The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training
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Foreign Assistance Series

JAMES KUNDER

Interviewed by: Ann Van Dusen
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Director (replacing Andrew Natsios) 1991
Bill Garvelink was head of the Operations Division of OFDA
Issues:
General instability in: Somalia, Sudan, Ethiopia, Horn of Africa, brutal civil wars in both Mozambique and Angola, the former Portuguese colonies, Bosnia

Involvement reflected political priorities
Consumed most of OFDA resources
Multiple field trips
Requires inter-agency coordination
Use of Denton Amendment which allowed Space-Available military transportation for humanitarian resources
Required working with DOD
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Hosted a Soviet delegation to U.S. to share U.S. earthquake protocols
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Traveled to Somalia, reported conditions
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Somalia atmospherics impacted by U.S. response to Rwanda
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Invited to stay because knowledgeable on Somalia
Briefed new OFDA Director Nan Burton

Return to Private Sector
Established a sole proprietary company, Kunder/RealiAssociates
Presentation theme for military: “knowing your partner's in humanitarian response.”
Institute for Defense Analysis 1991–1993
Received fellowship to train the military on the role of USAID

Save the Children 1993–1996
Hired as Vice President of Program Development
Trained on humanitarian response
Observation on office atmospherics
German Marshall Fund
Received Senior Fellowship

Return to USAID
Under 6-month USAID contract to assess the situation in Afghanistan 2002
Observation of decrepit conditions of U.S. embassy and rudimentary living conditions e.g. prefab trailers
Helped stand up Afghan ministries
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Pushes project to help education ministry to find and print school books in Pakistan
Expats, like Karzai, begin to return to Afghanistan
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Working with Ashraf Ghani
Conclusion: there is a role for AID in Afghanistan

Appointed USAID Asia and Near East Bureau,
Deputy Assistant Administrator 2002–2004
Rivalry among Afghan actors impedes policy development
Karzai's highest priority, repair and finish the ring road
American agencies in place can't agree and have no common strategic plan
Example: conflict over Opium crop; failure to initiate a pomegranate substitution program
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Appointed USAID Asia and Near East Bureau,
Assistant Administrator 2004
Replaced Wendy Chamberlin who transferred to an Iraq position
USAID overwhelmed with both Afghanistan and Iraq
Inter-agency coordination teams reflect problems of Vietnam
AID civilians in Afghanistan were under military
AID stands up Office of Civilian and Military Cooperation
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Appointed USAID Acting Deputy Administrator 2007
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Henrietta Fore becomes USAID Administrator Nov 2007–2009
Critical of Fore support for integration
Offered to resign
Highlighted USAID's need for additional resources
Supported the Development Leadership Initiative
Worked on Obama Administration transition

Left AID with start of Obama Administration 2009

Return to the private sector 2009
Member of the steering committee of the Modernizing Foreign Assistance Network.
Consultant to businesses
Course at USAID: Building Inter Agency Capacity and Skills.
Global Leadership Council
Worked with INR to define success of AID programs against terrorism
Views on USAID's role/future
Supports mid-level training
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INTERVIEW

Q: Today is November 1, and it is our first conversation with James Kunder. So, Jim, let's talk about the beginning. Can you say a little bit about where you grew up? Something about your family, your sort of family background?

KUNDER: Ah, you gotta be kidding me. I didn't know we were starting that early.

Q: Oh yeah! We're gonna start way back.

KUNDER: Well, okay, well, very briefly. So, I grew up in a small steel mill town near Pittsburgh. Life has been an incredible journey for me because I grew up in a family where my mother was an immigrant. My father was born here, but just barely. And my dad had a seventh-grade education. My mom got through high school in the clerical program. So, we grew up in a household without books. We had a concept of international relations, but only because we were surrounded by immigrant households. I grew up in the small town of Rochester, Pennsylvania.

Q: Where did your mother immigrate from?

KUNDER: Italy. She came here as a child from Italy and my father's family, they spoke Serbo-Croatian. They were from what was then Yugoslavia. Volatile mix, Yugoslav-Italian.

Q: Right. And I guess there were a lot of Serbo-Croatian in the mining belt of Pennsylvania, is that right?

KUNDER: Mining, as well as in the mills, factories, there was a large immigrant population of almost any kind, as you can imagine.

Q: What was schooling like there?

KUNDER: I went to public school, Rochester High School. At the time, we didn't know anything different. It seemed like a perfectly good place to go to school. I think, by current standards, we didn't have too many problems with drugs or anything like that. It was pretty orderly; they relied on physical punishment in those days. I was just joking with my son the other day. The punishments would seem obscene today; it would get somebody thrown in jail. It seemed like an orderly decent place to go to school. And we felt like we got a good public education.

Q: Right. So, you have siblings?

KUNDER: I had one younger brother, he passed away tragically.

Q: Right. The community was fairly stable, or were there a lot of people coming in and out because of employment?

KUNDER: In those days, this was before the Pittsburgh area and much of the Midwest turned into the Rust Belt. So, the steel factories were booming. I mean, jobs went up and down, depending on the economy, union strikes and so forth. It was a heavily unionized area. But I would say there was not a lot of in or out migration. I used to joke by the way,

I thought every child in America grew up where, when you went to bed at night, the walls of your bedroom glowed orange from the blast furnaces down the way. It's only later I discovered that was not the case.

Q: As long as you're not glowing orange. That's amazing. I'm guessing that you are the first person in your family to go to college. Is that correct?

KUNDER: Yeah, obviously, yes.

Q: Your parents' aspirations for you? What did they say?

KUNDER: Get a good job. Get something that pays good money. I mean, they thought in pretty basic economic terms. It wasn't sort of like lead a fulfilling life or sort of get ahead in life, climb up the ladder, somehow. My father's factory sponsored a scholarship program where one student of one of the workers in the factory was awarded an academic scholarship and it was to study engineering at the local college in Beaver Falls, Pennsylvania, Geneva College, a small Presbyterian College. And the concept was, at least one worker's son or daughter would make it up into becoming an engineer. So then my dad's concept of advancement in life was you win that scholarship, you get an engineering degree, four miles away, you live at home, you work in the mill while you're going to college, and then you get a job, you get a white collar job in the factory when you come out. So that was sort of the outer boundaries, I think of what they thought of as success in life. In fact, it led to a controversy because when I later won some academic scholarships to other colleges, it was not immediately apparent to them, why you should have to pay money when I won the local scholarship competition to the local college, free of charge. So, the notion was why would you not take a perfectly free education at a perfectly good local college and get a job as an engineer?

Q: You didn't do that, is that correct?

KUNDER: That's correct. I had a high school teacher who was a little more expansive in her thinking, who said, look with your I just was one of those lucky people who always tested high on standardized tests. It came easy to me, as it does to some people. And so I got really high scores on SAT tests. I won academic scholarships to a number of Ivy League schools and so forth. But thank God this teacher asked me one day are you thinking about going to college, and if so, where? Well, I was thinking about Geneva, or the one other name of a college that a Catholic young person in those days knew was Notre Dame. I had heard of Notre Dame.

Q: You knew where it was.

KUNDER: And so actually, she was an enormous influence in my early life, because she suggested that I apply to a range of colleges, in those days in a place like that sports, football, incredibly important. And the guidance counselor at the local high school was essentially, it was a sinecure for one of the assistant coaches. They didn't make much money as an assistant football coach. The school also made you the guidance counselor.

So, you're dealing with somebody who has no clue. His outer limits were recommendations to Slippery Rock college in Pennsylvania.

Q: Right? Well, I should have asked you about other influences, because it's amazing, the role that a good high school teacher can have to change your perspective and aspirations.

KUNDER: Absolutely.

Q: So you did get a scholarship and tell us about your undergraduate years.

KUNDER: Being an undergraduate at Harvard at that time was unpleasant for a couple of reasons. For me, it was just an inconceivable economic and cultural shock.

Q: What years?

KUNDER: 1966 to 1970. It was really interesting, the college had made quite a thing of the fact that that year was the first year that the freshman class by a couple tenths of a percentage point had more public school than private school graduates. So, it's still about fifty-fifty. So I was going to school with young people who had gone to Andover and Exeter Academy; a little bit different than Rochester High School. And then I worked; I had to work a lot to pay the bills. It was just sort of a grinding kind of thing and culturally demanding. Then on top of that, the campus was just utterly torn apart by anti Vietnam War protests at that time, one of those colleges where the president's office was occupied, and so forth. Whatever normalcy I might have otherwise encountered, it was just sort of ripped apart by all that. But I got through. I was a cum laude graduate. I got a degree in American Government. And I felt that in retrospect, it was obviously a worthwhile period of time, but it was not a pleasant period of time.

Q: Well, that was probably the most fraught period, '66 to '70 because of both the civil rights and the anti Vietnam. So the fact that you are able to stay focused and get a cum laude is really quite remarkable. What drew you to American Government?

KUNDER: It's hard to imagine sort of throwing yourself back into that period of time. Not only did I not have a clue of what I should major in, the concept of college majors didn't mean anything to me. I mean, I just grew up in an environment where people didn't talk about those kinds of things, and didn't know anything about it. I was sort of learning as I went along on a whole bunch of different levels. And I think I had some vague concept that I wanted to contribute to improving society. And so that led me into what they call the government department, it is political science today.

Q: Well, that was the post Kennedy era. I think we were all a bit inspired by that. I'm also guessing by the timing that you had a draft board that was interested in you as well, back in Pennsylvania, did you tell me a little bit about your relationship to Vietnam and the whole draft situation?

KUNDER: After college, I went into the United States Marine Corps for three years. And I volunteered, I had a high draft number, I was not going to be drafted. At the time, I had a nineteen, or twenty-year old's philosophy of life that was only fragmentarily developed, and it included because what it seemed to me, having made this inconceivable jump from this little mill town to Harvard University, that what one should do in life was sort of harvest of diverse experiences. And I always liked reading history. And it seemed to me that understanding military service and understanding conflict and life and death was something that one should understand in life. And I would have to say that the primary motive for me joining the military came from a family where everyone had served in the military in World War II. It seemed like a logical thing. And also, it was the advantage of not having anything else particular in mind, not like going into the family law firm or anything. I had some vague concept that it was going to teach me management skills, which it certainly did. And there were a number of these kinds of reasons why I consciously chose to go into the United States Marine Corps.

Q: I'm sure you were a minority among the Harvard grads of 1970, who actually signed up.

KUNDER: There were only a handful. That's right. The ROTC unit at the college was under assault at that time. And there were actually, ironically, even then, as there are now, a few Vietnam veterans who had worked their way back into college and were on the campus, but that was a tiny percentage, I think it probably seemed like a pretty alien choice to most of my classmates.

Q: Right. Just I want to go on to the Marine experience, because I'm guessing that's the first time that you really focused on anything international or maybe you didn't even think of that as taking you out of the country. But am I getting that wrong?

KUNDER: Well, again, as I briefly mentioned, growing up in that sort of multiethnic community, I mean, there was not a kid in my class who didn't know how to say good morning in Polish, yakshemash. The concept of all these ethnic groups coming together, it was something that people were very much aware of. I walked downtown to the nearest little town and that I passed the Turner's Club and it's the Turnverein, it's a German athletic club that I don't know if it even exists anymore. I spoke with my Italian grandparents in sort of an Italian American Patois and my Croatian grandmother in sort of a Serbo-Croatian Patois.

I remember her saying to me at age eleven. "Imbra, she called me. Imbra is Jim in Serbo-Croatian. There's something I want to tell you, one lesson in life, never trust a Serb. I mean it's most amusing in retrospect but from her life experiences that was a salient fact of life. But all I'm saying is there was a lot of this sort of awareness of different groups that had come from different places. And it all sort of fits into like you say this sort of Kennedy-esque notion. This is the American dream. The World War II movies where they showed a platoon of American soldiers marching down the road, and every one had some young guy named Gonzales and some young guy named Piotrowski, and this notion of the sort of, we're all coming together from various—the melting pot.

So, I would say, just to answer your very straightforward question in kind of a roundabout way, I probably had a pretty good sense that there were a lot of ethnic groups or people around in different groups and had different histories and so forth.

Q: Right. That's a great background. And I guess you probably had smatterings of a lot of different languages. In addition to whatever you studied, I've always been really interested in how communities that may fight in the native setting, when they get to the U.S. somehow, they actually feel closer to each other than not, and that sounds like your community was very much of the melting pot where they left some of the hostilities behind.

KUNDER: Unfortunately, there were still racial animosities, Black/White. We didn't have any Hispanic component at that time. But generally speaking, I would agree with your assessment. In my experience.

Q: Can you talk a bit about your experience in the Marine Corps?

KUNDER: Well, yeah, the most salient thing was I had orders to Vietnam that were then canceled because Nixon had passed the so-called Vietnamization policy. And so probably the reason I'm sitting here talking to you today is I did not go to Vietnam, and I served as an infantry platoon commander, and the casualty rate among Marine infantry platoon commanders was horrific. That's why I probably would not be giving you the interview today. But we were quite aware that the war was going on. My platoon, I commanded in the United States Marine Corps, in the infantry platoon, was probably half Vietnam veterans, a lot of purple hearts.

I spent three years serving as an infantry officer in the Second Marine Division based in Camp Lejeune, North Carolina. In those days, and to some extent, still today, there are Marine battalions onboard ships floating around the different parts of the world, the Pacific, the Indian Ocean, the Mediterranean, to handle trouble spots, and I was on board one of those battalions in the Mediterranean at that time. And otherwise, I commanded this unit and I did get a kind of an interesting insight into more senior levels of the U.S. government and especially senior levels of the U.S. military because I was plucked out of the infantry unit to be made the aide de camp, the aide or special assistant to the then acting, Commanding General of the Second Marine Division. I was plucked up at the headquarters and got a chance to kind of see the big picture of how an infantry division is organized. And so, it probably helped me later in life in terms of talking to senior military officers and so forth. I had a fairly routine three years, just like the undergraduate years at Harvard were torn up by anti war protests, the Marine Corps, all the military services at that time were torn up by a combination of the trauma of having so many veterans who had horrific experiences, plus racial divides, plus drugs, which was related to the combat experiences, and it was sort of a lot of turmoil, a lot of management challenges to say the least.

Q: You said, you thought this would give you management experience.

KUNDER: In spades. Yes.

Q: How did it happen that you were pulled up to be aide de camp? Was this just another standing in the right place at the right time, or did you apply for it?

KUNDER: The wrong place at the wrong time or something! The general was looking for an aide, he probably called the regimental commanders, the colonels and said, hey, guys got anybody that might fit up here and my regimental commander who was some hard bitten Korean War veteran from South Georgia or Mississippi or somewhere, I can't remember who I was interviewed said, you went to Harvard, most of our guys are from Texas A&M or Mississippi State, what are you doing here. And so, he probably remembered that he had a lieutenant that had an Ivy League degree. And the general might find that, I don't know what, interesting or something. So, somehow, they put me up the chain of command. And I got interviewed, and they picked me for the job.

Q: Did you ever consider staying in the military for a career?

KUNDER: A little. I thought about it a little bit especially since having had that aide-de-camp experience that now you've got a sponsor up the chain of command, and it would have been easy to get promoted, etc. But not really, I had had enough. I thought I did my duty to my country. I thought I learned a lot. But I didn't think seriously about staying in.

Like a lot of people getting out of the military, I had had enough and wanted to clear my brain for a while. I went backpacking in Latin America for half a year. I wanted to get out and see more of the world. I parked my car in Houston, bought a ticket to Mexico City and then traveled down as far as Bolivia. I had a lot of interesting travel experiences.

Then came back and went to graduate school on the GI Bill at Georgetown. I thought that I needed to get a master's degree, which I ultimately did in international relations at Georgetown. And then started looking for work. The idea of working on Capitol Hill had always appealed to me. My parents were not directly involved in local politics, but my mother was a clerk at what was then the local tuberculosis association. This was when Tuberculosis was a serious disease before it wasn't, then it became a serious disease again, right? At that time, they had just closed the county sanatorium. You will understand all of this stuff. And so, she worked in the county tuberculosis association, which was headquartered in the county courthouse. While she wasn't directly involved in electoral politics, part of our regular dinner table discussion was politics at the local courthouse. That was in the days they had to change registration every couple of years, depending on who controlled the county commissioners. Anyway, I thought about working on Capitol Hill, probably as part of that same theme that I mentioned earlier about going to college. It is a great way to help people, help pass the nation's laws, make them better. So, I started looking for a job on Capitol Hill.

Q: And that would be what '73 or '74?

KUNDER: I got out of the Marine Corps in November of '73.

Q: Right, exactly. What comes next? And you were in Washington anyway. And I suspect the Georgetown program didn't dissuade. That's one of the things that you did if you didn't join the Foreign Service since

KUNDER: Correct. Although ironically, I did also consider the Foreign Service and I took the State Department exam, and again, because I test well, I passed it, but then I failed the oral exam, the first time around, I didn't have a clue how to deal with ambassadors. And so, then I took it again and passed it again and passed the oral exam the second time and so I actually was offered a job as a Foreign Service Officer. But by that time with the other track of my life, I had been working on Capitol Hill a year and a half. And I had actually encountered Foreign Service officers, a number of whom said, in the early stages of their career, if you really want to influence U.S. foreign policy, probably stay where you are, rather than become a consular officer in Bujumbura or someplace. So, I did consider the State Department as well. I didn't know what USAID was, so I didn't consider USAID.

Q: You finished Georgetown in '76?

KUNDER: I enrolled in '74. I then started working on the Hill, I started going part time. And I think I ultimately got my MA in '77 as I recall.

Q: Talk about your Hill experience. Where did you work? How did you get the job?

KUNDER: I was a registered Democrat at that time. And there was a long time congressman from my home district near Pittsburgh. So I applied in his office. His reaction was, "well, help out in the campaigns, we'll see what happens after I get reelected." He had been there twenty years or so. And as it turned out that very year he got upset by some upstart young Republican, which was odd in those days in that area. It's now a heavily Trumpist Republican area, in those days it was very union because again, this all had to do with the economics for the steel mills closing down, and then the mills were booming. Everybody was a Democrat. Everybody was a labor guy.

Q: That wasn't _____ Morgan. I was just trying to remember the Democrat from that area.

KUNDER: Oh, at that time it was Frank Clark. He got upset; that would have been in the election of 1974. I had done a lot of research on working for the congressman from that district. And even though it ended up being a Republican. I applied in the new congressman's office as well. And it's ironic; what they were looking for. It was a Republican from a rural area of the district who had just won a narrow election. And for them, I was sort of the ideal steelworker's son from the most heavily industrialized portion of the district. It was good to have me on the staff for political reasons. They hired me and then I stayed with that Congressman for four years, a junior Congressman named Gary Meyers, from the Pittsburgh area. He had made a campaign pledge to only

stay for four years to restore some decency to the office, in his terms. And then he actually, in an oddity for a congressman, actually kept his vow and actually retired after four years, and he was succeeded by another democratic congressman, and I stayed with that Congressman for a year. So, I had basically five years working as a legislative director in the House of Representatives.

Q: And what kind of legislation was he interested in or did you get involved in?

KUNDER: Like all House-side legislative assistants, I had an enormous portfolio. National defense, foreign policy, labor issues, environmental issues, social security, etcetera, etcetera. He got active in some highway safety issues. He was on the Public Works and transportation committee, that was a pipsqueak issue in national terms but highway safety in western Pennsylvania which is mountainous and slippery in the wintertime with the large number of trucks on the road that are hauling coal and steel, a very treacherous combination. And so highway safety issues were a big issue for him. Got involved, ironically, I'm not sure how he ever did it; He got involved with Senator Scoop Jackson on an issue dealing with sanctions against the Soviet Union. And that was his one foray into the international relations field, dealing with Jewish emigration to Israel, and I think it was mostly sort of like most junior members, he was sort of tending the home fires, constituent service activities, and did a lot of visits. And ironically, in all these cases, I was working for my home district. So I got a chance to really immerse myself into the politics of the twenty-fifth Congressional District of Pennsylvania.
Q: Right. Interesting. And did his constituents or your constituents have any issues internationally? You talked about a very multiethnic group, but did they try to weigh in on any issues of Yugoslavia?

KUNDER: Sure, I mean, all of the issues that might be pertinent to all of the groups in that area that, for example, the invasion of Cyprus took place at that time. Greek American groups from the district came down to share their photos of atrocities against Greek Cypriots. There weren't nearly as many but the Turkish American citizens came down to share their pictures of atrocities against Turkish Cypriots. That was a hot issue in the area. I would say people were concerned about national security issues in general, a lot of perception of the weakening of the U.S. military, you had a huge veterans contingent in the area. Farmers, there were farmers, it was partly rural and partly the industrialized Ohio River Valley. Farmers were concerned about grain shipments and prices for commodities and that kind of thing. There was also a tiny bit of interest in foreign aid. Primarily religious groups. A lot of Lutherans—had a lot of German Americans. Lutherans are active in Lutheran World Relief kind of stuff. So, kind of a hodgepodge. Vietnam War, obviously, the Vietnam War ended or the U.S. component of it ended during that period, so a lot of interest, pro and con on the Vietnam War, whether to stick with it or not.

Q: Right, was that the first time you really encountered USAID?

KUNDER: I would say, I encountered it in the most fragmentary sense. I would say, because I was covering so many issues. He was not on any of the appropriations or

foreign affairs committees that would have been directly concerned with USAID. I probably by that time knew that it existed and that was about it.

Q: Interesting. Was that when you decided you'd try to run for Congress yourself?

KUNDER: Exactly. The Democrat who succeeded the Republican that I worked for, even though I worked for the guy for a year was a real dud. And I just thought, it's embarrassing. I thought I could do better. I guess I was a little idealistic and a little bit eager to get ahead in life. I thought there was an opening here. So I moved back to my home district, having worked for the district in Washington for five years, and now understanding it, and its politics a lot better. I moved back and took a crack at running for office.

Q: Well, talk about that experience.

KUNDER: I mean, I used to joke that everyone should run for office one time. I ran in '82 in the Republican primary. It's very convoluted that the Liberal Democrat who succeeded to the congressional seat that I worked for. You may recall, there was a movement by Ronald Reagan at that point, he was so popular in the early parts of his first term, that he actually started recruiting some Democrats, converting some Democrats and this particular Congressman, a liberal Democrat who had actually supported Ted Kennedy against Jimmy Carter in the Democratic primary earlier. It was also simultaneously a redistricting year. The Republicans who control the State House were almost assuredly going to do a hatchet job on him, because Pennsylvania was losing congressional seats because its population was static. And so he made a political calculation to join the Ronald Reagan wave, and he became a Republican in the middle of his term. And I ended up running against the incumbent.

I thought I had a clear path to the Republican nomination but ended up running against the formerly Democratic incumbent in the Republican primary and lost in '82. So then I ran again and in '84 won the Republican primary. At that time the Democrats in that area were so outraged that this guy had switched parties that they nominated a different Democrat and I lost a close election in '84. [Wikipedia: The 25th CD boundaries were redrawn in 1944 and then 1972. The 25th district was eliminated in 1983. The redistricted constituency became the 14th Congressional District of Pennsylvania.]

And while a number of people suggested the Abraham Lincoln model of sort of staying for six elections, if you had to win, like Lincoln, I really didn't want to stay six or twelve more years in Pennsylvania. I moved back to Washington, and got a job working for John Heinz, former senator from Pennsylvania who that year was named Chairman of the Republican Senatorial Committee. So he gave me sort of a political job working to elect Republican senators. And it was after that, that I decided to look for a job in the administration. And I contacted the White House personnel office as a Republican, defeated congressional candidate. Somebody from USAID contacted me, I was actually looking at the State Department. And then I really focused on USAID and ended up getting a job in the LPA precursor Bureau, it was called the Bureau for External Affairs.

Q: Leg?

KUNDER: Well, it was the Bureau for External Affairs, public relations, media, a bunch of other things, and the Freedom of Information Act were all in one Bureau. And so it was sort of a logical connection point for me. And they made me the Deputy Assistant Administrator for the Bureau for External Affairs, It was then a bureau, later Leg was pulled out as Office of Legislative Affairs. And then it was repackaged as the Bureau for Legislative and Public Affairs again later, but this was an earlier variant on that theme. That's sort of a quick and dirty of several years worth of stuff.

Q: I recognize that. Just a couple of sorts of names to anchor this. Do you remember who was the AA for External Affairs?

KUNDER: A political appointee who had come from Capitol Hill by the name of Tom Blank. Tom Blank worked for Congressman Walker from Pennsylvania, Bob Walker, a very conservative Republican from Lancaster.

Q: Right. And at that point was Kelly Kammerer in the Legislative Affairs office.

KUNDER: Kelly was there. I believe Kelly was there or shortly thereafter because I knew Kelly early on.

Q: Right.

KUNDER: We had a meeting in the Leg shop. I was put in one of the management positions as the head of the Bureau.

Q: Do you remember some of the issues that came up during your tenure there?

KUNDER: Oh, my goodness. I came in at the very tail end of the Reagan administration.

Q: So Iran-Contra was already gone.

KUNDER: It was part of recent history. That's correct. Peter McPherson was the administrator. I would say nothing, particularly it was towards the end of the administration. The Soviet Union was on the verge of breaking up, as I recall at that point. And that was the big issue of the day. Afghanistan was a big issue in the early phases where we were helping the Mujahideen against the Soviet invasion; that was a big issue. Latin America was still a big issue because of El Salvador. Murder of nuns there, and the bishop, the Cardinal. And so human rights in the Western hemisphere, battling communism in the western hemisphere. So those are the ones that pop into my brain.

Q: Right. And were you deployed a lot to the Hill to defend?

KUNDER: Ironically, I wasn't. As I recall, another DA (Deputy Administrator) might have had the Leg portfolio. No, I did not. I spent most of my time focused on management issues within the bureau. My boss, Tom Blank, because he had also just come from the Hill sort of liked to go up to the Hill a lot himself. And I think he was glad to have somebody back to the sort of Marine Corps management training somebody who could keep this sort of ship running on time. I applied myself to trying to learn as much as possible about how USAID operated the budget, and the personnel system and all the rest of that. But I did not spend a lot of time during that period on the Hill.

Q: Did you find the relations with the career staff fairly easy? Or did you feel that you were not trusted? How did you sort of get on with the structure?

KUNDER: Yeah, that's a great question. It's complex, obviously, for any political appointee at any time, I would say, given the fact that the Republicans had controlled things for eight years. Ronald Reagan was seen as a very conservative kind of guy, I would say things were not great in terms of relations between the career staff and political appointees in general. But then, as you well know, you have all sorts of categories of political appointees. And some of these guys were hard over right activists and they just despised the career staff. I had a low opinion of this type of political appointee, because I had actually considered joining the Foreign Service. I had tremendous respect for the career staff at USAID and the State Department and elsewhere. And I tried to show that respect and take advantage of their expertise. From my perspective, I didn't have any problems dealing with the staff, I'm sure that from other people's perspectives, I was viewed as an agent of "the dark side" here, and I understood that I'm not that unsophisticated that certainly you understood what role you're playing in this system, you're conveying the administration's point of views. But then again as a political science type, I mean, this is the way our system works versus the parliamentary system. The views of the people, as reflected in their electoral votes for parliamentarians, is conveyed into the bureaucracy of the government, by naming members of Parliament as heads of agencies. And in our system, we make political appointees. In my idealistic view that's the way the will of the people who elected Ronald Reagan, who appointed these people, gets conveyed into the bureaucracy. I felt like I did my job, but I also had respect for the people who work there. On a personal level I had absolutely no problems at all.

Q: I know that to be true, because I think a lot of people didn't really know that you were political.

KUNDER: I was at a CSIS (Center for Strategic and International Studies) conference much later in my career when I was serving as Deputy Administrator. I forget what the topic of the conference was, but somebody introduced me, as a longtime career Foreign Service officer. I've never been a foreign service officer. I remember thinking, Oh, my God! I hope there's nobody here from the administration listening to this. I think you're right. I think a lot even today, I think a lot of people assume I was a career person, because most political appointees are in an agency for a year or two, then they go back to their law firm in Topeka or whatever. I ended up working thirteen years for USAID in different administrations. I think your perception is correct. It's humorous, but correct.

Q: So just on the sort of waning days of the Reagan administration, did you have a lot of contact with the White House directly? Or alternatively with the State Department or were you pretty much tending the AID garden?

KUNDER: I would think it was a mix. I mean, I had contact with State Department political types. Because I had also worked for John Heinz, at the Senate Republican Senatorial Committee. I had some contact with people on the Hill who were pushing certain agendas, but mostly, I would say, I was just trying to do my job and learn how to manage a bureau in the federal government agency, the way I looked at it.

Q: Because the Reagan administration was followed by another Republican administration. Could you continue on? Or did they want a new broom in there.

KUNDER: Obviously, there was a new office of White House personnel that was loyal to George Bush (1989–1993), but because he had served as vice president there was some continuity. That kind of transition, in some cases, would mean a clean break, and the old crew would obviously be out. But as it turned out the incoming group asked me to stay. And then part of my job was to help get the new appointees from the Bush administration confirmed or through the system. And one of those new guys coming in was Andrew Natsios.

And at the time, Andrew was Director of the Office of Foreign Disaster. And I helped orient him, a small-town Massachusetts delegate from their house of representatives, to what OFDA (Office of Foreign Development Assistance) did, and so forth. And so then Andrew moved meteorically up the chain of command within USAID, because he had been well connected with some of the Bush types and had done a lot of yeoman's work politically for Bush in Massachusetts. His value was great, because Bush had run against Governor Dukakis. And so insights into Dukakis's thinking and so on, were highly valued, obviously, during the campaign. Andrew was able to provide a lot of that kind of intelligence to the Bush campaign before he joined USAID. When he got up to the administrator, I think first, he was named head of the Bureau for Humanitarian Affairs at that time. Then he asked me to move over from the External Affairs Bureau to take his old job as OFDA director. I made that sort of horizontal transition.

Q: That is a steep learning curve, I imagine, because OFDA is sort of a world into itself.

KUNDER: Correct. Yes. But again, I had tried to apply myself in the time I had been there previously, and tried to learn from foreign service officers. I met with a lot of foreign service officers, I tried to understand how the system worked, in which I was embedded. And then, again, OFDA is a very operational type of thing in an oddball sort of way. It wasn't all that different from the United States Marine Corps. And then third, it would have been different if I had been thrust into some sort of non functioning entity, but actually, the organization worked quite well. They were very efficient. They had good systems in place, they had great personnel. And they were, I was able to benefit from that in the sense that I had some breathing space where I basically just had to show up and

listen to the meetings. Bill Garvelink was head of the Operations Division of OFDA at that time and was pretty much running all of the field operations quite efficiently. It was a steep learning curve, but it did not seem like a particularly painful or difficult learning curve. I threw myself into it. And I think I was able to understand it pretty quickly.

Q: Well, I think you were. I think your name is associated with OFDA. Some of the challenges at that time. Certainly, you had the collapse of the Soviet Union. Do you remember some of the other crises that OFDA dealt with during your term?

KUNDER: Oh, sure. I mean, the collapse of the Soviet Union definitely. Afghanistan was a huge issue from a humanitarian perspective that you may recall, there was a special interagency working group and task force that was focused on Afghanistan. So interestingly, for future work, we did not get much involved in Afghanistan. So the major crises of that day were, unfortunately, some of them are still present today, Somalia, Sudan, Ethiopia, Horn of Africa. There were brutal civil wars in both Mozambique and Angola, the former Portuguese colonies. That was when there were tripartite civil wars going on, Chinese backing one faction, West backing a second faction, Soviet Union backing a third faction, hideous conflicts there. And then of course, very significantly, the breakup of Yugoslavia, the Bosnian Civil War, so that took a lot of energy and effort because most of the OFDA systems were focused on third world countries that did not have a lot of diplomatic or national security engagement. And if we wanted to help out in Mozambique, sure, there were some people who cared about the Renamo guerrillas, but it was not a high priority issue for the U.S. government. We had it pretty much to ourselves and focused on the operational delivery of supplies, kinds of issues. But now when you got into the Balkans, all of a sudden, you're dealing with the Europe Bureau at the State Department, which hadn't had a crisis of this type since World War Two at that time, and they were clueless on emergency aid from USAID: you deliver what? You do what? That was a real challenge. And all of a sudden, there were National Security Council meetings and so forth about the Balkans. Similarly, Central America still loomed large. And then obviously, the natural disasters that come along, inevitably. In Central America, we still had at that point, I believe the Contras and so forth. And certainly, again, El Salvador that the Civil War with the FMLN still going on there. So, a number of hotspots around the world. Liberia was another.

Q: It sounds like this maybe was the first time that OFDA sort of got politicized, or at least, became engaged in U.S. foreign policy. I'm trying to think how to say it.

KUNDER: It had done some of that earlier because of, for example, the Yerevan earthquake in the former Soviet Armenian Republic. And so people saw it, I think, political types and administrations had seen OFDA as a potential tool that could have political value, one way or the other. But I think there was much more of it at that time, and I think it was a combination of the system, seeing it as a tool of U.S. foreign policy. And also Andrew and I, both being political types, were eager to have it become more engaged as a significant player in U.S. foreign policy. At one point during the Glasnost period, right before the breakup of the Soviet Union, there had been a diplomatic initiative after the Yerevan earthquake [December 7, 1988], which was just devastating, I

believe 50,000 people died. And there had been not too distant in time from that an earthquake in Oakland, California. And the magnitude of the earthquake on the Richter scale was almost exactly the same, but maybe one in Oakland was a little higher. And something like thirteen people had died in Northern California. This led to a lot of discussion among earthquake experts and some political types saw this, in the context of Glasnost. Wow! Why don't we bring a Soviet delegation to the United States to understand what we do right. It turned out that even though the magnitude was the same, and I knew little about this at the time, but the duration of the initial shaking of the earth was something like ten times longer in Yerevan even though the Richter scale and the magnitude was the same. And what happens is harmonic waves start setting up in infrastructure, and it crumbles, the longer the earthquake goes. So even though the earth shook as violently in the Bay Area of San Francisco, it didn't shake very long as luck, basically, luck, as it turned out, had a lot to do with the differing casualty levels between California and Armenia. Anyway, a very high-level Soviet delegation was sent to the United States and OFDA hosted. I took them to see the Tennessee Valley Authority, nuclear power plant safety things in Memphis, and then I took them to the west coast, where we met with earthquake experts and took them around the country. Andrew and I welcomed it, we pushed this kind of thing, because we wanted to be engaged. We wanted USAID writ large to be engaged in U.S. foreign policy.

Q: And that really was sort of the end of the Soviet Union, people were reaching out. That's what Glasnost was. Fascinating. I would say that was probably one of the high points just from the way you talk about it. But are there other high points of your tenure at OFDA that you would flag?

KUNDER: Well, at the very end of you recall, at the very end of the Bush administration, he made this iconic, classic decision to send troops to Somalia [December 1992] and what was then seen as one of the worst famines in human history. And I had, again, because Andrew and I wanted to be involved, I had actually flown earlier to Somalia. And at that time, this is lost in the mists, since of lots of people piled on later, but I was then seen as the first, the most senior Administration official who had actually been on the ground in Somalia and then reported back which, in some circuitous fashion, I'm sure helped shape the administration's response. And then, when I happened to be at a peace conference with Ambassador Oakley [Ambassador to Somalia (1982–1984); Special Envoy, Somalia, (1992–1994)] in Addis Ababa, dealing with the Somali factions, when Bush announced the decision to send troops to Mogadishu. So, Ambassador Oakley, and I flew to Mogadishu to set up a little proto-embassy there. And I was there when the troops arrived, and then helped with Bush's tour of some parts of the famine zone [December 31, 1992 to January 2, 1993] so that we sort of showed the AID flag and OFDA's participation in the hope from USAID's perspective, a high point of being very, very heavily engaged in U.S. foreign policy, humanitarian policy decisions in Somalia. That would be the other thing that jumps out at me besides the experiences I mentioned.

Q: Somalia was just a devastated country at that point. No, it's—

KUNDER: Totally failed state. I mean, downtown Mogadishu there was no governance. There was no government. There was no police. There was no military. Just armed gangs driving on the back of what were ubiquitously called "technical" vehicles, with whatever armaments they had, and it was some post apocalyptic kind of world there. And again, I just wrote a chapter for a book that Andrew Natsios published about the Bush administration. I was asked to do the chapter on Somalia. And as I repeatedly point out to folks, what everybody remembers about Somalia is Black Hawk Down [October 3, 1993], six or eight months into the succeeding Clinton administration. But actually, in terms of the original scope of the operation and humanitarian crisis, the humanitarian crisis was solved within a matter of a couple of months, once order was restored, first by U.S. troops, and then subsequently by UN peacekeeping forces. Actually, the famine rate went down to virtually zero in a matter of a couple of months. Subsequently, much debated efforts to try to bring good governance to Somalia led to provoking further conflict with the warlords there and ultimately led to the Black Hawk Down incident, which ultimately led to President Clinton's decision to pull out and really regrettably, in my mind ultimately led to this subsequent decision, I believe, not to get involved in Rwanda, when the butchery was taking place there. But the Somalia famine actually was solved by the U.S. intervention. Anyway, that was the other thing that jumped into my mind.

Q: Interesting. I am required to ask, are there any big disappointments from that period in OFDA, interventions that just didn't work or could have worked better?

KUNDER: Well, yes, I mean, my staff was in constant turmoil, because even though Somalia was hideous. What was going on in places like Angola and Mozambique was in some cases worse. Obscene butchery and violence and from a sort of utilitarian point of view the system never elevated these countries to get the kind of attention they really needed in terms of peacekeeping. Ultimately, Chester Crocker, the Assistant Secretary for African Affairs, got involved in solving the Mozambique civil war. But by and large, they just didn't rise very high on the radar screen. There was a constant awareness on our part that for visibility reasons we had to be involved in Bosnia, and Somalia, because that's where the administration's head was. But our staff knew what was going on on the ground in places like Angola and Mozambique, and felt terrible that we weren't doing much more about it. So that was a disappointment that we just couldn't level that playing field out. There just weren't enough bodies to go around. OFDA was a much smaller organization in those days. And then I would say the other one was in general, Bosnia, was always considered something we could not get our hands and head around from a humanitarian point of view, because you had active, competent military forces, not a bunch of ragtag Somali militias. But the Bosnian Serbs were a well-organized military force. And the U.S. government didn't want a general war to break out in Europe. So they didn't know what to do when Serbian militias set up roadblocks and refused to let UNHCR [United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees] convoys through. The slaughter at Srebrenica later, was a sort of the ultimate capstone of showing that the West just was incapable of dealing with intentional killing and ethnic cleansing.

Q: The Bosnian situation was really horrendous. And I don't remember OFDA's role.

KUNDER: Very heavily involved, had a large office there. Very heavily involved in the normal delivery of humanitarian supplies and advocacy there. It was a very large response.

Q: Right. At that point, Peter McPherson was no longer the administrator. And I can't remember who was the administrator, but I don't remember strong leadership, but maybe I'm just not remembering.

KUNDER: At that point, if I'm not mistaken, it would have been Ronald Roskens, the former president of the University of Nebraska.

Q: Right. Did you deal with the front office much or was OFDA more or less its own independent?

KUNDER: It was heavily vertically integrated, because by that time, Andrew Natsios had been my assistant administrator, as I think it was BHA, Bureau for Humanitarian Affairs, humanitarian affairs, or I can't remember maybe DCHA [Disaster, Conflict and Humanitarian Assistance]. But whatever it was called the umbrella bureau that included both the Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance and the Office of Food for Peace, and I think there was a small office of transition initiatives at that point. Andrew was heavily involved in keeping an eye on what was going on in OFDA and then pushing that information up, both within USAID and then directly over to the White House because of his political contacts there. And the State Department. I would say, it was vertically integrated. We were not off kind of doing our own thing. We were heavily engaged in virtually daily conversations with the State Department and the National Security Council staff on issues like Somalia and Bosnia because they were so highly visible in the news, in the media.

Q: Do you remember dealing with other donors on these issues, or with the contracting in the NGO community?

KUNDER: Oh, yeah, absolutely. I mean, that's sort of the stuff of an OFDA director, constant engagement with humanitarian partners in the United States, in those two cases because the U.S. did not have a presence on the ground in Somalia, heavy engagement with the United Nations agencies, which although they weren't able to be effective, were on the ground. And same way in Bosnia, it was primarily the UN High Commissioner for Refugees that had the lead in the former Yugoslavia. Interestingly to loop this back to the first part of this conversation. I had to, of course, hide my ethnicity. When I was working in Bosnia, because if anybody had gotten a whiff locally that I was of Croatian-American ancestry, this would have been assumed that I was favoring one group over another.

Q: Right. Interesting. Well, luckily, in our system, your ethnicity is not part of your passport.

KUNDER: Exactly, exactly. And Kunder, other names would have been immediately recognized as Croatian or Serbian. But mine because of the work of the people at Ellis Island, who butchered whatever they were given by my ancestors, it does come across as sort of German or Dutch.

Q: Yeah, safe enough anyway. But you must have traveled to Croatia, Bosnia, a lot during that period?

KUNDER: Yes, I wouldn't remember the exact number of times but I was there numerous times and also in Europe for numerous meetings with other donors, with the U.S. military. U.S. European command is headquartered in Stuttgart. So yes, a lot of meetings with all of the above, donors and partners.

Q: Right. At that point, U.S. military wasn't that engaged with OFDA's work, is that right?

KUNDER: That's a very interesting question. Because during much of my subsequent career they engaged with civilian-military interaction and cooperation and training. We actually had started. Primarily for two reasons. One is the occasional need by OFDA for Military Airlift, and the Denton Amendment named after former Alabama United States, Senator Denton, who had I think, driven by humanitarian groups in Alabama, probably religious humanitarian groups, had incorporated the Denton Amendment into the Foreign Assistance Act, which allows space available on U.S. military flights for the delivery of humanitarian assistance by private organizations. If there's an earthquake somewhere around the world in Sri Lanka, and Sri Lankan Americans want to ask for space available on U.S. military flights going to Sri Lanka, and there is space available, they can donate humanitarian assistance to their former countrymen. Now, it's not as easy as it seems, because there might not be any regularly scheduled U.S. military flights going to Sri Lanka. And second, it didn't work from a disaster professional's point of view. You ended up with too many planeloads of teddy bears and inappropriate food and winter coats and stuff that wasn't necessary. But be that as it may, the Denton Amendment required us to deal with the office of the Secretary of Defense on a regular basis. Since we had to approve the way the Department of Defense operated, they required the concurrence of the lead civilian agency, USAID in order to agree to a Denton flight. And one last thought on this, I recall one meeting and it was about Central America. And I think it was El Salvador, where OFDA convened a meeting of some of the military units that were operating in that area and some of the NGOs operating in the area. And I recall it because it devolved into a screaming match along the lines of "the people you're training killed that people I was working with, in El Salvador", because there was the murder of American nuns there and other brutality, torture. And that is a sort of an exclamation point in my brain, because having seen the difficulty of getting all these folks on the same page, was one of the things that impelled me subsequently to offer training services to the military, as a consultant about who this alphabet soup of civilian entities is in hopes of getting them to work better together.

Q: Right. Interesting. And, of course, subsequently in your career. You have a lot of engagement with the U.S. military. All right. So the election happens. Were you asked to stay on in the Clinton administration?

KUNDER: That was a real oddball thing. It was the day of the swearing in. When would that have been? January 1993. And there was already a liaison officer starting in December, from the Clinton administration as would be typical embedded in the front office of USAID. I don't remember his name right now. I can picture his face, but I don't remember his name. And he was doing some of the initial hiring and interviewing people to come to USAID for the Clinton administration. I remember being summoned; I got a call. Literally, I was literally packing up books in cardboard boxes in my office, which was in the State Department, and my staff was getting ready for the transition. I had naturally named somebody who's going to act as acting director, etc. And I was literally going to put the boxes in my car and take off. And I got a summons from this person in the front office who I think maybe I met tangentially a couple of times. And I remember very clearly, Ann, the thought going through my mind, and this is sort of characteristic of presidential transitions. Why are they bringing me upstairs? I mean, is this going to be some ritual stripping off of my epaulets or something, they're going to ritually humiliate me, "you're fired!" or something like that. It's an odd ball thing. I went up to the front office as summoned. And I went into the office of this Clinton administration representative. And it was sort of this awkward kind of meeting where he was a little hesitant and just, I was wondering where on earth is this possibly going. And finally, to make a long story short, they wanted me to stay for a while, because they had somehow picked up the perception that I was not a Republican radical, that I had tried to be a good corporate, agency citizen.

And probably most importantly, I just came back from Somalia. And they were in the middle of trying to figure it out. And I had spent time in Bosnia, and they were in the middle of trying to figure that out, and said, Would you mind staying a little bit? And I was, like, stunned. First of all, I didn't know enough about political transitions to know that this was even feasible. So now I'm thinking to myself, well, what is this going to do to my political career? I'm working for Bill Clinton; will my fellow Republicans consider me some sort of spy? Also another oddball thing. Probably through my entire life, I held it against Bill Clinton that he got out of the draft during Vietnam. I mean, I understand I mean, I'm more nuanced on this now. But some of my friends had been killed. And I wondered if Bill Clinton, maybe, should have been there instead of them. But they were just working-class guys from Pittsburgh. They didn't have any way to get out of this thing. And so I had a personal kind of distaste for Bill Clinton, not his politics so much as that particular issue. Nonetheless, all in all, I thought about it. I asked the Clinton representative to give me a couple hours to think about that. And so I said, sure. I mean, in fact, we were in the middle of a chaotic situation, Somalia, middle of a chaotic situation in Bosnia and other places. So then I stayed on for a while, and I ended up staying on for nearly six months. It was a long period of time before Nan Borton was finally approved as the head of OFDA. And Brian Atwood came in, as I recall, as the administrator. But that's how the system works. It took a while to get everybody confirmed, and of course, OFDA is not a confirmed position, but it took a while to get

Nan through the clearance process. I ended up working for quite a while for the Clinton administration.

Q: Did you decide if I'm acting, I'll act or did you feel like a dead man walking?

KUNDER: Did I feel like what was the first thing you said?

Q: Did you just continue to act?

KUNDER: It was funny. If you're a political appointee, you've been in and out of the system a couple of times. Some people have their blinders, their ideological blinders on. They can't understand why the staff doesn't like them. Or they despise bureaucrats, who they think are a bunch of liberals, from a Republican point of view. I walked back to my office to contemplate this. And actually, there was a staff party going on to celebrate the overthrow of the Republican administration. And I was like, Oops. And they looked at me and said, oops, I called in my senior staff and explained what was going on. I would say there was a little humorous, awkward period there. But then I just sort of explained, I'm just obviously here for a period. At the time, I sort of thought it was going to be a matter of weeks. I didn't realize it was gonna be months. And I said, look, the incoming administration just asked me to stay so I'm just going to stay and we're just going to keep going and do what we do. And what they thought in their heart of hearts, who knows? Everybody was acting professional. And I mean, I'd been there for a while. And so we just went to work, and people had plenty to do. It seemed all normal for a while.

Q: Interesting. Did you actually end up? Sort of briefing Nan as she came in? Or did—?

KUNDER: Oh, sure. Oh, yeah. I mean, now I've been through three transitions, right. And I have been, each time I've taken it as my civic duty to, I mean, I gave the Obama administration, my list of if I were you guys, here are the eight problems that we couldn't solve that I would encourage you guys to try to solve. I've met with transition teams each time and gave them my best shot at what they needed to know. I briefed Nan. And then when she got on board, I finished packing my boxes and just walked out the door.

Q: And you didn't have to go through the transition or the move to the Ronald Reagan Building?

KUNDER: I avoided that, correct.

Q: Yeah. Had you been looking for onward assignments? Or did you basically then have to start from scratch when you finally left?

KUNDER: I probably was too idealistic. I did not spend as much time as I probably could have planning for my post-OFDA future. Again, I had never been through a presidential transition, I've never lost a job. Before and in the case of leaving the Marine Corps. I knew I was gonna go to graduate school. I didn't want a job immediately. I did not invest any time at all, in looking around for other jobs. And I just focused

immediately on right back to where I was the day before, a lot of stuff going on with an overwhelming amount of crises around the world. And so then, when I left and took a deep breath, I thought to myself, Well, I'm just going to start a consulting practice from scratch. And I had this vague notion of doing training for the military. And I quickly devised some training packages. And I offered them to the military, like any small business starting up, I mean, it starts from zero. But there was good receptivity to it. And then subsequently, the folks over at the Institute for Defense Analyses, one of the military think tanks, were generally aware of me because they were monitoring humanitarian crises around the world. They asked me to come over to serve as a fellow, a consultant, in sort of halftime work over there. And so between doing training for military organizations and this fellowship at the Institute for Defense Analyses, that's sort of what I did for a couple of years. And later in life, I realized that I probably was a lousy politician. And if I had played my cards better, I could have gotten myself some sinecure somewhere, people looking out for Republicans out of office, etc. Just wasn't thinking that way at the time.

Q: Were you a sort of a lone operator, or did you have staff that helped you with the training?

KUNDER: I just did it all; I was a sole proprietor. I just did it myself. And did a lot of traveling to military bases, and exercises around the world around the States primarily, around the States. I never had a staff the entire time I've worked as a consultant.

Q: Did you enjoy that?

KUNDER: I enjoyed it. I actually, there's a, I guess, somewhere buried in me some kind of entrepreneurial bent, and I actually liked the idea of starting and running my own business and trying to find, it's like, nobody is going to pay me anything in two weeks. And that just I found that sort of stimulating also found that a little bit liberating after time in both the military bureaucracy and the civilian bureaucracy, and Capitol Hill bureaucracy to just be completely on my own and having less process costs of day to day living. I kind of liked it.

Q: You are setting your own schedule. And you can decide whether you are going to go after a contract or not. Interesting.

KUNDER: Most of it was non contract work, I basically just reached out directly to various military contacts because I pretty good sense of the U.S. military and where they needed to train people in the Army War College and Command and Staff College at Fort Leavenworth, I sort of knew where the training nodes were. Fort Benning, Georgia does a lot of training of Latin America officers, so they get to do a lot of humanitarian work. And so I just reached out directly to them. And if they needed to put me under one of their local contracts, they just sort of stuffed me into the contract. And I didn't spend much time on bidding on federal contract work, because it would have been me against Boeing corporation or something silly, I just did it on a more of a retail basis.

Q: The training that you did was specifically on humanitarian disasters and response.

KUNDER: The core course was something like "knowing your partners in humanitarian response." And it was because of where the military was, and this, meaning civilian military relations has become much more institutionalized in recent decades., which is a good thing. But at that time, it wasn't so much. And there were military civil affairs officers, who were essentially civilian reservists. And they understood more about this, but even they didn't really understand what Catholic Relief Services was or how it fit in. So I sort of explained, here's the alphabet soup of all these organizations, here's what they do. Here's how they think when they go to a crisis situation, here's what they think of you, when they find you there. Here's how you should treat them. You can ask them, for example, about who the local warlords are. But if you're going to pass that information on to your intelligence agents, prior to assassinating a local warlord, you better let the humanitarians know the purpose for which you're asking this question, because otherwise, you're going to ruin the whole relationship. And they'll never talk to you again. And so a lot of it was sort of practical tips. Here's the range of things that humanitarians provide. They don't just dump food, here's how they operate. And that was sort of the nature of the training. And I would say very, very well received by the military.

Q: Do you think it's continuing to this day? Or is it now so internalized in the military, that they do it themselves?

KUNDER: Well, they do it a lot. But I mean, to this day, I think the contract ended about a year ago, but I was going down to the Marine base at Quantico every year for the Marine Command and Staff College, that is to say, essentially majors who are going to be promoted to Lieutenant Colonels. They get a whole year of training. And now they're going to move from the sort of tactical level where they're just worried about weapons and platoons. And now they're going to have to deal strategically with political advisors and staff planning and things. So they got to know the civilian agencies. So there's a lot of training on civilian agencies, and then they do a Capstone exercise and I was an advisor for the Capstone exercise. And they would say okay, there's a typhoon striking the Philippines, who should we call on the civilian side?, this kind of stuff. But in the meantime, they would also have to this day, they still do it sort of a meet the civilians day in the auditorium or in the gym, and OFDA still sends people I guess, OFDA no longer technically exists anymore but USAID still sends OFDA like officers down there, because it's yet another group every year, they're turning over a new group of majors who are going to become Lieutenant Colonels. Some of them may have bumped into civilian agencies in Iraq or Afghanistan. Some didn't. This is an ongoing process.

Q: Fascinating, fascinating.

KUNDER: And the military tremendously bungles it sometimes. I once went to a training exercise at Fort Benning, Georgia, and the colonel somebody met me at the airport to drive me to the base and they handed me a list of the participants in the class and I said, Wow! Colonel, this is a really impressive list. You've got Catholic Relief Services in here, Lutheran World Relief, you've got all these civilian organizations, you guys did a great

job of recruiting. And the colonel responded that, actually, those guys all work for DynCorp, a military contractor, they're all playing CRS and Lutheran World. In other words, they had hired a bunch of retired military officers working for a military contractor to explain to them how an officer from Catholic Relief Services would view them, as a completely useless circular training exercise.

Q: I know you've done the consulting from time to time over your career, do you mothball the organization when you take another assignment? Or do you try to keep some of the training going, even when you're at Save the Children or back at AID?

KUNDER: No. By the way, I sort of skipped right over the Save the Children three years there that I worked at, Save the Children, which if you want to we can come back to. I mean, each time, it's easy to mothball because it's sole proprietorship. I just stopped doing what I'm doing. I never tried to, it becomes too complicated and too many ethical issues would arise. I don't—

Q: Just kill it.

KUNDER: try to do the two things.

Q: Do you have time to do the Save the Children before we

KUNDER: Sure.

Q: What were the dates of the—

KUNDER: '93 to '96. I started consulting work when I left OFDA, but I was recruited not long thereafter, I just forgot that blob of time there. I was recruited by Save the Children to serve as what they call a vice president of program development up in Westport, Connecticut where they are headquartered. And so I went off to join the NGO where I thought this would be a great segue from my OFDA work. And I had a sort of interesting three years there, they were grappling with the question of whether they wanted to remain completely independent from the U.S. government or start doing contracts. They would take grants, but wouldn't take contracts. They were grappling with whether they wanted to take on contracting work, and I think they thought I could help them figure out whether to do the contracting work or not. I spent a lot of useful time with Save the Children, I headed their technical offices, education office, health care office, and so forth. But Jim Sarn, a retired USAID officer. Dr. Sarn, who I guess regrettably passed away, a year or so ago, was the head of the health office while I was there. I'm a big fan of Jim Sarn. Ultimately, I found the NGO work incredibly unfulfilling. My sense was that, when you're in the U.S. government, especially dealing with the front page stories in the media, it's sort of like in the big game, and Save the Children, a great organization, love them, support them, but sort of like a little family organization; they're not small. I mean, at that time, they were five hundred million a year in volume of business. Now they're in excess of a billion dollars a year annually. They're a big organization, but

compared to the U.S. government, a small organization, so I found that ultimately unsatisfying, and resigned from it.

Q: And you move to Westport to take the—

KUNDER: I did. Bought a house in Westport figured I was gonna maybe spend the rest of my career at Save the Children at the time but ultimately found it not my cup of tea.

Q: At some point off record, we can compare notes on that, but you had a technical staff that you appreciated and thought that they were pretty good. But you did find the whole system a bit confining. What was your experience dealing with their board? Did you maybe not have to deal with any of the sort of external actors that Save the Children dealt with?

KUNDER: No, as a vice president, I obviously regularly attended board meetings and briefed on board meetings and so forth. I mean, like any organization like that they had a board that loomed large in consideration and I would say given their headquarters in Westport there were prominent people on either the board or the advisory committee. I worked out a couple of times with Paul Newman in the Westport YMCA gym and Berry Brazelton, the famous pediatrician, was on one of their advisory groups. I would consult with him on Child Trauma during conflicts and things like that. And obviously made regular presentations to board meetings and went to social events, with board meetings, I would say I had a sort of a normal. I didn't find it to be an enormous value added. But on the other hand, I thought it was a solid relationship in terms of exercising, board-like oversight over the finances and direction of the organization. I found them a little wary of going into the contracting world, which was one of my primary responsibilities there. And so that was a little, I thought, confining. But I also understood their long proud tradition of independence from following U.S. government leadership. I sort of understood where they were coming from, but I would say it was a normal relationship.

Q: The view of AID from that side of the table, were they apprehensive about working with AID? Were you able to explain AID's ways and appraise them?

KUNDER: They were pretty sophisticated, they pretty much understood USAID and how to deal with USAID. They had decided to deal with USAID in a particular fashion; grants and cooperative agreements only fashion and not go into the contracting side. And they had the normal NGO perspective on those within the U.S. government, I had seen USAID as the folks closest to an on the ground the perspective within the USG, And the most likely to have some sense of what was really going on in the ground in any given country, especially with Foreign Service National staff and so forth. From the Save the Children perspective, USAID was yet another group of bureaucrats back stuck at the embassy who couldn't get out, and didn't understand what was really going on in the countryside. But I didn't find it particularly disconcerting, but one would sort of expect that, and I'm sure that the local community partner viewed Save the Children as stuck in their headquarters and not really understanding what's going on on the ground.

Q: It all depends on where you're sitting.

KUNDER: Exactly.

Q: Right. You gave Save three years, and then decided to come back to Washington and resume your training work?

KUNDER: Consulting work. I say consulting rather than just training because while I started off with training. Ultimately, a number of clients got a hold of me who wanted me to either to serve on an advisory board or serve as a general advisor, or they were considering going in, they found this humanitarian or development sector as a potential business line of work. They were interested in understanding it better, or in some cases, they wanted me to do actual marketing work in USAID. It's sort of covered the whole range, continued training, but also some of this advisory and marketing work.

Q: Right. And you basically did that for the remainder of the 90s. Is that correct?

KUNDER: Let me think now. And it would have been during that period of time that I had the relationship with the Institute for Defense Analysis. So I was sort of half time or so depending. Sometimes we did overseas analysis, and I would be working full time for them for several weeks or something like that. I think my bio, from that period says, Principal of Kunder/RealiAssociates, and also, I forget what I was called, what my title was, but something like Senior Staff at the Institute for Defense Analysis. Yes, essentially, I did the same kind of combination of work of consulting and working at the Institute for Defense Analysis.

Q: Right. So just maybe a final question on that, did you think that that's something you could continue to do? Or did you always assume that there would be another management job that's coming at you at some point?

KUNDER: I did not assume there was another full time job. I periodically considered other jobs. I was periodically recruited for other jobs. Primarily, I would say, in the NGO type world or think tank world. At one point, I'm trying to think of when this occurred, this would have been after I left the U.S. government for the second time, I was for a while, a senior fellow at the German Marshall Fund.

Q: I remember that.

KUNDER: I thought about the possibility of going to a think tank. With all due respect to your husband's distinguished work in the think tank world, I sort of went in there after the Marine Corps and the Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance. I sort of saw a bunch of cobwebs growing on telephones. I'm obviously stereotyping. But it is what it is, I mean, the German Marshall Fund, a great organization, but I find the endless meetings and discussions sort of deadly. Now we're thinking about a conference on such and such….

Q: You're action oriented, then always have them.

KUNDER: Management oriented and action. I actually say I must have a bit of an entrepreneurial bent. I did find that running my own business, and I actually made good money, made more money than I was for any of the jobs that were being offered. And kind of like the flexibility. And yet I either had a relationship with the Institute for Defense Analysis, or for the German Marshall Fund so some sort of quasi-intellectual, quasi Policy Analyst element to my work as well. So I found that kind of a useful balance. I didn't want to be just out there, flacking, for a bunch of contractors. I wanted some intellectual work where I could publish things and write things and conduct conferences. But I didn't want to do that full time. I probably to the extent that I was thinking that far into the future, and I probably figured I would do some hybrid of that for the rest of my life. When I bumped into Bill Garvelink on twenty-third street one day, after nine eleven. And he said, What are you doing? And I said, I explained what we were talking about here. He said, wait a minute, we're looking for somebody to go to Afghanistan. Could you be ready to go in a couple of weeks? By this time, I had a little child and I said, what? I remember exactly what I said to him. I said, I don't speak a word of Dari. And I've never set foot in Afghanistan in my life. Why would you want me—

Q: And he said, Perfect.

KUNDER: Well, it was more like you know how the military thinks; you're going to be embedded in a military situation. AID needs to raise its visibility in what was essentially, I mean, essentially a military operation. They were still bombing the outskirts of Kabul at that time. And they wanted somebody who could talk to generals, and somebody who could talk to ambassadors, and more than anything else, just get USAID on the radar screen and operationally get them up and started. One thing led to another and so that was my next iteration of government service. But the answer your question, no, I was not planning to—

Q: And had you not been on twenty-third street at that time, it might not have happened. I'd like to pause here because I would like to spend a lot of time on Afghanistan and your next stint with the government. I'm wondering whether we could reschedule or schedule our next meeting.

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KUNDER: to brutalize people and force them to choose pick sides. And so unfortunately, a small minority can have an outsized impact.

Q: Right, and basically heightened divisions that were quite muted. So, Jim, this is election day, November 8, this is our second conversation. And I think when we stopped last time, it was at the end of the Clinton administration, you had been asked to stay on a little bit for the transition. And you did for what, a few months?

KUNDER: Yeah, several months.

Q: Right. It wasn't the only transition, I think you had to preside over. But I know you, you have the competence of the career staff, which may have made a huge difference in that very fraught transition. Can you take it from there? How long? Any memories of managing that transition and then and on to your next assignment or your next?

KUNDER: I mean, basically, as I recall, it was an orderly transition. I gave you an anecdote last time about being summoned up to the office of the White House personnel representative for the incoming Clinton administration, kind of a humorous story, where we sort of talk back past each other for a few minutes, because I assumed that was there for my ritual firing. And he was trying to position this to ask me to stay but I don't I mean, it was a very difficult period, because this was where the initial success, initial humanitarian success in Somalia transitioned into Black Hawk Down. And so that was a difficult situation, the ongoing civil war in the Balkans. It was a challenging time from a humanitarian practitioner's point of view. But ultimately, Nan Borten got through the process, she was not a confirmed position. She got through the approval process, she came on board, we did an orderly handoff, friendly, clean handoff. And I moved on. And at that point, I was recruited to be the vice president for program development at Save the Children Federation and moved up to Westport, Connecticut, and spent three years as Vice President of Save the Children Federation.

Q: I thought that was earlier in the 90s.

KUNDER: I'm trying to make sure I get my sequence right, I skipped over that last time. I went to USAID originally from Capitol Hill in 1987, at the end of the Reagan administration, and then stayed on through the George Bush senior administration, which would take us up to '92 to '93 transitions. That's the period we're talking about is spring of winter in spring of '93. And so then, at that point, I was recruited by Save the Children and served Save the Children from '93 to '96. And then, at that point left, Save the Children, moved back to Washington and set up my consulting practice Kunder/Reali Associates and I worked as a consultant and primarily trainer as we discussed earlier, civil military relations being the specialty of the one person operation from '96 until the 9/11 attacks in 2001. Then I was recruited back to USAID to go to serve as Mission Director or humanitarian representative in Kabul, right after that. That was the sequence. So between the time I left federal service in 1993 and went back at the end of 2001. I was either at Save the Children for the first three years or in private business practice.

Q: Right. And I think your last anecdote, last time we talked was basically running into Bill Garvelink on twenty-third street and getting recruited.

KUNDER: Literally, that is exactly what happened. Clearly accidental, bumped into him. Hey, we're looking for somebody. I think I gave you some of the details.

Q: That's right. Did you have any apprehension about going to Afghanistan at that time? Did it sound like a good thing to do and you just went off and did it?

KUNDER: In the interim, I had a son born. And so my primary apprehension was family considerations, young child. Robbin, of course, was perfectly capable of taking care of him. But it was still a big deal to just sort of pick up and leave. I didn't have any children earlier. So to me, parenthood in my late 40s was a big, stunning thing in life. And so I was hesitant to leave a young child at whatever he would have been, at that time, three or four years old. Because I began to understand how much time is involved in raising children and how important your presence is. So other than that, I felt a sort of normal patriotic duty to do what was necessary. And because I had worked in conflict situations previously both at OFDA and then at Save the Children. I understood what they were trying to get at. They wanted somebody who spoke military 101 to deal with what was essentially a military operation at that time. And they wanted somebody to get post Taliban humanitarian operations started. So I understood that I was probably a good fit for what they were looking for. And so I took the job.

Q: When you went there. Was there any extant programming by AID? Or did you really have to set it all up?

KUNDER: I don't want to bore you with too many anecdotal details. I met very briefly with Ryan Crocker, who was being sent out and we did some joint meetings in Washington to prep for this. And then we literally boarded different planes, but arrived in Kabul approximately the same time. The U.S. Embassy was a destroyed shell of itself with bullet holes, pocketing the bulletproof glass and the front door. It had been taken over by a company of the United States Marines. The motor pool next door was burned by the Taliban. It was just a shell of a building. And there was a skeleton crew of about ten State Department officers who had arrived several weeks before I think it's a pretty well-known anecdote, but they kept the snack shop in the embassy in its condition upon arrival. And so there were still signs up there like hamburgers nineteen cents, cheeseburger twenty-nine cents. And there were literally desiccated hamburgers sitting on the table where people had had to evacuate earlier when the Taliban were approaching the city. In the earlier evacuation. It was just an unbelievable mess and people were starting to funnel in. So there were NGOs on the ground. CARE was there. Others were there who had somehow managed to run low level below the radar screen programs during the Taliban time. Some of that money may have been funneled through headquarters and down from USAID. But in terms of organized USAID programming on the ground, there was absolutely nothing. A small group of us, Elisabeth Kvitashvili, was sent out early. Nitin Madhav, I don't know if you know Nitin.

Q: I don't.

KUNDER: Nitin he's now I think, sort of super Afghan desk officer. He's been working on Afghanistan for decades now at USAID. Nitin, was sent out because he spoke the local language and had been working in this area. And there were a handful of other sort of technical folks OFDA sent a representative out. And Andrew Natsios flew out. And I recall, we met for a couple hours, and we tried to get a handle. I tried to get a briefing in Pakistan before I flew over on a UN flight to Kabul. There was a big UN Office on the ground. But basically, programming was almost non-existent. I recall specifically

Andrew getting on the helicopter to fly back out and saying, “Jim, make something happen.” Because our sense was there's nothing going on. We needed to gin up something to show that the Westerners had arrived with more than just bombing runs to try to get something going. Some ex-local hire staff started filtering back to the embassy and volunteering to help. We were housed in a bomb shelter, underground bomb shelter, outside the embassy building. And there was so little space. Everyone was sleeping, eating, working in the Chancery. I mean, there was no housing or anything, housing had been destroyed. The USAID mission in West Kabul, at some remove from the Embassy building, was destroyed and the grounds mined And so we did whatever we could from this position We joked that the bomb shelter; it housed is the entire USAID contingent plus some hangers on from the Treasury and so forth. So we were living underground in this bug infested bomb shelter. And the one little bathroom and showers sort of handled the thirteen men and women who were crammed in there plus served as the kitchen for the cooking facility that we set up. And so we used to joke about taking showers amongst the carrot peelings on the floor of the shower. And so the living conditions were rudimentary to say the least.

Q: To say the least. Wow! I was going to ask you about that. And your contact with the local Afghans. Was it pretty minimal at that point? I am sort of curious, were you considered part of the invading force or were people welcoming?

KUNDER: Well, Hamid Karzai, still recovering from his wounds when he was accidentally bombed by U.S. forces when he was in the field fighting the Taliban. had just come from the I think it was the Bonn Conference that sort of reorganized Afghanistan, post Taliban. He had just arrived and Afghan expats, primarily, were coming back into assigned positions in the newly coalescing Afghan, post Taliban Afghan government. I can give you one very brief anecdote that sort of encapsulates the flavor and the inconceivably primitive level of organization at that time, I mean, the city was still a wreck. And we thought to ourselves, okay, we talked to our UNICEF colleagues over at the UN compound, and there seemed to be some momentum building around getting schools started again, for as many kids as we can enroll that traditional opening of school was Nawruz, the sort of springtime and we were this was now January of 2002. We met with Hamid Karzai to get his blessing for this concept of starting school. And he said, Oh, absolutely, that would be fantastic. That would be so symbolically important if we could get schools. So, we made our way over to the Ministry of Education Building. Now, this was bitter cold in Kabul in January. And so, we go into this completely unheated building with the windows blasted out. And we're sort of looking around for somebody to meet with, it's not like there were any officials there and what was there were actually wounded fighters.

Q: Taking shelter.

KUNDER: Using the place for shelter, basically. And so we kind of wended our way through these dark hallways, and we finally saw a little light at the end of the third floor, and we went down there and it was the newly arrived, Minister of Education, huddled over a little heater. And no telephone service, no staff, no electricity. And he was asking,

we met with this guy who had just arrived from California, I don't recall his name anymore. One of the early transitions. And so we then came up with a plan for getting school books printed in Pakistan. There were no printing facilities functioning in Afghanistan. And so, it was just incredibly rudimentary. And then we went to the Ministry of Women's Affairs, because we thought the symbolic aspect was important, and the minister we met, a newly arrived minister, was a very knowledgeable woman. The roof had collapsed on the building from some fighting damage. And we agreed that we would put up a temporary shelter roof for the building. And we would try to have kickoff ceremonies for International Women's Day. There was a woman who's been a long-time consultant for USAID, Dr. Judy Benjamin. She was there as a consultant. So, we sort of roped her into the process of trying to get the women's ministry up and running. And so that was the sort of level at which quote, unquote, programming was taking place at that point.

Q: Right. And in the instance of getting a new roof or for the Ministry of Women's Affairs, did you have the Army Corps of Engineers? Or did you have other contractors sort of ready to move in and to help?

KUNDER: Other contractors. I mean, the UN Ops, building, supply part of the UN system, was available. I mean, all this was hard to do under any circumstance. Madhav, having had his life risked, his life threatened numerous times, shuttled back and forth to Pakistan, for supplies. We got the ministry of Education to approve some rough ideas of what the textbooks would look like, based on the pre-Taliban textbooks. He shuttled back and forth to printers in Pakistan. There was an enormous effort to try to just get all these books into the country and try to get them distributed to schools that were trying to start up again. And we got some military assistance for that kind of logistics. But primarily, I would say we used the UN system and existing NGO systems.

Q: Right. Were you fairly optimistic at that time? Or was your feeling? How is this gonna work?

KUNDER: I would say very optimistic because first of all, the military operation had gone much better than anybody anticipated. There was a sense of elation basically, in Kabul, at that point, people were glad to have the Taliban running for cover. There were no terrorist incidents, or very, very few terrorist incidents. It wasn't like Iraq later, where there was immediate sort of terrorist activity. Somehow, I don't recall what mechanics we used, but there had been a fleet of old VWs. I forget what that brand was called pre Passat. But anyway, there were some of the U.S. motor pools that had a bunch of old Volkswagens and somehow, we got those things running. And I literally just drove myself around Kabul. State Department was trying to build up logistics in terms of communications, getting the bathrooms to work in the embassy was a major consideration, trying to get fuel in. Initially OFDA had fitted me with one of these little portable satellite communications radio systems that one uses if one is being sent to some remote location in southern Sudan where there's no telecommunications of any kind. And I remember thinking to myself, What the hell am I doing hauling this stuff around? I'm going to the U.S. embassy for God's sake in Kabul. As it turned out, with Ryan Crocker, I

had read some manuals and aimed my little satellite dish in the right direction to pick up the right satellite. This was pre our current geo-referencing systems. And literally for a couple of days, Ryan Crocker was using my little dial up OFDA set and so it was incredibly primitive. But I would say in terms of your question, optimism was sky high. I mean, Hamid Karzai was enormously popular. All of the later concerns about corruption, we didn't have time to worry about those that time and we think we thought we had very important and symbolic goals in front of us, you get the women's ministry up, get the kids back to school. We were doing demining as well, and lots of other important things. We were incredibly optimistic at that time.

Q: And relations among the various U.S. government operations were fairly cordial. I mean, I know, as it evolved there, there became some conflicts among different parts of the U.S. presence, but in the beginning, you were all more or less rolling up your sleeves .

KUNDER: Yes. It was a tiny group of people. Everybody was crammed, we were all living in this. I mean, other than the fact that AID happened to be in the bomb shelter outside. We were all eating together. We saw each other. I was in Ryan Crocker's office all the time trying to figure this thing out. One brief anecdote for that for the historical record. I mean, Ryan Crocker is not somebody to be trifled with. He and I got along very, very well. But not to be trifled with. And at one point, Andrew Natsios, was encouraging me to be more aggressive in the interagency meetings, pushing AID more effectively. And I at one point, went in and sort of lectured Ambassador Crocker and said, well, here's what I plan to do next. And then I'm going to do this and then I'm going to do this. And I remember him, listening patiently to me. And he said, Jim, you can do all those things. And if you do, I will have your effing ass on the first plane out of here Monday morning, as we sort of looked at each other, and it was not a time for sort of niceties. I mean, it was incredibly intense. We were all exhausted. We were all sick. And I mean, we were very frank with one another. And so you had a little occasional blips on the screen. The U.S. military, because I tried to spend a lot of time with the U.S. military. I met with the commanding general of the forces in Kabul. And I had been approached by our NGO colleagues, saying, look, we've got to straighten this thing out with the military. They have their Special Forces guys wandering through marketplaces in Afghan clothing. And that's going to get some of them killed and it's going to get some of our guys killed, because the local bad guys can't distinguish now, between the foreign NGOs and the foreign Special Forces. So I made a pitch to the commanding general there explaining the NGO position to which his response was, that's just great, Jim, when you get the Taliban to wear uniforms for my snipers at three hundred meters, I'll start wearing uniforms for their snipers at three hundred meters. Once again, we like stare beyond each other. There were very intense life and death issues that had to be worked out. But all in all, that collaboration could not have been better as sort of like a model for U.S. government interagency cooperation, given the exigencies of the time.

Q: Right, well, too bad it only seems to happen when they're in a crisis like that. When you signed up to go to Afghanistan. Was it a one or a two-year assignment or was it open ended?

KUNDER: Completely open ended. And I think from day one to USAID's credit, they started trying to get regular staff in there. And Craig Buck eventually came out, I think I was there about six months, as I recall. And so then Craig came in and started filling in. Now in historical retrospect, I have mixed feelings about this, because to some extent, it obviously made sense. I mean, he brought contracting officers with him. You had to start regularizing this kind of thing. But then there's also, this is something when we get to the end of this, and if you asked me about the big issues I faced at USAID, I mean, to some extent, USAID can be bureaucratic. And so to some extent, it was exactly the right thing to do to sort of bring in a regular mission. But then to some extent, it was also the beginning of bureaucratization. Literally when I landed in Pakistan, the first thing they gave me was, I can't remember how much exactly a couple 100,000 dollars in cash. Because there was no banking system. And there was no functioning banking system as everything was done by cash. And I literally made some grants to ministers to get the agriculture ministry stood up. I literally counted out 25,000 dollars and just handed it to them and had them give me a little receipt on paper. And subsequently, when I passed through Pakistan on the way back out and had to go see the controller, what I was able to dig out of my grimy pockets. I mean, we were living in filth. I mean, it was an incredibly wrinkled, oily little smudged piece of paper that said, I accept 25,000 dollars on behalf of the Government of Afghanistan. I sort of laid this handful of grimy handwritten receipts in the hands of the comptroller for the 500,000 dollars or whatever he gave me. It was not a happy moment in U.S. government accounting. Anyway, so just to give you more flavor. I was there for about six months and then Craig came in, started building the team, and I set up a separate functioning USAID mission at a compound a couple miles away from the embassy. And by that point, we were starting to try to get some housing built. This whole-time people were flowing in. I started putting up these prefab trailers all around the embassy compound. By the time I left, there was a sense of a lot more happening, a lot of momentum, but we're still in the early stages. Everybody seemed to be getting along with one notable exception, by the way.

By that time, Ashraf Ghani had been named the Minister of Finance, and because of his previous work at the World Bank and his good language skills, he was the de facto liaison with the entire donor community and Ashraf has been widely reported to be kind of a pain in the ass, hard to deal with, demanding. He had a sort of World Bank model for development, which is give us the money, we will take care of it. This notion of funding NGOs, funding independent USAID programs, it was anathema to him. And so we had a lot of conflict with Ashraf and at one point Andrew had heard some cable reporting on this; Andrew Natsios called me up to see if he should lobby for the firing of Ashraf Ghani, which I argued strenuously against instead, along the lines of the guy's a jerk, but in most countries we deal with we wish we had somebody of this experience and competence. So anyway, a lot of stuff going on simultaneously. But all I would say generally, pretty positive in those early months.

Q: You left there after six months feeling pretty confident that it was moving in the right direction.

KUNDER: I did. I mean, you couldn't help but be optimistic. The economy was starting to revitalize. The schools had in fact opened, not perfectly, but it had opened, girls were back in school. We had in fact that International Women's Day ceremony, widely covered by the world's media. And so one had the sense of the momentum. The problems were inconceivably profound, but that the momentum was headed in the right direction, the political situation seemed pretty good at the time.

Q: Right. But when you got back to the States, were you in demand to brief AID and the State Department from the conditions?

KUNDER: Very much so. I mean, the Hill, the State Department, the National Security Council, the White House, political people, everybody wanted to know what was going on, obviously.

Q: Right. And at that point, were you just an independent contractor? Or did you have status within AID?

KUNDER: I was still an AID person at that point. And as I've joked, I told you when Bill Garvelink first floated this idea, I told him, Look, I've never set foot in Afghanistan, I don't speak a word of Dari, like why would you send me there? And as I've joked, multiple times, Ann, unfortunately, if someone had spent six months in Afghanistan, by that time, you are one of our nation's leading experts on Afghanistan. And they asked me to stay on to serve as the deputy, the DAA, in the then Asia Near East Bureau to continue to manage the Afghanistan effort from Washington now. And at that point, I mean, having just done those six months, under pretty grim circumstances, I was committed to the thing and I gladly stayed on. And then from there, over the next several years, my career evolved from DAA to the AA position in the Asian Near East Bureau and then to the deputy administrator position.

Q: But when you initially took the DAA position, the understanding is that your focus was going to be Afghanistan?

KUNDER: Correct. Yes.

Q: And I imagine, that's when you started seeing some of the rivalries among government agencies, and who's going to be in charge here or whatever?

KUNDER: Yes, that's correct. Although, again, I mean, I tried to keep my eye on the strategic ball. I mean, from a strategic point of view, there were a number of problems. I mean, I was there when Karzai met with Ismael Khan and Gul Agha Sherzai, who is the warlord of Kandahar. And he was running sort of Afghanistan where you still had an independent southern or anti-Taliban army warlord. You had an independent, Western, anti-Taliban army run by the guy who looked like Santa Claus and Ismael Khan.

The Tajik army in the north in the Panjshir Valley. Karzai was trying mightily, and we were drawn in, we the U.S. government were drawn into the process of trying to bring

these folks into some sort of regular arrangement with the national government, which unfortunately, as has happened regularly throughout Afghanistan's history, sometimes the power of the president only ran to the suburbs of Kabul. And so there was the guy in the North, Ismael Khan in the West. And there were those kinds of profound problems, and there was still fighting in the border regions. That was still going on. But our primary focus was on things like the project that most dominated that period of time, was President Karzai's request to President Bush to reopen the ring road, the National Road, the beltway around Afghanistan. And we threw ourselves, in USAID, into building the ring road. USAID had lost its infrastructure capability. And I recall the military sending a contingent from the Corps of Engineers over to the Ronald Reagan Building to meet with me. And it was sort of this dismissive, they being dismissive to us, we know you guys have been assigned this job. But obviously you can't do it. They weren't quite their words, but that was their meaning. And so if you just want to let us take over, you guys can symbolically be in charge. And I got into a spitting contest with the Pentagon because actually USAID is going to do this, we did it with contractors. But that was a titanic task to take that on. And we were still trying to get the schools up and running more effectively, we want to get agriculture going. I would say that, yes, of course, the early residual integration problems in Afghanistan were still going on. And the nascent inter agency problem was starting. But by and large, we were still focused on some meta development priorities that made a lot of sense. And I still viewed it as an optimistic time when I was in that position.

Q: Were there any requests of AID that you regretted having to take on? If not the ring road than anything? Or did most of what you were requested make sense in terms of development?

KUNDER: I would say the short answer to your question is most of it made sense. I don't recall some outrageous request to do some weird anti developmental thing. What I regret, in retrospect is . Again, as a political appointee, you're always in a somewhat precarious management position, vis-a-vis the career staff who have thousand times more experience than you do. And so you want clearly to value their development experience. But what I think happened is this is my two cents worth —we started thinking in terms of standard programming. One of my critiques of the agency that we both love is that it doesn't spend enough time on strategic planning at the 50,000-foot level. I am a huge fan of Mark Green's initiative that essentially was to put USAID out of business plan. I mean, from my point of view, I know we have five year plans, development strategies and so forth. But my view is we ought to say, for Malawi, this is the point, these are the eight things we have to accomplish, quantify them. And when we get there, we're out of the business, we'll set up a Malawian and U.S. cooperative foundation. But we don't come to an end point where we say enough development has been done by the foreigners and now it's time for them to do the rest of it. And here's the tools we've given them, and good luck. Because of so much happening and so much pressure. We didn't do enough strategic planning, that was Afghan specific.

And what started happening is the Global Health Bureau started kicking in with the health programs that made sense to them in Afghanistan, private sector folks started

kicking in with what they thought made sense from the private sector. There's only so many hours in the day and just trying to run the ring road. And getting the school started and managing the endless National Security Council meetings and briefing people on the Hill, there is only so much you can do to force USAID's planning processes into Jim Kunder's vision of what should be done. And what I think happened is that the system just started generating programming. And it wasn't as strategically focused as it should have been. And so that's my big regret about that period. And then, even then, I still thought we were generally I mean, I had a chance to review some of these, okay, private sector. We got to straighten out that currency, gotta get the banking system going. And then we've got to start looking for export crops. And again, this is sort of like of course, this is what an AID person would do. The agricultural folks would think about what they can commercially sell, pomegranates. Afghan pomegranates were well known in the Middle East, there was a traditional market for it. Yeah, yeah. Got it. But in the meantime, they weren't growing enough wheat. And so it was undermining their entire currency because they were importing wheat from Pakistan. And so without getting people fed in the countryside, pomegranate exports to the Middle East, probably, two or three steps down the road, but the system just sort of started generating programming, and there was plenty of money with which to generate programming. I think it started to fray a little bit, but not so much along the way that you asked the question and not so much like, State was demanding something bizarre. Mostly just a system, sort of, I think and I blame myself, but you only can get along with three or four hours sleep so many nights. But that was a huge problem. And then I'll just stop here. I know, I'm talking too much. While we were grappling with all these things, then the Iraq invasion took place. And that was a catastrophic event for Afghanistan.

Q: Right. Yeah. Well, that was going to be sort of the next theme, but just before we leave your intense Afghanistan, period, what kind of support and what kind of opposition did you get from the Hill? Obviously, you were up there briefing and explaining. For the most part, was it positive? Or were there committees or individual offices that were critical of what we were doing?

KUNDER: I don't recall there being a systematic opposition to anything we were doing there. I recall, generally supportive. I mean, the appropriation levels were significant. I recall, most of my briefings generally, were well received. Folks on the Hill, there are some folks, as you well know, who are great experts in certain areas. But understanding of Afghanistan had eroded enormously during the Taliban period and the Hill was no exception. So it wasn't like, you had a whole bunch of people saying, well, how come you're not doing this? And this and this, because most of them had no clue either. And I don't recall them with one exception, and that was repeated critiques of our policy towards drugs.

Because as far as I could tell, from the 50,000-foot level, USAID and the U.S. Government writ large, was conflicted about opium growing in the countryside, from day one, and remained conflicted until we got kicked out last year. I recall Jim Sarn, doing a very thoughtful, credible report on the role He spent a lot of time in the countryside. People were using opium paste, they have no dentist, when they have a toothache, they

rub a little opium paste. They're gathering of the opium harvest is like the gathering of the grapes in Italy to make wine. It's a big community fest and everybody gets involved and they've grown this stuff forever. It's all they have to use, it's all they have for foreign exchange. There's a ready market for it. The only agricultural credit program going in rural Afghanistan where farmers can get an advance on their seeds and fertilizer in the springtime is from the drug dealers. Because there's no functioning Agriculture Department programs, but the people who want to buy the opium know that farmers are cash strapped in the springtime so they provide sort of what our U.S. Department of Agriculture provides to American farmers. Jim Sarns wrote that, in rural areas, people would have a ball of opium gum that they would store like their family jewels because if things fell apart and raiders took their village or killed their sheep. That's the one thing you could rely upon to feed your kids, until something better happened. There was this understanding that yes, we had to take on in the long run the drug problem, but probably the worst thing you could do in the countryside right now was try to disrupt everybody's way of life and yet the outside world just kept hectoring us about the need to address the opium problem. I regularly get pilloried when I recall one hearing with some congressman from downtown Philadelphia saying, I have a question for you, Mr. Kunder. Why don't you just pave over all that agricultural land, then they can't grow poppies. Here's a guy who's living in an urban district in North Philadelphia where people are dying of drug overdoses. He's emotional. I understand. I get it. I'm from Pennsylvania. But what am I supposed to do? How stupid can you be? I remember thinking while the guy asked me the question, why don't you pave over the corners where they're selling those drugs in downtown Philly? I would say the opium issue was a constant drain on our energy because nobody knew what to do with it. It was too complicated. And we kept trying, we did eradication, then that would just stir up more antipathy towards the government. And we tried alternative routes. But by and large, I recall the Hill as generally supportive during that period.

Q: And this is before the Special Inspector General Office was set up?

KUNDER: Was eventually created. Yeah.

Q: Here we go. Along comes the Iraq invasion. Were you involved in the interagency planning process? Leading up to March 3, the invasion itself?

KUNDER: Yes. Don’t forget, I mean, Andrew Natsios, is a guy who if I'm a friend of Andrew Natsios. And he and I think a lot alike that USAID has to be sitting at the big kids table if we really care about international development, we do not want to become a boutique enterprise. And so if the White House all of a sudden was focused on Iraq, Andrew Natsios was focused on Iraq. We wanted to make sure we were in the game. And Wendy Chamberlain was then my boss as assistant administrator for Asia and the Near East. And Wendy comes from the State Department, right, she's a political type. She is very much a bureaucratic politician, she knows where the handwriting is on the wall. She's rushing into Iraq, to some extent, I was left alone, to some extent, to focus on Afghanistan. But one could just see the tectonic plates shifting all around you. And I did attend a number of the meetings, where I would say most, as has been widely reported as

endless books have been written on, most of the people attending those National Security Council meetings at the deputy assistant secretary, assistant secretary level were scratching their heads. What are these guys smoking? I mean, it's obvious, Saddam Hussein's a bad guy. But there's a lot of bad guys in the world with all these nuclear weapons. And yet there was a small cadre of people as has been widely reported and written about; they just drove the president towards making that decision. There was this sense of weird inevitability around us. And that's when we ended up invading

Q: In fact, there were lots of people in the process who had serious qualms about it. But again, the momentum and the political heft was pushing this forward. The invasion happens, and Afghanistan gets eclipsed, how did it affect the Asia Near East bureau in terms of your programming? Because, I mean, there really wasn't an AID mission in Iraq to speak of beforehand. Was it like deja vu. You're setting up a program after a battle or how was it different from what you were doing at the beginning of your Afghanistan stint?

KUNDER: Yeah, I mean, the overview is just that the whole thing was overwhelming and chaotic. I ended up going as part of a small team with Andrew to Iraq to multiple locations in Iraq. And I got drawn into the thing, it drew everything in. I mean, everybody in the Asia Near East Bureau was doing something on Iraq. And we just lost the bubble and focus on Afghanistan. I still, in theory, had responsibility for it, but I was going to NSC. Wendy eventually left. And then I got kicked up to do even more. And Iraq was what all the pressure was on. That's what all the NSC meetings were on. That's what everybody on the Hill wanted to talk about vast sums of money, U.S. troops on the ground, and an act of insurgency almost from day one. Setting up the embassy, trying to set up a secure AID mission, trying to recruit to get people out there, trying to get massive programs up and running quickly. It just was an overwhelming period of time. And Afghanistan suffered not so much from loss of dollars, because the funding stayed pretty high, but lack of focus within the U.S. government. And I think the tendency I mentioned earlier of sort of then to focus not so much on strategic objectives in Afghanistan and to focus on how AID programs can be used to help create a functioning Afghan state, which was the primary objective, then it tended to reinforce the segmentation approach. So there was all kinds of good stuff going on. But how it all strategically ended up in a way that created a functioning nation state in my opinion was lost. There may be others who feel differently about that. But that was how I viewed it.

Q: Right. And would you say just the same about our efforts in Iraq?

KUNDER: Oh, yeah, I would just say, I would say that the USAID, as an entity, was just overwhelmed by Iraq and Afghanistan together. From where I sat, that's how it looks to me. I mean, you had the Global Health Bureau still doing good health programming, in Africa, Asia, Latin America. They were so good. But in terms of the leadership in terms of the energy of the agency as a whole, the system was overwhelmed, like trying to remember the old story about the Dutch boy putting fingers in holes in the dike. I mean, AID just was constantly questioning why we couldn't send 1,000 people to Afghanistan. Why can't you send 1,000? I got into an argument with the U.S. Army Chief of Staff at one point, he said, I don't understand. I'm asking you for three people from my

headquarters. And I don't understand why you can send me three people. And I had to explain to him that this was because you had eight hundred American employees in DOD for every one USAID employee. And I said, General, this is like me saying, I don't understand why you can't send me one regiment of 2,400 soldiers to guard the Kajaki Dam. What if I asked you for 2,400 soldiers tomorrow. And that's like, when you asked me for three officers. He couldn't get his head around what I was talking about. And so I would say that the combination of the two things together just led to a sort of a diminution of any kind of coherent planning and a sort of bureaucratic fragmentation throughout the U.S. government. We continue to have national security regular National Security Council meetings on Afghanistan, we continue to talk about the need to support Karzai's Afghan state, etc, etc. But it just, the follow up the senior level of attention, just wasn't there in my opinion.

Q: But the other thing that certainly started with Afghanistan, but with the engagement with Iraq, USAID became much more involved or integrated with military operations. There were I think people assigned from DOD to sit with AID, I think it started then something that you just wouldn't have seen beforehand. The integration of military and AID was happening in the field, but it started to happen in Washington too, I think? I would not be able to tell you what the acronyms of these integrated teams are.

KUNDER: That's a really great question and a complex question. Let me do a couple of different quick observations. Number one it wasn't nearly as bad as it was in Vietnam. Where armed USAID personnel were out on patrols. Most of the names of people, USAID officers who died in the line of duty in the lobby of the Ronald Reagan Building are from Vietnam. I think in historical terms, I think a lot of people perceive it that way. But in my view, USAID had done more than that, in terms of integration with the military. On a second topic. As I mentioned earlier, civil military relations have been a part of what I've done for a long time. And so, my view and certainly Andrew Natsios, his point of view, was that USAID should be part of the National Strategic picture, we should not be an isolated NGO within the U.S. government. Integration with the military is something that we both advocated in the sense of, again, not to bring USAID under the military because we consciously resisted the military put forward a number of very interesting proposals to create at each geographic combatant command U.S. Pacific Command U.S. Africa Command and so forth a military led team that essentially made a lot of sense, organizationally. What DoD proposed was that each headquarters would have essentially a small U.S. government integrated team. Somebody from Treasury, somebody from Commerce, somebody from USAID, somebody from State Department. And they would then help the commander plan operations, taking into account both civilian and military capabilities of the U.S. government. Organizationally, we thought it made a lot of sense. But Andrew and I resisted that tremendously in the interagency, because we thought it was unconstitutional, you're essentially bringing the civilians under military control. And unless it was a wartime situation, we didn't think that made any sense. We resisted some of those. But in terms of integration, I had a lot to do with creating what's now called the Office of Civilian and Military Cooperation at USAID, because I wanted to place, just like the State Department places POLADS, political advisors, in the front offices of each of these four-star generals and admirals scattered

around the world. I wanted Senior AID Foreign Service officers sitting there as well. So that military official could be informed by a development perspective. In terms of the generic linking of the two into strategic planning purposes, so development would be integrated into military planning that was going on on a separate track from Iraq or Afghanistan, and I think it was just an accident of history that you happen to have two people well actually had three people in the top ranks of USAID at that time, all of whom had military background, Andrew Natsios, Mike Hess, and I.

Q: Mike who?

KUNDER: Hess, he was head of the DCHA (Disaster, Conflict and Humanitarian Assistance) Bureau, at that time and a former army civil affairs officer. He really was into this civilian integration stuff. And we created this office of civilian military cooperation. That was going on separate from Iraq, it might have been reinforced by Iraq and Afghanistan. But then the military and again, they're always thinking about how to bring all the—more than State and USAID. They're thinking about how to bring all the elements of civilian power into play, when there is a conflictive environment somewhere. And so then they came up with the concept of—how can I forget the term, these teams that were in the countryside—

Q: It'll come to you.

KUNDER: It'll come to me in a second. Creating an integrated team in each of the hotspots in Afghanistan and Iraq. And that was a tremendous pressure. Send us a couple Senior Foreign Service officers for each one of these teams. That is CERPs, that was the Commander's Emergency Response Program. They created money to do their own development type work, handing out money to civilian organizations, that was the CERP program, which was a real challenge to USAID. Because these guys didn't have a clue, right? Somebody would come and say, we need a school in our village. And the U.S. military officer in charge would say: Here's some money. Good. That's great. What about teachers? What about revenues? What about community support? What about the location of the school? What about where the girls are gonna be? I mean, they didn't know enough to ask, they didn't know what they didn't know. Right? So yeah, great idea we need a school. Great. Yeah, here's some money. By the way, we'll be patrolling your village. If you see any bad guys, let us know. That was going on, a tactical military quid pro quo for development assistance. Then they created these Provincial Reconstruction Teams, PRTs provincial reconstruction teams. To their credit, they wanted USAID officers, we didn't know that, it would have taken several hundred Foreign Service Service officers just to staff their request for Iraq and Afghanistan. And we didn't have them and that became a source of enormous frustration. We ended up hiring contractors, washing them gently through USAID training. And then they represented USAID in Kandahar, or Mosul, or someplace. It was a structural disaster. Some general would see me at some National Security Council session and tell me, your guy in Mosul, in northern Iraq, he told me that this and this didn't seem to make sense about how AID works. And yeah, because the General was right. The guy didn't have a clue how USAID works. We just hired him somewhere. A lot of times we hired ex military guys, because how many

people are ready to go to Mosul? Right and be under shellfire. And I would say that's a very good question you're asking about civilian military integration, cooperation. I look at it as a bi-level issue. On one level, there's a sort of a need, in my view, for systemic integration of the two at the strategic planning level. And that's what I think we're accomplishing now by sending AID Foreign Service officers to U.S. Pacific Command headquarters in Honolulu. So that right there in their planning office, they've got an AID person who can inform them of a development perspective. And there we are sending career Senior Foreign Service officers to those important positions. But then, at another level, during Iraq, Afghanistan, where there was this chaotic need for hundreds of officers to serve in these provincial reconstruction teams, and that was a chaotic, counterproductive type of civilian military integration.

Q: As you're talking, I'm thinking, the theory of the U.S. Foreign Service is that the Ambassador is supposed to be playing that role. Integrating all of the different parts of the U.S. government and coordinating of course, it doesn't work that way. But yeah.

KUNDER: And ironically, you are probably thinking to yourself, why doesn't this guy shut up on this topic, but unfortunately, I spent most of my life working on these issues. The U.S. military was congenitally wounded by Vietnam in the sense of what was perceived as too much civilian interference with military tactics on the ground and their perspective they got a lot of guys killed, and legs blown off because of stupid civilian objectives. For better or worse that's their perspective, right? And when they passed the landmark Goldwater Nichols Act which created these regional combatant commands and essentially created the modern military structure for projecting a military force abroad, which by the way is sort of a generation ahead of where the civilians are, if you want to talk about that. I'm glad to do it. But the Goldwater Nichols Act had a specific carve out in it that said, yes, when you have an Ambassador in a country, you have a country team, the defense attache is a member of the country team who reports to the Ambassador, the MILGROUP, the group of military advisors, we have selling weapons or conducting training with the local military forces. They're part of the country team that reports to the ambassador. However, if U.S. combat forces arrive in the country to do combat, they do not report to the U.S. Ambassador. And that is the reality of the situation. Anybody that makes a four-star general admiral in the U.S. military understands the importance of the U.S. Ambassador and is deferential towards the person, but they also know that they do not report to the U.S. Ambassador. So, the combat troops in Afghanistan, the combat troops in Iraq didn't report through the U.S. Ambassador. Whatever head butting there was between USAID and State was minor, compared to the head butting that was taking place between DOD and State in both countries. I mean, I was, depending on how you look at it, blessed or cursed to sit in the meetings with Donald Rumsfeld and Condoleezza Rice, it was not a pretty picture, what happened in those National Security Council meetings. Absolutely. State was under the same pressure. How come you can't send us more diplomats to the Provincial Reconstruction Team and negotiators to the Provincial Reconstruction Team in Kandahar? Where are they, Madam Secretary? The Ambassador, you're right, normally should in theory, integrate all of this. But number one, I don't think the average political officer, the average political officer who is going to become DCM someplace else, by doing some good political negotiations, not by saying I integrated the

country team very effectively, in my opinion, and second, Afghanistan and Iraq, were just off on a different level, hundreds of thousands of U.S. troops on the ground. However, it should have worked and worked very well, in terms of the Ambassador. Some ambassadors just had the temperament to deal with it; a guy like Ryan Crocker in the early days, because he had served in Syria and other combat zones. He was pretty good at it. But some of the guys who followed later. They really didn't have a clue.

Q: What you're talking about, too, is this huge resource imbalance in both in terms of funding and personnel. I mean—

KUNDER: It's unbelievable. To see what it might be.

Q: You're amazing. And honestly, these thoughts about AID and the military are incredibly thoughtful. At the end, I do want to ask some big picture questions, but because Afghanistan and Iraq were so all consuming, did the rest of the Middle East sort of get short shrift, or were there other issues that were happening in Egypt or in North Africa or Palestine that you had to focus on as well?

KUNDER: Yeah, very much. So that's a very astute question on your part, I mean, we took a perverse pride in the fact in the Asia Near East Bureau, in the fact that at one point, we did some kind of calculation and 65 percent or 70 percent of USAID's total funding was going through that Bureau, now obviously, that mostly had to do with Iraq and Afghanistan, but that the bureau stretched from Morocco, to Mongolia. Pakistan was a huge issue. West Bank, Gaza, very time consuming. I did a number of trips to the West Bank and Gaza, we had a number of hot issues there. As there always are hot issues there, Egypt clearly. Yemen was already on its way to becoming a failed state. There was an ongoing civil war in Sri Lanka. Indonesia, a huge issue and the tsunami occurred, the Christmas tsunami that wiped out Banda Aceh city. And now we had some great people like Mark Ward. We put Mark Ward on top of the Banda Aceh situation, that tsunami situation. But you can tell from the list of countries there. And that's a relatively small sampling but just each one of those was a very important foreign policy issue. And again, we were sort of running around putting our fingers in those dikes, along with the unrelenting pressure on Iraq and Afghanistan. So, yes, there were a lot of other issues that we tried, we had some, I think we had some programmatic successes here and there. The Hill, very demanding in terms of West Bank, Gaza. Lebanon, I did a couple of trips to Lebanon because there were already border issues with Hamas and Israel was another trouble spot. And staffing was just an inconceivably difficult task now. I found this recently, somewhere in a pile of historical records. We had tried again, in this sort of weird fascination we had with how much work we were having to do. We tried sort of finding the best mission directors from around the world and somewhere my staff did a mock-up of the old Uncle Sam recruitment poster, “I need you for the U.S. Army.” They jokingly did one of those and superimposed my face on Uncle Sam as sort of a recruitment tool for the rest of USAID. We had some great mission directors and people who did stupendous work. They were sort of doing AA level work, as Mission Directors because we had to but yes, of course, there was a ton of other work that had to be done.

Q: And the agency basically, or the SMG or whatever it was called, did allow you to increase the numbers. And was there a recognition that you needed those top level leaders for these?

KUNDER: I would say the system did as good as it possibly could under the circumstances.

Q: You were doing a lot of travel? Yeah. How did you manage it? If I calculate correctly, you had a young child. And you had certain representation responsibilities as an AA? How did you put it all together?

KUNDER: Yeah, well, I mean, some people would probably say, I did not have it together. I mean, I'm a high energy person, I thought I threw myself into it. As the old sports saying goes, I left it all on the field, right? I didn't, at the end of the time, say, Geez, I wish I had not taken that vacation. I didn't take any vacations, we worked hard. But we had a lot of great people. Very experienced Senior Foreign Service officers rotating through the bureau Alonzo Fulgham was in there as a deputy Jim Bever was in there as a deputy, Mark Ward was in there as a deputy. I mean, I aggressively pursued the best people I could possibly find. We had some problems with some mission directors in Afghanistan, I had to relieve a couple of mission directors in Afghanistan. But I have to say I viewed and this comes from, I think, being a former military officer, the famous Napoleonic dictum that an army marches on its stomach; that is, leaders have to pay attention to the practical management issues. One of my critiques of USAID is that people come into the agency to be assistant administrators. When I subsequently served as Deputy Administrator, I would tell the political officials coming in as assistant administrators, saying, look, I know you're here, because you're a Latin America expert. And what you really want to do is make policy in Latin America. However, your job title is not chief policy wonk for Latin America, your job is Assistant Administrator, you're supposed to administer the Latin America and Caribbean bureau so that your foreign service AID experts who have been here for twenty years can have the staff and the resources and the policy guidance to go out and do their jobs. I have to say, that often falls on deaf ears, right?

Because these guys have their own political connections to the White House. And there's only so much that I can tell them to do. But I did focus on administrative items, I did view this as if I can liberate Jim Bever to do his job that's going to magnify my impact a lot more than if I try to run around and do everything myself. There are a certain number, as you say, representational duties. And I tried to, I wanted AID to have a strong voice at the National Security Council, I went to a lot of National Security Council meetings to wave the AID flag, and because I was pretty experienced in dealing with it at that time, but I had fantastic staff running the place, helping run the place. And so I think that we did the best we could. It was hopelessly inadequate. I mean, it's just, we could have had twice the number of people and twice the number of senior officers. And then it would still have been almost impossible. We did the best we could.

Q: Right. Well, as you were ticking off all the other areas, Pakistan, Indonesia, Egypt, Yemen. It's really remarkable. Was there ever any suggestion that the bureau be broken up that it was too much for any one front office?

KUNDER: It had been before and it has been subsequently since at that time I think, there were too many things going on. Nobody stopped and thought about the obvious structural Issues. I did not recall it coming up a single time while we were there. But that's because we were running too fast to stop and think about it.

Q: Right. Sounds like maybe Morocco was the only place where there wasn't a major hoo ha during your period there, but—

KUNDER: Mongolia was pretty stable as best as I can recall. Vietnam didn't have any terrible problems. Thailand didn't have any terrible problems. But anyway, yeah, there were some relatively stable places, it really was sort of like you just had to shake your head every day. I mean, it's like: you gotta be kidding me, some other crisis has arisen somewhere.

Q: Coming to the end of Bush's presidency. And you must have been exhausted. Were you prepared to stay on if there were a second Republican administration? Or were you thinking at that point that you needed to do something else?

KUNDER: No, I was prepared. I think, as I recall, don't forget, I had moved up to be acting Deputy Administrator by that time, at the end of the administration. The dynamics were a little different at that point, it was unclear what was going to happen during the transition. And then my anticipation was that the thing was, the transition between George Bush Senior and Bill Clinton had been a bizarre one of a kind thing. I didn't expect that to happen, again, with the Obama administration coming in, but one never knows. Because Ambassador Wendy Chamberlain, who had just been at USAID, was part of the Obama transition team, I met regularly with the transition team. I had a whole list of recommendations for them. I don't know that I ever fully formulated that question in my mind. But I probably would have stayed if I had been asked to stay again, just out of a sense of duty to keep the thing going until the regular team gets in there. But you know how these transitions take forever to get the senior leadership into, especially the USAID because people want to take care of the State Department first and other places first. There can be a diminution of the development perspective in the U.S. government during the transitions, but it didn't come up didn't come up.

Q: I need to go back because I totally forgot that you had been asked to come be acting Deputy Administrator. So could you say a little bit about how that happened? And when?

KUNDER: Yeah, that's the whole— bizarre. The administrator who got into the scandal from Indiana—

Q: It will come to us.

KUNDER: Of course, we know who we're talking about. Andrew, left both USAID and the Administration. The guy who had been the Global AIDS Coordinator is nominated as USAID Administrator.

Randy Tobias gets named as USAID administrator, and he comes into the building, and he is widely reported to be looking for a deputy. And for some reason, and he went around, he got briefed by each of the assistant administrators. And something in the way I briefed him or something. He asked me to serve as Deputy Administrator. So, it was as simple as that. I subsequently could never get confirmed by the U.S. Senate. I had been confirmed earlier, as Assistant Administrator, by the U.S. Senate and I had two sets of hearings, one by the Republican controlled Senate Foreign Relations Committee they had approved me and then subsequently by the democratically controlled Senate Foreign Relations Committee, they had unanimously confirmed me but in each case, I had the former senator from Oklahoma, Senator Coburn (R), put a hold on my nomination, he was the one person who just would not budge.

Q: Because?

KUNDER: I don't know. Various theories have been advanced. I have always been pro choice. He and his staff are fanatically anti abortion. I had had some run-ins with Jesse Helms and various of his staffers earlier in my career. And some people think that that was widely shared among certain conservative Republican members could have been one of the 1000 things. I've run for political office, ran for Congress. My record was quite clear on a number of issues. Hard to say what it was. I had a talk with the guy. He just said I have some reservations or something like that. And so, he never budged. That's why I didn’t get confirmed.

Q: So that's why you became acting?

KUNDER: Acting Deputy Minister. I mean, I was formally appointed by the President, they give you a document, and all that kind of stuff. But in terms of that's why there's still an acting attached to it. I just stayed in acting status for a long time and then the Tobias incident sort of came and went and then Henrietta Fore subsequently replaced Tobias and I'm going to just give you a real quick thumbnail. This is an iconoclastic point of view within USAID. But other than the bizarre incident with the massage girls that Randy Tobias got into, an odious thing, I was actually a Randy Tobias fan. And I was actually a fan structurally as a student of bureaucratic politics of him being dual hatted as Deputy Secretary of State and AID administrator. And again, these are sort of more issue oriented rather than Jim Kunder. Personally, I was actually a fan of his and of the structure, but I could convince almost no one else at USAID of either of those things. But I saw, I mean, here was a guy who was formerly head of AT&T and formerly head of Merck or one of the world's largest drug companies. He was a very forceful presence. And I did attend the Secretary's meetings at the State Department, where he basically for the first time in my life, I saw an AID administrator, albeit a dual hatted AID administrator, chew up and spit out, Assistant Secretaries of State, and under secretaries of state and Deputy Secretaries of State. And it was a very empowering kind of experience.

Q: _____ reputation at all. And that's really—

KUNDER: That's why I had a hard time convincing anybody of my point of view. He started off, I would say, full of negative impressions about USAID. In my view, and I probably was closer to him than any other person other than his personal staff he brought with him to USAID, to see how his mind worked. And I would say that there was a pretty steep glide path to him appreciating and understanding what USAID is, he sort of didn't realize he had been handed this magnificent potential. And then he's a smart guy, a shrewd guy, a shrewd bureaucratic politician. And he quickly began to appreciate what he had here at USAID and how powerful it could be. Unfortunately, on top of that slow start of appreciating USAID, he had a bit of megalomania, and he really, really liked sitting in George Marshall's old office at the State Department, rather than the humble digs at the Ronald Reagan Building. He spent all his time over there, and really didn't care much whether he interacted with USAID staff or not. And so clearly, that contributed to the lack of support for him within the organization.

But again, I saw him a lot, talked to him a lot. Had pretty frank conversations with him. And my view is, I could be wrong, right? There's always that possibility, but that he was going to be one of the most powerful and effective USAID administrators of all time. And then he was going to make the dual hatted structure work to USAID's favor, rather than disfavor. There is the risk of course anytime you do that, that of swallowing AID totally within State and that's something I've argued with a million times in a hundred different policy forums over the years.

I am not in favor of USAID becoming part of the State Department. And I've argued with Condoleezza Rice about this, that it should be an independent agency. I made the Marine Corps analogy with Condoleezza Rice because once she started talking about it, I said, look, the U.S. Army is a lot bigger than the U.S. Marine Corps, it has exactly the same tanks and exactly the same boots. And a lot of people therefore think why don't we just swallow the U.S. Marine Corps into the U.S. Army. It would be a much more bureaucratically efficient way of running things, just like people talked about swallowing AID into the State Department. And I would say, Madam Secretary, but you know what, there are certain times in America's history where you need the United States Marines, there are just certain times where you need that approach to implementation of U.S. foreign policy. And, I argued, exactly the same thing is true of the U.S. Agency for International Development. Most of the time, integration would be more bureaucratically efficient. But there are times when you want to wave that USAID, handshake banner, and that's a more effective way of running U.S. foreign policy. Now, she listened to me whether she believed me or not, a different question. But I'm not in favor of integration. But under the circumstances of the time with Tobias's powerful personality. I thought we were winning, rather than losing the battle for inter agency influence. And hence, that's why I say what I did about, I'm a fan of him prior to this stupidity.

Q: Must have been for you a personal disappointment.

KUNDER: We're all big kids, right. And we've all been around. And we're all familiar with human frailty. I've relieved a number of Mission Directors for human frailty. I mean, I wasn't shocked, although on a personal level, I was thinking I can't believe this had just happened. How can I manage things within USAID so that this doesn't cause a huge morale issue? How can I manage things in the inter agency so that this doesn't work to USAID's detriment. I guess I immediately, being kind of a work focused guy,I immediately tried to focus on that and not spend too much time wringing my hands over Randy Tobias one way or the other.

Q: Well, in your report on the conversation with Condoleezza Rice, you could also have mentioned USIA where it did get absorbed and how many times have we said, man it would be good to have an Information Agency.

KUNDER: In the class I teach at USAID now. I specifically use that example Ann, at that time when Jesse Helms tried to consolidate the four independent foreign policy entities, State, USAID, ACDA and USIA, I mean, so it's just I specifically use that example. I couldn't agree more.

Q: Henrietta didn't know AID, but you basically had to help her come on board, right?

KUNDER: I briefed her and I gave her my best possible service. I gave her as much information as I possibly could. Sure.

Q: Right, she is well thought of by the AID career staff and I think her emphasis on new recruitment and new training basically rebuilding a decimated staffing is a lot of why people are high on her. Were you involved at all in her efforts to basically argue that we needed to totally start a whole new recruitment drive?

KUNDER: Once again, I'm afraid I have an iconoclastic point of view. I'm not a fan. I will be very frank, this is for the historical record, if anybody will ever read it. Of course, I had served with her earlier when she was Assistant Administrator for what was then the private enterprise bureau at USAID. I found her coming from her job as Undersecretary of State for Management or Administration or whatever it was. I found her to be much more. Again, again, I'm starting from the premise that USAID should be an independent agency with an independent voice. I found her to be much more in the groove of integrating USAID with the State Department than Randy Tobias had ever been. And I didn't like that. I found her kowtowing to State a lot. Twice, I submitted my letter of resignation to her because I refused to go along with some of the integrative steps that she was supporting. And both times was requested to stay on. And so I'm not a fan. The effort to rebuild the USAID workforce began considerably before Henrietta arrived. To Henrietta's credit, she supported it, she added some thoughts to it, she advocated for it, and certainly she took credit for it. But the effort was well underway before she got there. It was quite apparent given everything you and I just talked about on Iraq and Afghanistan, that almost anything—there were fifteen things that USAID could be doing better around the world. And when you took them down to the question of, well, why aren't we doing those things, it always came to personnel. And USAID's foreign service

staff had diminished dramatically after Vietnam, then that cut in the early 1990s, I wasn't there at the time, but then I think it was in the Clinton administration that staffing levels at USAID took a nosedive, we jettisoned dozens, if not hundreds of some of our best, most experienced people. I'd certainly been there before and came in afterwards. And it was apparent that we had this gap. And then it just kept going down and down. And so we had been lobbying on the Hill strenuously for rebuilding the Foreign Service workforce. I spent more time as deputy on that issue than on any other issue that I worked on.

I thought it was a very successful effort. And I think it's a great thing, and if people think Henrietta did it, frankly it doesn't make any difference to me.. And there were some things that were notable. I mean, obviously, she was the first woman administrator, I thought that was a great thing. She knew AID, it wasn't like they brought somebody in from Oshkosh to figure the place out, and that was a good thing. And I have nothing against her on a human level. But I found her to be much more condescending towards the State Department than I was comfortable with in terms of internal workings and the integration of the budget process I attribute to Henrietta Fore. And I mean, they had already started that under Tobias. But there was a huge, huge difference. When it was integrated under Tobias, he was the head of the foreign aid budget process. The USAID administrator slash Deputy Secretary of State was the head of the process. There was an F office created, but USAIDs administrator ran the F office. Subsequent to that, the F office continued its role, but now run entirely within the State Department, and Henrietta acquiesced to that. I thought that was a bureaucratic blunder of inconceivable damage to USAID. And she just thought it was great. I am not a fan. Those are my views. Some good things. She was a creative thinker. She was an expansive thinker. When we went to her to brief her on our initiative to increase the Foreign Service staff at USAID, we were thinking like, maybe five hundred. She said, well, why not 2,000? I think we were thinking 1,000. Why not 2,000? That's great. Why not 2,000? I'm not saying she didn't contribute anything to it. I'm not saying she didn't lobby for it or support it. But it's just inaccurate that she created the thing.

Q: Right, well, that is very, very helpful. And it is true when she came in, I think she came in from being head of management at State. People were very apprehensive about that. So perhaps, the enthusiasm was—

KUNDER: Because she hung around the building and because she talked to people and she'd wander the halls. I mean, people, I mean, I'm a human being too. I understood why AID folks did not like the remoteness, physical, spatial and social, of Randy Tobias, I get that. I understand why they loved Henrietta's warmth and praise and all this kind of stuff. Unfortunately, I was in a position to see what was going on behind the scenes in the Secretary's meetings. And my perspective is that Randy Tobias was doing USAID more good than Henrietta Fore was. And again, I'm not here to criticize Henrietta Fore. I'm just saying, I just don't fit into the mold of thinking that she saved the agency or something. But anyway, that by far the most important thing that I feel I did, the entire time I served at USAID, was throwing whatever weight I could behind expanding the Foreign Service staff. Spent a lot of time on the Hill on the development leadership initiative. And I

assigned myself the task. It happened to be the time when State brings in their mission directors for regional conferences, maybe once a year, or once every two years. And I made a point of attending every one of those regional ambassadors' conferences to make a pitch for USAID personnel increases because I thought we needed field level support for the USAID expansion. It was a real eye opener to me, and because you probably know this a hundred times better than I ever will, because you've actually been in the field, and seeing this kind of stuff happen. But I was astonished. I just sort of thought, Oh, these Ambassadors are gonna like this idea. I'm just giving them more resources. And I got all these weird questions about, hey, this doesn't mean that AID is going to have a bigger house than I have, like they used to. And that doesn't mean that they're going to have more cars in their motor pool, does it. I mean, it's like, you guys must be kidding. I mean, it was astonishing. Ugly, feelings. It will make sense to you. But I was astonished by it.

Q: Oh, my God! You had sort of those petty reactions, and you had a lot of enthusiasm, obviously, within AID. Was the Hill hard to convince was OMB hard to convince? Where did you get pushback on the Development Leadership Initiative?

KUNDER: Lots from OMB. Huge amount from OMB. Just plain didn't like it and I can see their logic to it. I mean, I think they understood in their heart of hearts that USAID was sort of diminishing, because we just didn't have the bodies. But tremendous pushback from OMB. The Hill, by this time, I was nearing the end of my USAID career. And I also felt that this was something worth sacrificing a career for anyway. And I was very frank, because I would go up there and people would say, how come you're not able to do this task? And how come you're not able to do that task? And my response became pretty sharp: You know what? Twenty years ago, when AID did the things you're asking me to do? We had 6,000 Foreign Service officers. And here's the chart of where we are today, we're down to a little over 1,000. Why is this my problem? You're the ones in Congress who cut the operating expenses or froze the operating expenses year after year after year. Until we only have 1,182 foreign service officers left to spread across eighty countries. Why is this my problem? I don't have anybody left. I have to say most of them were stunned into silence by that response. The Hill staffers just hadn't really thought about it before. We had some really convincing graphs showing the steady decline. The steady increase in the dollars per officer that were being managed, right? And so the Hill was stunned at first, but then ultimately pretty darn supportive. Nita Lowey. Her staff was pretty darn supportive. OMB pushed back dramatically. State Department I thought was pretty neutral. I do think Henrietta did some good things in terms of smoothing things out over there. But I say I tried to do it at the ambassadorial level and the assistant secretary level, but that's where the pushback came from was OMB.

Q: No one ever suggested that you just get rid of the operating expense account and just have one funding line for both staff and program.

KUNDER: Oh, I think that's a sort of a perennial issue, whether you can just sort of program fund people. And there are some pros and cons about whether it makes sense to have a separate operating account, it certainly came up. And I came out, I've seen

arguments on both sides, I came out on the side that all in all, it made sense to have the operating expense account, because it was a firm commitment to certain staffing levels. Now you had to fight the fight. You had to convince OMB; I had to convince the Congress to fund that. But my view was that it made more sense to fight that fight, win that fight, and then you had a firm commitment to staffing. Rather than in the short term, it might have been easier if you could just sort of program fund everybody. But then there could come a time when there were program pressures or other pressures where the Hill and OMB and the White House and everyone at State and F and everybody else would start putting pressure and then there would be no floor on the staffing. Right, then you could really see deep cuts in staffing. And there was a risk in doing it that way. That was how my mind worked. Whether it's right or not. I don't know. But certainly, the issue came up.

Q: Yeah, I hadn't thought of it as a floor, as opposed to a ceiling. But it's good.

KUNDER: There are excellent arguments on both sides. And I could see that argument as well. But I saw it differently. I wanted a firm commitment, and the operating expense account for whatever else it is. It is a firm commitment that I care that there are enough people and enough computers, enough office space or whatever else in the OE account. I just looked at it that way. But I see both sides of the argument.

Q: Right. To make sure I understand your point. You worked on Bosnia, you worked on Afghanistan, you worked on Iraq, you worked on a host of issues. And yet you say probably the most important thing in your career was working on improving the staffing levels of AID, did I get that right?

KUNDER: That would be my point of view. I mean, and again, maybe my weird military and management background. But the title once again, is Deputy Administrator. You're supposed to administer the place. And what's the first thing you need to do? You need to take care of "the troops." The United States Marine Corps is quite clear on this, your first job is to accomplish the mission. If you have to get some people killed taking that hill, then you have to get some people killed taking that hill. But beyond that, everything should be to support the troops and do everything you can to support the troops.

In my view, for AID to be able to accomplish its profoundly important development mission. The most important thing was to have the human resources to do it. And it wasn't getting that. And I happen to be in this job or that job. But in terms of systemic accomplishments, by far I thought the success of the Diplomatic Leadership Initiative (DLI) was the most important thing I did. One last thought on that, Ann, because for the purposes of this, I felt like I lost one important part of that, and that is that—I've been, again, where you stand is where you sit to that. And unlike USAID, in the United States Marine Corps, before the Marine Corps let me stand in front of an enlisted Marine as an officer, they gave me six months of immersive full time training. Six months of immersive training, before they let me talk to an enlisted man. And then at that time it was men only, and we now have more gender integration. I looked at USAID's training program. This Development Leadership Initiative, I thought, is an opportunity not only to

increase the number, but increase the effectiveness of USAID's Foreign Service Officer corps. And what we need to do is stop this existing system of just making every new education officer we hire, for example, to think and act like the last group of education officers. My view was, with the DLI, we need to create a new three month, four month training program where everybody is going to get the history of USAID they're going to get the History of how the U.S. government operates. They're going to understand the budget process thoroughly. They're going to get computer training, they're going to get diplomatic training, they're going to understand how the State Department works. They're going to understand how the private sector works. They're going to understand how the international financial institutions, the foundations, the NGO community works, and we're going to create not just a larger number, but a new cadre of AID leadership. And I think at that time, people were starting to see this, but this was also about the time that the 1988 presidential election had taken place. And it was quite clear, I, as a political appointee, wasn't going to be around much longer. And people like Janet Ballentine, were just dying to get their hands on these new people and put them in the field as soon as possible. I pleaded with the Senior Foreign Service officers I was dealing with to say, Don't you see that if we just put them in the field, they're just going to operate at the same level of efficiency in terms of looking out for USAID's interest, as education officers do now, which is virtually nothing. I mean, they're great technical officers, but they don't know how to influence the State Department's thinking. They don't know how to influence OMBs thinking. I argued, let's take all these new people and let's run them through a new improvement course and we will all design it together. Right? And what does an AID officer in the twenty-first century really need to know to help to drive development forward, you need to know computers, you need to know business techniques, you need to know the internet, and we'll make them experts before they become education officers. And I just lost that. Oh, now because people disagreed, and I understand the other perspective. Let's get him some field experience. But anyway, I just want to put that last point regarding training on the table.

Q: Well, last but it's an excellent point. And I mean, training is largely non-existent as far as I can tell. Jim, we're not going to finish. Can you spare at least another hour sometime?

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Q: This is the third conversation with Jim Kunder. Today is the 11th of November 2022. And when we were last talking, we were getting towards the end of your stint as Acting Deputy Administrator. But I'd like to maybe pick up there and just talk about sort of wrapping up that aspect of your AID career. And then, not to throw too many curves at you. But there are lots of things that I think would be very useful to cover, including life as a consultant, life at a think tank, life as a teacher because you teach not only at FSI and USAID, but I think I saw also at the Marine Corps University. And then, I think also, certainly in the last conversation, we were getting into some broader thoughts about the nature of leadership and the role of political leaders in a career institution. And the need for serious and sustained training, and not just the episodic training that there's been so if we can get to all of that, today, that would be fabulous. But let's go back to sort of the wrapping up of your stint at AID in 2009, it would be with the Obama administration.

KUNDER: Do you have a question?

Q: The question is, had you been planning to wrap up anyway? Or were you truly waiting for the results of the election? And did you expect to leave right away? Or were you asked to stay on as you had been in the past to help with the transition?

KUNDER: I mean, because of the turmoil at USAID upon Randy Tobias's departure. The thing that struck me was that we were in the middle of—let me just finish your thought to answer your question. Because of the turmoil, I had planned to stay as long as was necessary, if I could be of assistance during the transition. As I mentioned, I had some issues with the administrator. Due to what I perceived to be her willingness to allow a lot of integration of AID into State, I had submitted a couple letters of resignation. But beyond that, that was an individual choice. Systemically I was willing to stay as long as possible, I was not asked to stay. I duly departed on Inauguration Day, packed up my bags and left. As we discussed earlier, I've been in and out of government a couple of times now during transition. So, for some people, it's a traumatic event, it was sort of routine for me. But in general, at that time, what I was thinking about was the systemic issues with where USAID stood in the interagency process and the creation of the F office, and the creation of joint State USAID strategic planning. As we also discussed all, not just USAID, but all countries that run bilateral foreign AID programs. There's always some complex dynamic between the foreign aid entity and the foreign policy entity. And in some cases, like in the UK, the DFID, Department for International Development was a fully independent cabinet level position. In other cases the aid agency is a wholly owned subsidiary of the foreign policy entity. And USAID has always been sort of in between. and because of that, we covered a lot of this before, but it seemed to me we were in one of those periods where we were being absorbed into the State Department again. But simultaneously, we had success on the personnel side. It seemed to me to be a really sort of important period in terms of bureaucratic politics for USAID. So those were the things that were kind of in my brain at that time. And I was willing to stay on, if somebody had asked me to, but I didn't really anticipate they would. And I was interviewed extensively by the transition team, the Obama administration transition team, because as you well know, I have an opinion on everything, right?! And I did have a formal presentation that I made to the transition team that indicated what I thought the critical issues were for USAID going forward. Anyway, that's sort of the dynamic at the end of my USAID career.

Q: Well, I'd love to know. This will take us out of sequence, where do you think AID is in that dialectic in terms of its independence and its role in foreign policy, but maybe we can come to that. Had you already been planning for what you would do next?

KUNDER: I had assumed because I had done it in the past, my legal entity, my business Kunder-Reali Associates, is ongoing and I have a business license in the city of Alexandria. I just assumed I would go back to that kind of work. As it turned out, simultaneously the German Marshall Fund offered me a position as a sort of Senior Fellow. But the two were not full time jobs which to me, was sort of an ideal mix of

Think Tank world, so you could stay engaged in policy, and then simultaneously, do some consulting, which produced both business development and training work.

Q: Right, now you obviously were prohibited from doing anything with AID for a period of time, I assume?

KUNDER: Absolutely. Correct. Political appointees, when they're leaving, are briefed by the Office of General Counsel on what those restrictions are. They're quite clear and quite specific. And my whole career, I've tried to take seriously both the letter and the spirit of those requirements. I had significant restrictions. That's not keeping me from engaging a USAID person on a policy matter on which I have an opinion but in terms of getting work, or something like that there are clear cut legal restrictions.

Q: And that didn't really affect what you could do in your

KUNDER: I've never been a contractor to USAID at any time in my career. It was more explaining USAID to the U.S. Military. And at that time, frankly, I was like, this is probably to a fault or in my case, but I had my management blinders on, I was doing everything I could I mean, as I mentioned, to the big issue, in my mind, I was trying to convince the team that was going to inherit the Development Leadership Initiative, the increase in hiring of Foreign Service, to focus on a new kind of training, and I really thought that was important. We've covered that. And I was focused on that, and I did not devote, frankly, fifteen minutes to thinking about my post USAID career. I'm a big believer in whatever you're doing, you finish it as strongly as you can, then you move on to the next step. That's sort of stupid from a career management point of view. But that is how I think and so I didn't really think too much about future employment, but because I had done it before, I frankly, didn't think there'd be too much difficulty if I chose to acquire either full time employment or consulting work.

Q: Right. In fact, there wasn't much of a problem. I imagine you had consulting gigs basically, that you had to turn down because there were so many of them. What kinds of consulting work did you do in the few years after you left AID?

KUNDER: Basically, I joked with a lot of friends at the time, Ann, that I thought my shelf life, my half life, if you think in physics terms, would be about five years. You lose your contacts; you lose your close understanding of what's going on in the agency. But somewhat to my astonishment, here I am thirteen years later still doing consulting work. I'm not quite sure why, but people offer me work and if it's interesting enough and worthwhile enough, I take it. But essentially most of the work, it's been split about fifty-fifty between policy work and consulting work. I'm also a member of the steering committee of the Modernizing Foreign Assistance Network. And so I've tried to keep a finger in the AID advocacy business to the extent possible, that's obviously non paid. The thing with the German Marshall Fund essentially sort of faded away, they lost interest in foreign aid as a major issue for them. I've had a lot of full-time job offers and just chosen not to do that. And then also, I've had a number of teaching jobs, full time, assistant professor kind of jobs. I have to admit, teaching adult learning, what I'm doing now,

military or State or AID is, I have to say, the remuneration is sort of reasonable. You've probably done some of this kind of college teaching. I mean, God bless those people. You're working, like for sub minimum wage. Look at all the hours. And I think it's very prestigious and honorable work. But I just couldn't see myself doing that, because I did have bills to pay and I had to support myself and my family. Most of the work has been either for companies that have wanted to do work with USAID. It's pretty straightforward stuff. We want to do a water project in West Africa. Is AID willing to talk to us? And is AID willing to, in any way, to offer financial assistance to that. I go talk to people at USAID. I introduce people to people, all within the bounds of that ethical, legal framework, that's been established, that kind of thing I could not do for the first several years after USAID. And then the rest of my work is in the training field. It was at the Marine Corps University, at the Foreign Service Institute and at USAID. And increasingly, that's evolved to the Marine Corps thing has gone away and FSI closed down everything I was doing during COVID, and has not restarted it, at least not to the best of my knowledge. Now I'm teaching essentially at USAID.

Q: Right? Can you say a little bit about the nature of the teaching for AID staff? The idea that this is adult education, because that's what it is.

KUNDER: Yeah. The course is called Building Inter Agency Capacity and Skills. And the whole purpose is it's aimed at mid career USAID folks who are starting to have significant interaction with their executive branch colleagues at State, Treasury, DOD, Commerce, Agriculture, and or the National Security Council, and or Capitol Hill, and or those parts of the federal government, primarily the Treasury Department, which manages our relationships with the international financial institutions. And so it's a four half day course, when it was taught in person for a number of years before COVID, it was a two full day course, sort of introductory, here's how Capitol Hill works, here's how you can influence them. Here's how the National Security Council works. Here's how you can influence them on behalf of USAID's agenda. And now I taught that course for this is going to be the seventh year and with the arrival of Administrator Power, who is very interested in this topic, and with the increase in USAID's influence with the National Security Council, this has taken on more salience within USAID and so the number of classes increased dramatically in the last year. It's sort of a full-time job for me now.

Q: Wow. Are AID officers required to take this or is this strictly a voluntary training program?

KUNDER: According to our colleagues at the Office of Human Capital and Talent Management, HCTM, they have now made it mandatory for new hires. From an instructor's point of view, this is not an optimal situation, because these folks don't know enough about how USAID operates in the interagency process. The logic of the initial class design was people who've now been in AID five or six years now, you're reaching out to the rest of the interagency. But that's not required for the mid career people to whom it is targeted. And this is all a result of—I tell the story in the class that there's an origin piece to this. At one point, when I was assistant administrator for Asia and Near East. At that point, we had Iraq, Afghanistan, West Bank, Gaza, Yemen. Daily National

Security Council meetings. And I once brought my team together, and I was going over to a deputies-level National Security Council meeting, and I said to them, okay, here's what I need today. And here I am surrounded by these AID folks who know a hundred times more than I do about international development. And they're all writing notes so that they can give me talking points and all of a sudden, I had this epiphany. And I turned around, I said, does anybody here know what a National Security Council deputies meeting is? And of course, everyone looked at their shoelaces, because why would they know, because no one has ever talked to them about it before in their lives. And here I am going out representing AID and the staff is trying to support me and they were oblivious to what the system was like. I initiated some training because AID had no training, initiated some training within the Asia Near East Bureau on how the National Security Council works, how Capitol Hill works, bringing in our LPA colleagues. And so subsequently, after I left, I submitted an unsolicited proposal to USAID to teach this material. Then Administrator Rajiv Shah had basically come to the same conclusion, he created an internal working group on interagency relations. And so my timing was for a change, perfect. And so they accepted the unsolicited proposal. It was just quite clear working within USAID that folks needed to be empowered to deal with the rest of the U.S. government.

Q: Yes. The time that it was sort of its own island, is long, long gone. But it's interesting, because I know, when I was directing the health office, I had to do an AID 101, because we were bringing in all these fellows who really didn't know. And then what you're doing now sounds like a course that I actually gave at Georgetown, called deconstructing Foreign AID. And it's basically what are all of the influences? It's really important to put AID in its sort of interagency context for it to be effective. That's ongoing and as full time as you're going to make it.

KUNDER: It's ongoing. The last fiscal year ending September 30, we were required to teach up to twenty courses, and HCTM was able to schedule classes for eighteen. One of the things we try to do to empower USAID staff is bringing in a lot of outside speakers. So we bring in three retired Capitol Hill staffers and a retired Ambassador, retired military officer so that they can get this outside perspective. It’s an enriching kind of event, we bring in a total of eleven outside speakers, either outside from within USAID like an LPA person briefing on Congressional Relations, somebody from the administrator’s national security team briefing on the National Security Council or somebody from outside the agency. It takes a lot of time to get eleven people signed up and people are busy, etc. It's pretty much a full-time job now whether they're going to continue there. The contracting office in AID by now has extended the existing contracts. I'm teaching next week, for example, and we're doing all this sort of prep work right now, but I don't know. I assume they're going to continue the contract whether I get it or not. It's a different question. I don't know that but I think they're gonna continue the training.

Q: Well, it's credibly important. So you mentioned MFAN are you on that representing the private sector? Or do you represent anything except yourself and your experience?

KUNDER: For a while I was officially listed—as probably as common in what you're doing right now your questions, jog people's memories, things I forgot. I also was asked to serve as a fellow at the Lugar Center. And although that's never been a sort of, they don't do much with their fellows, basically, unlike the German Marshall Fund, which did a lot of podcasts and so forth. For a while I represented the Lugar Center at MFAN, Modernizing Foreign Assistance Network. But subsequently, they've got somebody else there. I just represent myself as a former AID person, basically, I think if they get anything from it, they see it as I'm one of the probably minority Republican oriented, private sector oriented people and also somebody who's worked within USAID. That was somewhat unique for a while. Now you've got a ton of people there: Wade Warren, Paul Weisenfeld. And a number of folks with more recent and very senior USAID experience as well. I just represent myself now.

Q: I think I was skeptical of MFAN when it got started. I'm always a late adopter to any new idea. But I have to say that I think it's played an incredible role in the way AID and foreign assistance in general is now perceived. I may be attributing too much to it. And I may also be too optimistic about what's happening. But the fact that you get bipartisan support for foreign AID, even when an administration is not asking for sufficient funding is really quite a turnaround from earlier times. Now, you may say that that's not really MFAN, but MFAN has played a role.

KUNDER: I'm trying to think of her name right now the person, she was the head of the-

Q: The Global Leadership Council, I know exactly who you mean.

KUNDER: Somebody just forwarded an email from her to me. Liz Schreyer, __Liz Schreyer's ____ group they had, I think, a very creative approach to this by bringing in the military because as we discussed earlier, I spent a lot of time working with the military, the military sees USAID as a really important thing, to keep them from having to be deployed somewhere rand getting people killed. And so I think she's contributed mightily. I think there's been a number of people approaching the importance of U.S. foreign assistance, advocacy for the importance of U.S. foreign assistance from different perspectives. I think MFAN has had something to do with it. And I think that USAID itself has not been asleep. They've been up on Capitol Hill. And I think Liz's group has been important, and there are probably a half dozen others out there that are active in one way or another. I think it's sort of astonishing. There is sort of a bipartisan consensus that despite repeated deep proposed cuts in the budget during the Trump administration, I mean, it basically kept the budget the same for four straight years.

Q: It really is a remarkable turnaround from twenty years ago. Back to the training you're doing for AID, is that all remote? Or are you now doing it in person?

KUNDER: It remains remote and we've been naturally asking the HCTM sponsors about whether they intend to go back to in person teaching and the impression I received. I'm a contractor. I mean, I am just asking for information, the impression I received is they do not intend to go back to in person training. To some extent it's cheaper and more

convenient to do it this way, remotely. And second, this has nothing to do with this. But you might find it interesting. I'm told that with Amazon, scooping up office space like crazy in Crystal City, the excellent Washington training center that USAID had there. The rent has just skyrocketed. For them to purchase, space is limited in the Ronald Reagan Building, for them to purchase that kind of space, certainly in Crystal City, but probably almost anywhere in Northern Virginia or suburban Maryland at this point, it's gotten competitive, and it will cost them a ton of money to go back to in person training.

Q: Right. Well, in this way, of course, you're able to be subject to timezone issues, you're able to do this training for people. Anywhere, and I imagine it's also a little bit easier to get outside experts, when they don't have to haul their stuff.

KUNDER: Exactly, right. And there's a cost to it, no matter how good you make it, and I think we've done whiz bang things with technology, but you miss the sort of sidebar conversations when you take a break from class and all that kind of stuff with in person training. But there are advantages, certainly on the financial side.

Q: Your AID students ever get in touch with you afterwards? Or try to put you in the role of coach?

KUNDER: Yes, I do get follow ups. And I always try to respond. I guess I have to say but doing training in general, I became aware of the sort of pretty vast mentoring industry out there. And I've never sort of stuck a finger in that in any formal structured way. And I don't, it's nobody that I sort of, regularly stay in touch with who was in my class, in sort of a mentor mentee kind of relationship. But sure people follow up, they have questions. And of course, we encourage that as instructors, feel free to call us after the class.

Q: Right. That's great. I saw in, I think, a blurb about you that one of the consulting projects you had was assessing INR. And that was maybe six, seven years ago. I'd love to hear how difficult that was or easy or what you found, or because obviously, you knew a lot about the structure of the State Department as well as other institutions.

KUNDER: Yeah, what happened, in the post 9/11 world, the National Security Council, in a recognition that violent extremism is an ongoing national security concern. There apparently had been a discussion at the National Security Council in the early years of the Obama administration about a sort of perfectly normal discussion of is any of our work to counter violent extremism working around the world? How would we know if it's working around the world? And they took this on as a project and assigned it to State which assigned it to the Intelligence and Research Bureau, which issued a contract, which was won by some contracting firm in Ballston, Arlington, Virginia. And they were working on this incredibly complex question, are U.S. programs to combat violent extremism around the world working and how would you know, how would you measure it? And it was sort of a monitoring and evaluation type of front. And I think you are Dr. Van Dusen. Right. Yeah, I don't want to say that there were too many PhDs involved in a project.

Q: Easy to happen.

KUNDER: Let me say there were a lot of brilliant people wrestling with it. And nobody could sort of make this congeal into anything that might be useful at the National Security Council level. And so, I forget how they got my name. But they brought me in to sort of manage the project, the team had been created and had done a lot of interesting work. But how does one bring this to some useful conclusion? I worked. I'm trying to think of the name of the company now, but I can't think of it's an Alphabet Soup Company, but I could look it up and give it to you. Not a problem. But they basically hired me for a couple of years. And it became my, essentially my full-time job to serve as project manager for this. And so we wrestled mightily, grappled mightily with this issue. And we came up with a final report, which was duly presented to the National Security Council with our State INR sponsors. We worked with them, and then we took it to the National Security Council and had a conference on it. All this was classified. But there was a non classified version of the report also made available to the public. And it asserted that there were metrics that could be used to measure whether violent extremists around the world could be countered. It offered some suggestions on how those metrics could be employed. And then it gave examples of U.S. programs that seemed to be working and reported on all of that. It was a very important, inconceivably complex topic. And I thought the report was well received, and I hope of some utility. Once we briefed the National Security Council, I don't know what they did with it.

Q: And then there was a transition. And you never know from one administration to the next what knowledge gets held on to, but basically, your conclusion was yes, and yes, yes, there are ways to measure it. And yes, there seem to be programs having—

KUNDER: The problem with that is, as you would recognize immediately, is, I mean, monitoring and evaluation is all—setting up monitoring and evaluation while you're attempting some programmatic effect somewhere. Sometimes it's an afterthought, right? Sometimes people don't think about it, sometimes they think about it, but they don't invest. They don't ask them, the monitors and evaluators to ask the right question. Sometimes they don't invest enough resources. And the problem is, it requires massive amounts of resources to get at these really complex questions of effect. I mean, if you're gonna do a survey of folks in a country that is affected by violent extremism. I mean, not only is it recruiting people who are willing to talk about it, asking the questions in such a way that doesn't get them killed, etc, all of which has to be done in some kind of secure environment. How do you ask oblique questions? If you ask somebody, have you been recruited for violent extremism? What kind of answer are you gonna get? So, sort of the oblique kind of questioning of how you get at whether attitudes have changed and in what directions, it just requires a ton of money, and effort to track. So, there are practical limitations on U.S. programs to counter violent extremism, but anyway. We thought it was a useful piece of work.

Q: Great. Do any other of the evaluations that you did in your consulting role stand out as really significant efforts?

KUNDER: No. I mean, there's nothing on the scale of this kind of thing. I mean, I'd like to think that my work and the work of a lot of others have significantly raised within the military community and the National Security Council Community an awareness of USAID and it's importance because I pounded away at this now for twenty some years. And I clearly notice that there is much greater awareness. In fact, back to the question of training USAID; the military does a lot more training on USAID than USAID does on the military. I joke in my class that when I went down to the Marine Corps University, I would start explaining to some group of Lieutenant Colonels in the Marine Corps. You might think these guys are not particularly thinking about USAID. I remember at one point saying something like, now there's this thing in the U.S. Agency for International Development called the Office of Transition Initiatives, and they responded, "oh, yeah, OTI, yeah, we know OTI." I mean, they had already encountered the concept of OFDA and OTI, somewhere in their training and even knew the acronym. Just to make one last point on USAID training, using the military as an example. I think I mentioned to you that as a young lieutenant, they gave me six months of immersion cohort training before they let me stand in front of an enlisted man because I would screw something up, right. And it became apparent to me over the years that by the time as somebody became the equivalent of a USAID, Senior Foreign Service officer at USAID in the military, you would have got that six months of initial training, then when you moved from essentially into the Senior Foreign Service ranks to be essentially a lieutenant colonel or a commander in the Navy, you would have taken another year, a full year of immersion cohort training at a command and staff college level, which is where I was teaching. Then by the time you became a mission director or military general officer, you'd have taken another full year of immersion cohort training at one of the War Colleges, so that by the time, not counting specialized schools and artillery or paratrooping or whatever, you would have had two and a half years of immersion cohort training. And at USAID, if you're a mission director, if you'd gotten two and a half weeks training over your career, you'd be lucky. That is probably an exaggeration; certainly two and a half months of training would have been a stretch. It just gives an example of how an organization like the U.S. military's just sees training is so critically important. And this also was one of the things that led us, when we started thinking about this, to the conclusion that USAID had to recruit more foreign service officers, because the military in their personnel planning assumes a 10 percent training float, because you're always going to be pulling 10 percent of your forces out for training. USAID had a negative float; that is, we couldn't fill the jobs they had. So anyway, but to answer your question directly I didn't do any other kind of evaluation work that I think stands out as something that folks would be interested in.

Q: Right. On the point of the difference in training, it's probably not that AID doesn't recognize the importance of training, but there's no such thing as a training float. There's also the budget issues, because I assumed training of staff personnel comes out of OE, which is already constrained. You'd have to have someone leading the agency who was visionary enough to say we have got to go to the Hill and get this funding.

KUNDER: Fortunately, if I go back and sort of look at sort of landmark accomplishments. We were stuck as you may recall, when I first went to USAID, we

were stuck at about five hundred million dollars, OE forever, or maybe slight increments and that's gone up. When we sold the Diplomatic Leadership Initiative, the increase in training, we did sell successfully, I think, a dramatic increase of tripling essentially of our OE budget. Now it's still not enough to do what the military does in the context of what we're discussing right now. But there has been some dramatic increase. But to your point, absolutely. USAID managers have to take on these kinds of systemic issues. And this would be one of those final questions you would ask me, but that has bothered me. I think I told you the anecdote that when political AAs came in, I would give them my lecture on your job is assistant administrator, you are supposed to administer the place, you're supposed to think about things like OE, and training and assignments. And nobody wants to do that, right? They're there because they're a Latin America expert, and they want to do Latin America policy. And I admire that, and I respect that. But I think the agency congenitally has under valued administration, I was one of those lobbyists for dual deputies. One full time Deputy Administrator could be focused on management issues.

And that is a systemic problem. I briefed Rajiv Shah, I asked for time on Rajiv Shah's schedule when he arrived, and I gave him my ten things that he should be thinking about, okay. And he's very courteous to give me the time on his schedule. He's a busy guy, to meet with me, an ex-Republican political appointee. I can just tell, when I mentioned something that was policy oriented, he engaged in the topic. When I started talking about things like OE, he's like starting to check the emails, and I mean, just zero interest. And Rajiv Shah is maybe at the Ford Foundation, or wherever he is.

Q: Rockefeller.

KUNDER: Rockefeller. I mean, maybe he has to deal with it, or maybe he has a deputy for admin, that takes care of this kind of stuff. But mostly people who come to USAID, they're primarily either interested in helping their fellow human beings, or they're interested in foreign policy. And I don't want to rely too much on my experience with the military, but the military guys, I mean, the army marches on its stomach. And so, there's sort of a built in systemic awareness you have to take care of all this stuff, or the main mission isn't accomplished. And so anyway, that's a huge issue at USAID, not just in training, but in administration in general. And you make an excellent point that the OE budget is sort of a prime example of that issue.

Q: Can we go to some broad themes; you were at ground zero for both the Afghanistan build up and the Iraq build up. And we talked a lot about that. I'm wondering how you feel about Ukraine? And do you think the administration is doing the right thing to not to commit people or troops?

KUNDER: Oh, you just want my opinion on Ukraine policy?

Q: I'm curious, because your background is really unique.

KUNDER: My honest opinion is that the administration is pitching it about right. I mean, as I conceptualize the issue that we're facing, it's how does one—there is always going to

be aggression in the world. And there's always going to be autocratic, totalitarian governments that are going to try to expand their power. And it is up to countries like the United States to blunt that and keep it under control. But the risk of widespread war, nuclear war, in Europe the fear is profound. And the risk is real, because one can slip into this thing through the use of tactical nuclear weapons. And so I think my honest opinion is that the Biden administration has hit this about right that they're making the Russians pay a very, very high price for their aggression, both on the battlefield and in economic sanctions and so forth, while being pretty cautious on not giving Ukrainians all the weapons they would like, they could reach into Crimea. I am a person who, throughout my life has thought U.S. foreign policy has never—I mean, I'm a conservative when it comes to believing that nations have to assert their foreign policy goals. But I've always thought since the time, the Soviet Union existed, that the U.S. failed to understand how bad the Russian situation is, how awful their history has been, what an awful neighborhood they live in, and that we probably, frankly, strategically, for if I had been king for a day, I would not have pushed NATO as aggressively to the east, as much as successive administrations of all stripes have pushed it. And I have a little empathy with the Russian position. But having said that, one I believe is forced to push back when there is blatant aggression. And so I think the Biden administration has got it about right. And simultaneously, they've been paying attention to maintaining an international coalition on the diplomatic side and the economic side, that is going to put pressure at a different level, not the battlefield level, but a strategic level, economic level, on Russia. I think they've done a pretty masterful job in my opinion.

Q: Good. We've talked about training again, and we've talked about the role of political leaders as administrators. Do you have other sorts of concluding thoughts or other thoughts on leadership or on the lessons from your amazing career?

KUNDER: I thought about what you might ask me about, I mean, the one other big issue, I think I touched on this a little bit is, I feel that the meta issue affecting U.S. Foreign AID, is that we don't have outcome we have not devised global outcome objectives. I used to joke at USAID that I was asked at some point to write it, make a statement as Deputy Administrator to commemorate Bangladesh, the sixtieth anniversary of USAID program or the fortieth, or whatever it is in Bangladesh. And I was thinking, shouldn't we be embarrassed that we're still there? I mean, to some extent, this is sort of end-state planning. Shouldn't we be asking, at the meta level, what is the end-state goal for U.S. foreign aid in Bangladesh, and how do we get there? The lack of end-state planning is directly related, in my view, to the ongoing Titanic issue that we deal with the Congress of earmarking. I keep saying to people look, unless we say we have a clear cut end-state for Bangladesh, and here's what we need from the Congress to get to the end state, we will be engaged in circular, earmarking discussions forever. Otherwise, for example, Ann van Dusen may think basic ed should get this much budget, and Nita Lowey thinks basic education should get this much. And guess what? Nita Lower is always gonna win.

I think I told you the anecdote about Jim Colby coming to the mission directors conference. We invited him to be a speaker for the mission directors conference one year. We distributed a bunch of questions on earmarking with the mission director, so he would

be pinged on by multiple questions and understand AID's pain with earmarking. And he went up there, and he's a very smart, shrewd guy. He got a bunch of these questions. He says, I see what you're saying. You feel a lot of pain. Let me refer you to that important development document. At that point, we all got our pens out assuming he was going to refer to some World Bank report or something and he said, "Constitution of the United States, Article One." That is, Mr. Colby was saying Congress gets to say how much money we're going to spend. We're all sort of completely crestfallen. But he was right. It is Ann van Dusen versus Nita Lowey, I mean, Nita's always gonna win because we keep saying, so how is our budget constructed? It's kind of a collection of historical factors, country specific factors, sector specific factors, pandemics, strategic battles against extremism, all just kind of thrown into a witch's brew and stir it up and we present it to the Congress. And it makes no conceptual sense whatsoever at the meta level. So, I have to say, I slipped as much information as I could into Administrator Green's front office on work that USAID had done earlier. With spider graphs, do you recall spider graphs?

Q: I don't remember that one.

KUNDER: Spider graphs are a most interesting concept. They were developed at USAID. USAID, when somebody briefed me on this at one point, USAID had done a ton of fantastic conceptual work on end-state planning in development. And what they were able to do, the reason are called Spider graphs, they basically did—

Q: Yeah, I've seen them.

KUNDER: They look like spider webs. For Bangladesh, you can say, okay, the points of the web are economic growth, democracy, investment in people, health care. And one can then say, okay, Denmark, if I did a spider graph of Denmark, it would be all black. It would be all filled in because they invest in people, they have democratic principles, they have booming economic growth, blah, blah, blah. If I do, Brazil. Brazil might be like, on the economic growth axis have reached 100 percent but on the democratic principles, they're only 40 percent of the way to Denmark, then if I go to Bangladesh, the investing in people axis is really small. Democratic principles may be pretty good. Every country has a different spider graph, but what it gives you is a global metric, of what we want a country to look like, and where that country is, on its pathway of what we call development, these concrete, quantifiable metrics. And so what you're then able to do, if you use something like this, is to say to the Congress, this year, we are making globally a 30 percent contribution to democratization. Now look, anybody knows that this is really hard to do, and it's not going to work perfectly. And you're investing in something in country X, and there's a coup, and there's backsliding and externalities shaping things. I mean, it doesn't work perfectly, but conceptually, at least it gives you a basis for going to Capitol Hill and saying the reason we are asking for 758.63 million dollars in basic education this year, is that we are working on our goal strategically, globally, to move twenty countries 15 percent of the way towards global literacy. And this can be tied into the UN metrics. Because it's not just that—not in some cases, they are bilateral choices we make but in other cases, they can contribute to the global metrics. But some kind of framework that says, here's where USAID is going. There is a possibility that in some

future world, it's not imminent, but we actually would not need to do Foreign AID in country X because it's reached the takeoff point. And that sort of thinking, we have a history of doing this in Eastern Europe. We no longer run Foreign Aid programs in some of these places, because they don't need it anymore. We might still do a U.S.-Polish exchange program, foundation, blah, blah, blah. But that to me has always been the meta problem that USAID has confronted in explaining itself on the budget side, in my view. I remember when Randy Tobias, whom we discussed earlier, said "you guys are doing a lot of interesting things here" when he first came to USAID. He continued: "I can't tell what it is trying to accomplish. I met some really bright people. Okay, we got it, you do a lot of good stuff, do a lot of good stuff. It's great. Totally great. And yeah, we get it sort of helps the U.S. keep COVID staying there, instead of coming here." I mean, we have always had general and intermediate objectives, but it's never really very sharp. And it's never really compelling from a selling the budget point of view. And so anyway, that would be my meta issue.

I thought Administrator Green came as close as you could come to sort of pushing this concept forward, with his Journey to Self-Reliance initiative. He pushed that on Capitol Hill. And he actually, I think, because I showed his front office team spider graph, they actually had spider graphs. He essentially pushed that on Capitol Hill. And I would say that it has never been something that if you're an education officer, right, you're passionately concerned with basic ed, if you're a health officer, basic concern with health, passionately concerned with health, this notion of a sort of global metric seems unrealistic, but it is conceptually very powerful. And, as best as I can tell, once Green left it, it immediately just frittered away and once again, it existed once in the past, when they developed the spider graph, whoever was the administrator or PPL PPC at that time, liked it. And so they used it for a while. And then it frittered away. I just feel like apparently, we can get adequate funding, with the sort of vague soup of things we do right now. But I do feel it's sort of a missed opportunity for the agency strategically.

Q: We say, our goal is to put ourselves out of business, but we don't truly mean it.

KUNDER: We don't have a way of calculating when you would get there. Putting ourselves out of business can't be a domestic issue. It's got to be that we've actually accomplished what we set out to accomplish in the countries in which we work. And that's what that other system gives you. But we say that, and nobody believes it. Nobody acts like it, nobody operates on it.

Q: And somehow graduation looks like punishment, rather than a success story. And it may be because we haven't really defined what comes after graduation. And I think the Eastern European model was a really interesting one where you set up what were their business foundations, or something that says, Oh, we're not going to deal with you anymore. It's just that it will be a very different kind of relationship.

KUNDER: Exactly. And one can, I mean, I wrote a paper, if you actually want to read this, I actually wrote a paper when I was at the German Marshall Fund on this topic. One cannot ignore in such a construct the fact that things change around the world; COVID

comes along, you can manipulate the model, but the model cannot account for that. And it fundamentally cannot account for the relationship with the State Department. I used to tell a joke to senior staff at USAID that we briefed John Negroponte when he was Deputy Secretary of State, we gave him an annual briefing on the USAID budget. And I viewed this as a strategic opportunity for us to get him on board. And I recall, one time we were droning on with the numbers, and I hate to say this, but the Deputy Secretary actually started dozing off while we were briefing him on the AID budget, sort of giving you maybe some sense of our stature, but aside from that. But then I mentioned that we had decided to pull out of several countries that we have been in and out of over the years. But I made the announcement that particular year, we had decided to close down the AID program in Brazil and Panama. And all of a sudden John Negroponte snapped awake! "Why would you do that?" he asked emphatically. I mean, from a diplomatic point of view. Why the hell?

In other words, if you implement such a quantitative, end-state focused system, you can't say we're not going to keep residual symbolic AID programs to keep ambassadors on board or to keep somebody to keep our satellite monitoring systems in the country or because country X is going to be on the security council next year. I mean, diplomacy shapes Foreign Aid. So one would have to embed this construct into a larger diplomatic construct, and come up with something. You're right that what was done in Eastern Europe was intriguing. But there could be all kinds of creative things we could come up with to keep something going. I've always thought training, exchange programs. But anyway, that's my opinion, of looking back over twenty years at USAID. I just felt like we were in this great organization doing great things. But you really had a hard time explaining it. One of the things I do in my class is I encourage the students to come up with their elevator speech about USAID, and I give them my elevator speech about USAID. But it's a hard task. And one other person, I think somebody at a Think Tank, at one point said, they conceived USAID as the Sahel, and you're at that place where the Sahara is approaching and sand is taking over fields and you look at USAID, and they're kind of trying to keep the Sahara back and they've got like a really interesting little fava bean plot over there. And over there, they've got a really useful little tree planting program. And but here's the Sahara, right, like, nobody's got a big strategic plan for pushing back global poverty and advancing human progress. And the fact is that we can't say, in an elevator speech, the three most important things we do to systematically advance human progress; it's a grotesque embarrassment.

Q: And now, when you add global climate change and the famines that are coming and the migrations, it's even more problematic.

KUNDER: In my German Marshall Plan paper, I wrote something like that. One would have to say that the model we're proposing for our budget is the sort of regular order, country by country model. And things like global climate change are going to happen and we're still going to need a huge emergency response component to our budget. And we're going to need supplementals and all the rest of it, but it, yeah, you don't want to assert that one can somehow distill the complexity of human history into some spider graph

model. But for the bulk of the development funding, I think it would dramatically improve the impact of what USAID is doing.

Q: And I agree with that absolutely. Jim, any wrap up thoughts?

KUNDER: One last thing that strikes me is I guess I feel like I understand that we created the lab at USAID but I don't think the lab is there anymore, right?

Q: I don't think so. I don't know that it lasted much longer than Rajiv Shah. I'm not sure it was ever sold to the agency.—

KUNDER: When I left the list of my proposed ideas for the Obama administration. One of them was to introduce the White House transition team, to the DARPA at the Department of Defense, the DefenseAdvanced Research Projects Administration. And I said that USAID needed its own DARPA. And they seemed intrigued by that idea. Whether that somehow fits into Rajiv Shah's thinking or Rajiv Shah already had his own thinking on this. I feel that it's a shame that the lab has gone away. I have used the example many times that the localization initiative, of which, by the way, I am not a fan, for the following reasons. Let's say some women farmers in Zambia find some rust disease on their corn. And we like to think that, okay, there was a time when USAID had to have their ag officer in Zambia, contact our partner at Iowa State to get the world's leading corn rust expert. And by the time we got that person out there, the fields were destroyed. And so localization, where we have a local Zambian agricultural foundation team., Localization makes a lot of sense. But actually, actually, what's really happening now is the Zambian women farmers are going to get on their phone, they're going to look up corn rust, and they're going to be able to actually communicate with a guy at

Q: They don't need an intermediary.

KUNDER: Don't need an intermediary, either at the global level, the national level or the local level, really. And so that's just an example of how technological advances can impel development. And USAID has done a lot of great things with allowing fishermen to connect to what port is offering the best price for their sardines, help small business, and dairy farmer deliveries, and all kinds of useful stuff with linking computers into development, payment systems and so forth, but I just feel like somehow, we haven't somehow weighted the technology high enough in the equation in a world where that's all you read about how transformative technology is, and that strikes me as another structural issue that if one is looking at the meta issues should probably be on the shortlist.

Q: I actually agree with you. And just back to the lab, I think, as I recall, talking to people inside the agency, they never got any resources for it. And the way it works, there's only so much you can do to cajole people who are already up to their eyebrows in what they are already doing, when you don't have money to put on the table. But I agree with you that technology has changed the whole nature of development operations and could do so much more. And the other thing that I think was slow but getting there is recognizing that our counterparts in developing countries, in many cases are better

educated than we are and we are really dealing with something that looks very different from the 1970s.

KUNDER: Absolutely. And I find in general, and I mean, we got some really, I just was invited to a couple of the missions. They just had the mission directors conference, I was invited to a couple of the social events and so forth, I moderated a dinner discussion for MFAN. But honestly, I mean, there are some brilliant, very sophisticated Mission Directors. But I mean, compared to World Bank, country directors in terms of sort of having the breadth of understanding of technology and international economics, and business relations and stuff. Our mission directors are very uneven. It depends a lot on their own personal experience in their career, what they know about dealing with the private sector or technology or anything else. And again, I loop that back to the training. There's got to be some way that by the time somebody becomes a mission director, the way you would solve your problem, at least partially, is that the technology problem is that you got to have a mission director who shows up and he or she understands sort of all of the tools in the toolkit in that particular country and maybe the deal is, maybe the best thing to do is to work with, for example, the Inter American Development Bank. All of these are not ideas that are new to AID, but we just don't drive them forward, which again, loops into both in my views on training and lack of attention to management, and the propensity of successive USAID leaders to be focused on policy issues so that when the new administration comes in, they focus on new set of policies, rather than the long term systemic use of the foreign assistance tool to achieve long term results, which we talk about, but it just keeps switching all the time. And anyway, I think we've probably covered any thoughts about USAID.

Q: Well, this has been one of the most fascinating conversations I have had since doing these oral histories. And I just want to say, thank you for the time and for you obviously thought about this beforehand, which is really great. And if you want to add anything when you see the transcript, or if you want to say hey, I've got let's do one more session, I'm always available, because I have a lot of time for you. Well, thank you. And I really do appreciate the time that you've given us.

KUNDER: Well, thank you. I'm glad you're doing this and it sounds like a worthwhile project. I hope our paths will cross again.

Q: I'm sure they will. So take care.

KUNDER: Okay, thanks a lot. Thanks for your time. Bye bye.

End of interview