The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training
Foreign Affairs Oral History Program
Oral Histories of U.S. Diplomacy in Afghanistan, 2001–2021

JIM BEVER

Interviewed by: Bill Hammink
Initial Interview Date: October 3, 2022

INTERVIEW

Q: Hello, everybody. My name is Bill Hammink. I am here to interview Jim Bever, former assistant administrator and USAID [United States Agency for International Development] mission director in Afghanistan. He established the Office of Afghanistan Pakistan Affairs, had incredible experience in Afghanistan over the years since the beginning back in 2002. Today is October 3. And this is for the oral histories of U.S. diplomacy in Afghanistan, special project at ADST. Thank you very much, Jim, for joining us today. I'm sure it'll be a few hours of discussion and is going to be interesting. To start with, let me ask when you joined the Foreign Service, your experience in general quickly and then, especially if you could focus on the time periods when you worked on Afghanistan.

BEVER: It's an honor and a pleasure to be speaking with you today about this important topic that's touched all our lives, whether with the U.S. Foreign Service or not. So I joined the Foreign Service as a USAID officer in November 1982. And I've served one way or another in pretty much all USAID regions of the world except Latin America and the Caribbean. A lot of my experience has been in the Islamic world, plus six years leading programs from HQ for the New Independent States of the former Soviet Union.

Before I joined USAID I served in the Kingdom of Morocco as the chief of party for an energy engineering and economic analysis company doing energy-related national policy work there.

I came into USAID as a mid-career lateral entry hire into the Foreign Service. I served my first post in the Islamic Republic of Pakistan from 1984 to 1988 USAID was there, because of the war with the Soviets going on next door in Afghanistan. Two separate USAID missions were there. One was the cross-border program, known as the Office of the AID Representative to Afghanistan,located directly within the Chancery by a separate USAID team. That team coordinated with the mission director for Pakistan, who was always a very senior legend in USAID. And I had the privilege to work for and learn from three of those legends in USAID as my bosses in Pakistan during those four years.

The Pakistan USAID mission was to provide economic and policy assistance to the Pakistan government in order to make sure it stayed as strong as it possibly could, in order to also support our mutual strategic objective to end the Soviet occupation of

Afghanistan. My job was the division chief for National Energy Policy and Planning, in the Office of Energy and Environment. The macroeconomic and macro financial aspects of energy work provided direct insight and influence into what makes a country like Pakistan tick economically.

Obviously, I didn't get into Afghanistan in those years, as we were forbidden from such as direct Officers. But we certainly felt the Soviet influence. Every now and then the Soviet Khad agents, their intelligence and secret police, would come across the border into Pakistan. They would maraud. And they would kill Afghan refugees known to be Mujahideen. Sometimes, the Muj would reciprocate and assassinate some members of the Russian diplomatic community in Pakistan in broad daylight just down the street from our home. Then the Khad would would blow up a Mujahideen meeting–and minutes later blow up the many people who showed up to give first aid to the victims. It happened in Peshawar where most of the millions of Afghan refugees lived and where we had USAID projects that I visited. And it happened in Islamabad, literally in the shopping center two blocks from our home, where my wife and I regularly shopped with our young children.

My next relevant exposure was in India when I was the USAID deputy mission director there from 1998 to 2002. On September 11, 2001, I was helping my mission director host an evening cocktail reception at his home for people from all over the diplomatic community and the Government of India. And that's when we all saw with shock and horror the September 11 tragedy happen in front of our eyes there on the television screen. We sprang into action to do what we could to be helpful to the Indian Government at that point.

Overnight, there was an immediate transformation in the Indian Government's relationship with the U.S. government. All of a sudden, Junior Secretaries—a high rank for the Indian Government bureaucracy administering what was then a nation of 1 billion people —were calling me at home, something almost unheard of due to prior Government of India tight restrictions on engaging with us except in formal settings. My senior counterparts in the Indian government were coming to talk with me and calling on us, because of their concern about this sudden flux in the world. Soon afterward, they also had a deadly Kashmiri terrorist attack on their Parliament. Taken together, these events cemented our relationship in the era of the twenty-first century. From a security perspective, and coordination and collaboration perspective, it was almost an overnight transition. It was stunning to watch it unfold.

And it was at that point in the Fall of 2001. that the connection between the Taliban and al Qaeda and Osama bin Laden was starting to become more known to the American people. I volunteered for a TDY [temporary duty assignment] to go back to Washington that Fall to help out for a few weeks on what was called the Central Asia Task Force. This Central Asia Task Force was set up byAdministrator Andrew Natsios, and it was co-chaired by a retired U.S. Army colonel formerly withCivilAffairs operations of the Army together with a senior career Foreign Service Officer in USAID.

That was my first in-depth exposure toAfghanistan. We had meetings every single morning, with the administrator who overall led the team basically, de facto. He was going into regular Deputies Committee meetings of the National Security Council. I was

awestruck, frankly, with Andrew Natsios—not only his deeply hands-on operational experience and skills, but also his ability to see over the horizon as an international development professional and humanitarian assistance professional who'd written books on famine, and how to avoid them and mitigate them. Here we all were—who we thought of ourselves as the career professionals–but here he was as a political appointee, outsmarting us almost every day with hisprobing and prescient questioning. Such as, what were we doing right now in the Fall to plan and execute to get wheat seed into the high valleys to help avert a famine during the coming "hungry" time in Afghanistan after the civil war there and heavy snowfalls blocked the transit routes through the high mountain passes, keeping food and medicine out.

And then I went back to India after a few weeks, where I became "the Afghanistan guy" in the USAID mission for the rest of my tour, which ended in late May, 2002. Meanwhile, with the advent of what was known as the Kargil Incident, there were growing serious concerns about whether India and Pakistan were going to go to war with each other for the 4th time–and possibly this time with their nuclear weapons. Without going into details, there was an effort to get humanitarian assistance to the Afghan people during the winter of 2001-2. There was the potential for starvation in the country, with major access roads blocked,dissolution of the albeit weak Taliban government, and deterioration over many years of civil strife in the country that had worn down the infrastructure, the highways, tunnels and the high mountain passes where they get colossal avalanches.

We, the U.S., were trying to coordinate with the Indian Government and other friendly countries to see what they could do to help Afghanistan receive urgently needed humanitarian relief. And one of the best ways would have been Indian food grain shipped through northern Pakistan by rail, to offload in Peshawar and then taken by trucks into Afghanistan. Well, without going into details, the Pakistanis came up with every reason imaginable, to not be helpful to the Indian Government, which was prepared to provide a tremendous amount of wheat to the Afghans. I won't go into the details on that, except that was my first real exposure to the way that Indians and Pakistanis distrust of one another—and how that affected Afghanistan. It also showed me how clever and resourceful the Indians were. Although the Indians could have easily sent the grain on truck, or by back to back offload-onload between trucks at their India-Pakistan border, Pakistan just wouldn't let them. So the Indians put the grain on ships and sent it to Iran. And it was cross transported up viaZaranj in the southwestern part of Afghanistan. It ended up as a Pakistan-India diplomatic opportunity missed that would have greatly benefitted Afghanistan in a good way at lower costs and more speedy relief efforts for food. But in the end, it created instead an India-Iran diplomatic opportunity that further strengthened their own respective collaboration.

So next, I rotated to HQ where I became the South Asia Office director that summer of 2002, having left India with our family just as our U.S. ambassador issued a directed departure order for most official U.S. personnel and their families, in case of possible India-Pakistan war again, including nuclear weapons exchanges on capital cities.

Q: Can I interrupt you for a second? Before we go on to your Washington assignment here. Just going back to that situation in India. Did you work closely with anyone? I'm thinking of the interagency for this particular project here at ADST. Did you work closely

with State and was it a team effort trying to get the Pakistanis to change to allow Indian food to go through? Or how is that done from an interagency point of view?

BEVER: We coordinated with the State Department colleagues in the political section and other U.S. government agencies at our U.S. embassy in New Delhi and with their counterparts in Pakistan. We didn't have a USAID mission in Pakistan at that point, because we had left by 1994/95 and didn't even have, as I recall, Foreign Service Nationals employed by us anymore in Pakistan. So we did coordinate through the U.S. government interagency. And the USG simply couldn't get the Pakistanis to budge. Pakistan Government has a lot of different ways to say "no" and used every single one of them, because the Indians kept coming up with different creative solutions and ways to answer their latest "no". My experience in Pakistan earlier had taught me that in Pakistan, negative decision-making was the most decentralized authority for public servants in the country: anyone and everyone can say "no"–only very few can say "yes".

Q: Okay, thanks. We'll get back to the whole interagency thing. You went back to Washington when?

BEVER: In August of 2002, I started as the director for South Asia, a geographic office that covered Afghanistan and Pakistan, even though the latter didn't have a program yet. But there were already efforts underway to rebuild the Pakistan foreign assistance program because of 9/11. And the Office covered the rest of South Asia: India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, and eventually Bhutan and the Maldives. I guess that was, at the time, about one and a half billion people, between those countries. So we also had a regional program for energy policy reform and energy trade assistance within and between all those countries, which I had the privilege to help initiate. President Clinton had come out to India in 2000 and endorsed it. So there were a lot of great, interesting things to do then, but I quickly found that Afghanistan was taking up about 80 percent of my time, and Pakistan about 10 percent. And the remaining other 10 percent of my time was focused on the other 1.25 billion or so people. And that's just the reality of the National Security Council and Deputies Committee demands and requirements during this time of U.S. political diplomatic history, and the role of a Washington senior USAID officer to support the administrator.

Then, about a year later, almost tragically, our renowned mission director in Afghanistan, Craig Buck, developed double viral pneumonia and almost died in Kabul;he had to be medevaced urgently in August 2003 to the U.S. Military Hospital in the Frankfurt, Germany area. So I was asked in late August to go to Afghanistan as the new mission director by Ambassador Wendy Chamberlain, who was our assistant administrator, [She later became the deputy the UN high commissioner for refugees; before USAID, she had been the U.S. ambassador to Pakistan on 9/11. It was my first mission directorship. But having been the deputy mission director for four years in India serving under two stellar USAID directors there was very good career experience for me to then serve as a mission director pretty much anywhere.

I had been to Afghanistan for a few weeks in February that same year of 2003 on a TDY to accompany our Deputy Administrator Fred Schieck, a long-time USAID professional and also senior official at the Inter-American Development Bank. We traveled to Pakistan

and Afghanistan together and met with many senior people, including President Karzai. And so I'd had some on the ground exposure to help orient me as early as February 2003, to Afghanistan. And we traveled some of the country all the way to the Western Iranian border area, and to the north and to the south, including the infamous Salang Tunnel that connected Kabul to the northern part of the country and also the almost destroyed Kabul-Kandahar highway leading to the southern part of the country–home of the Talaban. So I'd had a form of a tour d'horizon already. So I became the acting mission director in late August 2003 and then was sworn in as mission director at HQ and back out there in November of 2003, within days of the arrival of Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad for his first ambassadorship as a Senate-confirmed ambassador. Amb. Khalilzad was very close to President George W. Bush, and his most inner circle. I served as mission director there until July 1 of the following summer, honoring my commitment to serve out Craig Buck's second full year there, which was cut short by his severe illness.

And the third time in my life that I then interacted with this region was at the end of 2008. I had been the senior deputy assistant administrator for the new Middle East Bureau, which I had been tasked to create by carving it out of the Asian/Near East Bureau, for which we had to get the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and the Appropriators in the House and Senate to agree. A few months before the administration changed, it was late 2008——I was asked to be the acting assistant administrator for Asia/Near East Bureau byAdministrator Henrietta Holsman-Fore and her Deputy Administrator Jim Kunder. Respectfully, I suggested it might be better to partition—which would be an appropriate word for that part of the world—the Bureau, and have a special Task Force to focus only on Afghanistan and Pakistan, because of the interconnection politically, culturally, socially, historically, and other ways between the two countries. I had always observed and felt going in and out of the Deputies Committee earlier as a "Plus One" that our government should be dealing with these two countries together. And it took a while for the National Security Council to get the same idea. So those are the three periods of my involvement with Afghanistan.

So I was given the option to become the director of that Task Force, which I accepted. I asked that the position have "assistant to the administrator" equivalent responsibility and authority. I requested that the Task Force director needed to be a Direct Report to the administrator or deputy administrator, with direct line access to them anytime, twenty-four-seven. If the director ever had to literally step out of a Deputies Committee Meeting and make a phone call to them, then the director could do it and get an answer. I took on full-time directorship of the Task Force as Alonzo Fulgham [who'd earlier taken my place as South Asia Office director and then mission director to Afghanistan] was sworn in as the acting administrator when Henrietta Holsman Fore left on or about January 20th, 2009. So our Task Force eventually grew to one hundred officers, both FS and GS, with a Senior DAA, two DAAs, and a number of offices to execute our responsibilities vis a vis our missions in Afghanistan and Pakistan and vis a vis agency top leadership and the USG Interagency, especially the NSC and State Department. I served in this capacity until mid-August of 2010, when my wife and I moved to Egypt I became the mission director there, about a half year before the Arab Spring revolution later broke out there.

Q: It's substantial, from the beginning in 2002, to be in the big expansion in 2003–2004, and then, of course, the big huge surge, 2008 to 2010. One thing this project is interested in is to hear from you in terms of what were some of the policy issues that you had to deal with. So let's take each period when you were South Asia director. I know you spent a lot of time on Afghanistan, over the policy issues you dealt with and how did that work itself within the interagency? I mean, did you have to go to deputies committee meetings all the time and how were decisions made, then? Were they at AID or were they at the NSC or State? I'll ask you the same question for the other periods of your Afghanistan.

BEVER: Well, you're right to focus on the policy areas and policy decisions. Along with when I was the DAA for Iraq, this was among my most intense and most senior-level engagement in the U.S. government interagency decision-making process. And as normal, State Department had the lead in the IPC, the Interagency Policy Coordination Committee. So I was normally the point guy for that when I was the office director for South Asia. I developed a good relationship with the Assistant Secretary for South and Central Asia at the State Department and with her Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary [PDAS] and her DAS. And I tried to establish a weekly or biweekly meeting with them. And we in USAID couldn't conveniently have classified discussions yet by phone across town, nor did we have a classified video conference capability that was accessible to us as office directors very easily. So if we had classified topics to discuss , we had to physically go over to State. That's improved since then, thank heavens.

The policy issues, it was at a very early formative period, of course, by the time I got there, involved as office director, it was August of 2002. So that's like ten months or so after our Special Forces went in in the Fall of 2001, and started doing what they do best, which was dispersing the Taliban, and establishing ways to track down al Qaeda and neutralize them. So policy-wise for us, as USAID, we were expected to deliver humanitarian assistance and other developmental assistance that would help to not only relieve the ravages of war, but start to get the society to begin to understand that there may be some return to normalcy that they hadn't seen in decades. And so one of the very first things that had already started was to build on the NGOs [nongovernmental organizations] and the U.S. private voluntary organizations and others that seem to be responsible and responsive and accountable for people's money, and to get humanitarian relief flowing better. It had already started during the winter/Spring of 2002 with USAID mobilizing millions of local language school books published and printed, good for both Farsi speakers and Pashto speakers, and into the schools through our partners. USAID was providing initial resources into key towns and their governments locally and in Kabul, so that they could begin to demonstrate to their public that they could begin to govern again. Emergency support for health clinics was provided. Getting water supply going in Kabul again was a big step. We got Kabul adequate supplies of diesel, for example, so that they could have a power system and operate their water pumps again for a city that had rapidly grown in population—despite the fighting and conflict with large areas of west Kabul destroyed.

We were given a lot of running room by the U.S. government in our agency, under that general policy of material assistance and restarting support to a fledgling government under Karzai who had more or less been chosen by the Jirga leadership council, the

traditional was for the Afghans to choose their leaders. The big policy issues more or less had been settled at the Bonn meetings. I had a concern about one of them, which was the decision that seemed to have been made in the Bonn Agreement that the government structure of Afghanistan would be highly centralized as opposed to a more Federalist decentralized structure. This meant that leaders at the province level, of which there were about twenty-two at that time, would be hand chosen by the president–not elected by the provincial citizens.

My experience in the former Soviet Union—especially in the Russian Federation and Eastern Europe, central-eastern Europe, that had been under Soviet satellite status—led me to see the value and the importance of trusting people to elect their own leaders. Come what may, those leaders still had to be accountable to the people. I had seen this in the North West Frontier of Pakistan, when Islamic fundamentalist groups won the election to lead the North West Frontier Province, and then did not deliver, and the people threw them out in the next election. That's the way it's supposed to work, right? So that was a policy concern that I had, but it was frankly too late. That was water over the dam, at that point, which maybe could be corrected later.

The new Constitutional successful process, which we in USAID did support in numerous ways by helping toBudget was another big policy issue. Budget reflects policy and policy determines budget. And being based in Washington as the office director, we only had about a hundred million dollars that we could use to get to this country of maybe twenty-one or twenty-two million people that have been through conflict, from 1977–1979 until 2002, right. An entire generation of bloody, lethal, destructive conflict, in which most of the institutions of governance were destroyed. We needed some serious money for Afghanistan in 2002. And we could only get it by literally cobbling together for Kabul enough "fall out" money from the budget battles to get minimally barely adequate financing for the most urgent initial U.S. reconstruction, whether it was of their institutions of governance, or of their physical infrastructure, on top of the humanitarian assistance. That was a major policy issue for us.

I realized the other policy issue was really related to Pakistan, a country for whom we were reopening U.S. foreign assistance once again due to changes on its Afghanistan border and for which we needed Pakistan support. And so as this is a focus on Afghanistan, I won't go into a lot of it, but one of the issues was how to support our new mission director in Pakistan, a Senior Foreign Service officer who had been the head of procurement for the entire agency and a senior officer in Egypt and in Russia, a lawyer by background, Mark Ward. How to help Mark get his mission in Pakistan up and running and get the staff that he needed? This sounds operational, but it is also like, where is USAID on the pecking order? Where are we on the budget priority? Did we get the policy support inside the State Department in the embassy in Pakistan, to be able to hire who we needed to hire as quickly as we needed in the right kind of programmatic strategic interventions that we needed in order to have more than only a humanitarian effect on the country? [As in Russia about ten years earlier, USAID's new mission staff office was assigned space in the embassy motor pool garage/repair shop/warehouse.]

Q: Did you get that kind of support in Kabul that you didn't get in Islamabad? But I mean, from the embassy to expand staff and programs?

BEVER: Our first mission director, Acting actually, was James Kunder who was our assistant administrator for Asia Near East and then he went out at Administrator Andrew Natsios' request. I think he arrived there in January 2003. And literally, he worked and lived in the Marine barracks, which were underground, along with chargé d'affaires Ryan Crocker, who years later became Ambassador Ryan Crocker, to both Iraq and then Afghanistan. And during those first few months, it was primarily humanitarian assistance, kind of requirements.

Then Craig Buck came that late spring, who did a magnificent job of building on the humanitarian work and that of our response capability in the Office of Transition Initiatives, OTI, one of our best quick response mechanisms of effectiveness. And they also were magnificent, the OTI team. And Craig built on that, to then begin what he did so well in other missions around the world that he was asked to initiate, like Central Asia and like Bosnia. He then built up an economic growth portfolio. And I don't recall a lot of resistance within the U.S. government interagency to that concept. At that time under the George W. Bush administration, that seemed like a reasonable thing. That wasn't making big problems for us back at headquarters in late 2002. Anyway, we did have some interagency bureaucratic battles. They were always the ones over like, "Who's in charge here?". Without going into details, because we did have sometimes these IPCs [Interagency Policy Committees] happened at the State Department and higher eventually in the National Security Council, including with other officials of the Deputies Committee. And obviously, those were classified discussions. The policy issues for us began to become more complicated in the spring of 2003, when the U.S. then also invaded Iraq.

Q: Can you explain what you mean?

BEVER: Well, I mean, the long-standing U.S. defense strategy has been, as I understand it, from public sources, to be able to wage wars on two fronts simultaneously. And when we went into Iraq in March of 2003, if I recall correctly, initially, obviously this was pretty much a combat situation, and USAID was involved in some of the early planning and preparation for that.

However, as history books show, I'm not revealing anything here. Unfortunately, the executive branch of the United States felt that those who, as I understand, were Arabists and other lifelong professional career-renowned international development experts, were not particularly welcomed in the halls of decision-making. I won't go into much more detail about that, except it then led obviously to as history shows a much more complicated situation in Iraq. And we couldn't just have gone in there, dismissed the army, and everything that came from that, without us then having to engage far more deeply in Iraq than we maybe thought we were going to have to.

So we were then in a situation by the late summer of 2003, which is when I landed in Afghanistan, but we were beginning to get indications that we were going to be in Iraq for quite a while, it wasn't going to be "over in six months, and we're gonna leave." It wasn't going to be like a Gulf War–Kuwait thing where we were in and out in six months, and all the loose ends were more or less tied up in a year. Then we didn't quite know exactly what was coming at us yet. But we knew this was going to have a big

sucking sound effect on our ability to prosecute, execute an assistance program in Afghanistan. It was a heavy lift–even for us as a superpower.

Q: That was mainly on the budget side or personnel budget?

BEVER: Resources, meaning people. And USAID was "the little agency that could," to quote Ambassador Wendy Chamberlain. But we also had responsibility for U.S. assistance programs in seventy countries around the world. At that point, maybe 1,200 Foreign Service officers worldwide or less. We had come down, way down, with the decline of the Cold War. And we were a resource-stressed agency. And we were in extremis, I would say, in 2003–2004. We wanted to run faster. And if you've ever been in extremis, as an athlete, your brain is telling you you can run faster, while your body is saying that you can't process the chemicals in the body to run faster. And you feel like you're frozen in motion, and you cannot run faster. And we were beginning to see the first little hints of that. I mean, this is a macro policy issue because policies are only as good as our ability to execute them.

I'll just say the other issue that came up for us, for USAID, that kind of consumed me as the HQ director vis-a-vis Afghanistan. The president, in early 2003, had a White House Rose Garden event kicking off a major Afghan highway reconstruction project. Ambassador Bill Taylor had been working for Deputy Secretary Richard Armitage as coordinator for Afghanistan and had helped to get the Japanese and the Saudis to go together with us to publicly commit to rebuild the Kabul-Kandahar-Herat highway. This was not just any highway. This was the major transit and transportation economic corridor of Afghanistan, from Kabul to Kandahar in the south to Herat in the west. There was a formal public signing ceremony, press conference, the whole bit, with President George W. Bush. I think it was January, February or something like that, 2003. And he committed the United States to rebuild that highway, especially from Kabul to Kandahar, within three years. Three years. And the U.S. was financing 90 percent of it, 85 percent of it, and the Saudis and Japanese were each in for fifty million dollars. So it was a joint thing. So, policy wise, frankly, we were beside ourselves with anxiety as an agency, because we know what it takes to rebuild a major highway. But the first major part of the route goes through three hundred miles of Taliban and al Qaeda-infested territory, with a buried landmine that could take out an armored vehicle, let alone personnel, about every thousand yards, about every kilometer of five hundred kilometers, which is three hundred miles. And so we knew this was a big expensive project.

We had finally gotten ourselves a billion dollars for our assistance program for fiscal year 2003. And a major policy achievement for us because it meant we could have running room. Thanks to Congress and the executive branch's support OMB [Office of Management Bureau]. So we had won that battle, the policy battle, that resources, how much was going to go to USAID versus other parts of the U.S. government. And of course, the Defense Department's budget at that point was, I don't remember, my guess is it was at least twelve billion dollars just for Afghanistan. I'm rusty on that now. But we knew what it would cost to build a highway. And all of a sudden, we were looking at half a billion to seven hundred million dollars out of our one billion that we had in 2003 suddenly being absorbed by this one highest prestige project, a visionary project. I tip my hat to Ambassador Khalilzad and to the RAND Corporation, it was the RAND

Corporation's initial observation. I agreed with its priority–but not if it came at the expense of financially crowding out all of the other "balance of systems" needing attention to get the Afghan government up and running again.

Along with that also came the idea that we should also try to also bolster the rebuilding of many damaged or deteriorated health clinics or build new health clinics. at least one for every province and a decent school in every district. I think clinics, eventually a clinic and in a school in every district of the country, there were two-hundred and twenty districts or something at that point. So initially our big policy concern that we all had was that this one project of the highway, , was going to absorb everything we had to do all the other important parts of our portfolio: economic growth, trade, fiscal and financial resource mobilization, customs development at the border so they can finance their own government with customs fees, development of the health system, development of the education system, development of the water irrigation system for agriculture, the secondary road system, farm to market roads, the independent media, the governance issues, the justice sector, all of it suddenly looked like it was going to vanish and had become a mirage. And that's what consumed my office at that time was how to fix this problem.

Q: So did you get more funding then?

BEVER: Okay, so on the first of April 2003, a few months after this Rose Garden announcement-and meanwhile, our mission director, Craig Buck, bless him, was developing some instruments for contracting that we had perfected at headquarters: big, huge multiple-pronged contracts that were highly versatile and flexible. A lot of money, a lot of eggs in one basket, you had to watch that one basket very carefully. But if you took care of it, it could be a highly effective implementation instrument under the U.S. government Federal Acquisition regulations, which most people forget about how important it is to protect the people's money. So we were called into a meeting at the Office of Management Budget. And the associate director of OMB responsible for our part of the world and our portfolio told me that at that meeting—this was the first of April, I still remember the date 2003.

And I had just come back from Afghanistan. Remember, I said I went there with my deputy administrator. I was his "plus one" there for our trip there in February. So I had been back maybe eight weeks. We had no contract up and running for the highway yet. And we didn't know when we were going to get that and so on. But we had three years to work with that, that's what the president said just a couple of months before. And the associate director of OMB said, "We're looking forward to a ribbon-cutting ceremony celebrating the completion of the highway in December." And so I'm thinking right, December 2006 because the president said three years, from Kabul to Kandahar, and Herat. And she looked at me like, No, Jim, this December 2003. This is the first of April. So we had nine months to build a rebuild of war blown out, deteriorated highway through Taliban, al Qaeda-infested territory. We didn't have the money, and we didn't have the contracts. And they didn't have asphalt in the country. They had lots of rock but nothing to crush it with. I mean, the problems just went on and on and on in my head at that moment. And what came to me was that wonderful scene in *Jaws* where the sheriff turns

to the captain of the boat after seeing the great white shark and says, “Captain, we need a bigger boat.”

And that’s what I told the associate director of OMB. I said, “We need a bigger boat. We need a bigger budget. Half a billion to three-quarters of a billion dollars now. On top of the billion that we have for everything else.” And that was on a Friday afternoon or something and the associate director said, “I’ll get back to you tomorrow.” And or maybe it’s Monday morning, Monday morning, we get a call from the associate director, who said, “We’ve talked to the appropriators, you’re gonna get your money.” And I’ve never seen so much money come to USAID so fast in my life. Yes, we got the money. And we went into the highest possible gear for USAID. And Craig Buck was brilliant about this. Our contracts operation at headquarters, which was handling the important U.S. government functions for this, went into high gear. And we eventually got ourselves a highly regarded physical infrastructure contract consortium with special proven worldwide expertise in road construction and got ourselves underway that summer. And I was on a weekly or bi-weekly basis, literally going into the Deputies Committee as the “plus one,” showing our progress on that highway.

Q: Yeah, the road became a major White House priority.

BEVER: Yeah, I mean, literally the deputy national security adviser, who later became the national security adviser, the president would turn to the deputy secretary of state and say, “How’s the road going?” And the deputy secretary would turn to Administrator Andrew Natsios, and say, “How’s the road going?” And he would turn to his “plus one” and say, “How’s the road going?” I’m giving you this just to let you understand that USAID, in the constellation of the U.S. government interagency, all eyes were fixed on this.

Because people knew not only was the president associated with it, but our multilateral support from the Saudis. After all, Osama bin Laden was a Saudi, right? The Saudis had some public relations improvement right in front of them. And the Japanese were riding on our leadership to make this thing happen in the country of Afghanistan. Because what are you going to do next, after humanitarian assistance, if you want the country to get back on its feet? You got to get the economy going–and to get the economy growing, they needed this vital artery of transit to get going again, because that’s how goods and services were going to move between Kabul in the North and Kandahar in the South, which was the center at the time of the Taliban, still is. And all the other social, health, and other benefits that would come with reestablishing that transportation corridor, which involved about three days of hard travel to go three hundred miles. And usually, you would lose part of your chassis, your muffler, your tires, and spare tires, and get blown out. All the bridges had been blown during the fighting of the 1980s and 1990s. There were bandits along the highway who would take advantage of you having to go off the road. And there were IEDs [improvised explosive devices] off the road or under the road. Important project for the whole country.

Q: Right? A quick aside, I visited Afghanistan first in 1975 and I came in from Iran to Herat and I actually rode on that road in a minibus back then that’s how people got around. From Herat to Kandahar stayed there some time and then went up to Kabul, even

across the Band-e Amir and Sangin. And but that road absolutely was the lifeblood, it was packed. And you could get within some hours from Herat to Kandahar. It wasn't three days and like you said, whoever made that policy decision was right on that was their lifeblood.

BEVER: Yeah, and, of course, the United States in the early 1960s, built the asphalt highway from Kabul to Kandahar. Yeah, Soviets built the cement concrete steel reinforced highway from Kandahar to Herat. They built theirs, I think to this day, because they wanted to be able to handle tanks, heavy equipment between Iran and Pakistan. And that was a USAID project from Kabul to Kandahar, which eventually was at the last minute through what I read from an early 1960s report we discovered was ultimately taken over and finished by the Army Corps of Engineers after back then internal arm-wrestling within our government over resources.

Q: So you went out in August 2003, as USAID mission director, when Craig got sick? Was the road still the priority of the mission? Or your first six months at post, what were the priorities? And again, when you got there, what were some policy issues? How do you work through the interagency? And you had seen the Washington side, firsthand. And now you were there at post? How was the post different then?

BEVER: So, of course, I'd seen the mission in February, during the wintertime, and I traveled around the country by air thanks to one of our implementers who was able to fly us around the country, which was historically interesting to me. But the mission had been up and running by then. Craig Buck, the director, had done a magnificent job recruiting extraordinarily talented AID officers. The best project manager, in his view in our agency, was Bob Wilson who was his deputy and I came to agree with Craig. There may be others as good, but there was none better than Bob Wilson. We had Elizabeth Kvitashvili there, also handling a whole slew of functions. If I recall thinking back, she was the general development officer. And also a magnificent officer, courageous officer, who had first gone with Andrew, I think, if I remember in 2002, on his first flight into the country, and I had asked, suggested, Elizabeth to do that flight to Andrew. Because she so much impressed me on our task force with her ability to quickly identify problems on the ground and figure out how we address them. Probably nobody better than her on that, operationally.

What I began to see right away was, and it was basically a fairly permissive environment at that point for us, one of our implementing teams was able to just hire a local vehicle and a driver and drive literally around the entire country during 2002 and 2003. Meanwhile, I was exposed in 2003 to the idea of this thing called PRT's. Provincial reconstruction teams. And the concept of this to my mind actually was somewhat similar to the CORDS program of the Vietnam War where USAID officers were mixed in with State Department officers and other U.S. government agency officers, including with our military. We were beginning to see the opportunities for collaboration in the field more with our Defense Department colleagues in the U.S. government, and interagency. But there were also the beginnings by then of some interagency friction. Like who was going to be in control of these PRTs? At the time, I think there were four of those PRTs.

In the north, Mazar-i Sharif, and Kandahar in the south and maybe one in the east and one I think in Ghazni. And it was, if I recall, now that they were military, or military-run, but the civilians had these very important support roles and functions there. PRTs were meant to be catalytic, and allow us to function locally, but have some security at night because unfortunately, by the time I got there, there were starting to be some problems. A young woman with UNHCR [United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees], twenty-nine years old, had been assassinated. Murdered in broad daylight in the streets of Ghazni in Ghazni province, we assume by Taliban or al Qaeda. And there had to be some isolated attacks on civilians, starting on donor civilians. It was starting to be a less permissive environment by that fall of 2003, and yet, that was the time when our program activities on the ground were really starting to go into much higher gear than only the important humanitarian assistance with contractors. For example, American citizens and other internationals were way out there beyond the wire.

And we also had a situation where U.S. military might either have to destroy some physical infrastructure, or in the fighting Taliban or al Qaeda would destroy physical infrastructure in certain key villages. And the military could only replace the exact identical infrastructure it had destroyed. And this was a problem because at times that infrastructure was in the wrong place to begin with. The local people had originally put the bridge in the wrong place, it would wash out. They build the culverts in the wrong place, they wash out. And the military knew that they were there in the wrong place to begin with. And we knew that, but the U.S. military didn't have a way to address it. And there was an authorities issue and appropriations issue that was binding the military.

I had experienced in the former Soviet Union programs and new independent states where we could pass money to other U.S. government departments and agencies, special authorities we had. I offered to the U.S. commanding general that we would be willing to look at asking for some money to be transferred from this tiny little USAID to the Defense Department so they could actually add funds to put the infrastructure replacement where our military is operating into the right place. That was one of our first policy arm wrestlings that we were facing was internal. But eventually, I think that may have politely stimulated the Defense Department to seek its own authorities and that was the beginning of what was called the CERP, Commanders Emergency Response Program. It became a very important program for local U.S. military combatant officers in the field.

Also, by now, you remember I alluded to fighting a war on two fronts. We're fighting two separate wars, one in Iraq and Afghanistan. And so by the fall of 2003, when I was there as mission director, we were beginning to realize we couldn't in Afghanistan get the people that we needed. We had the largest health program in the world in that year, it was hundred and ten or hundred and twenty million dollars in fiscal year 2003. But I literally did not have a direct hire U.S. Foreign Service health officer director assigned at post.

We had used USPSCs–U.S. personnel service contractors. We had to beg, borrow, and everything but steal TDYers from around Washington. That's just an example. We were understaffed and we were not at that point responding because others of our staff were going to Iraq now. Iraq was the priority of the year, Afghanistan was so 2002. That's what it felt like, as the leader of our USAID program in Afghanistan, just when it was beginning to look like we're actually beginning to get traction and our hard-fought for

larger budget was kicking in. And we had a constitutional convention, the first in fifty years happening that fall, and we were supporting it financially and providing money to the United Nations for it, and coordinating very closely with the UN [United Nations] and with the Cabinet members and with President Karzai, who obviously then as a result of that Constitutional Convention, which happened in mid December that year, would then go on and be elected by the people of Afghanistan in 2004.

Having the people, the brainpower, the professional, experienced brains we needed from our agency, in Afghanistan at the very moment of real takeoff from a stabilization perspective of giving this the ability to deliver services to its people, and reinforce its credibility as we were hoping for and expecting as a representative government of their people, chosen by women as well as men. But we didn't have enough direct hires in place, we maybe had a dozen direct hire officers. We had a billion-dollar portfolio, a billion dollars in 2003 dollars. What would that look like in today's money?

I realized I remember, anyway, that was a policy issue for us, in terms of our government, internal to our agency. And USAID officers and leaders, the career guys and gals, especially if we're anything, we're resourceful, we think out of the box. And my experience in India taught me, there's some world-class Foreign Service nationals around the world. And I literally started sending emails and telephone calls to mission directors I knew around the world and said, "Help! Can you send me any of your FSNs [Foreign Service nationals] on a short-term basis? I could use them for a month at a time." And God bless our mission directors, every single one of them who said, "Absolutely, I'll send you my best personnel guy, I'll send you my best, executive assistant." Craig Buck had built some of that administrative support capability. And we had FSN third-country nationals from all over the world, but we then went into high gear on that. And we got TDYers from all over the world, not just assignments from Washington, because it was a real-time operation. And we had to have that brain power right away at post immediately. But it was also at this time policy wise that we began to see that building this highway was getting to be damn dangerous. The Turkish subcontractors were being literally shot out of their seats of their caterpillars and steam rollers earthmoving steam shovels by snipers up in the hills along the highway being repaired. They were on occasion being killed by these landmines. And so we had to slow down our process of construction in order to do the mine sweeping, for which we got very creative. We hired Zimbabwean Rhodesian, basically, South African landmine operations.

Q: So we have our connection back. Jim, I think you were talking about the issue with increasing insecurity in late 2003. And how that impacted not only on the road, but other projects, just as you're trying to expand, you have this issue of increasing security. How did that play itself out?

BEVER: So we began to be required by the Diplomatic Security regional security officer RSO host to operate within the coordinated security information, risk threat kind of mechanisms that were rapidly evolving. And to have our direct hires and USPSCs gradually over time placed in these PRTs, the provincial reconstruction teams. And fall under the in-loco parentis security requirements of those PRTs. So that made our implementation of programs more challenging. We'll never know what would have happened, had we not done that. I think you could theorize that, in some parts of the

country, we might have been able to move faster, better, with some risks and some tragedies. I don't want to make light of losing somebody under our chain of command, whether they are a direct hire, an Afghanistan local employee, or an international American or international country employee. It's all tragic.

And so once that begins to happen in a place, it does make us more cautious and we begin to get information like "No, no, don't go down that valley tomorrow, either because there might be an operation of U.S. government or our multinational forces happening there or because they had information that Taliban, al Qaeda, and there were other groupsHekmatyar's group, the HIG [Hezb-e Islami], and others that were looking to deliberately kill or kidnap Americans in particular or anyone with our assistance programs–and especially U.S. diplomats. So that became a new time and cost constraint on our ability to implement U.S. government policy operationally on the ground, in the field.

The policy is only as good as your operational implementation of what's happening on the ground. I think we had more or less worked out our collaboration with our U.S. military, they were beginning to understand and appreciate what these USAID people were doing. It was a little different story in Iraq that took on some other manifestations, we won't go there. But at some point, especially the Afghan people who were working for, let's say, an American contracting company, or working, trying to build a water system in agricultural areas somewhere, or work building a small dam or a road or those people and their leaders from local Afghan construction companies or Afghan tribal leaders. They were beginning to be victimized by Taliban and al Qaeda. I think at the end of my watch, when I left in July 2004, we had already lost one hundred people who were supported by our funds—mostly Afghans, but by no means only Afghans.

Building our highway project, and some of our ancillary, other construction work, building new primary health care, and schools and Afghan government administrative buildings. And those were Australian, Turks, Germans, British Indians, Pakistanis. And the list goes on. And there were, obviously, sadly, I mean, the lion's share of them were Afghans themselves, building their own country and taking the risks to do so. Yes, and it affected our budget and our costs. But never during that time did any of us think that this wasn't worth risking our lives for. And a lot of people were kidnapped as well. The time honored tradition around the world, but especially in that part of the world was to kidnap somebody and then hold them for ransom. It was usually a criminal thing to extort money. Either they kidnapped some Afghans, or they kidnapped Indians, which could be very dangerous for the Indians, or Pakistanis, or Turks. And then we had to figure out ways, which could be quite a diversion, for us to rescue them. And I can't go into the details on how some of that was done.

And of course, those people, whether you're injured in a shooting incident, or a bombing incident, or you're kidnapped, you're never the same the rest of your life, you are affected psychologically. How a Turkish contractor would get somebody shot out of the seat of the bulldozer, for example, the company would have one day of mourning for that professional. And there'd be another guy in that seat a day and a half later. And they would have welded some metal plates up armor to the bulldozer, so we could keep going on our project.

When I was in Afghanistan, at some point, our guys, USAID folks who were in the PRTs, could not leave without going out with U.S. military escort. And most of the time what that meant was the development folks had to go wherever the military was planning to go that day and maybe if they agreed, stop at a school on the way or kick the tires at a health clinic.

Q: Did that start when you were there? I mean, that requirement to go out with the military escort because that was the only safe way.

BEVER: Yeah, it did, at least for direct hire officers.

Q: I see.

BEVER: Diplomatic passport carriers, shall we say. Then, included our USPSC [U.S. Personal Service Contractor] people and our Foreign Service Limited officers. We'll get to that later in a later part of this discussion. That really crimped our way of doing business. However, with credit to the State Department Diplomatic Security guys, and the Defense Department, colleagues on the front line, they tried to be as accommodating as they could have for what our needs were. They also found it was a way for them to learn, make new connections with tribal leaders, or the district leaders.

We also had, and I can't go into details on this, but it was on my watch, and it was Jim Kunder's initiative, back when I was in headquarters, we created a mechanism to make sure that our U.S. military knew where our people were. And without getting into the details, they were able to respond very quickly, with the full combat capability to rescue any of our people, including contractors and grantees. Now, this became quite a challenge when we had literally, in any day, a hundred activities going on around the country in as many places. And it did come into play a number of times, when some of our people, sadly, were shot by snipers, their helicopter was downed by snipers. And we lost people and some of those grievously injured were rescued. So we had other mechanisms, in addition to our own private security people including brave Afghans who were meant to try to help prevent those situations from becoming tragic. But obviously, if they got into an attack, they often did give or risk their lives to save some of ours. The war started to become much riskier for civilians in 2004.

Q: A lot of texts have been written and talked about this whole topic of U.S. national security interests, and why we went into Afghanistan and what our objectives were. And interesting, because you were involved early on at the beginning in 2002, 2003, and 2004 when you were there. The U.S. did a lot of nation building as we in USAID know billions of dollars. But was that a clear U.S. national security objective when you were there? Or did that just kind of happen? As the U.S. got more involved in helping to build this new country.

BEVER: So early on, again, as I said, we had to do Congressional presentations on the money, and I'm sure if you went back and looked at those, they would say to the Congress from the executive branch from OMB, based on USAID and cleared by the State Department, that we were intending our assistance deliberately to try to build up the institutional capacity of the country to provide services to its people after thirty years of

civil war. And as I look back, was there somewhere an internal document, where we said, "We're going to stand Afghanistan up." I mean, if you went back to the Bonn Agreement, I think there was a clear understanding internationally that this was not just a combat operation of kill and capture and then go home. We were going to be there for a while, although we always kept falling into our own trap of thinking, the military would be able to downsize quickly and leave within about a year. It just became a perpetual Groundhog Day kind of movie. We knew from the development perspective that this was going to take a decade, likely decades.

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Q: Okay. Hi, this is our second recording. It's October 3. I am interviewing Jim Bever. So, Jim, please continue on this whole question of state building and nation building.

BEVER: So this U.S. and international commitment to Afghanistan may have accreted over time. But the tone and tenor—without going into details of the USG policy meetings that I attended—was clearly aimed at trying to redevelop Afghanistan's capabilities to govern itself and to protect itself. On the military side, you had all of the efforts to begin to train the Afghan Army how to fight more effectively, and how to integrate across all the different tribal elements of the country, Tajiks, Uzbeks, and the Pashtun. On the civilian side, it was clearly how to deliver certain services to the people starting early on with education and getting girls into school who had been out for an entire generation or more, female education.

Ambassador Khalilzad's initiative—before he came out as ambassador in 2003 when I was in the HQ office—was to start thinking not only of the highway, which he had succeeded in persuading the president United States to support but then it was how do we help Karzai and the government of Afghanistan to show that they cared about people in the districts, in the provinces, with health, because of the health conditions that were so miserable for women and children in the country. I mean, almost biblical health conditions. And how to have a free and independent press and media in the country? This was new stuff for the Afghans. I think maybe in their history. They'd always been a kingdom before. And then they were a succession of people who were governed purely by force, the Soviets and civil war. The idea being, of course, President Bush did not initially believe we should be doing nation building either, right? He came into the office saying we're not going to do this stuff. But then 9/11 reality happened. And I think he saw that it was worth the effort.

We knew in the rural areas that if you are part of a tribe, and your leader was sitting on the fence as to how long the Americans, the foreigners, were going to stay. What was going to happen to him and his people? That was an issue the whole time I was there and obviously for another twenty years. David Sedney who was the DCM [deputy chief of mission] at the time I was there, was a real Afghan expert and right up there among the most courageous Foreign Service officers or people with whom I've ever had the

privilege to serve, or get to know because of the risks he took both as a government officer, but also after he retired from Afghanistan. He was resolute in communicating that our purpose in being there was to make sure that Afghanistan was never the place from which another attack on the American people would ever happen again. And whatever we had to do to make that a reality, is what we were going to do.

And that was very understandable by me and all my people. And it's why we took a lot of the risks that we took risks with our own personal lives, and we never forced anybody to take those risks. But if they were willing to, we were going to support them. So that institution building, we were beginning to see progress in some areas in the health system in particular. Because of a very dynamic local leader, and as you and I know, in the end, it's all about leadership. It's all about leaders. It's not our countries, their country, even though there was a point [I won't say who] somebody very senior in our government said, "Well, we own this country, don't we?" I said, "I don't think so. The Afghans certainly don't think so. We haven't said so." But I also knew when the military eventually would leave, as in the past, usually it was USAID and State Department colleagues and certain other U.S. government agencies that would still be very active and out there in rural areas and taking the risks. So later on, we can talk about that. But that institution building thing was very explicitly part of our U.S. policy.

Q: When you were there, and or when you were working on Afghanistan from Washington, those were the days when the new Afghan government and major donors, especially the U.S., were involved in helping them think through how best to set up new systems. They just haven't had a civil service system that worked on quality, and not just sponsorship, a health system, as you said, how that set up and organized education, financial system. When you were there, were there any policy issues, at least within the USG were there interagency rivalries? As you were trying to work with the government setting up these brand new systems?

BEVER: "Life is trouble, as Zorba the Greek said." Anytime there's a lot of money involved in the civilian assistance side, our levels of funding where significant other parts of our government want to be involved out of loyalty to the president by their cabinet secretaries, political pressures from political appointees underneath the cabinet secretary, in their offices of international affairs, say, for a particular department. They wanted to be seen as being involved and present and being able to report on something that they were doing meaningful in Afghanistan. I understand that. But that said, it could be most distressing and diversionary and demoralizing for us when certain parts of another USG department whether it was Defense or it was other civilian departments or agencies would vie for or undercut us.

We learned, for example, that a particular entity of the USG would be up on Capitol Hill undermining what we were doing on behalf of the president of the United States. These were the same people who report to the same president, talking to foreign relations, Foreign Affairs Committees and appropriators without us being present to explain or defend ourselves. They were basically criticizing our work, advocating that the money should be provided to them. This should not have been tolerated. To me, it's one of the takeaway lessons. And I would hold the highest levels of the executive branch of the government of the United States of America accountable and responsible for tolerating

that kind of behavior. I also sensed sometimes that the highest levels of our government believed that the way you got good policy and implementation was by putting everybody in the room, shutting the door and may their strongest or most devious, or most conniving win.

That's a style of government leadership. But I think it's a horrifically bad one. Because it then pits a leader, subordinate leaders and all the people who follow them in a particular area, whether it's health or education, or its infrastructure in a war zone to compete with one another, or undercut one another, rather than saying, "There's plenty of room for any one of us to fail, but if we work together more collaboratively, we just might succeed." But this is an "aha moment" for me at that point as a senior Foreign Service officer, Counselor Rank. And I had seen snippets of that kind of behavior of the U.S. government, particularly the political, lower levels, appointees in a particular administration. And by the way, the behavior is often repeated under a new administration of a different party. So it seems to come with the USG interagency territory.

There's gotta be a way to get a handle on that. Because when you're out there on the frontline, you're understaffed, you're getting your people killed and injured, and you've got to be accountable for the people's money. Most importantly, you have got to be accountable for the people, you're leading for their welfare and their safety and their morale. And you're fighting friendly bureaucratic fire in Washington, friendly fire, just as injurious because back home, they don't have the discipline or the courage to compete for resources objectively in certain departments or entities of our government. If someone's not succeeding and leading out in the front lines,where we are, like in Afghanistan, then replace them, replace the USAID director, okay. And if USAID isn't doing the job, replace the USAID administrator, and they're still not doing the job, give the work to some other department or agency, but then hold them equally accountable for the same results, and the same performance standards and accountability for the peoples' money. And that's where we had a structural internal USG Executive Branch problem that transcended different political administrations and time. I saw it in Iraq. I saw it in the New Independent States of the former Soviet Union, and it came home to roost in Afghanistan, as well as Iraq.

Q: Later on like say, 2012–2013, Ambassador Crocker was there. They set up a system with five ambassadors to really coordinate at that level across agencies, if you will. When you were there, were there multiple ambassadors that tried to coordinate the different aspects of the U.S. engagement along with military?

BEVER: Okay, when I landed to be the USAID director, it was Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad. And I, in the Senior Foreign Service, as the USAID director, outranked everybody else on the Country Team except the Management Counselor, who was a fine officer, like me having a Consular Rank in the Senior Foreign Service. The DCM, at the time was FS-01.

Q: Whoa, really?

BEVER: And every office director or section chief on the country team below me, in other parts of State Department, political counselor, economic counselor, the refugee coordinator, the DSofficer, so on that they were FS-02 or FS-03.

Q: Wow, there were no career ministers or minister consular level?

BEVER: No. And across the table from us every morning, starting at the top of the table was the ambassador. So you had the DCM on the right of the ambassador. On the left of the ambassador was a three star general.

Q: Yeah, exactly.

BEVER: Equivalent in Foreign Service to a career minister rank.

Q: Yep, that's right.

BEVER: Next to him was a two star general. Next to him were a few three one star generals. Behind them were full colonels, all of whom outranked all the other State Department people at the table. And headed by Ambassador Khalilzad, who was Senate confirmed ambassador, plenipotentiary of the president of the United States and reported to the secretary of state, right? He was also very influential at the highest levels of the Pentagon, very well informed. And I'll just leave it at that. When I left, my outbrief to Ambassador Khalilzad before my next assignment, which you had also been to, was as mission director in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip during the Second Intifada.

He said, "Well, any other advice, Jim?" I said, "Yes. ambassador, you need to have the equivalent rank Foreign Service officers as the military has at your country team table." This was July 1, 2003. And he said, "I can do that?" I said, "There's nothing that I know that would keep the secretary of state and the White House from agreeing that current serving ambassadors elsewhere, or even retired ambassadors of equal rank to our military leaders in country, could be called back to duty to head up every one of your sections, the political section, the economic section, the management section that handled all the very important work, including coordination with the regional security officer." And that I remember he was startled by that. Because he was not a State Department career person, I don't think anyone had ever told him.

I don't want to go into detail on this one. Our discussion must have planted a seed. Not long after that he went to be a U.S. ambassador to Iraq. And then when I went there as the DAA for Iraq, all of a sudden, I saw he had five ambassadors under him. And then when I went later to Afghanistan, there were in fact, four or five ambassadors serving under the then ambassador. So I think it was a good step frankly, although a lot of our Foreign Service colleagues in USAID disagreed,as it leveled the playing field between the State Department and civilians on the one hand and our military on the other. Among other things, it showed them the respect that we gave to the commitment that their starred officers were giving in these conflicts, that we also were bringing our most seasoned, most mature, deepest gravitas people that the State Department could provide in these areas of conflict.

There were obvious problems that we're all aware of—who's in charge of what and who has what authorities and responsibilities and accountability with that. And in a war zone, that's really important. It's important anywhere, but it's particularly important in a war zone. The ambassador also created what was called the ARG, it was a forerunner to the equivalent in Iraq. This was the Afghan Reconstruction Group with people on contract, I guess they were the initial thirty-one sixty-one officers, under State Department's authorities, about a dozen of them. And that was an internal policy decision of the U.S. government to help the ambassador prosecute the civilian side of the war. And one of them was given a designation of being the senior advisor, or something like that, to the ambassador for health. One of them advisor for infrastructure and one of them the senior advisor for geology and so on. In and of themselves, each of these people had reasonable credentials. But they were unsure by the ambiguity of what their authority was, the responsibility was, and finally, what their accountability was, to the American people, or in the case of misdirection of funds, or tragedies on somebody's watch. And this became an internal problem. It was definitely a policy problem internally in the U.S. government; it wasn't between us and the Afghan government.

And that was diversionary for me. I can understand from the ambassador's perspective in a place like Afghanistan, in a war, that he felt he needed some people to keep an eye on us to deliver for the President. Oh, my God, it was a terrible practice. And it sucked some of the morale out of my best officers. And I didn't have too many officers, if you remember me saying, and it confused the Afghanistan government's highest level of government counterparts.

Q: So how long did that continue, this ARG? Did that go away when Khalilzad left?

BEVER: Too long. After the ambassador left and went to Iraq, the incoming ambassador, I think he gradually diminished it and it disappeared. It was an experiment. And it was a noble experiment that the ambassador had the best intentions for. But it's not a best practice. And it is a serious lesson learned that we must never ever, ever, ever do that again. I mean, you wouldn't do that with the U.S. military. A dozen people who suddenly become the senior advisors to the general at the political level, to then go out and second and third guess everything that was going on? I mean, in my view, that's what the role of the inspector general is. The role of the Government Accountability Office. That's what the role of the SIGAR is, or even better, the House or Senate oversight government oversight committees or the press. Anyway, it was one of those things tried in a war situation and should never be repeated.

Q: Yeah. Before we move on to your time working on Afghanistan in 2008, 2009 and 2010. From the early time of 2002 to 2004 or 2005, what are your insights and reflections from them? I mean, you just gave one related to ARG and in broad terms the U.S. response is the role of USAID inter agency. Any kind of, you mentioned a few lessons learned, but any further insights and reflections?

BEVER: I do want to say something about opium. I will say something about that in a moment.

But I'd say a few epiphanies I had, if you will. I mean, Afghanistan in combat is a place where men and women have epiphanies, right? One of mine was we shouldn't get into these kinds of conflicts unless we're prepared to be all in, all in in terms of the people that we need on the ground, all in in terms of the budget, all in in terms of the authorities we need. And all in by the administrators of our agency or the secretaries of our departments. War is total. And when you see people killed in combat, or because they were civilians, who were a threat to those who wanted to violently overturn the government, like the Taliban or al Qaeda. If we can't do it right and well, to be prepared to move up to that level, then we shouldn't be there. Because people burn out, then they make mistakes, or they become vulnerable, or they take risks they shouldn't take. Or their families fall apart back home. Because it's a separated post for both spouses or dependents. They suffer from PTSD [Post-traumatic stress disorder], as well, because of what they experience or the chronic stress, working eighty hours a week or more. So that was one.

The other is we need to do a better job by developing our own career officer leaders within USAID. If I had one tool at my disposal, it would be to do a much better education effort, at least for USAID officers and leaders. Before they go out to an assignment like this. They need six or nine months or ten months at in-service, updated, best practices education in all of the key sectors that they would be expected to have to lead. And I remember when I couldn't get a health director. I mean, literally, when I called headquarters and I said, "I need somebody out here to the head of health for the agency's biggest budget in health, the answer was, "I can't spare them, Jim. We've got Iraq, remember? Iraq." He sadly said, "I do have some good interns that I could send out to you when they free up in a couple months." I wish at that moment, one of my epiphanies, because I was an energy system, infrastructure economic guy. I wish that I knew a hell of a lot more about health policy and health strategy and effective best practices and in the health sector, for a country like Afghanistan. Because I was the one then having to give the technical guidance or policy guidance to my health team before I could get TDYers to fill in. So we need to prepare our own senior leadership group in USAID better. Anyway, the former Development Studies Program would be a good example, but doubled in duration, deepened.

Q: Ah, okay.

BEVER: I guess the third is to keep checking and testing our assumptions on which our strategies rest. We kept assuming certain things. There was nary a question. I can't remember one officer on my watch who left because he or she wasn't committed to what we were doing in Afghanistan, and trying to do in Afghanistan. And I guess I said, we saw progress. We saw some progress in civil service. We saw some progress in finance. We saw progress in health. We saw progress in education. We saw progress in infrastructure. We saw progress in a free and independent media. We saw the Constitutional Convention, equal for Afghan women and men, and everybody leaving their weapons outside the big tent literally, to pass a new constitution. We saw progress in a somewhat troubled national election. An elected president for and members of parliament. We saw progress in bringing in women judges and reduction of infant mortality and morbidity and increase in life expectancy and so on. So people were

committed. But that interagency coordination function, and getting the issues out on the table, and absolutely not tolerating freelancers, cowboys, and cowboys from different agencies or departments going up and bad mouthing some of the U.S. government and doing it with another equal branch of our government, the legislature, without the knowledge of the agencies or departments involved, that cannot happen again–period. Shouldn't ever happen, certainly not when people's lives are on the line and our fortunes are on the line.

So opium, let me finish on that. Expect the unexpected is another lesson. And that gets back to challenging the assumptions. Unfortunately, it was like a perfect storm the year I was there. The weather was perfect for natural opium—which is an indigenous native plant in Afghanistan, as is marijuana—to flourish all over the country, even in places where earlier it had been only marginal. It was perfect growing conditions, temperature, humidity or dryness, rain when it needed not when it didn't. And the Taliban had crushed opium growing on their watch. On the surface that seemed like a great thing they did. It later turned out from what I understand and from public sources that they had been stashing that heroin, that opium, the cake—it looks like a pack of clay—and artificially driving up the price which then they can cash in when they need certain things.

There was a key moment in 2003 when the United States government could have gone after the opium business and we made a fork in the road policy decision at that point that we weren't going to do that. It was one of those ferocious debates at post and there were some I think correctly argued that this was going to be a cancer that was going to kill us in Afghanistan. And there were others, I won't go into the who or what departments or agencies, who were saying hell no. If we have to use the bad guys to get to the badder guys or baddest guys, then that's what we're going to do. And there was also reluctance on the part of that particular department to get involved in anything to do with drugs, narcotics, opium and so on–"not touching that tar baby, unless we trip over them".

And that was a turning point I think in the corruption in the country. I mean. If you're a poor farmer, all of a sudden, you've got literally a few thousand dollars in cash available to you. Growing opium allowed you to buy your bicycle or even a small motorcycle, maybe pay your sons' school fees, probably not the daughters. But to get by when the rest of the international assistance program in the economy was not up and running yet. But it then led to Afghanistan becoming the world's major supplier of opium to the world's major markets, and then the United States became a growing part of Afghanistan opium consumption.

So you asked about policies, and I only saw the field overseas deliberations on this issue. I won't go into the details. I don't know what was going on back home. But I do know, eventually, by the time I left there, the Congress in particular, the Senate was raising questions of the executive branch at that time, that why this opium drug thing was growing so rapidly, and we didn't seem to be doing anything enough about it.

I think in summary, I've talked about the concern I had of the Bonn Agreement which seemed to vest the appointment of executive branch leaders in the hands of the president all the way down to the provincial or lower level rather than being elected. I think this troubled me from the beginning and I think it gets down to who has legitimacy at the

local level, even warlords at the local level still have to deliver for their people. And some of the warlords actually did pretty damn well–look at Herat. And I talked about having the resource correctly. And I talked about the challenge of fighting two wars and trying to restabilize societies and economies and policies simultaneously, how taxing it was to our agency and frankly, to the State Department, where I felt that they couldn't staff up either as much as was needed in Afghanistan, once Iraq hit.

And the biggest blow to me in my agency in Afghanistan was one early morning when we were with the U.S. Marine guards for breakfast, and we just had our first billion dollars, when we got the TV news that the executive branch with Congress had decided to provide twenty-two billion dollars to Iraq for Iraq reconstruction in a country that was so much wealthier than Afghanistan, both total and per citizen, and so much more technically skilled and hadn't gone through three decades of civil war, and had so much more professional capability. And that just sucked the wind out of us. And it was at that point when the colonel that was working with us for the Army Corps of Engineers got recalled and reassigned to Iraq. It wasn't just USAID and State. It was like even the military was being strained to do both.

Q: Thanks, Jim. Extremely useful insights there. After you left Kabul I heard you say you went to West Bank Gaza, you did some other work. How did you then get back engaged in Afghanistan?

BEVER: I volunteered for it. We're all patriots and I felt that was the patriotic thing for our country. When Administrator Henrietta Holsman Fore—who was also deputy secretary of state and the head of the new assistance coordination shop at the State Department—asked me to be the assistant administrator for Asian/Near East Bureau as interim between George W. Bush and whenever they could get a political appointee Senate confirmed. That bureau would have actually been the Asia Bureau at that point, because we had split up the Asian Near East Bureau into a Middle East Bureau and an Asia Bureau. So they asked me, and because they knew I'd been in Afghanistan, and I'd served in Pakistan, I've been the head of South Asia. And that's when I said, "No, we need to let whoever leads the Asia Bureau to focus on everything but Afghanistan and Pakistan."

That's when I proposed that task force. And so that's how I got back in as an assistant to the administrator equivalent. And within a few weeks, I then initiated a request for an appointment with Ambassador Richard Holbrooke, the late Richard Holbrooke, because he had just been appointed by Hilary Clinton, the incoming secretary of state, which was within a couple of days of Barack Obama becoming president. And he met with me and my deputy, a fantastic world class development diplomat, Charles North. So at that point, we were off and running. That was January of 2009, literally within the first week after President Obama was sworn in.

And we were given the assignment within days of that meeting with the late Ambassador Holbrooke to help the president figure out a new strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan. And because I had been representing the agency at the Afghanistan and Pakistan deputies committee meetings, to join this small team to come up with the new policy for the president of the United States, to be announced within the first three months of his tenure.

They gave us less than ninety days to come up with this policy for Afghanistan and Pakistan. And it was a very small team. And I never thought I or USAID would be in that kind of a group. It was headed by a former very senior USG officer along with deputy cabinet secretaries and deputy directors of certain U.S. government agencies.

And we developed this policy draft, we went through it with the secretary of state and the deputies committee and it went up to the principal's committee and then to the president. And we produced it on time, by the end of March or early April, and it was used in his public policy address given at the West Point Military Academy. And that launched the new policy, the new administration's policy, of what we were going to do in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

My first hundred days as head of our new Task Force in USAID for Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Q: Yeah, that's huge. And was it in your recommendations, if you can say this, the major surges that President Obama eventually approved, was that later?

BEVER: It was the beginning of a surge.This strategy was a dress rehearsal force for the much bigger surge coming. Again, policy is only good as your ability to operationally execute. And ideally, the reality of the operational execution would feed back to those in charge of policy back inside the White House, including the U.S. government interagency. So for example, that policy is public, you can look it up.

But the idea was that we were going to strengthen the government of Afghanistan, and by now we'd been in the country, other than the initial fighting in starting later, October, or mid-October, November, and December 2001, we'd been in there for at least seven years, and gone through a number of U.S. ambassadors. And now we're in a second administration, that had a different party that had responsibility for what was going on. But there's a specific publicly shared plank in that strategy, which has us getting much more engaged at the village level in the country, both from the point of view of public safety and security, police, and otherwise try to pull military out from having police functions in the rural areas or the Afghan military out from having police functions at the local level. Because that was a weakness in our involvement there. But the plan was to also be more robust in a whole range of areas: justice, access to justice, trying to bridge the gap between traditional Afghan justice systems and Pashtunwali code, for example, and formal best practices in international justice and judicial procedures, important both for criminal issues, for business, and commercial investment issues, and family law and all the rest of it, which seemed to be taking hold more in the urban areas of the country.

We had more involvement in deepening the education system and continuing to strengthen the media and certainly governance prerequisites for the next wave of elections. So the reality of what had been passed in the Constitution was beginning to hit the Afghan government and all of us too—five years, six years later—what it meant to do this in a country like this. So yes, that policy also increased the number of troops. Not a lot. And they were mostly aimed at training missions. By that time, every warrior on the ground was probably costing not a million dollars a person fully loaded, but maybe two million or more in my estimate. And so this was starting to get much more expensive.

And then there was, what we found, of course, as 2009 and 2010 went on, was that there was a resurgence in certain parts of the country. And that's when the call came for more combat troops, the big push, where we suddenly found ourselves at a hundred thousand to 125,000 soldiers in the country. Almost ten times what we had earlier there in the military.

Q: Would you call that strategy you guys put together a counterinsurgency strategy, or did that come later? Like the whole Petraeus COIN [counterinsurgency] approach?

BEVER: It had manifestations of counterinsurgency.

Q: And his experience in Iraq, I guess.

BEVER: He was influential is what I would say in how President Obama's strategy came out.

Q: One thing, if you look in the literature there was a growing disconnect—if that's the right word or problem—between the short term military objectives, especially with the surge of military surge and diplomatic objectives, many of which were short term, and the more longer term development objectives of institution building/capacity building. And this is manifested, for example, in agriculture, where you would have somebody like Holbrooke say I want to give away seeds and fertilizer. And basically USAID stopped doing your building markets and building longer term kinds of agriculture type capacity, whether it be irrigation or whatever. How did you deal with that? Because that really, I guess, started in a way to 2009–2010 and then obviously into the next decade.

BEVER: So at some point in late 2009 or spring 2010—and I'd have to go back and look—the Taliban came back strong in the south. And there were the battles for Marjah in Helmand Province in Kandahar province, and the marines were having a tough time holding their own. I haven't mentioned—bless our military—that the pressure was already on us at that point, to surge the civilian side. Surge for USAID meant, could we bring over three hundred FSO officers out to post. I mean, we were an agency then of still only twelve hundred or thirteen hundred officers, maybe we were growing a little more. Worldwide, and many had already served in Afghanistan and Iraq by that time, by 2009 and 2010. And they were there for a year without their families. I mean, most of us didn't sign up for that, right? We did sign up to serve anywhere. But as a young officer, did we think all that meant, we would be without our spouses and our kids at that post? And that our lives would be maybe daily on the line for the whole year we were present like that.

Q: What were the short term objectives of the military, in terms of trying to get a province? Giving the wheat seeds and fertilizer, for example?

BEVER: Okay, the battles and Marjah. I was asked by a senior USG official, "Where the hell are the civilians, Jim? Where are you guys? Our marines are dying. Why aren't you there?" Our people were dying too, I had to remind him. As a matter of fact, early on, in that particular part of Helmand and Kandahar, we had been informed, I think, well, intentionally by our diplomatic security in our military, that this particular road was cleared. And that we could go down there, and one of our implementing groups went

down that road, and they never came back alive. And that put a kind of a damper on what and how we would do things.

What we did, because of the creative, flexible implementing mechanisms we had, which is a lesson learned, it's a good lesson learned. USAID developed these instruments for implementation in these kinds of situations that were administratively, I think, good value for the money and cost effective. You wouldn't want to do them over long periods of time, because you want more competition and all the rest of it. Given the paucity of U.S. government officers accountable for their results in their accountability of the money. It was a good system. So we were able because of our good relations with our implementers U.S. NGOs and companies who were experienced in this kind of business.

I was able to say, "We can get quick equipment into that area of Helmand and Kandahar. We can get packages of seeds. We can get water pumps, we get fertilizer and like that." We did it through vouchers. They weren't direct cash giveaways that I think others in the USG wanted, but in the end, they didn't care. They wanted results. And so our implementer I remember talking with them, and they agreed, and with the mission director at the time, they agreed to do this. And we were able to get seeds, fertilizer, irrigation pumps in there quickly. Some of them were grants in kind if you will have equipment, and some of them were under vouchers, especially the seeds that in that policy, if you want and people buying seeds from local markets and agriculture, agents and suppliers,, then we have packages. I mean, each of these are hundred kilos, these are bags of seed, different kinds. And that's the good news. So the marines and others started to see, hey, the civilians are here. They are risking their lives, they are starting to get services to these people, together with local provincial authorities, and have been killed. District leaders that have been killed.

The downside, of course, is that some of this equipment was very easy to identify, actually, out in the field in Kandahar and Helmand Valley, which used to be a cotton basket. And you could irrigate that area, there were still irrigation systems and we cleaned them out and they were planting other food crops and other marketable crops. But as soon as the Taliban saw one of these new pumps, they knew that the farmer had associated with us, and the farmer would be killed. And so there's downside to sometimes how this is done, and who's actually paying the ultimate price for a particular policy.

Q: Yes. Oh, absolutely. I mean, it's a lot more complicated than the development theory would give. Yeah, absolutely.

BEVER: From my experience of having spent nine years of my life living and working for the United States government, in the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, the Republic of India, and the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan. In that world, our and the international diplomatic community's capability to forge a warmer relationship between India and Pakistan has over time, and especially during that time, failed.

I think it allowed, from a security and intelligence perspective, Pakistan could continue to support the insurgencies in Afghanistan. My experiences in-country really drove home to me how we were not able to keep either Pakistan or India from stirring the pot inside Afghanistan. I won't go into more details. At the highest level of policy, as a superpower,

we were not able to affect that change. And to me, that was an underlying source of infection, if you will, for instability to continue.

Q: Well, Jim, thank you. We've been on this for three hours on this morning interview. We'll continue at a another time. And we'll talk about some insights and reflections you have of this period of your life from 2008 to 2010. And then I know that this project on Afghanistan, for ADST, they also want your thoughts on the evacuation when the Taliban took over in August of 2021. What was your involvement and role so we'll touch that at our next interview.

BEVER: Okay.

Q: Thank you very much. This has been incredibly enlightening. I see so many similarities when I actually was involved in Afghanistan, as well, maybe eight to ten years later. And so the pendulum kind of just shifts back and–-

BEVER: Let's do that.

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Q: Hello, my name is Bill Hammink. I'm interviewing Jim Bever for ADST related to the oral histories of U.S. diplomacy in Afghanistan. It's October 11. And this is our second interview and third tape. So Jim, thank you very much for joining today. And we'll jump right in where we left off a few weeks ago. And our last interview, especially this period of 2008–2010, when you were head of OAPA, the Office of Afghanistan Pakistan Affairs, assistant to the administrator, and basically the USAID front person, on anything to do with Afghanistan and Pakistan. Give us your insights from that period. You mentioned, a big policy issue during that time was the surge. And it'd be good to hear your thoughts on the interagency process when you were back in Washington, especially Richard Holbrooke was the special representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan with Secretary Clinton.

BEVER: So in early 2009, as I said in our earlier discussion, almost within a day or two, Secretary Clinton was sworn in as Secretary of State by President Obama. At his direction, the position of Special Representative to Afghanistan and Pakistan or SRAP as it was called, was created. So the man knew the State Department, inside and out. I mean, really. I learned a lot from him tactically and strategically. He also had a wonderful way of constantly checking assumptions, three hundred sixty degrees in all directions all the time, including the assumption about whether he could trust USAID to deliver and to do our best to deliver. And he knew USAID, he knew what we could do.

My first thirty seconds with him in his office was when he showed me a picture of a young man aged twenty-four or so in a village speaking with a Southeast Asian peasant farmer. And I said, "Who is that?" He said, "That's me when I was in my mid-twenties. My first assignment as a junior officer overseas was as an AID officer in the CORDS

program in Vietnam." And so that's how he started out in his career, according to him. And he said, "So, I know what USAID can do. When USAID puts its mind to it, and USAID officers put their minds to it and are willing to take risks."

So that's how he and I started out. He created some really interesting and unusual internal interagency mechanisms. Basically, one of the first things he asked me for was the wiring diagram of USAID. So we also assigned him two of our best and our brightest FS-02s, who I personally knew from other interactions. And they jumped at the chance. And they became two of his favorite interlocutors within what was called the office of the Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan.

But also their interactions with other U.S. government, similar representatives, from other departments and agencies, whether it was the intelligence community, or the U.S. Military Department of Defense, or Department of Agriculture, Treasury, and so on. That's how he formed his staff. And he was able to do it very quickly. I think within two to four weeks he basically had his staff up and running, which is pretty remarkable at the start of any new administration. I told him, in no uncertain terms, that our USAID officers with him could not make policy, or operational decisions, for USAID. They were not authorized to do so. They were authorized to represent to him and others in SRAP the decisions that USAID had made or the status of things we deliberate in terms of our own operations and policies. And that they should be looked at as trusted liaison as our ambassadors to him. And that's how he formed his operation.

And then he did a couple of other things I thought were remarkable. Over time, meaning by the summer of 2009, or the fall of 2009, he was able to create the desire by other allies and friends of the United States engaged in Afghanistan and Pakistan to form their own SRAP ambassadorial representative. All of a sudden, he had dozens of these SRAPs from around the world. And he would consult with them. It was a way for him at his level, which was a very high internally appointed, not Senate confirmed level. Because of his reputation at succeeding with the Dayton Accords to end the Bosnian War. He was viewed with a lot of respect and gravitas. As books will say publicly, he also had a style of operating that did not necessarily endear him in certain parts of the White House and the National Security Council staff, and I'll just leave it at that, you can read the books.

The other thing he did, and he occasionally called these SRAPs together, they would meet in European capital or elsewhere and confer on political issues in their own governments and how the war was going in Afghanistan, and the fighting especially in the Federal Administered Tribal Areas. The FATA, as it was known at the time and in what was then the NorthWest Frontier Province, were Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. And some other internal terrorist problems and threats to Pakistan. And SRAPs would also struggle with how to approach India, governments in the region, whether Saudi Arabia, or others.

Diplomatically, I think it was a helpful tool for him as a special representative who spoke regularly, frequently with the secretary of state. He could basically have ready access to Hilary Clinton on a very short notice. There were a number of times he would ask the secretary to come and meet with us in the State Department building and I was--those meetings where it was kind of scheduled and I call back and let the Acting Administrator Alonzo Fulgham know and ask, "Is there anything special you want me to raise with

her?" Then I would go to those. And sometimes they were very small meetings, or maybe three or four of us or six of us, max.

He had pretty ready access to her and trust of her. I was impressed with her in that regard. That's a simple example of their relationship. But when it came to policy and strategy ultimate decision-making, she was calling the shots.

He could get policy decisions, and he knew where he had to check with the secretary, and he could do it within fifteen minutes, literally and get an answer back. And that's the kind of quick response guidance we all need, especially when we were doing policy formulation in a draft, final draft form that was going to go up to the highest level cabinet level chain of command and present. The other thing he did is he had—I can't remember exactly what it's called but it was he used the word Sherpa only because it's well known in diplomatic circles what that means. He had a Sherpa Council. And these were the big bosses of the USG Interagency, though below the Deputies Cmte in most cases. And that Sherpa council would meet every couple of weeks, maybe every few weeks. This was in in addition to but also in support of the Deputies Committee. In many cases, they would be the "plus ones" to the deputies.

Q: Were you in that category then?

BEVER: I was. I was in both categories. I mean, I was not the deputy. We had a deputy at that time, an acting deputy who was our counselor because we had an acting administrator. I think they let the acting administrator, as I recall, have an acting deputy. But we had an appointed counsel, and I didn't take directions from the counselor, from the acting administrator for that year, which was almost exactly a year from mid-January 2009–2010, when Raj Shah was sworn in. And Hilary Clinton actually came over to the Ronald Reagan Building to witness, and to speak to the entire agency and to meet with all of us backstage.

The Sherpa Council, which was, in my view, kind of maybe not unique, but unusual in my experience, sort of seen it during the collapse of the Soviet Union and the new independent states period when we were dealing with nuclear issues, nuclear proliferation issues, nuclear, the safety of nuclear power plants like Chernobyl. And I was involved in those for USAID. They had sort of a Sherpa process, then the State Department's political military affairs which handled those nuclear issues. But this is the only other time I have seen it. And it kind of ruffled feathers, and it kind of rankled people and got some people's nose bent out of joint, in the normal line bureaucracy of certain departments. And they shall remain nameless, but in terms of making sure there was cross communication between a lot of people in each department or bureau or agency that really kick in to make things happen, and can get policy guidance. My view was, it was actually pretty good, pretty much internal U.S. government interagency, special arrangement for policy coordination, or formulation, and discussion and debate below the levels of the deputies committee. It almost took the form of an interagency Policy Coordination Committee. And maybe that's how Amb. Holbrooke saw it. So he would chair those meetings, and he would usually ask the deputy national security adviser of the president, to come over in the seventh floor operations room, and sometimes the secretary

of state would attend. And he was able to produce other three star generals from the Defense Department.

The advantage of this Sherpa mechanism was that, obviously, as always, before and after, it gave all of us from different parts of the U.S. government a chance to built some bridges and some alliances and some trust and some collegiality among us. I give the late Richard Holbrooke credit for that. Other people thought it was redundant and a waste of time. I didn't see it that way. Again, USAID was not a cabinet department. And so any of those kinds of relationships that we can build would serve the agency well and did. As well as working out issues, to help understand one another's bureau or agency or department was coming from.

When things move fast, like during the fighting and Marjah and in Helmand, and our marines were fighting and dying and getting grievously injured. And we needed to spur a response on the civilian side to be helpful where there were appropriate risks that we could take. That mechanism was helpful to straighten things out between some of our various players that would then meet later in the deputies committee in a more time, limited, stream time limited fashion. And we could sometimes build alliances ahead of time, work things out and be able to approach. Anyway, you asked about an internal mechanism that might have been the best practice. But in my view, he put Afghanistan and Pakistan together as a special, reinforcing twin issue. And he organized accordingly, which meant it was not directly under the authority of the Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asia. And this was probably not unique in the State Department. But it was certainly bureaucratically unusual. But because of his standing with the new Secretary of State, he could do it. And he did it. And, clearly, there must have been some consultation with Senate and House Foreign Affairs Committees, and appropriators before the decision was finally announced in early January. But he basically and by doing that, by having this Sherpa Council, and having the SRAP Council SRAP group. He basically created the ability to be extraordinarily fleet of foot bureaucratically.

This is sort of background for a major policy issue, which was the surge.

By the way, I should say, Ambassador Holbrooke, a couple of times came over to USAID headquarters. He wanted to meet with our team in the Task Force, Office of Afghanistan Pakistan Affairs. And when he showed up in our administrator's conference room, which holds hundred and twenty people, the place was packed. That was the network that we created for in every part and sinew of the agency, so we could flex and be as responsive as we could, given that the agency also had humanitarian disaster response and development, international developer responsibilities in some seventy countries around the world. And he was stunned when he came into the room and looked around. But he also paid a high compliment to those staff, which was a real morale boost. And he basically said "When USAID speaks in this deputies committee meeting of this president, people listen." I saw a big boost in the responsiveness and the morale of the very hard working exhausted staff that were supporting Afghanistan and Pakistan after his visit.

Sometime between that summer of 2009 and the winter 2010 it became clear the first policy of the president to address Afghanistan Pakistan, which was an increase of troops, U.S. troops, and some civilians was not sufficient to hold the line vis-a-vis the Taliban.

After what I would call a very thorough debate in the deputies committee, and I won't go into the details, a decision was made to increase the significant major multi fold increase in the number of U.S. troops and allied troops who were willing to join us in Afghanistan, especially. And to increase the number of civilians that would also be present in Afghanistan, and also in Pakistan. This was one of those times when every department and agency was put on the spot, without advance notice, really to surge. And on the civilian side, the biggest surge of which I was aware, was State Department and USAID. And I don't recall the numbers for State Department. We're expected to do this within ninety days.

Q: Wow.

BEVER: So basically, USAID was directed to surge by the White House. And it was one of those times when, as the representative of the agency to the deputies committee, I was in a position where I could not go back and consult with the acting administrator. And it was the kind of situation in my judgment, where if we didn't step up to the plate, heads were going to roll and it could well have jeopardized the agency's credibility within the U.S. government interagency. And I did some quick calculations of my own during that discussion and committed that we would surge as did the State Department. And so responsibility for the State Department surge was in the hands of the deputy secretary of State—Jack Lew's portfolio was resources, meaning people and money—and it was in my hands as the USAID representative to the deputies committee. However, the really skilled one of making that happen on my team was my deputy Charles North.

And so this was a sobering moment for us policy wise, because on the one hand, we very much wanted to be more engaged in Afghanistan and Pakistan, in terms of staff and our ability to get out into the countryside. Because the surge plan was basically for American direct hire officers which was the requirement by Ambassador Holbrooke. And I'm sure he checked with the secretary on that. It was going to be very difficult for the agency. And when I discussed this, this must have been the winter of 2010 as Rajiv Shah, I think, at this point was on the seat as the administrator. It was a difficult decision for the agency to come to grips with internally. We knew from our experience in Iraq, that by asking officers to volunteer, we'd already gone to the well many times. By this time, we'd already been seven years into the war. And we're a small agency. And each of those times when an officer would serve, it was a year apart from his or her family. And so we started thinking out of the box. The State Department hired U.S. personnel through the mechanism called 3161, which was to bring people on, do a security clearance and I presume a medical clearance and swear the person in as a temporary State Department officer. And in our case, we used the Foreign Service Limited appointment hiring mechanism. We had an interview process set up, we hired some more people internally for such process. We took some people from our HR operation and brought some people on from outside to help us recruit. And we eventually took, I think, four months. We were able to fill almost all of those slots for Afghanistan and I think most of them for Pakistan. This was controversial inside the agency. But we did what we had to do.

We tried to recruit people who had developing country, international development experience. And who had, obviously, the required medical and security clearances. And we restructured the Afghanistan mission. The mission director there restructured it so that

there was a way to have a unit inside that could coordinate much better—with the State Department and other agencies—all the civilians who were being assigned primarily to the PRTs, the provincial reconstruction teams around the country of which there were many, many, many at that point. Was every one of these surge officers as Foreign Service Limited—which is a five year appointment that can be extended for another four years for a maximum of nine years—in the same position? Was every one of them an exhilarating success in their performance? I would say no. Were most of them successful and got the job done? I would say yes. Some did not succeed. We reassigned them internally to Afghanistan, or in a few cases we discontinued their assignments. But we responded. It then turned out of course, I think it was after I left the Afghanistan Pakistan program around August September of 2010. Then, no sooner had we kind of hit that mark, or came close to it, we got the directive from the Obama administration to start de-surging. So we finally staffed up around the country. And people got their feet under them to the extent they were going to or could. And we worked out the internal administrative arrangement. And then the decision was to start phasing back on the U.S. military presence around the country. And with that, therefore, the civilian presence because we didn't have the ability to secure the safety of the civilians, officers who were assigned to these PRTs.

Q: Was that the reason for the surge because there was a military drawdown?

BEVER: At that point, I had moved on to being the mission director in Egypt. Ambassador Holbrooke tragically died in December of 2010. I think in early 2011, around the time of the Arab Spring, somewhere in there, the decision was made to reduce the scope and size. I think it was 2011 for the military. And with that, then concomitantly, we had to reduce the exposure of our civilians in most parts of the country. And that's where I lost eyes on details on what was going on, because I was in Egypt and it was no longer my direct assignment.

Looking back, what was interesting about this policy decision for a surge, those of us who were close to the action, understood it and supported it. It allowed us to almost have mini missions in every one of these PRTs. I don't mean to mischaracterize it, but we could have somebody with experience in education, someone with experience in health, someone with experience in maybe engineering or infrastructure, someone with experience in local governance, or the media, and so on, in many of these PRTs. And they formed their own sort of in-house development teams, and they got guidance from a fellow senior USAID officer named Herbie Smith, who was at that point, I think, in his second or third year or something like that in Afghanistan, as the coordinator for the provincial reconstruction teams. And we had done a similar kind of organizational structure earlier in Iraq. I was familiar with that structure, because I had been the DAA for Iraq. And it worked reasonably well in Iraq. There were not as many people. But the communication coordination and lines of authority and getting people to work collaboratively, both at the PRTs in Iraq, and with headquarters in Baghdad, faced the same problems earlier than when we went big time in Afghanistan, with the surge. And they were extraordinarily responsive. And they got the technical job done.

The Obama administration wanted direct hires; this was Richard Holbrooke's explicit decision, and he was not as far as I could tell challenged by any higher authority about

that, and so that's why we had to do the special hiring mechanism to bring on and swear in and do the health and security clearances for Foreign Service Limited direct hire officers with top secret security clearances. In hindsight, I would just say I think that I wish that we could have retained a number of these Foreign Service Limited officers in the PRTs longer for their ability to influence, advise, counsel and get things done at the local level, and interact with our grantees and contractors out in the field, which was hard for our people in Kabul to do. We had more eyes and ears on what was actually happening out in the field because of these surge officers. It was not to be, alas, because of the concerns about the security of these civilian officers once the military started to gradually ratchet back.

And I think the other lesson learned here is that the agency, as far as I know, did not but should have maintained a roster for contact of these hundreds of Foreign Service Limited officers for using for future requirements to suddenly respond overseas, with lots of experienced people who knew what it was like to be in a conflict zone, and danger zones at risk, and knew how to work with other U.S. government interagency representatives, in far flung towns around a particular country. As far as I know, the agency lost touch with these people. Somewhere in our records, either in the Afghan-Pakistan office, or in the HR operation, or the general counsel or contracts or grants or contracts office, or Management Bureau, we might have those.

Q: I know. You said you moved on to Egypt before the surge and looking at the broader impact of these civilians on the surge. But do you have an opinion whether you think that was worth it? At the end of the day, since that the surge happened, right, we're able to get up to the full surge.

BEVER: Whether it was worth it to have done the surge in the first place? Well, in hindsight looking at it from a thirty-thousand-foot perspective. My view on this can be controversial. I think, yes, it was worth it. It was an enormous lift for USAID. But we learned how to do an enormous enlistment of officers, direct hire officers by using these mechanisms. And from what I understood and heard from these officers, and from those around him, a lot of them made contributions out in the field. Not all of them. But nothing's perfect in life. It did divert us in some ways. You bet. On the other hand, we knew we needed more eyes and ears and brains of American officers out in the field. Did we need a number we had three hundred and forty or whatever, some of whom were at headquarters in Kabul? That could easily be debated. And there were obviously problems in matching the right people to the right job at the right PRT. And that was a problem in Iraq as well when these things were done under threat. Does the agency need that kind of capacity? I think, yes, it does. How to do that? We've struggled, the agency struggled with civilian response corps or similar mechanisms that I can't remember what they were called. And under what arrangement would people be called up? And could they be called up, and then they'd be required to be called up or face some kind of penalty or prosecution if they had been approved for such work and trained for such work and been put on financial retainers for such work or something. So they were standby ready. We've never been able to cross that bridge as an agency.

And so I think in some ways, the agency is still vulnerable. If the decision by higher authorities in our government or the officers that go into these kinds of complex conflict

situations, have to be direct hires. Because what this surge showed me anyway, as well as in Iraq, is that our officers, many were willing to volunteer to go but not all, and the agency into conflict zones like this, and our agency, and our government, in both the George W. Bush and the Obama administration, we're not prepared to call the letters of the Foreign Service officers who were sworn in and on our roles, and order them to go to Afghanistan, or Pakistan, or Iraq. We debated that. And I won't go into the details of the setting and when and where. But higher order. Decisions were made that no, we were not going to order officers to serve, we were going to do everything we could to policy wise internal to the U.S. government to motivate them, I will say and encourage them to serve. And by that we would have meetings with the deputy secretary of state and under secretary of state for management and our own equivalent senior officers, bureaucratically in USAID workout incentive mechanisms of hardship, danger pay and other more frequent R&R and things like that for officers, to step up to the plate.

We also, interestingly, made a requirement for Foreign Service officers at the end of the George W. Bush administration, which was continued through the Obama administration, that for Foreign Service officers who'd been out of Washington for ten or eleven or twelve years, they had to bid on Washington assignments. And they also had to bid on the hardship, danger assignments, CPCs as they were called, critical priority countries, I think. They had to list at least one of their five bids. And if they listed it, and they were selected, that meant they had to serve or they had to resign. And so we found mechanisms within the rules to motivate people. And what was interesting to me was that officers who may not have been supportive of the Iraq war, for example, prefer to sign up and serve in Iraq rather than serve in Washington.

We found some other mechanisms, policy wise internal to AID, where we rendered every office director position in Iraq, and in Pakistan and Afghanistan—and this was my initiative, for better or worse. I'll take blame for it or credit for it but the head of HR approved it and so to the administrator and the deputy administrator—and that was to render those positions as deputy, as senior management group or what's called senior leadership group positions. It had to be an FS-01 officer. But nowhere else in the world where these positions ever rendered SMG. And we also created in Afghanistan and Pakistan multiple deputies. We had maybe three or four deputies. I'm a little rough on that count in Afghanistan. But in Pakistan, we had one for Peshawar, one for Lahore, one for Karachi, as well. The signal to officers who were FS-01 was, here's your opportunity to show your stuff in what was the senior management group of the agency, which was the core from which deputy mission directors and mission directors and Washington office directors and deputy assistant administrators were chosen. The signal was, step up and serve here, ladies and gentlemen, this is an accelerated path to leadership in the agency. And between these various incentives. And of course, there was a very rigorous selection process at headquarters to select people into the senior management group. But we were able to identify the cream of the crop and get it to rise faster that way by doing this, and therefore fill at least the senior positions in those two posts, with good, experienced FS-01 officers. And fill many of the rest with Foreign Service limited officers.

This whole surge process was an exercise under extremis. To me, the U.S. government at the highest level decided to be more engaged and more responsive on the civilian development side for us anyway. And diplomatic writ large for the State Department, along with our troops.

Q: Thank you, Jim. One quick question on that. There's been a lot discussed and written about one year tours. What was your thought? I know a lot of the FSOs officers actually stayed more than one year. They got out there and got out to the field. They stayed two, three, sometimes four years, and the Foreign Service officers stayed normally one year. And that kind of hurt continuity in the light. Were you involved in discussions on how to encourage folks to stay for more than one year?

BEVER: Yes, as a matter of fact, I felt from the beginning that we needed to encourage any of our officers to be there for more than one year. We found this situation rather quickly in Iraq as well. The ones who had continuity in the field in these countries—where we were expending in the low billions of dollars of the people's money, our taxpayers' money—were our contractors. Or the employees were our grantees, and to some extent our Foreign Service nationals, who also were under personal service contracts. That's not a normal situation overseas. And it had its moments when a number of us felt this is not wise. I came up, for example, with a proposal to try to render either a requirement that they be two year tours, or longer, even three years or that we again, come up with an incentive program. And so some of the incentive ideas we came up with were such as what was done in Vietnam which I'd heard about. We had five thousand USAID direct hire Foreign Service officers, pretty much at the peak of Vietnam. Many of their spouses were allowed to bivouac basically in a country, I think it was in Bangkok. And some possibly elsewhere. I can't remember whether it's Jakarta or Taipei or wherever. And that meant on R&R and sometimes more frequently, our civilian officers could reconnect with their spouses, maybe not with their dependents that I don't have the details on. But it meant that an officer would be willing to perhaps spend more time in the field in that assigned high conflict zone.

I discovered that we had an agriculture officer in Afghanistan, whose spouse was based in India, I think as a direct hire, or maybe a PSC contract or maybe an employee of a contract company of USAID's in India. And they were able to visit each other with him going to India on an Air India flight that had been established between Delhi and Kabul on a pretty frequent basis. And that's what made me realize, hey, we can do this. And so we did, as an agency, try damn hard to get the State Department through our embassy in India, and our embassy operations in Dubai or Doha in the Gulf to allow spouses to be located much closer to where their Foreign Service officer spouse was working in Kabul and Dubai. If I recall it was about an hour and a half flight, maybe direct flight to Dubai. And the other was Kuwait City. And we were pursuing this together with certain of our operations inside AID. Because of humanitarian disaster response capability requirements, because they were needing people who had some of those living and working experiences elsewhere. It was going to be a win-win-win all around. Then it became clear for various reasons, I will not go into detail on this discussion, that the U.S. embassy in New Delhi did not want to have such an arrangement nor did the embassy in

Islamabad, nor did the embassies in Kuwait, nor embassies of the U.S. in the Emirates or Qatar.

We had to shelve that. And again, I can't go into the details about the reasons for why this was not allowed. But yes, we did, we did try. And we were trying to do what USAID does best, which is be creative, resourceful, out of the box thinking so that we could have longer continuity of our officers, because we knew that many of our officers would serve longer in place if they could stay more closely and easily connected with their loved ones.

In terms of lessons learned, we still don't have that kind of arrangement or capability, as far as I know. We did however, with our Foreign Service nationals, who we were extremely dependent upon it, especially in Afghanistan, we were eventually able to come up with mechanisms that were very powerful motivators to them to not only serve on TDY in Afghanistan, from wherever they were coming from India, or Kosovo, or El Salvador but to stay for a year or two, or three or four or five, and that was by converting their FSN grade to a GS Civil Service grade equivalent. And all the benefits which meant these Foreign Service nationals were being paid basically, an international expatriate third country nationals pay scales. And we got some of the best and brightest around the world that way. And most senior of course, that's one way or where every mission every mission director around the world basically contributed to the war effort in Afghanistan and Pakistan. It was by letting their best FSN in many cases come to our aid. And just in most cases, I think they did not return until they were ready to retire. Because financially could retire at that point and retire well. But having very highly skilled USAID FSNs made all the difference in the world, especially in Afghanistan, where we did not have to get State Department blessing on the decision. We were able to be creative and resourceful out of the box and advance our program.

Q: Excellent. I just wanted to ask you. I know you stayed engaged on issues related to Afghanistan over the years and your different posts. But just wondering, what was your involvement? And what do you see as key issues involved with the evacuation from Afghanistan in 2021. We all know, August 15 the Taliban took over Kabul and the government fell. But as part of this oral history for U.S. diplomacy in Afghanistan, ADST is interested in yourself and other U.S. diplomats. What has been your involvement? And what do you see as the key issues with the evacuation?

BEVER: I was away from the Afghan/Pakistan details for ten years when the balloon went up August 2021. I'd stayed in touch via various informal dialogues with some Afghanistan senior most leaders and their cabinet and with our own diplomatic and military practitioners, who had more recently than me been involved with Afghanistan and Pakistan. I don't damn the current administration for what happened there. The prior administration wanted to leave Afghanistan, the current administration also wanted to leave Afghanistan, but wanted to allow more time for the internal logistics of it to secure ourselves during a phase down and phase out. Although, I always assumed that we would phase down, not phase out completely. I always assumed at least on a military and intelligence level, we would maintain a small cadre of elite forces inside Afghanistan. And I saw when I served there myself in 2003 and 2004 the benefit of having both military and intelligence assets, and their command and control located physically inside the country.

I knew from other means that there were some very committed views that we could operate outside. That was evident to me going back to the 2009–2010 period, some very forceful senior U.S. government views on that from some very prominent Americans. And so the ultimate decision of this president, executed by this secretary of state, was to pull all of our civilian officers out. And fortunately, our active duty Foreign Service Nationals who wanted to leave got out, along with their immediate family members that could be pulled out and wanted to be pulled out.It was tragic obviously, that ISIS elements set off the suicide bombing that killed our U.S. soldiers, and many, many Afghans killed and injured at the airport that day. I don't know that the internecine conflict between the Taliban and ISIS—who are even more reactionary and radical and are vying for control—under those chaotic circumstances of our departure, I don't know that we could have prevented that. My own view is it could have been a hell of a lot worse. However, I'll say two things. One is that our Foreign Service nationals basically sensed and knew from their own family members and their own places of birth and their own on the ground awareness that the jig was up. The jig was up much earlier than mid-August, the jig was up.

Sometime late June, early July, it was likely clear what was happening in the countryside. And that things were collapsing. And that the Afghan military with supportive U.S. military and our intelligence resources were not able to stem the tide. And the Taliban were creating reality on the ground. And some of the FSNs were becoming quite concerned, extraordinarily anxious about the ability for their families to be able to get out of the country. They put their lives on the line. They took daily risks, just entering and leaving the embassy compound and getting home.

I was involved over a decade earlier in the decision to extend the Iraq SIV policy of one year to the Afghan SIVs [Special Immigrant Visas]. And I think it was the right decision even though it made it hard to retain them once they were hired. It sure made it a hell of a lot easier to hire them in the first place and to get one or even many more years of service out of them, which was worth it. I think that was a good policy. Basically, our FSNs knew the jig was up, at least a couple of months before the decision was made to fly in big planes and bring people out and that it was getting beyond our and the Afghan government's ability to hold, to keep the finger in the dike. I have to assume there had been a lot of Emergency Action Committee plans, a lot of trip wires established. And I'm not going to speculate. It's not appropriate for me to do so as I didn't have direct knowledge of that.

What I did not understand is why we weren't able to surge a capacity either in person or digitally with the video technology that we have around the world now in the State Department and other agencies to process more of our former retired FSNs who were still residing in Kabul and elsewhere around the country with their family members. Afghans who worked for the U.S. government but who had left that employment were still marked by the Taliban and still living in the country. Why did they have to leave Afghanistan and go to a second country in order to apply as refugees for asylum? If that policy of the United States is in law, then, then we should change that law in these situations. If it's in USG practice, we should change that practice for these kinds of situations. Those people could have been interviewed, processed, and evacuated. After proper screening, on a

much more accelerated basis, with each department and agency of the U.S. government ordered to take care of such people in advance. Anyway, that's my view. And I think that's a shameful lesson.

And even people like now a retired CIA director and a retired General, I think in July, was saying, "Why aren't we moving these people out by plane now?" One of the lessons learned seems to me that in a protected, secure, classified way we should keep records, if our local employees are willing, as well as of relatives willing, that would be appropriate to also be evacuated because of credible threats to their lives, should a similar situation happen in the future. I think if this happened again, in another country, we'd be in the same mess. But I have to assume we haven't done such efforts in countries where you could have this kind of situation in the future.

I guess the other thing that did work well I'll say for USAID, is that senior political appointees reached out to our Alumni Association and asked our alumni association if we could step up and volunteer to help with our Foreign Service Nationals who had been evacuated to the USA. So we then stepped up and helped a third of those FSN evacuees to find jobs here in the United States. And to more informally help their families out with everything from schooling, to health needs, and cultural adjustment. I think it was a good practice and a good decision by the agency to reach out to our alumni association, and bless our fifty alumni that stepped up to the plate almost immediately and stuck with it for almost a year to help them. That was good practice.

Q: That's fantastic.

BEVER: I should say one thing about budget. Some of my colleagues have said we had too much money in Afghanistan, and maybe in Pakistan, but especially in Afghanistan. I disagree. As one who started out with just barely a hundred million dollars when the war started in late 2001–early 2002 and had to fight and hardscrabble to get a billion dollars a year. I actually applauded when Ambassador Karl Eikenberry, former three star general Eikenberry, with whom I first worked when he was a one star and two star general in Afghanistan. He became our ambassador to Afghanistan and we worked together again then, with me running our HQ Task Force. He said, "Look, I want two and a half billion dollars for Afghanistan." And I believed, as he did, that we needed to do that at that point in time which was the start of the Obama administration. So that we had enough money to last just for a couple of years because we didn't know when the bloom was going to come off the rose. And we knew there would be financial pipelines built up. But we felt that was better than needing the funds and not being able to have the appropriators provide them. And in Pakistan, which I knew even better than Afghanistan, having served there for four years doing infrastructure work in the war against the Soviets, it had much greater absorptive capacity than Afghanistan did.

And I always felt the one and a half billion dollars for Pakistan under the Lugar Act, was to my mind, basically a down payment on what was needed in a country where our existential interests were at stake. I'm sure this will come up in your other interviews, but that's where I stand on the budget. The one area where it was complicated was the policy of the SRAP, Ambassador Holbrooke, which was initiated I think, because of a signal that came from the top of our government, that we needed to do more of our aid in places like

Afghanistan and Pakistan, especially at the local level, and with local organizations. And not so much with the big U.S. contractors and big U.S. PVOs and NGOs. Fifty percent is what Ambassador Holbrooke instructed acting director Acting Administrator Alonzo Fulgham that we needed to do. And when this kind of an approach was discussed within the government, I won't go into details, my own position was that all of us development professionals understood the value of that. But the consequence of doing it in such a sudden, very immediate way, rather than a deliberate planned way over a number of years, was that we ran the risk of either creating huge financial pipelines or choking to death some good local organizations that couldn't handle so much money, or that had financial accountability vulnerabilities because they wouldn't be able to have the controls in place to really account for what was happening with larger amounts of money that exceeded their carrying capacity, or all of the above. And I made my views known within our government.

But the decision was to damn the torpedoes and move full speed ahead. Just do it. And of course, soon became an aspirational policy, which is what it eventually was called by the Obama administration because it became clear that we couldn't really move that much money in that way that fast in a place like Afghanistan responsibly. And we were not administratively or legally equipped to be able to actually execute in a financially accountable, programmatically accountable way in Afghanistan with those magnitudes of funds.

Q: You may be aware that at one point also, former President Karzai asked the Obama administration that 50 percent of all U.S. assistance, especially USAID, come through what they called on budget or through government systems. And it was also extremely difficult in a country on the corruption index.

BEVER: I am aware of that. Because it was evident during the Holbrooke time before his tragic death. That it was becoming evident to him that we needed to have a broader definition of what we meant by the 50 percent rule. And so we had proposed, instead of just funds only to local contractors and local grantees in these countries, that we also be able to use tried and true USAID mechanisms such as Fixed Account Reimbursable Agreements, host country contracting, sector support grants, cash transfers, and public international organization grants—those kinds of things. And what was becoming clear was, there was one ministry that looked like it had the leadership and the internal controls that would be worth testing, which was the Ministry of Health. And I think our first arrangements like that were modest, they were maybe in the hundreds of thousands of dollars, we may have done a pilot with them, and then we expanded it to maybe forty million dollars.

And that's when I transferred to Egypt, in late 2010, and I lost track of it. I don't know how, ultimately, that worked out. I do know that in 2004 we put a lot more money into the Afghanistan National Solidarity program, via the Afghan Reconstruction Trust Fund, which was, in our view, a reasonably pretty good program that was originally the Ministry of Rural Development's initiative, along with the World Bank. I was the mission director that put the first USAID money into it to the tune of ten million dollars back in 2004. And I think Ambassador Holbrooke wanted a lot more money and eventually got a lot more money of USAID put into that mechanism.

Q: You'll be happy to know when I got to Kabul in 2013, that health program, on budget with the Ministry of Health, had grown to about a hundred and thirty million dollars.

BEVER: Wow.

Q: And I'm actually, was one of the more successful on budget, government to government programs that USAID had that then morphed into, well, it was kind of moved into the World Bank health program. In any case, it's interesting to hear the genesis of some of these commitments and programs.

Any concluding reflections and lessons learned on the overall U.S. involvement twenty years and involvement in and withdrawal from Afghanistan, you mentioned the whole series of lessons learned and this terrific interview, but can any concluding reflections and lessons learned?

BEVER: Yes, and as one of our senior career USAID colleagues would say, "We keep relearning the same lessons." And I will say upfront, all of us who served there and put our lives at risk there, whether it was on short-term TDY or was on working on the ground for a year or more. I don't think most of us ever questioned the importance of our presence there. And the effort to do our best to help the Afghan government stand up again, which had functioned back in the 1950s, 1960s, and early 1970s, before the Soviet issues started to deteriorate the country leading to the civil war. And we saw this as doable. And there were some good leaders in the cabinet. There were some who were not so good, but every cabinet has that.

And most of us who took personal risks, felt they were risks worth being taken. And we knew, and those of us who had been there on the ground, we knew what that meant, it meant you could be shot out of the sky, it meant you could be driving on a road and get blown to smithereens because of a buried IED, that meant you could be shot by a sniper, it meant you could be kidnapped. And we didn't take those risks lightly, not for our direct staff, nor for anybody of any expatriate nationality including Afghans and paid with USAID funds, when any of them lost their life or was kidnapped, or injured, it was a very sobering experience obviously, for everybody. But we believed, those that served there, many of us, most of us, I have to believe, believed that we were doing the right thing.

What we obviously were not responsible for was how the military, policing, counter-narcotics,t and intelligence parts of the efforts were going. We were there to support the other civilian aspects of raising this Afghan government up. Hard lessons learned, I think, were as I've said before, that once corruption got insidiously deep, we were not able to help them maintain control. The U.S. government's initial unwillingness and then inability to help the Afghan government get control over the opium narcotics industry is another sobering and I believe causal lesson learned. Narcotics in Afghanistan is at its roots, so to say, an incredible agro industry, indeed a multinational international agricultural industry–especially when other elements of what we call corruption are long-held tribal practices and cultural practices of allegiance, reciprocity, and legitimacy–these were outside of our ability, at least for USAID alone, to control or influence. Nor I think, did we have the standing or the gravitas, at least initially inside the either of the George W. Bush or the Obama administrations, when seated around the

decision-formulating and decision-making tables with our military combat generals, our intelligence officials, our State Department diplomats, and our Treasury officials to—prevail on these questions.

In terms of the internal accountability on corruption issues, our inspectors general in various parts and in those parts of the government of Afghanistan did not appear to me that these concerns were being taken as seriously as they could have and should have been. I think the two U.S. Administrations correctly figured out that security at the village level was important, and that soldiers, whether they were Afghan or American or other NATO allies' soldiers, should not be policing. That's a civilian function that should be part of the civilian government's function. And the U.S. was never able to come up with an approach there through the Ministry of Interior, despite some good leadership at times at its top,to get an effective handle on that.

I think that the Taliban had already gone too far, the cancer of corruption had already done its damage. And at the larger diplomatic level, our American and international inability to get the Pakistanis and the Indians to cease stirring the pot constantly in Afghanistan from the outside, in their own national interests, I think is an unfortunate global diplomatic legacy.

I guess I'll finally say that I think our agency USAID, I say our because we're all still very faithful to USAID where we spent our careers, is probably still not prepared enough to be able to respond quickly and effectively enough when USAID will be called upon, again, to mount an in-country response with direct hire officers, or officers under some quick call mechanisms that had trained and drilled basically with other U.S. government agencies like especially Defense Department. I think our bureaucratic mechanisms between us and the State Department still have not been honed adequately for such circumstances which will happen. There will continue to be "Next Times." So yes, we could have had longer than one-year assignments in the future in these kinds of situations. And the mechanisms could have been established for spouses to be closer to their Foreign Service officers spouses to be able to serve longer. There seems to be some built-in resistance to such in the State Department and in the *Foreign Affairs Manual*, which, as far as I know, have not been upgraded in order to foresee such future contingencies. And I wonder if our emergency evacuation procedures have been upgraded yet, institutionally in the State Department or USAID, so that we actually know how to contact former retired FSNs who were under our employment, or former in-country, local employees who work for USAID contractors and grantees, using secure databases that are classified and protected but available, so that we could in fact, accelerate the evacuation of such people under duress who weren't still on active duty but who served us at risk even of association with us. They still are at risk after having been former employees, as are their immediate family members. There is still some work to be done looking forward to being able to respond to this kind of national security need when USAID is again called upon in the future.

End of interview