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# DAVID HARDEN

*Interviewed by: Carol Peasley*
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[1] Note that discussion of the 2013 - 2016 period is included in earlier sections in which Mr. Harden covers his experiences in the West Bank and Gaza.

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## INTERVIEW

*Q: Today is February 28, 2024, this is Carol Peasley with interview number one with David Harden. Dave, we are delighted to have this chance to talk with you. I wonder if you could start by telling us where you were born, where you grew up, a little bit about yourself, and your family, so we get to know you a bit better.*

### Early Background, Childhood, Family, Education, and Pre-USAID Employment

HARDEN: Well, Carol, thank you for having me, it's an honor to be a part of this program with you. You're a legend. For us to have this conversation really is an honor for me. I am a small-town country boy. I grew up in Westminster, Maryland, I was actually born on a farm in Reisterstown, Maryland, which is about sixty miles north of D.C. [Washington D.C.], just below the Pennsylvania Line. When I was five, we moved to Carroll County, which fifty-five years ago was very, very rural. It's still pretty rural right now. I grew up on a small farm and went to public school and you can imagine, I mean, this is "Trump country" here, but back in the late 60s and early 70s, it was "Wallace country." I mean, it's a very conservative rural area. It's changed from when I grew up, but it was very conservative and rural. I grew up on a small farm where I raised chickens, we had a gigantic garden, we had horses, and my dad later raised steers, which he still is doing at the age of eighty-five.

*Q: Was farming the business?*

HARDEN: They were hobby farms, but for IRS [Internal Revenue Service] tax purposes, we're not going to say that, but I'm actually jumping ahead, fifty-five years, I'm back in Westminster on a farm that we have, that my wife and I have that is close to the farm where I grew up. We have chickens, goats, bees, pigs, and sheep or oil and water, and we're putting in a commercial greenhouse next week. I've actually gone full circle. I was really shaped by these small-town rural values. I went to public school, small elementary school, then increasingly larger junior high school, and then high school. The way it works in a lot of America, particularly in rural areas is that you actually have a pretty large high school pretty, you don't have a lot of public high schools in the rural counties. When I was growing up, there were four in this county,

and they were all kind of big. So I went to a big public high school, Westminster High School. Let me stop there before we get to college and see if you have any questions?

*Q: I vaguely recall from my youth that there were many scenes of stress from rural Maryland during the 1960's civil rights movement. Was that true in your community as well? Or was that more in other parts of Southern Maryland?*

HARDEN: You mean protests in favor of civil rights or–?

*Q: Both violence and strife.*

HARDEN: I mean, the KKK [Ku Klux Klan] was very prominent when I was growing up. I remember, in the sixth grade, our gym teacher asked–I'm not going to use his last name–asked Josh, "Hey, Josh, I saw you parking cars at the Klan rally last night." There were definitely Klan marches in Westminster, in downtown, in the late 1970s, early 1980s, for sure. I think when we moved, again, we moved from one farm area that my parents were just kind of renting to another. And, in the new place where we moved to, my dad got a welcome to the neighborhood mail from the Klan in 1966 and 1967. Honestly, a lot of this really shaped my life and my thinking. I mean, my parents were both very educated. We had an exchange student from Switzerland that lived with us through the American Field Service, which really shaped much of what I ended up doing with my life. In fact, I spoke to him yesterday, he's in Zurich, and my son was visiting him in Zurich last night.

In 1978 or 1979, we had an exchange student from Switzerland come and live with us. He liked soccer, he wore clogs, he had a big fur coat in the winter, and he had a funny accent. None of that worked in Westminster High School in 1978-1979. But it was interesting, and we had a lot of big conversations about the world. I had always wanted to be a lawyer from a pretty early age, but Peter and his visit really opened up the space for me to think and, again, I am back in the hometown where I grew up. So even though I'm saying a lot of things that are negative about it, I'm back in the hometown that I grew up in. One of the things that was really hard for me, in a way when I was growing up, was that there was a lot of anti-intellectualism. Almost nobody went to college, and those that did, they went to the community college. There weren't a lot of heightened expectations.

Very few people went to private, small private liberal arts colleges. So I kind of bumped against that and rebelled against that for like forty years or something. However, at the same token, it's a very beautiful area. It's changed pretty seriously, because now it's an outskirt of D.C. and Baltimore, so you got a lot more money and higher end farms and all this kind of stuff. However, I ran for Congress, I don't know if you knew this. So I went back, and I looked at the voting record of this county when I was growing up to see if it was my perception, or if it was reality, supported by facts, and everything I've laid out to you is just all supported by facts.

*Q: Right. You said the farm was not the business. What were they doing?*

HARDEN: My dad was an engineer. He worked at Westinghouse, and then later Northrop Grumman near BWI [Baltimore Washington International] Airport, which was a big tech center. He did some leading-edge technology in the late 60s, 70s, and early 80s. My mom was a teacher, and she was a special education teacher. She has a PhD, I mean, she passed, but she had a PhD. Then she became a trainer for teachers in Maryland, on special education and disabilities. So in this rural area, they were very, very educated. We had a very traditional family structure, and it was nice, it was good, it was all nice. But then the funny thing is my family has been in this area on both sides for four hundred years. But my parents and their parents emigrated from the country to the city. They grew up in Baltimore City, my grandparents were in Baltimore City in the 1930s, 40s, 50s, and 60s, I guess, and then my parents were in Baltimore City in the 1950s and early 60s, and so then they moved out back to the kind of area where I am originally from. Are you in D.C. or where are you?

*Q: I live in D.C.*

HARDEN: I mean, we're just sixty miles straight north of D.C. Frederick County, Carroll County, and Baltimore County, those are the three counties just kind of on the Pennsylvania Line, we were on the upper end of that, and my family and both sides have been there forever. Interestingly, my parents moved away from the city, which was a bit of a rebellion for them in the early 60s. My mom went to McDaniel College, which was then called Western Maryland College. Then later, Hopkins, my dad went to University of Maryland, and then, they got married young. Even though they grew up in the city, I grew up in the country 100 percent, I lived in the country.

Q: *That's an interesting pattern. But you have long roots in the country.*

HARDEN: Yes. Very deep roots, which did not get me to Congress, by the way. It gave me a real run for the money on the eastern shore, and then this kind of rural band, just south of the Pennsylvania border.

*Q: Okay. Do you have siblings as well?*

HARDEN: I have a sister. She's in Virginia. We are all good. I mean, my mom passed away about two years ago. My dad is eighty-five. He still raises steers [a type of cow]. He's really in extraordinary health. He's very, very active. I'm getting ready to have dinner with him tonight.

*Q: Well, that's great. So, you mentioned you went to public high school and that few of the students went on to college, but you obviously did. What were you thinking about when you were looking for colleges? What were your priorities?*

HARDEN: I mean, my mom had the expectation, and I'm glad she did, that there was no question about me going to college, I was always going to go to college. My mom really was leaning towards small liberal arts colleges. Partly because that's what she

started out with, which is now McDaniel, but Western Maryland at the time, in the early 1960s. So, I only looked at small liberal arts colleges, and I chose Franklin and Marshall in Lancaster, which, to put this into some perspective for you all in the audience. Lancaster was a much bigger city from where I grew up. In some ways, it was a good step. I really liked Franklin and Marshall a lot, I liked Lancaster a lot, I liked the fact that it wasn't too far away from home. So it was only an hour and a half away from home and it had a strong pre-law program. I also studied a lot in terms of foreign policy when I was at Franklin and Marshall.

The New York Times just recently had a survey about what is the right college for you? They asked you to fill out what it is that you wanted, and I went back and I took this survey, and I tried to put myself back into my eighteen year old head. I took the survey and really Franklin and Marshall was a great choice, which I made at eighteen. Looking back, it was a really formative choice for me. It wasn't too much of a stretch, meaning it was kind of spot on. It just stretched me enough, but not too much. I had confidence, we had small classes, I had deep relations with friends, and professors and all. It was good.

*Q: So, you said you were in a pre-law program. But you also did some foreign policy work? You said, you'd always wanted to be a lawyer. Did you know what you wanted to do in the law?*

HARDEN: From that perspective, Franklin and Marshall could get you into law school. What they probably don't do is get you into necessarily the top national law schools, but if you go there, you go to law school, for sure. Maybe some people get into the top national law schools. For me at that time, I mean, earlier on, I didn't have any big vision of being like a New York lawyer or D.C. lawyer. I mean, I was just gonna be a lawyer in my own town or something like that. Again, when we had this exchange student, Peter, he really opened my eyes to a much bigger part of the world. Then I did a study abroad in my junior year I went to London, which, okay–

*Q: With Franklin and Marshall?*

HARDEN: Yeah, but look, London is about the most modest semester that you could possibly do. But for me, that was still a big stretch and London's a fantastic, fantastic city. In fact, I really learned a lot. I traveled all around Europe. I spent some time seeing Peter in Switzerland. So I really started to become interested very seriously in foreign policy when I was in college. But I made a pivot in my senior year.

*Q: What year was this, your senior year?*

HARDEN: This was 19– well– I graduated in 1984. So around 1983, I started to make some pivots in my mind about the direction that I wanted to go.

*Q: Okay. You mentioned the exchange student, Peter, who was with you, and you mentioned your junior year in London. Had your family traveled at all internationally as well? I'm just wondering how much international exposure you had?*

HARDEN: No. Peter was the impetus behind all that. Yeah.

*Q: Okay, and I'm trying to think what was going on internationally in 1983?*

HARDEN: Well, I went to college in 1980. The Soviets invaded Afghanistan, Reagan was nearly assassinated in Washington Hilton. There was a lot about Margaret Thatcher in London, there were a lot of protests and debates about Star Wars, the anti ballistic missile systems, and the placement of the Persian missiles in Western Europe.

*Q: And Central America, especially the Iran-Contra Affair, was in the news.*

HARDEN: Central America was very hot. I was more focused on Europe than, say, Central America, but I was aware of Nicaragua and El Salvador, for sure. In many respects, this was still a very intense time in the Cold War. Having Peter in Switzerland, the post-World War Two era, with Swiss neutrality, and kind of expanding the European Union and NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization], I actually kind of tracked all this stuff. I mean, it was kind of interesting to me, and I had a couple of professors that I worked with pretty closely. Looking back, because I ended up going to Columbia and Georgetown and all this stuff later, Franklin and Marshall, they had professors who weren't maybe nationally known or world renowned or hadn't written a lot of textbooks that everybody was reading, but they cared and they pushed, and we had a relationship with them. By far different than what I had anywhere else. I mean, that helped me to see the larger world too. I was a government major, but I also was an English minor and took economic courses.

*Q: Okay. So the pivot was–?*

HARDEN: I really started to like in foreign policy, but how do you even get a job in foreign policy? How do you even know? I ended up applying to law school and the Peace Corps concurrently. So, when the Peace Corps came to visit, I was very intrigued by them. I didn't know what to do, because, of course, I had been, I'd been wanting to be a lawyer since I was in seventh grade or something like that. In my senior year, and of course, nowadays, people study for a year for the LSAT [Law School Admission Test] and spend 10,000 dollars on courses and we didn't do all that then. We had weekend courses, and I studied through a book and I took the LSAT. I did well enough. I also applied for the Peace Corps. I heard from law school earlier, I got into GW [George Washington University], I paid the matriculation fee, which is just a small amount to hold your spot. I went to the orientation, let's say that was all in March and April or something like that. Then I heard in June– let's say, May or June that the Peace Corps had decided to place me in Botswana, which is a place I'd never heard of in my entire life. I bet you almost nobody else had either.

At that point, Botswana had been independent for eighteen years. They got independence in 1966. This was 1984 let's just say, actually, I think it was– yeah, it was 1984. They were one of the poorest countries, at Independence, in the world. They subsequently made a lot of great decisions and are doing very well. I just decided I'm gonna go to the Peace Corps. So that summer after graduation, I didn't do anything except I was a lifeguard. We had training in the U.S. a little bit before we went to Botswana, and the training was in Harpers Ferry. So the entire Peace Corps class comes together, and it's at a facility which is forty-five minutes from where I grew up. Then, in November, we flew. At that point, Botswana was still pretty undeveloped and there wasn't a modern airport. We landed and the Peace Corps volunteers that were already there, met us at the airport, and there was nothing. I mean, it's like a landing strip, we flew in from South Africa. I just remember seeing these people who were a little bit older, and they were tan, and they looked like they were kind of living an interesting life. We had just flown in from the United States in November. It was really just absolutely fantastic. So going into the Peace Corps and going into Botswana, changed everything at that point. So I put law school on hold.

*Q: What were you doing in the Peace Corps in Botswana? What was your position and where were you stationed?*

HARDEN: I was a teacher and I opened up Chobe Junior Secondary School in the very rural North of Botswana, on the Zimbabwe-Zambia border along the Chobe River. They never had a junior high school or senior high school there before. I took the first class ever of sixth graders that were going into seventh grade, plus, anybody who had graduated from sixth grade in the last few years, we're all kind of jammed in. We were just given a block off of the elementary school. There was a Canadian, me, and the principal from Botswana, and we just started the school. Let me tell you one really incredible story. The school meant everything to me. I was an English teacher. I raised chickens. This is not that incredible of a story, but I'm going to tell you, I raised chickens and I was the gym teacher. It was absolutely fantastic. I mean, look, being an English teacher was easy enough, but I really liked being the gym teacher. I ran around, we played everything and stuff like that. Of course, we couldn't play against anybody. So because there were no schools for hundreds of miles. We played the prisoners. I remember pulling our team together, a bunch of fourteen-year-olds and thinking "look, we don't have anybody to play, let's go play the prisoners. They're come over–".

*Q: What were you playing? What sport?*

HARDEN: The students were saying, "no we can't play them! These guys are big, they're men. They're dangerous criminals." I said, "listen, you guys are smarter than they are. So let's just go ahead and play them." Then on the chickens. I mean, I would hitchhike down to Gaborone, I would get a bunch of day-old chicks, I'd put them in boxes, I would hitchhike 1,000 kilometers back up to the north. Then we would raise the chickens and I did three things with the chickens. I sold them at very expensive international prices to the game lodge. It was just ten cents less, let's say than what

they would get flown in from South Africa, but I would say to them at a very kind of inflated price because they want a good quality stuff. Then at the local market, I sold it at the local price. Then all that profit generated school lunch programs for the kids. The kids help do all the work. It was fascinating. Of course, I had raised chickens, so I knew– I didn't know what I was doing– but I did kind of know what I was doing. Soccer! football!

*Q: Ok. Football.*

HARDEN: Very, very, very funny story. A couple of weeks ago, I was on Facebook, which is something I never do, but I was on Facebook marketplace looking to buy some goats. I saw that I had a message, and it was from one of my students in 1985, this is now 2024. He reached out and asked if I was David the teacher, and I said, "yes". Then he told me who he was. Through a long story short, I connected with all of the class. I got three or four WhatsApp messages today. I mean, I connected with them in the last, say, two weeks. It was rather extraordinary to take a snapshot of 1985, 1986 and then today see what happened.

I'm going to tell you, there were eighty students that I taught. Some of them became professors. One was a wildlife, senior wildlife Ranger, one works at the Ministry of Agriculture. One was a police detective. In the city, they all had real jobs, they all had real big, successful jobs. Some who didn't. For instance, one woman had only been a cleaner her whole life in the hospital, wrote me and she said, "the only reason why I was a cleaner that I was able to get this job is because you taught me English, and the public and the government hospital wanted people who knew how to speak and read English. I've had a steady job for twenty-five years. Even though it's a modest job as a cleaner, you taught me."

They were so incredibly gracious to me. Of course, as a twenty-two year old Peace Corps volunteer, I really learned much more from them than I gave to them. There were two lessons that I learned. One was reinforced in the last two weeks. I learned that we opened up talent for those who have been excluded. None of those kids, up until that year, went to seventh grader beyond. None of them. Nobody in that village. That village had shut down education for thirteen-year-olds and beyond for its entire history. So opening that aperture to allow education to continue to these rural village kids really helps that society and helps those kids.

The other thing that I learned is that 25 percent of the people died from AIDS. So, this is– I'm not sure forty years or something like that, since I was last year, forty years, 20 percent died. A lot of them did really well, and 25 percent died. Again, because PEPFAR [President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief] is actually in the news right now about whether it'll be re-funded. Keeping people alive and keeping people educated really makes a big difference in society. This is all very striking and it's all very, very, very recent to me, as all these communications just happened in the last two weeks.

*Q: That's a wonderful success story for the Peace Corps as well.*

HARDEN: I really loved it. Listen, I know, in the terms these days, like I was privileged, okay, I mean, actually, I didn't know that. I had an obligation to give back. I went to a private college, my parents paid for it, my student loans, and then went to the Peace Corps. As a twenty-two year old, you don't actually have any skills offered. As a twenty-two year old liberal arts major, you literally have no skills. However, for some reason I was able to go, and the only skill that I really brought was energy, and then kind of drive and like running around with the kids who were hardly any younger than me. I mean, some of them could have been sixteen or seventeen, and I was twenty-two. So yeah, there we go.

*Q: Come on, you brought chicken raising skills and some entrepreneurship. So that's a wonderful story. Did you have any exposure to USAID [United States Agency for International Development] when you were in Botswana?*

HARDEN: Yes, yes, yes. Well, first of all, when I was a Peace Corps volunteer, we all thought that USAID was just big, rich people that drove Land Cruisers and completely disconnected from everybody and that they were slightly closer than the World Bank and would fly in to sprinkle their money and then fly out. I did get arrested for insulting the postman in my village because I was trying to– it actually was quite innocent, but as I was leaving, I was trying to weigh my stuff to get it out but this guy wouldn't let me weigh, I put it on and put it off. He'd been very rude to me. So, I said he was being rude to me. I said, "Sorry you're being very rude and impolite." So, then I got arrested. I had to call Peace Corps and they called the embassy and I get that they're all different agencies and lines and all that stuff. However, the RLA [Regional Legal Adviser] from the mission came up and helped me. I think I got released on my own recognizance.

*Q: That was the Regional Legal Adviser. Who was it? Do you remember who it was?*

HARDEN: No, no, it was like in 1986. I'm assuming I got this right. Who knows? So, from there essentially I left Peace Corps and I went to Columbia. Okay. I mean, there was a few months off and all that kind of stuff. But I went to Columbia, and I was in a PhD program at Columbia. I loved the Peace Corps, it changed everything. I was crying my eyes out when I left.

*Q: You were there for two years?*

HARDEN: I was there for two years. I really thought long and hard about staying for third year. I decided against it because I mean, I had done it and a third year didn't add anything more. It was just so interesting and lovely that I was really strongly interested in doing it. I decided it was time to get back and start graduate school. So, I didn't go back to law school. I went to a PhD program.

*Q: At Colombia in International relations? Okay. Just one other thought about Peace Corps Botswana: a number of very distinguished USAID people were also Peace Corps volunteers in Botswana, including Bill Jeffers and Stephanie Funk, so it was a Peace Corps program that had some real benefits for USAID.*

HARDEN: It really did. It was a lovely country; it was on a clear trajectory towards success. Yeah, it was lovely. Have you ever been there?

*Q: Yes. I visited a couple times on business but have not had the chance to be a real tourist there.*

HARDEN: I've never gone back which is sad and shocking. I said the other day to my wife, "I gotta go back at some point before I die." I don't know when that will be, but I'm going to go back.

*Q: You mentioned selling chickens to the game lodge. You were right near Chobe National Park?*

HARDEN: Yes, I was in Chobe!

*Q: Okay. One of the things that Botswana was doing, as in other southern African countries, was community based natural resources management. USAID was working to help the communities benefit in some way from the presence of parks, and the idea was to have them earn some income so that they would help to reduce or get the communities to help support anti-poaching efforts. Did you ever see any of that work when you were in Chobe?*

HARDEN: Limited. Three quick things. Number one, most of the money though, comes from diamonds. Botswana has been one of the very, very few countries that has been able to take extractive resources and use them productively. It's because partly they had a significant ownership interest in De Beers and they were able to use that money productively. So secondly, very limited engagement. I mean, I went to the game park which was a kilometer from there. I went to the game park literally all the time. It was an extraordinary game park. My house was maybe four hundred yards from the entrance. I'd sit and have beers and watch the sunset over the Chobe River a lot.

When I ran for Congress, the watermen on Maryland's eastern shore on the Chesapeake Bay, I developed a very deep relationship with the watermen. Now, the watermen are not Democratic voters. So, they helped me not at all in the Democratic primary, which is where I lost, but they either don't vote or if they do, they're Trump supporters. I decided my theory on my running that I wanted to demonstrate because this is a heavily conservative area, that's Trump country. So, I wanted to demonstrate that I could get some of the Republicans, the independents, and the Democrats so that I could win in a general election.

I just didn't win in the primary. But I spent an enormous amount of time really understanding the watermen. My great great grandmother grew up on the water. I use the example of the game parks in Africa all the time. Nothing works, if the local population, if the indigenous people next to the big natural resource are excluded from the economic gains that are there. If they are included, then they are the best storers of those natural resources and you can't ignore them.

Even though my entire adult life was spent overseas and Africa and Asia and the Middle East, when I spoke to Watermen who don't like lots of people, they totally understood the relevance of my experience, and my background and my background is the validator but my experience as it related to them, they totally understand. Look, if it's just the Chesapeake Bay Foundation, a bunch of high-end hotels, politicians, and people with yachts using the bay, nothing will work.

If they ignore the Watermen, who break their back on the water every single day, who know the water better than anybody else, who know and have an innate feeling, and whose livelihood is attached to the success and the stewardship and environmental integrity of the Chesapeake Bay, then you can have some success but honestly, our entire ecosystem excludes them. They all hate each other. They all hate each other. The environmentalists hate the Watermen, the Watermen hate environmentalists, and Watermen just feel completely marginalized and excluded. Which is why they all voted for Trump!

*Q: Yes; this is a great example of the relevance of your international experience and the arrogance of intellectual elites.*

HARDEN: The New York Times did a massive spread on my campaign right before the primary, of course, it didn't matter. They interviewed all the watermen and they had me with the watermen. I mean, there's a lot of rural anger. There's lots of reasons behind that but to dissect that is, really my experiences in the Peace Corps, but also in USAID really helped form my understanding of what is happening in rural America.

*Q: That's very interesting. Okay, you left Botswana, then in 1986?*

HARDEN: In 1986. I started in Columbia–

*Q: Your initial intent was to enter a PhD program, although, I don't think you ended up staying–*

HARDEN: I decided very quickly, I was going to get a degree that wasn't going to get me a job. I was going to take an enormous amount of student loans and opportunity costs and I would end up being an "in the system professor" somewhere out in the middle of nowhere, without any prospects. So, I got a master's degree from Columbia and then left the graduate program and worked in a couple different places, but ended up going back to Peshawar Pakistan on the Afghan border and working with USAID contractors. Did you ever know Hank Cushing? He was like the crustiest old school,

USAID rep to Afghanistan. Back in the day, he smoked like a million cigarettes a day. I'm sure he wasn't successful in the aid bureaucracy, but out on the Afghan border, he was good. He died and his daughter actually supported my campaign. Yeah, from 1989 to 1991. I worked in Pakistan, I worked in Peshawar Pakistan.

*Q: Let me go back for just a second. So, you did the master's degree. Did you focus on development related international affairs? What did you specialize in?*

HARDEN: The deal was that you dropped out of the PhD program, but if you finish the year, they'll give you a master's. I took all the international affairs, like political economy, not necessarily international development, political economy, foreign policy, all that.

*Q: Okay. So, then you're looking for a job, and you end up going to work on the Afghanistan cross-border program in 1989?*

HARDEN: I had a short job in the middle, but in 1989.

Peshawar then and now is extraordinarily dangerous. At that point, the Mujahideen were our best friends. They later became the Taliban. The refugee camps were overflowing. It was very, very, very dangerous. The Pakistani intelligence services ran all across the border. We supported the Mujahideen. We met with them all the time. We would, it was– I worked for a contractor. I'm not going to name–

*Q: Okay, so you weren't working directly for USAID. You were working with an USAID implementing organization?*

HARDEN: I was working for a contractor. Yeah. It was almost like a poppy reduction program, which of course was an abysmal failure. It was like an AG [Agriculture] program that was encouraging farmers to raise corn and wheat instead of opium.

*Q: Farmers in Afghanistan?*

HARDEN: Yes. I mean, it was almost like the wild west in many regards. This was Charlie Wilson's War. I learned a lot about everything. It was a very fascinating two years. Peshawar was like the launching point for the war. It was very kinetic, very dangerous. The Peshawar club and the American club in Peshawar were like out of space wars. So, one day, we get a message that the lawyer from the Embassy in Islamabad is coming up, his name is Mark Ward. And we are all running around because this guy is coming to visit, and we want to make sure we have everything all locked in together and we look great. We brushed our teeth and combed our hair and shined our shoes with special care. But funny enough, I could not distinguish between USAID and State.

Okay, here I am, an USAID contractor with a master's program who worked abroad, and I looked at the org chart, and everybody is based at the State Department. Okay, it

does have a little dotted line with a little dotted box that says USAID, okay, but it's in the State Department org chart. Then you come to the embassy in Islamabad in the same building and there's this lawyer that comes up. Okay, it turns out it's the regional legal adviser for USAID who works at the embassy in Islamabad, but it's a separate mission, and he covered both Pakistan and he clearly covered Afghanistan, and his name was Mark Ward. I'm in the American Club. I see this guy and I'm thinking, "Damn man! He's like a rock star,". He's like near God. Now remember, as a Peace Corps volunteer USAID was so far above, you couldn't even envision this, but now I'm a contractor. The USAID lawyer comes and I'm still thinking, this is like a god coming down from the mountains to honor us with his wisdom or something like that.

I see Mark, and I say to him, "Hey, Mark, how did you get this job, man?" He gives me some advice. He says, "Look, go to the best law school you can, work at the top firm in the private sector that you can, and then hope there's an opening four or five years later." I'm thinking, "got it." That meeting with Mark Ward, who was legendary, stuck with me forever. So, I mean, I've spoken to Mark maybe not in the last year, but certainly a zillion times since then.

That was Peshawar, Pakistan. I decided, kind of talking to Mark that I was finally going to cash in my law school check. This was seven years later after I had applied. I had Georgetown on a waitlist too. Andy Cornblatt, who's I think, still, the dean today said to me, "Look, I'll keep giving you referrals. But at a certain point you're in the law school or not, so are you going to come or not?" I decided in 1991 that I would go to law school. So I left the Afghan border in mid-August of 1991. I flew directly back, and I started law school two weeks later. Of course, I looked like Indiana Jones coming into law school where everybody's super perfect and brilliant. So yeah, that was my time in Peshawar Pakistan.

*Q: Are there any lessons learned in that experience in Peshawar that stuck with you? Because you went on to some really, very important positions thereafter? I'm just wondering if there were any lessons learned from that early experience that stuck with you? You said, "it's a bizarre program".*

HARDEN: Yeah, it was, totally. I mean, you can't outdo the economy on opium. It's just never going to happen. You could really, really sense the changing vibe of the Mujahideen. On the one hand, they are our friends and freedom fighters of Afghans. There's some big cultural gaps between them and us, but you could see some kind of alignment. But I also started to see the Islamic fundamentalism that was very corrosive starting to seep into that even during my time there, I mean, I definitely saw others who were not Afghan. Such as Saudis, or whatever, coming in and beginning to support them.

It was weird because, "hmmm these are our allies," and I was all in for them at the time. When we look at the Afghanistan program now, we kind of look at it from a 2001 perspective to the time that we left, but our history with Afghanistan is much longer than that. So I was there when we loved the Mujahideen. There'll be a period

after our exit, where we'll have a history with Afghanistan. I mean, I liked the complexity, the conflict, the mix, but we also didn't accomplish anything.

*Q: Right. Was this your introduction to Islam?*

HARDEN: Yes, yes.

*Q: Because that focus on the Moslem world became another part of your career.*

HARDEN: Yes. I mean, Pakistan is a very complicated society. When people think of Pakistan, they think of Islamabad, Karachi, or Lahore which are more Indian subcontinent, Punjabi oriented. I mean, I was with the Pashtun up in the northwestern province. It's got a complete cultural distinction from all that. I did not, at that time, see the cataclysmic events that were soon to hit us, but it was fascinating, just from a cultural, political, economic, social experience. It was fascinating.

*Q: Okay. So as Indiana Jones, you arrive at Georgetown Law School. Law school is two years? three years?*

HARDEN: Three years. I loved Law School. Also, I mean, I went later. First day I sat in the back sitting next to this other guy. First day, first class, first person they call up in contracts. Sharon Albright, she stands up. She's very clearly smart and put together and knows the difference between plaintiff and defendant, and the guy's peppering her with questions. She knows the answers. I don't even understand the language. And I say to the guy next to me, "Oh, we gotta get her in our study group." I ended up marrying her. We've been married thirty years. She's at the State Department. She's still working there. I mean, she's there today. The thing about law school is it's intense.

It's intellectually challenging. The students are all really brilliant and I focused a lot on international law when I was at Georgetown. I took plenty of international law courses, which international law is essentially meaningless in foreign policy, as you can kind of see today. I really enjoyed it. I also learned a lot. I even enjoyed the classes that most people would not like. Such as corporate law, tax law, and property law. You learn a lot about the foundations of our society. By the way, that also provided me with a skill set that's a little bit rare in, let's say, International Development, or in the NGO [Non-governmental organization] world.

So usually, what you have is a lot of people who have passion and energy and creativity, you don't get a lot of software engineers, you don't get a lot of MBA [Master of Business Administration] in finance, and you don't get a lot of lawyers. Particularly those who are practicing lawyers. So, I really liked law school and then I went to New York, and I work at a big firm– I took Mark Ward's advice.

After Georgetown I went to New York, and I worked at a big white shoe firm. Doing corporate mergers and acquisitions, which I hated and hated the law firm life and the billing and all that kind of stuff, but they teach a level of discipline, skill, and precision

that you don't readily get elsewhere. I am thankful for all that. I was a corporate lawyer. This was in the very, very early days, the internet, I saw that USAID was looking for somebody. Drew Luten was the contact. It said don't call and I was a day late too. Which of course, none of these things would be allowable anymore, but I was stupid.

They closed December 31st, I saw it January 1st, I wrote through January 2nd, and I faxed in my resume. I called him, he flew me up. USAID GC [General Counsel] recruits differently than the rest, and so thank goodness. I went through the whole process, Drew calls me back and he says, "Hey, man, we really really liked you. We're hiring five people. You were number six." Here I am saying to him, "No, Drew. No, no, no, no, no, I'm not number six. I'm in the top five, go back and rework and there's nobody who wants this more than I do." He later came back and said, "Alright, you got it." So, in my class, by the way it was Leslie Reed who was a five time Mission Director. You know Ken Parker? He retired a while ago, but was multiple mission director, and then a few others who didn't end up becoming Mission Directors and kind of maybe left after a while, but the RLA [Regional Legal Advisor] cohort, it was a fantastic cohort to be in.

*Q: Yes, so that was in –*

HARDEN: I started in 1998. August of 1998.

**Hired as USAID Regional Legal Advisor – August 1998**

Q: *Okay, so you came in with a group of five? Who was that other person? If you were number six, who did they bounce?*

HARDEN: I don't know exactly what happened. Maybe they either didn't bounce somebody or somebody rejected it or something like that. But the point is, I got in on the skin of my teeth. The five of us were not competitors. Okay. I mean, in some ways, you would think that we would be competitors, because there's only so many jobs overseas and stuff like that. That's not how we entered. We entered thinking "who can even understand the government?"

I come in from my very, very, very first day, the first hour, and I go into some kind of windowless room in Ronald Reagan Building, and I sit down with all the other newcomers that start that day. I say, "is there any coffee around?" They say, "yeah, fifty cents, there's a machine down the aisle. Just put in two quarters to get your cup of coffee." I'm thinking, "What? What is this?" I mean, it just seemed– so I've never worked in government, I'm a Peace Corps volunteer, I never worked for the government. I found it really complicated to understand. Then when you add in the Foreign Service, and the RLA skilled training and all that kind of stuff. So, the five of us worked really closely together to share information so we could figure out how to succeed, because it's very complicated.

*Q: Right. You went through an orientation program, the five of you sort of stuck together throughout that initial training period?*

HARDEN: I mean, we were active lawyers, and we were all in the general counsel's office. I think I did Cuba. I mean, they put us through a rotation. I don't remember everything that I did. I did know that I was on the Cuba account. I couldn't believe how crazy that was. It was just so much underlying craziness. I also remember, there was somebody who didn't get tenure. Typical of USAID– and it wasn't a lawyer, it was the lawyers were looking at somebody who was denied tenure, who was complaining or grieving. Typical of USAID, all the evaluations are outstanding for everybody all the time. So we looked at her tenure rejection, we looked at her evaluations, and she's amazing. So then how is it that she's denied tenure?

The way they write it is you were outstanding in that pencil procurement, or you were outstanding in the Afghanistan evacuation of 10,000 people, but you're always outstanding. We had to take training on appropriations law, and we did a Jag course down in Charlottesville, which was very great. We did all kinds of stuff. It was great. I mean, I was working, but it was like training. Then I was assigned to Bangladesh by myself. Usually, they put the first lawyers in with senior lawyers, but I was at a solo place. I did Bangladesh, India, and Nepal, and then later a little piece of Pakistan after 9/11. So after less than a year at GC, I went to Bangladesh.

*Q: Oh, you went to Bangladesh.*

**USAID/Bangladesh, Regional Legal Advisor for South Asia, 1999 – 2003**

HARDEN: Yeah. So that was South Asia, I covered South Asia. Okay,

*Q: And that would have been 1999?*

HARDEN: That would have been 1999 to 2003. I was based in Dhaka. I met Jim Beaver, who was the Deputy Mission Director in India, and he is in our West Bank Gaza Mission Director Group that we all meet and talk to. Gordon West was the Mission Director in Dhaka, who was lovely and wonderful. Linda Morse, who was Mission Director in India. The thing about the RLA cone, and I know they don't use that term anymore, now it's RLO, but the thing about the RLA cone is that you are mentored by the agency's best because you just work with the Mission Director and the deputy Mission Directors a lot. If you're a regional, that means you're getting to know a lot of these– I mean, these were all big programs, so therefore, these were big Mission Directors. They're all intimidating. You go into Linda Morse's office, gigantic, it's an embassy in Delhi, and Walter North, another one. They're all demanding, tough, smart, and don't suffer fools.

*Q: Right. So, you had to be on your toes?*

HARDEN: Yeah, it was great training, though, because you work with all these people. Honestly, the Foreign Service is a range of people, even though I love the Foreign Service, and it defines me in many, many, many, many, many ways.The Mission Directors at big missions are really kind of extraordinary people. I learned from them.

*Q: You had mentioned that you married the smartest person in your law school class. Were you married when you went out to Bangladesh then?*

HARDEN: Yes, one of the grave injustices in the Foreign Service is the lack of spousal opportunity, although it may be better now. However, it's not great now, and it wasn't great, then. Now, Sharon, I mean, we have three kids. So we have three little kids. So she stayed at home primarily for a while and worked remotely. Even back then we actually had pretty decent internet in Dhaka in 1999 to 2000. So she was able to do some remote work, completely unrelated to anything in the government. At the end of the day, she really differed a lot with her career ambitions for a long time, and that was very difficult. It's maybe one of the foundational limits of the Foreign Service.

*Q: Let's come back to that periodically as we're talking because you're right, it is a serious issue. Since you were in a regional position, how much time did you spend on the road in that job?*

HARDEN: Yeah, maybe like 50 percent. It was a lot. Here's my wife from Georgetown Law at home in Dhaka which is not anywhere that she wanted to go, and with three little kids, and I'm traveling all over the place. The funny thing is, always with these assignments, you get a handshake, or maybe you're going to go somewhere and there's some kind of disruption. So we actually ended up thinking that we're gonna go to Dhaka. Then thinking that we might not go to Dhaka, we ended up fighting to go to Dhaka and we ended up going to Dhaka, but the kids had a very incredible upbringing.

I mean, they were say, five, four, and two, okay, something like that when we went. Four and a half, three and a half, and one and a half. I mean, they lived this great, interesting, funny expat life, and you always want your kids to go to great schools, which they kind of did. They had really interesting classmates, and the parents were all interesting. We had a big house with a big yard, which doesn't even exist anymore in Dhaka. Jackfruit trees, we raised chickens there, and we had goats there, but the poverty was deeply overwhelming. The kids went to the American Club and learned how to swim, and they had Cub Scouts and brownies and Waverly went to prep school early on. It was a really extraordinary experience. 9/11 happened when we were there, which was everything for me for the next twenty years.

*Q: You were in Dhaka on September 11. Can you tell us how you learned about it? Would it have been probably afternoon? evening?*

HARDEN: It was evening. So, I was over at Defense Attaché's house for a cub scout meeting. It was basically a bunch of dads from the embassy. Our sons, who were five, or six, or seven. It was just overwhelming. It was just shocking. I mean, he got a call and we turned on the TV. Then I came rushing home. Then the second tower fell, which I did not believe could happen. I thought they were just rerunning the collapse of the first tower. It was very, very, very scary to be there on 9/11 with three little kids 8,000 miles from the U.S.

*Q: Right. What happened then the next day? Did the embassy send out notices? Were there meetings? How did it get handled?*

HARDEN: I mean, so the thing about being a Mission Director is that you're on the country team. The thing about being the RLA, is that you do get exposure to the country team, but in addition, you're also on the Senior Staff of the mission. So even though it was my first tour, I was pretty connected to Gordon. I wanted Gordon to understand what it was like, for young families there and what I thought was necessary. I mean, again, great, the mentors that I had were all extraordinary, but I also felt free to tell them what I thought was necessary. So, I don't think we closed that next day, I'm pretty sure we didn't. For five or six weeks, we had a lot of flowers that were being delivered to the embassy, and all that kind of stuff. Also, I was given an opportunity to have a lot of public roles with Gordon. Meaning, Gordon let me have a lot of public roles. I was out speaking all the time all over the place.

*Q: About what?*

HARDEN: Anything, whatever. I'd get into law schools and speak about law or whatever. The thing that I do have one skill is that I can speak on anything that I know nothing about. I was a pretty regular public speaker for the USAID mission and for the embassy. So, after 9/11, I became even more. I started inviting all the Mullahs over to our house. So, we would have a big dinner at our house and we would talk to Mullahs. Then, I would start to talk to them about some of the things that we're doing. Now, the interesting thing is USAID and let's say South Asia, or in Bangladesh, a lot of the people that we deal with are educated.

Often maybe in the U.S., or the UK [United Kingdom] they're usually very beautiful and brilliant and connected. So, you get these NGO leaders that are kind of sophisticated people. The Mullahs don't know any of them, and they don't know anything Mullahs, they don't like each other. They all think they work at cross purposes. I took them around and I said, "well, this is what we're doing with water. This is what we're doing for food security. This is what we're doing for small businesses. This is what we're doing for disaster preparation. You guys on board with us? What do you think?" So I really, really, really worked hard with the Islamic leadership to kind of communicate what it is that we were doing, and to kind of tighten and close the gap a little bit between, say, NGO leaders that we predominantly worked with, and I'd say the religious community.

*Q: Was it your initiative to do this?*

HARDEN: But Gordon gave me free rein and the Ambassador, Marian Peters, did too. Actually, all of USAID kind of liked it, because I got some visibility. I mean, I call it "Mullahs on a bus". So I put them on the bus, we'd go around, look at everything. And my Bangla was actually pretty good. I tested in Bangla, that was my tenure language. I don't know a word of it now. It was a very concerted effort to engage the communities that were influential in Bangladesh that we never talked to. Kind of like the Watermen.

*Q: Right. Well, that's an important skill. Bangladesh is known for its very successful family planning program. Was that something that you took the Mullahs to see?*

HARDEN: I don't think so. I can tell you in the West Bank in Gaza, we would never do a family planning program, never. But [in Bangladesh] it was wildly successful. But in addition, I think, I mean, for sure, small families would come up. I think that they all understood it was good not to have the kid die and have them not be malnourished and have them go to school and have some kind of life. That was not a controversial issue.

*Q: What did the Mullahs like best or what did they like least?*

HARDEN: I did it in Central Asia, too. So some of these things– look, I even went to their seminary. Okay, and I'm just a guest speaker at the "we're training to be a Mullah seminar" thing. I mean, anything that you can equate with traditional values all worked fine. You wanted people to have jobs, you wanted to clean water, you wanted to be prepared for typhoons, there was no controversy in any of that. None. Human rights or whatever, I don't think we ever even discussed any of that stuff. The issues that you can obviously get behind; clean water, agricultural production, jobs, which are all disaster preppers, is probably 90 percent of what USAID does in Bangladesh and South Asia anyway.

*Q: Right. One reads about the concerns of the more traditional religious groups, whether it's Islam or perhaps Christianity in some ways, as well, on looking at modernization and the changes taking place. Did they express concerns about modernization and western values?*

HARDEN: That's what I was trying to get to, in the sense that, if we fund, let's say, a Bangladeshi NGO to do whatever, street law or democracy and human rights– I also oversaw a lot of elections. Those were run by beautiful, educated women who went to Oxford. Maybe they flew like business class to London and had nice clothes and all. The gaps were enormous between both of them [the Mullahs and educated women], and they all were deeply suspicious on the other side. My only question was, were there some things that you guys could agree upon, like, hey, clean water is a good idea.

*Q: Did you have exposure to BRAC [Bangladesh Rehabilitation Assistance Committee] and Grameen– were they involved at all with this kind of reaching out to the Mullahs or did you have exposure to them in a different way?*

HARDEN: Grameen, because I was a corporate lawyer in corporate finance, I actually looked at the underlying foundations of Grameen pretty carefully, which honestly, there's a lot of weaknesses there. There's a lot of weaknesses there. Because I was interested in securitizing some of the flows through Grameen Bank. I actually did work closely with them and Grameen has a bunch of spin offs, they do technology. I even then wrote, because I think I wrote some stories about solar technology and the digital divide, that were in the AFSA journal. For sure. BRAC is essentially a shadow government. I mean, BRAC is way more effective than the government. They can make decisions much faster, they have more credibility, more accountability, and more integrity. I mean, integrity is an ethical value, but in terms of programmatic integrity.

Since I left government, I worked a lot with MIT [Massachusetts Institute of Technology] Lincoln laboratories, and I connected them with BRAC to do a moonshot on climate resilience, early warning systems based on FEWSnet [Famine Early Warning System], which was when I was an AA [Assistant Administrator]. FEWSnet was under my jurisdiction. I was envisioning this kind of FEWSnet-like thing for climate change, but twenty years and six to nine months. MIT and BRAC partnered to do a moonshot hundred million dollars. It didn't win, but I connected just about BRAC, I connected BRAC and MIT.

*Q: Bangladesh is an interesting development case study, because it is one of the most successful development programs over the past forty fifty years. Yet, its governance is probably not at the top of the governance list. When you look at most of the poor performing countries, it's because of poor governance. Yet Bangladesh has succeeded and improved the lives of many, many people in spite of poor governance. Are BRAC and Grameen the reasons why– you referred to BRAC as almost a shadow government?*

HARDEN: I mean, so you obviously know Bangladesh and South Asia pretty well. Do you think BRAC is a government?

*Q: Well, no, I mean, it's done a huge amount.*

HARDEN: I mean, I'm not sure that's the right term, and maybe it's a parallel governance structure. I think there's really no doubt about that.

*Q: It's huge, yes, and has had a huge impact.*

HARDEN: Yeah. It's the biggest NGO in the world, by the way. I mean, I'm surely at least 10,000 employees. By the way, BRAC is now spun off to a bunch of other countries around the world.

I also covered India, and that was much more of a geopolitical mission, which, of course, I liked. I mean, at that time, there was always a big question about big development gaps, blah, blah, and what justifies its presence. I actually wrote an op-ed not too long ago about saying that we should close down the India USAID mission because they just sent a spaceship to the moon and they're doing a Solar Probe. They're doing a Blue Ocean Navy aspiration. I think they're the fourth largest economy in the world now. So even then, you could see like some of the work was on capital markets and unlocking the statist history that they had and kind of opening up some of the entrepreneurial talent that you have in India. Of course, they still have massive poverty gaps and all that. But they also probably have raised three to seven hundred million people all probably. Three to seven hundred million. They're definitely a global power now.

When I was there, we also had the standoff in Kashmir, Kargil, I think it was called Kargil which was on the verge of a nuclear war. It was nuclear brinkmanship between Pakistan and India. I mean, that was one time when I flew out to help Jim evacuate the people in the mission, because they were on the verge of a nuclear fight with India. Suddenly everybody is in India saying to me, "you know what? We'll start a nuclear war! So what? We lose ten million people, they lose ten million people, and we're gonna win!"

In Bangladesh, I'm saying to Sharon "the government meteorologists say that the nuclear fallout is not going to get to Bangladesh", she's like, "forget it. I'm going back with the kids. We're not staying here if there's going to be a nuclear war. You're evacuating everybody out of Delhi. What about us?" So, we came back to this farm where we are right now. The Indian Mission was much more of a geopolitical, big power politics mission, which I liked.

*Q: Right. Were there any particularly difficult issues that you had to deal with? Or was it pretty much more routine legal advisor work?*

HARDEN: So, in Nepal, I had to get rid of a Foreign Service Officer who was using his position for personal gain. That was one of the very first things I had to do. As a legal adviser overseas. Drew said to me, when I went overseas, he's saying "look, know when to come back to D.C and know when not to come back," meaning for advice. So, I tried to manage things prudently, but without too much reliance. Also, we worked Sunday through Thursday, and we were thirteen hours ahead of D.C. The time zone difference was a big deal. That was very difficult for me.

I mean, 9/11 was also a big deal. From a legal perspective– I mean, Clinton came out to visit, we were having to have some deliverables, and you have to be able to demonstrate this, that, or the other. I think we had some problems. I wrote a very long piece defending the use of child survival funds for home fisheries. Jim Kolbe and his staff took this thirty-page opinion and waved it all around Congress saying "who tells me there's no creativity in the executive branch! Free desk!" But of course, we had to

say that it was allowable use of funds because we spent thirty million dollars on home fisheries.

*Q: I won't ask for the basis of that.*

HARDEN: You know what? Here's what. Home gardens provide nutrition for small families. And that was okay–

*Q: It was a nutritional Program. Okay.*

HARDEN: I mean, the weakness in the argument is that a nuclear weapons manufacturing facility provides jobs, which keep families fat. So, we use job survival funds for that. Yeah, so it was all good. That was all gold.

*Q: You did that for three years?*

HARDEN: Four years.

*Q: Okay, four years 1999 to 2003. And it came time for you to move on. Were you discussing that with Washington? Did the legal advisors go through a bidding process? Or is it all done through the lawyers' network?*

HARDEN: I'm not sure what the allowable answer is on that one. I mean, there is the formal bid process, but there's also the informal bid process. The fact of the matter is we're not– particularly at that time there weren't that many RLA, and there are not that many slots. Then if you take out everybody who's not moving that year, or who doesn't want to, because they are in D.C., and they don't want to move back. It's like a relatively small set of musical chairs, and we went to Kazakhstan. Central Asia Mission. So that covered five countries, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan, whatever, the five southern Muslim "stans" of the former Soviet Union which was also fascinating. So there I studied Russian.

Again, this is all now great power politics. It's not a huge development program. Bangladesh was a development program, India wasn't. Nepal was a development program. Our reengagement into Pakistan is basically not a development program. Then now I go to Central Asia, which is essentially trying to plant the American flag in the southern flank of the former Soviet Union. That's intense. For all intents and purposes, that's what it was.

**USAID/Central Asia, Regional Legal Advisor, 2003 - 2005**

*Q: The mission had been in place, this regional mission for about ten years. I think it was created in 1993 or so. I assume it was well established and operating well by 2003 when you arrived?*

HARDEN: But speaking of Indiana Jones and cowboy, Craig Buck–

I don't know him, but there were two or three cowboys that headquarters always loved and hated. Okay. Craig Buck was one and the guy in Lebanon, Spike Stephenson. I always wanted to be like them.

*Q: Right. Well, I had no idea you aspired to be a cowboy–*

HARDEN: That's dead now. No more cowboys or cowgirls left anymore.

*Q: Right. The invasion into Afghanistan started shortly after 9/11. Was part of the Central Asia program rationale related to getting cooperation from the Central Asian countries for supporting the Afghan war? Did you get involved in any of that? Or was that no longer an issue?*

HARDEN: I went down to Afghanistan to help on some legal issues. I flew from Dushanbe on an UN [United Nations] flight to Kabul. I then flew back on a U.S. aircraft into Uzbekistan, and the pilot put me up front. So that was all super cool. I mean, for sure, it was the war on terror, I mean, 100 percent. From that perspective, the authoritarian regimes in Central Asia were pleased to tamp down on Islamic radicalization. They were very authoritarian, they did not like any human rights or democracy activities, they didn't like NGOs, and then like anybody any of the foreigners. I had head-to-head battles with their legal enforcement and police authorities a lot. They would rage against our NGOs. I would go and defend them and stuff like that. We also lost a Foreign Service Officer in a car accident which was horrific. Rebecca Brackman. The whole family was in a car and they rolled the car and the mom died and dad was in the hospital and the two little girls who were the ages of our kids were essentially without parents for a little bit.

*Q: Which country was that? Was that in Kazakhstan?*

HARDEN: This was in Kazakhstan.

I was only in Kazakhstan for two years, but I went around the five "stans" a lot. I covered a lot. We all learned Russian, which now nobody in those places wants to speak anymore. They speak Kazakh, but we learned Russian, which was good because the two boys ended up getting– it's not a Boren Fellowship, but it's something equivalent to that for our high schoolers when they were in high school, to study Russian. Again, I mean, it was basically geopolitical. It was basically a bunch of geopolitical missions. We had a base in Kyrgyzstan in Bishkek. We definitely had a base in Uzbekistan.

*Q: You mentioned that because the governments in that region were cracking down on NGOs, did that mean that a lot of our work was supporting civil society? Did you spend time negotiating with governments on the local NGO environment, whether it was permissive or not permissive?*

HARDEN: You remember Janet Ballantyne, right?

*Q: Yes, she was acting director for a while, and was that when you were in Central Asia?*

HARDEN: No, at that time it was George Deikun, but she was running Abt Associates [Abt Global]. One of the things I was good at doing—because she then came back into government– I was good at keeping influential people who had real power, happy by helping them achieve their missions. She had, I think, been running a program that was supporting NGOs, and maybe human rights, but she had a problem moving cash. She asked for a legal opinion that said that she could take suitcases with cash from point A to point B, which of course I gave her. So, she remembered that clearly when she came back into government.

Those countries are in a very, very complicated space. They want to have independence from Russia. They want to have independence from China. But they also have to be realistic about their neighborhood. Furthermore, they would like to have a relationship with the United States. So in many ways that formed the missions at that time. We had a bombing in Uzbekistan and had to evacuate everybody out of that one.

*Q: And the lawyers get involved in evacuations, in part because you have to determine who's eligible and who's not eligible?*

HARDEN: No, I have no idea. But I was always there. You want to be able to know who's going and who's not going and what the costs are going to be? What the process is for people that are outside and Chief of Mission authority. Whether these people are inside the Chief of Mission authority or outside the Chief of Mission authority.

*Q: Because it's very complicated.*

HARDEN: It actually is. It really is. Are you charged at all and all that stuff?

*Q: Okay, good. You said that you continued some of your work with Mullahs when you were in Central Asia–*

HARDEN: Yeah, I did it in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, and it was fine. In fact, there was a law review article written by Jessica Hayden, who was an EFM [Eligible Family Member], but she was also in the middle of Georgetown Law School, and she took some time off. So she worked for me and she wrote a law review article called "Mullahs on the Bus." I think it's on Georgetown's website not too long ago. Her father was General Mike Hayden– sorry, her father-in-law was General Mike Hayden. The CIA [Central Intelligence Agency] director. So, Jessica worked for me and she helped me a lot on the "Mullahs on the Bus".

*Q: That kind of "Mullahs of the Bus" work must have brought you into close contact with the embassies.*

HARDEN: Yeah. I was always in contact with the embassies.

*Q: Were they supportive of this? There were no issues?*

HARDEN: Yeah. They all loved it. I mean, some embassies are hundreds of people, most embassies aren't. Most embassies are a few dozen, or maybe not even that. So, if you're the ambassador, and you're sitting in any country other than the top twenty countries, and you see your country team, there are not– you end up not having like a ton of people that you can count on. It's just the nature of it. I was always pretty integrated into the embassy, or into the front office, or whatever, for whatever reasons. I mean, I always knew the ambassadors. Again, partly because a lot of these embassies were small. So they have twenty officers or fifteen officers and you know, half of them are checked out, and others aren't. So if you're the Ambassador, or you want to reach out to the University of Dhaka law school or the Young Lawyers Association, whatever, I worked with all of them. All the ambassadors everywhere.

*Q: Just one more question about whether you, as an RLA, got involved with programs in the Democracy/Governance (DG) sector. RLAs often did become substantively engaged in the DG sector.*

HARDEN: In short, no. For several reasons. The General Counsel's Office actively discouraged that because you couldn't be the client and provide service, so there's that. Number two, in terms of the scopes of things that I was interested in, in terms of extracurricular activities beyond your RLA work. DG [Democracy and Governance] was not necessarily the top thing I was most interested in. I mean, I was always interested in public communications, and kind of representing America, in the country in which we were in. I probably was more interested in EG [Economic Growth] activities.

*Q: Okay. During this period, both in Bangladesh and in Central Asia, one of the big initiatives out of Washington, which relates to what you were just talking about was the Global Development Alliance. Were you involved with any of those early GDA [Global Development Alliances] programs in either Bangladesh or Central Asia?*

HARDEN: Was that the kind of public private partnership developments? I don't think you went anywhere.

*Q: Okay, you didn't see them. I was just curious.*

HARDEN: I mean, there was always some little thing. For example, a gas company wanted to do something here or something, but they weren't material.

*Q: Okay, so you were two years in Central Asia, and then you go off to a part of the world where you will then be spending a significant part of your career–*

HARDEN: Next eleven years. So that was actually Mark Ward and Jim Beaver that were the decision makers on that assignment.

*Q: Because Mark at that point was DAA [Deputy Assistant Administrator]?*

HARDEN: Yeah and Jim was the Mission Director. That was a very, very competitive Deputy Mission Director slot. I was lucky I got it.

**USAID/West Bank-Gaza, Deputy Mission Director, 2005 – 2009 (Also Includes Discussion of Later Period in WB/G as Mission Director)**

*Q: This is West Bank and Gaza, just to clarify?*

HARDEN: Yeah. I mean, on the other hand, they had at that time, an enormous amount of suicide bombers and stuff like that. So there were a lot of people who didn't want to do it and a lot of people don't want to do it because it's only political, okay. It was a competitive slot, and I was a little young to be a DMD [Deputy Mission Director] but for whatever reason, I got it. It was really an amazing, shaping experience.

*Q: This is 2005 and you go–*

HARDEN: I was there from 2005 to 2016. I did excursions in Libya and in Baghdad, but my family stayed in the house for eleven years in Herzliya in north of Tel Aviv.

*Q: Okay, so when you arrived in 2005, what was the situation with the West Bank Gaza program? Was Jim Beaver the mission director?*

HARDEN: Yes, Jim was there.

*S*o, first of all I had gotten Lyme disease at the farm that summer and I didn't know. It took a little while to figure it out. My mom, who was convinced I was taking foolish risks all around the world, I could at least tell her, "Look, I got Lyme disease and nearly died at the farm! Let me go. Let me head out to the middle east." So we all went out to the Middle East. My daughter, our youngest, I can't remember how much it was then. Let's say she was five or six. She had done a lot of gymnastics in Kazakhstan with the Russians. In Israel, she just picked up with the Russians and the Romanians and did super intensive gymnastics in Israel and the boys were at the American school. That was a very good school, very competitive school. We were happy to be there. We lived in a wealthy neighborhood north of Tel Aviv, in a nice house, close to the beach. The weather was always nice. Have you been to Tel Aviv?

*Q: Just once, yes.*

HARDEN: Tel Aviv is a really fun place. Okay, it's got great weather, great restaurants. The family was good. I got to do war and conflict and crisis. We arrived, let's say August 1, 2005, and Gaza disengagement was on, which is in the news every day now because the Israelis always say, "well, we left Gaza."

*Q: Right, because the Second Intifada had already started right?*

HARDEN: The Second Intifada was well under way. I mean, it was beginning to wind down, the Second Intifada, but for sure, I mean, for sure, there was still the Second Intifada. I mean, every single restaurant had guards. You never sat in front of a restaurant or by glass. You didn't go to movie theaters and stuff like that. You could go to the beach, stuff like that. I came right with Jim and then Kurtzer, Dan Kurtzer, who is almost like a legendary ambassador. The thing about the West Bank in Gaza is that we were on two missions. We were on two country teams. So, it was very, very, very time intensive. So, we were on the Israel country team that was based in Tel Aviv. With the U.S. Embassy in Tel Aviv, we covered Israelis. We were also on the Jerusalem country team, which covers the Palestinians and Jerusalem. Gaza flipped between the two. The point is that there's two country teams. Very, very demanding. They didn't report to each other. It's the Middle East, so they fought all the time, and they all hate each other. So, Jim and I and let's say the CIA Station Chief, we were the ones that were accredited to both sides. However, the Ambassador wasn't, I mean, it's changed now since the Trump Administration, but at that time, one side was accredited to one side and the other side was credited to the other. It was almost a negotiation between our systems.

*Q: This was the Consulate in Jerusalem just to clarify?*

HARDEN: Yes. I walked in, and the Israelis are disengaging out of Gaza and out of four settlements in the northern West Bank, and we are preparing for chaos. Both with the Palestinians and with the Israelis, because with the Israelis there was a lot of opposition to that disengagement and to bring down twenty-six settlements, and so there's a lot of fighting. Ariel Sharon was the Prime Minister and there was a lot of fighting on the Israeli side about that. Then of course, on the Palestinian side, there was a lot of fighting too between Fatah and Hamas and what the future would look like and all that kind of stuff. So, we had to prepare for essentially chaos on both sides. The other thing is the U.S. had set up a security coordinator, let's say a three star [General]. They were kind of overseeing the U.S. analysis of Gaza disengagement. So very high profile, very senior U.S. government officials all around the place, and a lot of engagement and on two country teams. That was the atmosphere on which I started.

*Q: Sounds like a lot of fun.*

HARDEN: It was really fascinating. It truly was. I mean, it's like baptism by fire. I mean, you really had to understand the intensity of it really rapidly. We were always under threat. I mean, we had a bomb scare threat, because the greenhouses were being

handed over and the settlers wanted to blow up the USAID mission and stuff like that. I mean, all of Congress comes through Israel and Jerusalem. I've literally met everybody all the time. All the senior leadership in the executive branch comes through. So, you meet everybody.

*Q: Maybe we can parse this into some pieces. The work USAID was supporting in Gaza would have been coordinated with the embassy in Israel?*

HARDEN: At that time, yes. After Gaza disengagement it moved over to Jerusalem to the Consulate, but at that time–

*Q: When you say Gaza disengagement that–*

HARDEN: That was when the Israelis left Gaza. Dismantled the settlements.

*Q: They dismantled their settlements?*

HARDEN: They had twenty-six settlements in Gaza. They took them down and evacuated. Moved everybody out. They did for settlements in the northern West Bank.

*Q: Okay. disengaged–*

HARDEN: So, I've worked really closely, I mean, among others, I also worked really closely with the IDF [Israeli Defense Force]. The Palestinians and the IDF and the UN.

*Q: Were we involved with the disengagement process and working at all with the Israelis in that?*

HARDEN: You mean, the U.S. or USAID?

*Q: Maybe, the U.S. generally and then with USAID.*

HARDEN: Yes. 100 percent.

*Q: Was USAID involved in it?*

HARDEN: Yeah, 100 percent. We were deeply involved.

*Q: What were you doing?*

HARDEN: So, first of all, Israel's defense forces have a civilian administration function that oversees the occupying and the civil administration of the territories in which it occupies. It's called COGAT. The Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories–

*Q: And the territories are Gaza and the West Bank?*

HARDEN: Yeah. Right. They are the occupying governing force, for all intents and purposes. They plus, the kinetic fighters have to bring down the settlements, twenty-six settlements. I don't remember how many people. 50,000? I don't know what the number is anymore. But it was not nothing. There were a lot of people and moved them back into Greenline Israel, and they also did the same four settlements in the Northwest Bank. Then the Palestinian Authority needed to kind of come in and fill that vacuum. That meant, governing structures, social services, economic opportunity, and security, and all of that. So that kind of relinquishment of space and the refilling of space was an interagency undertaking and the embassy ran it, but they kept Ward, who was AFRICOM [United States Africa Command] later, was the first U.S. security coordinator that I worked with pretty closely and then Keith Dayton after that. Their job was to prepare the Palestinian Authority security services and just to make sure this transition would work.

*Q: Okay, was it moving people as well as overseeing the administrative disengagement or was it also Israelis who had settled in? Were there Israelis in Gaza who were also returning?*

HARDEN: Yes. We didn't have any involvement in that.

*Q: But in the new administration of Gazans over those settlements we were involved?*

HARDEN: What do you do with all the houses that were left? Okay, what do you do with all the greenhouses that were producing tulips and strawberries? What do you do with the security on areas that were highly bisected with Israeli Defense Forces prior to Gaza disengagement and where they left and they evacuated. So, the Palestinian forces would have to come in and operate. What do you do with cross border trade? How to protect that and how do you get goods and stuff like that under this new, essentially dynamic?

*Q: But this would have been seen as a positive step. Was that correct? By the Israelis?*

HARDEN: I thought it was a positive step. I think the Bush administration thought it was a positive step, Tony Blair, who was UK Prime Minister and was also involved in all this thought it was a positive step. A lot of Palestinians weren't so sure, because what the Israelis ended up doing was essentially sealing the perimeter around Gaza except for the very bottom at Rafa and I did a lot of work on Rafa too. Also more or less sealing the access from the Mediterranean. So, the Palestinians would argue at the time that this was an open-air prison.

*Q: It was isolating them in a way?*

HARDEN: I mean, the Israelis are maintaining occupation by controlling the perimeters and access points. Now, the very bottom though is connected to Egypt. I

mean, I was all over– and all the entry points for people and goods, all of that was USAID, a lot of it was USAID, figuring out how to get goods in and out. Which as you can see is still the case, because Samantha Power was in Amman the other day, just saying the exact same thing. I mean, I spent eleven years working on this, bringing in the best technology, taking Israelis to the southern border, to work on movements of trucks, all this kind of stuff. So yeah, so I started during the Gaza disengagement, which was a historically very big event. Of course, the evacuation out of the northern West Bank, which gave us a twenty-year opportunity, which we failed to deliver. In a nutshell, right at that time, we were faced with two questions.

So, during Gaza disengagement with Hamas, basically, in control, we had a decision to make. We had two theories to take, and we applied each theory separately to the West Bank versus Gaza. In Gaza, our theory would be economic pressure on Hamas would yield political change. So, if you put enough pressure on Hamas, they would fail, they would moderate or they would get out of the way. Not an unreasonable theory on what to do, okay. In the same in Jenin in the northern West Bank, equally dangerous place, which was the center of the Intifada, I'm sorry, the center of the suicide bombers, the capital of the suicide bombers, we had a very similar problem, but a different theory.

There, our theory was that economic opportunity would yield political change. So, we had a chance to assess these two different theories in real time in similar labs to see what worked and I've written enormously about this very point. In a nutshell, economic pressure on Hamas was a catastrophic failure. Hamas just got more powerful, and they defeated all their enemies. In the northern West Bank that created a massive window of opportunity for fifteen years, which the Israelis did not follow up on and it's not a substitute for political change, but it created a window for political change that has since failed.

*Q: Okay, no, that's a great introduction and I do suggest that because we're up against two hours now that we stop for now and then come back to the program in our next session.*

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*Q: Today is March 6, 2024, and this is interview number two with David Harden. Dave again, thank you very much. When we left off last time you had become the deputy director of the USAID [United States Agency for International Development] mission for the West Bank, Gaza. You spoke a little bit about this being 2005, and the importance of that period with Israeli disengagement from settlements in Gaza, and also some settlements in the West Bank. You talked a little bit about the Consulate in Jerusalem and the embassy in Tel Aviv and the complexity of that, but I wonder if you could start today to talk a little bit about the USAID mission itself and how it was operating in occupied territory, including the important role for Israel. If you could put all of that in context because I think it would help to understand the other parts of the program.*

HARDEN: The USAID, West Bank, Gaza mission and obviously, things change between administrations and over a twenty-year period, and all that kind of stuff. But essentially, from the time that I was there, 2005 to 2016, this was the structure. The U.S. Embassy was based in Tel Aviv, but the Trump administration moved that in 2018. The Israeli government is based in Jerusalem, the Ministry of Defense for Israel is based in Tel Aviv, on the outskirts, a little bit on the way towards tourism at the Curia. The USAID Mission Director reported to the U.S. Ambassador to Israel. And except for a short period of time before this engagement during my time, the U.S. Ambassador to Israel was only accredited to Israel, not to the Palestinians, and not to Jerusalem. The U.S. Ambassador wrote the appraisal report for the mission director, that's really important because that shows where the direct line of authority is.

In addition, the USAID mission to the West Bank and Gaza was headquartered in Tel Aviv, where the beach was right near the embassy. In addition, the USAID West Bank, Gaza mission also had an office in Jerusalem, in the Consulate, or a Consulate annex, and the Consul General at that time. Again, this all changed since Trump, the Consul General, was like a super Consul General, in the sense that they did not report to the Ambassador.

Normally, everywhere else in the world, the Consul General reports to the Ambassador, but in this case, the Consul General in Jerusalem, who covered Palestinian affairs, reported back to the assistant secretary or the deputy assistant secretary in Washington, just like the Ambassador, and so there were two separate country teams that often did not see eye to eye and often kind of advocated or looked at the situation in the region from the perspectives of their country team, of basically they're the country that they're being represented to. Start moving back to the U.S. embassy in Tel Aviv. That means everybody on down the political counselor, the DCM, the political counselor, the Econ counselor, Public Affairs, all of them only covered Israel, and we're not accredited to and had no engagement with the Palestinians. The FBI, we got Foreign Commercial Service, the agency, those all can cross over into the Palestinian area so they were duly accredited.

The most senior person in the region who was accredited to both the Israelis and the Palestinians, was the USAID mission director. That's very important. The USAID mission director was on two country teams. Likewise, in Jerusalem, the consul general represented America to the Palestinians. They went to Ramallah a lot, and they covered Jerusalem because we didn't recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, but as a matter to be resolved, they had no ability to engage with the Israelis. So, when an event happened, let's say, an event between the Israeli military and the Palestinians, the consulate would lay out the cable based on what they saw, and the embassy in Tel Aviv would write out a cable based on what they saw. And there was never any kind of cross coordination, or if there was, it was a very structurally bumpy set of relationships.

*Q: I should go back and look at the history, but logic suggests that USAID would be in Jerusalem and reporting to the senior U.S. person who was accredited to the Palestinians. But I assume that a compromise was made with Israel to locate it in Tel Aviv so that the U.S. ambassador to Israel would always have an eye on what USAID was doing?*

HARDEN: Yeah, I mean, there was a lack of seniority, parallelism, seniority in that. The U.S. ambassador to Israel usually was somebody extremely senior, often a political appointee, often with a direct line to the President, and the consul general often was a career person who did not have that. There was a little bit of an imbalance there, but also up to Gaza disengagement, Tel Aviv covered Gaza, and Jerusalem covered Jerusalem in the West Bank. And there was that. I arrived right during Gaza disengagement. So, at that point, the responsibility for Gaza shifted to the consulate, and the reporting and all that but the U.S. ambassador was still the boss of USAID mission director.

*Q: Theoretically, you could have an ambassador from the U.S. to Israel, who was anti Palestinian, theoretically.*

HARDEN: Yeah, of course, which is what you had under the Trump administration.

*Q: So that's very awkward for an aid program.*

HARDEN: Look, in a very kind of bureaucratic way, and I'm not sure a lot of instructors would be as upfront about this as I am, but we liked being in Tel Aviv. We like being associated with the stronger diplomatically. We liked having independent relationships with both sides that almost nobody had. We like being able to go to the IDF [Israeli Defense Forces] which nobody in the consulate could do. So, it gave us really massively outsized authority. We were accredited to both sides and nobody else was.

*Q: And why would you be going to the Israeli Defense Force?*

HARDEN: The IDF, Israeli Defense Forces, has a senior level structure underneath them called COGAT, the coordinator for government activities in the territories, and you can basically understand that as the civilian administration authority of the IDF that oversaw the governing structures in the West Bank, and in Gaza. And then after Gaza disengagement, they oversaw the crossings and all of that. It was beyond a defense portfolio, they were the oversight over the territories. It wasn't just in terms of security. I mean, in the West Bank areas that are under political and security control of the Palestinians, not a big portion, that's area A, then you have some portion that is under the political control of the Palestinians, but security control of the Israelis. Then you have other areas, the bulk of it, maybe 60 percent of the West Bank is under Israeli political and security control, where the Palestinians vote and then you have all the settlements.

So it's really very, very, very complicated, but COGAT was the governing authority in the West Bank.

*Q: Would the COGAT have been concerned beyond the security question, would they have been concerned about the educational opportunities for people? Or what were the health opportunities?*

HARDEN: Yeah, we would have to go there to get a permit to build a school there.

*Q: It was complete oversight.*

HARDEN: I mean, especially as an occupying authority. It's an occupying military authority.

*Q: It's kind of like the CPA [The Coalition Provisional Authority] in Iraq.*

HARDEN: Yeah, that's exactly it. But I mean, they exercise real control. I mean, there's all these obstacles to movement and access in the West Bank that the Israelis control or checkpoints, the crossings. There's water and sanitation and the shared or complicated interests that are associated with that. I mean, it just goes on and on and on. The level of complexity, what I used to say, is like the negotiator, let's say George Mitchell, whom I worked for. In my second tour there, he cared about, let's just say, the status of Jerusalem, the borders, the security, the right of return. He covered four or five issues. There are a thousand issues between Israelis and the Palestinians. The USAID mission covered another nine hundred ninety-five. Okay, it gave us really an incredible and uniquely political understanding, and whoa, okay, which is completely different than any other USAID mission anywhere in the world. In addition, every member of Congress goes to Israel, every. I mean, I remember one August, I briefed 80 percent of Congress. If you're the mission director in Tanzania, once a year or two people might come out from Congress, but I mean, I briefed members of Congress or senior members of the administration all the time. All the time. It really helped me during the confirmation process as Assistant Administrator.

*Q: I'm sure. Again, on the context question. As an AID director or deputy director of an AID mission, you're having to vet what you're doing with the U.S. Ambassador to Israel, the Consul General in Jerusalem, the COGAT. And then there were the Palestinian authorities in the West Bank, and then Hamas in Gaza.*

HARDEN: Never, never, never had contact with Hamas.

*Q: There were no Palestinian officials in Gaza that we dealt with?*

HARDEN: I mean, we deal with all the people but not Hamas. Under no circumstances, because it's a law. The thing about that job now, as I described

earlier, like the RLA [Regional Legal Advisor], dealt with the senior mission directors in the agency, and so you got really elevated, really qualified. The deputy mission director in the USAID West Bank and Gaza mission, the job is so overwhelming for the mission director because there's two country teams that Deputy takes on an outsized role. I mean, just envision there's two country teams, there's an endless parade of members of Congress and staffers and administration people that come through. There's an enormous amount of media and you have offices and you have multiple offices, you have an office in Jerusalem and you have an office in Tel Aviv and then you had staff in Gaza and elsewhere in the West Bank and so the job had really large budgets when I was there. The job was so immense that the deputy mission director was almost like a supercharged job.

*Q: You arrived in 2005, this was your first deputy mission director position. How long did it take you to understand this incredibly complex environment? Did you just get dumped in, learning by doing? Swim or sink?*

HARDEN: It's both. You have to be extremely astute on national security and the politics of all this. In addition, your average tour for a senior Foreign Service officer is two to four years and often AID tends to be four years. What I noticed is that you could learn eighty percent of it in four years. But I was there for eleven years. I really, really got to the point where that last twenty percent is extraordinarily critical. It's the history, it's the perspective, it's the mechanics, all that kind of stuff. That takes a very, very long time to get it.

The other thing that I noticed, I had a very deep relationship with the FSNs [Foreign Service Nationals], and the longer I was there, the longer it became a very deep relationship because you can see that while a lot of USAID people like development, they don't love all the politics and security stuff. Half the mission, Foreign Service officers, didn't necessarily love the political elements of this. They wanted to do health. And then the others that were able to work in these complex environments. It wasn't long before they really couldn't tell me something about the environment that I didn't know. And it was the FSNs who always could. For FSNs, we had Israelis and Palestinians and Jews and Muslims and Christians and West Bankers and Gazans and Jerusalemites. I mean, we had this entire matrix of local staff, who are (A) brilliant and sophisticated and talented and (B), understand at a level that's much deeper than your typical Foreign Service officer that comes in for two, three or four years. And so I ended up relying more and more and more on the local staff.

I also always had them brief members of Congress, which of course, Foreign Service officers want to be the ones that do the briefing. But after a certain point, I was able to have enough confidence that I could bring in a bunch of Gazans or a bunch of people from Hebron and have them brief, and it reflected very positively on the mission and me as a leader. And I became very close to a lot of FSNs, which also created some structural problems in the mission too, right? Because I discounted sometimes like a new junior officer would come in, and I've been there

eight years. So they're literally not telling me anything, but their deputy, a Palestinian who I've worked with for eight years, knows everything. It was awkward from that perspective at times.

*Q: Again, the complexity of just where people were sitting. You said there were Gazans on the staff, but you didn't have an office in Gaza. Were they coming into the office in Israel?*

HARDEN: Yeah, this is where you need IDF. You need a permit, you need to be able to get them in and out. You need them to not be killed. You need for them to not be interrogated. And so we had Gazans come in. I mean, Gaza and Tel Aviv, are thirty miles apart. It just takes a long time to get there. But yeah, so the Gazans would come in, they would come in on Friday. The other point is that we work Monday through Friday, which is U.S. time even though all the Israelis and the Palestinians work Sunday through Thursday. So we were a little bit off from that perspective. But yeah, so the Gazans would come in and we were bringing in people from Hebron. I mean, we had an enormously expensive motor pool because we were running people all over the place. You needed our motor pool again, through the checkpoints.

*Q: Well, that's a huge amount of context to show how difficult the environment was. When you went in in 2005, since the Israelis were disengaging from those settlements, were people feeling a little more optimistic about what might be going forward? What was the USAID program doing at that point in time?*

HARDEN: I'm not sure if it was positive or not. In 2003, we had three security contractors killed in Gaza, so traveling to Gaza had been prohibited since 2003, and we shut down a lot of massive infrastructure projects. My view was that movement off the status quo was a positive thing, and so therefore, the Israelis dismantling twenty-six settlements in Gaza, and four in the northern West Bank, was a good thing, but it was not without controversy. The Palestinians tended to think that Gaza would be enveloped by the Israelis, and would be able to control all the access, all the water, all the air, and that it wouldn't really be fully disengaged. It turned out that there was a lot of truth to what the Palestinian perspective was at that time.

When we came in, and I came in right before Gaza disengagement, we were preparing for a breakdown among the Israelis, and among the Palestinians, so on the Israelis, there were a lot of people that were opposed to disengagement, and there were a lot of people who were being uprooted out of their houses in Gaza, Israelis who were living in settlements, who had been there for a long time, and they were forcibly removed by the Israeli military. So, you can imagine the kind of controversies that surround that because these people, their jobs, their livelihoods, their homes, their families, they're all in Gaza, and the Israelis uprooted them and moved them out.

At the same time, it created a sense of almost a vacuum in Gaza, and we weren't clear who would fill that vacuum. Would it be the Palestinian Authority and Fatah? Would it be independence? Would it be civil society and the business community? Well, it turned out ultimately, it was Hamas that filled that. And we understood the risks of all of this. We were prepared for a really chaotic situation. It turned out to be a little less chaotic during the immediate disengagement period than what later transpired.

*Q: Since we weren't allowed to go into Gaza, how were we doing a program there? Were we doing grants to local organizations or to international NGOs?*

HARDEN: We had Gazan employees, we had like six or seven of them, and I was very, very close to them. Then we had all the implementing partners that had operations in Gaza. So I think it was primarily assistance as opposed to contracts. But Gazans themselves were able to come out, particularly if we facilitated.

*Q: So, our local staff was overseeing it?*

HARDEN: What is the biggest country that you served in, like geographic space?

*Q: Russia.*

HARDEN: Okay, a very, very, very political mission, but you also didn't get out into the hinterlands very often.

*Q: Well, I did go out a fair amount, but...*

HARDEN: Yeah, I mean, this space is miniscule compared to Russia. Obviously, you would want to be there to be able to see it and we weren't. That's a big negative, but it's not that far away.

*Q: No, I understand, and I understand that the Gazan staff was overseeing the work. Can you explain the kinds of activities in the grants? What were we doing?*

HARDEN: We did a lot of water and sanitation, even small community-based water and sanitation, we always did health. We would provide some kind of assistance to certain educational institutions that weren't attached to either the UN or Hamas. We did a lot of private economic trade where it helped Gazans like actually earn some money. Those are the kinds of things that we did.

*Q: And then on the West Bank side, was that different the way it operated?*

HARDEN: The West Bank was under the Palestinian Authority. And we could talk with them and meet with them and meet with the ministers and all the institutions. We still had to work in coordination with Israelis, because they had this governing authority over top of it. Also, you went through crossing points all

the time. So, our security guys and Israeli security guys bumped up against each other all the time, all the time. It was almost 99 percent of the time, it was always deconflicted, and it was no big deal and all that kind of stuff, and you flash your diplomatic credentials, and you went through the crossings. But you can imagine, you got a bunch of nineteen-year-olds running these crossings. And you have an armored vehicle with a bunch of Palestinians. There are times when it was bumpy. In the West Bank, we did everything, we did water, sanitation, health, education, private sector, trade, democracy and governance, civil society, strengthening, all that.

*Q: Okay, you were working with the Palestinian Authority?*

HARDEN: Yes, very much so.

*Q: And I assume that there were strengths and weaknesses there?*

HARDEN: Yeah. Yeah, for sure. But just to be clear, everybody talks about the inefficiency and the corruption of the Palestinian Authority and Hamas. There's a hundred and ninety countries. The Palestinians are not in the bottom third. I mean, they're not in the top third, probably the end of the middle third. There's lots of places that are much worse.

*Q: That's an important point. That's one of the things in working in aid, you get to go to countries where you get an idea for that continuum. Now, the first four years you were the deputy mission director. Who was the USAID Mission Director?*

HARDEN: I was the deputy to Jim Beaver for two years. Then Howard Sumka came in. I was the deputy for four years, so I overlapped with Jim and Howard. I was the continuity, once again, the complexity of all this.

*Q: Before we go on, you mentioned the Gazan employees. How have they fared given what's going on today?*

HARDEN: They all left Gaza in 2008 or 2012. For one of them I wrote his letter of recommendation to the Harvard Kennedy School. He got an MPA at the Kennedy School and he's a partner and he lives in Canada. But I'm really close to a lot of them. A lot of them have emigrated. They got SIVs [special immigrant visas]. Some of them are still there with the mission, but they're based out of Ramallah. It's been terrible for everybody. I mean, it's been terrible. I mean, it's more terrible now, but it was always terrible.

I'm going to tell you one thing later when we get to my confirmation in the SFRC [Senate Foreign Relations Committee]. I'm going to tell you a story about Gaza, because I was a little nervous for the SFRC hearing, and I kind of rooted myself based on some of my interactions with some of the Gazan's staff. Will tell that one later.

*Q: Okay, we'll tell that one afterwards. Four years as the deputy and providing continuity, which was probably very, very valuable.*

HARDEN: Again, it's two country teams, and in addition, there was the U.S. security coordinator. There were so many big personalities in such a small space. The U.S. security coordinator was a three star, early on appointed by the President and reporting to the Secretary of State with a dotted line, the consul general, I mean, everybody bumped up against each other all the time in a very, very friction-based way. But we also worked with the U.S. security coordinator very closely. The U.S. security coordinator's job was they'll train security forces so that they could provide law and order in Area A, of the West Bank. And we would also then provide private sector opportunities and schools and clinics and all that kind of stuff. And so we worked with the U.S. security coordinator pretty closely as well.

*Q: Were there other donors also helping in the West Bank and Gaza?*

HARDEN: Yes. The EU, World Bank, bilateral European missions.

*Q: And presumably, everybody was operating with a very complex understanding?*

HARDEN: Yeah, but everybody understood that the United States sat apart in that we had a special relationship with Israel and nobody else did.

*Q: Right. So our situation was more complex. So, for four years you were USAID's Deputy Mission Director; then you went on to a very unusual job for two years. Could you tell us about it?*

**Detail as Economic Advisor to Special Envoy George Mitchell, 2009 - 2011**

HARDEN: So it was three years, but there were a few gaps. I was supposed to go to Iraq in the summer of 2009, and I was going to be the deputy mission director in Iraq to Chris Crowley, and Alonzo Fulgham. And whoever the Assistant Secretary of State was, at the time, pulled me from that assignment. So you can imagine being pulled out of Iraq. There's not much that would have gotten pulled out of Iraq, but I was pulled out of Iraq and assigned to George Mitchell.

*Q: Okay; this was during the change of administration. So, the Obama administration was-*

HARDEN: Like six months, it was basically six months into the Obama administration. There's often been an envoy. Now, there isn't one currently. But in the past, there's often been an envoy, and we also work closely with them. Bush had an envoy, General James Jones. We housed General Jones, and we gave him

office space. He was the special envoy to the Middle East, and he and his team, we housed and provided services for them, I brokered that. So, I got to know General Jones really well. He later became national security adviser, and we supported him. These are things you don't talk about in USAID headquarters. And he carried on for the rest of the Bush administration.

Then Mitchell was assigned under Obama, George Mitchell. An unusual move, but one that I actually thought was pretty good. Usually, the envoy team and the envoy are based in DC and travel up to the region. But I was in a different role since I was already there. So, I took the economic portfolio for Mitchell, and I was based in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem. I was still a USAID employee. But I was detailed to Mitchell. I only had USAID's support. I had no authority over USAID, except that I represented the envoy, the President's envoy.

*Q: It sounds like you could have some authority.*

HARDEN: Yeah, I had apparent authority, but not actual authority. Now I'm in year five. Remember, I was telling you four years going on. I literally went everywhere in the West Bank. I took enormous notes. I drove the green line. I studied it really closely. I studied the settlements. I studied everything, about everything in great detail and kind of the beauty of that job, for instance, I didn't have any management responsibilities, I didn't run the internal operations of the mission. I didn't worry about the budget. I didn't worry about acquisition and assistance. I didn't worry about the country team. My only job was to deeply understand the situation and try to think about bridges between the parties.

I would drive around with my security detail for like eight hours, in the West Bank, looking at every little thing, just where the water is, where the checkpoints were, where the settlements were, where market lines were, where agricultural opportunities existed, where area A could be converted to area B, or Area C could be converted to area B. I had nothing to do except study the situation. And then we would make recommendations to George Mitchell and his team. Yes, we tried to align our entire government activities to support Mitchell and try to create some kind of momentum towards a peace solution. It was a fascinating job.

*Q: Were there any changes of approach during that period?*

HARDEN: There was also the same thing during when Kerry was the Secretary of State. I mean, the one thing is, there tends to be a shorter-term play because it's very political. Hey, let's create momentum, let's build these things. Let's improve these roads. Let's have some wins. So that's all the things that AID hates about the State Department the way they think. I was acting like the State Department guy, like, let's create a momentum here. The other thing that was different is that when I was with AID, everybody, more or less liked this, because we had enormous budgets. And so everybody wanted to meet with us, and they wanted to be nice.

They wanted a piece of our money and all that kind of stuff. When I was with Mitchell, everybody yelled at me.

*Q: It's an interesting fact of life.*

HARDEN: Yeah. Look, it's not exactly zero sum. And I'll give you an example. Israel, you're going to forget about this, and Palestinians forget about this. So that's different than when you're adding. I will say that one of the big things I learned about is how to take zero sum negotiations and through both politics and technology, you change something that is zero sum to something that's not zero sum. So, water, during Oslo, and all that water was zero sum, I got it, and you didn't, and if you want any more then you're going to have to take it from me. But as a result of efficient use, reuse, and desalination, water was no longer so much zero sum. It was a function of money, okay, but there was enough water for everybody to do everything. It just costs money, which is a very, very different negotiating tactic, then this is your sum, my gain is your loss.

*Q: Was the U.S. supporting either the re-use or desalinization work?*

HARDEN: I mean, Israelis are probably the best in the world on re-use and efficient use, but we also help the Palestinians a lot on all that too. We've had, I don't know, if it still exists, like a whole water team that was embedded at the State Department and USAID hosted the trilateral negotiations. Again, something that's a little bit different and unique to this USAID mission compared to anywhere else. I mean, we were the venue and the hosts of water and sanitation negotiations for at least two decades between the Israelis and the Palestinians. We would open up our offices and Israelis would come and the Palestinians would come and we would convene a meeting over water negotiations. Everybody would yell at each other, and they would walk out and they would slam the door and we'd have to coax them back in and all that kind of stuff, just like what you would envision.

*Q: Right because we were one of the few U.S. government entities that could speak to all sides.*

HARDEN: Right and also, again, we would host it because the embassy can't host and the consulate can't host and so we would host and we will invite the embassy and the consulate. But it was brilliant from that perspective.

*Q: Right, and obviously then the special envoy would be more affiliated, I mean, you'd be helping to represent them as well.*

HARDEN: By the way, I forgot to mention during my first tour as deputy mission director, we had Gaza disengagement, we had Hamas and Fatah fighting, which was essentially an internal civil war in Gaza. We had the Lebanon War in 2006. Then we had Operation Cast Lead, which was the Israeli and Hamas first war. So,

in four years we had four wars. And I got to be deeply involved in the mechanics of war in 2008-2009, before I joined Mitchell and all of it, which USAID never has this, but working with ICRC repairing lines, doing evacuations, getting people in, getting people out, GPS coordinates, deconfliction, all that stuff. I mean, I was really headed in the Curia, as U.S. Representative. Curia meaning Israeli Ministry of Defense.

*Q: Okay, so in a sense, working with those who were affected by the war.*

HARDEN: In that instance, we ran a cell, and it was a very, very, very limited number of people who had the ability to affect outcomes in the war. So, for instance, that war came at the very end of the Bush administration, then the beginning of the Obama administration. There was a group of Sisters of Charity, nuns in Gaza City that provide aid and help to special needs kids. They're nuns. Denis McDonough, Obama's Chief of Staff sends a message. He's like, whatever the Israelis do, don't hit the sisters and I call at 1 am, and I'm like, here's the GPS coordinates, don't hit them. And I mean it, don't hit them. We had an extremely intense, but productive way of operating to deconflict risk. Also, the Israelis don't use the same kind of GPS coordinates we do. And so this was actually a pretty big problem.

*Q: This could lead to some issues-*

HARDEN: Yeah, but I mean, I handed them GPS coordinates all the time, like, all the time. And I passed messages back and forth all the time. There was a lot in the press the last two months, about some of the stuff that I did in 2009 and 2012 and 2014, related to the Al-Shifa Hospital. But I mean, I passed messages back and forth all the time.

*Q: Okay. Did you also work with the UNRWA [United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East]? It is under the microscope right now.*

HARDEN: Yes I did. There were so many big personalities in such a limited space. We had the Quartet, which is the U.S., UN, EU, and Russia separate entity called the Quartet. And that was usually headed although it hasn't been for the last ten or fifteen years by a very, very senior American. I mean, these were different negotiating bodies. So, you had to touch base with all of them. So, they have the mission director, they have the Ambassador to Tel Aviv, they have the Consul General, they have the U.S. security coordinator. They had the Quartet.

*Q: The special envoy.*

HARDEN: The special envoy teams, there were so many of them. The Quartet is one group, and then, you have the UN system, which includes UNRWA, and so we've dealt with them all the time too, but I know in 2014, I really coordinated

with UNRWA to get food in and people out and stuff like that. I'm not sure they are (and I may have a minority opinion among the mission directors, but I'm not sure that I do) really that. They're not a UN agency like any other UN agency. I mean, they have a staff of 30,000 people. And 13,000 of them are in Gaza, and they only are on the Palestinian side, and they're implementers. They're implementers, they're teachers, and janitors and stuff like that. There's no doubt that Hamas infiltrated part of UNRWA, and there's no doubt that Hamas used Al-Shifa hospital or had tunnels under UN facilities. No doubt about it.

*Q: Right. I think that's a good point. I must say that my head is spinning because of how difficult and complex this job is.*

HARDEN: It was an exhausting job. But it was extraordinarily exciting. And particularly when Mitchell was on, I actually thought we were going to have peace in the Middle East. At the time, I thought, You know what? Mitchell can do it. Obama can do it. Mitchell can do it. I'm going to work with these guys. I'm going to work a little bit harder to close the gaps. I know these issues now really well. I think you can do it.

*Q: How close do you think we got to that?*

HARDEN: Not really close, but one really, really funny thing is that, I would call them the second tier negotiators. I was like a second-tier negotiator. One of the Palestinian second tier negotiators, one of the Israeli second tier negotiators, and myself, we all went to Georgetown Law School together around the same time, it was really, really fun.

*Q: Let me go back during this experience, when you were working for the special envoy, and you were out looking at opportunities for engagement. While you were independent of the AID mission, were there things that you learned that you would take back to AID? And did AID make any changes because they had the benefit of your very unique role?*

HARDEN: I'm going to blend Mitchell's time and Kerry's time a little bit because John Kerry essentially became the special envoy.

*Q: And that was after because you did the two years working with the special envoy and then you became the mission director.*

HARDEN: Then I went to Iraq.

*Q: Oh, then you went to Iraq.*

HARDEN: I went to Libya, opened up Libya, and then I went to Iraq, but I kept my family for a period of time, a few months, I was actually in Iraq and almost the special envoy.

*Q: Okay, well, let's stick with the West Bank then we'll deal with Iraq later. But you were the mission director when you were dealing with Kerry. That's the point.*

HARDEN: I don't know if this was good or not good. I'm going to combine a few big takeaways. Before I was on the negotiating team, I worked with Condoleezza Rice's team to try to tip the scales of the election away from Hamas in 2006. Okay, and I was very much on the ground with OTI [Office of Transition Initiatives], supporting Fatah and the Palestinian Authority and opposing Hamas, and a story broke in the Washington Post, like the day before the election. Ultimately, probably not a good thing to do. I was excited to do it and in retrospect maybe it was not the right thing to do.

On water, using that example, you can solve certain zero-sum positions through technology or advancement. Not everything has to be zero sum, some things do have to be zero sum, but not everything has to be zero sum. And so you try to bundle up as many things that you can solve that aren't zero sum, to create momentum.

Third, Netanyahu was fantastic at taking my portfolio and elevating it to the Secretary of State and the Prime Minister of Israel, when none of it should have been done that way. But we allow that. So, Area C, which is the area that's under full Israeli security and political control with the Palestinians living in the West Bank. We were trying to put in schools and clinics, and I was essentially the negotiator who tried to save space and security. This was actually under Kerry, to save space and services and opportunity for Palestinians in Area C. And there was a very, very intensive effort. Essentially, Netanyahu hijacked it and then he wrapped up Kerry so that instead of Kerry negotiating let's say, the status of Jerusalem, he's arguing about eight schools in Area C of the West Bank. You saw that in this war right now, early on, when Biden is effectively negotiating with Netanyahu on how many trucks can come through Rafah. Netanyahu is a master of that and we allow that to happen over and over and over again. So that was another takeaway that I had from that experience.

Lastly, we definitely, particularly under the Kerry administration, meaning envoy negotiations, we definitely tried to create a momentum of positive news that would reinforce the notion of peace, and we used AID money to do it, and it didn't work. We opened up new schools, new clinics, or new roads all the time. We made sure that Bethlehem was successful for tourism over Christmas. Money would flow into Palestinian restaurants and hotels, and bus services, all that kind of stuff. Really, at the end of it, it didn't make any difference.

We couldn't get beyond the structural problems. I mentioned this in our last interview but let me reiterate this again. In 2005, this really stuck with me, so in 2005, in Gaza, our theory was economic pressure on Hamas to yield political change. Not a bad theory. We use that theory all the time, sanctions, it's essentially

sanctions, but in the northern West Bank, it was an economic opportunity that would yield political change. What we saw is that economic pressure ended up backfiring completely and empowering Hamas against all of our interests. Economic opportunity created a massive window of opportunity, which was squandered, and it resulted in change for a ten or fifteen year period, but it did not result in a political breakthrough. These were the lessons that I learned from being on the negotiating teams.

*Q: And how would you apply those to what USAID was doing?*

HARDEN: I mean USAID doesn't think this way. Nobody in our ecosystem has these experiences, maybe the Russian Mission Director in the 1990s did, okay. I mean, that was a highly politicized USAID mission. And maybe there were some others. I don't know, Nicaragua, or El Salvador and Haiti or something like that. But generally speaking, the infrastructure over the USAID mission was so top heavy, that the mission director reported to an Ambassador rank person who covered economics in Iraq or Afghanistan. That wasn't the case for us. We were one of an extremely small handful of people that were accredited to both sides.

*Q: Right. No, I guess the point I'm wondering is as you began to learn more and to understand the dynamics of all of this. Did you think there were specific things that USAID could do that were maybe different that would be more supportive, or were there things that you thought were even counterproductive? Were there changes in the way AID itself went around its business as a result of this increased knowledge of the situation.*

HARDEN: I'm not really sure. I would say that being on the principal's committee now is pretty important. But when I was the AA, I went to the NSC [National Security Council] a lot. And then I see at the deputies level, which I tend to do a lot. For the one notch below that which I can't remember. You have the DOD civilians and then you have the Joint Chiefs, you have the State Department, you have the CIA or ODNI [Office of the Director of National Intelligence]. It was good that we were there. It was because it provided a way for us to influence, given our longer term perspective and our deeper understanding of the people and the cultures, and our closeness with the FSNs that made the interagency stronger. So, from that perspective, USAID engagement and a really political security, smart national security perspective in the interagency would be one of the only things I would take away from my experience.

*Q: Yes, that's important. But also within those things that USAID had control over its own program, for example, were there changes made as you got a better understanding? Did you ever think: I wish we were doing X, Y, or Z and make adjustments to how you were working on the ground?*

HARDEN: We never had a country strategy. I always opposed it. I mean we had a draft concept paper that would kind of shape what our vision is, but the changes

are so rapid, so often and so unpredictable and so political, that I didn't want to do that. The other thing is we had to write contracts and acquisition and assistance in a way that would allow for monumentally different circumstances six months later. So those were things that I think USAID did, but we're mainly structured to think about problems in Nepal, Tanzania, Ivory Coast, and Bolivia. This is literally nothing that I ever did.

*Q: Without naming any names, did some people end up getting assigned there that this was beyond their capability?*

HARDEN: Oh yeah, many.

*Q: In those kinds of cases, would AID just say, do your two years and move on? Or would they get rid of people early?*

HARDEN: That was very difficult from that perspective. I mean, look, so people coming in had a couple of issues. Number one, they would have a political perspective on one side or the other.I was not pro-Israel or pro Palestine, I was pro American, and so I was trying to advance our interests. There were many people, particularly in the West Bank and Gaza, that were predisposed towards the Palestinians. But you have to work with Israelis, and you have to work with the IDF. They can see all that, right. So you really needed to be an honest referee. And so that was hard for some people.

Some people didn't like the pace and the pace was exhaustive, and that's the way it goes. And I will say, as it related to me, some people didn't appreciate the fact that I really, really, really listened to the FSNs, who are in essence in competition with junior Foreign Service officers in terms of authority and control. But I get a first tour officer that comes out here who wants to run a program, and I have an FSN that I've known for ten years who knows issues inside out. There's a lot at stake, and so you want to go, you want to make the right decision, not that decision that's based on helping the junior officer move up the ranks. But I also gave junior officers, which I guess is not a term you're supposed to use, but I gave them enormous visibility that they would never get anywhere else, and I gave them enormous responsibility. I mean, I had people briefing negotiators on their area of expertise, water or sanitation, or like health, or education.

*Q: Right. If over the eleven-year period that you were there working in one capacity or the other, what do you think were the things that were most successful, both in terms of the impact on Palestinians, one, but then secondly, on trying to bring some element of peace or at least stability in the relationship?*

HARDEN: I say this without regret. But my enormous efforts to bridge the gaps between Israelis and Palestinians completely failed, and I think we see that now. So, from that perspective, I didn't have any success. I believed that we would, and I failed. I worked really, really, really hard and we utterly failed.

*Q: A lot of people failed.*

HARDEN: I don't say that with deep regret because if I had to do it over again, I would do it over again because you take a shot and you think to yourself "Hey, man, I'm on the brink of historic success. I might as well try". And I failed, but it was exciting to do.

*Q: In line with that, before we go on to other things you might have thought were successful. But in line with that, there were a lot of efforts bringing young Palestinians and young Israelis together to the U.S. to do things together. And all those kinds of cultural bridge programs. I assume we funded some of those?*

HARDEN: Yes, we funded it. We had girls play basketball with Samantha Power and girls play basketball with Susan Rice at the White House.

*Q: But those things, they might work in a small way with those individuals, but they don't have any longer-term impact?*

HARDEN: Makes you feel good. What I do think mattered. So, opening up Area C for basic services for people who were completely denied, which required an enormous political will, was a great thing. You gave people in villages water or schools or clinics or electricity that were unable to get it. And only the United States could do that.

*Q: Area C was the area that was administered by the Israelis?*

HARDEN: Right, and only the United States could do that.

*Q: Did the Israelis put any money into anything like that?*

HARDEN: No.

*Q: They didn't see it in their interest to do that?*

HARDEN: No, we would run a water line or electricity line from a settlement. So, Area C was important. I think I did a lot to connect, beginning with the American tech firms operating in Israel, Cisco, Google, Intel, connecting them to the Palestinian tech sector, and creating a real market and a real capability in Ramallah to grow tech jobs in a way that is maybe fundamentally different than a lot of Middle Eastern countries. I was very, very, very involved in that because I would invite all of the leading Israeli leaders of American tech firms to the ambassador's house and I would interview, or if it was me, or I would invite them to a neutral space and invite all the Palestinians. That created real connectivity and real opportunities, and we paid for that.

Everybody comes to Jerusalem, everybody. Everybody who is a billionaire thinks they have some idea that nobody's ever thought of, everybody comes through there. So, I got a chance to meet a lot of people and the tech work has some lasting impact. Then, the understanding of economics and its relationship to conflict. There was the Hamas Gaza story versus the Janine and opening up that I saw a lot of in Yemen, too. In how economics can either accelerate or blunt conflict. These were things that I was proud of doing, and I retain, I mean, look, when I ran for congress, I had enormous support from both Palestinians and Palestinian-Americans and Israeli- Americans.

*Q: Right. That's good. Obviously, you were in a unique position. But there were other USAID directors in neighboring countries that were impacted in some way. Jordan being one, Lebanon, another. To what degree did you all meet regionally to talk about these issues? And how was the working relationship with Washington?*

HARDEN: So, Paige Alexander and Alina Romanowski. I mean, first of all, there's hardly any Middle Eastern mission directors. When you look at the scheme of how many mission directors are there in the agency? And then you have Africa and Asia and Latin America? I mean, there's like six or something in the Middle East. And we met I would say twice a year, it was great. It was absolutely great. All of us being together. But in all of those instances, USAID did not have an outside wall. I mean, they were still on a normal mission.

*Q: Yeah, right. So not parallel. But you got the support you needed from Washington because you were in such a unique environment.*

HARDEN: Alina Romanowski, because she also sent me to Libya to open up the mission there. They wanted cowboys that would do things on their own, not ask, and then they could disavow.

*Q: That's a value.*

HARDEN: The case in 2014, definitely, definitely. But I did things legally. For instance, you generally don't operate programs and spend money if there's a congressional notification that's still on hold. That's kind of a rock solid thing. But you can spend money, despite a hold if people's lives or safety is at risk, and you just can do it.

*Q: You make that declaration.*

HARDEN: Yes, and after the fact, and everybody would yell, and then they would be glad I did it. Then, you take like your normal contract, let's say it's a hundred dollars or it's a hundred million dollars. And you gotta work within the scope of that contract because if you deviate from that scope, then it wasn't fair procurement, and it's subject to litigation. But you can have a de minimis

deviation from a contract that doesn't go beyond the scope. It's so inconsequential that you can't litigate it because you abided by the scope of your contract except for this de minimis change. Well, in a hundred million dollars contract, de minimis can be five million. If you're facing a war, and you don't have a lot of options for moving money and procurements and responses, because it takes eighteen months to do anything, then you cobble together a couple of de minimis exceptions, you get the ROA to sign it, you got something happening.

*Q: Right, a lesson for the agency is don't put people into those kinds of positions unless they're prepared to be innovative and risk takers, basically, because you can't operate without it. I can think of two other high profile foreign policy issues in which USAID played a key role: the early days of anti-apartheid support in South Africa and the Contra support in Honduras. AID was doing things that were very controversial. And in both of those cases, the people who were leading them coordinated with the Inspector General's office at the outset to try to develop some parameters of what was acceptable and what was not acceptable. In both those cases, they ended up with few issues, if any. Did you have much involvement with the Inspector General's office? Did they hassle you, or had you brought them in enough that they understood the flexibility needed?*

HARDEN: Yeah, interestingly, to this day, Mike Carroll, who is the former acting Inspector General, and I are partners on many different things. But we had the inspector general embedded in our mission, and I used them all the time. The rank-and-file smart AID person's approach is, look, man, just don't deal with the Inspector General. Keep them at arm's length, don't let them know too much, it'll end up killing you in the long run. And I was the complete opposite; more or less, they provided a safe harbor. If I told them, and they didn't do anything. Then I told them, and they didn't do anything. And now the GAO [Government Accountability Office] was a little trickier. I tried that with them, but they were a little less easy. But we had the inspector general embedded into our offices, and it worked. For instance, we could not find water pipes that we had bought. And these are the big infrastructure water pipes. And that was risky, because we were afraid that Hamas stole them and then would use them for rockets. We eventually found them. But I called the inspector general as soon as I found out to help me.

*Q: I think you said that smart people stay at arm's length; really smart people work closely with them. While assigned to work with the Special Envoy, you also went off to Libya right after the fall of Gaddafi. Can you tell us about that?*

HARDEN: This was a period of no activity between Israelis and the Palestinians. I think it was 2011. There was some stuff that was going on at the end. The other thing is at the UNGA [United Nations General Assembly], which is an absolutely fantastic thing to do. The Israelis and the Palestinians would always meet at the margins of UNGA under the Norwegian auspices. So, I went to UNGA all the time. And the beauty of all that is that you take people out of the Middle East, and then you give them a bunch of red wine and you're sitting in New York and it

suddenly seems a lot easier to communicate and talk through things. I really came to value UNGA. The other thing is I had an enormous budget which no USAID mission director has. And because I could host both Israelis and Palestinians. I have seen them all the time at our house and we would have a Christmas party. We always had regular Christmas parties, and look, this is the middle east; nobody's having Christmas parties.

*Q: Well, it's a neutral event.*

HARDEN: We would have a beautiful Christmas tree. Our kids are still young. We play like great Christmas carols, and we'd have an Israeli wine and Palestinian beer and cosmopolitans that were red and invite the Gazans and the IDF and the tech guys and the ministers and we would just all come to our house. I even wrote an op ed on one of the parties. The U.S. ambassador couldn't do that because he couldn't invite Gazans or Palestinians. So, I'd invite the ambassador and invite the consul general and they were coming to my house. It was super fantastic.

*Q: In some ways, that's very depressing. People can get along together in that kind of environment, and yet, then the next day, they'll be shooting at one another. It's very depressing.*

**Temporary Assignment to Libya -- Opening Up New Embassy, 2011 - 2012**

HARDEN: There's many, many, many similarities between Israelis and Palestinians, which not many acknowledge that, in fact, is the case.

In 2011, the Middle East Bureau called me, and they said, we need somebody to go into Libya. Gene Cretz was the Ambassador in Libya, but he was the DCM in Israel, and I had worked with him. And he and the whole embassy had evacuated and left, right as the war was raging. And Gaddafi and Chris Stevens who was in Benghazi, Chris Stevens had been the Deputy Consul General in Jerusalem. He was the envoy in Benghazi, and this is the thing, all these people I had already worked with, for years. And then it's just a different assignment. Different problems, Mark Ward had some role both within the UN and State Department with Bill Taylor, who, by the way, Bill Taylor, was on the Quartet. So I knew all these people.

In September, I'm in Herzliya, in northern Tel Aviv, one night, and I get a call and they're like, look, we need you to go to Libya. Gene and the team were going to try to reopen the embassy. So, I call the RSO and I'm like, "Well, what should I bring?" Because we don't have anywhere to stay or anything, which, by the way, none of this would ever happen again after Chris Stevens was killed, but we're like, okay, that's fine. I'm instructed to bring a flak jacket, a sleeping bag, and cash. I'm like, sounds great. I go in, we fly to Malta, I lose my luggage. We fly to Malta we meet and then we take a little plane into a completely bombed out

runway, and we were met by the warlord that controls the airport. And they whisk us to a safe house where they're like thirty or forty of us, most of them are security, including SEAL Team Two.

Our job was to open up the embassy, John McCain came, Marco Rubio came, Secretary Clinton came, Lindsay Graham came. We did this wounded warrior evacuation of Libyan fighters that Libyans paid for; they had some oil reserve money. I had two jobs. One was to help reestablish the embassy and create the first USAID presence and secondly was to mitigate the risk. Gaddafi was not dead. Gaddafi had left Tripoli, but he was still fighting. The hospital system completely collapsed, and I wasn't sure what to do. We were able to take some oil reserves that were sanctioned and held in escrow in New York, to take some portion of that and put it into a trust fund for health and humanitarian services for the Libyans. So, it's not USAID money, it's not U.S. taxpayers, it's Libyan.

The system was so collapsed, I wasn't sure what to do. Normally, you just send in a big C-130 plane full of stuff, and it's useless. But what I did was I caught up with all of the pharmaceuticals and the equipment manufacturers and guaranteed their payment, if they would come in and fix the equipment and start resupplying the meds. They did that, and it was much faster than anything we could have done, and it didn't cost us anything. Then concurrently as a symbolic gesture, we took some people to get rehabilitation services at one of the Harvard hospitals, which Libyans paid for. I went around with SEAL Team Two into an insanely dangerous situation all the time. I'd be on the phone at a hospital in Tripoli with like fifty people from the national security agency, NSA, and then you'd suddenly hear all this, like, gunfire, and I'd be like "I gotta duck, sorry." And I had undersecretaries call me every other day, all this kind of stuff. And that was really where I got more of an interagency reputation. I was only there for sixty days, and it was insanely dangerous.

*Q: Was Gaddafi's demise before you left?*

HARDEN: Yes, he died while I was there, and I was out running with Gene Cretz around a track that of course, DS would secure and we would go run around. We're out there and suddenly all the freaking gunfire is all over the place. DS comes out, and they hide Gene. Meanwhile, I'm outside by myself. We go jump into the car and all that kind of stuff. But I opened up the USAID mission to Libya, which was great. That was great. And then I went back to Mitchell, and then in 2012, I went to Iraq.

*Q: Right. So, you went as the deputy director to USAID Iraq in 2012*

**USAID/Iraq, Deputy Mission Director, 2012 - 2013**

HARDEN: Interestingly, I was there seventeen months, but my family still resided in Israel. And I went back and forth a lot because at least for some period

of time, I was still doing some things on the Israeli Palestinian conflict. I would fly from the embassy in Baghdad and have brunch on the Mediterranean Sea in Tel Aviv.

*Q: Who was the mission director then? There were probably two?*

HARDEN: Tom Stall eventually came. I got there a little bit before Tom. That was good. I mean, Iraq was difficult. I spent a lot of time in Erbil and I spent some time in Basra. I got out quite a bit, actually.

*Q: At that point the new embassy had opened, and USAID was in that Embassy building?*

HARDEN: AID was there. But that was when we had 35,000 employees under Chief of Mission authority. We were instructed by Obama to reduce the staff by 75 percent, including the entire embassy and all the USAID operations. That was a very interesting assignment. And I also learned a few things but, in that instance, we had four projects. You have to kill three of them. Two, you have to kill two of them in the next thirty days and one can be phased out in six months. You got four people, one stays, makes decisions.

That was a very, very instructive time for me. Because while it was difficult to do, you really got a chance to be kind of brutally honest in evaluating USAID programming and make decisions and so their results count. I remember, with a bit of hubris. But that time I still had a heightened hubris. One Iraqi FSN said to me, I'm like, this project has produced nothing, no results, you spent a hundred million dollars and we don't have any results. The only thing we do is we have people talking to each other. This FSN looks at me and he goes "hey, you know what? In Iraq people talk to each other. It's actually a huge result. Let's judge this a little bit better here." I was like, Yeah, you know what? The irony of all this is Iraq, for the most part, turned out much better in Afghanistan.

*Q: What kind of criteria did you ultimately use in making the decisions?*

HARDEN: From that perspective, I tried to look at value for money and results like that would lead to some kind of stability. So, I generally tended to favor economics.

*Q: Do you remember some things that got cut?*

HARDEN: I mean, everything got cut. Literally everything. They called it the glide path. This was Obama. He had the State Department's Tom Nides come out and enforce this. You have to go from 35,000 to 5,000 employees under the Chief of Mission authority. That's very difficult.

*Q: What was the size of USAID at that point? And then what did it go down too?*

HARDEN: We had a billion dollar budget. And then I mean, we took it down in that year to one hundred or two hundred million.

*Q: And how many people were there? What did you go down to?*

HARDEN: We were never that top heavy, because we had all the implementing partners. So, the number of let's say USAID staff, let's say was sixty-five. But you know what, that was easier, because I wasn't so worried about them, because they all had jobs. I mean half of them didn't want to be there anyway. I will say this, and not without criticism, the discipline that was required of the American staff at the embassy was tough. So, for instance, you could not drink to the point where you couldn't run to bomb shelter in thirty seconds. If you were drunk, and you couldn't do that. Even if there was no alert, you got on the next plane out, and really, there wasn't a lot of wiggle room with all that stuff, and when you're getting rid of seventy five percent of people, that makes it easier. That was a real thing. But interestingly, I went back to West Bank, Gaza after Iraq, and that August of 2014, we went to the bomb shelter more times in the month of August than I did in seventeen months in Baghdad. Just for perspective.

*Q: On Iraq, you thought it was more successful than Afghanistan, I'm just curious if they're things you thought was particularly well done, or that you think that it would be nice for people to know that were well done?*

HARDEN: I mean, this is where, going back to the point that the peace process between Israelis and Palestinians, completely failed and there's nothing. Afghanistan was born under a fundamental attack against the United States. So, there was much wider support for the authority and the legitimacy. It was just simply an easy thing to get behind. Of course, Iraq was highly politicized. So, in a sense, Iraq was birthed out of illegitimate means, and yet turned out to be more successful. That means all assumptions that people have about things may or may not hold, you just simply don't know. Afghanistan is a failure, and I had been on the Afghan border, as I mentioned, last interview, well before 9/11. And so, we had a relationship with Afghanistan before 9/11. After our withdrawal from Afghanistan, today it is a hellhole. I mean, clearly, it's the most oppressive gender apartheid imaginable with massive humanitarian catastrophe. We've completely failed in Afghanistan, despite all of our effort and good intentions and hard work. And Iraq is not a failure.

*Q: Right. I was just curious whether you thought that there were certain things you thought were better than others? Right. At that point in Iraq, was aid still doing anything collaboratively with the U.S. military or had that ended?*

HARDEN: No that had ended.

*Q: Ok, and a lot of what we were doing was economic growth, private sector development, employment generation?*

HARDEN: Right.

*Q: Ok, so seventeen months and then that's when you then went back to West Bank, Gaza, and were the mission director.*

HARDEN: I mean, again, I tend to look at these things a little bit more geopolitically. I spent six weeks in Erbil in Kurdistan. It was very hard to envision that country being put back together in a way that would retain sovereignty. The fact is, it kind of works, and it was kind of surprising. So maybe our presence alone and kind of connectivity, and at least some thinking about what the future could look like and not just short-term thinking maybe it helps. Certainly, things that we did in Afghanistan that were good, like girls' education that have profound implications for those girls and their families. But in general, I don't know why we succeeded one place and not the other and you would think you would want some robust answers to that question. So again, I was assigned to Nepal. And I got pulled back to be the mission director in the West Bank and Gaza.

*Q: So, you were originally going to Nepal, a very different experience. Was this because something fell through on the West Bank, Gaza, or did they say no, we can't waste David on Nepal*.

HARDEN: There were some personal issues that suggested that I go back.

*Q: Okay, so you go back to the West Bank, Gaza, after being gone for seventeen months, although you were visiting your family.*

**USAID/West Bank - Gaza, Mission Director, 2013 - 2016**

HARDEN: That period of time I was still doing the Mitchel work—

*Q: So you just fit right back in and you didn't have any start-up issues?*

HARDEN: No, I knew everybody, and I knew everything. For my supporters, it was good. And from my detractors, it was a nightmare. This guy never leaves! I worked really closely with Dan Shapiro, the ambassador. In 2014, we had another war in which Israelis took Al-Shifa hospital. I was in the Kyria when they told me they were going to take the Al-Shifa hospital. I called Dan and like, they want to go after Shifa. I mean, this is the level of connectivity that we had. Shifa was in the news in November. But there was no doubt that Hamas had some kind of functional control or operational capacity underneath Shifa but the Israelis didn't go because I understood that would be a problem.

I mean, so many things have happened all the time and I worked really hard to get assistance. We would negotiate a ceasefire, a humanitarian pause, and then Hamas would shoot at somebody. I mean Hamas were bad actors, you know we'd got people in and now. Because I was the one that had the relationships with the IDF again, so nobody in the consulate could. At the embassy, they didn't really want to subcontract that out, and I already had relationships. In addition, I talked to both sides. Of course, the embassy can't talk to both sides. I worked really closely with Dan Shapiro on the 2014 war. And then Kerry, after that Kerry came in and made a big push at the end of the Obama administration. I worked really closely with his team.

*Q: Right, given how long you worked on the issues, did you ever feel any burnout, especially given the lack of progress?*

HARDEN: I mean, Kerry was before he was Secretary of State, he was SFRC, I used to drive around with Kerry all the time, in the West Bank, see all the tech stuff and all that kind of stuff. So, for a very long time, I didn't want to leave for a whole bunch of reasons. The family was happy there. Particularly my daughter, the youngest, she was very happy. We had a nice house; the weather was great. They didn't have to worry about poverty. In Dhaka we were living in it. The kids are in a good school. My wife was at the embassy and there were great restaurants, great weather, but I had to do war stuff, travel an hour and a half. I'd be in Ramallah and all that kind of stuff. I didn't want to leave. I mean, there's a point where you can't keep doing this. But I mean, I liked it.

So, then I got a call. I was actually hosting an Iftar at my house and somebody in USAID headquarters called and asked if I would be interested in applying for the AA job in DCHA. And I said yeah. DCHA stands for the Democracy, Conflict, and Humanitarian Assistance Bureau. They have since broken up into three bureaus, but the logic behind it was right. And I think Natsios is the one who set it up. It's a continuum. And I think he was right. And I think it was a mistake to break it apart. I mean, they're feeling like it was too big, and it was too diverse of a portfolio and stuff like that. I thought it made sense. I was in Israel, I was running a massive program. I would fly back and do a little prep here and there for the thing, but man, I was the mission director, and then, SFRC came out for a tour. I had them for three days. I had six members of SFRC that I took all over the place. They were the ones who were going to approve my nomination to get me out. I got through the vetting process on the administration side.

**AID/W, Bureau for Democracy, Conflict, and Humanitarian Assistance (DCHA), Assistant Administrator, 2016 - 2017**

*Q: Are you somewhat surprised by some of the Congressional approval process?*

HARDEN: Enormously difficult, right, that whole vetting process was enormously difficult. Everybody on the Hill knew me because I would speak to

the Hill all the time, even to the point where like AID would be like, we don't want to go up to the Hill, but they would all call me all the time. I mean, all time. I knew a lot of people at SFRC and all that kind of stuff. Then I had taken six members, and I gave them really amazing life experiences that they will never forget.

*Q: What did you do? What kinds of things were made unforgettable?*

HARDEN: I would try to figure out what they needed to know to do their job. Usually, it meant like meeting Palestinians or meeting a couple of tech people or seeing a basketball game between girls or going to the crossing points. I mean, I remember I took Administrator Raj Shah through into the Kyria; the Ministry of Defense, and it was like late at night, it looked like it was under siege. It was 10 pm. He's meeting with a three-star general whom I know very well. And Raj was like "Hey man, this is incredible." We don't usually get these kinds of experiences when we go out and I got through.

I was held up a little bit. Because I worked with the Palestinians, I had an anonymous hold. That's what they called it, an anonymous hold. From a senator that I did not know. And when it's anonymous, you don't know who's putting it on. It could be a Democrat, it could be anybody. So, I called up McConnell, who I think was the Senate Majority Leader at the time. I call up McConnell's senior staffers and national security adviser and I'm like, man, what's the deal? And he's like, I can't tell you who. But it's one of our guys. I'm like, Okay, I'm going to make an educated guess. You have to call validators. I called the validators who called Ted Cruz, and said, he should ask me, and he did. Like within an hour of having my validation call, I got the hold lifted. And I got in. Look, being a mission director was a much better job than being an AA. You were many times a Mission Director, right?

*Q: Twice. Yes.*

HARDEN: And when was your senior job in DC?

*Q: I was Counselor. I was also acting AA for Africa for a couple of years.*

HARDEN: I know what by the way you were on-after you had retired you were one of the outside evaluators for Senior Foreign Service promotions. You once said to me “Oh, I saw your appraisal, you did a really good job. I was the outside member on the panel.”

*Q: Right. Well, I would argue that also in a bureau with such a diverse portfolio as the old DCHA Bureau, it would be particularly difficult to engage on the breadth of issues. You presumably had good people who were in charge of democracy, good people in charge of humanitarian assistance. And so it's harder for you to get involved.*

HARDEN: I was always, always ranked very high on the rankings. So, I really dislike being the Assistant Administrator. Compared to being a mission director. I mean, it was good because my daughter was going to college. She was the youngest one. And it was time to come back. We've been overseas for so long, and all that kind of stuff. Bought a house, finally. In terms of jobs. Everybody thinks the AA, they have a whole army of people that begged to be in their presence, and it's a meaningless job compared to being a mission director. Listen, I was used to being the boss 6,000 miles away. Now a hundred people have to clear on anything that you think about. That was fine, whatever. I did that. I went to South Sudan, I saw the air drops, which I had tweeted a lot about, and I was on TV a lot about the air drops this past weekend.

*Q: What were you saying about air drops?*

HARDEN: The airdrops in Gaza are ridiculous. They're, in fact, inefficient. They're effectively meaningless. Only optics. I mean, it was very negative.

*Q: Right. No, I saw Jeremy Konyndyk interviewed a day or so ago. He basically said the same thing.*

HARDEN: Jeremy and I've been talking. So, I was on CBS News and CNN and I was on six TV stations this past weekend. But look, I did some good stuff. I wasn't there that long because I was brought in. I was the senior foreign service officer who had been confirmed. So, the idea is I would carry on after the 2016 election. I had a lot of Republican support during the Senate confirmation process. I knew all of them. I had a lot of support and there was a lot of interest in keeping career people. The Trump White House had zero interest. And at that time, my mom had a terrible accident. I took off for five months. The career Foreign Service officers who were confirmed were to revert back to career status. I was trying to get some guidance about what they were going to do. Linda Thomas Greenfield says, I'm not leaving my office. I'm instructed to get the hell out of the office by noon on January 20. And if I'm in there I'm in big trouble.

And so I took some time off right in the beginning of the administration. Then my mom had an accident and I took the family medical leave, which of course, I incurred, like a zillion years of family medical leave. And then, I mean, literally, I didn't do anything. I was literally just helping my mom and my dad, and I really wasn't working at all and it was great. And then I got a phone call. I think it was Tom Staal who called me. He's like, look, you got to do something. You want to go to the War College or you want to go to Yemen? Like my wife said, I used to go to Yemen because the War College just means you're at the end. I'm like okay. I'm going to Yemen. I negotiated a deal with whoever the AA was at the time on Yemen coverage.

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*Q: Okay, today is March 14, 2024, and this is interview number three with David Harden. Dave, when we finished up last time you were talking a bit about your experiences with USAID [United States Agency for International Development] for the DCHA Bureau, the Democracy, Conflict and Humanitarian Assistance Bureau. I'll ask you if you have any other thoughts about that, because we talked about how it really wasn't as much fun as being a mission director. But one part of the DCHA Bureau I'd like to discuss is the Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI), especially given the work that you did overseas.*

HARDEN: So, let me let me go a little bit broader about the DCHA Bureau and the theory behind it, the offices behind it, and then we can go into some of the specifics into OTI. So, to begin with, you're right, I liked being a mission director much more than I liked being the AA [Assistant Administrator], even though the AA is a higher rank, and it's Senate confirmed, and all that stuff. The mission director has unique authorities and independence, and the AA is working within a bureaucratic system within USAID and within the inter-agency. And it's really kind of driven by consensus. In many respects, you need the Management Bureau to clear on something or the General Counsel [GC] to clear on something and you report to the deputy administrator who may or may not have a similar view and may or may not be aligned with the administrator and all that. It was much more of a bureaucratic function than being a mission director.

The theory behind DCHA which has since been broken up into three, I think, was smart and good. And it was Andrew Natsios [administrator of USAID, 2001-2006]. I actually think it was a mistake to break it up. But the theory is that democracy and a lack thereof, or a trend away from, say, democratic institutions and norms helps to inspire conflict in a sense, which leads to a need for humanitarian assistance. The theory that Natsios set up was the right one. And I think it was also a very, very heavy position because you covered the whole world, and you covered humanitarian assistance and stabilization and democracy programming. So, it was a lot for one person, but I think, dividing into three kind of devalued USAID and the interagency. And I'm not going to remember all the names of the organizations that were under DCHA, but it included Food for Peace.

*Q: OFDA [Office for U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance] was a big one.*

HARDEN: Yeah, right. OFDA which has since been combined OFDA and Food for Peace into the Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance. There was the democracy center. So, democracy rights and governance. There were American schools and hospitals abroad. There was the civilian military liaison crew. And so we had people at all the military commands. And we had about fifty military people in DCHA through the Office of Civilian-Military Cooperation. We had OTI and probably some others. I can't remember them all.

*Q: There was a conflict mitigation unit also, I believe.*

HARDEN: Yeah, CMM [Conflict Management and Mitigation] Yeah. I liked it. It was really big. It was really bold. And you kind of had the whole gamut of everything. It was about maybe a third of the agency. So again, since then, structurally, they divided that up into three and they combined OFDA and Food for Peace, which was really pushed by Jeremy Konyndyk who is the head of Refugees International now. He was in the Biden administration for a little bit. I did not think it was a priority. Looking at all the things that were wrong with USAID, and all the ten things that you needed to fix, combining OFDA and Food for Peace wasn't in the top ten. I mean, we have so many other structural issues that I felt like it was a diversion from priorities that we needed. An enormous amount of money goes into humanitarian assistance. And that's the thing that people see visually. You see it right now with Gaza and Sudan.

So, I really liked OTI, because OTI, its mandate, is very different. And that's the Office of Transition Initiatives. OTI's mandate is different from anything else in USAID. USAID is essentially an international economic development agency. And the big divide is between that and the humanitarian system, one is relief and one is kind of longer-term development. OTI is political. And it's just essentially short term, political funding to achieve political objectives that relate to either blunting or mitigating conflict or climbing out of conflict. And their theory will be that if you pick up the trash and open up the markets and get the clinics online in Raqqa within thirty days, it reflects nicely on the political actors that we're supporting.

We brought OTI in on the West Bank in Gaza in 2005-2006 during the Hamas elections. Our job was to demonstrate that the Palestinian Authority and Fatah could deliver for the people and of course, they can't, and they didn't. I mean, it was essentially a plurality, but Hamas kind of took control. OTI, like humanitarian assistance, is kind of shiny and exciting. There's a lot of passion, a lot of political interest, it gets a lot of press. They hardly have any money. I mean, they have like ninety million dollars and you have to buy into their operation. That creates the argument that there's a demand for it because people are having to give up their unit money in order to buy OTI programs.

There is a fundamental threshold question that I think remains unanswered. I know it was unanswered during my time, and I believe it's still unanswered, and that is: Do short term political activities accrue to the benefit of political actors that we support, and therefore reduce the risk of conflict? And there's anecdotal, maybe self-serving stories that demonstrate that that's true. But there hasn't been a sufficiently rigorous undertaking, I believe. I would like to see that. The only thing I was aware of was crime in El Salvador. And in high crime areas, they did, they played, let's say, classical music out loud on loudspeakers at night, in certain areas and other areas they did, and then they saw a measurable quantifiable difference in criminal activity. All right. But as far as I'm aware, we don't know if the fundamental premise is right, and there's not a ton of demand to see if that is correct.

By the way, since you mentioned CMM, the conflict management mitigation office, which I think maybe has changed its name since then. I don't know. But there are some theories where girls, ages fourteen to eighteen play basketball together, and half of them

are Jewish, and half of them are Muslim, and they live in East Jerusalem and in West Jerusalem, will you get less conflict? Will, if you send smart, young leaders from each side of a conflict to a summer camp for three weeks, and then follow up with continual engagement with them, do you get leaders that value peace over war? All right. And I don't know if there's been a little bit more, I guess, rigorous study on conflict management and mitigation. But in general, I think both of those theses for CMM and OTI, need to be explored more deeply. I mean, clearly, it's not the case between the Israelis and the Palestinians. We've been running CMM activities for two decades.

*Q: Right. And those young people, they may have played basketball together. And five years later, they may be shooting guns at one another.*

HARDEN: And even if they really value what it is they did, they're not able to move their society. OTI, I guess it's kind of intended to address grievances that local citizens might have, and so they feel less aggrieved and be more bought into the systems. But I don't really think it is as simple as that necessarily. Because there's a lot of things that create their grievances, and they have nothing to do with whether the trash is picked up. It has to do with identity politics, or tribal relationships, or vast economic inequity. And these things just paper over that.

*Q: Right. Were there ever efforts on the West Bank and Gaza to focus on women to see if they could do more to try to find peace in the region? Because certainly, that has been the case in areas such as Northern Ireland which is often cited as an example.*

HARDEN: I think that there is rigorous analysis that supports a few of these. So, let me walk through them. I think it's clear that economic, let's say, growth or opportunity or increase in economic position for the benefit of women, benefits the family. Alright, so the dollars go for it. I think that's pretty undisputed at this point. The idea that women, peace, and security leads to less conflict. These aren't things I study that deeply, particularly nowadays, on the farm. It doesn’t feed the goats. But interestingly, on a farm, the female animals are much more deeply valued than the male animals, the males are all basically butchered, gotten rid of as early as possible. Everybody on the West Bank and Gaza, everybody who had an opinion about everything came by and were happy to share it with us. And we for sure had people who are kind of pushing that. It may just be too cute for words to say that the women want peace across the green line more than the men and it's really the men that are fighting, and the women don't want that. I mean, there are very, very deep ideological bases that both societies hold that the women hold that are so deeply ingrained. It's much deeper than, say, gender inequality. I just saw something yesterday from Bonnie Glick who was the Deputy Administrator of USAID, whose sister Caroline Glick is one of the most right-wing rabid commentators in Israeli politics. You see a lot of language among women about maximalist positions. And so I would be a little careful to think that women, peace, and security is going to reduce the essence of conflict. I think economic results or economic yield, I think that's pretty clear, particularly as it relates to money spent on the family and children and stuff like that, but I'm not sure about conflict. What do you think, by the way?

*Q: I don't know. I've participated in or listened to some meetings in which women are brought together. Certainly, Melanne Verveer believes that it's possible, and I was curious about what your views were.*

HARDEN: I mean, there's always anecdotal stories, right. Even if we take Afghanistan where I believe that at least half the population or more supported the direction that the U.S. was going with the Afghan government, even though the Afghan government was corrupt and inefficient, something like that, I believe the bulk of the people supported the modernity of Afghanistan. But they couldn't prevail. No doubt that for the women there it's gender apartheid. No doubt about that. But we spent twenty years kind of pushing against that.

*Q: Right. Let me ask you a somewhat related question. USAID is working in a large number of countries that have been beset with conflict, often ethnic conflict within the country itself. Whether we're talking about the Balkans or you mentioned Afghanistan, Rwanda. Were there ever attempts to bring together the mission directors from those countries to talk about commonalities or lessons learned? Or did you all ever talk about the role of AID is in that kind of situation?*

HARDEN: That's a really good question. Because I think generally, the mission directors meet either in the aggregate with all eighty of them, or along bureau lines, and for sure, we met along bureau lines a lot. We met with the Middle East Bureau, a very small number of mission directors. In fact, in some regards, I'm going to make the argument against this. I remember at one of my very last Middle East mission director meetings, and then I was doing Yemen, and you look at the allocation of talent, and money, okay, as a reflection of priorities, and let's just take the Middle East. So, what we saw was an enormous amount of money going into Jordan, Egypt, West Bank, and Gaza, with large missions. And this was around 2016-2017-2018. And then we saw Syria, Lebanon, Libya, and Yemen that probably had a total of one third of the USA West Bank, Gaza mission. For all of those deep, deep, deep conflict states that were at the crux of American foreign policy and national security. And so, I was really arguing that there was a pretty gross misalignment of resources to risks, which is probably still the case.

And so, we don't work in the poorest countries. We probably have a nonprofit. I mean, if we look at the thirty poorest countries in the world, I bet that the allocation of resources and people is really misaligned to that, so are we in economic development or poverty alleviation? We're going to help the poorest of the poor, is that who we are? Because that's not what our budget says. Are we going to really, really engage in complex stabilization and mitigation and kind of make sure we're at the nexus of helping to reduce risks for U.S. national security by making sure our smartest top people with money and authority and resources are going to those complex issues now? We don't see that. Think about all the kinetic action that we have had since, let's say 2016. And let's just use the Middle East or 2012, whatever, you got Libya, you got Yemen. I mean, we're still on the Red Sea right now, shooting at the Houthis every other day. We've got Iraq, we have Syria, and we have chaos in Lebanon. We don't have any presence in these places.

*Q: To challenge you a little bit. If we look at USAID as a development agency, there's a lot of research that shows that real development is very much dependent upon governance within the countries that you're working in. So, if you want to achieve development results, you have to work in countries that are committed to development—*

HARDEN: Which is probably none of the bottom thirty.

*Q: And then there's the humanitarian side. How do you make resource allocation decisions?*

HARDEN: Yeah. All right. So fair enough, by the way. So, India, let's just say and forget backsliding and India, the Philippines and Indonesia, maybe Vietnam. I'm not sure where else. Costa Rica? I don't even know if we're in Costa Rica.

*Q: Well, we finally got out of Costa Rica.*

HARDEN: Guatemala, Colombia. Yeah. Right. Then how material is our support? How material is that? Because they have good governance, and they're probably on their way. Now, I do think from that perspective, this is not super resource intensive and I had to be creative in so many ways in these conflicts because you never knew what you had. But helping India with its stock exchange may have nothing to do with poverty alleviation. But it might be a great way to help create capital markets that reinvest into the economy and kind of unleash its innovation and entrepreneurial talent. On the other hand, should we be in India? I mean, it's the third largest or fourth largest economy in the world. They just went to the moon. Should we give U.S. tax dollars to help India? I wrote an op-ed arguing that we should. I think when you're sending spaceships to the moon, and doing solar probes, and you have Blue Water Navy aspirations, I don't think they need U.S. assistance. I mean, we can at most put some people in to be advisors, maybe.

*Q: Okay. I'm not arguing in favor of India. But interesting. I mean, your point on the lack of resources, both financial and personnel in some of the most problematic places in the world is clearly correct. But, is part of that driven by security concerns as well?*

HARDEN: Of course. Let's take Yemen, for example. I mean, we haven't had people that have stepped foot in Yemen in ten years. And yet, we run pretty large programs in Yemen, which are mainly humanitarian relief. Every once in a while now we will send the country rep or mission director to go in with basically an army, and they'll touch the beach for five minutes, and they'll have people that will come in and meet with them. That's how it was in Somalia. It's completely ridiculous. I mean, I get the security risk, I really do. But almost all foreign service officers that I know understand the security risk, and think that we need to be present, not dedicated. I think Chris Stevens, which is why this all came up, he was killed in Benghazi, he would agree with that. We understand the risks. I mean, that's compared to Libya, and Chris was killed. And it was insanely dangerous. But it wasn't like I was snookered into going. I knew what the risks were. I mean, we haven't been to Gaza. We haven't sent an American diplomat to Gaza in probably twenty years. But after I quit. I went.

*Q: Okay. But our implementing partners go in and some of them are Americans, right?*
HARDEN: Yes. I mean, I'm not sure that's particularly satisfying. We don't go in, but we send in Catholic Relief Services and Mercy Corps. Yeah. I don't know.

*Q: Okay. Anything more on DCHA and we've obviously gone beyond that.*

HARDEN: I was glad that I took the job. It's a qualitative level above. I didn't like the job compared to being a mission director, but in terms of simply rank, being Senate confirmed is a big deal. And there's not been a lot of career Foreign Service officers who have been presidentially appointed and confirmed by the Senate. I was happy to do that. And then after Trump came in, I went to Yemen.

**USAID/Yemen, Mission Director/Minister Counselor, 2017 - 2018**

Yemen was good for me, to kind of complement my understanding of the Middle East, because that's the Gulf, and the Arabian Peninsula, and the Saudis and the United Arab Emirates, and Iran, and Qatar, and then Yemen and the tragedy of Yemen. And so that was good. But that was the end. After that point, I quit. Now, I will say—

*Q: What did you go to Yemen to do?*

HARDEN: I was the mission director. So, we had to negotiate something because I wasn't going to go as the country representative. I think we negotiated that I'd be the minister counselor for Yemen, the Yemen crisis. I covered all elements of Yemen from the region.

*Q: Where were you based?*

HARDEN: I was based in Jeddah, and Riyadh, and now they are based in Riyadh now, but I mean, I traveled extensively. I mean, in a sense Yemen is a little bit like the Israelis and Palestinians, because the Saudis, at least at that point, had very firm control. The internationally recognized government was they had a tip on the very south and aid or they were mainly staying at the Four Seasons hotel in Riyadh. A lot of the meetings were in Riyadh but also in Abu Dhabi, Amman, and in Djibouti. So, I went to Djibouti, which was very fascinating. You really see a great game in Djibouti. And so, like Yemen, really rounded. Not a lot of people have really focused on Yemen. And it is actually a pretty big issue. Then even fewer have done Yemen and Israel Palestine. I've been, there's been a lot of demand for me since October 7.

*Q: Right. And that gives you more insights into the efforts to get the Saudis to actually—*

HARDEN: You get the Gulf dynamics, which is really important to understand the Middle East.

*Q: And the Abraham Accords, probably?*

HARDEN: Yeah. And you also see Yemen in the conflict there and oh, and Yemen has really good food, which a lot of people don't know about. The cuisine is different from the Levant. When you think of Middle Eastern food and the Levant, you go down around DC and you go to Lebanese restaurants. The Yemeni food is much more of a blend of Indian spices and East Africa, India, and, and the Levant, all mixed together. So, it's a spicy version of the Levant food and way heavier on seafood. So, it was really it. I mean, I had close relationships with very senior leadership in a lot of these places. So yeah, there you go.

*Q: How long were you doing the Yemen position?*

HARDEN: I did it for a little less than a year, and I decided, I mean, at that point, our kids were growing up and my wife was at the State Department in DC, and I had been the Assistant Administrator. Now I'm suddenly done with all this nonsense. And I just decided to retire. So, I retired after my two weeks' notice. I was in Riyadh on April 15. I wrote Mark Green, because actually Yemen was a pretty big deal at that point in the Trump administration and told him I was leaving on May 1. I didn't even do the retirement course. I didn't do anything. I just spent one week wrapping up in Riyadh, and I flew back to DC. By the way, it's extremely hard to check out after two decades in government, to check out in a week back in DC, but I did, and I closed the chapter on April 30. I loved USAID. I loved being a Foreign Service officer. It was a mission, a passion, leadership, experience, adventure. I can't say enough about it. I lived a great life, but I didn't want to be caught up in bureaucracy and all that. I had a great, great run, and I hung it up.

*Q: Yeah. So that would have been April of 2018, then. When you retired, did you decide to go to the farm?*

**Retire from USAID, April 2018 -- Post-Retirement Work and Concluding Thoughts**

HARDEN: I was still in DC. I mean, we had this farm, but we were still in DC. So, on May 1, I launched my own company. And I went virtual, I opened it up at six am, on May 1. And I have had real serious traction right off the bat. It's been up and down since I opened up my own firm, the Georgetown Strategy Group. But you can read about it in The New York Times and CNN and everywhere else that has quoted it. The Wall Street Journal, I think today or yesterday. My vision of what was going to happen on May 1, and the first six months, differ from what actually did happen, but it worked. It worked out fine.

I did two things that were particularly interesting. I mean, I did a lot of things. I tried to provide higher and almost corporate, strategic corporate strategy, and consulting services, often but not exclusively in the aid sector. Okay, I didn't help you write your proposal to win the Yemen award. I helped organizations position themselves in the marketplace and figure out growth strategies, because remember, I was a corporate lawyer before I joined USAID. And that went well. So, I did two things in particular, I was really excited about.

Number one, I had some investors ask for a venture capital fund that was run by Israelis and Palestinians to take over a portfolio company in Ramallah, which did not make it. But the company was struggling. You know, venture capital money is extremely high risk, and there's a ninety percent failure rate. So, if you fail, it's no big deal, because ninety percent of the time firms fail. The investors asked me to take over a company that might have promise but was struggling to see if I could turn it around. So, I ran a company in Ramallah for a couple of years. We did not make it. But that was good. That was interesting. And it was good because we had both Israeli and Palestinian money. During that time, I would fly to Tel Aviv then I would go to Ramallah, Amman, because I was also looking for further investment money for the tech startup that we had. I'd go to Tel Aviv, Ramallah, Amman, Riyadh, Abu Dhabi, and back. Everybody knew that I was doing this, and the Saudis and Emiratis and Israelis were all excited that I was really, really talking to each one of them and trying to build stuff together, and all that kind of stuff. It was incredibly fascinating.

I testified on Capitol Hill because now I don't work for anybody and I'm free to do whatever I want. So, I testified on the Hill and I guess in 2020 to the House Foreign Affairs Committee or whatever it's called, on the Arabian Peninsula. It was me, Jake Sullivan, and I can't remember, but she was very high up in the Department of Justice. I was the only one that didn't go into the Biden administration. But that was really good, very different. I'm running a startup tech company. It was very different from anything that USAID did.

And then, the other thing that I did is I worked a lot with MIT Lincoln Laboratories for about four or five years. There I was trying to open up different kinds of commercial technologies to humanitarian assistance—mainly humanitarian assistance and disaster relief. Lincoln Laboratories is an arm of MIT. It's not on the main campus, it's about eight miles north. And it's like a big research lab. There's 4000 scientists and stuff like that. I didn't understand anything they did, but they didn't understand anything I did. And we had a really good run for about four or five years. And then to start, I mean, and I've done a lot of other business work.

*Q: Can you give an example of using technology for humanitarian assistance?*

HARDEN: So, you're familiar with the Famine Early Warning System, FEWS NET, right? It was developed in 1986, between USAID and NASA and the weather people, whatever they're called, to forecast weather and market conditions three, six, nine months out to assess food insecurity around the world. It was in response to the Ethiopian famine of 1986. And the point was, if you knew if you could look over the horizon, you saw what was coming, you could place people in food and take steps to mitigate famine, which was wildly successful. And we deserve a lot of credit, it probably ranks up there with PEPFAR [President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief], in terms of saving lives. It's a little less known, but it probably ranks up there with PEPFAR in terms of saving lives. And I will tell you, in 2016, when I was the AA, I went to Ethiopia thirty years later, they were also facing a very heightened famine risk. But because we had DART [Disaster Assistance Response Teams] and Food for Peace, we're able to place things and

we were able to blunt the famine risk, which was as steep as it was in 1986. FEWS NET was really, really fantastic.

I took that idea of FEWS NET, and I tried to apply it to the climate. Alright, see, if I'm still listed on MIT's page on this. It was my idea completely, of course, MIT owns it completely because they were paying me, but so I wanted to do the climate resilience, early warning system. So, instead of looking three, six, nine months out, I wanted to look twenty years out at a very, very micro level, to understand what climate impact would look like at the five hundred square meter level anywhere in the world, and to be able to take adaptive or mitigation strategies. It was a whole of MIT undertaking, oh, they've really, really increased this. At one point I was listed as one of the founding thinkers. In any event. So, an example would be, like how you look at climate impact and a non-risk area. By the way, have you ever heard of the wet-bulb temperature?

*Q: No, I don't believe so.*

HARDEN: Neither had I. But when you start working with all these scientists, you learn things. Wet-bulb is a heat humidity index. And so roughly around ninety degrees Fahrenheit, ninety degrees humidity, or some kind of combination of that not high heat, low humidity, and not medium heat high humidity, like let's say, Maryland or DC, but at relatively high heat, but under a hundred degrees Fahrenheit with high humidity, it's incompatible with human life. You can't live more than six hours because your body can't cope. You can't sweat and so your organs begin to fail at the six-hour mark, and you either have to get shelter, cool, or you die. If you look at where the wet-bulb temperature is at risk, it's thirty-five degrees Celsius wet bulb temperature, that's what it's called. That's the threshold. Again, it doesn't mean it's thirty-five degrees Celsius, it means it says heat humidity index, but thirty-five degrees Celsius wet-bulb, it's incompatible with human life. If you look at the swath of the world from the Indian subcontinent, Bangladesh, India, the Arabian Peninsula, the Sahel region, and Central America, which is this arc of instability anyway, you're going to see massive climate displacement as a result of heat and humidity, this wet-bulb temperature.

*Q: Something else to worry about.*

HARDEN: Yeah, no, it was a very cool thing.

*Q: That's very interesting. And obviously, I am sure that your early days in Bangladesh when—*

HARDEN: When we had MIT, we brought in BRAC. And so we set up a partnership between MIT and BRAC. We did a MacArthur, moonshot $100,000,000 proposal and we didn't win. But it was a fantastic team. It was MIT University and BRAC. That was really good.

*Q: Okay, well, those are exciting things that you—*

HARDEN: Yeah. Then I ran for Congress. Did you know that?

*Q: Yes, I did. I even contributed, Dave.*

HARDEN: Oh, you did? Thank you, thank you. I wish I would have given you a better return on your money. So, what happened was, I left. I was eligible to retire. Okay. So, I left because I couldn't stand [President] Trump. It was hard to come down from being AA, I couldn't stand Trump. It was chaotic. It was embarrassing, like to represent the administration, all that kind of stuff. So, I retired, I opened up Georgetown Strategy Group, which never had breakout success, but it had sustained success. But I was at the forum, and my wife was on Capitol Hill on January 6. I was just getting firewood at the farm. We have a truck, a black pickup truck. I was wearing flannel, I was splitting wood and loading it on the truck, and I was listening to the radio on January 6, and I was just so appalled. But also I was nervous because my wife was on Capitol Hill at our house and I didn't know if it was going to be ransacked, and whatever. I hurried up and I drove home, and I looked like a January 6 marauder. But I got back to the house with my truckload of firewood, and it was just so appalling. And then I understood on January 7, that in Maryland's first district, our farm is no longer part of that district, but at the time it was. Andy Harris was the Republican congressman who was very supportive of January 6, and I was so disgusted about what happened on January 6, that I decided to run against him Our middle child was an Air Force officer in Qatar in Doha on that day, and he called me up and he's like, "Dad,"---you like let's say twenty-four years old. To all the other twenty-four-year-old officers, the most junior officers at the operation center, and they're all from all around the world, because we had a big coalition. And he called me up, and he's like, "Dad, all the other junior officers from our allies and partners are asking us if we're in the middle of a civil war. What do you think I should say?" I was so pissed about January 6, because I felt like it was personally putting my son at risk. And Andy Harris was, I mean, he supported January 6, he also didn't support the Defense Authorization Act right then. So that means not only was he putting my son at risk, but he was also not paying him. So, I decided to run for Congress, and I ran a real campaign. I mean, we ran a real campaign. I kind of positioned myself and the New York Times did a very big story on my campaign. It was Farah Stockman who I helped her with all these conflicts all around the world. So, she came down and went with me on the campaign trail. But I was a registered independent, prior to running for Congress. And I was registered, because in my opinion, you want to get through the Senate confirmation, it's easier to do—

*Q: As an independent, yes.*

HARDEN: It took me a little while to get everything, even though we had this farm. And we had this for a very long time, our actual residence was in DC. I had to reestablish our residence at the farm and get a Maryland driver's license to register as a Democrat. And once I got all that, kind of reestablished, it's where I grew up. I ran and we raised 400,000 dollars which in a primary in a rural county in America is actually very good. I had about 250 national security leaders around the country support my campaign. I had a real digital campaign. I had a real team. We had the real thing, except that I didn't have the support of the Democratic Party. And I was running against, I mean, the field got crowded at

different times. At one point, there were probably seven different candidates that have either dipped in or dipped out. But I was running against a very progressive, long time, democratic activist who was able to galvanize all of the base, and she had zero chance of winning this conservative rural district. And she didn't, but she beat me in the primary. It was really an interesting experience for sure. I concluded that I hate politics, and I lost by a large margin in the primary. Then, of course, my opponent lost resoundingly, she did not call anybody back from the Republican or independent side, so she made no games to try to switch that.

*Q: Yeah, well, a lot of people were excited by the fact that you were running and that you were bringing a lot of issues onto the table. They're good for the people of that district in Maryland to hear.*

HARDEN: Here's the funny thing. I have to say, like in the Foreign Service, or at USAID. I mean, I'm speaking for myself, but there might be some truth to this. We're focused on five issues, national security, the Middle East, and economic development and growth. When you run for Congress, there's like a thousand issues you have to have an opinion on. And I didn't really know a lot about 995 of them and what my position should be and obviously, some of them are galvanizing but some of them aren't. Should there be free lunch at school? You have to have an opinion on that. Not a free lunch for—it's whether or not there should be a free lunch for everybody. I mean obviously guns since I mean in the rural areas the Second Amendment is really big and abortion. The New York Times article there's a guy who was Bob Beckman, or something like that. He was a Foreign Service officer in India. Do you know who I'm talking about?

*Q: Bob Beckman, yes.*

HARDEN: He moved to rural Virginia, like, kind of Southwest. And he called me and we spoke, and Jim Beaver put us back in touch. And he gave me great advice. He's like, "Look, if you're going to run as a Democrat, and in rural America, you're going to lose number one." But setting that aside, there are three issues. One is abortion. One is guns, and one is regulations. These galvanized everybody. You can only take the Democratic position on one of them. I can't remember exactly what he said. But the point was, you've got to pick and choose about what it is you're going to do. And if you want to win, you've got to take a Republican position on one of these three.

*Q: Right.*

HARDEN: I did regulations, which you live in DC, and where do you live in DC?

*Q: I live near Georgetown University.*

HARDEN: You live in an environment where there's a social contract, you pay your taxes, and they'll pick up the trash, the police will come, and the snowplow will come, although in DC, that's always a little iffy. There's almost a contract between you and the government. That is widely accepted in urban and suburban areas. It's what people want.

I'm not talking about Social Security and Medicare. I'm talking about this notion of your relationship with the government. In rural areas, the idea of a social contract is inverted. The government is a problem for anything that I want to do because I can't sell my grandma's peach cobbler at the farmers' market because it has cream in it or something. Or we can have a farm, a winery or a farm brewery or—Well, first of all, you can't grow, you can't make wine. It was only thirty years ago that farmers were allowed to make wine legally in Maryland. Before that they weren't. You're not allowed to take your hops and barley and make beer. It's only been ten years that you could even have a craft brewery. But even at your craft brewery, you can't sell a hamburger, because the regulations don't let you do that. Or you need a permit to fix up your barn.

These things seem inane to people. I'm trying to put in some irrigation lines, and I just put it in a commercial greenhouse. And I have to run another water line from my well and the contractor said, "Well, what's required is that we do a survey to make sure that there's no utilities underground that we would dig up." I'm like, "This is in the middle of a hay field. We have to call this utility because it's in the middle of a hayfield?" "No, no, we have to do this. It's the rules."

I also have very, very, very deep roots. But look, we ran a real campaign. It was exciting. It was interesting. I got killed. I probably would have lost in the general election, but I would have done better. Well, 90 percent of all rural counties in America. They're completely not competitive in rural counties in America, which is a problem. By the way, the Republicans could never win in Baltimore or DC, which is also a problem. I mean it would be better if you had a two party system in these places instead of a one party system.

*Q: I will just add one further comment that it's interesting that former mission directors for West Bank Gaza, who focused so much on political issues in their careers, have engaged politically post-USAID career. Monica Stein-Olson, another former West Bank Gaza Director, also ran for office.*

HARDEN: Yes, she ran in Alaska.

*Q: She ran in Alaska for the State House, their state legislature.*

HARDEN: Both of us lost.

Conservative area too. So, she lost, and here's what worked for me. So, I worked with the watermen a lot. And the watermen, they hate the government. They're like the out-people. They're the rebels. These are the guys that do the crabs and oysters and all that kind of stuff. But they all liked me because of my mission director experience. They understood that I worked in Africa, in the Middle East, and it didn't bother them. They were totally, totally fine with that. They just didn't vote in Democratic primaries. But they were like, "Look, this guy, he is from here. He grew up here. And he helped economies all over the place. He can help us." I mean, I had the watermen, the gnarliest bad ass people that one

thousand percent supported me. They were profiled in the New York Times with me. I can send you that article if you haven't seen it.

*Q: No, I've seen it. It's a wonderful article.*

HARDEN: And they thought, but they don't like us giving tax dollars to all these third world countries. They would rather have the money themselves, but the skills that I learned as a mission director were absolutely one hundred percent applicable to running for office, except as mission director, you had more staff, more money, and more logistical help. You know what, probably better talent too.

*Q: That's good. You've been keeping very busy, and I know that with the crisis we're in now, you've been writing a number of op-ed pieces and being asked for your opinion on a number of issues relating to the problems of today. Is there anything you want to say about that now? If not, I was going to move on to just ask you about some concluding thoughts—*

HARDEN: I mean, a couple of interesting things. For younger Foreign Service officers, it's interesting for them to know that USAID West Bank, Gaza, mission directors in particular, are a very, very close knit group. We talk together all the time. Not everybody every two weeks, but generally speaking, we're in very regular contact. And so there's like a camaraderie and therapy that's attached to all that, which is nice. The other thing is, I think, for younger Foreign Service officers, they should know that the work that we do has meaning and impact well beyond the space in which we're operating. And so the fact that I ran for Congress in a rural community, and people understood that I had skills that mattered to them, that were shaped at USAID really mattered. The fact that I'm all over the media practically every day. I mean, I just did CBS nightly news two days ago, and I was doing it from the farmhouse and I'm burning these chickens, and they called me up out of the blue and it was like, I had a really short notice. I had to do it where the chickens were, I just hoped they weren't too loud, and I had to block them so they couldn't see the chickens. The producer loved that. She thought it was funny. The point is, there is a lot that you can learn at USAID that is applicable in the world afterwards, that really, really matters.

*Q: Those are important points to make. Do you think that USAID should or can do more to help employees be prepared to work in those kinds of environments? Or is there any special training that's needed to help people get ready to perform in those kinds of high priority countries or is it something that some people just have the innate ability to do, and you have to identify them to go into those situations? I think it's very challenging.*

HARDEN: First of all, our talent pool is deep. It doesn't mean everybody is talented, but we have a deep and talented staff at USAID. And so therefore, we should feel confident in the interagency. And even though we're small and miniscule compared to State and DOD, and CIA, and Justice, and all that kind of stuff. We are as smart as anybody else, or smarter. I mean, I remember meeting Karen Turner very early on in my career. And I think she was like from Harvard Law, and I was thinking to myself "She's in

government?" But we should know that we have the strength to be effective in the interagency. Secondly, we should know that we get outsized experience relative to other agencies because we're small. So, I sat at the NSC table all the time when I was in DCHA, and sometimes I sat at the table and sometimes I sat in the second chair, but that situation room is very, very small. It's the size of a dining room. And if you're in the first chair of the second chair, you're in the room. And to be in the room from DOD, you're one or two of two million people, for USAID you're one of 7,000 people, so it's easier to get into the room. And the same with the State Department. And the State Department always thinks that they're better than us. And yet we have the ability to access at the interagency level, disproportionately better. Third, leadership. The DOD does leadership. The State Department does not do leadership, we're in the middle, I do think that we get good leadership experience, meaning running people and money. And I think that that's an outsized thing.

I'm going to tell you a quick story about my eighteen year old son who had just started at the Air Force. And so about at the Air Force Academy, so about one month in, okay, so these are all eighteen year olds, and they've been at the Air Force Academy for four weeks. They take them up into the Rocky Mountains, a group of ten. They give them a rabbit and a canteen of water in the Rocky Mountains, and they say "We'll be back in three days, you guys have got to survive. Okay, and you've got to survive as a team. And oh, by the way, we've got a bunch of thirty-year-old non-commissioned officers, who just came back from Kandahar who are going to be chasing you down and trying to kill you. So good luck."

That compelled teamwork, leadership, innovation, resilience, survival in a way that your senior staff at your USAID mission or a country team you don't get, right. But USAID leadership is superior, in my opinion, to State's leadership. So, your political counselor at an embassy who thinks that they're likely to be the next ambassador to nowhere important has never managed people for the first fifteen years or life and then they manage five people, and zero money. Meanwhile, our most junior officers are managing five people and a hundred million dollars. I actually think that we have a lot that is inherently strong about what it is that we do.

But we do need to be savvy about the media. We need to be savvy about how the interagency works and how you communicate to the media. I also learned in the West Bank, Gaza, because everybody in Congress came through. So, I spoke to members of Congress all the time, and then staffers all the time. And of course, the Legislative Affairs (L) folks want to make sure they control it all. But then everybody had my phone number. And so they would call me all the time. I mean, I have the NSC calling me on every side, all the time. And I didn't run through L. I just did it. Of course, I got back and they're like we're never going to let you go up to [Capitol] Hill again, I'm like, okay. But these are the things that you learn in these missions that I think are valuable, that would make us more compelling. I mean, I think we have that capability.

*Q: And you need to be a bit of a risk taker as well.*

HARDEN: Yes. If you care about your job, and you're afraid of getting fired or being punished, then it's not right.

*Q: Right. I assume you would recommend to young people today to pursue this as a career or?*

HARDEN: Yeah, I loved it. I mean, I really loved it. I really loved it. It was great.

*Q: Since you spent so much time on one set of issues in the West Bank and Gaza. Is it frustrating to have spent that much time on something and then to see it today? I mean, it remains an unsolvable problem.*

HARDEN: I am going to say this, it does make me wonder: Okay, I spent all my time on this, and I've accomplished literally nothing. I mean, I could have done a million other things. I would have accomplished something here. The situation is worse than when I arrived in 2005. It's discouraging from that perspective. And I was always one, like, you need results, not process, right. In many respects, I had a failed process and not results. But I tried, I gave it all. I know you're friends with Monica, I mean, she tried too. I mean, all of us, we gave it everything, and we gave it everything. And Monica, dealing with the Trump administration. But yeah, she was working at pretty senior levels in the Trump administration on all these things, and she gave it everything.

*Q: I think it is interesting to be working on almost intractable problems, and the challenge of continuing to do so. But it sounds like you were always able to maintain enough optimism and enough faith that—*

HARDEN: It was a mistaken optimism.

*Q: Well, but probably important, I mean, you have to have it otherwise you couldn't—*

HARDEN: I was really jazzed about George Mitchell when he came in. I figured okay, he did Northern Ireland, he can do this, but now I'm a lot more, I think this next chapter I'm going to be a lot more concrete on what it is that I do. So, raising chickens, feeding the goats, and growing hops. Do you know Robert Ford at all? He was the U.S Ambassador to Syria when everything was collapsing. He was one of those crisis ambassadors. There's another guy that was like that too, in Iraq, kind of like the legendary cowboy crisis ambassador. Anyway, I was speaking to Robert Ford the other day. I mean, we're both pretty young for retirement. I mean, we could not be retired. He is in Bangor, Maine. I think he retired at fifty-five or something or fifty-seven. I mean, I retired at fifty-eight which is really very young. But I think the thing is we had these very exciting, demanding, adventurous, dangerous experiences. And then, those chapters closed, and you go and live in Bangor, Maine. Mary Ott once said to me, "Either retire young and do something else, or don't retire. But whatever you do, don't retire at sixty or sixty-one, either get out at fifty-five or get out at—"

*Q: Sixty-five.*

HARDEN: Yeah. So, we'll see. I'm not going back into the administration. I mean, I don't think they want me anymore.

*Q: Well, but I certainly hope that you continue to write and to speak out on the issues.*

HARDEN: Well, that's the thing about that. Because it's true. It's true. I mean, Gaza is in the bullseye, and there's practically no one that has the level of experience. But I have to say, I think, this and I'm not saying this with sour grapes, but the current administration has zero interest in learning and understanding the history and how it could be useful. Larry, and I, and Howard, in particular, and Monica, and Mike Harvey. I mean, you go back a little bit further, Chris Crowley and Jim Bever. It's a little far, but there are many things that they don't even know. Like for instance, the crossings that we talked about all the time, we paid for and put technology in on the Israeli side on that border crossing. And Rafa, we set up a remote sensing capability. Now, all these things have since been destroyed, probably a decade ago, but the point is, we put time, money and energy into those crossings that demonstrated commitment to Israeli security and a commitment to the Palestinian opportunity. And so it's important that we understand that we were the birth of that Karem Salem crossing, and that we know it. I bet I've been to that Karem Salem crossing more than any American. I know it inside and out, and I'm still in touch with Israel, but the U.S. administration could care less.

*Q: One of the reasons we're doing the oral history program is to try to get more history documented. But it's very difficult to get people to want to pay attention to history.*

HARDEN: Of course, and look, I get nobody wants to hear the guy that was the quarterback in the high school football team fifty years later, and sitting at the bar drinking a Bud Light talking about the time that he threw a touchdown in 1978. Okay, I get that. Yeah, anyway. Well, this has been really nice. Thank you for doing this.

*Q: Thank you. Thank you very much, Dave.*

*End of interview*