

An Introduction and a Conclusion

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Back in 1980 I was working as an aide to Bob Strauss. He was President Carter's political guru, sort of an early Karl Rove, and at that time he was serving as the President's Middle East negotiator. When Bob briefed the Congress on our progress, I remember being really impressed at what a smooth talker he was. Actually, we were making no progress at all, but that was hardly the story he wanted Congress to hear. So he briefed those members on what we were doing, told them not a thing of substance, and made them believe that they had just heard the secret story behind the story, in detail, of the negotiations and that everything was going swimmingly. That is the mark of a real politician.

So I complimented Bob on his stellar performance and he quoted Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg address back to me: "The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here,..." Now, of course, Abe was wrong about his speech, but Bob was right about his own comments. And, in the same way, no matter how hard I try, I cannot remember anything about the commencement speakers we had at my high school, college, or graduate school commencements.

Nor do I even remember the commencement speech at my daughter's graduation from Juniata on May 11, 2003. Frankly, I was too busy being proud of my daughter. So, I looked up the speaker in the commencement program and it was Stanley Ikenberry, a great educator, and I am sure that he said many important things. But in the final analysis it is the ceremony to mark the day, and the students who are graduating, that count.

It is for this reason, I think, that Juniata, wisely, limits its commencement speaker to fifteen minutes. Now, I know a lot of ambassadors and it is hard to believe that any of them could get much beyond introducing himself in fifteen minutes. But I will do my best to give you an introduction to my career as an example of the ways that twists and turns in life can take you places that you have yet to imagine are possible. As my title suggests, then, I will give you a conclusion.

When I graduated from college in 1962, the doomsday clock that symbolically indicates how close we are to nuclear annihilation stood at seven minutes to midnight, right where it had started in 1947. Over the years, the minute hand moved nearer and away from midnight as international events brought us closer and further away from blowing ourselves up.

Then in 1991 with the collapse of the Soviet Union, the clock was the furthest we have ever been, before or since, from nuclear war—seventeen minutes to midnight. Today, the clock stands at a mere five minutes to midnight. That strikes me as strange, that we would be closer to nuclear annihilation in 2007 than in 1962 shortly before the Cuban Missile Crisis.

I, like some of you, and unlike the graduating class, lived most of my life in the Cold War and the threat of a nuclear war between the US and the USSR. When I got out of college, unless I had gone on immediately to graduate school, I was likely to have been drafted into the Army. To avoid this, I enlisted so that I could choose to serve my time in the intelligence corps.

I lived in Heidelberg, Germany, for three years waiting for the Russian hoard to attack us. Actually, it was a pretty nice place to wait. When I got out of the Army, I joined the State Department as the world seemed to be coming apart. We were bleeding to death in Vietnam while on the home front my friends were joining protest marches against the war. For my part, I spent a couple of months in Vietnam working for the Agency for International Development trying to clear out the ports so that we could get more weapons and ammunition in to kill more Viet Cong.

After Vietnam, I was sent to the visa office in Washington until it was discovered that I, believing naively in “freedom of speech,” was letting student radicals from Germany and France into our country to, in my boss’s words, “corrupt our youth.” There was considerable sensitivity at the time as students were taking over the offices of the deans and presidents of colleges. Some members of Congress felt that the American students did not need European radicals telling them how to protest. So the Department pulled me out of the visa office and, assuming that I knew something about the youth movement, sent me around to US college campuses to report to the Secretary of State, Dean Rusk, on the mood of the youth.

I joined the protest marches, sat in on radical meetings, and reported back that the mood of the youth was bad. The Secretary of State was not impressed. At that point the FBI informed the State Department that it had a rogue officer, me, who was protesting the Vietnam War at various marches and meetings. The Department straightened out the problem with the FBI and decided that it would be better for me to stay off college campuses for awhile. So, to get me out of town, they sent me to Israel to learn Hebrew and report on Israeli political parties, which was obviously safer than reporting on long haired college students. That is how I started my thirty-five years of working on the Middle East.

When they offered me the post in Israel, I knew virtually nothing about Israel or the Middle East. I had studied the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe in graduate school. So I read as much as I could on Israel, which was not a whole lot in the primitive pre-Google stage of our information development. I watched the movie *Exodus* and signed up for a four year stint in Israel. A series of circumstances and

disjointed decisions—certainly no plan on my part—brought me to Israel and my career. I thought I was going to be a lawyer, but I seized opportunities that took me in a different direction, a direction I have never regretted.

I spent a year studying Hebrew—I was not very good at it—but I could read the newspapers and brief them to Henry Kissinger and the Assistant Secretary, Joe Sisco, when they came to town, give the odd speech in Hebrew and sit in as note-taker when the Ambassador had his meetings with the Israeli leaders of the day.

I recall that Prime Minister Golda Meir's Milwaukee accent was as strong in Hebrew as it was in English. She was definitely a powerful personality, but it was not true what the Israelis said that she was the only man in her cabinet.

Moshe Dayan, the Defense Minister, was the heartthrob of every young woman in Israel, which I could never understand. He was short and had a pot belly—but the eye patch, an engaging smile, and the aura of a military hero must have been the secret.

Abba Eban, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, was so eloquent that most Israelis could not understand him in Hebrew or in English. He was an extraordinary man who was much more popular in the US than in Israel. The last time I saw him was in Cairo, shortly before his death, and while his body was failing him, his mind was as sharp and his speech as erudite as ever.

Right before I left Israel in July 1973, I visited the Israeli defensive Bar Lev line on the Suez Canal. There had been some hints of war so I expect that I wrote a trip report suggesting that the line was invincible and could defend against anything the Egyptians might throw at it. A month later the Egyptians proved me wrong with the outbreak of the '73 war. I was not very prescient, nor was I a very good judge of military fortifications. But then again, neither were the Israeli or US military experts who had also reviewed the defenses.

I went on to study Arabic because there were not too many places where you could use Hebrew other than Israel. Arabic had a bad reputation for getting ahead at State. Too many officers had been too enamored of the Arab world and were suspected of localitis—that is, representing the Arab world to Washington rather than the other way around. Because of this, the Arabists at State used to say that learning Arabic was a golden key to an empty room. That was hardly the case for me. It was a room filled with riches.

For example, I sat in on meetings with Anwar Sadat while he painted an extraordinary picture of the world at large and Egypt's place in it. When I was serving in Syria I endured the three hour long

monologues that President Hafez al Assad used to deliver to Henry Kissenger. Kissenger had one rule for those meetings—never go in to them without making a pit stop first.

That was when a buddy of mine who was a covert CIA officer in Yemen was visiting and we took an evening trip up the mountain behind Damascus to sip tea—it was a marvelous spot overlooking the city. Well, we saw a road that I had not noticed before and decided to see where it went. The next thing we knew we were driving around a surface-to-air missile defense site and we knew we were in deep trouble.

We tried to get out of there but a guard appeared out of nowhere and leveled his weapon at us. By virtue of the fact that my friend really was a spy and I had an ID that established my diplomatic immunity, I was elected to go talk our way out of the end of our respective careers, and jail time. I never really knew that I could actually speak Arabic until then.

The guard was pretty abusive and was about to telephone his superiors when I asked him how he thought we had been able to drive into that secret location without so much as a checkpoint or a guard to stop us. The guard thought for a moment, undoubtedly had visions of being hanged or shot for abandoning his post temporarily, and told us to “get the hell out” of there.

I worked for Deputy Secretary of State Ken Dam during the Israeli invasion of Lebanon, the PLO pull out to Tunisia, and then the Lebanon Marine barracks bombing of 1983. I was supposed to be advising on Lebanon policy, but I didn’t see that danger coming.

Before the disaster, Secretary of Defense Cap Weinberger had wanted to pull our troops out—Secretary of State George Shultz was convinced it would undercut our standing if we ran under fire. The problem was that our intervention had made sense when we were separating Israeli forces from the various Lebanese militias. But then the Israelis, under our pressure, withdrew back to southern Lebanon and our forces were left in the middle between competing Lebanese militias—it was not where we should have been. One of the greatest regrets of my career is that I did not call the situation correctly when I was advising my boss.

For a very short while, I was appointed Deputy Assistant Secretary of State until the Reagan presidency ended and President George H. W. Bush took office. Then, the new Assistant Secretary for the Middle East, with whom I had had a few run-ins previously, made a clean sweep of his deputies and I was without an assignment.

I wasn’t exactly without options. Paul Wolfowitz had offered me a job as a Deputy Assistant Secretary at the Pentagon where he was working as Assistant Secretary. But then the State Department decided once again to get me out of town and made me an offer I could not refuse.

I suspect it was the Assistant Secretary's effort to bury me in a quiet little place that did not figure very high in our foreign policy at the time—the United Arab Emirates. He probably assumed that would be my retirement post. Nevertheless, it was also my first ambassadorship. So I embarked on what I thought would be a quiet little vacation in 1990, that is until Saddam attacked Kuwait.

A wartime ambassadorship is not a quiet little vacation. Numerous squadrons of F-16s and assorted other aircraft soon populated the airfields of the Emirates while 300,000 sailors made their way into Abu Dhabi and Dubai on shore leave. Trucks criss-crossed the UAE highways carrying ammunition from Omani ports to the front in Saudi Arabia.

The Pentagon instructed me to get the leader of the Emirates, Sheikh Zayed, to sign a status of forces agreement so that when our sailors or airmen got into trouble they would be turned over to the US and not be charged under Islamic law. I went to Sheikh Zayed and explained the situation. He said that he could assure me that it was not a problem. I said: "So you will agree to sign a status of forces agreement?" He looked at me, this old tribal leader, as if I were nuts. "I just told you that there will be no problem. Are you saying that my word is not good?" I backtracked so fast that I almost fell over getting out of the meeting and I told the Pentagon to send its lawyers elsewhere. For the entire war period, Sheikh Zayed was as good as his word.

It was in the UAE that, for the second time, I saw my career disappearing before me. Secretary of State Jim Baker flew in with Paul Wolfowitz to get Sheikh Zayed to contribute two billion dollars to the war effort. They had a great meeting and Zayed agreed. They then flew off to Europe for other meetings. About an hour had passed when I got a call from Paul on the plane saying that they had miscalculated and would I go get another billion from Zayed, and by the way they needed an answer in about an hour so that they could reveal the UAE pledge in their next meeting. Jim Baker is great to work with, but he is not the most patient of men. I had visions of having to tell him no dice, or at a minimum that I could not get an answer in the time frame he wanted. But I went to Zayed's financial advisor, a sympathetic fellow, and outlined my problem to him. He disappeared for a few minutes and came back saying, "The President agrees."

I went on from the UAE to work for Madeleine Albright as her principle deputy at the United Nations. One day she asked me if I would like to go out to have dinner with Secretary of State Warren Christopher. It was a very enjoyable dinner. Some war stories were exchanged and we had a good time. But I couldn't see the point of the dinner.

It was only some time later that I was talking to a friend at the Department who said: "congratulations!" "What for," I asked. He replied: "Oh, for your appointment as Ambassador to Egypt."

Strangely enough, they were going through the appointment process and forgot to tell me or ask me if I was willing to go to Egypt. Christopher had apparently asked for the dinner meeting to size me up.

That was a great four years in Egypt. I worked closely with Vice President Gore and his office on economic reform measures for Egypt. That was before his major push on global warming. And as my posting was coming to an end, Madeleine asked me if I would take over as Ambassador to Israel. One day I was Ambassador to Egypt, the next, literally, I drove over the border and was Ambassador to Israel. Before I left Egypt, I had checked with a former Ambassador to Israel, Sam Lewis. He had one piece of advice: “Learn how to scuba dive.” He then explained that the Israeli environment is so intense and intellectually active, and the American ambassador is so much in demand, that thirty meters under water is the only place you can get some peace and quiet.

The reason I got the job was a bit of Israeli palace politics. It seems that my predecessor, Martin Indyk, who had done an outstanding job, had nevertheless picked the wrong horse in the Israeli election and was thought to be supporting Shimon Peres for the Prime Ministry. I think even Martin would admit that he was hoping Peres would win. Martin worked with the winner Binyamin Netanyahu for awhile but Bibi was suspicious of him because of his identification with Peres. To smooth things out, Madeleine took Martin back to Washington as her Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs and put me over in Tel Aviv.

Then history repeated itself. There was another election. I had been working closely with Bibi on the peace process and was seen by Ehud Barak, his opponent, to be too close to Netanyahu. I had been quoted in the press as questioning Barak’s chances, which did not make him happy. I gather that he made it clear to President Clinton that he would prefer to work with Martin. So Madeleine had us switch jobs. Martin went back to Tel Aviv and I became Assistant Secretary, first under Madeleine and then under Colin Powell until my retirement in May 2001. Thus ended that career and began another.

But I have run out of time. I warned you when we started that it takes an ambassador at least fifteen minutes to introduce himself. I think I have lived up to my word.

Now as for the conclusion I promised you in my title and alluded to earlier—why we are only five minutes away from self annihilation according to the Doomsday Clock today when we were seven minutes away at the height of the Cold War. Because in 2007, they added a new calculation to the determination of the length of our existence on this planet—global warming.

My generation may have reduced the threat of annihilation from global nuclear war, but yours may face the threat from a perfect storm of the adverse consequences of global warming.

In 1878 a smallpox epidemic forced this college to close for over one month. Today, colleges around the country are planning for the possibility of an avian flu epidemic that could force closure of campuses from three months up to a year with hundreds of thousands of fatalities. And if this epidemic doesn't hit us, the scientists seem to think another will. With globalization and the free movement of people around the world, they say it is inevitable. So that is one problem that may be on your agenda. And it will be compounded by the continuing problem of AIDS and the anticipated migration of other diseases like malaria to the north due to climate change.

In addition, the other day eleven senior retired generals and admirals published a report warning of drought, disease, water wars, and the breakdown of entire societies in the years ahead with significant ramifications for our national security. I know these men and have worked with some of them during the Gulf wars. They are not prone to exaggeration. So if you are worried about not having enough challenges for the future to keep you busy—don't.

When I first went to the Middle East, I thought we would have the situation there wrapped up in no time. And I could not understand how previous generations had left us in such a mess. Now I know why. We have made some progress over the years and maybe we will make some more before we are through. But one thing is sure; my generation is going to leave your generation with plenty of things left to do in the Middle East and in the world. And in the end, you will leave it a better place than you found it, just as my parents' generation did and, I hope, as my generation will do. That is what we can hope for and that is what makes the future for you both exciting and promising.