

Yeltsin had come in. Bob Strauss had gone out just at the time of Yeltsin's standing on the tank on the barricades in August 1991 and supported Yeltsin. Bob had been there a year and decided that with the Clinton administration, the Clinton administration should go find a new ambassador. The Clinton administration, according to the historical reports to which I had later access looked around at a few people. They couldn't find willing volunteer from among the pre-eminent and widely noted. So as usually it dipped down into the Foreign Service and somehow yours truly's name came to their attention.

I had an interesting experience over this because in December after the election I was called to Little Rock to interview with president-elect Clinton for another job. That happened to have been the intelligence job. We had a very nice interview and a good discussion, I came out very pleased with the results. I got on a plane and stopped over in Frankfurt. I got a call from Warren Christopher who had been handling personnel and Warren informed me at the Frankfurt airport that the job had gone to somebody else, which was obviously something that was disappointing to me but never the less...

Q: This was what job?

PICKERING: A CIA job.

Q: CIA job.

PICKERING: So I went back to India, but Christopher had said that they certainly had things in mind for me. So along about, it must have been mid-January or so, I had a call at three o'clock in the morning from Peter Tarnoff who was under secretary at the time. Peter said in a kind of cryptic way in the middle of the night and I was half awake, "We would like to have you go to FSU (Former Soviet Union). I said, "Well Peter, why would you want to send me to be a diplomat in residence to Florida State University. Are you really unhappy with the job I've done here or do you have somebody who you think is going to do a better job in India?"

Q: You are thinking Florida State University.

PICKERING: Florida State University, yes. I said, "I don't have any real interest in going to Florida, maybe I can have my choice." So he said, "No, no, no I was being cute and it's the former Soviet Union." It was Russia, so I said, "Well, obviously this is something I would like to do, it will not be easy here because they had just been four months without an ambassador before I came, or five months without an ambassador and they will be unhappy. They will want to know if somebody is coming to take my place and if so who and all the rest of it." He said, "Well I can't tell you the answer to all of that because that hasn't been decided yet. But at an appropriate time in a few weeks we'll be announcing this." I said, "Well I've got to have at least twenty-four hours advance notice so I can tell the prime minister here what's going on and explain what's happened." So he said, "Well in the meantime you'll have to sit on it," which is the usual thing and I said, "OK." I said, "I will consult my better half and let you know my final decision in a few hours." So I did that. Alice wasn't particularly happy about getting up and moving. We were living in unusual quarters so to speak because the embassy residence was under reconstruction.

We were living in a very nice bungalow in New Delhi that had been the economic counselor's house. We were getting along fairly well but we literally had just hung all the pictures.

So this came about by the end of March. It was interesting that the time at which I was to talk to the Indian prime minister, it turned out to be the night that John Major, then British prime minister, was visiting. I was invited by my colleague the British high commissioner in New Delhi, the British ambassador in effect, to dinner. I knew there would be a lot of people at the dinner including a lot of Indians and I was quite surprised by that. I had called Prime Minister Rao before the dinner, he was at the dinner and I again apologized to him in person at the dinner for the change, but it was extremely interesting because my British colleague who for no reason of diplomatic precedence or otherwise sat me at John Major's left hand and the Indian prime minister at his right hand. We had a kind of conversation about this and Russia. John Major who had brought along Sir Rodric Braithwaite who had been his last ambassador in Moscow and who was his foreign policy advisor insisted that Rod Braithwaite and I have a drink an hour or so after the dinner was over. So I had an immediate briefing. Rod was tremendously knowledgeable about Russia. He has now become an old friend and has recently written two important books on Russia. I started my briefing in India at the hands of Prime Minister Major with this completely kind of serendipitous activity on things.

Later on after that all happened, Yeltsin visited India so I had a chance to go to the Indian parliament and hear Yeltsin perform at some distance.

Q: Well how did the prime minister and eventually the Indian press, I would think that they would take a certain amount of umbrage at this.

PICKERING: Well they were respectful. I said that, of course, if I had my personal choice, which was true, I would have preferred to stay in India. I had only been there eight months and had just begun the job. They were complimentary about the work that I had done and said they regretted my leaving, but they understood that governments make choices in these things and they also understood the importance of Russia to the future of the United States and they didn't minimize that. So they wished me well. Well, I think I had some expressions of disappointment in the local press for the usual reasons. But they were complimentary reasons rather than reasons of unhappiness. Unfortunately, I think it took a whole year for Frank Wisner to be nominated and get out as my successor and that cannot have sat well as I had anticipated. Frank was a superb Ambassador; he was there three and a half years, so he kind of mended the breach and in his usual fashion did a great job in India. For that reason, I believe my short stay did not leave any kind of long festering problem in India.

I've always been welcomed back in India since, and people have been very, very kind. We made a lot of personal friends in India so we've been able to keep up. It was for me a very unusual tour because the minimum in the past for me had been a couple of years. This revolving door business obviously didn't help the Indians understand where things were going, but what happened under Frank and then later on under Dick Celeste and the whole Clinton-Indian relationship had shifted the focus. President Clinton paid a very successful visit to India. Those two ambassadors and the State Department and the White House moved the process of dealing with India way ahead. Of course, President Clinton played a very personal role in the resolution of the Kargil issue when

Nawaz Sharif came to Washington. We can talk about that later on. When I became under secretary I had an opportunity to go out to India start a dialogue at the level of Indian foreign secretary which I also helped to put things, so far as there was any kind of personal issue there, back on track.

Q: Why do you think it took so long for Wisner to..?

PICKERING: You'll have to talk to Frank about that. I was in Russia worrying about a lot of other things.

Q: Southeast Asia.

PICKERING: The usual problem that administrations have in finding people to go as ambassador to certain places. Frank had been under secretary of Defense for policy and moved over maybe he did it the other way and became the under secretary for security affairs at the State Department. I suspect that they didn't want to lift Frank out right away because he was doing an important job.

Q: OK, you've come back to Washington. What was your impression of...I mean this is all quite new for us. What was the date of this when you came back to Washington?

PICKERING: I came back from India at the end of March 1993. I headed for Moscow in May. I was there around the 20th of May. Clinton had just come into office in January and Yeltsin, of course, had been in place for a couple of years in Russia. But this had been one of our most important and difficult, tense, strained and significant relationships -- so it was a high priority. The president had asked Strobe Talbot to come in to cover Russia. Strobe was an old friend and roommate of the president's at Oxford. They had been together for a long time and talked a lot. Strobe in effect became Mr. Russia for the State Department. Warren Christopher had brought him into the State Department. He became special assistant to the secretary and ambassador at large for the area of the former Soviet Union. This piece of what had been in the European bureau when I came in was in the course of being established as Strobe's virtual bureau for dealing with the former Soviet Union. It included not only Russia, but the other former republics of the Soviet Union, absent interestingly enough the Baltic States which went to EUR right away and stayed with EUR. It got the initials S/NIS which stood for the Secretary's office dealing with the newly independent states.

Q: Well what was sort of the attitude that you were finding within the Department? The greater European bureau and then this was split off, did you find that there were bureaucratic problems or disconnects or anything like that?

PICKERING: No, not so much because in effect the staffs, which had been dealing with these countries were now sitting in the same place, but constituted this new organization. The administration and management stayed with EUR. Strobe was in effect operating as the regional assistant secretary on the policy issues, but his own broad contacts with the administration and his own background both as a journalist and in politics and with Clinton meant in fact that he was very much at ease working with Tony Lake at the White House. Tony was then the National

security advisor with Sandy Berger as, his deputy. Nick Burns was over at the White House about that time dealing with Soviet affairs. Toby Gati went over there for a while and then later came over as head of NIR at State.

The group was quite tight knit; they had pretty much a broad gauged view. Jim Collins who was holding the fort as the embassy's DCM and charge when I arrived, stayed with me until roughly from May till October. Then Strobe asked him to come back, which was very much his preference, to become Stroke's deputy on NIS affairs. I worked very easily with both Jim and Strobe from Moscow at that time. I learned a lot from Jim in particular while we were together. Then I got Dick Miles who was ambassador in Azerbaijan to come up and take over the DCM job. Dick had had long experience in Russia and had the language. He had been part of the Soviet-Russia crew for a long period of time. I thought that was essential for continuity to make sure in fact that we got the best of his expertise and the expertise of that organization integrated in the embassy while I was there learning Russia. Yet again this was another learning experience for me.

Q: What again sort of from the Washington perspective because this often becomes so important. You may be out in the field doing something but Washington has its own perspective, which often calls it. What was the feeling toward Yeltsin? He had been around for a while, he had been denigrated sort of by the Washington establishment for a while when Gorbachev was our boy...

PICKERING: Yes. *Q: And he was, you know, I mean you can just see it from the newspaper accounts.*

PICKERING: This was one of the beauties of the election. I think President George H. W. Bush had helped bring Gorbachev along in his own evolution and moves toward reform. He felt that Gorbachev's precipitate removal, less by Yeltsin than by the old line Communists, but once he was in the position in the sense of being 'dissed' by the old line Communists and then recovered from the August 1990 events, some of that loyalty to him was still there. Then Yeltsin did become president of the Russian Federation. Over a period of time he emerged as the key leader in a new group of independent states, but also the key leader in Russia. Gorbachev was pushed away and that left some bad taste. With President Bush there was naturally a kind of interest in and willingness to continue with Gorbachev. All that happened before I was personally involved so I had only a distant feel for it.

The Democrats coming out of the election were much more prepared to deal with the person now in place -- Yeltsin. They understood him and felt it was important to do so. While Yeltsin had received what he considered to be serious slights in his the visit to the Bush administration, Clinton set out to try to rectify that. He and Strobe were going to have to deal with Yeltsin. Yeltsin represented a fairly formidable force and over a period of time and, certainly during my time, showed himself generally on course. This is despite the fact that he made mistakes on some key issues. Yeltsin had a kind of insight, an internal compass that kept him on track on the big things -- doing the right things and in a democratic direction. That was one of his redeeming virtues. There were a lot of people who denigrated him for his drinking and denigrated him for his inability to make rapid change happen in Russia all at once. We all understood that it was a huge monolith that had to be moved around from a very extreme position in one direction to a

rather extreme position for them in another direction. From Communism to an open market economy, from autocracy and dictatorship to some kind of representative government, and to do so while he had to undo all of the Communist apparatus and bureaucracy and all the institutions of the State. This was not going to be easy at all. It was going to be like making sausage, very messy and unappetizing to watch and that indeed that was the case.

A Polish economist, Adam Michnik, said that going from capitalism to communism was like making fish soup from an aquarium, but no one had figured out the opposite, how make an aquarium out of fish soup.

So while I would not be an apologist for Yeltsin and for some of his serious mistakes, especially on Chechnya, I would also say I think history will treat Yeltsin a little better than he's been treated in the immediate aftermath of his own period in office. And maybe even in comparison to Putin who has done other things in different ways than Yeltsin would have, but for Putin maybe not with the same kind of unerring sense of where the compass was pointing with respect to democracy at crucial points.

Q: Of course we are looking at as you point out a work in progress. It was pretty remarkable where it is today compared to where it was. It's still very much evolving.

PICKERING: It is and it is still very much. It happened that just as when we were talking about India and I was off to do something on Kashmir this afternoon, I'm off to do something on today's Russia with all the warts and with what I think are all also the many positive changes that have taken place. To treat Russia as our press tends to as all black or all white is a serious mistake.

In retrospect one of the criticisms that has been made of the Clinton administration in the eight years in dealing with Russia is that perhaps we took Yeltsin too much for granted or that we painted too rosy a picture of Yeltsin and his administration. I said I will have to leave that to the historians to decide whether we had the right balance. But those of us who were there and certainly I did, I talked often about the deep concerns we had about corruption, about lagging reforms and the difficulties of making reforms happen; the deep sense of disturbance we had at what the Russian people were going through in terms of their own personal welfare. They went through inflation, they went through periods of no salary payments, they went through periods of having to live literally on what crops they could raise on small garden plots at the edge of the large towns and cities and many of them had almost no access to private transportation or private ownership of buildings as communism went away. And they suffered in the cold and particularly the most victimized part of the Russian society was the pensioners -- the retirees who were in a way totally oppressed by this situation.

It was very tough. It was some of those issues I just mentioned that produced both the public demonstration against the people who tried the coup while Gorbachev was in Yalta in August 1990. Then to the same extent, who thought that they would support change against Yeltsin by supporting the armed parliamentarians of the right in the Russian white house in October 3rd of 1993 when it came to shooting there. With those two events I think certainly my view in the former, Bob Straus did exactly the right thing by supporting Yeltsin. I got a call during the evening of the October 3rd events embattled in the embassy basement. Strobe asked, "What do

we do about Yeltsin?" I said, "You've got no choice, the folks who opened fire on the government and who are entrenched in the white house have not shown any interest in what we are interested in or in the kind of future for Russia that we want to support.

Q: You might explain what the white house was.

PICKERING: The white house was in effect a building on the Moscow River in downtown Moscow just across the street from our new embassy, built originally as the executive headquarters of the Russian Federation under Communist days. The executive office building was then changed with the fall of Communism to be the seat of the new Russian parliament, the Duma. After the October events, the Duma was moved out -- downtown to the former Gosplan building -- and it became the seat of the new Russian federal government, including the office of the Russian prime minister. It went through an evolution from executive to legislative to executive. It went through an evolution from totally pristine premises to one gutted by fire and then rapidly repaired by Turkish artisans brought in for the job to be the new seat of the Russian government.

The October events took place because over a period of time in the summer of '93, just after I had gotten there. The parliament competed what could best be considered an orgy of activity in changing the Russian constitution. They were able to change the constitution by majority vote and did so some 300 times. It was a parliament elected under communism but with competition among members of the Communist Party, so that they dominated this Russian parliament. They were especially with the fall of communism, a continued liability for Mr. Yeltsin. He and the parliament didn't get along. The Parliamentary leaders, in effect, revolted at a step taken in September by Yeltsin to dismiss them and to ask for new elections. There were real constitutional questions about whether he had the right to dismiss them or not. That was somewhat offset in the U.S. view by his willingness to hold very early elections after the dismissal -- elections for the new parliament. The fact was that the constitutional basis for the questions were really the hangover from the Soviet regime and its constitution rather than something that we would necessarily have considered to be a democratic, legitimate document. There are some who argue that he, Yeltsin, was illegal in his actions and preemptory in his decisions and wrong in the outcome. I totally disagreed with that, but I had even people in my own embassy ex post facto who argued the other view, surprising me a little bit because they didn't argue with me while they were in the middle of the events. Were Yeltsin to have failed to do what he did, there was a good chance there would have been another effort at the top to return Russia to communism. I cannot but believe that would have resulted in greater bloodshed and a long civil conflict.

Q: I would like to come back to that but let's sort of keep this a little bit chronological. Before you went out did you find yourself up against, it's the wrong term but did you find sort of competing views from you know we had this huge Soviet establishment, I'm talking about people who had studied the Soviet Union. This had been our major preoccupation, academic, from Congress and from the media and all. Things were changing there and I'm sure everybody had their point of view of how they wanted things to be and did you find yourself up against...I mean people coming to you and saying oh make sure you do this or that or we do this or that?

scrupulous standards of ethical conduct in place and many of the governors developed partnerships with Americans, some with dubious reputations. Europeans also worked to get special relationships set up. In the meantime, you had large American businesses moving in.

When I was there I think a few months before I left, Coca Cola flew in 22 bottling plants in very large Russian airplanes (AN-124), set them up in buildings that had been built for them in various places in Russia to start the Coca Cola-ization of Russia. Previously Pepsi, beginning under the communists, had enjoyed a monopoly American soft drink relationship in the country.

Mars, the famous American candy company, began by getting special arrangements and customs duties to import large quantities of its candy bars. But in keeping with the commitment it made. it did build a fully self-sustaining separate plant in a region outside of Moscow to produce its own products;. It fought the battle of getting raw materials and other things in. It was a very modern and very effective plant.

When McDonald's came in they decided that what they had to do to maintain quality was almost all of the processing of everything they had was kept in a central location rather than parceling it out to contractors and insisting they meet McDonald standards -- a Moscow central supply operation. I think later they were vindicated because when I was there they may have had seven or eight restaurants in Moscow, by the time I left in '96, they have some 70 all over Russia. Obviously the centralized arrangement allowed them to do centrally what they would otherwise have depended on contractors from many other countries to be able to do because that capability didn't exist in Russia.

Q: How did we view Yeltsin at the time?

PICKERING: Yeltsin was without doubt was becoming an increasingly controversial person. Because of the early relationship I talked about which Yeltsin developed beginning in Vancouver with Clinton it was a Yeltsin-Clinton relationship. Yeltsin would see other people but rarely. Occasionally Vice President Gore did, a couple of times Strobe came over and had an opportunity to meet with Yeltsin and once or twice Warren Christopher met with Yeltsin when he was secretary. But it was not something that Yeltsin did often. Yeltsin was like a lot of presidents of large continental countries, they spend the bulk of their time on domestic issues and rarely, if ever, meet foreign diplomats; one only has to take the White House as an example of that.

On the other hand, if you are in a small country and many of the countries I served in were reasonably small and you are the American ambassador you might see the head of state two or three times a week. So the Yeltsin position was very different and I saw him very rarely, often with other visitors. I saw Prime Minister Chernomyrdin much more often and he was available to me. I saw other ministers and deputy prime ministers but it was interesting and that was the way in which the country operated and that was the way Mr. Yeltsin operated.

Over a period of time, Yeltsin was constantly full of surprises for us. He would signal in advance often when he did so. In fact in 1993, when he set up the conditions for dismissing the parliament and having new elections that led to the confrontation over the occupation of the Russian White

House by the parliament, he had Foreign Minister Kozyrev meet with the US, UK, French and German Ambassadors to tell us what he planned. The inability on his part to stop their incessant modification and changing of the constitution on one hand and his interest in moving the process toward reform on the other, led to a stalemate and even worse. We met the foreign minister late in the afternoon on a day late in September before the crisis broke out. The foreign minister said very clear this was what the president is going to do. He is going to throw out the parliament and send it home, but we will have elections in December and this is not going to be easy. We expect it's going to be very, very tough, but the president is committed, he's going to persevere and the president would appreciate your and your country's support for moving ahead. This is why we are telling you in advance that this is the way in which we are intending to go. We all expressed support generally based on the commitment to hold early elections for a new parliament, even as we informed our capitals.

My view was that one could have been a slavish adherent of excessive legalism in Russia. But it was all based on the old communist structure and the old communist constitution with all its peculiar arrangements from the democratic perspective. Or one could have said, "OK, this is an opportunity for change, we've got to support Yeltsin." My view all along was Yeltsin wasn't Thomas Jefferson or George Washington. But he's trying to create revolutionary change inside a hugely difficult bureaucracy in a situation where our former largest enemy is now about to try and move in a direction that makes that confrontation much less dangerous. We could see a chance for a more benign future, less contentious, ideological, and why shouldn't we support him? He was doing things that in the Russian system were not going to be completely legal, but nevertheless this was one where if we had stuck to strict Soviet legality given the way in which the legal structure had been organized we would have ended with a disaster. If we had stayed with Yeltsin we might well find our way through the process.

I can remember in the morning after the shooting that took place Sunday night October 3rd a phone call with Strobe. Washington was at that point preoccupied by the disaster in Somalia, but which I hardly heard about. Strobe called me and said, "What's your recommendation? Do we support Yeltsin?" I said, "Strobe, it's a no brainer. We have no other alternative in this situation as difficult as it is." He said, "Well, that's not completely clear from here." I said, "Well, it is from here. Use my name, if you need to. But this is the direction in which we have to go. The fact is that the guy has said he will go to elections, it is an extremely important basis for supporting him even if we don't actually have the Russian constitution entirely on our side." And that's what we did.

As I noted previously, some officers in the Embassy disagreed at a much later point with this approach.

Q: Did we do anything during this confrontation?

PICKERING: We made statements, which were supportive of Yeltsin, yes. There were several interesting aspects of our role there. At one point, on Saturday evening, I think about mid-evening, the parliamentary opposition came to the embassy gate and one of the political officers who knew some of them went out and talked to them. Our building was just across the street from the white house -- the parliament. And at that point all the Russian para-military police

presence which had been there had left after the firing started in the late afternoon of October 3rd. They said that they wanted to establish contacts with the government and they weren't able to do so and could we help them.

Q: Who is they?

PICKERING: The folks in the Russian White House who were in effect the rebels and so we made contacts for them and put them in touch. We said that we would not take a role in this, but that if we could help establish contacts and if both sides were willing we would do so. We understand that there were talks back and forth, not very fruitful ones because the Russian government then was in a position of deciding whether it was going to treat with these people and deal with compromises or take back the White House. They decided that they were going to take back the White House. They had the troops and the capability of doing that.

Q: Did you get...did you feel under any threat or anything at that time or was this something that was happening and we were more observers?

PICKERING: No, we were in a very difficult position. We were right across the street from the Russian White House. When it started I was at home at Spaso House, and I was sitting in my study on the second floor on Sunday afternoon catching up on some work. I could look right down the street where Spaso House is at the end and see the Garden Ring Boulevard. Suddenly, I heard this roar from the Garden Ring and saw police with aluminum shields running across the opening of my street and people following them in the direction of the Embassy and the White House. So I called the embassy right away and I said, "You got a mob headed down your way. I suspect it's going to go toward the mayor's office and the parliament building. Do what you can to button up." They did and they moved our people to safety. We had 147 housing units above ground right across the street from this -many of them facing right on the street. They put all our people below ground level. Happily they had built the embassy in Moscow with a basement gymnasium, a swimming pool and a shopping center below ground level. So they went down there and took refuge in the gym. We got all of our people out; they did a superb job in about 15 or 20 minutes before the shooting started. Then the shooting started with a vengeance in that area. My RSO with a couple of Marines, of course, was standing out and watching and was on the phone to me and I said, "You guys better get the hell out of there."

We had a policeman shot at our gatehouse. They took him off, happily, we didn't have to care for him, but we took a couple of the other Russian police gate guards in to give them shelter because they were being subjected to armed attack by people with weapons in the white house. By 5:00 in the afternoon with all the shooting and the mayor's office across the street which was the parliamentary office building these guys who had been doing the shooting chased off what was a large unit interior ministry troops from the Felix Dzerzhinsky division -- para-military police who had been surrounding the white house for a number of days. The armed unit surrounding the white house was pulled out and so we were outside, no longer protected by the perimeter had been between us and the white house. Then the rebels all loaded themselves into the trucks of the Felix Dzerzhinsky division and drove north 4 or 5 kilometers and started to attack the main TV station at Ostankino in north Moscow. When that was happening, the shooting all shifted up toward the TV and I called the embassy and said, "Well, I'm not doing

any good over here, I will come over.” I walked over. I knew how to go through back streets and allies and around my district. There was a tunnel under the Garden Ring to get to the embassy. I said, “Why don’t you meet me at the end of the tunnel and we’ll go in and I’ll stay at the embassy. At least I’ll be in a position to be in touch with all of you.”

So that went well. Then some of my folks came to me and said, “Well we’d really like to evacuate all of our families, this is a very messy situation.” I said, “Well, I’m not sure you are going to get anywhere, how can we organize this to get to the airport?” We looked at it and I said, “Well, give me a plan for what you think you are going to do.” Well by that time things had become so bad out by the television station that I said, “No, we are going to stay here overnight and we’ll stay here together. We are as protected as we are going to be.” So we did that and rested there until the next day. But we spent a lot of time briefing people about what was happening and where things were going. Obviously there were numbers of staff caught outside the embassy. I said to those we could contact, “Go to Spaso House, we are going to need you because we will be the only embassy in town that won’t know what’s going on outside of this compound that we are holed up in here.” So some of our political officers settled at Spaso, monitored television, walked the streets where it was safe and reached out to contacts. There was some shooting, apparently snipers and others from tall buildings overlooking Spaso House in the neighborhood. I said, “Well don’t go out obviously and take any risks of getting sniped at while you are there, but do what you can to stay in touch and use the phones and obviously settle in there, if you need to.” So we had maybe four or five political officers and other people who could operate on the outside and kept us informed about what was going on. We were in touch with other friendly embassies as well while we were semi-cut off on the inside.

Moscow television and CNN which had locations across the street from the white house on the other side and in one of the Stalin buildings -- Barrikadnaya -- overlooking the district with good views of the white house and our embassy were great sources on real time information. I had turned on CNN as soon as I had seen the crowd chase the policeman down the Garden Ring. They were people sympathetic with the parliamentary group who had for a week or more been demonstrating in front of the Foreign Ministry also located in the area several blocks from Spaso House and the Embassy.

The next morning, Russian troops used APCs driving down a small road next to the Embassy attacked the white house and entered. At the same time, in front of CNN, a contingent of tanks (T-72s?) were being loaded from trucks with ammunition. Two moved forward into a bridge over the Moscow River which was perfectly sited to overlook the front of the white house and began firing. We could feel the ground shake under the Embassy. They aimed and put rounds into several front windows in the upper stories of the building which caused fires to start inside. Because the rounds did not seem to explode on impact, the damage was only immediately around the windows. The fire spread and caused the blackening of parts of the structure. We assumed they were using some form of inert or training ammunition in order to hold down damage to the building and those inside.

Later in the morning, we had a Marine shot in the neck and we had the help of the Embassy’s Russian physician to evacuate him in an armored ambulance out of the back of the embassy. We had a policeman shot on our doorstep who I think was OK but we never were told the result. We

had Americans, one killed and one very badly injured, who were covering the fighting around the TV station.

Our Marine was hit looking through an open window on the then unfinished new Embassy tower. I had called the Marines down from that position about a quarter of an hour before. A second Marine was with him and helped treat the wound which was close to the jugular. He was taken to the Kremlin clinic where they did an excellent job in closing the wound. The wounded American from the TV station fighting was a photographer working for the New York Times. He was saved by Russians who went out on to an open plaza at the TV station and brought him to safety. He too was taken to the Kremlin clinic with heavy chest wounds and very well treated. I went by to see both men two days later and have stayed in touch with the photographer over the years since.

Q: Yeah, but there was a lot of smoke though.

PICKERING: The tank firing started fires and the whole building burned. By the next morning it was clear that big areas of this building were still on fire and we watched on TV but, of course. The troops attacking the white house came right by our gate. The Russians in armored personnel carriers came down a small alley by our street rolled out onto the park behind the White House and right up to the steps of the building and then discharged their troops to go into the building. They eventually chased the people out of the building who interestingly enough a lot of them went down and out underground. There were underground passages in Moscow and other escape ways so they got out of the building, but many were arrested and taken out. So by the afternoon of Monday, the thing was pretty well over. I was able by Monday noon to get in my armored Cadillac and go over to the residence and make sure everything was alright over there. We took some more people out to help with the reporting from outside our compound.

But while this was going on there were crowds of people standing on this bridge with tanks firing into the building, it was completely lunatic and some were hit.

Q: Were we concerned with over repression as this was winding down?

PICKERING: No, interestingly enough they had trials. People were put in jail but not wildly so. Some people who probably should have been put in were let go, so they didn't conduct an extensive purge. As I said earlier, the communists were worried that because they were involved there would be retribution against them. They split the party into the Agrarian Party and the Communist Party to see if they could get some protection by doing that, but Yeltsin was pretty open. The Russians were shocked at the fighting. They hadn't seen anything like that since the Second World War and that was an aggression -- or since the civil war in the early twenties -- which was such a horrible period of time in Russia. Almost every Russian wanted to forget it and never repeat it again. So there was, I think, a shock effect that set in.

The December elections didn't produce a victory for Yeltsin interestingly enough. I think in part because of some of the shock effect of this event. The Russians like, I think, two things in a leader -- strong authority and order. This was an event that showed Yeltsin weak and vacillating in terms of what he was actually going to do about it. The stories were that they had a tough

decision in the Kremlin figuring out how they were going to use the military retake the place. They had a lot of discussion about that but that whoever prevailed; maybe it was Defense Minister Grachev who was close to Yeltsin who made a difference.

Q: This is Tape 18, Side 1, with Tom Pickering. Well in the aftermath how did we view this?

PICKERING: We in effect took a view that Yeltsin had done under serious provocation the right thing. We put a lot of stake in the fact that he was committed and later carried out elections for a new Duma and went through a process of constitutional reform to give Russia a constitution that was liberal and reformed as opposed to communism and statist approaches. Those things I think helped. I think to some extent Mr. Zhirinovsky who was coming up with a kind of ultra-nationalist party benefited in part by this because it was not clear over all that public opinion was totally for Mr. Yeltsin. But the majority was and he managed to hold on. We, and others, did what we could to assist him from outside which was limited in recognizing that he had a particularly tough and difficult solely domestic issue to deal with.

Q: OK, we will end here and we will pick this up the next time. I would like to ask a question I can't help asking, what was the role of the French during all this time you were there because they often take, from the American perspective, it's a contrary view and I suppose they have an opposite view of that, but also any others. The Germans, were other European countries looking to play roles there? I mean was this an opportunity? Then also the relations with the other inside countries, the former Soviet Bloc countries, and nuclear disarmament and all of that?

PICKERING: Well there are a whole lot of those issues.

Q: Great.

Q: Today is the 16th of April 2007.

PICKERING: We were talking the last time about Russia and you had asked first the question about the French, which I think, is interesting. Certainly the French role was much more congenial in 1990 with respect to Iraq than it was in 2003, 2002. To some extent I think it related to the differences in circumstances. The circumstances in 1990 were an unprovoked Iraqi aggression against Kuwait with the shaping fairly quickly of a limited objective, which was the expulsion of Iraq from Kuwait. In 2003 it was obviously an American-led invasion of Iraq with the idea of toppling the government of Saddam Hussein -- seemingly to put in place a replacement democratic government of sorts. But there were uncertainties about that. ...

Q: Are we talking about I think we, aren't we in Moscow at this point?

PICKERING: Oh are we? I thought we...

Q: I think we are back...

PICKERING: We are in Moscow...so let me go back and leave that all aside and just say we are in Moscow and the French in Moscow were quite different. The French ambassador in Moscow

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