1989, President Bush was sort of reassessing our policy toward the Soviet Union. Gorbachev called me aside after a public function where we were present and they were present to say privately, “Please ask your president to be a little more considerate.” He was not more specific, but this was in July 1989—the first year of Bush’s presidency—and Bush was planning a trip to Eastern Europe. So I sent a message, of course, telling him what Gorbachev had said, and speculated that what Gorbachev feared was that he would make a “tear down the wall speech” when he visited Eastern Europe. Bush took the hint, and when he went to Warsaw and Budapest, instead of mentioning the wall, he praised perestroika.

This allowed Gorbachev, when he went to East Germany, to press the East Germans to reform, to bring about their own perestroika, and to tell them that if things go wrong, we’re not going to send in the troops; we’re not going to save you. So this meant that they were in a position that when it happened, there was a report on television, misinterpreted by people, that they were going to allow free access to the wall. People gathered, demanded to leave, and when the border guards could not get any instruction from the leadership, [they] let them start moving in and out. And that was the beginning of the Germans themselves tearing down the wall.



So in a sense, Bush facilitated that result by not bringing this up. Now, does that mean that it was wrong for Reagan to bring it up when it did? No, because at that time, the wall was up; Reagan knew that we had almost gotten ready for the treaty to reduce intermediate-range ballistic missiles—the INF [Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces] Treaty; he was going to be signing that in Washington with Gorbachev—and we were going to probably have a fight over ratification. So he had to demonstrate that we are not going soft on the Soviets. The wall is there; get that wall down. In effect, he was firming up his reputation with the right in American politics to keep them from blocking the thing that was coming up. But President Bush, under a different situation, didn't bring it up, because we saw that Gorbachev was moving in a way that, if he continued, was going to result in the liberation of Eastern Europe.

The thing here is if you really want another leader to do something, you don't put them under public pressure, so it looks to their own people [as] if they are bending to the pressure. But so many people, particularly on human rights issues like that, if you're not out speaking loudly, you're not supporting us. That gets it absolutely backwards. Absolutely backwards. That's that one.

Q: That is a wonderful story.

Matlock: On the general question of personal relations, it applies at almost every level. There is simply, I think, nothing whatever to be gained by public disputes with foreign leaders over their domestic behavior. You just make them mad, and actually, it makes it more difficult for them to do what you'd like them to do. But also, I think for diplomats, and for other leaders, it is to show

really personal consideration for the people you are dealing with. Certainly, if you have a misunderstanding, you don't call them a liar in public, even if you think they misrepresented what they told you. You can say, "Our views differ on that one. We need to discuss it more." I mean, what's wrong with that?

But I was able—and I still almost marvel that it happened—but even though I was a hardliner on most issues, and certainly [laughs] no admirer of communism, I did understand the people I was dealing with were human beings, and most of them not only decent human beings, really very nice human beings. In the case of the diplomats, they were sometimes representing an impossible regime with impossible goals, and they might understand that, but what are they going to do? So we keep our sharp words private, and we don't make them personal. And you show, both by your action and your words, that you're not really out to get that country—you are only out to stop some things that are damaging to your country's interests, and actually to theirs if they understood it.

So that's sort of the background. Then the next thing, if you really want to get to know a person, you have got to speak that person's language. No matter how well they speak yours. When we get into conditions and situations where you get an emotional reaction, a person speaking his or her own language is much more apt to tell it like they really feel it than if they are having to filter it through even a language they are fluent in. I found this in Africa, that Tom [Thomas R.] Pickering and I would go up country in Tanzania, and we always spoke to the local people in Swahili. Now, they all spoke English, and if we had used English, we would have had a fifteen-minute courtesy call and learned nothing. If we go in speaking Swahili and asking them about

conditions and where their problems are, we would get a long discussion. Here is this foreigner who is interested enough in *them*—to learn your own language, and so on. I found that that was absolutely essential if you were going to develop really close personal relations.

It also means in a situation like we had with the Soviet Union, you can go in to the leadership, and one-on-one—no interpreter, no record made by anybody else—and you can be really frank. I know one of the most sensitive conversations I had was with Shevardnadze. This was just before the Lithuanians declared their independence. This would have been sometime in March—would it have been '90? I got word from him that if I could come over to see him alone the next morning, he'd appreciate it. Well, I realized he didn't want our meeting publicized, so I actually walked so that I wouldn't have a car with the flag on it in front of the foreign ministry [Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia]. My residence was only a few blocks from the foreign ministry.

I walked over, went in, and we sat down in his inner office. Nobody else there, a table about this size [gestures size] between us, and I saw he had a little pad with notes written in the Georgian language. Obviously, he had written it, not his staff. He had apparently just come from talking to Gorbachev. The message was whether something can be done to persuade the Lithuanians to delay their declaration of independence for a week to ten days. Because Gorbachev was planning on that Monday to have a vote on the establishment of a presidency. Well, I guess that had already happened in principle, but there was to be a vote selecting him as president on Monday. Shevardnadze said, "You know, if this declaration occurs before that happens, we can't guarantee what's going to happen." The implication was Gorbachev could be removed.

“Now, we know they are going to do this, but if they will hold off for a week to ten days, until we have the presidency, and Gorbachev as president, we can deal with it. Is there any way we can get that message?” He knew that I was scheduled to meet the leaders that morning at ten o’clock. He said, “It’s best if you don’t meet with them, because our people are blaming you for this. They think you are tutoring them.” Actually, I had made sure that every meeting I had with them was in a place we thought was bugged, because I wanted them to hear that I wasn’t leading them. But I learned, among other things, that that doesn’t matter; they’re going to claim whatever they want to claim. I told Shevardnadze, “Look, I can’t turn off that meeting. They’re going to be there when I get back. But,” I said, “I will come back and talk to you after I talk to them.”

They came, and yes, they said that Sunday, they were going to declare restoration of their independence. I said, “Well, what’s the rush?” “Oh, we have to do it before Monday!” “Why do you have to do it before Monday?” “Well, Gorbachev wants to become president so he can crush us.” I said, “Are you trying to tell me that if Gorbachev wants to crush you as general secretary of the Communist party of the Soviet Union, he wouldn’t have done it already?” Silence. And then I said, “All I can say is your reading of the situation is not ours, and it’s not mine. I see no reason for you to rush.” Actually, I was feeling very bad, and I told Shevardnadze I would keep this—actually, I was coming down with the flu and my head was hot. So I excused myself, saying, “Well, my political counselor is here and will continue to talk to you. But I do want to emphasize that in my opinion, there are dangers in rushing ahead too rapidly.”

Now, then I went back to Shevardnadze the next morning to report on our meeting, and I said, “I don’t know any way we can deter them.” I said, “I know this is going to be very risky, but if

there is any way, it would have to be that President Bush has to send them a message asking them to delay.” For Bush to send that message, he would have to have a private assurance that if they delay, their attempt will be successful. Shevardnadze said, “Well, wait. I’ll have to check on that. Don’t do anything.” I said, “Of course I am not going to do anything until you let me know.” And I know that’s very risky, because if the word had gotten out that—on both sides [laughs], it would be almost considered treasonous by Gorbachev to be dealing with us on this issue. On the other hand, the word would be that Bush was trying to preserve the Soviet Union [laughter]. You know how these things would come out.

I said, “It’s just that I can’t think of any other way we can persuade them to delay.” Obviously, I can’t guarantee that would work. Well, he later sent word to me he had talked to Gorbachev and we shouldn’t do anything. They did go ahead and declare their independence, and the coup did not occur. So they got by with it. But this is the interesting thing—[laughs] among the interesting—as I walked out of his office—there were just two of us there—he turned to me and he said, “Jack, I want you to know one thing.” I said, “Yes?” He said, “If I see a dictatorship coming, I’m going to resign. I will not be part of a government with blood on its hands.” Now, this was in March. In December, he resigned, saying a dictatorship is coming.

Q: Wow. What a story.

Matlock: Now, I don’t think anybody at that time could imagine that [laughs] there could be that kind of conversation between the foreign minister of the USSR and the ambassador of the United States of America. They’d agree not only was the Cold War over, but we understood that, look,

we are all striving for the same things, basically, and yet, how we do it has so many pitfalls.

We're on the verge of a coup against Gorbachev which could bring repression. And that's why when the [unclear] had earlier asked me, "If we declare our independence, you are going to recognize it, of course?" and I would say, "No, we won't. We can't, because they would crush you, and we can't save you."

Q: Makes total sense.

Matlock: I didn't say, "Oh, we'll give you arms and help you resist it." I mean, it's ridiculous. It's one of the things wrong with our current policy of democratization, and so on. You start standing up to a dictator? Okay, we'll help you! And then you end up with a Libya, and an Iraq, and a Syria, and—

Q: Yes. What strikes me about that story is the immense trust you had for each other, and the honesty that you—

Matlock: Actually, it started with Shevardnadze earlier. I have already mentioned the case of Shultz and Shevardnadze shaking hands. That had already occurred in New York. But by the next January, there was an attack on the television tower in Vilnius, and about seventeen people were killed. Then the Lithuanians surrounded their parliament [Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania]—which already had, actually, declared their independence the year before—and were, in effect, protecting it with their bodies. Bush sent Gorbachev a letter, where he said, "If

the violence continues in the Baltic, I'm going to have to withdraw from a number of our cooperative projects." And he listed them.

I took the letter and I went by myself, because I found if you have a really frank conversation, you don't have somebody there taking notes. And I didn't need an interpreter, of course.

Gorbachev had only [Anatoly S.] Chernyaev, his foreign policy man. Just the three of us in the room. So I take the letter in in English, I translate it as I read into Russian, handed it to him, and Gorbachev asked me in Russian, "Well, did my friend George say he has done those things, or he will do them?" I said, "He said he would have to do them *if* violence continues in the Baltic."

Then Gorbachev absolutely astounded me. He looked up and said, "Jack" —he was already calling me by my first name— "tell me, how do you read the situation here?" Boy, I wasn't expecting that. I thought, geez, he's asked me, and by god, I am going to tell him.

I must have spent about twenty minutes. There had been what we called a swing to the right. Shevardnadze had resigned, saying a dictatorship was coming. He had appointed a new internal minister, who was hardline. We had had the attack on the television tower in Vilnius. They seemed to be preparing to tighten up in general. I had to say, "You know, I thought I understood where your policies were handling, and I've been explaining that to my government. But since last November, I don't know how to explain them." I don't understand this, I don't understand that. I said, "Why in the world you name a man like [Valentin S.] Pavlov prime minister, that's just hard for me to explain."

He listened patiently. I could have gone on for twenty minutes; you know how I continue talking. He would jot down a note or two. Then he looked at me and he said, “Look, try to explain this to your president. This country is on a verge of civil war. *Eta strana na grani grazhdanskoy voyny*. That means my basic responsibility is to avoid that. I am going to have to tack with the winds. My goal is what it always has been. We are going to have to hang in there. Don’t worry. When we can, we’ll be headed that direction. In the meantime, well, I understand. Your president will have to do what he feels he has to do. But assure him I’ll abide by all my commitments whatever.” And one of them was to support us in the U.N. at the Gulf War. [Laughs] I mean, this was right before the bombing started.

Well, as I told Bush, “I’m afraid he’s got you there. Please, nothing punitive.” But the utter frankness. Now, you don’t get that if you have been treating them as enemies, if you have been playing games, if you have been trying to drive a hard bargain on everything that comes up. Instead of the spirit, “Look, we have got a common problem here. Let’s see how we can solve it.” So, from a number of points of view.

And then finally, as an incident of the importance of the personal relations, then there was the report I got from the Moscow mayor. I’ve written about this; I’m not sure I recorded it here. But in June—actually, I had already announced that I would be leaving, I thought at that point, the end of July. It turned out I stayed into August, for about a week. But that I’d be departing post, and actually, I think they had already named my successor. So I was in a round of farewell parties and things, and we had invited the mayor of Moscow to come to lunch. He called to say



he couldn't come to lunch, but he wondered if he could pay a farewell call on me. So I said, "Well, come by at twelve." The lunch wasn't until one.

He came. It was a week when [Boris Nikolayevich] Yeltsin was visiting Washington and had an appointment with the president. We started talking about Moscow politics. [Gavriil Kharitonovich] Popov had fairly recently been elected. They were having a number of moves; certainly, interesting things going on. But as we talked in my study, which we all assumed was probably bugged, he wrote down on a piece of paper that a coup was being organized against Gorbachev, and could happen soon, "Must get word to Boris Nikolayevich." That's Yeltsin. Just in a few words.

I looked at it, continued talking about the other thing, and simply wrote down, "*YA dolozhu*," I'll report, "*no kto eto delayet?*" But who is doing this? I wrote it down in Russian. And he looked at it, wrote down four surnames, passed it to me. We continued talking. The four surnames were [Vladimir A.] Kryuchkov, Yazov, Pavlov, [Anatoly I.] Lukyanov. Head of the KGB, minister of defense, prime minister, chairman of parliament.

Of course, I immediately wrote down on a yellow pad a very quick message to Washington asking them to pass this to Yeltsin. Because it was not a message for us, it was a message for Yeltsin.

Q: Oh, I understood.

Matlock: And he was meeting the president at ten that day. We had an eight-hour time difference. I sent the cable out—it probably got out a little after one o'clock Moscow time, but that would have been plenty of time in Washington. And obviously, it was highly classified. When Bush met Yeltsin, he gave him the message and asked Yeltsin what to do. He said, “We ought to warn Gorbachev.”

Now, by afternoon, I got a call—we had just had a newly-installed secure phone. Before then, we didn't have secure voice—saying, “The president wants you to go warn Gorbachev.” I said, “Well, okay, but obviously, I shouldn't tell him where we got the information.” He said, “Well, of course not.” I said, “Furthermore, I don't think I should name those four people.” These are four of the most senior people. For the American ambassador to go in and tell the president—when we can't confirm it—that the most senior people are conspiring against him, that's going to look like a provocation.

Q: Yes.

Matlock: They said, “Well, of course.” I said, “Okay. How about this? I am going to say we have information that is more than a rumor, but we can't confirm it. So,” I said, “that will convey this is not an intel report that we can confirm—”

Q: Yes, yes.

Matlock: “—but it was so serious that the president thought that Gorbachev ought to know.”

They said, “Oh, that’s perfect.”

So I call and got an almost immediate appointment. Went in, and again, only Chernyaev was there. Of course, they already knew that I would be leaving in a few weeks, so when I walk in, Gorbachev starts complimenting me on my work as ambassador. In fact, he called me “Comrade Ambassador,” [laughter] and he said, “It’s not that you don’t represent your country. Honestly, you do. But you are such a help in us in reforming this country.” I kept thinking, well, how in the hell—I can’t put this in a cable! [Laughs] My colleagues will ridicule me for the rest of my life if I repeat any of this.

But then I delivered that message, whereupon at first, he sort of laughed, and turned to Chernyaev and said something about the naïve Americans. Then he turned back to me and said, “Thank you.” That President Bush had said they were friends, “and now he has proved it. He has done exactly what he should do.” He had a report, and that he’s proving his friendship by passing it on to him. But said, “Don’t worry. I have things well in hand.” A thousand percent sure that this isn’t going to happen. He said, “You’ll see tomorrow.”

Well, what he and I knew was that that week—this was a Thursday. That Monday, in closed session, the prime minister had tried to have the parliament transfer some of the presidential powers to the prime minister without Gorbachev’s approval. It had been approved in closed session by Yazov, Kryuchkov, and several others. By Wednesday, that had leaked to the press; it was all over the press. Moscow was becoming as leaky as Washington. Gorbachev had said

formally that he did not approve of this. If you can imagine, the nominees of the president were going to transfer the president's powers to one of the nominees, without his approval!

Well, obviously, Gorbachev either thought that we were responding to that, or, he implied, to some of the loose talk of some of—there were a couple of lieutenant colonels who had gotten seats in the legislature who kept talking public about the need to remove Gorbachev. But we never thought that lieutenant colonels could manage a coup [laughs]. I mean, we were not that stupid. So we never took that very seriously. Anyway, Gorbachev then thanked me, and then said, “You will see that we are taking care of this.” In fact, the next day, he had it voted down in the parliament, that move.

I repeated that we could not confirm the information, and I was trying to convey it's not an intelligence report of our intelligence, but that it seemed serious enough that we thought he should know. So we had the discussion, and then I was escorted out after the conversation. The next day, I got a call from the State department saying, “The president talked to Gorbachev on the phone this morning, and unfortunately, he let the name of your source slip.”

Q: [Gasps]

Matlock: Popov, the mayor of Moscow. Oh, I thought, how in the world? This guy, he ran the Central Intelligence for a year, [laughs] and here he's giving Gorbachev the name of my source.

Q: Oh, god.

Matlock: By now, you know, we have actually the transcript of that telephone call—it's been declassified—and the way it went was that Bush asked Gorbachev, "Did you see Matlock yesterday?" Gorbachev said, in effect, "Yes, thanks for sending him in. And don't worry—the problem he mentioned is not really a problem. I can assure you a thousand percent." [Laughs] He actually used that. Bush said, "Well, you know, I really wouldn't have bothered you with it, but Popov and Yeltsin wanted you to know." Well, it was okay to say, "Yeltsin wanted you to know." It wasn't okay to say Popov. When Bush then later came, the next time Popov saw Gorbachev—he told me this later—he was coming through the line for the dinner, and Gorbachev shook his finger at him and said, "What are you doing, telling these fairytales to the Americans?"

Now, in the meantime—and forgive the length of this—

Q: No, I love it!

Matlock: —but is full of so many incredible things. Anybody who thinks that diplomacy—or that things happen by planning, or by—

Q: [Laughs] Strategies.

Matlock: —wile and so on, I mean, they just get it all wrong.

Anyway, meanwhile, what I didn't know at the time but only learned later was that Baker, who was then in Germany—of course, we sent all of our messages through the secretary of State—got that message and decided he should talk to Sasha Bessmertnykh, the Russian foreign minister, the new one. Sasha was also in Berlin, so he called him and said, "Sasha, I have got to see you. Can I come over at six-thirty?" This was Berlin time. Bessmertnykh said, "Jim, you know, I've got three appointments this evening. Could we do that in the morning?" Jim said, "No, cancel them. I've got to see you."

So he did. He went over, and he gave Bessmertnykh the names.

Q: Oh god [laughs].

Matlock: Bessmertnykh said, "Jim, hard to believe these guys are behind it, but if they are, there's no way I can get word to Gorbachev." We all knew the KGB controls all of their communications. I mean, it's the NSA [National Security Agency] and the FBI [Federal Bureau of Investigations] and CIA all put together. He said, "You know, if anybody warns Gorbachev, Jack's got to do it." So Baker said, "Okay. Make sure he gets an appointment."

So that's when they call me. They didn't tell me that Baker had talked to Bessmertnykh. But they told me to call Chernyaev and get an appointment with—it turns out that Bessmertnykh called Chernyaev and said, "If Matlock asks to see the president, get him in."

Well, all of this, of course—these were the people that, in fact, conducted the coup later in August, the night of August eighteen and nineteen. In January of the next year—this was all very classified—I met with Popov, who was still mayor of Moscow, and I said, “Can I write about this?” He said, “Sure.” He said, “Just give it all the details.” It was then he told me about Gorbachev shaking his finger, and as we both knew, he was at the top of a list to be arrested if the coup leaders had succeeded. He said, “I couldn’t imagine you were so indiscreet as to use my name!” I said [laughter], “Gavriil, I wasn’t! I was not the one! It was Bush!”

And then to my surprise, he said, “Well, you know, it was probably a good thing.” I said, “What in the world do you mean?” He said, “Kryuchkov had a leak. And once that word got to you all—” he didn’t say “you all” “—once word got to the Americans, he realized he had a leak, he had to stop his plans. It failed because it wasn’t planned properly. And it wasn’t planned properly because of that leak.” Now, you want to talk about [laughs] impossible coincidences, plans gone awry—

Q: And no potential of planning it, really.

Matlock: —Murphy’s Law in international relations [laughter].

Q: Oh, just breathtaking.

Matlock: And why was the coup? To preserve the Soviet Union. What was the effect? It hastened the—

There are so many lessons here in this. But again, going back, how was it that the American ambassador had the sort of personal relationship with the mayor of Moscow that he would try to get a personal message to his political leader going through the American embassy and the American president?

Q: What an incredible story.

Matlock: You don't do that without treating people with respect, with understanding, and also making them friends if you can.

Q: Having that trusted, honest relationship.

Matlock: Yes.

Q: Well, one very intriguing part of that story is how Gorbachev wanted your point of view on his country. That was very interesting.

Matlock: A number of them did that, and you could never be sure whether this is just probing for—

Q: Your mentality?



Matlock: —to find out what you want. With Gorbachev, it wasn't. I think he—well, he wanted to know what I was telling—obviously, I don't think they were necessarily reading my cables. If they were, I mean, that's okay. I wasn't trying to persuade them to attack the Soviet Union tomorrow [laughs] or something like that. In fact, I was usually trying to explain what they were doing in ways that would help us cooperate. And I think they knew that.

But one of the points here is that it's not just a matter of deciding what you want, and then either compromising or not. Diplomacy really has to—you've got to understand pretty deeply how things are going to affect the other side, and the fact that the person on the other side has an interest in defending his or her own position first of all, you might say. So the last thing you do is to make this a personal duel, no matter how much you disagree.

But the other thing is that you really need to be absolutely discreet, so that they can talk to you in confidence and this not get back to people in their own country—or yours—that are going to leak it, or do something, or use it against them. That's one of the problems when people back in your capital begin to leak confidential conversations. It makes it very difficult to do that. That meant that often, when I was reporting in my cable, I would sometimes not name the person. I would describe who they were, and maybe in an informal way let key people know who they were. But if it was something that if it leaked it could really do damage, I would sort of protect the person that was there. If it were very sensitive, like something like some of my direct conversations with Gorbachev, I would send it and have the State department limit it to three hard copies, and then have an authorized list of people to read it. They would read it, signed that they read it, but not take a copy.

Q: Smart.

Matlock: That way, if it leaks, [laughs] maybe if only six people read it and it leaks, well—

Q: You'd know who they are.

Matlock: Yes [laughter].

Q: Very smart.

Matlock: Yes. Well, anyway, there were even occasions, when we weren't sure that our communications were completely secure, that I sent a handwritten letter by pouch to Shultz, using the old forms of address and so on [laughs].

Q: Very smart.

Matlock: But anyway, that's all sort of part of it. But the thing is you—basically, this whole idea that you have now, “Oh, they don't share our values,” “He lies to me. Look what he's done—” Good heavens? How in the world are you going to develop a working relationship with a person if you treat him that way?

Q: Makes total sense. I have what we call in oral history a summative question now, which often come at the end of the interview. Which is, I'd like for you to discuss, if you can, what you are proudest of in your role as a career diplomat.

Matlock: What? I'm sorry.

Q: What you are most proud of about your own—which achievements that you are most—that you would bring to the top of the list?

Matlock: I guess what I'm most proud of—I know this sounds like self promotion, but I will quote somebody else on it, because I didn't make this claim myself. When we were discussing my book *Autopsy on an Empire* [*The American Ambassador's Account of the Collapse on the Soviet Union*], Bud McFarlane told a group, "If Jack hadn't come to the White House, it wouldn't have happened."

Q: Wow.

Matlock: That is, the negotiations to end the Cold War. So I guess what I have to be proudest of is I really was the key figure in defining what and *how* you do it. At that time, we were going to end the confrontation, but we made it really ending the real Cold War, if they went along. That's what it came down to.

And then the second thing, I guess, was I'm so—I think quite honestly—again, without self promotion—and I actually wrote this in my diary at the time—the reason I wanted to be ambassador to the Soviet Union at *that* time was that I thought I was uniquely qualified to do it. I mean, it was not that we didn't have many fine other diplomats, but the combination of knowledge, rapport, knowledge of people; I thought I could pull it off. I'm not sure others could have.

I guess this went back to the very day that they asked me to come to the White House, and I didn't want to, and they briefed me at breakfast that morning that the president decided to negotiate with the Soviets, but, “We don't have anybody here [who knows] how to do it. We want you on the staff to show us how.” This was the way it was put to me. At the same time, I was learning that McFarlane was going to concentrate on the Middle East, and that Clarke, who was then national security advisor, was mainly interested in Latin America, and particularly things like the civil war that was going on in Honduras and some of the Central American countries. I wrote Rebecca a letter, which now will go in the library here, and I said, “You know, I have to come and do this, and I have the feeling that I'm going to be the first to succeed.” This was at the height of the Cold War. Sometime, I had the feeling, “Look, if Reagan really does want to communicate, I think I know how to do it! If he'll just listen, we can do it.” I didn't see any way we were going to get out of the mess in the Middle East [laughter]. I said, “Poor Bud,” to get mixed up in that!

Q: Well, I've been lucky enough to hear the story of how you did it, so thank you.

Matlock: But certainly, being there in Moscow at that time, and with all of our Soviet friends—they *were* friends—that was, well, just absolutely exhilarating to see those changes.

Q: Well, I'm going to go back to Deana's remark now at the end, and say you better than anyone she's ever known—an American she's ever known—understands the soul of Russia. What would you say that is? How would you describe it?

Matlock: I'm not sure I understand anybody's soul. I am pleased when a number of Russians—and I had this on a number of book dedications—will say things like, “Of all Americans, you know us best,” or something like that.

Q: That's a modest reply to my question, but I will accept it.

Matlock: Yes. I'm sorry, what did you say?

Q: I said that's a modest reply to my question, but I will accept it [laughter].

Matlock: Oh, okay. You know? But, well, I have been very lucky. And not just because I fulfilled one of my professional ambitions, to be ambassador to the Soviet Union. If I had been named by a different president three years earlier, it would have been a disaster. Probably. So, [laughs] to do it precisely at that time, that was a marvelous thing. Which is not something I created.

Q: Sure, I understand. You told me a story, on our walk to the cafeteria this morning, that one of your teachers had assessed that you had a lot of ambition; perhaps you will have the skills someday. Could you tell that story?

Matlock: Well, it was actually when I entered the Foreign Service. We have a basic officers course, and part of it is sort of a show and tell. They would ask us, “Well, what’s your ambition? What do you eventually want to do in the Foreign Service?” I was young enough and naïve enough to simply tell it like it was [laughs]. I said, “Well, I would like to be ambassador to the Soviet Union.” Later, we were given access to our personnel files, and I was able to read the file. The person conducting that class wrote that, “Matlock’s ambition is obviously excessive, but he seems level-minded enough to adjust his aspirations as his career progresses.” However, before I came in, one of the three people who voted on my entrance voted against my entry into the Foreign Service because he considered me *over* specialized, and not of full use to the Foreign Service because I had spent too much time studying Russian and Russia. So, opinions differ.

Q: I hope he lived to see you become ambassador [laughter].

Matlock: Yes. Yes. Oh, life’s full of ironies. It’s amazing how many things really do happen by chance. You can’t plan. You can’t plan. The only thing I could plan in my career where, or I had some control over, every time they would ask me to go to the Soviet Union or take on some task involving the Soviet Union, I would say yes. Whereas others who thought, “Well, is this going to promote my career or not?” And I was told in mid-career several times, “Jack, you are specializing too much on the Soviet Union.” Actually, I spent several years in Africa, and

actually [laughs] was very successful in dealing with African problems. But this was the attitude of many in the service, that if you were too highly specialized in one area, you were not versatile enough to handle the really big issues. Or, if you got too immersed in a foreign society, you may not be the best manager of an American embassy, and so on.

There was the old combat—not combat—but difference between those who were generalists, and those who tended to specialize. Well, obviously, if you spent most of your life, say, studying Nigeria and not much else, that's going to limit your usefulness, and maybe it doesn't even make you that good in Nigeria, because you've got to put things in perspective. So there is certainly an argument of being broader than simply an area specialist. At the same time, if you were in a given country, really, the more you know about it, and the more contacts you have there, and so on, the more use you are going to be to the service. But I would say particularly those who seemed to either not have that much interest or capacity to learn foreign languages tend to press the generalist arguments, and those of us who, either because of aptitude or simply application, really found languages fascinating and enjoyed using them normally would push on the specialist side.

In the case of the Soviet Union, those who specialized in Soviet external behavior were usually much less sensitive to things that were happening internally that could affect external behavior, than those of us who specialized on what was happening internally. So you get all of these nuances. There is no general answer, except that ultimately, I keep going back to the thing—ultimately, international relations is a form of human relations, relations between human beings. You've got to pay just as much attention to psychology and to cultural background as you do to

the economics, the size of their military, their history of certain issues, and so on. That combination really has to come from experience as much as training.

Q: Well, thank you so much. This has been an extraordinary journey for me to listen to your adventures.

Matlock: Oh, thanks for the opportunity to talk about these things.

Q: I'll be in touch with you after you've read Bob Legvold's book.

Matlock: Oh, yes, okay. Okay. As I said, I will read it, and I know exactly where it is. I got about six at one time, and I'm just—I started with one that was shorter, which I may assign my students this term. But I will read it and will give you some comments on it.

Q: Thank you so much.

[END OF INTERVIEW]