

The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training  
Foreign Affairs Oral History Program  
Foreign Assistance Series

**MONICA STEIN-OLSON**

*Interviewed by: Carol Peasley  
Initial interview date: June 11, 2024  
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*This oral history transcription was made possible through support provided by U.S. Agency for International Development, under terms of Fixed Amount Award No. 7200AA21FA00043. The opinions expressed herein are those of the interviewee and do not necessarily reflect the views of the U.S. Agency for International Development or the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training.*

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## INTERVIEW

*Q: Today is June 4, 2024, and this is interview number one with Monica Stein-Olson. This is Carol Peasley. Monica, we're delighted to have the chance to interview you. If you could start with telling us where you were born and a little bit about your childhood and your family.*

### **Childhood, Family, Education, and Early Background**

STEIN-OLSON: Sure. I just want to say, it's a pleasure to be here and talking with you, Carol. I was born in 1957, in Queens. My father was a career military officer and I grew up as an Army brat.

*Q: In Queens, New York?*

STEIN-OLSON: Queens, New York. I have three siblings. I'm the second oldest. When I was two, we moved from Queens to Fort Riley, Kansas where I went to elementary schools on a military base. When I was six, we moved to Frankfurt, Germany, in 1963, where my father worked at the High Commission for the Occupation of Germany (HICOG). This move marked a life-changing moment for me because when I set up the USAID Frankfurt platform for the Middle East programs, I'd moved into the same apartment complex (HICOG). Of course, I didn't know that at the time.

*Q: In 1963, even though you were quite young, did you still see the aftermath of World War II in a place like Frankfurt, or was everything rebuilt by then?*

STEIN-OLSON: I think everything was rebuilt by then, but I lived on an American base where my mom did all of our shopping at the Base Exchange. Although we did travel one summer across Europe. I don't know about the buildings, but attitudes amongst the Europeans were varied. In some places, we were very welcomed as an American military family, but I remember once at a French cafe, my dad ordered something, and the French waiter was rude. My dad said under his breath, "He forgets who liberated them."

We spent three years in Frankfurt and then moved to Leavenworth, Kansas, when my dad served in Vietnam. The first year, we lived on the base where my father taught at the Command and General Staff College. The second year, we moved off-base when he served in Vietnam. So that was his third world war.

*Q: He was assigned to Leavenworth, and then he went to Vietnam?*

STEIN-OLSON: Yes. We moved to the city of Leavenworth.

*Q: Okay, the family just stayed then in Leavenworth while he went overseas?*

STEIN-OLSON: Yes.

*Q: And when he was in Vietnam, what was he?*

STEIN-OLSON: He was the battalion commander up at the Phu Bai listening base in the demilitarized zone. He did an extension, so he served 18 months; a year and a half—an attempt to move from a lieutenant colonel to a full colonel, before he retired. Like the Foreign Service, the military has the up or out system. Or vice-versa. But, of course, I didn't know this at the time. We spent a year in Leavenworth, just my mom and the kids.

*Q: You said this was his third war. So, he had been in Korea and in World War Two as well?*

STEIN-OLSON: Yes. During World War Two, he deployed to Belgium in December 1944 during the Battle of the Bulge and was later captured behind enemy lines and became a POW near Frankfurt. When I was assigned to Frankfurt, on the weekends, I retraced his steps as a POW, his camp moving around, and the spot where he was mock executed. I sometimes wonder if he was being marched to the death camp, Buchenwald.

*Q: Okay. We can talk about that when we get to that stage of your career. So, he went off to Vietnam in 1968 during the height of the war?*

STEIN-OLSON: It was right after the Tet Offensive.

*Q: That was not a good time.*

STEIN-OLSON: Not a good time, no. He was the battalion commander. On the opposite end of the spectrum, I was a hippie and I was anti-war.

*Q: Were you in high school by this time?*

STEIN-OLSON: No, I was in middle school and I didn't know the issues—but still, I was very—very easily influenced. Flower Power. Make Love not War.

*Q: You were precocious.*

STEIN-OLSON: Yes, exactly. When he returned, he was not promoted as hoped but put out to pasture with a posting to Decatur, Illinois. He was assigned as the commander for the National Guard for the central Illinois region. So that's where I finished middle school and high school. I ended up getting a full ROTC scholarship to the University of Illinois.

*Q: Okay. And then he was an active-duty person overseeing the National Guard and then retired from there and then stayed in Decatur?*

STEIN-OLSON: Yes. He decided that it was financially beneficial for him because of the low taxes on his pension, etc. He liked it. He liked that we lived in the first house they ever bought (\$30,000). He loved the Midwest after growing up in the poverty-stricken Lower East Side of Manhattan. He loved the lifestyle in central Illinois.

*Q: And where did your mother grow up?*

STEIN-OLSON: She grew up in the Dust Bowl, Kansas. She was very happy when we were assigned to Ft. Riley and Ft. Leavenworth. We visited our relatives all the time. It was good. It was good for both my parents. They loved the military life and lifestyle. But the military wasn't for me. My father and I had a huge rift when I got caught with my Army uniform on at a Halloween party, and I was drunk, and I got called into the office.

*Q: This was ROTC at the University of Illinois.*

STEIN-OLSON: Yes, I was wearing my uniform for a Halloween costume. I got called to task, and then I basically said, "I quit." They didn't want me to leave since there were no women in the military at the time. Plus it was 1975 and the military wasn't popular. I just ended up dropping my ROTC scholarship and waitressing and just paying my way through college.

*Q: What does an ROTC scholarship require? What do you have to do with ROTC? Does that mean marching around a lot and taking certain classes?*

STEIN-OLSON: Exactly. And you know what? Again, after I taught at the National War College, I realized it would have been a good career for me, but nobody wants to listen to what your parents' wishes are. It was marching once a week at the armory. But the thing is, on the day that you marched, you had to wear your uniform to classes. Even though I looked like Private Benjamin or Hot Lips Houlihan and it looked really cute, I hated it. I had to take war tactics and map reading and orienteering, but like I said, military history— all of the stuff that I'm super interested in now—I wasn't at the time.

*Q: Did you have to do any physical training as well?*

STEIN-OLSON: We used to do weekend trips. Boot camp kind of stuff, and I learned how to shoot an M16. Oh, rappelling- I learned how to rappel. Are you laughing, Carol?

*Q: No, I'm not. Those are important skills to have.*

STEIN-OLSON: When I look back, yes. They were. It was like I said, I was too immature. It took me about ten years to finally find my path.

*Q: Did you leave the ROTC part of the program in your freshman year of college then?*

STEIN-OLSON: It was right before my junior year.

*Q: You did two years then?*

STEIN-OLSON: If you do over two years, then you owe the army service. I quit right before I was required to commit six years. Which would have been— when I look back, again, you think that's the end of the world when you're a twenty-year-old female going out with frat boys and partying. At the time, I didn't have the respect for the military that I have now.

*Q: Well, it was a difficult period. What were you majoring in?*

STEIN-OLSON: According to my scholarship, I was going to be an army nurse. My dad chose that for me. I ended up majoring in business.

*Q: Had your father encouraged you to do the ROTC?*

STEIN-OLSON: I think he actually filled out my application and wrote the essay. I don't ever remember filling it out except maybe signing my name. Or maybe he signed it? I don't remember. I'll ask him the next time I see him.

*Q: Okay, you were not a deeply committed ROTC enrollee?*

STEIN-OLSON: No, I was not.

*Q: Not surprising that you didn't continue with it.*

STEIN-OLSON: I was the only female in the battalion and, like you said, it was a difficult time. It was 1975, right after the fall of Vietnam, and it was not a good time.

*Q: You then were a business major in college. So that was a mix of accounting and all kinds of finance and business?*

STEIN-OLSON: Just basic business. I think I changed my major because that's what my boyfriend at the time was doing. He goes, "why don't you be a business major?" I go, "alright, as long as we get married after college."

*Q: Okay, you graduated, and I don't believe that you did get married to this fellow right after college.*

STEIN-OLSON: Nope.

*Q: What did you then decide to do? When did you graduate?*

STEIN-OLSON: I graduated 1979. When he said that he didn't want to get married, he suggested, "go to graduate school in Arizona or someplace," and I go, "okay," and I packed up my car, and I moved to Arizona and went to graduate school at the University of Arizona, Tucson. When I graduated, he said, "Do you want to get married now?" I said no.

*Q: What was your graduate degree?*

STEIN-OLSON: I got an MBA.

*Q: You got an MBA (Master of Business Administration) from the University of Arizona. I know you became a controller with USAID, so I figure there had to be some accounting in there.*

STEIN-OLSON: I have an MBA in accounting, and then I eventually got my CPA (Certified Public Accountant degree).

*Q: Okay, so that was a two-year—?*

STEIN-OLSON: Two-year program.

*Q: That would have taken you then until 1981. You had your MBA, and then you decided that the fellow who convinced you to go to Arizona was no longer in the picture.*

STEIN-OLSON: No, I wanted to see the world.

*Q: What did you do then, in 1981?*

STEIN-OLSON: Well, I didn't see the world, but I moved to California—to Santa Rosa, California. I was recruited by Hewlett Packard as an accountant. It was not what I expected. Santa Rosa at that time was very rural. I was thinking, "Oh, San Francisco." And the accounting was for defense equipment— and I couldn't find purpose in what I was doing. After a couple of years of that, I was recruited by Runner's World Magazine. I moved to San Francisco and worked for them for a year.

*Q: Were you a runner? Is that how you ended up there?*

STEIN-OLSON: Yes. I ran for Hewlett Packard. I was on their running team.

*Q: Hewlett Packard had a running team?*

STEIN-OLSON: Yes. There's something called the Corporate Cup—not the Olympics, certainly. Although it was Silicon Valley when it was booming, all of the different companies had running teams. It was Runner's World magazine that actually put it together. It was called the Corporate Cup. It was for all the high-tech companies and

other running teams. God, it was so long ago. I can barely remember. It was like running a 4x4. It was fun.

*Q: What were you running? Did you sprint, or were you a long-distance runner?*

STEIN-OLSON: I was middle-distance— 800m.

*Q: Oh, wow. That's one of the toughest ones.*

STEIN-OLSON: I don't know about that. It's not like I finished first or anything, but I was a participant. I was an enthusiastic participant. That was the fun part. I did not like the Silicon Valley corporate job. It was boring.

*Q: So then you got recruited by Runner's Magazine? Was that, again, an accounting position that you were in?*

STEIN-OLSON: It was working in the marketing department— public relations and selling ad space. It was just a complete change.

*Q: But that was based in San Francisco?*

STEIN-OLSON: Yes, I was on their running team— Runner's World running team. Who would have known?

*Q: I knew you were a jogger, but I didn't realize that you were a track star.*

STEIN-OLSON: I ran the San Francisco Marathon for them. It was my life— running. I only dated runners. Running was everything for me. I loved it. But Runner's World was cutting budgets. The president and his wife were getting divorced. They were splitting up the company. I got laid off. I saw the movie, “Gorillas in the Mist” and that’s when I bought a one-way ticket to London.

*Q: What was your plan? I know your travels went on for a long time, two years or so. Was that your intent when you took off for London?*

STEIN-OLSON: Oh, no, no, in fact I had a boyfriend at the time. I gave him my bicycle and my futon. I said that I'd be back in two months. I came back two years later— he still had my stuff. He was married.

*Q: That's wonderful. So, you were just a tourist in London or did you—?*

STEIN-OLSON: I had never really seen much. I wanted to see the world, so I bought a one-way ticket to Europe. I had \$3,000.

*Q: This would have been 1984 that we're talking about.*



STEIN-OLSON: I was traveling through Europe. When I interviewed with Ambassador Bill Taylor for his deputy job at the State Department that we'll talk about later, I told him this story. I traveled around Europe, and then I met somebody. He goes, "Why don't we just go to Turkey for Thanksgiving?" I'm like, "Oh, what a great idea. Let's go to Turkey." We did it. It shifted my perspective on everything that I knew to be my reality.

*Q: Initially, you were focused on Europe and thinking about that. Going to Turkey introduced you to a different culture.*

STEIN-OLSON: I was brought up that Israel was everything. I didn't know anything about Israel or the Middle East or all the different sides of the stories or— I had no idea who the Palestinians were. I hitchhiked everywhere. This is what I was telling Bill— I hitchhiked all through Syria. It was just an incredible experience. I felt so safe.

*Q: Initially, you went to Turkey just for Thanksgiving. But then when you got back to wherever you were in Europe. You then decided to expand your travels?*

STEIN-OLSON: No, I stayed in Turkey. I needed to make—

*Q: You stayed in Turkey?*

STEIN-OLSON: Yes. Stayed in Turkey. I hitchhiked around the entire country and met so many wonderful people. I mean, Turks are wonderful people. Went out to Cappadocia— people just adopted me everywhere I went. This friend of mine— we went down to— where was it? It was Mersin and we took a cargo ship south to Cyprus. I didn't know that there was a Turkish Cyprus and a Greek. I learned so much about politics. We took a lemon ship from Famagusta, Cyprus — Turkish Cyprus — and landed in Latakia, Syria on Christmas Eve.

I told this story to Bill Taylor and that's why he hired me. I was telling him that I hitchhiked all around to the Euphrates, out to the borders, and I just fell in love with Syria, and I stayed there for a couple of months with Syrian friends that I'd made. Then I went down into Jordan and learned about Palestine. Then I went over to Egypt for about six months. I was out of money, so I worked on the Nile. I made tea. It was on one of the felucca boats— one of the really long ones. I made tea, and I stayed there for a long time. And then I hitchhiked up to Gaza.

*Q: To Gaza. Wow!*

STEIN-OLSON: But at the time, this was, god, 1985? I hitchhiked through Gaza and up to Israel, and then I didn't really like it. Israel was too modern and expensive for me at the time. So I left on a boat to Crete and stayed there for a month or two. Then I went over to Japan.

*Q: And then you traveled around Asia. You were traveling around the Middle East for a good six to nine months?*

STEIN-OLSON: Oh, easily. I fell in love with it. That's when I started meeting Foreign Service Officers. And I'm like, "Oh, this is what I want to do with my life." I want to educate people on what the issues are. It opened up my eyes. I went to Japan to make money as an English teacher, and I went down to the Philippines for the election when Marcos was toppled. I ended up taking the Trans-Siberian across Russia, from China.

*Q: I don't think I knew that either, that you had done that as a young person. I know you did it later.*

STEIN-OLSON: Exactly. I took it across Russia, from China, and I'd gone to China from Japan. I went to Thailand— Thailand, Burma, Bangladesh. One country I've never made it to was India. I've still got to get to India. Tibet— I hitchhiked across Tibet, the Tibetan Plateau. And then went to Russia— Moscow.

*Q: And this was all in the mid-1980s, during the Cold War?*

STEIN-OLSON: The wall had not fallen yet.

*Q: Glasnost hadn't really started either. Did you feel threatened or at risk at all?*

STEIN-OLSON: No, no, but we had to stay at certain hotels. People would come up and ask if I had any blue jeans for sale and things like that. I have diaries from that time. But no, I never felt threatened. Never. It was exciting. Because we grew up in the Cold War. It was like the Russian, the evil empire. It was very exciting to be on— the train was magnificent. Like I said, it shifted all of my perspectives on what I'd learned— what I'd been taught as a child— what I had grown up with. One of the problems with the American media, and I just didn't want to be part of it anymore. I thought at the time that I would never go back to the States.

*Q: You'd been in Japan, you were in Asia, then you went up to Russia, and then you ended up back in Europe, again?*

STEIN-OLSON: No, I never went back to Europe. Well, I went to Finland. I went back to Turkey. I stayed in Turkey for a very long time— in fact, I went back to Turkey and then, again this is jumping ahead — When I was hired by USAID in 1989, I had six weeks before my start date. I went back to Turkey for a month— I made so many friends.

*Q: Where were you in Turkey? Was it primarily in Istanbul? Or were you on the coast somewhere?*

STEIN-OLSON: I traveled to the Kurdish part in the east, out to Gaziantep and the Turkish-Syrian border, because I knew how to cross it. Crossing that border from Turkey into Syria was so unusual. It was an adventure. I was a kid— well I was twenty-seven, but it was so fun. Fast forward 25 years, as Bill's deputy, when I helped set up the

mission in Gaziantep, I knew exactly where we were going to lease the USG building—the city was familiar to me.

*Q: And was this when you started studying Arabic while you were on these travels?*

STEIN-OLSON: I started studying after my travels. I moved to D.C. with ten dollars, and I knew I wanted to live and work in the Middle East. I interned at the Brookings Institute with a Middle East expert, Judith Kipper. That's where I met my friend, Jerry White, who went on to win a Nobel Peace Prize. Then I got a job as a librarian at the Middle East Institute. I was able to take classes there for free. I decided to study Arabic for two years, but what's interesting about that is that when they give the MLAT (Modern Language Aptitude Test) at the FSI (Foreign Service Institute), it's based on Arabic transliteration, I scored seventy-nine percent on languages.

*Q: A language genius, we have here.*

STEIN-OLSON: Oh, yes, that's why they sent me to Africa. I thought for sure I was going to the Middle East. I was sure. But I didn't, which was fine.

*Q: You came back then to Washington in 1986 or so? You had the two years of traveling around and came back, and you were working at Brookings and the Middle East Institute?*

STEIN-OLSON: Yes, and those were both unfunded internships, so I was waitressing at Nathan's in Georgetown at the corner of M and Wisconsin to support myself. People were always trying to give me advice on how to get into government, and I had no idea what I was going to do. I just did it.

*Q: By the way, you mentioned that when you were traveling, you met a lot of foreign service officers. I'm just curious. How did you do that? Did you go by the embassies, or you just ran into people out on the street or—*

STEIN-OLSON: On the beach. In fact, the first foreign officer I met was Jim Foley. I don't know if you remember him. He became ambassador to Haiti and Croatia. We're still friends. We met on the beach in Boracay, the Philippines. We became really good friends. It was right during the Marcos revolution. We were all— everybody was so excited. We were just at the beach, drinking, and so he ended up going to Algiers after that. He was a State Department spokesperson, I think when I moved to DC in 1986. Anyway, we kept in touch and he became an ambassador.

*Q: While you were there, you were working, doing unpaid internships in the areas that you liked at Brookings and Middle East [Institute] and then earning money as a waitress? You were, at that point, also trying to apply for government jobs as well?*

STEIN-OLSON: I was trying to figure out what the landscape was. The government is so complicated, and I had no idea how to navigate it. So, I got settled and worked. I was

determined. One of my friends from high school lived in DC and worked for Radio Martí. He and his friends tried helping me. I don't know what happened, but someone suggested USAID. There was an advertisement for a GS accountant, probably like a GS nine or seven. Maybe a five. It was with David Ostermeyer, head of Accounts Payable, who conducted my interview. It was a general accounting job. I knew that that was my foot in the door: my MBA, and accounting. You had to have a certain number of hours, and I happened to have just the bare minimum, but Dave Ostermeyer, he was looking at my— oh, I think I put on my resume that in my two years of travel, I was a photojournalist, and so he wanted to know all about that. What I was doing in that. So I told him. He looked at me, and he said, "You should probably go to the Foreign Service." I had no idea what the difference was between foreign service and GS. He set me off on my journey. David, I'm still so grateful.

*Q: You had never seriously looked at the State Department then, as a career?*

STEIN-OLSON: No, I wanted to help people, teach or— I wasn't interested in politics. I wanted to improve the lives of those less fortunate. I would have been a good Peace Corps volunteer, but I didn't know anything about the Peace Corps— I wasn't brought up that way. But I didn't think the State Department was for me. I did informational interviews with DIA and CIA. I didn't really know anybody from USAID. I knew people from the State Department. I applied and was called in for the Controller's exam. They gave me the wrong exam and I didn't even realize it. They gave me the EXO exam. I took it and passed.

*Q: There was an exam, an actual exam?*

STEIN-OLSON: Oh, yes, there was an exam which I had to retake. USAID HR called me to retake it. This was the end of 1988—probably early 1989 because I got hired in March. I must have passed the Controller's exam because I was called in for the panel interview. It was Ray King, who became a mentor. He helped manage my entire career. But Marge Lewis would ask questions like, "what would you do if the ambassador asked you to do something illegal?" Things like that. What do I know? Like what? I would say, "No." She goes, "Well, what if he says, make it, do it?" I go, "I would just say no." Marge Lewis. She was so mean. I swore to myself, if I got in, I would help other women. And I did.

*Q: Before the 1988 election.*

STEIN-OLSON: Yes, it was before the 1988 election because I was working on the election with Arthur Andersen. I forgot— I just needed the money, I guess.

*Q: What were you doing on the election with Arthur Andersen?*

STEIN-OLSON: Computer work. Somebody had asked me if I wanted to work on the presidential election. I'm like "sure!"

**USAID - International Development Intern - Financial Management - 1989**

*Q: And did you come in as an international development intern- an IDI?*

STEIN-OLSON: Yes. They said it would be six weeks before my start date, so I went to Turkey for six weeks. I came back, and I got hired. And that was it.

*Q: Was there a whole class of you— a group of you? And did you spend time in training in Washington before going out?*

STEIN-OLSON: Yes. Pam White and I became close, close, close. Liz Palmer, she was also in our class. It was just such a different world for me. But I was beyond happy— this was my path. I knew that. I worked hard to get there. I was gonna get there no matter what, and I did. When I look back too, I knew my dad wanted me to do public service, and then, in the end, I did public service. But I did it my way. It was one of the most exciting days of my life when I got it. It was this woman named Marge. She was bleached blonde. From HR, she was so happy for me. And I'm like, "Yes, this is it. This is it." This is what I wanted to do in my life.

*Q: Did you know what your first assignment would be when you entered, or did that happen after you already come into USAID and were in the orientation in Washington?*

STEIN-OLSON: It was the orientation in Washington. And I think they said, "Mali." I thought they said "Maui."

*Q: Ha, no program in Maui!*

STEIN-OLSON: I didn't know where Mali was, but I was ecstatic. My whole life had meant for me to be there. It took a while to get there, but I did. I guess I was— let's see 1989— I was thirty-two. I tell people, "Take your 20s to figure out what you want to do."

*Q: Did you have to take French language before going to Mali?*

STEIN-OLSON: Yes, yes. I was in an accelerated class because of my MLAT score. I got a three/three.

*Q: In two weeks or something?*

STEIN-OLSON: It was short. It was very short. One thing that I am good at is that I can memorize. The thing is, once you memorize for the exam and save it, then you forget everything. But no, I still have pretty good French. I was gonna go out as IDI Financial Management Officer, yay. I had no idea— people were helping me to figure out— to do all the paperwork. I didn't know anything about a 401K or— I remember John Tinkoff filled the form out for me. They all— everybody helped me do all the paperwork— Pam. Of course, Pam. Oh, Pam and I were always going out for a drink and dinner. She was always telling me what I had to do. She was telling me about her PSC days in Haiti. She

took me to women and development (WID) meetings in the State Department. We were over at State Department of Africa Bureau.

*Q: Yes, it was before the move to the Reagan Building. Go to the women action organization meetings, is that what you said you'd do?*

STEIN-OLSON: Yes, that's right. It was Marilyn Zack. I remember the name. Marilyn Zack, and I met Phyllis Dickter-Forbes then too. But Pam took me under her wing. She was so good to me. So good.

*Q: That's good. Did you spend some time in the Africa Bureau? This would have been 1989. Did you spend any time in the Africa Bureau before you went out to Mali?*

STEIN-OLSON: Oh, yes, I didn't go out to Mali till December. So, I must have been there. I worked on Mali. You're an intern so you just tried to do what you can do and learn the programs. I worked with the Desk Officer.

*Q: Were you in the Sahel office? But there was a bureau controller— were you working for the bureau controller?*

STEIN-OLSON: In the Sahel office. I don't think I worked with the bureau controller. I think I worked in the Sahel office. I worked with a tall woman. Very tall. Louise Werlin. She was the desk officer for Mali.

### **USAID/Mali, Financial Management, 1989 - 1991**

*Q: Then you went out to Mali— you said in late 1989?*

STEIN-OLSON: December 1989.

*Q: December 1989. Who was Mission Director then? Who was the controller that you were working for and how big was the mission? Do you remember?*

STEIN-OLSON: Dennis Brennan was the mission director. Don Clark was the deputy director, who was also my next-door neighbor. I worked for Jack Winn, who was the controller. I don't— honestly, I don't remember how big the mission was.

*Q: I think it was a good-sized program. That was a positive period, I think, for Mali's development. Were things going along well on the development front there? Do you recall?*

STEIN-OLSON: At the time, it was. Mali was becoming a success story for West Africa. It was safe to travel throughout the country to the different projects. But then, there started to be some disturbances up in Gao, up near the border. But on my own time, I travel anyway. I had no fears at the time, and there was a coup d'état while I was there. But, at the time, it was seen as a positive in Africa. I'd had to go back and look— I mean,

it was so long ago. But yes, we traveled all over West Africa. It seemed safe. There was a lot of potential.

*Q: Was there a good set of FSNs- foreign service nationals- in the mission then? Because, usually, in most controller's offices, there's a strong set of accountants that are local.*

STEIN-OLSON: So good. They were so good. In fact, there was a senior financial analyst who was just brilliant, Anna Diallo. During the re-engineering, she became a deputy on the Democracy Team. The accounting FSNs were so good that Mali became a platform for financial management training. I remember going back to Bamako after I was evacuated out of Burundi. I went back and taught classes there.

*Q: Bamako did?*

STEIN-OLSON: Yes.

*Q: I think there was some special Sahel financial management program that was developed to strengthen systems. Is that right?*

STEIN-OLSON: Yes, exactly. I have to go back and look at it, but Ray King sent me out there. He was all about training, Ray King.

*Q: You were there really before that initiative started, but probably one of the reasons they located the training center there was because you had strong staff, I assume.*

STEIN-OLSON: It was great. Yes. They were very strong, very strong. Yes. I think it was a fairly large mission too. I don't remember the details.

*Q: What's it like, as a young officer, to go into a post working with Foreign Service nationals who are very talented and have a lot of skills. Obviously, it varies a lot by office, but what's it like in the controller's office, especially when they're doing most of the accounting work? How does a young American going into that environment find a role for themselves?*

STEIN-OLSON: God, no, it was so easy. I mean, the staff— First of all, Malians are very wonderful people, very open, etc. But I had no idea what I was doing. It was government accounting which is very different from the accounting I had done. They taught me. It was wonderful. They took me around, and I didn't know much about projects— I didn't know anything. They took me out to the field and showed me all of the internal controls that we needed and government requirements— No, it was wonderful. It was wonderful.

*Q: So, you were able to learn a lot in that first assignment?*

STEIN-OLSON: Yes, that's where I learned almost— well, that and then my second assignment. Then Ray King said I was ready.

*Q: Ready to become a controller. You were in Mali for one tour — is that two years?*

STEIN-OLSON: Yes, one tour, and that's where I met Steve. He followed me out of there.

*Q: That's your husband. He was working in the private sector there?*

STEIN-OLSON: As a geologist at the Syama gold mine.

*Q: Is there anything more you want to say about Mali? Or should we go on to the Philippines? It sounds like the fact that you were able to travel and that you had an excellent FSN staff made it a great first tour.*

STEIN-OLSON: It was wonderful. The controller was very good to me because he'd been slammed before for not being mentoring or coaching. So he was very helpful.

*Q: That's good. Did you have much contact with the embassy in that first tour?*

STEIN-OLSON: No. I don't even know who the Ambassador was. No. I don't know. No.

*Q: Another big question about the Sahel in the Africa Bureau and AID was the annual softball tournaments. Did you play softball?*

STEIN-OLSON: The "Soft and Wet" it was called. I traveled with Don Clark, and who was it? Gary, who was—? Gary Nelson? Wait, yes.

*Q: Gary Nelson, probably.*

STEIN-OLSON: Deputy director. We traveled out to Senegal, and we played softball. That's actually— my husband joined the softball team to pursue me. It was a big part of our social life.

*Q: That needs to be in the record because the softball tournament was famous.*

STEIN-OLSON: Is it still going on?

*Q: I don't know. But every three-day weekend, it was in a different city, as I recall.*

STEIN-OLSON: Yes. Exactly. One year it was in Dakar. Another year it was in Ouagadougou. We took buses. Every year we went— well, twice I went. It was great.

*Q: When I made my first trip to Africa, my first stop was Bamako in September of 1985. Jim Anderson was the deputy director and maybe the acting mission director, and they had created a position of senior advisor in the front office for a senior FSN. He helped the AID mission liaise with senior government officials. Was that in place while you were there?*



STEIN-OLSON: Yes. I can't remember his name.

*Q: I think it was Mamadu something. I remember he was an absolutely fantastic man.*

STEIN-OLSON: Yes, all of the staff were fantastic. Yes, I do remember- Mamadou was a senior economist in the front office. I think he sat next to Don Clark's office.

*Q: Interesting that they're now encouraging all missions to have that.*

STEIN-OLSON: All these lessons learned.

*Q: Was there a possibility of you staying on in Mali longer or it was a training assignment, and therefore you were always going for just one tour? Or did you just bid to leave?*

STEIN-OLSON: I never bid on anything. They just told me I was going to the Philippines. The controllers were different, I think, and, even after the Philippines, they told me I was going to Burundi. I go, "okay."

### **USAID/Philippines, Financial Management Office, 1991 - 1993**

*Q: You went off to the Philippines, then in 1991. Who was the mission director then and what was the state of the mission and the controller's office?*

STEIN-OLSON: Jim Stanford was the controller. It was a horrible time. I was replacing Jim Redder. They just had the earthquake up in Baguio. Their chief accountant and several staff had been killed. It was a horrible, horrible time. I mean, I didn't know them, but the mission and especially the finance team were grieving when I arrived.

*Q: Oh, wow. And then the earthquake hit and people—*

STEIN-OLSON: There was a lot of shuffling of the office, and Jim Stanford was wonderful. He was a Senior Foreign Service. Big guy. Lisa Chiles was the RLA - lawyer and became my lifelong friend. She was our legal adviser. Malcom Butler was the mission director and Dick Johnson was the deputy.

*Q: Wasn't there a huge increase in the Philippines program? It was kind of a Marshall Plan for the Philippines—it had a special name that I don't remember.*

STEIN-OLSON: Yes, but it was also the time of the negotiation of the bases there too. I think Subic Bay. There were negotiations. There was a huge budget, but most of it— a lot of it was infrastructure from what I remember. Big infrastructure office.

*Q: I assume that most of it was Economic Support Fund (ESF) money. I believe they were doing a lot of it with special mechanisms to ensure the appropriate use of funds. I'm*

*wondering, in the financial management office, were you involved with oversight of those programs? I think they were using Fixed Amount Reimbursement (FAR) mechanisms to try to protect the use of U.S government funds.*

STEIN-OLSON: I do remember. I was in a lot of meetings with Jim and Lisa. It was a lot of negotiation with the Government of the Philippines on how we were going to monitor the funds. My team and I were out in the field all the time monitoring and evaluating end use, but I don't really remember a lot of what we did. There were four of us. There were four direct hires in the controller's office.

*Q: Did you have any dealings with the Inspector General's office because I think they were located in the Philippines as well?*

STEIN-OLSON: Tony Delayo. He was a very big guy. He said he liked to hurt people. So that's all I remember about him. I don't remember that much. I just remember doing a lot of field visits throughout the country.

*Q: Did you have much exposure to the front office or seeing Malcolm at work? Or were you squirreled away in the financial management office?*

STEIN-OLSON: I was squirreled away. I remember telling Dick Johnson years later that I was so afraid to come into his office. His big office. I remember—Malcolm even had his own secretary—an American secretary. They were scary. Very scary. I thought at the time—Dick Johnson was scary, too. In fact, I was so junior that I was never allowed—I was never—I mean, there were so many direct hires. I was never acting controller. It was a huge program.

*Q: Did you have much contact with the embassy at all, even socially?*

STEIN-OLSON: No, nothing with the embassy. We went to the Marine Ball, but nothing really. It was hard. Earl Gast was there with me. We were friends there. The thing is Manila was such a hard place to live in. It was a big city. It was polluted.

*Q: Did you live in that area where most of the expats live— Makati or something like that?*

STEIN-OLSON: Makati. Yes, something like that. We lived in a gated community. I don't think I knew anybody from the State Department there. It was so new. I'd been there a couple years and I was starstruck. Oh, God, I loved Lisa. You know how much I loved Lisa. We became really close friends there. She lived right around the corner.

*Q: Okay, so it doesn't sound like there's a lot to say about the Philippines?*

STEIN-OLSON: Not really, we were just learning how to work in a mission. It was so different from Mali. It's so different from Sub Saharan Africa. Again, a lot of training.

The FSN staff was unbelievably fabulous. I learned a lot about—they trained me. They trained me.

*Q: Okay, they did a good job. You're two years there and, again, I assume the controller's office saw it as kind of a training position because they wanted to move you on. So, you went to Burundi in 1993 and that was as the Controller. Is that correct? The Washington controller's office seemed to have carefully managed its young financial management officers and put them into missions where they thought they would learn and then assign them out as quickly as possible as controllers.*

STEIN-OLSON: That's what Ray King decided. Mission management planned on me staying in the Philippines longer, but Ray goes, "There's too many—we need you in Africa." So I said, "Okay." They moved me to Burundi.

*Q: Okay. Now, have you had your first child yet?*

STEIN-OLSON: No. But Steve and I married before we left the Philippines.

**USAID/Burundi, Controller, 1993 - 1994; Controller for Burundi and Rwanda (Kenya-based), 1994 - 1995**

STEIN-OLSON: We loved Bujumbura. We loved everything about it. They had just had their first, so-called, "free democratic election." President Pierre Buyoya, had stepped down graciously.

*Q: Was Myron Golden the mission director?*

STEIN-OLSON: No, it was Glenn Slocum. And Myron replaced him.

*Q: He came into Burundi and then, after the genocide, he was overseeing both. I think he may have replaced Glenn.*

STEIN-OLSON: Yes. He called it COBRA: the "Coordinating Office of Burundi-Rwanda affairs".

*Q: When you were in Burundi, they'd had an election and things were looking quite good initially in Burundi. But, that didn't last long, as you ended up going to Kenya. What happened?*

STEIN-OLSON: I was the controller for Burundi. The first thing that happened was in 1993. The military executed Burundi's first Hutu president elected through free and fair elections, along with several of his ministers. I was seven months pregnant. Glenn Slocum asked us to house ministers because they were on death lists. The Minister of Agriculture moved in with me with his extended family. It was tough. The thing is, I remember Pierre Buyoya was hiding at the American Embassy. I remember him being there. He was hiding. It was so chaotic, and it was so painful. The coup eventually failed,

but the violence erupted. In 1994, the parliament appointed another Hutu president. And then that— and that was at the beginning ten years of civil war between the Tutsis and the Hutus in Burundi. That was January 1994. Because I remember— I left in February 1994 to have the baby.

*Q: Did you come back to the States?*

STEIN-OLSON: Yes, I came back to the States to have the baby. And then the plane was shot down by—

*Q: That was in April of 1994 in Rwanda?*

STEIN-OLSON: Yes. But both of the presidents (Burundi and Rwanda) were on board launching the genocide.

*Q: When did you return— did you return to Burundi?*

STEIN-OLSON: They moved my FTE [Full-time Equivalent position]. The USAID CFO, Tony Cully, moved my FTE to Nairobi, from Burundi.

*Q: You were still in the U.S. on maternity?*

STEIN-OLSON: I was working for David Ostermeyer. That's when I had my baby in a swing. That's when we met. I was in the Africa Bureau. And you thought it was so lovely to have my baby in the swing there. And somebody complained that the baby was crying during the AEF process.

*Q: I don't remember.*

STEIN-OLSON: You were like, "Oh, look, the baby."

*Q: They then decided your position would be moved to Nairobi?*

STEIN-OLSON: Yes, and then I would also take over the Rwanda office.

*Q: Right, so eventually you went off to Nairobi to oversee the financial management of both. When I saw you in October of 1994, when I was on a trip with Tony Lake to the region, we stopped briefly in Kigali. You were there at the mission on TDY from Nairobi and with the baby.*

STEIN-OLSON: With the baby, with Hans.

*Q: Had the FSNs returned to the office in Rwanda by that time?*

STEIN-OLSON: The ones that were still alive.

*Q: The ones that were still alive. So, you were working with FSNs who had been through that trauma?*

STEIN-OLSON: Yes. Yes. And, yes, it was a terrible time but everybody had so much compassion and empathy for what had happened. In Kigali, some FSNs came to work. Some didn't. Some had amputated limbs. I remember one had HIV/AIDS. It was a horrible, horrible situation. Harry Dorcas was the Regional Controller out of Nairobi and he really helped me. Although we lived in Nairobi, I traveled every other week either to Burundi or Rwanda. I felt like I needed to be down there to help the FSN staff as well as the evacuated staff. We did the best we could.

*Q: I think that there were payments made to victims, so were you doing some of that work as well trying to figure out how the U.S. would reimburse families who had lost people?*

STEIN-OLSON: Yes, I was involved in all that, and also I was trying to- for all of the Americans that left- I was trying to close their houses and send stuff back to them. There was an EXO from Uganda that came up to help me. Because the Americans didn't— I don't remember—

*Q: I don't think any of the Americans who had been stationed returned.*

STEIN-OLSON: Yes. I helped pack out of their houses and ship stuff back. The thing is, I was the only one there— I was going to either Rwanda or Burundi every week. I felt like I couldn't do it from Nairobi. I traveled with Hans and my nanny, and we went to Rwanda for the week, came back for the weekend, and went to Burundi. I mean, we went back and forth.

*Q: Wow, that sounds incredibly difficult.*

STEIN-OLSON: I had purpose. That's what I had wanted in my life was purpose. I was able to help people and get them the money that they needed. I kept wondering how this could have happened? And why didn't we stop it? — it was painful to look into the eyes of the FSNs that remained. Do you remember Bonaventure?

*Q: Yes, we've done his oral history.*

STEIN-OLSON: I have to read it. Is it posted?

*Q: Yes.*

STEIN-OLSON: I want to read it because his story is amazing. After the genocide, I just felt like, "Okay, this is why I joined USAID, so I can be of help." I mean, not that I was much help, but I mean, at least I could do what I could do.

*Q: Did Washington provide enough support, including staff care because I know staff care became an important issue for you later in your career. Was there any special help for the FSNs in Rwanda who were returning to work?*

STEIN-OLSON: I don't remember any. No, I remember even in Tanzania after the bombing, I don't remember anything. Really. I think Martha Reese may have come out.

*Q: Okay. That sounds incredibly difficult to me. George Lewis eventually went in to become the Rwanda Mission Director. Was the Mission Director during the time you were there? Were you providing the financial management oversight after George came in?*

STEIN-OLSON: No, Myron.

*Q: Myron was there the whole time?*

STEIN-OLSON: Yes. Myron is not the easiest person to work for either. Is he still around- Myron- do you know?

*Q: I have lost touch with him.*

STEIN-OLSON: I remember when I was evacuated back to DC— I had a newborn and I wanted to take a few days off to see my husband. Myron goes, "Well, no. I need you to do my travel voucher." I go, "Okay, Myron." I was so afraid of all of these people. They were so senior. So important!

*Q: Yes, well, we put him in a very difficult position to try to manage the two missions. This really sounds like it was an extremely difficult and stressful situation, trying to hold things together and help people restore their lives, which I guess was meaningful in its own way.*

STEIN-OLSON: It was. It was a tough time because, in Burundi, there was so much violence. There was one woman, Corinne, who was born in Burundi. She was Belgian and was a friend of mine. She and her baby were murdered out in the field. We thought we were safe as white people, and that's what was really shocking. We should never have thought that, but it was so violent. It was heartbreaking for all of us. I'll never forget when— I mean, yes.

*Q: Do you think it's worth trying to keep those kinds of offices open? Or do you think they should just close them? In circumstances like that?*

STEIN-OLSON: I think there was a lot of anger towards the Americans from the Kigali mission. We didn't take any of the FSNs out. That's a tough question, Carol. I think things have changed where we do take people out— like in Afghanistan, I think we made a different choice. But in Rwanda, the FSNs felt abandoned. That's why Glenn Slocum asked us to take people into our houses.

But yes. I think it's worth keeping the offices open, actually. I think even though we make mistakes, we do more good than harm.

*Q: That's helpful. It was a very unique situation. I saw it a little bit from the Washington side. It was much more complex, I think, than any of us realized in Washington.*

STEIN-OLSON: We even helped Jane Goodall get her chimps out of Rwanda. I remember— were you on the Clinton trip when he came back to Rwanda?

*Q: I was on the trip, but not on the Rwanda portion of it. No.*

STEIN-OLSON: He came back and apologized.

*Q: Okay, this was a very unusual assignment, a very difficult assignment. In 1995, you get a much more traditional assignment in one than that—*

### **USAID/Tanzania, Controller, 1995 - 2000**

STEIN-OLSON: So I thought.

*Q: Well, yes, it did end up having its own unique set of challenges. You were asked to go off to Tanzania to be the controller for an important development program in Africa in 1995, and you ended up spending a good period of time there. Do you want to tell us a little bit about the mission? I assume that the controller's office in Washington said, "We need to get Monica into a more traditional position."*

STEIN-OLSON: No, nobody said that. I had to fight for that job. That was the first time I ever had to bid. I was the first female controller there. There was somebody else I was competing with. A tandem. Everybody wanted Tanzania, and I had to interview for the job. Bill Anderson was the deputy there.

*Q: Who was the mission director when you were-*

STEIN-OLSON: Mark Wentling.

*Q: Mark Wentling was and then Bill was the deputy. You were interviewed? Wow!*

STEIN-OLSON: Yes, I was interviewed. I didn't tell them I was pregnant. That's the hard part about trying to move up the ladder. Balancing work with having a family. Tanzania was great. It was easier for Steve too because he was working in the region, so I wanted to stay in the region. Even though Rwanda and Burundi were so complicated, I embraced it. Harry Dorcas kept saying, "You don't need to go down there every other week," and I'm like, "I do, but I do." It wouldn't have worked any other way. I was young, too. I wouldn't do it now. In my early 30s. It was very interesting to see the politics surrounding the post-genocide. The Ambassador there—David Rawson—was very supportive. I

wasn't supposed to bring the baby into the country and he's like, "Bring the baby in. We want to try to normalize this place."

*Q: Did you ever get any special recognition for your work doing that? Just out of curiosity?*

STEIN-OLSON: Promoted.

*Q: Got promoted— well, I guess that's a good recognition.*

STEIN-OLSON: Exactly. I got promoted. I honestly don't remember. Myron was not one to provide a lot of awards.

*Q: Then I assume at some point, they assigned a controller full time to Rwanda because the program there began to grow.*

STEIN-OLSON: Andy Plitt.

*Q: Andy Plitt. Did he actually go into Kigali?*

STEIN-OLSON: Yes, he went to Kigali.

*Q: And then he oversaw Burundi as well?*

STEIN-OLSON: I don't remember that. I know that they do that now- that Rwanda provides administrative support to the Burundi mission.

*Q: Okay.*

STEIN-OLSON: Which makes sense.

*Q: You went to Tanzania, fortunately. You went in 1995, and it was an important mission that I think had a growing program at that point in time.*

STEIN-OLSON: Good. Yes, it was big. A lot of democracy and governance, health, health funding, education— it was a traditional development program.

*Q: Hillary Clinton, didn't she on her trip to Africa go to Tanzania?*

STEIN-OLSON: Yes.

*Q: Were you involved at all in that trip?*

STEIN-OLSON: No, that was Diana Putman. She went up— oh, you must have been with her on that trip?



*Q: Yes. Right.*

STEIN-OLSON: You guys went up to visit the orphanage up in the north?

*Q: Yes, we did a couple of things. We were in Arusha, but I thought we went into Dar es Salaam at some point, but maybe not.*

STEIN-OLSON: I only saw Hillary Clinton when she came out after the bombing.

*Q: Right. She was doing some natural resources management stuff.*

STEIN-OLSON: Right. I was the controller and so that was a big job, because the staff was not that great, so I was very busy. Although there was Blandina Nyoni, the chief accountant. While I was there, she went off to become the Inspector General for Tanzania. Remember that?

*Q: That was good for Tanzania.*

STEIN-OLSON: It was great for Tanzania and for USAID too. We trained her and she was wonderful, but when she left, I spent a lot of time mentoring staff. I was very busy as the controller. That's when Lucretia Taylor came in as Mission Director. I was very busy.

*Q: Did you have any non-project assistance policy reform-based programs that were making cash transfer disbursements? Do you recall?*

STEIN-OLSON: I think so. Pat Fleuret was there.

*Q: Okay. I was just going to ask you if there were any special challenges with managing local currency, if you recall. You might not—you may have blocked those memories.*

STEIN-OLSON: Maybe. No, I don't recall. I think we had non-project assistance in Mali.

*Q: You would have, because the early African Economic Policy Reform program, and then the Development Fund for Africa allowed non-project assistance. So, have you been exposed to it?*

STEIN-OLSON: Yes. That's right. I do remember clearing on the cables to disperse funding in Mali. I do remember that. I don't remember so much in Tanzania. I do remember in the Philippines. We'd have to look at the grid to make sure that they had met all of the requirements.

*Q: Okay. You had your second and third children while on this assignment? Was Hunter born in South Africa? And Tatiana as well?*

STEIN-OLSON: Yes.

*Q: So they were both born in South Africa and the evacuation process worked well. I talked to another person who wanted to have a child at post and had to fight the system. She was not complimentary towards-*

STEIN-OLSON: Is this Susan Fine, by any chance?

*Q: And Holly Wise as well.*

STEIN-OLSON: Oh, okay. No, I was there during that whole time.

*Q: But everybody was cooperative and helpful to you when you were having—?*

STEIN-OLSON: I had a very good relationship with the doctor there in Tanzania. He was a local— local hire, so I didn't have to deal with the regional people. Sadly, he has passed, but we had a great relationship with the doctor. Dr. De Silva.

*Q: So, your experiences were bureaucratically easy?*

STEIN-OLSON: Super easy.

*Q: Were you able to travel around the country at all and see projects, or would that have been difficult with young children?*

STEIN-OLSON: No, I traveled. I traveled all over the country- over to Zanzibar too. A lot more day trips, though. I wanted to be home in the evenings.

*Q: Did you have any interesting audits that you had to grapple with? Any significant issues implementing programs?*

STEIN-OLSON: I had to call in the USAID auditors several times because one of our direct hires was embezzling funds, and he ended up going to prison. Then the EXO Dana Mansuri and I uncovered an embezzlement ring within a couple of FSNs that had set up a training school and were siphoning money there. A million dollars had been fraudulently dispersed under my watch, as Lucretia used to tell me. People were fired, but I mean, it was so traumatic for the mission. We had to bring in auditors but, like I said, the staff was weak, or it wasn't as strong as the other missions that I'd been in. The training officer, in fact, was an FSN 13, very senior. His wife owned the sham Training Center, and we were paying stipends to fake students. Finally, we uncovered it, and we calculated that we had probably lost about a million dollars.

*Q: What is the process when you have a suspicion or see something? Do you bring in the Inspector General's office to investigate and verify that there's something wrong?*

STEIN-OLSON: Yes.

*Q: And so you had a good relationship with them to be able to bring them in to do that?*

STEIN-OLSON: Yes. Joe Farinella. He was the regional Inspector General for South Africa, maybe even for all of Africa. He was a Senior Foreign Service officer. He and I had a great relationship. That reminds me, I called in auditors all the time from South Africa because I had a great relationship with them. They were always welcome in our mission, as far as I was concerned. Like I said, the staff was weak. I couldn't do it all myself, and I had kids. I was also the Acting Program Officer for a whole year. I had the auditors in all the time. They were the ones that uncovered this U.S. direct hire. Then I called in another— after Joe left—that helped uncover the embezzlement of one million dollars. It was FSNs. He ended up submitting it to the Auditor General's anti-corruption office. But I don't know if anything ever happened.

*Q: In Tanzania. The Auditor General's office.*

STEIN-OLSON: Yes.

*Q: In general, you would say it's important for controller's to develop a good relationship with the Inspector General's office to be able to use them—*

STEIN-OLSON: — and not be afraid!

*Q: I think that's not always the case.*

STEIN-OLSON: No, that's so true. We had the best relationship. I was always on the phone with Joe at least once a week. We became the gold standard for a RIG-Controller relationship. I would volunteer projects for audit. I wasn't afraid. I don't remember how we became friends, but we were friendly, and I was not afraid of telling him things that I thought were going on. He didn't play god. He was a good one.

*Q: Okay. That's important.*

STEIN-OLSON: We always touted our relationship as one of partnership.

*Q: You said you were Acting Program Officer for a year. How'd you like that?*

STEIN-OLSON: I was out of my comfort zone by then, but I wanted to do more than accounting, as you know. I loved it. I was working with Lucretia every day, and I started to learn the strategic planning process. I knew the administrative side, but, on the program side, to match that with the results that we wanted to attain. It was a great learning experience for me. I was pregnant with Hunter. I had so much energy at that time. I really wanted to learn it all. It was wonderful.

*Q: I assume you had much more contact with the embassy in Tanzania than you did in your earlier posts.*

STEIN-OLSON: Oh, my God, Lucretia often made me acting director. She'd deleted the deputy position. She took me to country team all the time. John Lange was the deputy at the embassy and he and I— we knew each other. We were friends from French class, so we became social friends too. I was always over at the Embassy for meetings that Lucretia sent me to. And that was the beginning of ICASS. And when Charles Stith came in, she didn't want to go to country team, so she sent me. I was always at the embassy, and we socialized with Embassy families. It was a tiny community. Steve and I were married and with kids, so we met other people with kids, and, you know, the whole community thing. I was friends with the CLO. Yes, I was always at the embassy.

*Q: Okay, so it was a very close-knit community. I wanted to ask you about one of the things that was done and managed, I believe, by USAID controller offices. I don't remember what it was called, but it was an annual survey of mission systems.*

STEIN-OLSON: FMFIA (Federal Managers Financial Integrity Act of 1982)

*Q: I'm wondering if you could talk a little bit about this, because I remember it forcing entire USAID missions to sit back and think about issues that it might not otherwise think about. I'm wondering what your views are about that?*

STEIN-OLSON: That's absolutely true. It was the Federal Managers Financial Integrity Act from FIA (Federal Investigation Agency), and it looked at the internal controls of each office. There were questionnaires for the office level, and at the mission level, too—in terms of making sure that all of the systems in place were sound for what we were trying to do, whether it's in the controller's office or the EXO's office, health office. It ranged from everything from, "Are we properly staffed? Do we have proper resources?" — I think what it did was it allowed us to say if, if things needed to be— could things be done- fixed- at the mission level or does it have to be pushed out to Washington? That's right, a material weakness. That was done on an annual basis. We— the controller had to certify that it was correct. It looked at all—the program office— "do we have—" "Are we on time for our program reports?" things like that. It was a huge endeavor.

*Q: Do you think that helped to enhance the role of the Controllers in the missions and helped put them into positions to advance in their careers?*

STEIN-OLSON: No, I wouldn't say that. It depends on each controller. I think that would— to me the FMFIA was one of the tools that we had to make sure that the mission ran efficiently in terms of stewardship of U.S. government resources, but I think every controller— if a controller wanted to get out, he or she could. For example, the Moscow controller before me, Doug, was always working with the auditor generals in each country and anti-corruption programs, things like that. I think that the FMFIA— I think it's just one—I think that it's just a necessary part of the job.

*Q: Within the controller field, there are opportunities to be very creative and innovative and take on additional responsibilities?*

STEIN-OLSON: Absolutely. There's so many ways, so many ways to break out. I don't think FMFIA is one of those.

*Q: Okay, that's important. Obviously, the huge unfortunate event that happened while you were there was the bombing of the embassies in Nairobi and in Dar es Salaam. Did the bombing in Nairobi, just in terms of timing, did that happen before the one in Tanzania?*

STEIN-OLSON: Three minutes before-

*Q: It was just a matter of a few minutes. So, the embassy in Dar es Salaam had not already heard about the bombing in Kenya?*

STEIN-OLSON: No, in fact, no. It was nearly simultaneous. What was interesting after we met over at John Lange's house, there were a lot of rumors flying around that multiple US embassies in Africa had been bombed; we really didn't know what was happening. Then John got a phone call from Madeleine Albright and told him what had happened.

*Q: Okay, you want to walk through what happened that day? USAID was not co-located with the embassy, is that correct?*

STEIN-OLSON: It was a mile away. Let's see. It was Friday August 6, 1998. I was pregnant with Tatiana. I had gone that morning for prenatal with Dr. DaSilva. You've heard this I think a lot when Susan asked me— remember when I was in Russia, it was right after 9/11? Susan asked me about the bombing. I started to choke up because I hadn't processed what had happened that day.

I was pregnant with Tatiana, Hans was four, Hunter was two, and they used to have a Friday playdate across the street from the Embassy at the Connors' house. He was the consular officer, but they were on vacation. Thank God. I went to the embassy, I had a prenatal checkup. One of the female guards had wanted to talk to me, and she'd always asked me about jobs at USAID, and she was taking secretarial classes, etc. And I never saw her again.

I drove to the mission. Jim Dempsey was the acting deputy. Lucretia had just left for home leave, the night before. The EXO Dana was in my office. A few minutes later, there was a loud noise. Oh, we could hear it. I think it was 10:30. Apparently, the Nairobi one had already gone off. What's interesting is that everybody flew to the windows to see what was happening. Which is what we're not supposed to do. Well, that's what happened in Kenya.

I remember that we got word from the embassy that a bomb had exploded, and that they didn't know how many people were dead. Steve was in London on business. John Lange called an emergency meeting at his house and went through and told us what had happened to him and staff. He was conducting a morning meeting, the blast went off and then the wall behind them collapsed. Apparently, the bomb went off early and at the front gate the same moment a full water truck was leaving. The truck crushed the impact of the bomb. The driver evaporated. Nobody inside the embassy was killed, but the fireball

ricocheted from the water truck backwards, across the street and into the house of our friends burning everything- incinerated everything in its path, up the stairs and into the playroom where my kids normally played on Friday mornings.

I could never talk about that before therapy. I remember it was such a blue, blue day, it was so beautiful outside too. There had been a line of people for visas, and those were the people that were killed. Because they were outside of the embassy. Nobody in the embassy was killed; plus the building was the ex-Israeli embassy so was well fortified.

*Q: So it was all Tanzanians who were killed?*

STEIN-OLSON: Except for— as far as we know, except there was one Tanzanian-American who was in line. He was married to a Fulbright, and I'm still in touch with her actually. Dr. Susan Hirsch. I ended up sending her money because we ended up having a program to provide funding for victims, which I helped to disperse as the controller. It was sad, because the victims were people applying for visas to the US. And other victims included the guards. I mean, this female— It just broke my heart. I was too busy that day to talk to her.

That night, over nine hundred FBI agents came in. It took a while, but I think they finally linked it to al-Qaeda. I think there was— I can't remember how many people were killed in it. They don't even know how many people were killed in Tanzania. No Americans. I mean one American, one Tanzanian-American, but no direct hires, not like in Nairobi. It was unbelievable. I became obsessed with the safety of my children, although they weren't the targets. I started suffering from my own PTSD. John Lange was— oh, my god, he and I talked about this all— we still do talk about it, about how— what he should have done. I think it would have been better for me if I had left right after that, like they did in Kigali, like people just moved on. We ended up staying, as did Dana, in the aftermath of trying to pick up the pieces, but it was a terrible time.

*Q: That's an interesting point — after that kind of traumatic experience, is it better to shorten people's tours and say, "yes, it's time for you to move on." You think that is the better approach to take?*

STEIN-OLSON: Yes. I told John Lange that because he moved on, perhaps he could heal more quickly. He came to see me once in my office: "Oh, Madeleine Albright asked me if I wanted to go to Zambia or Botswana as the Ambassador." I said, "Go to Botswana." So he moved on, but our whole lives stayed in Dar es Salaam. I didn't want to move on. I was offered a move to Ghana as the controller. I was pregnant. Dr. De Silva encouraged me to move on, but I couldn't. I was paralyzed. The thing is, we didn't have any support in terms of— we had Martha Reese come out again.

*Q: Martha Ries. She came out and at least talked to the staff.*

STEIN-OLSON:  
Yes.

*Q: She was probably more focused on Nairobi. You guys probably didn't get as much attention.*

STEIN-OLSON: Yes, that's so understandable. After all, At the U.S. Embassy in Nairobi, Kenya, approximately 212 people were killed and an estimated 4,000 wounded. At the U.S. Embassy in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, eleven people were killed and over 85 people injured. But, as I told John Lange, we didn't know we needed help. We didn't know. I mean, who knew? I didn't know. Dana didn't know. Lucretia stayed on. After the bombing, she came back the next day. I called her, and I was crying and she was watching—she didn't even know what happened— she was watching Wimbledon. "You gotta come back" and she did.

*Q: I know we'll probably talk about this again later, but I know later in your career, you did work on policy for staff in non-permissive environments. Obviously, this is a little bit different, but I'm wondering if you ever saw a personnel policy that would recommend steps to take after a traumatic event occurs in a mission? How best to manage staff? Is there any kind of a policy related to that anywhere?*

STEIN-OLSON: No, I don't know really what staff care does, but I know that when Susan asked me to lead the Non-Permissive Environment (NPE) taskforce after only spending one day as senior DAA in HR, that work was so fulfilling because I was never afraid to talk about my trauma. When I went into Afghanistan after a grenade was thrown into the USAID Green Zone, I opened up and talked about my own PTSD in an "all-hands" meeting. People came up to me, thanking me for being so open about my trauma. There was a report called The Greenleaf Report that focuses on stress and resilience. It had done an assessment and all of these non-permissive environments, about how 30% of aid workers suffer as much trauma as your frontline military people. That stuff still carries with me—when I was recruited for HR, I told Elizabeth that I didn't want to be her deputy. I wanted to head up staff care. That's what I wanted to do.

I wouldn't even know how to call Staff Care. But they should be out in the field. For example, last summer, when we had the twenty-fifth anniversary of the bombings—John Lange and I were there at a special memorial and so was the Secretary of State, Tony Blinken. Tony Blinken! He asked me about my trauma. Where were the staff care people?

*Q: This is important. Your oral history will help us to point out an issue that AID may need to be paying more attention to.*

STEIN-OLSON: We need to talk openly about therapists and medication and help for people. It took me years, but I finally got therapy, as you know, in Morocco, but it all related back to this bombing. All of it. I remember that there was a regional medical officer— a regional psychiatrist did come to Tanzania, but wasn't helpful. "You are a working mother, of course you're exhausted and depressed." I began to write about it. I wrote an article for the Foreign Service Journal. I wrote about the bombing, and how I

needed to get help, and that it's important that the Foreign Service recognize that. In fact, Tony Blinken, when I was talking to him, last August, asked, "Did you get the help you needed?" I said, "I did." He goes, "I'm so grateful for that." It was so nice. It's like you need people that care about the staff. You need people that maybe have gone through it themselves? I don't know. People are the backbone of what we do. Americans and global staff- we have to make sure that they're taken care of whether they want the help or not.

I don't know what staff care does. I'm a big proponent of it. But there's so many— it's so huge. I don't know.

But to me, the Greenleaf Report is important. It outlines that 70% of the aid budget goes to NPEs, where our aid workers are under the same stressors as our military in combat. That's why Susan Reichle wanted me on the NPE. We fought to have the Greenleaf Report recommendations implemented, and one of them was to have staff care at non-permissive environment posts. You have somebody that's qualified.

Also, because of the FMFIA that we talked about before, the Agency had a material weakness for years: the inability to monitor and evaluate USAID programs in non-permissive environments. My work on NPEs took care of that and I closed the Agency's material weakness. The Deputy Administrator Don Steinberg gave me a public shoutout for that. What I care about is really how we take care of our people. Mentally and physically.

*Q: Yes. We've gone for two hours. Do you want to stop now or do you want to continue to talk a little bit more about Tanzania. You mentioned that there were programs put in place to provide some assistance and then the other thing I would ask you about is what Washington did after the bombing? Was Washington helpful, not helpful? I know people came out. Was that helpful? Not helpful?*

STEIN-OLSON: A lot of people came out, a lot of people. Vivian Derrick was coming out, and so Lucretia told her she couldn't come out without bringing money, because Nairobi was getting so much attention. We got ten million dollars. I do remember that we put in place reparations for victims. I'll have to go back and look, but one other thing that I did as a controller was— John Lange came to me— I worked so closely with the embassy. He said his financial management people wouldn't pay for a bill for one of the hospitals for something because they said it wasn't within the regulations, what can I do? I paid for it. I documented it and all. In terms of— but these are the kinds of things I love doing as a controller. It was the right thing to do. John Lange was very distraught. I was able to—that reminds me too, that I also helped on the Burundi Peace Talks, that Lucretia asked me to help with that. We can talk about this later, too, but those are the kinds of things I could do as a controller, which was great where, if you needed money, I could document it. Make sure it had all— and I would check it out with the IG. Make sure that they were okay with it, and then I was able to be a little bit creative.

*Q: That's an important skill. You were involved with Burundi Peace Talks. Tell us what that was?*



STEIN-OLSON: Julius Nyerere was holding talks in Arusha, and Lucretia would attend. She asked me for funding for certain things. I was able to do that. It's not like I was involved in negotiations or anything like that, but I was able to provide funding for— I'd have to go back and look at my AEFs from those years, but maybe I can find them now that I know what we're going to be talking about. I also provided funding for the Rwandan trials held in Arusha. I think that was with Nelson Mandela, wasn't it? Was he or was he- I ALWAYS documented and passed by the South Africa RIG.

*Q: Yes, I think he may have— he had just become president in 1994. They were doing the Truth and Reconciliation Commissions in South Africa, so perhaps there was some of that. That was also done in Rwanda.*

STEIN-OLSON: They did it in Tanzania, though. We were there. Lucretia was involved in both of those. She would send me to the planning meetings for the Burundi ones, and to see what we could fund and what we couldn't fund. That's the kind of thing that a controller can get involved in, which was fun.

*Q: Absolutely. Although I am curious, where did you find the money to do that?*

STEIN-OLSON: There was something about the bombing. I was the acting director. Lucretia went back on home leave for like three months. I was the acting director in all of this follow up, which was— and again, fun. We got money from Washington. I'd have to go back and look, but I was not allowed to use it for any operating expenses. I just called up Washington and said, "Hey, I need this" and they go, "Okay-" and I go, "I can't do it otherwise," and they'd go, "Okay. We'll have to find the money for you." And they did. I didn't do anything illegal, but I was always calling people and saying I need this, I need that.

*Q: Okay, being creative.*

STEIN-OLSON: Yes, but legally.

*Q: Legally creative. I know. I understand.*

STEIN-OLSON: Yes. Those were exciting times. Then when you were part of it, although mentally I wasn't stable.

*Q: Right. And that happened because you were in Dar es Salaam for five years.*

STEIN-OLSON: Five years.

*Q: The bombing was right in the middle.*

STEIN-OLSON: It was 1998.

*Q: And you left in 2000?*

STEIN-OLSON: Yes; you recruited me.

On Tanzania, Lucretia used me for everything: Program Officer, EXO, Acting Deputy. By then, I had a chief accountant who was strong. That was after our million-dollar embezzlement. The other thing she had me do was lead the GAO team from DC to go into the field to make a determination as to whether Tanzania was eligible for debt relief under the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) congressional relief fund.

When we talk about Russia too, we all should have internal audit units in all big missions.

*Q: Right. That is something I will want you to talk about. I'm going to suggest we stop for now because I think we probably both are getting a little bit tired.*

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*Q: Okay, today is June 7, 2024. And this is interview number two, with Monica Stein-Olson. And Monica, when we finished up last time, you had talked a lot about Tanzania, but we agreed you might have some final thoughts, including one of the things you briefly mentioned which was when Julius Nyerere passed away? Any thoughts you have about that?*

STEIN-OLSON: Yes. Sure. And it's great to be here again. Julius Nyerere played a huge part in all of East Africa, as you know, and in Burundi's Civil War. He was an ex-president and African elder statesman. And he was the chief negotiator to achieve a solution in Burundi. 300,000 people had already died. And then 470,000 Burundians had already fled to safer regions into Tanzania. He died in 1999. And I remember the embassy had rented a plane to go to the funeral and we got to Lucretia on the plane.

*Q: Where was the funeral?*

STEIN-OLSON: In Northern Tanzania. Butiama where he was born.

*Q: Is there anything else on Tanzania or should we go on to your recruitment to Moscow?*

STEIN-OLSON: No, I don't think there's anything. I think we talked about HIV/AIDS.

*Q: No, we did not. That is something I did want to ask you about. Because HIV/AIDS was obviously an issue throughout the 1990s in eastern and southern Africa. I assume that the mission did have a program working on it. But also, to what degree was it any issue with your own USAID staff? Did you all take any special steps to help staff or to deal with the trauma that many of them were probably going through?*

STEIN-OLSON: Yes, no, I mean, okay, so I think, yes, I was there mid to late 90s, and we had the HIV/AIDS advisor, a big program. And there was a huge prevalence rate, I think about 5 percent in certain pockets within Tanzania. But the problem was the Tanzanians, there was so much stigma surrounding getting tested at the centers. Even for Rwanda, when I went into Rwanda, there were several staff that were dying from HIV/AIDS, but I don't remember anything we specifically did for staff. Our chief accountant, his wife, died of HIV/AIDS. And I attended the funeral. But I know that we gave people plenty of sick leave. I don't remember anything other than that really, I kind of missed it. But there was a lot of stigma.

And I remember, I had a going away party when I left Tanzania at the Yacht Club. I hired a terrific youth band called Tutunane and Keith Brown was out there. He wasn't there for my going away party, but he happened to be out there with Lucretia and then years later when I went back to Dar with the National War College, I asked the staff about Tutunane and they all died of HIV/AIDS.

*Q: Did the mission do some prevention work with staff, such as condoms readily available? Any things like that?*

STEIN-OLSON: Yes, we did that. Yes.

*Q: Okay. No, it was obviously a very difficult time for AID missions and embassies throughout the region because there were so many deaths of staff.*

STEIN-OLSON: Yes. And it was before PEPFAR [President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief], it was before PEPFAR. It was President Bush that set up or tripled our foreign aid budget with HIV.

*Q: Yes, it was President Bush. And when we get to Moscow, we might talk a little bit about that as well since I know you were dealing with the issue there. If nothing else on Tanzania, why don't we talk about your transfer to Moscow. I don't recall whether Moscow was your first choice or not. But I know you were the Moscow mission's first choice.*

STEIN-OLSON: No, Moscow was my first choice. I had to kind of railroad my husband into the idea of Moscow. We were ready to leave Tanzania after five years, three kids. And your emails really reeled me in about the ballet and Russia and the winters and how beautiful it was and I just remember I wanted to go and we went.

**USAID/Russia, Controller (2000 - 2002) and Deputy Mission Director (2002 - 2004)**

*Q: You went to Moscow in 2000. And you initially go in as the controller, although ultimately you then become the deputy mission director. I believe your older son was starting school. What about the two younger ones?*

STEIN-OLSON: Preschool. Hans was going into first grade. And so en route, Hans, and I stopped in Paris to go to Paris Disneyland for the day. And then we arrived in Moscow and then Steve followed with the other two kids.

*Q: Okay. Very good. What was the housing situation for families at that point in time?*

STEIN-OLSON: First, I wanted to start off by saying Moscow, when Steve and I talk about thirty years of USAID [United States Agency for International Development], Moscow has always been our favorite posting, not because it was super family friendly at all, but it was just like living in a black and white movie. It was just so fascinating after living through the Cold War. And it was a wonderful time to be there. But the neighborhood itself, it was a gated community of very wealthy Russians and expatriates and embassy folks. It was guarded so you knew that these guys were all KGB [the Committee for State Security] and spying on all of us. They knew exactly when we would order a pizza. I mean, it was a huge compound and it also had a path leading directly to the school, which was fabulous. Yes, I guess it was the Anglo-American School. It was a fabulous living situation for families. It was a huge commute for the parents.

*Q: Great for the kids, and not so good for the parents.*

STEIN-OLSON: Right. But it was definitely worth it. And yes, I remember taking the little shuttle bus out to the Socol subway stop. But the kids would just run around and you wouldn't even worry about it because the KGB knew exactly where they were at all times

*Q: They were babysitters.*

STEIN-OLSON: Yes, exactly. I remember Susan's husband found the two boys at the little store at the gate one day and brought them home to me because they were trying to get people to buy them candy. Wonderful.

*Q: Well, that's good. You were initially heading up the controller's office and it was an interesting office because of the innovative things you all were doing. Also, can you talk a bit about the FSN [Foreign Service National] staff?*

STEIN-OLSON: I came in and I spent two years as the controller. But first of all, the staff was so educated, I can't remember the number of people but at least twenty, maybe even thirty people and I can go back and like the numbers, but I mean, we even had a rocket scientist working in our team.

But what was so interesting about the Moscow mission—there was a unique internal audit unit of four Russian financial analysts that would go out to the field and do the pre-feasibility studies for local organizations: It was one of our sustainability tools and in my mind, the precursor to the local solutions (Russification) that everybody was talking about in terms of how to really build sustainability within programs.

These Russian FSNs were well trained. Their supervisor, Cliff—I don't know if he trained them, but he was the leader of the pack. And he was a former auditor. And they were always out in the field. And they wrote official internal audit reports for me with open recommendations for the mission director, for the office directors, and for the project director. They tracked these recommendations until they were closed. They performed phenomenal work. And they were very professional. I think that's one of the reasons we were able to have a great relationship with the RIG, which was in Budapest. They would often look at our audit reports and not feel a need to come out and audit our programs. This unit was very unique in my career, ten years in the controllers field to have this internal audit unit. Aside from the unit, one of the major issues that we had with the rest of the finance team was the fact that there was no chief accountant— it's very Russian to be afraid to supervise other Russians, even though that seemed like a normal path in many organizations. There was a lot of tension between the accountants (four of them) on who was the lead, who was not the lead, who wanted to be the lead, who should have been the lead. And it was just very stressful for the office because honestly, the most qualified were those financial analysts of the internal audit unit. But there were so many personality conflicts and baggage. I never had the courage to name one person as the Chief Accountant. I tried, but I never had the courage to put in place a chief accountant. I had a deputy controller, Allan, that played the role.

*Q: And he was a direct hire.*

STEIN-OLSON: He was a direct hire. It was a two person direct hire office. And we had an offshore PSC as the head of the audit unit.

*Q: Oh, Patrick, he came in his direct hire. That's right, Patrick Robinson.*

STEIN-OLSON: I hired him as a local. I don't remember if we lost that position?

*Q: He did come back out as an IDI.*

STEIN-OLSON: Well, that is what I mean in terms of helping him navigate EXO versus controller. I wanted him as a direct hire controller, and that's what he wanted. But he didn't have enough accounting hours.

*Q: That's right. So he came out as an EXO.*

STEIN-OLSON: But I hired him first as a local hire in the controller's office. We'd lost the deputy position and Allan left. Budget cuts. I hired Patrick Robinson who was amazing. He would be so excited when I would say things like, "Patrick, I think it's time to do an audit of all of our contractor's contracts." He goes, "Oh, okay. Okay." He would be so excited to figure out their vacation hours and make sure they were all correct. He was so good. And then Cliff left, Patrick served as the deputy for the whole staff. They really looked up to him. He was good, was great actually.

*Q: And he was the spouse of our direct hire health officer. And then he ended up being hired by AID as an executive officer.*

STEIN-OLSON: Exactly. Although I tried. He wanted to be controller. He loved it. He loved controller operations.

*Q: Well, he ended up doing quite well in his career.*

STEIN-OLSON: He absolutely did.

*Q: He started off on the right track.*

STEIN-OLSON: That's the best thing to do.

*Q: You mentioned the Inspector General's office. And I know that in at least one case, you had to deal with a fraud incident involving an American contractor. I don't know if you recall that.*

STEIN-OLSON: HIID? [Harvard Institute for International Development]

*Q: No, not HIID. That was before our time there.*

STEIN-OLSON: Oh, that's right. That was with Mark Ward. Yes.

*Q: I bring it up only because I remember when there were allegations of fraud with one of our contractors, you quickly contacted the Inspector General's office in Budapest. I was really impressed with your proactive actions to bring in the IG on the issue; I suspect this is a best practice for USAID Controllers.*

STEIN-OLSON: No, it's definitely a partnership. They're part of our extended team. And I think the IG has evolved a lot where they don't play gotcha when you invite them to look at programs in the mission. No, I worked hand in hand, always with the IG. I met them in the Philippines, and in South Africa—and I was always bringing them in because I didn't want anything to bite me during my tenure. I felt safe with them. And the auditors liked being liked!

Now, I have to say something about the IG, though, because what was upsetting about them is, it wasn't in Russia—it was West Bank and Gaza, that there were allegations of sexual harassment on one of my contracts. I brought in the IG and they wouldn't touch it. That was extremely disappointing. They said it was out of their area of responsibilities, and I couldn't fathom that. I got very upset and I sent a strong message to the head of the IG at the time in DC. I don't know if it's changed or not, but I was just furious. I'm like, how are we supposed to manage? What am I supposed to do? I'm not an investigator and I wanted to take this stuff seriously. No tolerance.

*Q: That's a good point. I have no idea how they handle it.*

STEIN-OLSON: They didn't handle it. They didn't. And that was—Yes. I don't know. I mean, it was very upsetting though. Plus, in the West Bank and Gaza, the IG was co-located with us. Can you believe that? And I asked him to investigate this sexual harassment claim for me. He said he didn't have the authority

*Q: As a controller, were you able to go out to visit projects at all? Or did you have any views about how the controller's office can work effectively and feel a strong part of the team with the rest of the program?*

STEIN-OLSON: I tried to get people out all the time. It was hard for me to travel a lot because I had three little kids. I remember since my staff was so fabulous. For controllers to get involved with the rest of the program, the best is the anti-corruption stuff. In Russia, I had the capacity to work on programs since my staff was so fabulous. And I remember I was so upset when Susan Reichle held the first anti-corruption working group while I was on Home Leave. She told me not to worry.

*Q: Were you then able to get involved with the mission's anti-corruption working group?*

STEIN-OLSON: Absolutely. And then my big break came when Susan went out to have her baby and she couldn't find an acting DG team leader. And that was me remember Carol?

*Q: Yes, I do remember.*

STEIN-OLSON: That was my big break. I just completely embraced the role. Patrick was the Acting Controller at the time so that I could focus on being the DG office director, and you brought me to meetings where I had to brief our DG program which were politically-charged. There were so many briefings to all the CODELs [Congressional member Delegation] and STAFFDELs [Congressional Staff Delegations] and embassy meetings, and I became part of the gender working group out of that.

*Q: Good. When you eventually became a mission director, did you remember this and get your controllers to be involved in things other than their specific jobs?*

STEIN-OLSON: Let me think. That's actually a very good question. Or did I keep them in their box? Before we get there. My other big break came when you asked for a volunteer to write up stories of the Russification of our U.S contractors that were success stories. I think it was the Urban Institute. It morphed into a Russian institute. And I remember that was another one of my big—You gave me my big breaks in Moscow. And I just ran with it.

*Q: This was to do reporting on some success stories through cables, so that the State Department would see them and—*

STEIN-OLSON: I interviewed people. I interviewed the heads of the organizations. I remember going once with Inna Loukevenka to talk with the head of the AFL-CIO labor union group working on Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union. I remember, I was there with her as the acting democracy officer, and she was trying to explain again, to the head that they had to step back, and then it was time for the Russians to move up and oh my God, it was very tense. But Inna was tough. She was good. And in the end, that was what was in the contract. It was also at a time when our AFL-CIO chief of party was a woman.

So let me think about Morocco. I'm trying to remember who that controller was. My EXO was Dana Mansuri, and also served as the controller, who I-

*Q: Gave lots of opportunities, yes.*

STEIN-OLSON: I made her the Acting Program Officer. Also, then Anne Aarnes stole her away from me. I hadn't expected her to leave so early with all those opportunities, but she did. She ditched me and chose Anne and then she had her own fabulous career, I think of who was my controller?

*Q: Well, if the point was to give opportunities to executive officers and controllers, you did do that—*

STEIN-OLSON: I had Dana serving as an alter ego, really. And then ah, yes, I did that.

*Q: Okay, good. Just out of curiosity, how much communication do controllers have with Washington and chief controller officers? Is there much oversight or camaraderie or sense of being part of some special cadre?*

STEIN-OLSON: There's controllers conferences, which were important. Then they had the regional conference, for example—the Africa controllers conferences, and then Middle East controllers. And that's good, that stuff was good. Once, there was a joint controller EXO conference, which was phenomenal. Because that's who we work with, mostly the executive officers.

*Q: It's an opportunity for the field to talk about some of the issues that they're facing and to get Washington to come up with some solutions?*

STEIN-OLSON: Yes, and also to network and know the people in Washington. And it was great. Once, we had Bob Bonnaffon come out to Moscow, and it was just great to have a senior person to bounce ideas off of and discuss solutions and problems and solutions. Otherwise, you're out in the field on your own. I had basically two training assignments as a controller. I did the best I could. As a controller, I had the ability to make payments that I made out of common sense, the right thing to do. For example, in Rwanda, one of the landlords wanted his rent money for an American house and everything—the paperwork—had been destroyed—in this case, the rental agreements. So I drafted a letter to “the File” saying that I'm making this payment without the proper



obligation document. I just made the payment. And I was able to do that as long as you have a good relationship with the EXO, you can do things like that when you have to.

*Q: That's an important lesson, knowing that it's the common sense thing to do and to do it.*

STEIN-OLSON: Exactly and that's how we're so different from the financial management officers of State Department. And I heard this many times.

*Q: I was going to ask you about the degree to which you in Moscow had contact with the State Department financial people.*

STEIN-OLSON: None. None. They-

*Q: Overall experience was that they're very different and very rigid?*

STEIN-OLSON: Yes, for example, in Tanzania: At the International School, there were two kindergartens; you could send your kid to K-1 or K-2 and the Embassy would make the payment. If you sent your child to both, you were responsible for the second payment of 5,000 dollars. As the Controller, I would allow USAID people to choose: K-1 or K-2. There are no rules against which one. But oh, my God—State Department would only allow K-2. With no reason. And so they said no. The choices that I provided made life bearable in places with kids.

*Q: Oh, goodness. Okay. Was ICASS [International Cooperative Administrative Support Services] in place when we were in Moscow? Or, did that come about later?*

STEIN-OLSON: That was in place in Tanzania. In fact, that's how I knew John Lange so well. I loved it. I loved ICASS. I understood it. I loved the whole cost accounting concept. And I could run circles around the FMO there in terms of, of who pays what, for what and Oh, my God. I remember when Lucretia did my evaluation, John Lange sent her a note saying, Monica is a really good controller, but she needs to take off that green eyeshade sometimes. And then, after the bombing, there was so much press there, and we weren't allowed to talk to them. And so John and I were standing there and the CNN guy came up and asked us what was going on? I go "well, we're having a conversation about a secret undertaking." And John goes, "Yes, we are." And I go, "it's called ICASS." And we were just really being mean. John hated I mean, he loved me, but he hated the fact that I always-

*Q: You always won.*

STEIN-OLSON: I actually loved it. It made a lot of sense. But that doesn't mean I believed in combining services. I was the ICASS chair. I was the ICASS chair and I got a lot of kudos from the inner agency on that. The previous EXO fought with the embassy. And I always believed you have to work together.

*Q: Yes, I was going to ask the degree to which you had much interagency contact while serving as controller? Even from your controller seat, you had a lot of interagency contact?*

STEIN-OLSON: And I built relationships with the deputy FMO. I can't remember her name, but she was somebody I had a lot of contact with.

*Q: Okay. That's very good. And so after two years as controller, you then moved up to become the deputy mission director. And I guess the first question is are there any difficulties in moving up within a mission to take on that broader role? Were there any special challenges associated with that? Or was it all quite smooth?*

STEIN-OLSON: Yes. I think it was well received by the team. After two years as the controller, I had great relationships with all the office directors. And I can't think of one person that gave me a hard time about it. I think everybody was very respectful.

*Q: Good. I was just curious if there were any lessons learned on that front. From that time, just for the record, I was there for one more year as mission director. And then Terry Meyers came in as the new mission director. Are there specific parts of the program that you got more heavily involved with or specific issues, either during the time I was there or the time that Terry was there that you'd like to talk about?*

STEIN-OLSON: Sure. Yes. No, I mean, I think when you were there, we experienced 9/11 together. I mean, we all remember where we were that day, and we were in the Russian mission. You gave a talk the next day?

*Q: No, I was actually out of town. I was in Bulgaria at a meeting. We had something when I got back, yes.*

STEIN-OLSON: I do remember we had something when you got back.

*Q: Well, that was in fact, because you had suggested that there be something, that the mission needed to come together and talk about what had happened.*

STEIN-OLSON: Yes. You remember that.

*Q: The outpouring of sympathy from the Russians was extraordinary. Flowers outside the embassy. Maybe you could talk a little bit about what that was like for all of you in the embassy?*

STEIN-OLSON: It was a scary time. And I do remember I had pictures of all of the flowers outside of the embassy. I remember Patrick, our judicial reform expert, called me into his office and the plane had just hit the first tower. And he and I watched it together. I'll never forget that. But I think we were all in shock. Everybody was in shock. And I don't really remember just numbness and then when you got back, you held a meeting

and then Susan asked me to talk about the East Africa bombings. And we experienced a lot of terrorism during my tour there with the Moscow theater. Were you there?

*Q: No, but I had come back as a visitor when the horrible school shooting took place on the first day of school. You all had a special meeting at the mission at that time.*

STEIN-OLSON: Oh, yes, that's right. That was Breslin. Yes, there was a lot. There was a lot happening at the time with Chechnya that we had the invasion of Iraq. You were there for that, right?

*Q: Yes.*

STEIN-OLSON: 2003. Okay. I became the deputy. And then that meant that I started serving on the PIO [Public Information Officer] the public affairs committee. As we figured out Ambassador Vershbow's monthly visits to the field. And that was so much fun, because that way I learned the programs. And I had a lot of great ideas. I sent him to a Gulag. I don't know if you went on that trip, where they went on the Gulag with and had a roundtable with all the human rights activists. And you might have been.

*Q: I think I was. I have a picture of myself in snow with fences and a very austere building.*

STEIN-OLSON: Barbed wire. Yes. And then I remember, I mean, I used to be able to add stuff, like HIV AIDS Day. And I said, Oh, the Ambassador has to go to one of our health programs because we had PEPFAR then. And there was an HIV AIDS interagency working group that everybody was involved in. And then I remember, I had Vershbow go out to a pub. And he played the saxophone?

*Q: He played the drums.*

STEIN-OLSON: Okay, so he went to a youth club, and played the drums on HIV AIDS Day. So things like that. I mean, it was so fun to be part of. And then as a deputy, I got very involved in the public private partnerships.

*Q: Right, because the Global Development Alliance had recently started. While I was still there, folks from Washington came to do a training program. Eurasia Foundation had also done a lot of work on partnerships, so we invited them to participate. Do you recall any of the partnerships the mission ended up creating?*

STEIN-OLSON: We had a lot of small ones. I'd have to go back and look, but I know that. I mean, after the training. We put together a partners meeting. Steve Schmida came and somebody from Open Russia Society, the organization created by Mikhail Khodorkovsky of Yukos Oil. We talked about our program and where there were intersections. It was successful. And then we signed an agreement with Khordokovsky. Susan and I went to talk more to open society about the program and Susan of course said

I want six million dollars to match our grant. And then we had the signing where you were there and was it Vershbow?

*Q: Yes.*

STEIN-OLSON: And Misha? And Irina Yasina, the head of Open Russia. Do you remember her?

*Q: Yes.*

STEIN-OLSON: Okay. Yes, no, but that was so exciting. And then of course, what a week later, he was arrested. And we never got the money. I mean, that's secondary and was sad that he went to-

*Q: He was in jail for ten years, or something.*

STEIN-OLSON: God, it's so horrible. I think the other thing that I did for \_\_ I traveled out to Sakhalin Island and met with the oil companies, but I don't remember anything really happening with them. I think we wanted something big. And it didn't happen. When I was there anyway, but we had Denise Korepanov and he became an agency leader on putting together the partnerships.

*Q: Good. In fact, you had talked about the skills of the FSN staff and the controller's office, but that was across the board in the mission.*

STEIN-OLSON: It was across the board. Part of this was HIV/AIDS Working Group. MiraMed remember MiraMed?

*Q: Yes. That'd be good to talk about because that was a big controversy.*

STEIN-OLSON: It was huge. And Kent Hill was right in the middle of it. And Sandy Vershbow. Miramed submitted an unsolicited proposal that wasn't very good, but Kent Hill was pushing it along with John Miller, a political from State Department, everybody was pushing it. And then Sandy Vershbow was so balanced and he asked that we do a review of it and of course, it had a bunch of holes in it and it didn't make sense to fund it. It just was a lot of overlap, I think from what I remember.

*Q: This was a proposal to do something related to the HIV AIDS working group?*

STEIN-OLSON: Just like safe houses or hotlines. It was stuff that was already being done or that things that were not sustainable, I don't remember. But it had a bunch of holes in it. And it would have been a waste of taxpayers' funds. So Sandy Vershbow asked, I don't know if he asked me directly, I doubt it. But somebody asked me to write up a dissent cable on it and I did that. I became runner up for AFSA dissent award that year for my cable into Washington.

*Q: I saw on your CV that you had that recognition. So that was a dissent that you had done in Moscow?*

STEIN-OLSON: And at the request of, yes, the request of Vershbow.

*Q: Because the mission was required then to fund the Miramed project, even though the mission didn't want to do it. So that's what the dissent was? As I recall, there was a broader controversy and the mission was under fire from some very conservative religious groups in the U.S about its HIV AIDS program and allegations about supporting prostitution. Was the Miramed proposal somehow related to those accusations?*

STEIN-OLSON: Absolutely. Absolutely. Yes. Juliette Engle was the head of it. And she was part of a right-wing group. And I think she used to pick up brochures from our programs accusing us of promoting the pretty women syndrome where we promoted women to become prostitutes because we showed them prostitutes were glamorous and beautiful from those brochures.

*Q: Right because these were brochures to try to help women get protection if they were going to be in the sex industry, right?*

STEIN-OLSON: Yes, exactly. And then Kent Hill [USAID Assistant Administrator for Europe and Eurasia] became kind of a foil in all of this too because once, we got an email from MiraMed but on the bottom you could tell it was Kent Hill that had drafted it. Things like that. It got ugly. Another time, I traveled with Kent and we had lunch with Juliet Engle. And he was talking to Juliet, and he gave me money to pay for lunch, but it wasn't enough. I just sat there like, I didn't know what to do. Kent was so important. And I was afraid to ask him for more money. But he had a lot more than I did!

*Q: You bore the brunt of that lunch?*

STEIN-OLSON: Yes, that's exactly one of the many sacrifices I made. No, it was good. Kent, he was a kind person. He had his views.

*Q: Right. One other unique aspect of the Europe Eurasia program was the coordinators office. Could you talk a little bit about how that worked in Russia with the State Department coordinators, both from Washington and then in the embassy as well?*

STEIN-OLSON: Okay. So Bill Taylor was the coordinator for the Freedom Support Act (FSA) funding. They would come out annually and then we would have a big meeting where everybody would present their programs and that they were requesting funding for and I mean, it was pretty—I can't remember if the embassy must have been involved, but I can't really remember but—

*Q: Representative in the Econ office, right. Pamela Spratlen I think was the coordinator.*

STEIN-OLSON: That's right. She was Aid coordinator. And I think we would present programs that were on the chopping block. I remember one time Susan started crying when her Partnership Program was on the block. And anyway, I think she saved it through her tears, but it was non-controversial in any way. They wanted certain things funded, but I think pretty much they wanted it to make development sense. I think Bill Taylor was really very good at that. And very respectful of USAID. That was before [MEPI] [Middle East Partnership Initiative], I think, yes, that was before MEPI.

*Q: One of the things I know that the mission got involved with after I left more direct work in the northern Caucasus. Was that something that you were involved in? Can you tell us anything about that?*

STEIN-OLSON: All I remember is that when Terry Myers was the director, he asked me to come up with three one-page proposals. One was for work in the Northern Caucasus, working with civil society. There were two other ones too that work. But they were very small, seed programs. And I went with Terry because I always went with you, you or Terry, to weekly meetings with John Byerly the DCM. At this meeting where Terry presented the one-pagers, Vershbow had been there. And they weren't comfortable with it, but they gave them the okay and then that was right before I left.

*Q: Okay. Anything else on Russia to mention right now? If not, we could talk about how the transition took place to your next assignment, which was obviously a really very exciting one.*

STEIN-OLSON: I think when it was time to bid, I started getting emails on MD openings. When Morocco came through, I asked Terry to support me for the position.

### **USAID/Morocco, Mission Director, 2004 - 2009**

*Q: You then left Moscow in 2004 to become the mission director in Morocco. Can you tell us a bit about the program and mission?*

STEIN-OLSON: I was the first woman Mission director in Morocco, after fifty years, fifty years. I went for a visit before the current mission director left, Jim Bednar. And the big joke when I met the ambassador and the country team the day I got off the plane in seventy degree weather, I was wearing an oversized winter coat. So 2004, yes, but that was my first contact with a political Ambassador, which was very different. And so my first meeting with him was an introduction, which I thought was going to be Hi, I'm Monica blah, blah, blah. It was two and a half hours of him telling me what was wrong with USAID. He was George Bush's roommate in college, Tom Riley came from Cisco. And he had tried and tried and tried for decades to try to get government contracting and never could. And so he ended up wanting to be on our tech committees. And that was my first six months, and I really was a wreck. I had a very, very tough time. And I thought of curtailing and the DCM was not helpful. A lot of State people did not like USAID

because we talked about being there for long term development rather than short term policy goals linked to short-term election cycles. It was so painful.

*Q: Did you see value to any of the things that he was suggesting that needed perhaps some change? Or was everything as outrageous as him sitting on a technical review?*

STEIN-OLSON: You know what it is? And I don't want to bash anybody, but it depends on the mission director too. I mean, it depends on a lot of things because it depends on if the USAID mission wants to work with the embassy. This was the time of MEPI and the previous mission director did not want to take on the MEPI programs and manage them because they that—

*Q: And that was the Middle East Partnership Initiative that was started by Liz Cheney. Right?*

STEIN-OLSON: Yes. Liz Cheney. A bit of history: The mission staff had been cut in half. We only had three direct hires at the time. It was me, the EXO and economic growth officer. And then the DG officer was a PSC. And this is another example of where I got him converted to FSO Limited status. I sent him to Afghanistan where he became a direct hire.

So they didn't have the capacity. It had been on the graduation list, they cut staff. And then AA Wendy Sherman went out there and said, Oh, my God, there's like a 98 percent illiteracy rate. We've got to turn this around. They reopened the mission, gave them a ton of money for education, and we didn't have the staff to manage MEPI. It was right at the very beginning of our strategy. We had an education program. We had an economic growth program, a democracy and governance program. And then Phyllis Dictor Forbes came out under the education program and she took me aside and she said, listen, whatever you do, you get along with that ambassador.

So I did. I loved being a mission director and my team became my best friends. Mark Parkison was my democracy officer and Dana Mansuri was there too. And they were all rooting for me. They could see that I was very distraught over this ambassador. And so Mark gave me great advice: every time we meet with the DCM, you take this with you. And it was a picture of an Academy Award. I started to agree to the MEPI programs. I mean, and I wanted, I didn't have any problem with the MEPI programs, but I said, I need more staff. And I started doing all of this analysis. And I only needed three additional FSN bodies.

And so my team rallied around me and made me successful. And luckily, I was successful, because I was there for five years. And Tom Riley was also there for five years. And we're still friends, we're really great friends, actually. And I ended up making him front and center. The previous mission director had been close friends with the prime minister who had been a participant training guy. And I mean, he was close with USAID, the former prime minister. And so my ambassador wanted to be front and center and that was fine with me, because I didn't care. I just wanted to do a good job.

I held a fifty year review of our portfolio, which I involved the ambassador in every single step. And showed him how USAID assistance has evolved from basic human needs to sophisticated technical assistance and agrarian reform, things like that, and how we had graduated the country out of our health programs, and how much we'd reduced maternal morbidity. And then I had a huge gala event that included the princess I mean, it was I mean, it's a kingdom, Morocco is a kingdom. I had the ambassador, upfront speaking at the fifty-year anniversary of USAID programs in Morocco along with me. He just loved that. I had him in the field every week. I just decided this is what I had to do. Actually, it was fine. It wasn't about me, it was about our program. And I had the Ambassador front center of everything and he gave me the staff, he approved the staff from MEPI programming. And Alina Romanowski came out and was so thrilled.

*Q: And what position was she in at that point?*

STEIN-OLSON: She was head of MEPI in Washington.

*Q: Okay. What kind of programs are you doing? Were those all democracy, sort of related programs*

STEIN-OLSON: Yes, they were all DG kind of programs. I got three more positions—program funded. That was a tough first year. And then, I became more comfortable speaking French and doing interviews but I just made sure the ambassador was out front for everything, all of our education, our program launched because that's when we started doing our program launches. I mean, we had our strategy down, we started awarding contracts, but we only had three big contracts. I mean, because we were so small staffed, and I had to explain to the ambassador how—I finally got him to back off on being on our tech committees. I had Washington, Jim AA Middle East Bureau. He was a political appointee. He was really good—white hair.

*Q: Not Jim Kunder?*

STEIN-OLSON: Yes. Jim Kunder. Jim Kunder came out and talked with the ambassador. But with me—

*Q: That sounds like good advice for any mission director. You have to make the relationship work and find out what the ambassador's priorities are and then help to feed those priorities.*

STEIN-OLSON: Oh my God. Yes, every document I wrote, even in my evaluation, I go under the Ambassador supervision, I blah, blah, blah. He loved it because his ego was huge. But that was okay because he helped me become successful. And in the end the DCM [Deputy Chief of Mission], and I became really good friends, even though it was so ugly in the beginning. And I just couldn't believe that I had gotten thrown into this. Dave McCloud was the DAA at the time, and he was so helpful. I even remember when the



Ambassador did not want to allow a NEP [Newly Employed Professional]. USAID was putting people out into the field for training positions.

*Q: The new hires they were creating training positions for? The embassy wouldn't give you an NSDD thirty-eight [NSDD-38: Staffing at Diplomatic Missions and Their Overseas Constituent Posts] approval?*

STEIN-OLSON: But I mean, I convinced them too, finally. I said, they're going to pay for her out of Washington. I interviewed Miriam Onivogui and then she became the F person because that's when Tobias had come in and merged PPL into F. And Miriam became the F point person. She was so talented and impressive. And so the ambassador loved her. It worked out.

*Q: What are the other big things that the mission worked on and took big pieces of your time? Was the MCC, the Millennium Challenge Corporation, also trying to develop a program in Morocco during this time, and were you involved at all in that?*

STEIN-OLSON: I was heavily involved. We actually ended up leasing an office to our MCC colleague. USAID had all of the experience and the trust of the country. But the problem was the Embassy wanted the lead. That part was ugly. Because if they were giving seven hundred million dollars to Morocco.

Morocco was the first Muslim country, Morocco, but the ambassador was salivating over all of this money. And he made it all about tree planting and there were just so many holes in the strategy. But it ended up happening even though I had written my viewpoint, to David McLeod and Andrew Natsios. But it went through. It wasn't that successful; it was seven hundred million dollars, for trees. It's scary because the MCC didn't have the knowledge. But my people worked on it. Once, at a mission directors conference, I said to Andrew Natsios, that I was working with MCC because we're one U.S government. He responded, "You don't believe that, do you?" But I was friends with the MCC lead, Munira, who had been a USAID officer. The one thing that I really elevated in Morocco was our relationship with AFRICOM [United States Africa Command], and I was always in Stuttgart meeting with the four star. That's where I met Chris Stevens. He was very interested in USAID.

*Q: What prompted you to start going to AFRICOM? And can you explain a little bit more about how that relationship developed? Did they come to Morocco to talk and then you developed a relationship with them?*

STEIN-OLSON: I think he had a regional meeting. Probably of ambassadors and then on development. For some reason the ambassador sent me. I don't remember why. Because Chris Stevens was there from Libya and there were some other people from the region. I talked about private partnerships with AFRICOM because they had money. I was always trying to get more money. I invited AFRICOM people down and gave them a presentation on our programs to see where there were intersections, what they would be

interested in working on. And then the new organization in Washington headed by Ambassador Herbst, the one that Susan was working on, I think.

*Q: Conflict, Reconstruction, and Stabilization (CRS) office*

STEIN-OLSON: Yes, they had given AFRICOM five million dollars for countering terrorism programs through a funding mechanism called the Trans Saharan Counter Terrorism Program (TSCTP) And I wanted that money so bad. My staff, and I brainstormed, and we came up with a brilliant idea. Basically it was preventing young people from going to jail.

CRS was interested in prison work. There's a huge problem in Morocco, where young kids are picked up for petty theft, they're thrown into prison, but they're thrown in with radicals, so they're radicalized when they get out. We wanted to keep kids out of prison. We came up with a youth program and I don't know how many times I pitched it. I pitched it so many times. And Ambassador Herbst sent me a note saying, this is a great program, and we're gonna fund it, and so AFRICOM and I became partners. It was so exciting, because, I mean, it was something I totally believed in. It was so exciting. I went up to AFRICOM and pitched it. The four-star and I pitched it together to Ambassador Herbst, the head of CRS. That's what happened. And then he approved it. And that was before I left. So that was my legacy—the youth prison program. We got a lot of kudos.

*Q: Good, that's, that's very innovative and creative.*

STEIN-OLSON: I loved working with the military. It was new for us. This is before Afghanistan and yes, I got five million dollars for a youth program. That's when I started really focusing on youth.

*Q: That's good. Were there other parts of the program that you'd like to mention and anything that you particularly were enamored with?*

STEIN-OLSON: I think, certainly vocational training. I mean, the education program was so important. I always believed that education was the foundation of development in Morocco. I mean, there was so much illiteracy.

*Q: Was this all cast as programs to confront terrorism? Was that the rationale?*

STEIN-OLSON: Yes, exactly. I pitched another youth program to MEPI in Washington for funding to fight terrorism, for one million dollars. There were youth centers throughout the country for some reason our education assessment had missed a target where we could have a lot of impact. There's hundreds of them throughout the country and we did get MEPI funding. We call it the Dar ShaBaab program. But yes, you're right. It was all about fighting terrorism at the grassroots level— through education.

*Q: Were there other donors there as well? Did you have to spend a lot of time on donor coordination, and particularly with the French because I suspect some of the terrorism is directed towards France?*

STEIN-OLSON: It was right after the Casa Blanca bombing, which was their 9/11. Trying to think of. I mean, let's see. We were obviously the biggest donor.

*Q: We were larger than France or the European Union?*

STEIN-OLSON: Yes, I think so. I'm pretty sure. But I could be wrong. I have to check.

*Q: Since Morocco is a very long-standing USAID mission, you probably had lots of FSNs who had been there for decades. I'm curious if you have any thoughts about the FSNs staff there because I assume again, some of them had been there for many, many years and really knew their way around town.*

STEIN-OLSON: Yes. I remember. Our star FSN worked on economic growth, agriculture. And he ended up leaving to join the Ministry of Agriculture. Like I said, half of the staff had been cut. A lot of them had been there a long time. But I think in Morocco, one of the problems is that the retirement age was at sixty. And so we had a lot of new people. Our Democracy Program was new. So we had new people there. In education, we had a Belgian woman who'd been there forever. We were lean, very lean. And then on the economic growth, again, maybe three or four people, I mean, very small, the big operations were EXO which handled the financial operations.

My last year, I took a victory tour and took people out on field trips, FSNs who had never been out there like the mailroom guy and the deputy XO. It was so emotional. They had never been out to the field in like thirty years or whatever. And they were Moroccans! And then in the end, it was a goodbye.

*Q: That's great considering it was a difficult start. That's a real credit to your management of the relationship.*

STEIN-OLSON: Yes, I was ready to curtail, seriously. I was so unhappy.

*Q: I assume that Morocco was a very good family post and assignment. Were you able to travel around the country with the family? Or were there a lot of security concerns?*

STEIN-OLSON: There was a horrific murder within the diplomatic community, like my second or third year there. We did travel. We traveled. And I traveled a lot by train out to Oujda, which was up on that Mediterranean coast over by Algeria. That was a big hub for our programs. We had our programs in hubs, so that they could all become bigger than their own programs. Those were good.

We just got them doing business, the World Bank was big in Morocco, and we work closely with them when they're doing business initiatives. And so our economic growth

program was tied to that. And they moved up on the index while I was there over the five years. It was great.

*Q: Now, the program there has ebbed and flowed over time. There have been multiple decisions to close the mission; then they decide to increase the program. It's been very cyclical. When you left, was there any discussion of graduation or did they abandon that thought?*

STEIN-OLSON: They had abandoned that thought. And the education requirements there are so significant. I mean, the illiteracy rate is unbelievably high. 98 percent. It's just unbelievable.

*Q: And is that because— is there a nomadic population? Is that why? Or is the development we see in photos only in the cities?*

STEIN-OLSON: Yes, only in the cities. The education system is so weak. I think part of it is just the language too. The Moroccan language is an oral language. And so it's not written. And I think that was part of our program where we used alliteration for people to start understanding each other in terms of writing.

*Q: I didn't know that. I guess you're by definition illiterate if the language isn't written.*

STEIN-OLSON: Exactly. And so that's what our education program focused on. It also takes Moroccans who are committed and there's a lot a lot of corruption everywhere and people change positions. And then once you have someone that's committed to the program, they move on to something else. It's hard.

*Q: Were you doing any anti-corruption programming?*

STEIN-OLSON: No, we did mostly political platform building through NDI and IRI.

*Q: Well, it sounds like by the time you left, everything was moving smoothly. There was a good relationship with the embassy, so your successor had a much easier job.*

STEIN-OLSON: John Groarke. Yes, he did. And it was time for a new strategy. It was really wonderful to see the beginning of a strategy and see the end of it. It was a five year strategy. It was great.

*Q: And had the strategy been developed before you got there, so your job was to figure out how to implement it and fine tune it?*

STEIN-OLSON: Yes, exactly.

*Q: There was no temptation to redo the strategy?*

STEIN-OLSON: No, but I have to do— have to tell you the one thing that the ambassador loved about me and how I won him over. Probably over the first year, I changed every Chief of Party on our program.

*Q: How did you go about doing that? Is that just working with the contractors to do it? Or did you take stronger actions?*

STEIN-OLSON: Well, I would, I mean, we knew come on x. We would just make a call to Washington and say, this is not the right person. Yes.

*Q: Okay. So it was done in a friendly way.*

STEIN-OLSON: Yes, the ambassador loved that. At our annual mission retreat, the ambassador came over and said, "Monica has no problem making waves."

*Q: Yes, so if you had all bad Chiefs of Party in your program, maybe there was a reason the ambassador wanted to be on the selection committees?*

STEIN-OLSON: Yes, but this was before they were all put in place. I mean, this is right when I first got there that I mean, they hadn't even been selected yet.

*Q: Okay. Anything else on Morocco? We've talked about the relationships with Washington, we talked about the embassy relationships, we've talked about some of the major parts of the program. Were there any special challenges working in an Islamic country as a woman Mission Director?*

STEIN-OLSON: People had warned me that the Moroccans would have problems with me, but no, there was no problem whatsoever. No, in fact, I remember I had a party at my house once and the Minister of Finance—people, they embraced me. It was fine. It was easy. I don't think there were any female ministers in Morocco.

*Q: We'd spoken earlier that you had learned Arabic during your earlier travels, were you able to use any Arabic while you were in Morocco?*

STEIN-OLSON: Yes, and I took Arabic class, too.

*Q: So, the educated elite would be speaking Arabic or French? What would have been their primary language?*

STEIN-OLSON: French.

*Q: When you had government meetings, they were usually in French?*

STEIN-OLSON: Yes. Always in French. That was a bit of a struggle. I mean, it's hard. I only have a three-three in French. And so when it was my turn to speak, I was just a little bit better than the Japanese speaking French. That part's hard. I mean, I was not fluent.

*Q: Did you have a FSN staff member that was with you on key meetings if you had to make sure that the message was absolutely clear? Did you have someone else with you who could perhaps add to what you said if need be?*

STEIN-OLSON: Always, always. Absolutely. Always.

*Q: Did you have an interpreter or was just someone substantively in the staff?*

STEIN-OLSON: An FSN team member. My democracy officer who I've talked about was fluent in Darija. So his wife is Moroccan. He was a Peace Corps volunteer there. So he often went with me to meetings. The staff was very good. They were the elite.

*Q: Did the ambassador have French?*

STEIN-OLSON: Yes he had French. And like I said, we became really very close. In fact, I just heard from him but a week ago, he retired to Palm Springs.

*Q: He left Cisco, Texas for Palm Springs?*

STEIN-OLSON: He was in Cisco in the Bay Area, Silicon Valley.

*Q: I see, the company, Cisco. I had thought since he was a friend of President Bush that he was Texas.*

STEIN-OLSON: Company, Cisco had a lot of relationships with the administration. We had a lot of people from Cisco.

*Q: Okay. Anything else on Morocco that we should cover?*

STEIN-OLSON: Morocco. I mentioned that my legacy was the prison program.

*Q: And you obviously had a lot of experiences, which then you built on as you move forward with your career. Your work with AFRICOM I suspect was a contributing factor to your next assignment. Is that correct? When you left, you went to the war college as a faculty member. Did your work with AFRICOM stimulate the interest?*

STEIN-OLSON: No, what happened was, my daughter was suffering from some mental health issues. And I had been asked to head up HR from Washington. And I said that I needed something where I have more balance in my life. And so that's what I would really like to do would be a student at the War College. Remember, Susan? When I was assigned as a professor, I'm like, Oh, my God!

*Q: Okay. Well, I mean, that shows a plus for USAID human resources function that they recognize when people need to have a job that provides a little more relaxed format to deal with family stuff.*

STEIN-OLSON: Yes, exactly. It was perfect,

**National Defense University/War College, Faculty, 2009 - 2011**

*Q: Why don't we cover a little bit of war college and then we'll finish up for today? So, this takes you back to your ROTC days now. Did you have memories of ROTC the first day you walked on the war college campus?*

STEIN-OLSON: No. I was so immature then. I felt like I was Loretta Swit? from M\*A\*S\*H when I was in college, from Korea, you remember M\*A\*S\*H?

*Q: Yes, I do. Anyway, so you go to the War College. And what is that like to suddenly arrive there and be told you're going to be teaching? How did you get oriented? Sounds overwhelming to me.*

STEIN-OLSON: Yes. No, it was so exciting. And I think I took over from Andy Sisson. And I got there, right at orientation. It's a two week orientation they give you and people are so nice. They really respect USAID. And you get a mentor to help you along the way about what you're supposed to be doing. Then classes start, and then you sit through the first class to see what it's like. There's six classes throughout the year. You sit through the first class on the introduction to strategy. Basically, it's an interagency group with the military that learns strategic thinking and you have to come up with a strategic plan for your oral exam at the very end.

*Q: And a student can choose anything to do a strategic plan on?*

STEIN-OLSON: No, I don't think so.

*Q: Let me just go back to the orientation. In that orientation, they tried to teach the civilians about who's who in the military? Or, is it orientation on teaching?*

STEIN-OLSON: Teaching but also to give you your own rank. Like, they crosswalk our ranks to the military ranks so everybody knows, it's still a hierarchy system. Fred Scheck was there; he was my USAID chair, and he used to copy all my assignments.

*Q: What they do is tell you you're a general or something like that. I assume the military needs to know your rank.*

STEIN-OLSON: Yes, I guess so. I remember, once I went on a trip and I got to ride in the two star general plane for some reason. AFRICOM is very focused on rank. Very focused. Everybody knows their rank—everybody's ranks.

They also gave me overviews of the different courses and what I would be teaching.

*Q: Okay. And basically, it's a seminar approach. And it's more of a facilitator role than it is a teaching role?*

STEIN-OLSON: Giant book club. I loved it. Yes, it's a facilitation. But you have to grade papers, and all the students want to get your anecdotes on your own experiences, too, as a development officer too. I mean, these are interesting because at least half of the group were from Afghanistan and Iraq. There were a lot of people suffering from PTSD.

*Q: Is that something that was discussed openly among the students?*

STEIN-OLSON: No. Never.

*Q: Discussed among the faculty in that you might have recognized that some of the students might be suffering from this?*

STEIN-OLSON: Never.

*Q: Never. So, it was just obvious but not dealt with.*

STEIN-OLSON: Never dealt with.

*Q: And the classes were a mix of civilian and military, but was there usually a majority of military in every class or was it evenly split?*

STEIN-OLSON: I would say it's probably the majority of military but it also included foreign military. Like Japanese, there was an Iraqi general in one of my classes, and there was a Canadian. That was in my class, who I loved. And it was mostly, there were female military which was nice. And then I think, yes, I think the majority was military.

*Q: The first class you taught you said was one on strategy?*

STEIN-OLSON: The first one I sat through. You sit through the first one, and then you're assigned to one of the sort of the facilitator, you sit there and just kind of watch what he or she does.

*Q: Does that mean the first semester you're not actually teaching? You're observing and learning?*

STEIN-OLSON: Exactly. Yes.

*Q: Were there other classes you were observing?*

STEIN-OLSON: Yes, I was observing on the Africa elective because I was going to be teaching that the next semester.

*Q: Okay. Who was teaching the African elective when you sat in?*



STEIN-OLSON: It was David Dunn. He was actually the DCM when I first moved to Tanzania. So I knew him really well. Okay. And then he ended up going to Zambia. But he was the Deputy Commandant at the War College.

*Q: Okay, so he moved up from faculty to Deputy Commandant.*

STEIN-OLSON: I don't know if he was ever faculty, but I know that he was Deputy Commandant. And he taught the special elective. I don't know if he was teaching. He's taught a special elective.

*Q: Special elective on Africa. I assume there'd be a difference between the curriculum and the focus of a seminar led by a State Department person versus an AID person.*

STEIN-OLSON: Absolutely, because I remember with my own class, I had sessions on economic development ( education, economic growth, HIV AIDS). I had all the different development challenges covered. The previous State Department prof taught more political sessions. Mine were very different. And then I had different books to read. I had a film class. I really went for it.

*Q: I'm sure that you and the students were having great fun.*

SAT STEIN-OLSON: We're having great fun. I was voted Teacher of the Year there that my first year.

*Q: Wow. Is that the first time anyone from USAID has gotten that distinction?*

STEIN-OLSON: I have no idea. But all I do know is that my first year there, I was the first professor that did not pass a student ever.

*Q: You didn't pass a student?*

STEIN-OLSON: Well, they did such a shitty job. I just said to the commandant that I can't do it. I'm sorry. They let him—somebody else gave him the exam after I did it. I mean, yes, I just couldn't do it.

*Q: That's good. Was it someone who just didn't try?*

STEIN-OLSON: Yes. Oh, yes. It was somebody that did a really shitty job. I mean, don't use that. I won't use that word.

*Q: Right. Did you find any differences among the services?*

STEIN-OLSON: I have to tell you that my favorite service was the Navy SEALs. I remember graduation, the Navy SEALs would pick me up and twirl me. They were so fun. And then we took two trips out to Africa.

*Q: Could you tell us about the trips you took to Africa? Where did you go? And what kinds of things did you focus on during those trips?*

STEIN-OLSON: I remember one year we went to Tanzania and Zambia and Rwanda. Another year was Kenya, one year was Tanzania. But they were both to Africa. For Rwanda we had—and of course, I was the only woman on the trip. I had led these six guys. They were almost all military. And they doled out the Ambien on the trip. I'd never taken Ambien before. But it was great to go to South Africa. And we met with Paul Kagame in Rwanda for two and a half hours, which was the highlight of both trips—the opportunity to talk to a leader that had pulled his country together and overcome the ethnic conflict. Especially after I'd already worked there, and to meet Paul Kagame for over two hours.

*Q: That's really quite something. He was former military himself. Did anyone ask him any tough questions about human rights or any of those kinds of issues?*

STEIN-OLSON: I think he did most of the talking really. Probably not.

*Q: In talking about Africa, were there ever any issues that came up that might have presented serious differences of opinion between the civilians and the military? Or were people just open to learning and they didn't have any—*

STEIN-OLSON: People were open to learning, and they'd never been to Africa before. I think that's what it is. There were almost all military on my team. I don't remember any civilians but maybe. But no, there were no differences. But the Navy SEALs would be out all night long. They would go out and be back in time for morning meetings.

*Q: I hope you gave them some counsel on this trip, so they didn't get themselves in serious lifetime difficulties.*

STEIN-OLSON: I don't judge. I don't know. But yes.

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*Q: Okay, today is June 11th, 2024. This is interview number three, with Monica Stein-Olson. Monica, when we finished up last time you were at the National War College as a faculty member, and you were about to conclude those two years. Any final thoughts on that experience or the importance of USAID [United States Agency of International Development] and participation in the National War College activities?*

STEIN-OLSON: Well, to answer your first one, I think it's essential that we participate in the National War College. You must have the right people there, though. Because the military doesn't really understand our soft power, what we really do, a lot of them think

of us as a big giant charity. It was fulfilling to talk about how we work outside the wire with them, partner with them, and explain the work that we do. Especially now that we're working in CPCs and non-permissive environments. We were working alongside the military, so it was very helpful for them to understand what we did and the value that we added.

*Q: Can you define the right people to go to the War College? Are there certain skills or types of people or personalities that are needed? Or the converse: who are the wrong people?*

STEIN-OLSON: —Yes, I mean, that's a good question. Sometimes, the best people are put in senior leadership positions in Washington, the corporate headquarters, but sometimes it's necessary to let these people do crossover assignments, over at the State Department, or at the NSC [National Security Council], or the War College. I think it's good to send the best people rather than the B team. But maybe I was part of the B team, which is fine.

*Q: You were in between assignments. And so it was convenient to send you, but you're saying they should be more proactive in identifying people to be either students or faculty?*

STEIN-OLSON: As either a professor or student, having that as part of a career path, because it would be great if everybody had the opportunity to go that had been identified as a leader. I don't know how the workforce planning works in terms of the senior leadership, I really don't know how that works. But I think it's important. You need to know how to manage the inter-agency. Part of that is either teaching at the War College or being a student at the War College, because those are your peers and that's who you move up with. It was incredibly helpful for the rest of my career. It's almost like the War College was sort of a pivot - going from Morocco, to the War College, and then all of a sudden, I'm starting to work with people with PTSD [Post-traumatic Stress Disorder], the military, non-permissive environments. Then working with my next position as the DAA [Deputy Assistant Administrator] for management, it's so important to know how to work in the interagency.

*Q: That's important. That's a good lesson for AID to be more proactive in identifying those activities for its best performers.*

STEIN-OLSON: In terms of long-term career path. I didn't have one anyway, I just kind of got lucky or had mentors.

*Q: —That's probably true for most people. It's a lot of luck involved.*

STEIN-OLSON: Yes, exactly.

*Q: So, you did the War College faculty for two years. Then, you went into the Deputy Assistant Administrator position in the Management Bureau—*

STEIN-OLSON: I was recruited.

*Q: —Okay, to go in, why don't you talk about that a little bit? From that, you moved into working on Middle Eastern issues, and then for the rest of your career, you were working on Middle Eastern issues. And those are obviously really important, but if you have anything to say about the Experience Management Bureau, that would be great.*

**AID/Washington, Management Bureau, Deputy Assistant Administrator, 2011 - 2012**

STEIN-OLSON: Yes, I was recruited by Sean Carroll, who was the A/A [Assistant Secretary for Administration] from the Management Bureau. Another lesson learned is that I had no experience working with politicals. I didn't have any kind of oversight or mentorship, either. I didn't know what that involved. But anyway, that's just a point when I look back at my career, but I was the Senior Foreign Service in the Management Bureau in the front office—

*Q: And you were the only Foreign Service person there in the front office, right?*

STEIN-OLSON: Yes, exactly. The DAA [Deputy Assistant Administrator]. My portfolio included OFM [Office of Financial Management]. Finally, Dave Ostermeier worked for me, he's the one that recruited me in the beginning. I was also in charge of all overseas operations, including security. So, I did quite a bit of travel to the CPCs, as we were building our new embassies, and made sure that the equities for USAID [United States Agency for International Development] were protected. It was also a time when there was a lot of discussion of consolidation. I worked closely with Pat Kennedy's office, and I also represented USAID, the interagency ICASS [International Cooperative Administration Support Services] Committee.

*Q: That must have been fun.*

STEIN-OLSON: I love that stuff. I was a good Administrative Officer. I'm very operational, so I think that's one thing that helped me with my career was having that background, the EXO background, because I often was acting EXO in my previous positions. But Pat Kennedy listened to me, in fact, he allowed me to put in Steve Callahan Senior EXO into his office as one of his deputies. I called Steve, the state whisperer. I would send him in to talk to Pat about certain things, and there were a lot of results based on that. One of them was about the passports for the OTI [Office of Transition Initiatives] people, where the State Department had declared that they were going on official passports, and they wanted to be on diplomatic passports. I made the case to Pat, and boom; it was done. I mean, so things like that, it's all based on relationships.

*Q: Was Steve the first USAID Executive Officer to be assigned over to State like that?*

STEIN-OLSON: Headquarters.

*Q: In Headquarters—Yes, right.*

STEIN-OLSON: Yes. Be honest, I think they needed somebody. They needed a body, and it was perfect timing. He loved it. I loved it. Pat loved it. It was super helpful to know that we had that communication link.

*Q: Did that position continue? Or was it just embodied in Steve?*

STEIN-OLSON: No, unfortunately. Again, I think it just happened to be a key vacancy that they wanted to fill. They knew Steve, because he did crossover assignments in Peru or something like that. He was the right person at the right time.

*Q: If AID could manage to do that more frequently, it would be to their advantage, correct?*

STEIN-OLSON: Oh, absolutely! Because we make decisions based on relationships a lot of times, in the end, we didn't consolidate. There were a lot of battles out in the field. And that's why I traveled a lot. There were battles to consolidate motor pools and travel. And in some places, it made sense to consolidate. One of the biggest ones was consolidating HR. And that never happened. But it was, again, a meeting with the Undersecretary for Management. You have to make the case, you have to have the numbers. Pat can get into the weeds and which is okay, I actually really liked him. He wasn't the best friend of USAID, but I could talk to him anytime I wanted to.

*Q: Okay, that's good.*

STEIN-OLSON: There was a joint management board too. I can't remember exactly what the details were, but I served on that. It was about consolidation. We had monthly meetings, but they had to do with ICASS [International Cooperative Administration Support Services]. I traveled a lot. For example, they were building a new embassy in Pakistan and the mission director called me. My team and I— I didn't have a team—but I could go down to the EXOs, in the basement where Gary Nagle was in charge of OBO [Overseas Buildings Operation]. I could just pick, and I could say, "Who wants to help me?" They would just come upstairs.

*Q: Did anything to get out of the basement?*

STEIN-OLSON: Exactly. But a couple of those people are Deputy in Pakistan, a woman that I brought out of there, and she became Special Assistant. That reminded me, you asked me how before this, you asked me how controllers and XOs can get more visibility and on mission or how do they do it to the FMFIA [Federal Managers' Financial Integrity Act]. One thing I remembered that gave me so much visibility was the MCRC [Management Control Review Committee]. Remember the Management Control Review Committee that we had at every mission? I used to lead that. It was a big deal, whether in

Russia, Morocco, Tanzania, or the Philippines was when I got my first kind of visibility when I set that up for the first time.

*Q: That might have been the thing I was thinking about earlier, because I remember the first time that I saw it being done. I thought, "Wow, this is an interesting tool because it puts our controller leading the mission and looking at a whole array of issues."*

STEIN-OLSON: Maybe that's what it was. Yes, the FMFIA. it's more of the tactics, where you just gather the information. The MCRC is where you synthesize it and analyze it, and they have one in Washington, too, the Washington MCRC at the agency level. We'll get to that when I talk about NPE [Non-Permissive Environments] because we had material weaknesses. The FMFIA and MCRC are linked.

*Q: That's good. That's important. The mentors for controllers should be reminding them of the importance of that exercise, not only for doing what it needs to do, but also for the professional development of the controller himself or herself.*

STEIN-OLSON: Yes, absolutely.

*Q: Other things about the time being as the Deputy Assistant Administrator in the Management Bureau, you want to talk about?*

STEIN-OLSON: I just know that one thing that we were all focused on was a part of the MCRC at the agency level where everything comes in from the field. You have to track all of that, as you know, at the position level. There was one material weakness that had been festering for about ten years, and it was "USAID can monitor and evaluate programs in non-permissive environments" That's how I got into NPE, but that was what we talked about, how do we close this? So, that was a big issue there.

*Q: I know that in Afghanistan, they ended up developing some very interesting mechanisms to do that.*

STEIN-OLSON: Right.

*Q: And I hadn't realized that had been part of the MCRC.*

STEIN-OLSON: Yes, that's how we got highlighted. It got raised to that agency level. I remembered that it was such a serious issue. I don't remember which mission it came out of, but then we decided to make it a material weakness. Then, what happens is you have to report every single year and you have to come up with an action plan. So, it was fascinating. I closed it as the head of NPE.

*Q: Fantastic. Speaking of that, did your office or your part of the Management Bureau also do liaison with the Inspector General's office?*

STEIN-OLSON: No.

My liaisons were mostly in DS [Bureau of Diplomatic Security] in the Office of Security. I worked hand-in-hand with David Blackshaw on everything I did. In fact, he travelled with me a lot. I know one thing I did as the DAA [Deputy Assistant Administrator], Sean Carroll and I talked about it. Jeff Ashley was the Deputy Director out in Afghanistan, and a grenade had been thrown into the green zone, and it was traumatic. Sean and I talked to him; I said, "Sean, one of us has to go out there, and I did for a few days. I had a town meeting. I talked, and people were so traumatized. I talked about living and working in the CPCs [Country of Particular Concern], and I talked about my own PTSD from my own experience. Some people were crying, and one woman raised her hand; she said, "I didn't sign up for it." And I go, "Well, yes, you did. This is our reality." I spent a few days there; then I remember one of the FSNs [Foreign Service National] told me she didn't know what to do because she had to stay overnight in the green zone, and she was Muslim. Her parents were upset. These are the things we have to make sure we take care of as officers and managers. I asked Jeff to come out for a few days because the Mission Director asked me to do that because he was so traumatized.

People are afraid to make those decisions. That's what I don't understand. It was clear. He was losing it. And I go, "Let's bring you out for a few days." I think he went to Dubai or someplace that was quick and easy, and he thanked me for the gift that I gave him. But he was causing more problems than not for the staff. Had gone through all of that. But that's the stuff I loved to do: see how people were doing and going in and showing that Washington cared about the Americans as well as the FSN staff.

*Q: There were other non-permissive environments, but the two major ones during that time were Iraq and Afghanistan. Did you work with the Management people and those two regional bureaus?*

STEIN-OLSON: I worked a lot with Larry Sampler. He was the DAA and I worked with Dave MacLoud. I never did anything without bringing them in and with the Office of Security. I worked so closely. I probably worked with them every single day. They were my main partners, while I was in the Management Bureau, but Chris Bodle and Dave Blackshaw and then they brought a new guy in to head up the Office of Security. He was a military guy, again that I could easily work with—John Voorhees. We were on the same page. And Dave Blackshaw had so much experience. I worked a lot with OBO [Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations] and Gary Nagle made me look good.

*Q: We may come back to this when we talk about your time leading the task force on working in non-permissive environments. But I've seen in oral histories some people arguing that USAID is too risk-averse, that people do need to stay for more than one year in these difficult environments, that the way it has been structured doesn't allow people to do the work that they're meant to do.*

STEIN-OLSON: I totally agree with that.

*Q: How do you balance trying to get the job done with protecting people as well?*

STEIN-OLSON: We have to. I remember talking to the head of DS, it was a woman, Charlene, that I had known when I was in Tanzania. She was an RSO [Regional Security Officer] there. We talked about what we could do in terms of working together to work outside the wire, and we came up with a plan. Part of it was this training that was put in place where we became involved. It's a requirement now, it's a five day training. Also, when I was head of the NPE, I began giving my spiel at orientation, and it was so well-received because people don't know what they're getting hired for. What's not even just being honest, it's just informing them. It informs them because people are like, "Oh, okay." I think, maybe, that's part of a recruiting effort. I don't really know. We should be working outside the wire if we're going to, but also, if we're not working outside the wire, we need to stay longer in these places.

*Q: Okay, so it's being honest with people upfront at the beginning of their career. Okay. Well, we'll come back to that. You had a good relationship with DS. All these things have to be worked out with them as well.*

STEIN-OLSON: Yes, absolutely. Again, I think the biggest one was the training. When I was DAA, SEC and I brought USAID people out to the border in El Paso and did some training. These are the things that we did. It was necessary, so people know what they're getting into.

*Q: Good thing I retired when I did.*

STEIN-OLSON: [Laughter] Carol, doing hand to hand combat. It's a different agency than when—

*Q: I'm a wimp and afraid of guns.*

STEIN-OLSON: Oh, I see. I was ready to go.

*Q: Okay. Anything else on that? I'm eager to get on to the Middle East.*

STEIN-OLSON: Let's move forward. I was there for one year. Then, I interviewed for this job as Deputy of the Middle East Transition Office over at State [Department of State] headed by Bill Taylor, our infamous coordinator for Freedom Support Act Funds that we knew in Russia. I got it, so I was thrilled. I just walked over one day, and that was it.

**State Department/Deputy Special Coordinator for Middle East Assistance, 2012 - 2013**

*Q: That's the coordinator's office and was it for all assistance going into the Middle East. Was that in the Middle East Bureau of State?*

STEIN-OLSON: No. It reported to D.



*Q: Related to that, how did the coordinator's office relate to the State Regional Bureau? Because I suspect they were not always happy relationships.*

STEIN-OLSON: I was shielded from that. Bill had all the power; he was with Bill Burns all the time, and I think he got his own. So, it was set up in the wake of the Arab Spring. It was 2011, maybe?

*Q: Because budgets increased massively, right? For the Middle East.*

STEIN-OLSON: I think he had his own budget or he had money. It was probably ESF and then these yes but it was what Bill hired the elite of State department people who were GS-14 and hungry who wanted to be GS-15. We held a lot of meetings to hear proposals from CSO [Conflict Stabilization Operations], OTI [Office of Transition Initiatives], MEPI, and DRL [Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor].

*Q: Was the regular USAID budget involved? I assume there were some development funds that were also used in the Middle East. Would the coordinator's office have influenced them?*

STEIN-OLSON: I don't think so.

*Q: It was probably ESF [Economic Support Fund] and then these other—*

STEIN-OLSON: Yes! What Bill had done was he took sort of the elite of State Department people like GS-14 folks who were hungry to become 15's. He and Mark Ward, Mark, was the first deputy. They hired people, and they also hired people from DOD [Department of Defense] to work with because we allocated funding for military and non-military assistance. We had people from the DOD, and we had somebody to focus on Libya. Somebody on Tunisia; somebody on Syria. We each had a country. They were the A team, an A-plus team. They were wonderful. Bill had funding. We had meetings, and they could be quite vicious. There was a lot of jealousy.

*Q: Among the agencies?*

STEIN-OLSON: Not necessarily since MEPI was part of the State Department. I know that there was \$10 million in U.S. dollar funding that was allocated to the OTI, and MEPI was so upset, just crying. Bill would hear everybody pitch their proposals, and he would make the decisions. One of them was CSO; Rick Barton was the Assistant Secretary or head of CSO at that time.

*Q: The Conflict Stabilization Office.*

STEIN-OLSON: Yes. They were always pitching money. OTI got a lot of it because they set up like that. They brought in a lot of equipment and training. They brought people out to train them. To be honest, all my energy was focused on Syria. I would work closely

with the woman who was heading up the Syria team, because that's all everybody talked about Syria, and that's what everybody was interested in. We set up a Syria transition office called the Start Mission in Turkey.

*Q: Because Syria at this point in time in 2013 and there were uprisings against Assad [Bashar al-Assad]. There wasn't a war in Syria at that point, right?*

STEIN-OLSON: There was a war going on, in fact, there was the Syrian Opposition Council that I think we had acknowledged. Beth Jones was the AS [Assistant Secretary], and we had acknowledged the Syrian Rebel Council, and we were providing funding to them. I was also part of top-level discussions -- day one or day after planning. I mean, there was all kinds of scenario planning for what happens when Assad falls because that's what everybody expected to happen. Again, it was just so devastating to the staff who are working on these issues. We ended up setting up Syria Transition Assistance Response Team [START]. Mark Ward was the head of it, somehow.

*Q: And he was based in Turkey, is that correct?*

STEIN-OLSON: Gaziantep, Turkey, was right across the border. That was where I had originally crossed when I was in my 20s. I knew that border crossing very well, not that it made a difference here. That became an inter-agency mission. We had to get Patrick Kennedy on board, and they went out. SEC [Office of Security] and DS went out; everybody finally agreed. Then, Bill and I talked about how many people do we need? And it became twenty-five.

*Q: This was setting up basically a mission, not an AID mission, but an inter-agency mission in Turkey, to supply programs for Syria.*

STEIN-OLSON: To synchronize and coordinate our U.S. government assistance effects. I know it was State and USAID. We also had people in Istanbul and OTI. OTI was our main player there.

*Q: Were they operating within Syria, OTI?*

STEIN-OLSON: I don't think so. Not the time I was there. Syria was considered the most dangerous place on earth at that time.

*Q: What were they doing then?*

STEIN-OLSON: Well, they were bringing people out and training them.

*Q: Oh, and then the people went back in?*

STEIN-OLSON: Yes, exactly.

*Q: So, it was sort of a cross-border program, but we never crossed the border.*

STEIN-OLSON: Not during my time. Mark Ward probably did. We had eighty million dollars of non-lethal assistance.

*Q: For Syria?*

STEIN-OLSON: That's right. We were supporting the Supreme Military Council, which are the rebels against Assad, trying to build up their capacity. Bill also allocated funding for military systems, but I don't remember. There was one time—I think we got MRE [Meal, Ready-to-Eat] and stuff. The DoD knew what to do. They knew where all the stuff was. They had a bunch of emergency funding in Cyprus or emergency supplies, so that we could accept things like that, which was so exciting. They had MREs that we shipped over, and we had to get presidential approval. It was a team that was so committed. We just got things done.

*Q: Right, to support the transition in Syria, which never took place, ultimately.*

STEIN-OLSON: Never took place. Right.

*Q: At some point, the Russians got involved, were they involved at that point in supporting Assad? At some point, isn't that what helped turn the tide?*

STEIN-OLSON: I was so busy working on the assistance side of things. Of course, I was hearing from Gayle Schwartz and Ricky Gold. I was working with them a lot about the programs that they were designing, but it was really OTI that had the capabilities. At some point, Bill realized how expensive they were.

*Q: OTI?*

STEIN-OLSON: Yes.

*Q: Because they were using a couple of different contractors, right?*

STEIN-OLSON: Oh, yes. They outsource. Exactly. I can't remember they set up some kind of—I have to remember what they did. I have to go back and look at—but I couldn't find my NPE AEF [Annual Evaluation Form]. I have to go back and look, because I know that there was a huge issue about endowing some kind of mechanism. OTI won that procurement. MEPI was out. It got ugly.

*Q: The main issues that you all had to deal with were more interagency-type issues about who gets to do what rather than issues about what would be done?*

STEIN-OLSON: Yes, I would agree with that. Because we had full support, we worked for the deputy. And Bill, all he had to do was snap his fingers. He got whatever he needed, really, but he had to make tough decisions. I was amazed that Bill could make

tough decisions when he needed to. He was a good listener, and he was very thoughtful. We really thought that we were going to help win this war.

*Q: You said you also worked closely with people in USAID who were working on these programs in the Middle East.*

STEIN-OLSON: Yes, people knew I was in the know, because we had a significant pot of money.

*Q: In making decisions, because there was money that was not part of that pot, Bill was really coordinator of a special pot of money.*

STEIN-OLSON: Yes.

*Q: So, there were regular programs that were going on as well. Were you able to take account of what AID was doing, although perhaps AID wasn't doing anything in those countries which were in the middle of war.*

STEIN-OLSON: I just remembered what AID did. They put up a Global Fund to set up a donor mechanism.

*Q: A donor trust fund?*

STEIN-OLSON: Yes, that's what USAID did. That was their big thing. That's right. Now, that's coming back.

*Q: That was for Syria?*

STEIN-OLSON: Yes. For Syria only and so the USAID did a great job. USAID did that. They put up a trust fund and figured out all the mechanisms for that. It was managed by KfW [KfW Bankengruppe, German Banking Group]. Again, this was so long ago. I know that Bill was really happy with that. OTI did pull out of the train and equip, so did the State/Conflict and Stabilization Office. OTI and CSO were really battling it out. And then MEPI, of course, was MEPI.

*Q: This was training people or providing materials for people based in Turkey who would then go into Syria? Was any of it trying to create a new Syrian government? Were they talking about "the day after?" Any kind of institution building relating to a new peaceful Syria, or was it all directed towards overturning the Assad government?*

STEIN-OLSON: I don't think it was overturning the Assad government, I would say was managed capacity building. Maybe I didn't get the political ramifications. We were not trying to overturn the Assad government, but we were trying to train the people that wanted to overturn the Assad government.

*Q: Training to help overturn the government or to run a new government the day after?*

STEIN-OLSON: The day after, plus one. So we had meetings like that. I don't know if there was any humanitarian aid. I don't think so. I don't remember any.

*Q: There probably was humanitarian, because there were a lot of refugees. Were there not?*

STEIN-OLSON: There were a lot coming into Turkey.

*Q: Yes, right. So, was this office also overseeing that as well?*

STEIN-OLSON: I can't remember, honestly. Okay. It doesn't sound familiar.

*Q: No, that's fine. So, most of the work that this special fund that Bill was coordinating for was Syria and Libya, it was the countries that were dramatically in some sort of potential transition.*

STEIN-OLSON: I think, yes. And also, Egypt, I should say, Egypt too.

*Q: Egypt as well?*

STEIN-OLSON: Trying to think. Was there an Egypt person? We had an Egypt person on our team.

*Q: But then that would sound as if Bill was coordinating all assistance that was going into the region.*

STEIN-OLSON: The transition was Libya, Tunisia, Syria. I want to say those were the three. We had a guy on Egypt, but he didn't really do anything. He was kind of just parked in our office.

*Q: Okay, now, just trying to understand the breadth of the office and how it relates to everything else going on in the Middle East.*

STEIN-OLSON: Yes. I know that Bill and Alina, Alina was the AA? No, she was the senior DAA for the Middle East Bureau, at USAID or was she the AA? I can't remember. Yes, so they talked a lot. She recruited me, and so Bill was there for a year because he went over to USIP [United States Institute of Peace]. When the new person came in, it was just a whole different ball game. Then, Alina asked, if I wanted to take on the USAID Libya portfolio, come home.

#### **AID/Washington, Senior Development Advisor for Libya, 2013 - 2014**

*Q: You then went back-to-back to USAID, in the Reagan Building, presumably. What were you doing as senior development advisor for Libya? Can you tell us what was the*

*state of Libya then and what you were doing? Were you part of the assistant administrator's office? Was there another office that you—*

STEIN-OLSON: Yes; the Senior Development Advisor was part of the Middle East Bureau's Assistant Administrator's office. I went out to Libya a couple of times, and I don't know whose job I took over. We were funding six, implementing partners all working on democracy and governance programs because I think Gaddafi [Muammar Gaddafi] had already been toppled. There was a lot of fighting going on and there was a vacuum. Then I had two FSN [Foreign Service Nationals] women that worked for me, brand new officers.

*Q: And where were they based?*

STEIN-OLSON: In Tripoli.

*Q: In Tripoli, and you were based in Washington.*

STEIN-OLSON: Yes.

*Q: Okay. Were there any direct hires on the ground in Libya?*

STEIN-OLSON: There was one OTI guy, but that caused a lot of problems because the Ambassador trusted him. He was there, which is fine. But OTI was on the ground, NDI [National Democratic Institute], IRI [International Republican Institute], I'd have to think of who else was there. I think CSO had some funding or CSO was trying to get funding, that's right.

*Q: That's, again, the conflict stabilization office in State.*

STEIN-OLSON: But they never got the funding, I think MEPI was there because Deborah Jones was the Ambassador. She brought in an assistance coordinator for the money, so that was painful. What happened was, then the embassy got evacuated out to Malta. My FSN stayed, and one of them was Tahani. You met Tahani? Who I became very close with, but our programs continued. Tahani and Sarah stayed there.

*Q: You said they're doing democracy stuff. Was it just trying to work with civil society?*

STEIN-OLSON: Yes.

*Q: What kinds of things were they doing?*

STEIN-OLSON: I think it was working with the election commission.

*Q: The election was scheduled to take place?*

STEIN-OLSON: Yes. Voter Education, a lot of it again, working—

*Q: Okay, so trying to help them perform an election.*

STEIN-OLSON: —Exactly. What happened was, I was SDA for Libya, honestly, I don't think I did much that first year other than meet the people, visit Tripoli a couple of times, meet the Ambassador, and my team. They pretty much had everything covered on the ground. Basically, I was in Washington as the mouthpiece for the program, keeping people informed of what was happening. What happened was then they were setting up the Middle East Regional platform.

*Q: But let me just go back for one second, did an election take place while you were there?*

STEIN-OLSON: No.

*Q: Now, they're setting up a regional platform.*

STEIN-OLSON: Wait! This reminds me, but what happened was I think the embassy was evacuated. The embassy relocated, but they relocated in a building that was in the middle of both sides fighting. It was just this bizarre—very bizarre situation.

*Q: Now, you've mentioned before your good friend Dana Mansuri, who was with you in Morocco, and her husband is Libyan. And I believe that he had gone back at some point. Was he there during this period?*

STEIN-OLSON: No, never. No, it's too dangerous

*Q: He had been there earlier when there was more optimism about what would happen in Libya.*

STEIN-OLSON: There were so much.

*Q: There was optimism, but by the time you were involved with it, that optimistic glow had kind of ended.*

STEIN-OLSON: Yes, there had been so many potential people to fill the vacuum, but nothing came of them.

*Q: This was a lot of wishful thinking.*

STEIN-OLSON: Yes, surprise. But this is why we do this work. So the SDA position, I think it's for a year only, but I ended up extending it.

*Q: You would say here you were that 2014–2015? You were the senior development advisor for Libya.*

STEIN-OLSON: Yes, they couldn't fill a position. It's a tough position to fill because you're in Washington, and it's hard to be remote. I was asked to be the Mission Director for the Middle East Regional platform. Pat Kennedy absolutely wanted Cairo to downsize, so they moved it to Frankfurt, and they had done all of this cost analysis between Frankfurt and Budapest, et cetera, et cetera. It finally became Frankfurt.

*Q: That was going to be using old government facilities in Frankfurt. Is that correct?*

### **Middle East Regional Platform, Frankfurt, Acting Mission Director, 2015**

STEIN-OLSON: Yes, they needed us to pay rent there. Frankfurt is the largest Consulate in the world. Although it made more sense to be in Cairo, we ended up being in Frankfurt. We were welcomed with open arms there. In terms of my assignment, they wanted me to go, but I couldn't be assigned because I hadn't competed for the position. This was Angelique. And so that kind of messed everything up. So Alina goes, "Okay, why don't you just go out there as the acting director, and then bid on the position that will select you." Of course, by that time, things changed, and I didn't want to stay for three years. Anyway, I was the first director out there.

*Q: You created the new platform.*

STEIN-OLSON: I created the new platform. I set it up and launched it.

*Q: Had some of the people come from Cairo? Were they transferred to Frankfurt?*

STEIN-OLSON: No.

*Q: So, you were starting from scratch?*

STEIN-OLSON: I started from scratch, and I was also the SDA for Libya. I had it for a whole year. What happened was MERP [Middle East Regional Platform] was set up. It was first set up to deliver financial management, all the administrative stuff, contracting for the eleven missions in the region. That was the initial thought. Then, it was decided that we also had to provide technical support to the missions and people who needed health or economic growth experts. We had to have a technical team. The third one was decided after I got there. Then the fourth objective: we needed extra space now for people who were evacuated out of Iraq so they could sit there in Frankfurt. Those were the things that it was supposed to do.

*Q: You weren't being asked to provide services to Egypt. They would have their free-standing capability. To provide for all other missions in the Middle East, including Iraq, or did some missions retain their own standalone capability?*

STEIN-OLSON: Well, what we provided assistance to—the thing is we'll just remember. We also had to have our own at MERP to provide support to us.



*Q: Yes, right.*

STEIN-OLSON: We provided assistance to Tunisia, Lebanon, and Libya. Then, we became well-known, and people like Morocco would ask, "Can you send a health person here for this amount of time? Can you do an assessment here?" That was in Lebanon; I remember I was part of a management assessment of that place. Jordan, of course, had its own. Every once in a while, they would ask for some help or coverage. We did a lot of coverage for people. I was the first one there, and I'm like, okay, the first thing I need is an EXO [Executive Officer] because you know what was interesting about this place? There were twenty-five direct hire positions for the EXO, technical support, and FMO [Financial Management Office] staff. They'd been assigned, and everybody was clamoring to come out. I'm like, "No way. I couldn't have all those people coming out." I mean, we weren't set up. So, people were really upset. Oh, we had a program office too. That's right. We had a strategic planning office. That's what I was thinking. That's what was missing. We did a lot of strategic planning support for everybody in the region.

*Q: Were there any regional projects that you were also managing?*

STEIN-OLSON: No. We're not managing any projects. That would have been too much. That would have been an overload. We weren't staffed to do that. It's still standing MERP. I got an EXO sent to me from the Budapest Regional Platform. I took two people from the Budapest regional platform who lost their jobs. They were the EXO and the computer guy, which I needed. It took us about six months to get everything in place for housing; we had to get vehicles, well, maybe we didn't. Do we have to have motor vehicles? I can't remember. We had to set up computer systems, and that was fun. I was there for six months on my own. I hired Mark Parkinson as my De Facto Deputy, and Mark was my person in Morocco that I had sent to Afghanistan as an FSL [Foreign Service Limited]. He was brilliant, so I brought him in as my super program officer. He was the next guy to come in, and then he recruited people for the technical team. And then I got Alan Vargas. Do you remember him by any chance? He was from Costa Rica. Anyway, he became my FMO, another brilliant guy. He was just brilliant. I had the key people in place, and then we had all of our furniture and housing, the school, etc. so I'd started letting people come in. What was great about it was that we ended up having a couple of regional mission director meetings in MERP because we had the facilities and the hotel. People wanted to go to Frankfurt. Mission Director Jim Barnhart helped me realize that what I needed was a body shop contractor that could be set up. People could buy into it for whatever they needed if we didn't have the capabilities at the regional platform. And so we set that up.

*Q: To provide what kind of services?*

STEIN-OLSON: Any really. Any services: EXO, FM, and technical services and because we discovered our Technical Service people were always in the field. They were always gone. They were so busy. So strategic planners. To be honest, I was gone by the time—we selected the mechanism. Mike Fritz was the Chief of Party for it. Apparently, it went well, it was a good move. That's all I really know. For example, well, this is jumping ahead. When I was at West Bank, Gaza, I helped one of my economic growth

team leaders get the Mission Director job in Tunisia. I helped him figure out how to access stuff at MERP because he didn't, he didn't have the right capacity at post, things like that.

*Q: Because so many of these middle eastern posts are in non-permissive environments and had very small staffs, and they really needed a lot of support.*

STEIN-OLSON: Lebanon took up most of our support; I would say Lebanon.

*Q: Because you mentioned Lebanon, did you have any humanitarian relief capacity? Or was there a regional OFDA [Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance] person there for example to help?*

STEIN-OLSON: But they had their own regional hubs.

*Q: Right, I was just wondering if they might be co-located with you?*

STEIN-OLSON: No, but I mean, maybe they did after I left. But that's actually a great idea. I'm surprised OTI didn't come after me. I think they were in Budapest. I remember OFDA going into Iraq, but they came out of Budapest. They were a one man show, so they could live where they wanted.

*Q: Okay. Did you ever visit any of these missions?*

STEIN-OLSON: I was still overseeing Libya, so I went to Libya quite a bit. I wanted to because I was on my own, although my daughter came out for her sophomore spring semester. I wanted to, but people were always in Lebanon; people were always in Tunisia. I didn't feel right also going on those trips.

*Q: How long were you actually in Frankfurt ? For just over a year or two years?*

STEIN-OLSON: I was there for fourteen months. I got there in October. And then, guess what? When I got there, the EXO I had already hired from Budapest, forgot to tell me I needed a visa. Here, I am a Foreign Service Officer of about twenty years. Alina and I go, "Okay, well, let's just get you out there. You stay on a tourist visa and then come back anyway." It worked out fine because then I came back for Thanksgiving, etc. But then I think Paige Alexander was the AA. She asked me to stay until December because they couldn't fill the position. Until January, something like that. I can't remember who went in after me. To be honest, Carol. It was fun to set up and launch it, but I didn't want to stay.

*Q: Right. Because it's not so much fun managing a service platform. It's fun to set it up.*

STEIN-OLSON: It was so fun to set it up! It was so fun. I had a great time. I worked closely with the CG [Consul General]. He was a riot, and Pat Kennedy came out and I got a lot of awards for morale because we participated in everything. We all lived on this little compound, and this is the compound where I realized I lived fifty years earlier when

my dad was there. I was ready to go, for sure. Because that's when these people—the thing is, what was also interesting is that the people that had been on the job, a lot of them had come from CPCs [Critical Priority Countries] not realizing that they were going to have to spend half their time having to go to CPCs. One guy curtailed, it was fair. I just got goosebumps thinking about that.

*Q: They thought we were going to have a cushy time, right?*

STEIN-OLSON: Right, exactly, but I'm like, no, no, no. I don't know where they got that idea because they were to spend half their time in the CPCs. You know what? We ended up also providing support to Afghanistan when needed. We were expeditionary; it was so fun to set up. A lot of it was project design, and we helped people do project design. As I said, I had a program office team that I felt was essential to be there. It was very good. It's still standing.

*Q: You got good support from Washington in going through with this. They were very interested in it.*

STEIN-OLSON: Everybody was interested in it. Alina had to back me up when I said I did not have any direct hires come out here right at that moment because there was no support in place. I realized that when I went out, it would have been a floodgate, and people would say, "Well, I can help you set it up. I can do this." No.

*Q: Well, I think a good example of it not being set up before you got there was the fact that you did not have the right kind of visa.*

STEIN-OLSON: I know, exactly! Anyway, it all works out. He and I became really good friends, and he did a great job. Again, he made me look good. But I think one year was enough for me; otherwise, the job would be boring.

*Q: Okay, Washington understood that, so you came back?*

STEIN-OLSON: They didn't understand it. No, they thought I was going to bid on it. I said, "No, I'm not going to." It was pretty upsetting because the administrator had the right to assign me to the job.

*Q: At the outset.*

STEIN-OLSON: At the outset, Angelique made a big deal about it, because she wanted one of her people to go out there. In fact, I was only the acting Mission Director. That's okay. I was okay with it. I mean, Steve was okay with it, too. Originally, the whole family was going to go, all the dogs and everything. If I weren't going to get assigned from the outset, I would do something else.

*Q: Washington wasn't happy with your decision not to bid on it, or at least the bureau wasn't happy. How did you figure out what you would be doing next?*

STEIN-OLSON: I was recruited by Elizabeth Homesteader to go to the Human Resources Office. What was so disappointing is that I bid and was slated number one for Ukraine, and I was being actively recruited, and Steve wanted me to come back. Liz recruited me for—I mean, I would have loved to have gone to Ukraine. I would have if I had known what was going to happen.

*Q: You were recruited by the head of HR to go to HR.*

STEIN-OLSON: Yes.

*Q: Was that to replace her or to be the deputy?*

STEIN-OLSON: To be her SDAA [Senior Deputy Assistant Administrator].

*Q: To be the senior deputy for the FS.*

STEIN-OLSON: Or something. No, she wasn't political; she was a professional HR person.

*Q: Yes. Right. You came back to take that senior job in HR, and then that ended up not happening?*

STEIN-OLSON: No, I went for one day.

*Q: You went for one day.*

STEIN-OLSON: I brought a bottle of champagne. You and I have talked about me being head of HR for many years. Many people have asked me to do it. I finally was excited. I bought a bottle of champagne and popped it for my first staff meeting. Secretary goes, "Oh, you're wanted up in the front office." I go, "Oh, my God, I'm gonna get in trouble for having this bottle of champagne in the building."

*Q: But, they then told you that you would not be going into that HR position?*

STEIN-OLSON: No, they were very specific. It was Eric Postale and the person who was chief of staff, Michele Sumilas. "We think your skill set would be better used in the E&E bureau." I go, "What? Did I already do a bad job?" I kept asking questions. They go, "We think your skill set would be." Eric Postale did all the talking. And he goes, "We think your skill set would be." I go, "Well, what if I don't want to go there?" "We think your skill set would be better used at the E&E bureau." I was very upset, as you know, very upset. And then HR had the audacity to come to me and say, "You need to bid again." I'm not bidding again. So, Susan rescued me.

*Q: Is this Susan Reichle, and she was the counselor at the time?*

## **Non-Permissive Environment Task Force, Lead, 2016**

STEIN-OLSON: Yes. I was assigned to the Counselor's Office to lead the non-permissive environment task force.

*Q: What was your mandate and who was on the task force?*

STEIN-OLSON: It was just me.

*Q: Oh, I see. It was a one person's Task Force.*

STEIN-OLSON: I recruited people. You know me, I'm like this magnet for people, especially the DLI [Development Leadership Initiative] down in the EXO office who want to get out of the basement.

*Q: So you then created a task force by bringing some other people into the process, but not full time. You were the only one working on it full time?*

STEIN-OLSON: I got Jeannie Briggs. She was assigned to me somehow. And then I got somebody else named Donna that was also working part time, remote. This is when people started working remotely and I could never figure out how that happened. Never. I reported to Susan. I had three primary objectives for NPE: prepare USAID employees to live, work, and program in the growing number of NPEs. 70 percent of our funding was already going to NPEs.

*Q: That's non-permissive environments.*

STEIN-OLSON: I had to advance the recommendations from the assessment. Oh, this was the Greenleaf report.

*Q: The Greenleaf report had been done earlier?*

STEIN-OLSON: Yes. At the behest of SEC and the Larry Sampler at AfPak [Afghanistan and Pakistan].

*Q: It was the Greenleaf report. Was this Charlie Greenleaf? By chance?*

STEIN-OLSON: No, Siddharth Shah. Oh, I remember now. This assessment was done after a USDH Ragaai Abdelfattah was killed in Afghanistan. His roommate ended up committing suicide when he got home. So, Larry took this very personally, and he wanted to know how many of these people were walking around out there that we didn't know about? How could he have done better?

*Q: That's what prompted the Greenleaf report?*

STEIN-OLSON: Yes.

*Q: Okay. And then you took the Greenleaf report?*

STEIN-OLSON: Yes, it's an assessment of stress and resilience of our people overseas.

*Q: And then you are tasked to follow on from that?*

STEIN-OLSON: Well, that was part of it. We were trying to set up an NPE unit. It would continue after me.

*Q: That'd be something in HR in the Management Bureau?*

STEIN-OLSON: SEC wanted it in their bureau.

*Q: SEC. Oh, security. That's AID security.*

STEIN-OLSON: Angelique. She heard me brief a couple times here and there, but she never took it seriously. I wanted the staff care people to take it seriously. It was so hard to get people to listen to the stress of importance of taking care of our people.

*Q: Right, but I'm still trying to understand. The Greenleaf report was done. What did you all do? Did you then do further meetings? Or did you travel to the field? Or did you just come up with recommendations based on what the Greenleaf analysis had been?*

STEIN-OLSON: I did all of that. I had meetings. Alright, so my team and I put together an NPE Task Force roadshow. PowerPoint, I mean, I didn't know how to do the PowerPoint, but my DLI did, so we did that. It was in partnership with SEC, so we met each of the bureaus about what needed to be done in terms of stress and what the stats were, for one thing. 30 percent of people in the field are overworked. They're overstressed and overwhelmed. I remember when this report came out, Beth Page closed her mission, so everybody could get all their paperwork done like their wills and their beneficiaries. It was a bit extreme. I have the Greenleaf report because I still am heartbroken that nothing ever happened with it. I remembered one of them was putting a staff care person in each region out in the field. Instead, all Washington did was blow up the staff care. They kept getting more money and more office space, and they had like, upside down chairs, you can land. I don't really know what they did, but they were there when you needed to call, and you couldn't get a babysitter. I don't know. It was outsourced to a contractor.

*Q: Was that done before you were making your recommendations? So, you were making recommendations, and those didn't get implemented—*

STEIN-OLSON: No.

*Q: But instead they outsourced this contract?*

STEIN-OLSON: They were supposed to include them, but they never did. Susan and I worked tirelessly. We talked about the Greenleaf report everywhere we went, everywhere we could, we went to the region. The thing that would be helpful, is if I had my list of recommendations here. What I had to do was this roadshow. I had developed the strategic plan for the NPE. Anyway, so I made the pitch. The Greenleaf report did not get adopted.

*Q: Okay, the Greenleaf report didn't get adopted. So, your main recommendations related to things that came out of the Greenleaf report?*

STEIN-OLSON: Oh, absolutely. And from my own experience, I was always talking about how USAID has to realize there's mental health issues at stake here. We had to be able to let people talk about them.

*Q: Did you ever have meetings with the agency front office on this?*

STEIN-OLSON: Don Steinberg.

*Q: Don Steinberg was the Deputy Administrator at that time. So, you were able to do your PowerPoint presentation to him?*

STEIN-OLSON: Oh, absolutely. And Michelle Semillas too. That's right.

*Q: She was Chief of Staff or something like that in the front office?.*

STEIN-OLSON: That's exactly it. The thing is, I had burned bridges already. I think that was part of my problem in terms of credibility because I had said that I wasn't going to work for Angelique, and I made a big stink about it. I looked back and saw that I didn't handle myself very well. That's when I went out. Don Steinberg understood what I was trying to do. I presented the Greenleaf report and the NPEs strategic plan, which included setting up a unit in SEC with three direct hires. I ended up providing enough information to close that agency's ten-year-old material weakness about what we were doing in these NPEs for monitoring and evaluation. Don Steinberg was very pleased, but then he got out. He left for some reason.

*Q: Yes. You're saying the message got a little bit mixed up with issues some people might have had with the messenger? But the Office of Security wanted to set up this unit as well?*

STEIN-OLSON: Absolutely. Oh my God.

*Q: So, it's a matter of them getting the authorization to create the unit and they were not able to do that?*

STEIN-OLSON: Because M had to sign off on it, and it would take OE (Operating Expense funds). Oh, here it is! Can I read something here?

*Q: Yes.*

STEIN-OLSON: I was asked to lead the NPE task force and liaise with the Department of State on their agility review. We had specific typologies in determining whether one of our countries is considered a non-permissive environment, whether there's armed conflict, corruption, criminality, poor infrastructure, and restrictive political space. In the last six months, another seven countries have been added to the NPE list, now totaling 32 percent of USAID countries, receiving 50 percent of the funding. We have two hundred fifty FSOs [Foreign Service Officers] deploying this year; we need to act. This is part of my roadshow. Two exceptional FSOs asked to work with me on this important endeavor, bringing together programming, security, and staff care. We built upon the lessons learned from five pilot trainings to prepare. We set up five pilot trainings to prepare our people. We had a basic course for living and working in the NPE. Yes, I had forgotten this. We set up two trainings that started in January 2017 and a training on how to program in an NPE. I conducted brown bags with regional bureaus and inserted myself into the operation of the orientation for new FSOs, the mission and Deputy Mission Director training. That's how I got it out. That's how I mark it. We need to keep our people resilient. 75 percent of our people have served in CPCs or NPEs and are exhibiting stressors normally associated with the frontline military. Oh, here it is, at the request of the Chief of Staff, Michelle Semillas. I submitted a budget needed for staff to implement the assessment recommendations.

*Q: But that ended up never getting approved?*

STEIN-OLSON: No. For one thing I left, I was only the lead for a year. When I left it fell apart, I think SEC couldn't carry the ball. I mean, there's so much animosity between M Bureau [Bureau of Management] and there's just so much baggage. But, you need to train people how to live and work in these places.

*Q: But people do routinely now go through the security training program where you learn how to drive your car through barricades or something?*

STEIN-OLSON: Oh, yes.

*Q: They do that training. As far as you know, that's the only training that's done. Does it deal with some of the mental aspects of working in NPEs, or is it just guns and cars?*

STEIN-OLSON: Yes, I did it. I just found it so depressing. If somebody comes up behind you and grabs you by the neck, how do you— I mean, it's a start. How do you live in these places? Who do you go to? Honestly, I'm selling staff care. I don't really know exactly what they're doing, but to have it in Washington is a mistake.

*Q: Now, that's important. Again, it's important to highlight in your oral history, and these are the kinds of things that can be brought to USAID'S attention as to whether it is doing enough on this front.*



*Were you also working with the State Department at all on this and was State dealing with this issue as well?*

STEIN-OLSON: What's interesting at State Department is that they have a class at FSI [Foreign Service Institute] that deals with stress and resilience that I attended. They're well-aware of it. I don't know exactly how they deal with it, though. But they ended up like a five-day course on it, maybe?

*Q: For managers to be able to recognize when it's happening?*

STEIN-OLSON: Yes. How do we get our people to seek help when they need it?

*Q: Are there lessons learned from that you might have gotten at the War College from military colleagues on this?*

STEIN-OLSON: At the war college, they did tell us I do remember that many of the military guys, we're coming from Afghanistan and Iraq and they are sensitive and compassionate. That's all I really got.

*Q: Okay. I think I've seen some things in the news about military suicide rates being very high, so they're obviously not dealing with it, too well, either.*

STEIN-OLSON: I think people need to be able to feel safe to come. I mean, I was always afraid to come out and say, "I need help" because I was afraid of losing my security clearance.

*Q: Anything else to say on that front? You did that for about a year. You had a road show; you were making recommendations; you were talking to lots of people; you generated some training. So it sounds like you did quite a bit during that period.*

STEIN-OLSON: I closed the material weakness. Don Steinberg loved that.

*Q: Well, good. While it wasn't a completely satisfying experience, you did achieve some notable things?*

STEIN-OLSON: I strengthened my bond with SEC. I mean, we were all on the same page. And AfPak, too. Larry, we all wanted it to happen, but it was M Bureau. They're the ones that have to allocate the OE funds. Yes, well, we—

*Q: Okay, it then came time again to bid on a new senior management assignment. Did you bid on multiple things? Or were you primarily interested in one post? And if you got that post fine. If you didn't get that post, you'd have done something else?*

STEIN-OLSON: After I was called by Eric Postale, and I probably went into Susan's office, I started to cry. What happened was they removed me, and they put in Sharon Cromer. She ended up heading up HR the next day. I went in, and I was good. I went in

and congratulated her. I was happy for her. But see, I didn't understand the politics, I just didn't get it. I was a USAID officer. So, I went to talk to Susan, Susan talked to Michelle Semillas. So, then I talked to Michelle Semillas and she told me to go home over the weekend, and think about what you want to do if you don't want the E&E bureau? So I went home, and I looked at the bid list that was coming out, and I went, "Oh, I want West Bank, Gaza. That's what I want!" I don't think I would have gotten it except that Susan was at the SMG [Senior Management Group] meeting.

*Q: And that was going to come open a year later. And then, you filled in during that year with the non-permissive environment task force?*

STEIN-OLSON: Yes, although Paige Alexander, the Assistant Administrator, did want me to go out immediately. So I said I would go out in September. That's exactly it.

### **USAID/West Bank and Gaza, Mission Director, 2017 - 2019**

*Q: Okay. So, when did you go out to West Bank, Gaza in January 2017?*

STEIN-OLSON: Yes.

*Q: So that was right after the change of administration?*

STEIN-OLSON: Yes. I thought I was going to be the first woman in the West Bank, Gaza, working for the first female president, but it did not turn out that way.

*Q: Why don't you tell us a little bit about the program? What was USAID doing in the West Bank, Gaza?*

STEIN-OLSON: It was a two-billion-dollar program with all the mortgages in the pipelines. West Bank, Gaza was a huge mission. Maybe fourteen or fifteen U.S direct hires. What was interesting about the place that I didn't know beforehand was that there was the Embassy in Tel Aviv and there was a consulate in Jerusalem that worked with the Palestinians. So, I worked with both, I went to the country team in Tel Aviv, and I went to Jerusalem as my main partner, so I went to two country teams a week.

*Q: Your work was with the Palestinians and the Embassy in Tel Aviv. Their work was with Israelis, not with Palestinians. The Jerusalem Consulate was for the Palestinians.*

STEIN-OLSON: That's right. Our main programs when I got there were water issues for the Palestinians, again. Infrastructure, we had a lot of infrastructure problems, especially in Gaza. We had reservoirs, wastewater treatment plants. I mean, big money going into it, so I had an infrastructure team. I had a water team, private sector development, governance, and health. Although we ended up that for some reason, we had health, we had health and humanitarian assistance and education. It was basically a development program.

*Q: What was the split? Would you say the percentage between the West Bank, Gaza was it fifty-fifty? Was it more West Bank? More Gaza?*

STEIN-OLSON: Well, first of all, let me just say that, no, it would definitely it wasn't fifty-fifty. It was probably more of the funding that went into the West Bank than Gaza. I was a mission director for two different places. I mean, they were so on polar opposites and the needs were so different. I would say that I didn't have that. I don't really want to make a mistake here. I never once was able to go to Gaza because we were not allowed to. Because I think in 2004, there had been some security contractors that were killed. We were not allowed to go.

So, I got there in January and the deputy was still there. I got a little bit oriented. After about a month, and then of course, David Friedman was confirmed as Ambassador to Israel, although he barely got through the Senate vote. He came out right away and he was an Orthodox Jew. The first thing he said, "we were not allowed to say occupied West Bank, we had to take the word occupied and occupation out of our vocabulary." That was the sort of the first realization that things were going to change. What happened was I started with a four hundred-million-dollar program. Basically, the strategy was built around advancing a two-state solution. We were not allowed to say that anymore. No more, no more two state solution.

*Q: Did you have to brief the Ambassador on the program?*

STEIN-OLSON: He wasn't interested in the program. He wasn't interested in Palestinians. No, the only time that the DCM [Deputy Chief of Mission] wanted me to brief him on Gaza. Oh, I know what happened! He only heard me brief. I mean, he was so new. He didn't even know that he was going to get picked up at the airport; he didn't know how to get to his place. He didn't know anything. I was not the first thing on his agenda. He was meeting lots of Israelis, the CG. I was not there in the beginning, but he started to notice me in meetings with codels and staffdels and about what we were doing. We were very friendly. One time, early on, the DCM asked me to brief them on Gaza, and I did. He was surprised about what we were doing there and about what different issues were. He had never met a Palestinian before. I mean, how could that be?

*Q: The DCM or the—*

STEIN-OLSON: Ambassador. I set him up with meetings with my staff. I began that process of— but that was kind of secondary to what— I mean, because Jason Greenblatt started coming out and he was in charge of the Middle East Peace process. Jared, and I mean, it was just becoming such a blur. I got right in the center of it because my major partner was the Coordinating Office of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT), meaning an Israeli three Star General was in charge of the Palestinians. What was going on in the territories, so he was my partner. I had to work with the Israelis, and then I had to work with the Palestinians. It was a fine line.

*Q: I think that's really important because it was something that I hadn't realized till recently, how much you had to deal with the Israelis in order to provide assistance in West Bank, Gaza. You really had almost two sets of counterparts?*

STEIN-OLSON: Two sets of counterparts and two programs, really, West Bank and Gaza. Gaza, I mean, the CIA [Central Intelligence Agency] was always trying to get involved in what we were doing in Gaza, too. I mean, it was just—

*Q: Let's kind of go back, you started to say, you were working with this three-star Israeli general in the Israeli Defense Force?*

STEIN-OLSON: He was associated with it. He was in the COGAT [Coordination of Government Activities in the Territories].

*Q: He was responsible for the occupied territories?*

STEIN-OLSON: Yes. What was happening there, including our aid programs.

*Q: What did you tell them about what we were doing? What was given to them to explain what we were doing?*

STEIN-OLSON: Yes, they traveled with us to our program. They knew every program that we had. They had everything on GIS [Geographic Information System] coordinates. I met with them weekly about what we were doing, and they would try to direct our programming because there was a wastewater treatment plant that they wanted us to clean up. Of course, it didn't impact any Palestinians, but it would impact all of the Israelis. These are the things I had to deal with; they were always trying to get me to do certain programs. What was interesting is every six months, there was a meeting outside of Israel and Palestine like in Europe, that brought all of us together: COGAT, Israelis, Palestinians, and all the other owners. It was called the Ad Hoc Liaison Coordinating Committee or something where we talked about our programs and how we could partner. COGAT was always there. That's the general. And we became great friends, actually. I was invited to his house for Passover—

*Q: He wanted to see a two-state solution?*

STEIN-OLSON: Yes. He did. In fact, he sent his daughters to that Seed Program in Maine, where you bring Palestinians and Israelis together. No, he did. And that's what was so heartbreaking about the whole thing. In fact, I made the Ambassador meet with him. Because the Ambassador knew nothing, except what he wanted, which was to move the capital to Jerusalem, which was to annex. Yes, I mean, that's what he wanted. He didn't care about programming. Even though I think in the end, I moved the needle a bit.

*Q: Going back to the COGAT, the Israeli oversight of the programs, were there more concerns over the programs in Gaza than West Bank? Or, were there equal concerns about both?*

STEIN-OLSON: I would say there were more concerns about Gaza, and there were more restrictions in getting our stuff in there. You know what I have to say, we had the Gold Star vetting process from around the world.

*Q: Partners with whom you work?*

STEIN-OLSON: Yes.

*Q: Can you describe the vetting program?*

STEIN-OLSON: We had like a whole vetting office, in fact. Names came in, and it would go through our database that brought together all the intelligence databases. It was a gold star vetting team. One time, during a horrible time between the Palestinians and the Israelis, it was after the capital moved to Jerusalem. There was a lot of fighting going on, and some Palestinians were killed, and one of them was one of our recipients, a USAID recipient.

*Q: This was someone who worked for one of our grantees?*

STEIN-OLSON: And had been vetted. [Benjamin] Netanyahu wanted the Ambassador to say that we'd made a mistake, and that he was a terrorist or something like that. I can't remember exactly what happened. The Ambassador called me in and I went over everything about what we did. And I go, "Ambassador, he was not a terrorist." He goes, "Okay. I will never ever harm USAID like that." He never did.

*Q: That's an important point. You had the right to protest.*

STEIN-OLSON: It was interesting, because whenever we had a staffdel, people would say, "Well, Gaza is just full of terrorists." I go, "No, it's not!" I mean, that's what the propaganda tells them and that's what's so painful. I ended up, even for Jared and Jason, I had a Gaza roundtable, and they met Gazans that did not have horns on their heads. They were shocked.

*Q: Can you tell us what kind of people you brought in?*

STEIN-OLSON: Lawyers.

*Q: You had meetings in Israel and the Gazans came over across the border to meet with them?*

STEIN-OLSON: Not in Israel, it was in Jerusalem.

*Q: Oh, in Jerusalem, okay.*

STEIN-OLSON: Yes, it's in Jerusalem. They had to have special permission from the Israeli government to come out and they had to be back before curfew, things like that. It was very complicated, but I was determined for them to meet people from Gaza. There were businessmen and there were teachers, and hospital workers. People that we knew and we worked with, including humanitarian people. We had CRS [Catholic Relief Services] down there and ANERA [American Near East Refugee Aid]. We had people from ANERA, a Chief of Party from an ANERA that was there from Gaza. I mean, educated people.

*Q: Okay, so there were roundtables and Jared Kushner and Jason Greenblatt had the chance to meet some Gazans and discovered that they were not all Hamas terrorists?*

STEIN-OLSON: At my side was the COGAT General; he was always with me. I made the Ambassador meet with him, and then Greenblatt and Jared began communicating with him. I got those partnerships together. It was weird because Jason Greenblatt was in charge; he was named Special Envoy for the Middle East and was like a real estate lawyer. Of course, Jared was in charge of the Middle East Peace process. They're interested in knowing what our program was about, not the Ambassador. They were briefed consistently on how and why we would have a program to achieve and advance a two-state solution. I also brought them to the Gaza border to show them how we had known business people who got clearance right away to go across the border. I worked so closely with COGAT that if there were ever a problem, I would call the general and say, "Hey, these guys have been vetted." Boom, they were let in. Some donors wanted to know if we would vet some of them. And I said, "No, there's no way I'm not going to take that risk." USAID never had a problem. Never, not once.

*Q: What kind of impact do you think that the meetings with the Palestinians with whom USAID was working had on Greenblatt and Kushner?*

STEIN-OLSON: Well, when it was time to abrogate the program that two hundred million dollars. It was returned.

*Q: They froze your program?*

STEIN-OLSON: Not only froze it, but it was reallocated to other countries.

*Q: They weren't supportive even after meeting the grantees?*

STEIN-OLSON: Not at all. I don't know if it was them, the Ambassador, or Jared. I thought Jason finally resigned. Jason was good, and he always would be good to me. He asked if he could talk to my people because USAID became tasked with putting together, with Jared or the White House, the economic part of the Peace Plan, the economic growth, and all that. After the embassy was moved, that's when everything fell apart. We did that.

*Q: I want you to talk about it. Again, let me ask before we go on to the impact of moving the embassy to Jerusalem. When they met with the grantees, Greenblatt and Kushner, did they ask any hard questions, or was it a good dialogue? I'm just curious about the issues that came up during their discussions with them.*

STEIN-OLSON: They were in a learning mode. They'd never met these kinds of people before.

*Q: It was mostly listening.*

STEIN-OLSON: Mostly listening. The CG and I were on the same page. He and I became very close. He's now the Ambassador in Pakistan.

*Q: What did the COGAT General you're working with say when our funds were frozen?*

STEIN-OLSON: He wrote letters to the Congress. They knew him. Because you know what, honestly, our funding subsidized their occupation in the end. They wanted that money there. The COGAT ended up sending a letter and he would try to talk with the Ambassador. He was talking to both of them, but he was on our side. I mean, he tried hard.

*Q: Okay, that's very interesting.*

STEIN-OLSON: I think it was Jared because in one meeting with him he asked, "What happens if we move this money to the UN [United Nations] to Gaza?" I go, "Why would you do that?" He goes, "Just answer the question." I go, "Well, you lose all ability to brand U.S government taxpayer money. That's one thing. Why would you want to do that?" And he goes, "No, you're right." They tried to figure it out. I don't know what they were trying to figure out, to be honest. I told him, "You give up this money, then all these programs are going to die." I had to come up with a lot of strategic planning to be done. We had to figure out how to fully fund the construction contracts in Gaza which, of course, are probably all destroyed now. We had to come up with our closeout plan.

*Q: Let me go back. So, the decision was made to move the embassy to Jerusalem. Did the decision to freeze the program happen before or after that decision, do you recall?*

STEIN-OLSON: It was after. First of all, Trump and people came out in September with his first trip overseas. I mean, there was a plan somewhere.

*Q: It was a plan from the beginning?*

STEIN-OLSON: And Trump had been told that there were two ambassadors, one to Tel Aviv and one to Jerusalem. And he'd said, "This is going to change." Then, Trump realized, or he was told that Ambassador Friedman was not the U.S government interlocutor for the Palestinians. That's when they moved the embassy in December, proclaiming Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. There was a lot of discussion whether they

should say East Jerusalem or West Jerusalem. I mean, the Ambassador, he knew what he was doing.

*Q: In saying just Jerusalem?*

STEIN-OLSON: Yes, he knew what he was doing, even though this was going to cause a lot. I mean, his CIA people, everybody was telling him that what you're going to cause was going to be a flashpoint.

*Q: When it got moved to Jerusalem, what happened to the Consulate in Jerusalem and its role to coordinate with the Palestinians?*

STEIN-OLSON: Yes, it became the embassy.

*Q: But, the CG was your main conduit to the Palestinians, right? Your CG partner was working with the Palestinians.*

STEIN-OLSON: I became the conduit.

*Q: The Consul General in Jerusalem left, right?*

STEIN-OLSON: Well, they became, yes. I mean, well, they didn't leave yet. But it means they became impotent. Let's put it that way. Because President [Mahmoud] Abbas stopped all contact with the embassy and the CG, except for Monica Stein-Olson, head of USAID. He didn't really say that. I didn't talk to Abbas, but I talked to the Prime Minister regularly.

*Q: You became the US government's liaison to the Palestinians on the ground?*

STEIN-OLSON: In my mind, I was. Although I'm sure there were a lot of back channels. COGAT was always meeting with me. I remembered that the Ambassador gave me messages to give to the Prime Minister if he wanted to. I don't remember, even. Jason wanted to meet with them, and I would pass that message off. And he goes, "No," I mean, things like that. One time, Senator, who's from South Carolina?

*Q: Lindsey Graham.*

STEIN-OLSON: Lindsey Graham. I told him that the Prime Minister said hello. He goes, "Oh, I'd like to have a phone call with him." I had the consulate set it up, and then the Prime Minister wouldn't take it. The prime minister said, "I know Lindsey, tell him I said, Hello." Those are the kinds of things, you know. They stopped all communication with the U.S government, except for USAID, so I was seen as safe or neutral. I think that's what's going to happen in Gaza too. After the war's over, USAID will be able to go back in. He cut off the communication and then Jared was mad, saying that they were being a bunch of babies and that's when they froze our program.



*Q: Okay, so the embassy's decision was made, and then they cut off communications and then the program was frozen. I vaguely recall you having to go to New York to UN meetings at some point. Can you describe what happened? What was that?*

STEIN-OLSON: Yes, every six months, they had this AHLC is the Ad Hoc Liaison Coordinating Committee where it brings together all the partners and stakeholders for the Palestinian programs together—all the envoys and the quartet. There was a quartet that the State Department funded, and they had their own little programs. The COGAT and I went for drinks, and we invited Maria Longhi with us. We talked about the importance of trying to get our program back on track. Maria was our DAA at the time. Before all of this, I would sit with Jason. These meetings were high level. It's like the head of the EU [European Union], maybe or minister?

*Q: Probably the Minister of Foreign Affairs.*

STEIN-OLSON: Yes, that's what I'm thinking. Jason Greenblatt was always the U.S. government's representative. I would sit next to him and pass some notes about our program, but then they froze the program. I met with Jared one last time and said, "You gotta at least keep these humanitarian assistance programs alive. Even just keep the lights on." But, the answer was no.

*Q: But did some of it get restored after?*

STEIN-OLSON: Yes.

*Q: Did it have to wait till the change of administration or—*

STEIN-OLSON: It had to wait for the Change in Administration. What happened was that I was told to close the mission, and we were going to become this little office in the embassy. Congress wouldn't allow it to happen. It was painful because we had to come up with this whole RIF (Reduction in Force) plan. We had to close the mission, and what we did, I have to give a lot of credit to Mike Harvey on this, we ended up putting many of these people on long-term contracts in the region, around the world, and in Washington.

*Q: This was your local staff.*

STEIN-OLSON: And then, we had to get U.S. direct hires to bid out.

*Q: Did the grants actually close out or were they just on fumes and then were able to get restarted?*

STEIN-OLSON: Opposite, I think they were supposed to close their offices.

*Q: Well, I don't know about their offices, but our grants closed.*

STEIN-OLSON: Yes.

*Q: When the change in administration happened, they—*

STEIN-OLSON: I wasn't there.

*Q: Right, you weren't there. They would have had to start really from scratch with new grants and everything.*

STEIN-OLSON: I think ANERA [American Near East Refugee Aid] had other funding. We went around and made sure that the UNDP [United Nations Development Programme] could pay for certain things.

*Q: Speaking of the UN, can you say anything about what the role of UNRWA [United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East] was? Since there's been so much controversy about them recently, and what were your views of them?*

STEIN-OLSON: There's always going to be corruption. UNRWA, I mean, it was only set up for the refugees there, and they've been there for, I don't know, fifty years. In a way, I can understand that. They provide a service. I mean, the problem is Israel because they do not allow the Gazans to have any kind of economic growth. Gaza used to be a fairly vibrant economy of exports with strawberries and textiles. Until they can have a vibrant economy, I mean, UNRWA is just going to stay there, I think. I think like any organization, it gets bloated over time and there is some corruption. I wouldn't say that they were embedded with Hamas.

*Q: That was the main thing I was curious about. I mean, you didn't see them as being part of the problem with Hamas.*

STEIN-OLSON: No, not at all. They're just all part of the big problem that is Israel-Palestine. I mean, it's just a piece of the puzzle.

*Q: Well, it sounds very unhappy.*

STEIN-OLSON: I was schizophrenic. I actually believed that I could convince the administration to keep some funding.

*Q: And the embassy has remained in Jerusalem, is that correct? They didn't move it back, right?*

STEIN-OLSON: No, but you know what it is. I told the Ambassador this. All he did was move the sign over there, and he was telling Trump that it only costs 250,000 US dollars to build a new embassy. There I go, "How can you say this?" He goes, "Oh, that's okay." He said this on CNN [Cable News Network]. All they do is move the sign.

*Q: Right. But there is no longer a Consul General in Jerusalem, who is the main liaison with—*

STEIN-OLSON: They have a Palestinian affairs unit in the embassy in Jerusalem.

*Q: Should the AID mission be moved from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem then?*

STEIN-OLSON: When I left, we had an office in Jerusalem—

*Q: I'm just saying, if the main liaison now with the Palestinians is in the embassy building in Jerusalem, should USAID argue that it needs to get out of Tel Aviv and into Jerusalem?*

STEIN-OLSON: Needs to go to Ramallah. That's what I always said Ramallah, up in the West Bank. The thing is there's different aspects of that argument, and it was brought up every year. Sure, it's nicer living in Tel Aviv. However, our main Israeli counterpart COGAT is there because— That is a strong reason because they are really the puppeteers, sadly. There's a lot of people who think that we should live in Jerusalem, but some people do live in Jerusalem. We have a few people living over there. A lot of our staff live in Java, which is— it's just so hard because it's so complicated for the Palestinians to travel. Now, the border crossings. My big argument was always that COGAT was in Tel Aviv. What's interesting, I would have to go to meetings, donor meetings were always in Jerusalem, always.

*Q: Because the other donors were probably all located there, right?*

STEIN-OLSON: All of them are located there, and all the ambassadors were in Tel Aviv. I would always go with the Ambassador to any meetings he had on whatever issue he had on AID and foreign aid. In Jerusalem, I would just go with the CG or I would go on my own. It's complicated. It's going to get more complicated once this war is over.

*Q: Yes.*

STEIN-OLSON: I just saw that Anthony Blinken announced four hundred million U.S. dollars in aid to Gaza.

*Q: Yes, humanitarian assistance. I believe to this day, although I may be wrong, that USAID still gives a big check to Israel every year?*

STEIN-OLSON: Yes. That's right. As part of the old agreements.

*Q: Did the AID mission in Tel Aviv have anything to do with that? Did you guys have to sign off or it's just completely done by Washington?*

STEIN-OLSON: We had nothing to do with it.

*Q: Okay, other things about this experience? Your interview will join those done earlier by other former West Bank/Gaza mission directors, Chris Crowley, Larry Garber, Dave Harden, Jim Bever. We hope to be able to pull them together to help tell the story of what USAID has done there over a number of years. Any sort of final thoughts on the West Bank, Gaza assignment?*

STEIN-OLSON: We need to stay there. We need to stay engaged there. USAID does. I think because eventually, Abbas will be gone, and Netanyahu will be gone. There'll be new leadership. We are the conveners there.

*Q: Hamas running Gaza created its own set of issue's—really almost an impossible situation. However, on the West Bank side, I know that there has been lots of disappointment with current leadership. Did you see people that you would hope on the West Bank might rise to become the new leadership for West Bank or a new Palestine?*

STEIN-OLSON: Yes, many of our partners. I mean, there's so much talent. Palestinians are highly educated. The problem is you become a target and—I mean, some of my staff. Oh, my God, I had such a brilliant staff. An economist—very talented.

*Q: And they believe in the two-state solution and working something out with Israel to have a two-state solution?*

STEIN-OLSON: Yes, and it has to be real with sovereign borders. Of course, don't forget that there's this animosity between West Bank and Gaza too. I mean, Gazans are taking Palestinian's money. Abbas doesn't want to absorb that economy. There's a lot of issues with the current leadership. Before I got there, maybe even years ago, they came up with some kind of USAID assessment where you could connect Gaza and West Bank superhighway or something like that, where they would be one country. I don't think anything has been done since then.

On USAID too, because I remember I said to the Ambassador, "Palestine needs its own state." He goes, "Well, they have one." I go, "What do you mean? And he goes, "They have Gaza." I go, "Okay, well, that's not helpful."

*Q: They don't believe that West Bank should even be part of Palestine?*

STEIN-OLSON: This was Ambassador David Friedman.

*Q: There are people who believe that Palestine should be only Gaza.*

STEIN-OLSON: Yes, this was the Ambassador. He's out to do what he wanted to do, and he did it.

*Q: That's helpful. Anything else on that? It sounds like even though there were lots of policy differences, you worked very effectively with the embassy and your relationship with the Ambassador was good?*

STEIN-OLSON: Oh, absolutely.

*Q: And the same with Washington as well?*

STEIN-OLSON: I'm not sure with Washington. The front office, for some reason, I had provided some policy guidance to the Ambassador. I think they got upset because the two hundred million dollars, I really did not want to lose that. I used my OFM [Office of Financial Management] background and explained to the ambassador how we could save that for Gaza or whatever. And he goes, "Well, write that up for me." And I did, I think everybody got upset.

*Q: Wouldn't they have been supportive of you saving the money?*

STEIN-OLSON: Mark Green, you know he's political. I was trying to save the money. State Department said USAID should not be making policies.

*Q: But you said the Ambassador sent the cable.*

STEIN-OLSON: It wasn't a cable. They knew it was me.

*Q: But he sent it, so why should they complain?*

STEIN-OLSON: The reason that Mark Green was really mad is because I made the Ambassador when he went to Washington to see Mark Green. He did, and Chris Milligan was in the meeting. Ambassador raved about me and wanted this blah, blah, blah. I never heard from Mark Green, ever. But he sent an email to Courtney Chubb, my deputy saying that he heard she was doing good things. So that's okay. It was time for me to retire.

Chris Milligan called me, and he goes, "Oh, you're never going to believe this. The Ambassador was here. Blah, blah, raving, raving, raving." I'm like, "Oh, okay! That's fine." We had a great relationship.

*Q: You disagreed on almost everything.*

STEIN-OLSON: I can do that.

*Q: That's good. Well, that's something that all of us should learn how to do.*

STEIN-OLSON: Yes. Well, I mean, my parents are Trumpers

*Q: Right. Any final thoughts? You had a wonderful career. Anything, final thoughts or recommendations you have for young people thinking about such a career?*

STEIN-OLSON: Do it. Oh, my, it's a great career. In fact, I have people here at Mendocino or people with their kids coming here. They come over or they call, email,

and ask me about my career and how to get in. I had a great career, and I would never have changed anything. Maybe I could have been a little savvier, when it came to the political. No, I didn't really understand it.

*Q: You worked well with your counterparts. You definitely did well on that.*

STEIN-OLSON: I had a great career, and I did good. I made lifelong friendships which is really important, but I'd like to continue doing something about the stress and resilience of aid workers because I think that's so important.

*Q: Okay. Well, with that, thank you Monica.*

*End of interview*