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AMBASSADOR PATRICIA HASLACH

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INTERVIEW

Q: Good morning. It is August 30, 2022. I'm Robin Matthewman. Today I am interviewing Ambassador Patricia Haslach for ADST's Afghanistan project.

So, welcome Pat.

HASLACH: Thank you, Robin, for asking me to do this. It's pretty much been a year now since I was brought back in to work on the Afghan evacuation from Doha, where I am based.

If you wouldn't mind, I'd like to start with a quote from General Petraeus in *The Atlantic* on August 8, "The U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan was heartbreaking and tragic for many Afghans and devastating for their country. We underachieved in Afghanistan despite the professional service of diplomats, the military, coalition partners, and the Afghans." I agree with him and others that our fundamental mistake was a lack of sustained commitment. We took our eye off the ball and shifted focus to Iraq at a time when the Taliban and other elements could have been defeated. People say it was clear by 2005 how far behind we were in Afghanistan when we compared our operations in Iraq, where I also served. One indicator was the amount of senior policymakers' time being spent on Afghanistan. The "battle rhythm" changed after the first year, from at least one Principals Committee [PC] meeting—senior cabinet-level meetings—a week to less frequently, and then PCs became Deputies Committee meetings [DCs]. It didn't have to be that way.

Q: I thought first we would just start with a brief summary of your career leading up to 9/11. I think you started in the Department of Agriculture.

HASLACH: Yes. I was with the Foreign Agricultural Service and my first tour was New Delhi. After that, I shifted over to State. I came in as a mid-level entrant, one of the few that entered as mid-level economic officers, and then I served in a series of posts in the European Union, Nigeria, Indonesia, and Pakistan. After Pakistan, I worked on the Afghanistan reconstruction effort, then went out to Laos. That was my first ambassadorship. I came back and served as ambassador to APEC [Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation], and then I went to Iraq to work on reconstruction in Baghdad. When I returned to Washington, I worked on Feed the Future, the food security initiative, and

then I worked on the Iraq transition from military to civilian operations under Deputy Secretary Tom Nides. Then I was principal deputy assistant secretary in the Bureau for Conflict and Stabilization Operations. In that role, I did some work on Afghanistan. In mid-2013, I went to Ethiopia as ambassador and came back to the Economic Bureau at State in 2016 as principal deputy assistant secretary and then acting assistant secretary. I retired in November 2017. In 2022, I was brought back briefly to work on the Afghanistan evacuation in Qatar.

Before we go into some of the specifics, I'd like to start on Pakistan. It is really important for putting my involvement in Afghanistan into context.

Q: Right. So, let's start off with that. Could you describe your job there and also what it was like when 9/11 occurred?

HASLACH: I served there as economic counselor from 2000 to March/April of 2002, both pre-9/11 and post-9/11. It impacted everyone's lives, ours directly because we were on the frontline.

There were only a small number of Americans, I'm talking about average citizens, who even knew anything about the threat from the Taliban or al Qaeda. Pakistan had recognized the Taliban and they had an office across the street from our political counselor.

When 9/11 hit, it was our job to enlist Pakistani support for Operation Enduring Freedom. Wendy Chamberlain was the ambassador at the time, and I was doing economic work, so I was tasked with going to the Ministry of Finance, where I met with the secretary general to the finance minister, Moeen Afsal. He was a wonderful man. The finance minister at that time was Shaukat Aziz, who later became prime minister in Pakistan. I described to Moeen the world with no U.S. funding or support from the IMF [International Monetary Fund] or the World Bank if Pakistan did not join us in this operation, or a world where Pakistan had our support and we agreed to lift sanctions. In those days, Pakistan had dozens of sanctions placed on it because of their nuclear program. We had agreed that a number of those sanctions would be removed if they cooperated.

And they did. They delivered, and we set up a pre-military operation in the basement of the embassy in Islamabad. The military wore golf shirts instead of uniforms. I was asked to negotiate the financial reimbursement with the Pakistani government for their support to our military, such as uniforms. I do have to say, the list was a little unusual, items like wool socks in the middle of the summer.

I was also acting deputy chief of mission [DCM] when we invaded Afghanistan on October 7, 2001. Wendy Chamberlain was the ambassador. The DCM at the time, Michele Sison, returned to the United States for personal reasons. Wendy and I were the only ones aside from the intelligence and military folks who were given advance notice that the United States was going to start our operation in Afghanistan. We were concerned and brought everyone onto the compound. We didn't know how the Pakistani public was going to react to this, and we didn't want a repeat of 1979 when a mob burned

down our embassy in reaction to a false rumor that the U.S. had bombed a holy site in Mecca.

I was also acting consul general in Karachi when the consul general, John Bennett, accompanied the wife of Danny Pearl, the *Wall Street Journal* journalist killed by terrorists, to his funeral in the United States. This happened at the exact same time terrorists bombed a church in the diplomatic area in Islamabad, and thirteen people were killed, including two members of our mission, the wife and the daughter of the information management officer. It was a tragedy, and when you asked me to do this interview, that brought up a lot of painful memories. At that time, Pakistan became an unaccompanied post and my husband at the time was the general services officer, and we had two young daughters. We made the decision that he would remain at post, and I curtailed to be with our young children.

Q: When was that? When did you leave?

HASLACH: That was in the beginning of 2002.

My deputy, Andrew Havilland, was left in charge. Andrew lost his brother in the Twin Towers and he had a family that evacuated as well. Later Andrew served on a PRT [Provincial Reconstruction Team]. He is just one example of the dedicated FSOs [Foreign Service officers] and the type of service they give in these situations for their country.

We also set up the USAID [United States Agency for International Development] mission under Mark Ward. I'll come back to Mark because he was also actively involved in Afghanistan. Let me stop at that and go into the questions.

Q: Okay, thank you. So, you went back to the U.S. earlier than expected, early in 2002?

HASLACH: Yes, I curtailed.

Q: Okay. And they immediately asked you to work on the Afghan desk?

HASLACH: It's not as straightforward as that. Former ambassador to Pakistan Bill Milam was recalled from retirement to help set up the government-wide lateral mechanism for the reconstruction of Afghanistan, which included setting up the State office at that time under Ambassador Dobbins. Ambassador Milam recruited me when I left Pakistan in the beginning of April of 2002. It was arranged that I'd be setting up the office for Afghanistan reconstruction under the new coordinator, who was Ambassador David Johnson. I also worked for the second coordinator Ambassador Bill Taylor when David was assigned to London. Both of them would be excellent to interview.

It was originally set up as the Office for Afghanistan Reconstruction, and it covered just those aspects of the job. The more traditional desk office functions were in the Office for Afghanistan, Bangladesh, and Pakistan. I must emphasize that we got a tremendous amount of help setting up the reconstruction office, particularly from two people. One was the deputy director, Steve McGann, and the other was the desk officer, Gita Pasi. Later, Jerry Feierstein came in as the director. Jerry and I would meet each morning with David Johnson, the coordinator, to make sure that our two offices were in sync, and we

were working together on cross-cutting issues, for example, on the loya jirga. About a year later, the two offices were combined, and Jerry left for Lebanon. At that point, the Office of the Afghanistan Reconstruction became the Office of Afghanistan. It changed later into AFPAK, Afghanistan-Pakistan. It was initially a separate operation.

Q: Okay. And so, let's talk about the context then. So, you already started with who the leaders were, but you were focused on reconstruction.

HASLACH: Yes.

Q: And so, what was going on on the money front and on the planning? What kinds of reconstruction did we have in mind?

HASLACH: Well, it was everything. We were managing billions of dollars over the course of our time there. The money was used to establish the joint military and civilian Provincial Reconstruction Teams, to support the constitutional loya jirga, to help set up a democratic system of governance, and to provide human rights protections for minorities and women and for people that were practicing different religions. The funds were also used for the Ring Road project. This was a very important project because the road was going to connect people from rural areas to each other and to the central government in Kabul.

Q: So, initially, reconstruction wasn't thinking about physical infrastructure, except for—

HASLACH: That came later. You had questions about rebuilding the embassy. That work was carried out by Under Secretary Pat Kennedy and the management staff in the department. I think it's also important to remember that all the coalition members had different responsibilities and different leads. Our office was set up to reflect that as structure.

The U.S., we took the primary lead on building the Afghan National Army. The Germans had primary responsibility for the police. The Japanese were brought in to demobilize the Afghan militias, DDR [Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration]. The Italians were focused on the judiciary, and the British were largely responsible for combating illicit narcotics. That was the original setup we used to engage with the different coalition partners.

My staff mirrored that structure. The deputy director was Tim Wilder, who I believe is still working on Afghanistan. I also brought in the former defence attaché from our embassy in Pakistan, the really talented Colonel Todd Wilson. He covered the military and the police, along with Foreign Service Officer Jim McNaught. We brought in other Foreign Service officers like Denise Marsh who covered governance and women's issues. We also hired a civil servant from the Department of Health, Neil Kromash, who worked on health issues. We had excellent partners at the U.S. Agency for International Development. I mentioned Ward earlier. We coordinated with a whole host and range of interagency partners, e.g., the Department of Justice. I'll get back to that structure later because it evolved over time.

Q: Well, let's start with Provincial Reconstruction Teams then, okay?

HASLACH: Thanks for asking me about the PRTs. They were designed to be an important component for reaching out to the people. That was the original plan. The idea came from the deputy secretary, Dick Armitage. It was based on something called CORDS, which is Civilian Operations and Revolutionary Development Support.

Q: That was terminology from Vietnam.

HASLACH: Yes, that was from Vietnam. There were civilian military advisory teams dispatched throughout Vietnam during the war. Our PRT structure was first established in 2002 for Afghanistan and later for Iraq.

They were initially called Coalition Humanitarian Liaison Cells, nicknamed CHLCs. President Karzai objected to the name and chose Provincial Reconstruction Teams, which I think is probably a better name. While the concepts are similar between what we did in Afghanistan and Iraq, they were initially different compositions and slightly different missions, but the common purpose was to empower local governments to govern their constituents more effectively. In Afghanistan, in the beginning, they were led on the U.S. side by lieutenant colonels, in some cases colonels, and they included representatives from the State Department, the U.S. Agency for International Development, DOJ [Department of Justice], Foreign Agricultural Service, et cetera. The leadership role, though, and who was in charge, was changed in Iraq, where it became civilian-led and military-supported.

The first five PRTs were divided among the coalition partners. The U.S. started in Gardez with the first one. The Brits initially had responsibility for Mazar-i Sharif, but they later moved their work to Helmand because it more closely coincided with combating illicit narcotics—Helmand is in the poppy belt. And the Swedes, I think, later took over that PRT. Italy was the first in Herat, New Zealand in Bamiyan, and the Germans in Kunduz. They were a mixed bag. Some of them were successful, but in the end, the challenges of maintaining the staff, resources, and operating in an insecure environment, really limited the PRTs' staff getting out.

If you'd like, I can talk about how we recruited people for the PRTs.

Q: Yes, please go ahead.

HASLACH: The assignments started off as ninety-day TDYs [temporary duty]. We recruited the staff, largely State Department officers. I even assigned one State Department intern because he had military experience. It was a constant cycle: selection, training, and deployment. Three months is not a particularly long time. It wasn't sustainable. I felt like I needed to walk around the department with a sandwich board advertising. We had a lot of volunteers. You can imagine a lot of people really wanted to do their bit. Some of them were excellent officers. One comes to mind; I don't know if you know Dick Norland. But he was super. He really wanted to go. We really had to pull strings to get him out there.

Once we had the embassy up and running, we recommended that the responsibility for staffing the PRTs be run out of Kabul and that it needed to be longer than ninety days

with a proper assignment of one or two years, depending. I think that was the right decision.

Q: So, in your time there until 2004, how many U.S. PRTs were set up?

HASLACH: I was looking at the final number. In my time, we added Kandahar and Jalalabad and five or six others, probably no more than ten. The challenge was finding coalition partners that were willing to take this on. Each one operated differently. The Germans in Kunduz had their own way of running a PRT, and I believe they ended up taking responsibility for another PRT later on. So, it was a mixed bag. I'm not against them, but we have to be realistic about what PRTs can achieve.

Q: And so, was it sort of a hearts and minds thing, or like, even Peace Corps where you go into the community, and you see what they need? Or was it concentrated?

HASLACH: Yes. It was meant to be both. But, going into the community became more and more difficult as the security situation started to deteriorate.

Q: Okay. All right. And then, tell me about the Ring Road. I understand from my reading that Karzai asked for it?

HASLACH: Yes. At the time, we thought that it was a good idea. We had difficulty in funding it, though. I was there only for the beginning and not for the completion of it. There were problems every time we moved and built a segment. There was sabotage and other sorts of issues. I believe the Japanese came in with some funding for it, but it was a very expensive project. There were reasons why we [developed countries] moved away from funding large infrastructure projects. The road was meant to be symbolic but it also was needed because Afghanistan is very rural and people were not connected by roads. Nevertheless, I'm sure there is a lot of criticism of it. I didn't even check to see if it's still fully operational. I hope so.

Q: If I remember correctly, part of it or much of it was built in the '50s and '60s with U.S. dollars?

HASLACH: Yes, it was rebuilding something that we'd already built before.

Q: That connected the main cities.

HASLACH: Yes.

Q: And then, one of the key parts was between Kabul and Kandahar, is that right?

HASLACH: That part's probably still working because I'm sure the Taliban needed that corridor.

Q: But you were involved, in addition to the recruiting, you were involved in a lot of the discussions on how to get the funding?

HASLACH: Yes. You can imagine we were involved with so many different aspects of the funding process. We were under a lot of pressure to produce. In retrospect, I think we

moved too fast, we were too Kabul-centric, and we weren't very choosy in selecting members of the government. We didn't have any ground knowledge because our embassy had been closed for years. As a result, we did not meet local people or business contacts. By not getting out into the rural areas, there was a tendency to focus on the capital.

We knew President Karzai from his time in Pakistan. I met him when he came to the embassy for political discussions. We had a roundtable with Karzai and other potential leaders. We also met Hamad Gilani and Ashraf Ghani. None of them were on the ground in Afghanistan. It became apparent that maybe that's not the best approach. I was reading somewhere, I think it was General McChrystal who said we should have waited a year to start the reconstruction and taken the time to develop knowledge on the ground.

Q: Well, that brings us to the fact that there really wasn't a government in place to rely on.

HASLACH: Right.

Q: So, let's start with the political situation. In December, before you left, there was a meeting in Bonn.

HASLACH: It resulted in the Bonn Agreement, which created the interim administration. Ambassador Dobbins' oral history really covered that well. Thank you for sending that to me.

We worked on the constitutional loya jirga that was held from June 11 to 19, 2002, to elect a transitional administration. That was one of the things that came out of the Bonn conference. There was jockeying for power.

Q: Could you just describe what the emergency loya jirga was and what loya jirga means and why it's important in Afghanistan?

HASLACH: A loya jirga is a traditional gathering of tribal leaders and elders. But there were flaws with it, such as no women or minority participation. In retrospect, it was not perfect and we should not have stopped there. I was glad to see women involved in the latest round of peace negotiations [in Qatar], although you can see how ineffective that was when none of their interests were taken into consideration.

Q: Okay. So, in Bonn in December 2001, Karzai had been selected for a six-month interim government, and then this loya jirga in June of 2002, it set out a roadmap for what was going to happen next to create the new government and a new constitution, is that right?

HASLACH: Yes. It's important to remember the parameters of our assistance and who was responsible for what in the interagency. The overall policy guidance came from the White House. The meetings were led at the NSC [National Security Council] by Steve Hadley. The coordinator would always go to the meetings. I was there on the sidelines. We were responsible for implementing the plan that the interagency agreed upon. The Department of Defence and the Central Intelligence Agency were all present in those meetings. Our office was responsible for helping to staff the new embassy and establish

an interagency office at State. It did not work that well because people wanted to spend more time in their own offices. There was also an over-reliance on models such as PERT charts, which are performance evaluation and review techniques. They were used to measure progress on a timeline in all the areas of engagement, the army, the police, the judiciary, education, health, and every aspect of it. We spent a lot of time in the PCs and the DCs at the White House, discussing whether a particular line of effort was red, yellow, or green. I would caution against relying too heavily on models.

Q: A part of it is that policymakers wanted quick results, but development, political, and economic development takes a long time. And so, these models were maybe unrealistic in their timeline.

HASLACH: If you use them for their actual purpose but don't rely on them too heavily to make policy decisions, because it makes things look better in some areas and worse in others. It wasn't always an adequate reflection of what was happening on the ground. We've never been that good at monitoring and evaluation.

Q: So, tell me about the development of the embassy inasmuch as your office was involved in that.

HASLACH: Yes. The actual building of the buildings and the tunnel under the road that connected the two—there were two parts to the embassy—were all handled by Under Secretary Pat Kennedy and his team, Kathleen Austin-Ferguson, and others. Our primary responsibility initially was the PRTs and hiring for them. Later, when we set up this office at the State Department, there were representatives there from DOD [Department of Defence] who recruited and vetted Afghans in the United States to serve as advisors in ministries. These were well-meaning Afghans who wanted to go back and make a difference and who could speak the language. But, they hadn't been in their country during the long Taliban rule, if ever.

Q: One thing I read, and I'm not sure if it's true, is that as Karzai was trying to pull together a government, he wanted to include the Taliban and that didn't work out. Were you involved at all in the discussions of that?

HASLACH: Yes. That was a non-starter.

The Taliban were pretty disorganized at that time. Up until about 2005, we really had an opportunity to defeat them. We missed that chance.

Q: I think that's the implication in the books that I read on the war. So, was the sense in Washington that we had sort of won militarily?

HASLACH: I think up to the point I left, yes.

Q: And that it was peaceful?

HASLACH: Yes, I mean, relatively peaceful. The surge occurred after I had left.

Q: Okay. And then, early, there was a lot of back and forth on whether or not we should be involved in building an Afghan army and Afghan police.

HASLACH: That was part of the International Security Assistance Force [ISAF], which was stood up in 2001 and lasted up to 2014. That wasn't just our decision. One of the big issues was security, and Afghanistan needed a professional military that could fight the militias and the Taliban. The militias, as we learned later, didn't go away; they just disappeared under the radar and were running the illicit narcotics trade. They came back and were the source of much of the corruption. Some of these militias, like the Haqqanis, allied with the Taliban. The current minister of the interior is Sirajuddin Haqqani.

Q: Okay. And then, in terms of the process of writing the constitution, was the embassy involved?

HASLACH: Yes. We influenced the Constitution. There were interagency teams working on drafts, mainly from the legal departments at State and DOJ. There was a lot of back and forth.

Q: This was part of our assistance.

HASLACH: Yes.

Q: And so, a large part of it was involved in that.

HASLACH: Yes.

Q: And from your perspective, was that going well?

HASLACH: Yes, initially. Everything was going relatively well. It was only a matter of time before the cracks appeared. We were focusing on so many things—education for girls and women, health, and sanitation. There was so much that needed to be done. The interagency partners each contributed in their particular areas of expertise. We had folks from the Department of Justice and others working with us on the constitution and setting up the police with the Germans, who focused on building an elite academy for training police. In retrospect, there should have been more focus on building local police units. We were doing this with the coalition. It was the same at State Department, where we coordinated with other agencies. That is why I would always support the role of a coordinator from the State Department. Since State [unlike the Department of Agriculture] does not have a clearly identified constituency for funding, we can make sure that all agencies' interests are taken into account.

Q: Okay. I asked about the main themes and what was going on at that time. So you had at least three ambassadors in Kabul that you were working with, and things were coming and going. By the time you left in 2004, people were starting to be on one-year assignments, is that right?

HASLACH: Yes. I mentioned that we didn't really have people who knew Afghanistan very well, but I want just to cite two ambassadors that did, Ambassador Ron Neumann and Ambassador Finn.

Q: Let's start with Ambassador Finn because he was there last.

HASLACH: Yes. I really enjoyed working with him. And he had a lot of knowledge about Afghan history and about Afghanistan politics. And I would say the same for Ambassador Neumann. Again, there are a lot of people who deserve shout-outs for their good work.

I did go back years later when I was PDAS [principal deputy assistant secretary] in the Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization Operations and met many more committed people.

Q: What is that office, that bureau?

HASLACH: Yes. CSO was set up around 2002 at the time the military wanted State to establish a civilian office that was going to help in conflict situations. I wasn't involved in the initial setup of that office. In 2012, under Assistant Secretary Rick Barton, we focused on civilian-led efforts. Our aim was to try to prevent conflict, respond to conflict when it broke out, stabilize the situation, and set the conditions for long-term peace. We also examined reconstruction and development efforts in Afghanistan. I visited Afghanistan with a team, and in our report, we concluded that corruption was pervasive and that public expectations, especially in the rural areas, were not being met or managed due to a lack of resources and staff, but mostly importantly, due to the security situation, By that point, it was extremely unsafe outside of Kabul in the PRTs. This really limited our outreach. We recommended at the time that the U.S. and its partners should plan for an orderly withdrawal.

Q: Was CSO responsible for the PRTs at this point?

HASLACH: No, we weren't. There was an allergic reaction to having CSO work on PRTs in Afghanistan and Iraq, partially due to the push and pull of regional bureaus versus functional bureaus. I think there's room for both. The challenge with CSO is that every administration has a different idea about what CSO should be doing. It was initially more of a military-civilian operation. By the time I joined CSO, there was a reserve of people from various agencies like the Department of Justice that had been put on a roster in the event they were needed. We paid their salaries and had warehouses full of equipment. In the end, it was not a sustainable model. We hardly used it and a lot of money was wasted. This was the reason that Rick Barton had CSO shift focus to civilian-led approaches.

Q: I just wanted to backtrack. You said that there was an allergic reaction to them working in Iraq.

HASLACH: Iraq.

Q: But did CSO initially do work in Afghanistan?

HASLACH: Initially, no; eventually, yes. CSO also worked on Syria as well. But the bureau faced a lot of resistance from some [not all] the regional bureaus.

Q: Right.

HASLACH: I haven't been in government since 2017. Our record over the last thirty years in Afghanistan, Somalia, Yemen, Libya, and Syria is a powerful argument for humility. We could do better and hopefully, we are.

Q: Okay. (laughs) But as far as CSO in Afghanistan in that period, 2012–13, when you recommended that it be phased out, what were they doing?

HASLACH: The full embassy was up and running. We had the two compounds, we had the PRTs. People were being assigned, money was being spent. The assistance was moving forward.

Q: Okay. So, your recommendation was in your capacity as the PDAS of CSO.

HASLACH: Looking at the overall picture, yes.

Q: Okay. All right. And then, you did retire at some point and ended up living in Doha, is that right?

HASLACH: Yes, we arrived in the middle of Covid March 2020.

Q: As a private citizen?

HASLACH: Yes, as a private citizen. I retired from government in 2017. My husband is the British ambassador to Qatar.

Q: And from there, at that time, the Trump administration was negotiating with the Taliban.

HASLACH: Yes.

Q: Were there contacts with the Taliban going on in Doha?

HASLACH: Not with me, I wasn't contacted. But yes, they were here and some of their representatives and their families are still here.

Q: Why was Doha the place that was the hub?

HASLACH: Qatar has been playing this mediating role, in some ways, sort of a neutral Switzerland role. They feel they have a role to play. They have money. They can certainly support these types of discussions. They worked on a border deal between Eritrea and Djibouti. They worked on a number of different conflict disputes. They work with the Palestinians and others. They funded a lot of the housing and support for the Afghans that came here for the negotiations. They were in a good position to help us when the evacuation took place.

Q: Okay. So, in 2021, President Biden announced that we would be leaving, that we had a date certain for leaving Afghanistan; what did it look like then?

HASLACH: Well, I might just revise what you just said. The former administration, the Trump administration, had actually indicated that we were going to be withdrawing. I

saw a cartoon at the time that depicted Trump pulling out the pin of a hand grenade and handing it to Biden.

Q: Okay, thank you for the clarification.

HASLACH: Yes. That's important because this type of withdrawal required a lot of planning. And if you're given a date to leave and the Taliban know what that date is, they'll just wait you out. The Afghans have a saying, "They have the watches, and we have the time." And if you look at history with the Afghans, they'll just wait it out, and that's exactly what the Taliban did.

Q: Okay. So, as the year went on, 2021, what were you seeing before the actual evacuation?

HASLACH: Well, I didn't have eyes on the negotiations, just what was reported in the press.

Q: Right.

HASLACH: The chargé at the American embassy at the time was Greta Holtz. She was brought back to Qatar later as coordinator for Operations Allies Refuge. Greta was the prefect choice to lead this operation.

Q: Okay, and then Kabul fell to the Taliban in August of 2021.

HASLACH: Yes, a year ago.

Q: Yes, 2021. So, what happened then?

HASLACH: Greta asked me to come join OAF and work with other embassies and partners in placing Afghans that were transiting Qatar that had ties to other countries.

Q: Were most Afghans coming through Qatar?

HASLACH: I can't give you the exact answer for other locations, but there were seventy-five thousand who came through Qatar. They were coming through other countries too. Kuwait and UAE [United Arab Emirates], and then Frankfurt, but I'm pretty sure that Qatar was certainly one of the larger transit points. By the way, Qatar is still getting Afghans out. So, that's important—and they also were involved with transporting a number of the media outlets staff, e.g., the *New York Times* and other newspapers. It wasn't just our military evacuation side. They've been working with a number of other partners. All the larger embassies here have ambassadors or charges to Afghanistan in exile that are still working on getting Afghans out.

I joined when they were processing people through in a more orderly fashion. At the very beginning, when they were flying people out of Kabul, they were not doing background checks. You will recall there was a terrible bombing at the airport. The goal was to get people out, and some people may have slipped through the cracks at the first point of departure. When the evacuees arrived in Doha, they were processed and vetted after

being fed and given supplies. The Qataris supplied them with water, food, diapers, et cetera. They really stepped up to the plate.

A number of these Afghans had ties to other countries, for example, Germany, Turkey, and Canada. When they went through processing, if we met someone who had a residence permit, a passport or some other connection to a country other than the United States, I would call up the ambassador to that country and let them know that we had identified an evacuee with a connection to their country. After that, we arranged for them to meet with these people. Some of them went to another country and not to the U.S.

This included three hundred unaccompanied minors whose situation had to be sorted. [A minor is a child up to the age of seventeen.] I mentioned that during the initial evacuation from Kabul, everyone was scrambling to get on the planes. You remember the photo of the baby girl who was handed over the fence. There were children who had lost their parents, children who got separated from their families, and "street" children. The U.S. committed to taking all of these children back to the United States for processing. But before, we wanted to make sure that they did not have ties [relatives] in another country. All this was coordinated by State Consular Affairs, PRM [Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration], the Office of IOM, the Office of Migration, and UNICEF [United Nations Children's Fund]. They arranged this with the Qataris who had taken the children under their care. I'm happy to say that we were able to find relatives and others for some of the children. We did not send anyone back to Afghanistan, even if they had a questionable background.

The Qataris did an outstanding job. I mentioned the U.S. military and civilians who worked on the evacuation. It was an amazing operation to witness. Greta Holtz, who is now at the NDU [National Defence University], really deserves a presidential award. The people that worked on the evacuation showed the same spirit that we saw in people after 9-11. They are unsung heroes. I realize there's a lot still left to be done. It's heartbreaking.

Q: Just a side question, did we have a lot of Americans coming through Doha?

HASLACH: No. Most of them were Afghan citizens and their families who had worked for us at the embassy or PRTs, or for the UN, NGOs, news outlets, et cetera. We had people here from our immigration offices to vet them. The accusation that criminals and terrorists were getting on airplanes to the United States is not accurate.

Q: Now, in Qatar, there's a U.S. military base?

HASLACH: Yes. They were initially brought through and landed at the U.S. base. This included U.S. private carriers [United and American] and some charter planes that flew them out of Qatar. The Qataris also opened up another site that had better temporary accommodations. It was a Qatari site run with our assistance.

Q: And these seventy-five thousand people came in a very short period of time?

HASLACH: Yes.

Q: It was like two or three weeks or a month?

HASLACH: That is the number to date. I was brought in after the first couple of rounds of ten thousand or more. In the beginning, there was a shortage of beds and supplies but the U.S. military and Qataris quickly provided supplies. Qatar brought out the Afghan women's robotics team, staff from an NGO, Turquoise Mountain, and journalists. They put them in villas and provided for them. In some cases, they used housing that was newly built for the upcoming World Cup. These were not long-term stays up until measles broke out at another location and people had to be vaccinated before they could go to the United States or elsewhere. They also needed to be tested for Covid. Nevertheless, people were being moved through as quickly as possible. Greta can give you the specifics on that. She was perfectly placed to do this because she had run the PRTs in Iraq, and she had a very good relationship with the Qataris and the military.

Q: And so, the people that were going out very fast, were they in the airport or in tents or things?

HASLACH: Yes. In the beginning, they were in tents but when they had to stay longer in order to be vaccinated for measles, they were moved into more solid accommodations.

Q: Okay. All right. And well, it sounds like it was a very heroic effort that you were able to participate in. Thank you.

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Q: Okay. Pat, thank you so much for your time today. I wanted to give you an opportunity to talk about your reflections on what happened in Afghanistan over the whole twenty- or now twenty-one-year period. It was episodic, but you were involved in some way from the beginning.

HASLACH: Yes. Well, thank you. I think I mentioned before, my husband's a British diplomat and he also helped to reopen their embassy in Kabul. He says that we need to follow the five out of ten rule before committing a lot of resources to reconstruction. You need to have at least a five out of ten in your relationship with the leadership, and then the leadership needs to have at least a five out of ten in their relationship with the people. We never had that in Afghanistan.

Q: In Afghanistan.

HASLACH: No, we never did. Reflecting back on my work in CSO, I recommend Rick Barton's book on reconstruction and development: *Peace Works, America's Unifying Role in a Turbulent World*. I agree with him that we need to focus on making local people our primary concern. And I think we relied too heavily on expatriate Afghans that hadn't been in their country for years. We didn't know the people on the ground. We didn't take time to learn from people who had experience in Afghanistan. When Rick was running CSO, he made sure that we knew at least a hundred locals before embarking on a project.

Our assistance should be used to leverage and jumpstart reconstruction and development, and not try to rebuild the country overnight without really understanding the situation on

the ground, especially far from the capital. And there's nothing wrong with starting small in order not to waste funds.

We used the civilian military affairs officers too long. These people were well-meaning, but many did not have experience managing large reconstruction and development projects. Some of these projects were funded with commanders' emergency response program funds. Those CERP funds have a place in the initial stages of a conflict when you are trying to disarm the fighters. Those funds should not be used for unsustainable development projects. Leave that job to the development professionals.

Which leads me to listening, learning, and admitting mistakes. You know, every situation is different, every situation is complex. We love cookie-cutter approaches. How many times did people cite the Marshall Plan, which is not a particularly good model for Afghanistan.

We do not do a particularly good job monitoring or measuring progress or failure and hesitate to change course when necessary. While SIGAR, the Special Inspector General for Afghan Reconstruction, was tasked with auditing the programs, did anyone ever read those reports and change course? The Center for Strategic and International Studies [with USAID funding] wrote a report in 2007 called Breaking Point: Measuring Progress in Afghanistan that suggested that the U.S. stood on a precipice. People were warning us that the path that we had chosen was leading to corruption due to the lack of oversight, the lack of monitoring and evaluation, and the lack of absorbing the information once it was out there.

We need to stay focused and committed with senior attention, staffing, and funding. We now have experience dealing with more than one conflict at a time. We can't constantly just shift from one shiny object to another shiny object or, as the Brits would say, wicked problems, i.e., complex problems with no easy and even possible solutions. There is only so much money and time. I mentioned before how the rhythm of meetings changed. This meant that senior-level attention and focus were diminished. It became a scramble for funding. I can only imagine what's happening right now with Ukraine. I'm all for supporting Ukraine, but that means that we're not funding something else. Funding is an important component. We have to work with Congress, both sides of the aisle, I should have mentioned that before. There are many experienced professionals working on these issues.

Finally, we have to communicate with the local people, listen to what they say, and we have to keep our promises. When we don't, we are not seen as a reliable development partner. And we can't be constantly boomeranging from giving away too much and then not giving enough. It affects our reputation and our credibility.

Q: And on that, on all those notes which are so important and valuable, if we had handled the commitment and the economic side differently, do you think we would have been able to stem the Taliban's resurgence?

HASLACH: We have to look at why there was a Taliban resurgence. People are looking for security, opportunity, and empowerment. And they weren't getting any of that. I read

reports of what it was like in Helmand Province. The people were victims of the Afghan army and the militias. Many of them welcomed the return of the Taliban.

Q: Okay, on the events leading to the withdrawal. You described it as handing a grenade without the pin to the next administration. Did you want to talk about that as far as what that path looked like?

HASLACH: If you've given the Taliban the date that you intend to leave, you've basically handed them all the information that they need. They're going to wait you out and they're going to agree to everything you say. And that's what happened, and they walked back on every single thing they agreed to.

That's not the way to negotiate a lasting deal. I'm not questioning the need to withdraw; we should have done it earlier and planned for it better. We need to establish a timeframe to enable a country to stand on its own. Not indefinitely. Not nation building, but building institutions that can withstand our withdrawal, like the military and security forces. Look how quickly the Taliban took over.

And you made a point before, we didn't bring the Taliban in at the beginning. Maybe we should have done so. Our biggest mistake was ignoring what was happening in the provinces with the militias and the Taliban.

Q: And people just wanted peace, right?

HASLACH: Yes. Poor Afghanistan. How often do they have to go through this?

Q: You did touch on this, but you did feel that the evacuation, as far as you could tell, was done with as much—you felt that there was a lot of heroism in our U.S. response?

HASLACH: I thought there was heroism. People knew how to respond once it was geared up. I mean, suddenly, ten thousand people are dropped on your doorstep. We had a good relationship with the Qataris and we needed to maintain that relationship. I admire the professionalism that the army and our civilian colleagues brought to this monumental task. It was awe-inspiring what they were putting up with—no sleep and working twenty-four-hour shifts. Imagine walking into a hangar full of people sitting on cots and trying to feed them and get them water. People left with nothing. Some children didn't have shoes. People didn't have anything, not even a toothbrush. There was one U.S. NGO, Spirit of America, that's made up of former veterans that worked very closely with a local supermarket chain Lulus. They made up packets of sanitary supplies, diapers, and foodstuffs for the evacuees. Many people stepped up to contribute and help. It's easy to criticize these operations if you're not on the ground and you're not actually seeing what's happening. No, it wasn't perfect, but I would challenge anybody to evacuate that many people the way we did.

End of interview