

The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training
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DAVID COHEN

*Interviewed by: John Pielemeier
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KEY WORDS

Rutgers University

NDEA
Univ of Texas at Austin
NYU
PUDINE
Philip Schwab
Donor Lion
Bill Gelabert
EMBRAPA
IDEA (Instituto Dominicana de Educacion Aplicada)
SADAP (Southern Africa Development Analysis Program)
Graham Allison: The Essence of Decision,.
Hank Bassford
PL480 Title III local currency
Chapare region of Bolivia
Jeffrey Sachs
President Paz Estenssoro
Pro-Salud
Manual Antonio Noriega
Ambassador Arthur Davis
Ambassador Alvin Adams
Jean Bertrand Aristide
Chuck Drilling – EXO
Marc Bazin – Acting President of Haiti
Reps. John Conyers and Walter Fauntroy
National War College
U.S. Southern Command
USAID Alumni Association

INTERVIEW

Q: This is John Pielemeier on January 23. I'm sitting here about to interview David Cohen, who spent much of his career in Latin America and has a long, very positive history with USAID (United States Agency for International Development). And I will start by asking David to tell us where he grew up and how he gradually got interested in international work.

COHEN: I was born in Orange, New Jersey. At the time, my parents lived in East Orange. When I was six, they moved to the small town of Verona. I've always felt that New Jersey is largely divided into two parts: one that is the suburb of New York and the other that is the suburb of Philadelphia. Verona is a suburb of New York. Originally, it had been a town that was comprised of small farms. In the '50s, when I was growing up, that farmland was being made into housing developments. These days, on the rare occasion when I return to Verona, I envision where the farms were. But if I mention them

to people, they look at me like I'm crazy because the area now is well-defined as New York City suburbia.

Q: How far away from New York?

COHEN: 45 minutes on the DeCamp bus.

Q: DeCamp bus?

COHEN: That was the bus line that went down the main street of our town and others in the area and collected people and dropped them off at the Port Authority terminal in Manhattan.

Q: Did you go to public school?

COHEN: I did. I went to public school in Verona: elementary, junior high and high school. When I graduated from high school, I went to the state university of New Jersey, which is Rutgers.

Q: Ah. So, you stayed close to home.

COHEN: I did.

Q: What was your major?

COHEN: My major was Latin American Studies. I began at Rutgers as a liberal arts student. We didn't have to declare a major until the end of our sophomore year. As a freshman, I really liked dining at the liberal arts academic buffet and was resistant to the notion that I had to choose a focused major. At that time, I certainly had no concept of what I wanted to do when I graduated. As it turned out, my faculty advisor was the Chair for the Latin American Studies program. He convinced me that being in an area studies program was like being at that same liberal arts buffet. I could take courses in languages, literature, history, economics, geography, etc. I thought I could do that until I got inspired by something more specific. But it turned out that I really liked being an area studies specialist. One of the good things about the education process is that you learn things about yourself, and I discovered that I really was interested in economics. So, while staying in the Latin America program, I started tending toward classes and things that were more involved with economics. Those turned out to be decisions that ultimately were significant factors in determining the path of my life.

Q: Did you go to Latin America as part of your program?

COHEN: Not as an undergraduate. Between my junior and senior years, I experienced my first *de facto* travel "abroad." In this case, "abroad" meant that I left New Jersey and went to the University of Texas in Austin. Support for this came from a Defense Department program, the National Defense Education Act (NDEA), that supported study

of “critical” languages. Portuguese was considered “critical” given the Cold War politics of the mid ’60s. Experience in that program greatly amplified what had been my nascent interest in Brazil.

Q: That was just a short term program?

COHEN: Yes, it lasted the summer. It was two months of various classes given in Portuguese. Some of it was pure language learning; but we also studied relevant history, culture and literature. We were a group of undergrads who were all passionately into the same thing, which was a great enthusiasm multiplier.

Q: Was this part of the University of Texas?

COHEN: It was, yes.

Q: Wow.

COHEN: That was the summer after Charles Whitman stood on the top of the University of Texas tower and shot and killed a number of people. That kind of mass murder was a rare event back then. Sadly, it is much less so now.

In significant ways, Texas was my first experience living in a foreign culture. People would come up to me in my dorm and ask, “Are you a Yankee?” as though I were a creature just landed from Mars. That was so interesting to me. I certainly didn’t find it threatening, but I found it really curious that people should look at someone from the Northeast of the U.S. as an exotic and different species.

Q: Well, were the Texans pretty exotic to you, too?

COHEN: They *were* different. There was a guy in my Portuguese program who had become a friend who also was an Easterner. At the center of the UT campus is a large quadrangle. We used to go there before class just so we could watch people parade by. We were, as usual, dressed in jeans and t-shirts, the way college kids dressed in the East. The people we were watching were dressed really well and clearly enjoyed parading the fact. It was so interesting.

Q: So, you had the summer program and then you went back for your final year at Rutgers?

COHEN: I did. And I applied to the Peace Corps and was accepted. I also applied for some graduate fellowships and actually was offered a couple of them. One of those was for study at New York University which would keep me close to Rutgers. Being close to Rutgers was important because that’s where my girlfriend was.

Q: Oh. Alright.

COHEN: The NYU program also focused on economic development with a specialization in Brazil.

Q: So, you had met this young woman at Rutgers?

COHEN: I had. Who I ultimately married.

Q: And you still are married to her, I believe.

COHEN: Still.

Q: Well, that was an early coup de foudre, as they say in French. You just sort of decided that was it and that was it.

So, Rita, who I believe is your wife, also was studying at NYU?

COHEN: No. She was still an undergraduate at Douglass College, which was the female counterpart of Rutgers. Douglass was on the other side of New Brunswick, where both universities were located. She was two years behind me, and I happened to be in a two-year graduate program. That worked out quite nicely.

Q: And the graduate program was called what?

COHEN: I think it was Brazilian Affairs in Economic Development, something like that. This was during the period of the Cold War. The potential for Soviet misdeeds in Latin America, particularly Brazil, was perceived as high. Interest in the region, both academic and strategic, was at a peak.

Q: What year was it that you went to NYU?

COHEN: 1966.

As I was saying, the U.S. was very concerned about communist inroads in the region, particularly in South America and most especially in Brazil, its largest country. There was a special concern regarding communism in the northeast of the country. These were the very early years of President Kennedy's Alliance for Progress.

Q: '66; when did Castro take over Cuba?

COHEN: That was much earlier, maybe 1959.

Q: Okay. So, we had Ché Guevara and other people running around South America.

COHEN: We did.

Q: And, as you said, the Alliance for Progress was established. As you were completing your degree at NYU, did you have a clearer idea of what you wanted to do professionally? Were you leaning towards finding a way to go to Brazil?

Through one of my professors, I discovered a program involving universities in the New York area that provided summer fellowships for graduate students who would select a topic and be able to study it in Latin America. Through that program, I got a fellowship in the summer of 1967 to study and do research in the northeast of Brazil, in Fortaleza, the capital of the state of Ceará. I was attached to a small scale industrial development program (PUDINE was its Brazilian acronym) managed by the Federal University of Ceará in collaboration with UCLA. PUDINE was implementing this program that was focused on strategically located rural towns in the interior of Ceará. By strategically located, I'm not talking about politics or military. Towns selected for the program were located at places where there might have been underutilized natural resources or have road or river transport access that would provide good links to markets. As I came to understand more about PUDINE, it sounded like a really interesting topic and ultimately became the focus of my NYU Master's degree dissertation. This experience in Brazil also provided me with my first opportunity to better understand USAID. As it happened, PUDINE was so successful in Ceará that USAID decided that the program should be replicated throughout the Brazilian Northeast. So, in addition to looking at PUDINE in Ceará, I also assessed USAID's Project RITA (Rural Industrial Technical Assistance) that was undertaken in about five or so other northeastern states. We in Fortaleza all agreed that USAID had not done a very good job of program replication as that effort did not incorporate a number of the key lessons learned in the original effort.

Q: So, am I correct to imagine that your Portuguese got substantially stronger during this time period?

COHEN: I spoke only Portuguese most of the time that I was in Fortaleza. I really enjoyed that. The only time I ever really got to speak English was sometimes having dinner at the Savannah Hotel where I was living. Occasionally, there would be some English-speaking people in the restaurant and, aside from missionaries, most of them worked for USAID. In our conversations, they would say things like, "So kid, what are you going to do when you grow up and finish grad school?" My usual response was that my objective was to find a job that would take me back to live and work in Brazil. And they would say, "Well, have you ever thought about working for USAID?" This was the time of the Vietnam War and, being from a good liberal eastern college, I said, "Me, work for the United States Government? That would never happen." And they said well, you know, when you come to Rio you should talk with some of the younger USAID people just to know what their experience has been. Thus, when I was leaving Brazil and I was in Rio, I thought well, why not, and so I went in and ended up speaking to two people who had been suggested (Jerome Hulehan and Lou Macary).

Q: Two program officers, right?

COHEN: Yes. Two program officers in USAID/Rio who happened to still be in USAID/Rio when I returned as a USAID officer. So, that was my introduction to the Agency.

Q: So, you traveled all around Ceará and also to parts of the northeast?

COHEN: More around Ceará. The university grant I had was good to get me to and from Fortaleza, but it didn't have any extra travel money. So, I spent some time in Rio and also visited Recife, but I didn't get much outside of those cities. Still, this was the first time I had ever really been out of the country. It was a good, and life changing, experience.

Q: And you were living by yourself, not with other students?

COHEN: Right.

Q: So, it was kind of a culture challenge?

COHEN: Indeed it was, yes.

Q: Which you obviously liked. So, you had to go back and finish your dissertation; did it take a while longer?

COHEN: There was some coursework to finish up, which I completed during the first semester following my return. Second semester, I quit the personnel management job in a steel processing factory that was paying some of the money I needed for school and focused on writing my dissertation. The writing was finished by early spring.

Q: What was the title of the dissertation, do you remember?

COHEN: Evolution of an International Development Project.

Q: Okay. It was accepted. And did you start looking for a job while you were still writing?

COHEN: I did. Rita and I were getting married in September, and we needed a reliable income. I ended up getting a job in the international section of a large Wall Street bank, the Irving Trust Company. Primarily, our unit did credit analysis of the bank's correspondent relationships with other banks around the world and a few of their borrowers. I probably was hired because I spoke Spanish and Portuguese and knew the Latin America region. It was a terrible job. I worked for the person who was the first woman vice president of the bank. That my boss was a woman is just a fact, not a plus or minus. The first day I was in the office she called me into her office. In front of her was a large loose-leaf binder. She said, "Everything you will ever need to know is in this book that I'm about to give you; you should never have to ask anybody any questions. You should never have to write anything original. Everything you need is here." And I thought, "Oh my god. I went to school and, while I didn't take a vocational degree, I had

very good learning skills, was a sharp analyst and was acknowledged as an exceptionally strong writer.” And this woman was telling me explicitly that I was to use none of those capabilities.

Q: Really?

COHEN: Really. So, after just a couple of months, I decided to begin a search for another, more satisfying and challenging job. Just as I started that process, USAID called me (literally – it was a phone call) and asked if I might be interested in joining the Agency as an International Development Intern (IDI) assigned to Rio de Janeiro.

Q: Had you approached them previously? How did they get your name?

COHEN: I had contacted USAID during the job search I did while writing my dissertation. Though working for USAID was not a high priority for me, it seemed that no harm would be done in investigating the possibility. About three months before starting work at the Irving Trust Company, I got a call from AID asking if I would be interested in a job in their Vietnam program. My response was that, although it was very nice of them to ask, I was getting married in September and that working for AID in Vietnam was not my first choice for a family planning methodology. That ended the conversation. I figured that was the end of any possibility of employment with USAID.

Q: So, were you draft bait at that time also?

COHEN: Not at that time. A couple of months earlier, as I was finishing my dissertation, my graduate school deferment ran out. As a freshman at Rutgers, I had joined Army ROTC. I thought that if I were going to get drafted (a high probability at that time in the early days of the Vietnam War), I might as well be an officer. When it came time to enter the advanced ROTC program, I took the physical, but was turned down because of my eyes (a congenital condition that, among other things, limits the extent to which my vision can be corrected). The sergeant who gave me that news said that I could be drafted anyway and advised me to seek a waiver. My waiver request was denied. I went back to the sergeant and said that as they turned down this waiver I should be free and clear of the draft, right? And he said, “Son, when the Army’s got a war and we’ve got a guy what got eyes and ain’t got no arms and another guy that got arms and ain’t got no eyes, we draft them both, and the guy with the eyes tells the guy with the arms where to shoot.” That unhelpful comment haunted me for three years until my NYU deferment ran out. When I finally got called for my draft physical, I was turned down because of my eyes. Ironically, I wasn’t physically qualified to go out and die for my country.

Q: My goodness. That’s amazing.

So, AID called you and said, more or less, how would you like to go to Rio?

COHEN: Yes, right. To join their new IDI program.

Q: Okay. What year was that?

COHEN: That was early 1969.

Q: And did they explain what the IDI program was to you?

COHEN: At the time, they did not explain it in any great detail. They said it was an entry level program; I was being hired as an economist; and they were going to send me a lot of papers to fill out.

Q: And did they say you would have to come down to Washington for training for a period of time?

COHEN: It was implied, and indeed that's what happened. I think I spent about six months in DC-based training.

Q: So, you were married by that time?

COHEN: I was, yes.

Q: So, you and Rita came down and had to find a place to stay for six months?

COHEN: We found a one bedroom apartment in Rosslyn.

Q: How did you like this time Washington?

COHEN: After some snafus in getting nearly everyone in my IDI class (including me) on board by the scheduled date, it was great. We were the second ever IDI class, so people seemed kind of fascinated with us. We were well received and felt fully supported by the Agency. My class was a good group of people and, obviously, we had a great deal in common. We were all in our 20s; so socially it was a compatible group as well. I think the Agency staff that put this program together, Bill Berg and Lou Faro, did a great job in providing us with excellent training and practical experience. The Washington part of the program was a mixture of learning how the Agency did its work and understanding the context in which it operated. Our training included relevant rotational assignments. In this context, I spent time in the Latin America Bureau program office and the combined AID/State Office of Brazilian Affairs.

Q: USAID was co-located with the State Department desk at that time?

COHEN: It was in the Latin America region. During the period of the Alliance for Progress, USAID and State worked together under one Alliance for Progress head. So, when I did a rotation on the Brazil desk, that office had both AID and State leadership, with the State person as the senior officer.

Q: Do you remember who the Brazil desk officer for AID was?

COHEN: Of course. It was someone I'll never forget, Philip Schwab.

Q: Also, a very humorous gentleman.

COHEN: One of the best senses of humor I ever encountered in the Agency. Phil had spent a long period in Brazil and had a passion for it. He had an excellent understanding of the country and its issues. He also had a profound knowledge of the USAID/Brazil program.

Q: What was the next step? Did they give you any advice before you headed off to Rio?

COHEN: We had language training, of course. Since I already spoke the language and spoke it fairly well, instead of going to classes at FSI (the Foreign Service Institute), I was sent to an intensive, full immersion program at Berlitz. I spent about six weeks there. After two or three days of class, my teachers said, "You obviously know this language; why did they send you here?" I said, "Well, I need to get up to a level of greater fluency." They responded, "If you don't mind, we don't need to sit in a classroom all day." I liked that idea. So, we wandered the city: went to museums, made observations of passersby in the park and went out to lunch – all in Portuguese. It was effective, situational language training. It really helped me.

Q: This is with one teacher?

COHEN: Actually, I had two teachers who would switch off. About half way through the program, it was two teachers and two students, including another person from my IDI class. It was a great experience. I was able to test at the FSI 3+ level of fluency that exceeded my target.

Q: Did Rita get any Portuguese training?

COHEN: Rita also had studied Portuguese as an undergraduate. Two years after me, she, too, had won a summer fellowship to the University of Texas Defense Education Act Portuguese program. So, when we arrived in Rio, Rita was able to go out on her own and do the things she needed and wanted to do right away, including finding a job in a Rio language school.

Q: Right. So, you moved to Rio in what would be 1969?

COHEN: Yes. In early October.

Q: And they put you directly into a house or an apartment?

COHEN: We spent at least five weeks in a hotel before we could find and move into an apartment.

Q: How was the adjustment to working for a big bureaucracy in Rio? It was big by that time, wasn't it?

COHEN: At that time (the early 1970s), Brazil was the second largest AID mission in the world after Vietnam. USAID's Rio headquarters was located the Guanabara State Bank building (BEG by its Portuguese acronym). I don't recall how many floors of the building we occupied, but it was quite a few. I know from contacts I had in later years that I never got to meet all of the people who worked for USAID in Rio.

Q: The BEG building was almost like a skyscraper for Rio.

COHEN: It was, yes.

Q: Right in the middle of downtown Rio, wasn't it?

COHEN: And, to some in the media, it was symbolically significant that the name of the building spelled out B-E-G and we were the aid program.

Q: And the embassy was just down the road?

COHEN: Right, it was about a ten minute walk through downtown Rio. Initially, my office was in the embassy, not the BEG Building. This was because I was an economist, and the joint Embassy/USAID economics section was located in the embassy.

Q: Really?

COHEN: As part of my IDI program, I did short duration, one to three month rotations to a variety of USAID offices. I found those experiences to be very useful and interesting. Still, my home office was in the embassy. The experience of sitting in the embassy instead of USAID served me well. It gave me a first person view of embassies, how they worked and what people did there. This was not an experience that many USAID officers were given. It integrated me more with the work of the State Department as an AID officer early on in my career. That helped me in later years in terms of my perspective of how the world of the U.S. overseas mission worked and how USAID fit into that world. That was a fortuitous opportunity.

However, being assigned as an economist was increasingly becoming a frustration. This was because I discovered fairly quickly that AID didn't use economists very well. Essentially, the main focus of our work was to do cost-benefit and rate of return analyses to support loan programs designed by the Mission's Capital Development Office. (Note: At that point in time, the large majority of AID assistance to Brazil and many other countries was provided through highly concessional loans – not grants. Only in the 1980s did the Agency move to all grant assistance.)

Q: Who was your boss, who was the senior economist?

COHEN: That was Dick Palmer. The actual head of the office was a State officer, Dick Bloomfield. Bloomfield went on to have an outstanding career, including ambassadorships in Ecuador and Portugal.

Q: What were the other rotations that you did?

COHEN: I did rotations in Program, Capital Development, Evaluation and Agriculture. The Agriculture Office experience was in USAID's Northeast Mission, which was located in Recife. The Northeast Office was larger than many other countrywide USAID Missions at that time, both in terms of staff and program size.

As I previously mentioned, those rotations were good experiences for me. Because I had been sitting in the embassy, I understood quite well how embassies worked, but had less of an idea about how AID operated and what it did. I learned a lot of that on my rotations which, for obvious reasons, also served me very well. In particular, it helped me decide what I wanted to do if I didn't want to continue being an economist. That is how I came to decide that I was most interested in becoming a program officer.

Q: You mentioned Donor Lion being one of your mentors; was this rotation to Recife where you got to know him?

COHEN: It was. Donor was the USAID Associate Director for the Northeast. He also was the Consul General for Recife. Donor was this awesomely smart, sometimes fearsome man who I came to greatly admire.

Q: It was a small enough office you got to know him pretty well?

COHEN: For one thing, we sat in different buildings. Also, as I was just this 25-year-old kid IDI and Donor was the head AID officer there and the consul general, I can't say that we just hung out. But I certainly got to know him. Recife was a much smaller post than Rio. So you did get to meet pretty much all of the people there.

Q: Do you remember any of the work you did there?

COHEN: I do. I was in the Agriculture Office for all of my rotation in the Northeast. This was a good experience, as working with agriculture defined much of the rest of my time in Brazil. Even though I was a program officer, nearly everything I was involved with was related to the Mission's agriculture program, which was quite large. My experience included project design, evaluation and budgeting. We had projects in ag education, dry-land fisheries, seed production, extension, etc. It was a very positive experience.

Q: Did you travel at all?

COHEN: In the Northeast?

Q: Yes.

COHEN: Absolutely I did.

Q: Where did you go?

COHEN: Oh, I went to Alagoas, traveled fairly far into the interior of Pernambuco (the state for which Recife was capital) and visited the interior of Ceará, which gave me the chance to re-visit Fortaleza, where I had done my graduate research.

Q: And these were AID projects you were visiting?

COHEN: Yes, right.

Q: So, they were everywhere almost, most of the states in the Northeast?

COHEN: In the Northeast – yes. The idea of rotation was to expose people to what the Agency did and how it did it and who the people were who were implementing it. While I might have learned that all another way, I wouldn't have learned it as quickly or comprehensively.

Q: Was Rita with you on this rotation to the Northeast or did she have to stay in Rio?

COHEN: Rita came with me to Recife. She was the one that killed the cockroaches in the temporary apartment we had. We had some huge cockroaches.

Q: Oh, my gosh. And then you rotated to the program office in Rio?

COHEN: I did.

Q: I knew one guy who rotated to the motor pool, but you didn't do that.

COHEN: No, that was not me.

Q: So you had decided that you wanted to be a program officer. Did the Mission transfer you once you made that interest known?

COHEN: Bill Gelabert had recruited me aggressively to become a program officer. As I remember it, he made the transfer happen fairly quickly.

Q: And who was Bill Gelabert?

COHEN: Bill Gelabert, at the time, was the Deputy Program Officer. During my rotation to that office, he took care that I would see that my greatest professional interests and goals would be best served by becoming a program officer. The Program Office would offer me a variety of responsibilities that I would find challenging and engaging.

When I began in Brazil, the Agency made a distinction between Program and Capital Development Officers. The former mostly worked on grant programs while the latter was focused on loans. Gelabert strongly believed that the distinction between the two functions was not valid. As he rose to become the Assistant Director for Program, he successfully sought to combine the Program and Capital Development responsibilities. Therefore, as a program officer, I would get to work in both areas. I was very excited to be given that opportunity.

Q: Did you also do strategy?

COHEN: I did and especially liked being engaged with strategy work. I was always amazed that, even though I might have been only 26 or 27 years old, I was the one who did the first draft of Mission strategy and what followed my draft was people's reaction to what I wrote. I'm not being so arrogant as to say that everything I wrote was always fully accepted, but it was really exciting to start with a blank piece of paper and to assemble a full strategy. This was an experience that held me in good stead as my career developed throughout the years. I acquired a good feel for what strategy was and the purpose it served. I had a similarly positive learning experience working on project evaluations. Indeed, strategy, evaluation, and project design were all the vital parts of a USAID programmatic whole. I learned all about that during these early years.

Q: So, you participated in evaluations. Did you lead any?

COHEN: I certainly participated in many evaluations and led several, especially in the agriculture sector.

Q: I saw your name on one. Remember?

COHEN: That was for a primary education program in Brazil's Northeast. I was a participant in that evaluation, not the leader. Education wasn't normally my portfolio. However, my supervisors said you know evaluation; you know the Northeast; and you're a fluent Portuguese speaker, so why don't you go with these folks. That was a great experience. I really learned a lot and greatly appreciated being a member of that team.

Q: Was there a significant age differentiation within the Mission? You were one of the younger people there; you were in your mid-20s. I think there may have been several others your age and you were working with people who were at least twice that age if not older. How did they welcome you? Were there social interactions? Did it go well?

COHEN: What you say about the differences in the ages of officers in that Mission is quite true. From my perspective, the differences never posed a significant obstacle. The only person I can think of who was not always comfortable about the age issue was Bill Gelabert, which was ironic as he was the one who recruited me to the Program Office. When USAID (along with the rest of the Embassy) was made to transfer its main office to Brasilia, I was Gelabert's first choice to make the move. In one of our first nights in Brazil's new capital, Rita and I were invited out to dinner with Gelabert and his wife,

Georgia. They got onto the subject of age. Georgia said, “You know, I never speak to anybody under 25.” Rita responded very quietly, “Georgia, I’m 24.” Georgia quickly replied, “Except to Rita.” But, in general, everybody treated us very well. What I really grew to like about AID was that it offered a very egalitarian work environment; age and grade mattered relatively little. If you had something to contribute, you were you encouraged to say it. What a great fertile environment for the development of young officers! Also, Rita and I weren’t the only young ones in the USAID Mission. A good percentage of us were in our 20s or early 30s. USAID/Brazil was a major beneficiary of the IDI program, which was generally perceived to be drawing high quality young officers to the Agency.

Q: And Brazil seemed to have a policy of wanting a lot of IDIs.

COHEN: Right. But work and social groupings were not always age defined. For example, there was a fellow who was a USDA (United States Department of Agriculture) PASA (Participating Agency Service Agreement) named Henry Gerber, who was a cooperative advisor to the Ministry of Agriculture. Henry was certainly well over 60 at that time, which to my 20-something was really old. Henry and his wife were among our best friends. He was a great guy and had an incredible life story as a World War II refugee in Europe, Asia and the U.S. Another couple of close friends, more than twice our ages, were the Food Officer and his wife, who in an earlier incarnation had been missionaries in the Brazilian Northeast.

Q: So, you lived in Rio for a year or two years?

COHEN: Two years.

Q: Two. And where did you live?

COHEN: Copacabana, in an apartment about five blocks back from the beach.

Q: And you enjoyed that? You enjoyed the music scene I think?

COHEN: We absolutely did.

Q: That was an era of great Brazilian music, was it not?

COHEN: It certainly was. One of the great things about living in Copacabana in that era was having so much great music within walking distance, and affordable – even on an FS-7 salary. The purchasing power parity of the dollar against the cruzeiro during a period of hyperinflation in Brazil was really strong. So, even though we were at the low end of the wage scale, there was really little that was unaffordable to us in Rio. As you walked down the street in Copacabana or other nearby parts of the city, there on offer were such greats as Caetano Veloso, Maria Betania, Elis Regina, Jorge Ben and Baden Powell. You could just walk up, spend the current equivalent of about \$5 and see those people. It was amazing.

Q: And you had the beach.

COHEN: The beach was its own microcosm in Rio. It was a great place to find your spot under an umbrella (my very light skin is not compatible with lots of sun) and watch the world of volleyball, maté and coconut water venders and string bikinis parade by.

Q: And they forced you to go to Brasilia or you chose to go to Brasilia? How did that work?

COHEN: Well, there really was no forcing about it. Gelabert asked me to make the move, and it seemed like that was what was good for the Agency and its future in Brazil. We were content with making the move.

Q: The move was because the Government of Brazil was encouraging the embassies to relocate to the new capital area?

COHEN: Brasilia had been constructed about a decade earlier, but most of the embassies in Brazil, while they had a token presence in Brasilia, still had their headquarters in Rio. Finally, in 1970 or 1971, the Brazilian government told embassies that they either had to move fully to Brasilia or lose recognition of their diplomatic accreditation. As a result, embassies began the westward move. On my first visit to Brasilia, before our move there, the U.S. Embassy was in a single-wide house trailer. Alongside that trailer, construction had just begun on what is now the old section of the current embassy.

Rita and I weren't upset about moving to Brasilia; we thought it would be an interesting experience. I don't remember having any negative feelings about that. Obviously, Brasilia wasn't going to be the exotic locale that Rio was; but work-wise it was a great opportunity. And indeed, so it was.

Q: Socially, what was it like during those early years in Brasilia?

COHEN: There was a good cohort of young people to do things with. Brasilia has one of the most magnificent climates I have ever lived in. It was never too hot or too cold, though there was a lot of red dust due to all the new construction and dry air. There were plenty of things to do. Of course, it wasn't the same as Rio. However, between the embassy swimming pool and tennis courts, camping opportunities and other things, living in Brasilia was quite fine.

In those early days, one of the very best things about being in Brasilia was the enhanced ability to make close friends with Brazilians. While Brazilians, in general, are warm, friendly and good humored, they also are very family oriented – a fact that limited social opportunities in Rio. In Brasilia, nearly everyone, regardless of nationality, was a newly arrived transplant looking to form new friendships. For the most part, Brazilians had no nearby families. We made some really good friendships, some of which still endure. I very much enjoyed that.

Q: Did you live in a super block?

COHEN: We did. Super Quadra Sul 113.

Q: And that was what, like an all-American apartment building?

COHEN: It was a ghetto for those in grades FS- 2 and under. The USAID third of the building included, in addition to us direct hires, some USAID contractors. Also, on the top floor, at the time, was the Marine house. That could get a bit noisy.

Q: Oh. I'd forgotten about that.

COHEN: Living in a USAID ghetto had been one of the things we really didn't look forward to in the move to Brasilia. But even that turned out to be not so bad once we had done it. There were probably more advantages than disadvantages. For example, after a good party, you never had to worry about your drive home, and it was easy to borrow from your neighbors.

Q: Right. Were you on a second tour at this point?

COHEN: Our first tour in Brazil lasted three years – the two in Rio, plus the first year in Brasilia. We then took home leave and returned for a two-year second tour.

Q: Oh, I see. So, you had extended and this time period we are discussing is your third year. How did your work change when you went to Brasilia?

COHEN: Well, as I mentioned earlier, in the program office our workload was divided among the different sectors of USAID engagement. One of us had health, another had education and a third had agriculture. I was the one assigned the agriculture portfolio, which was probably the largest of the different sectors. I had a great relationship with the head of the ag office, Bill Rodgers. Living in Brasilia provided a great opportunity to work even more closely without all the background noise of the BEG Building in Rio. Our more compact USAID Mission had only four or five floors of a smallish office building – the Edificio Bandeirantes. It made communication and collaboration with people so much easier. I really enjoyed and gained a great deal from that new and improved environment.

Q: What was that ag portfolio that you were involved with?

COHEN: It was quite diverse. The largest part of it was strengthening university level agricultural education, which I'll come back to. Ultimately, we progressed into ag research and a substantial seed production program. There also was a project working with agricultural cooperatives. In addition, there were some marketing activities that we did.

Agricultural education was the largest part of the portfolio, the one that probably had the most money and certainly had the biggest impact over the long term. Indeed, this might be the most consequential program that USAID ever had in Brazil. Today, the investments we made in that sector continue to pay huge dividends to Brazil, its development and its place in the world.

Q: Would you say a bit more about that program.

COHEN: Assistance to improve the undergraduate degree programs in agriculture began in 1963, well before I arrived in Brazil. It ran through 1973. That project worked with four universities to develop sound agricultural education at the Bachelor's Degree level. The local universities were located in Fortaleza, Ceará; Viçosa, Minas Gerais; Piracicaba, Sao Paulo and Porto Alegre, Rio Grande do Sul. These universities were paired with the University of Arizona (in Ceará), the University of Wisconsin (in Rio Grande do Sul), Ohio State (in Sao Paulo) and Purdue (in Minas Gerais). Without being certain, I have the understanding that all or most of those partnerships continue today to have close working relationships.

One of the best contributions of those programs was the large amount of people we sent to the U.S. to get undergraduate degrees and, ultimately, graduate degrees in agricultural sciences. When their degrees were completed, the trainees returned to their universities and not only conducted classes in their areas of expertise, but also in the style of American universities – truly a model of development assistance sustainability. This resulted in outstanding educational programs that turned out large numbers of highly qualified Brazilian agricultural specialists for generations to come. This level of expertise has enabled Brazil to vastly expand its agricultural productivity in ways that made the country self-sufficient in providing for its food and nutrition needs as well as furnishing a major input to growing an internationally respected agri-business sector.

In (approximately) 1971, when it looked like USAID had mostly achieved the goal that we had for undergraduate ag education, the Brazilian universities came to us and said that they would really like to be able to offer Master's and PhD programs. They asked if USAID could wrap up the existing program and begin a new one to focus on graduate level degrees. We had conversations within the Mission about the worth of doing that. It was easy to see why it would be a good idea to proceed. But we thought about how we could get something better out of this. As a result, we went back to the universities and said we would be willing to consider graduate level assistance, if they, the Brazilian universities, would agree to provide technical assistance to the other agricultural universities in the country that had not received USAID assistance in the past. In this way, the four Brazilian universities would be providing similar technical assistance to what they themselves had received for the previous decade. In doing this, they would be using the faculty that had been trained under the earlier program and transferring the educational model they were now using. They had something great to offer and were enthused by the opportunity of sharing it. That said, they also liked the carrot of receiving the requested assistance for the graduate level programs. So, here we had a great model

for replication and expansion of the development investment USAID had made in undergraduate education.

Q: Were there other impacts?

COHEN: There were many. But in the short term, that is, during my time in Brazil, there was one of particularly high importance. This was agricultural research.

The high quality, well trained agriculturalists that resulted from both the undergrad and graduate aged programs contributed mightily to Brazil's great advances in agricultural research. Many of the senior faculty that we worked with over the years had close relationships with Brazil's Ministry of Agriculture. At about the same time we were designing the Master's and PhD level assistance program, we were asked by the Ministry if we would help in strengthening their relatively small research program. The rationale for proceeding with this was immediately logical to us.

This ultimately contributed in a major way to the development of a national agricultural research structure called EMBRAPA. Over the years, EMBRAPA has developed some outstanding technology for tropical agriculture. They have made major contributions to productivity increases in a wide variety of areas. Illustrative of this are the advances made on production enhancements in chronically drought-prone areas, such as the Brazilian Northeast. EMBRAPA research also made Brazil one of the world's major producers of soybeans. In recent decades, Brazil has become a provider of foreign aid, particularly in Portuguese speaking Africa, places such as Mozambique and Angola. Improvement in tropical agricultural productivity is one of the principal areas of Brazilian assistance. Much of that assistance is provided using EMBRAPA staff and intellectual resources.

Q: Right. This was a major success. You mentioned the continuing relationships between the universities that participated in the program. Do we have evidence of that continuing? Has that been evaluated do we know?

COHEN: My knowledge of this is only anecdotal. At a recent USAID Alumni Association Annual Meeting, one of the participants, a fellow from Purdue, was a product of the Brazil program, a fact he acknowledged with great praise. I also have heard about continuing activities between Ohio State University and ESALQ, in Sao Paulo. I believe that an evaluation of the overall program exists, but I have not seen it.

Q: I agree with that. I went back 20 years later and found that was happening still. So, you worked really exclusively on agriculture pretty much when you were in Brasilia?

COHEN: That is true. However, I also did nutrition and feeding programs, but they didn't define my time in Brazil in the same way that agriculture did.

Q: Okay. So, you did home leave.

COHEN: I did.

Q: There was no trouble coming back to Brazil for another tour.

COHEN: Rita and I loved living and working in Brazil. It was our undergraduate dream to be doing this. The thought of not returning for a second tour never entered our minds.

Q: Even though the Brazil USAID mission was starting to downsize, wasn't it?

COHEN: By the time I returned from home leave, it was. Brazil, it was said, was on the threshold of "graduation."

Q: Which would have been about 1975?

COHEN: '72.

Q: '72. Alright. Anything else you want to say about the Brazil experience in terms of the program content and your involvement with it?

COHEN: A macro political-economic thing to emphasize is that we worked in Brazil at an optimal time. Brazil was undergoing what was then commonly referred to as the "economic miracle." The country was under the rule of a military government that, without question, had its downside in the way it managed human rights. In addition, much they did impacted negatively on the country's institutions. But these same military rulers very clearly had a high priority for development. One of the career-important things I started learning in Brazil and never stopped learning is that foreign assistance works best when you're helping people do what they truly already want to do. We, USAID, are extremely effective when we work as a catalyst; we are less good when we are trying to drag people along or push them. In Brazil, many of the people we worked with were running in the right developmental direction, virtually saying to us, if you can help me with this I'll be able to run even faster. And that is what we did. The agriculture education program was an excellent illustration of that. The Brazilian counterparts we had in that program were awesome people. Their priority was to improve the quality of university level agricultural education, and we were facilitators; we were the catalyst. We provided critical support to their ability to succeed. It would be arrogant to say that they wouldn't have succeeded without us, because maybe they would have. But we certainly improved the quality of what they accomplished, if not fully enabled it.

Q: There is an important point to add. Helping Brazil become a major exporter of soybeans, maize and other products led a senator from Arkansas, Dale Bumpers, to put an amendment into the Foreign Assistance Act, I believe in the late '70s, saying that AID cannot provide agricultural assistance to countries whose exports might compete with America's exports. As a result, the AID agriculture assistance program almost disappeared globally.

COHEN: Yes. The irony of that is in the early days of my involvement with the agricultural education program, when you talk strategically, one of the most salient things we discussed was helping Brazil become self-sufficient in meeting its food needs. At the time, Brazil was not able to do that. As the song said, there was an awful lot of coffee in Brazil, but even though Brazilians did their best to drink as much of it as possible, many poor people, especially in the Northeast, were going hungry. A measure of the success of this program is that Brazil went from being a food deficit country to a competitive exporter.

Q: It's a marvelous success story of interesting significance.

So, as you moved toward the end of your fifth year; you must have been thinking that it was time to leave Brazil, and what do I do next?

COHEN: Eventually, I did think about that. But before I was too deep into those thoughts, two jobs came at me through informal channels. Surprisingly, one of the inquiries was regarding my possible interest in becoming the agriculture officer in Guatemala. Evidently, this query was made because I had done so much in ag Brazil, and it seemed that some people had noticed. While I was entertained by the possibility, it was immediately clear that it would not be the right path for me. Then I was offered the program officer job in the Dominican Republic, which did seem like the right kind of assignment for me. Again, this "interest" in me came through informal channels. As far as I understood, there wasn't a very functional formal assignment process in the Agency at that time. I am sure that there must have been some kind of system there, but from my perspective, it was virtually non-existent.

Q: No bidding process?

COHEN: Not that I ever knew much about. One could tell HR which countries interested you, but it was never clear that ever was considered. Instead, as I understood it, through informal channels, people heard that you were on the market and word got around. That certainly was the way that I got identified for the DR (Dominican Republic) job, at least as far as I ever knew. The DR Mission Director had been the Brazil Director's deputy in Colombia. To my understanding at the time, that link was key to putting me together with the DR position, although I can't say that for sure. This sort of informality also explains, at least in part, why many officers tended not to move much between geographic bureaus because the people available to you to speak with about assignments were the ones you knew, and these individuals tended to be in your geographic bureau.

Q: So, they offered you the Program Officer position in the DR?

COHEN: Jack Robinson (the Director in Santo Domingo) evidently had heard positive things about me. But he also knew that I had just turned 30, and he wasn't sure he was ready to have such a young program officer. As a result, I was asked to go to the DR on a TDY (Temporary Duty Assignment) for Jack to evaluate me before he gave his personal

approval of the assignment. Happily, the visit worked out well, and the assignment was formally made.

Q: As the program officer?

COHEN: As the program officer.

Q: That was a big step up, right?

COHEN: The job was a very good one for me. Working in the Dominican Republic was quite a different kind of assignment. As a country occupying only half of the island of Hispaniola, compared with Brazil, the DR was rather small. Relative to the rest of the Agency, the USAID program was of average size. Well before my assignment there, Brazil was a love of my life; no other country was going to compare with it. There is no denying that I went through some withdrawal pain.

The language transition was relatively easy, as I already had a fairly strong grounding in Spanish. Also, there was the revelation about language that I had while I was in Brazil. This revelation was that language learning in school was more like gaining knowledge of the elements of a secret code, while my Brazil experience taught me that language was more of a means of communication. Thus, I now understood that it wasn't essential to have every grammatical element correct. The main goals were to understand and be understood. Getting grammar and vocabulary correct were certainly important, but communication was the first, most essential goal. That understanding held me in good stead as I transitioned from Portuguese to Spanish.

Q: Did they test you in Spanish?

COHEN: They did.

Q: And you had to have a certain grade level to be assigned there?

COHEN: Yes. To begin my new job, I had to have an FSI level two, which I had without any classes before my travel to post. Immediately after my arrival, I began language classes and quickly got up to an FSI three level.

Q: What was the program like in the DR?

COHEN: The USAID/DR program had a rather typical portfolio for that time period, at least for the LAC region. It had agriculture and health elements, a fairly substantial PL 480 food assistance program, a nutrition activity and a relatively small education program. As the Program Officer, I performed what at the time were the normal Program Officer functions: I wrote strategies, did evaluations, made sure all the program implementing documents that moved money were completed on time and made sure that grants and contracts were signed and in place. I worked with all of the offices in the mission. The goal was to do the bureaucracy that facilitated program implementation.

During that time period, the Agency discovered what today are called non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Back then in the mid-70s, they were known as PVOs, private voluntary organizations. There was an Agency mandate to do more small grants with PVO implementers. The Director, Jack Robinson, was not a big supporter of this effort and did not want it to distract the technical offices from their “real,” higher priority responsibilities. Thus, the conduct of the PVO effort was made a Program Office responsibility or, as Jack called it, David’s little aid program.

Q: Oh.

COHEN: It turned out that managing this program was both interesting and fun. For me, it was a good first experience in overseeing my own technical assistance portfolio. Most of the grants that we made were to smaller Dominican organizations, who did things in sectors such as education, small enterprise and humanitarian assistance. There also were some U.S. PVOs that also received grants.

For a while, after the Mission lost its education officer, I also was given that portfolio.

Q: Oh, really?

COHEN: It was another perspective and a very good experience for me – a good grounding in things that would be helpful over the years.

Q: Did these non-government organizations already exist or did you sort of have to prod them into existence?

COHEN: They already existed.

Q: And they had been supported by other donors perhaps or not at all?

COHEN: There was a variety of organization types, sizes and histories.

Q: Were there other elements in the Program Office portfolio?

COHEN: Indeed there were. We haven’t mentioned an activity that was one of my favorites, the Special Development Activities Fund (SDAF). This was a small community development grants activity. No grant was larger than \$5,000. We also required that grantees contribute at least 50 percent of what they received from us in cash or kind (e.g. local labor). All LAC missions had SDAF resources, though it was never a large amount of money. Other geographic bureaus (e.g. Africa) had similar resources, often known locally as the Ambassador’s Fund. Grantees used these resources for a variety of purposes, including water systems, drainage cleanups, small-scale irrigation, and school and health clinic fix-ups. Often, Peace Corps volunteers were engaged in facilitating and implementing some of these grants (an attention getter was a PCV basic literacy program for prostitutes). Though the SDAF program involved very little USAID money, I always believed that this was some of the best, most sustainable development that we did. Local

engagement in and ownership of the activities and their results were clearly obvious in the pride communities showed when we visited with them.

Q: Let me ask you a question that may take you back to the Brazil situation. In the DR did you have the combined Program Office/Capital Development Office?

COHEN: We did not.

Q: As you look back upon the experience of bringing those two offices together, at least in the Brazil context, how well did that work? That was a really novel organizational change.

COHEN: It certainly was. While there were two very different models in Brazil, there was an almost artificially easy transition in blending them. In Rio, there was a significant cleavage in the roles and responsibilities between Capital Development and the Program Office. However, in Brasilia there never was a Capital Development Office. Those of us who moved to Brasilia were, without exception, Program Office people. As the move to Brasilia pressed forward, the existing Rio-based Capital Development officers moved on to other posts. Their “turf,” in effect, was not taken away; it evaporated, as the Rio office sharply diminished in size.

Q: But that organizational change had not proceeded across all the Latin America Bureau?

COHEN: No, not to my knowledge. Over time, I believe Agency-wide, the functions have blended. Along the way, Capital Development officers were re-branded as Project Development Officers (PDOs). As the Agency moved out of loan-funded programming, the grant/loan distinction between the two functions was lost. Today, when you talk with Agency folk about project and program types, they nearly always are referred to (using their personnel backstop codes) as 02/94s, a blurred and blended distinction.

Q: Any significant successes you can think about in the DR program that you feel happy about?

COHEN: Yes. The program I was most engaged with there in terms of its conception and implementation was an education project called IDEA.

Q: IDEA, I-D-E-A?

COHEN: Yes, the Instituto Dominicano de Educación Aplicada. This was a distance education program, home study, the first in the country. It was essentially meant for poor people who could not attend school otherwise. Typically, students were young adults, not necessarily school age people. Essentially, IDEA put together learning materials that were backed up by a weekly radio program. About once a month, students would come in for a class held at a local school so that they could have the opportunity to ask questions of a qualified teacher. It worked quite nicely. As an AID officer, it was interesting to

have the full project experience from conceptualization through implementation and to work intensely in a sector that was not agriculture. I thoroughly enjoyed that experience.

Q: Is there something else you would like to discuss that took place during your time in the Dominican Republic?

COHEN: Yes, there is. After I had been in the DR for about two years, I got a call from AID/Washington asking if I would lead a team to do initial project development for a new USAID mission that was going to be set up in Guinea-Bissau, in West Africa. What they were seeking was someone who could design projects, had good strategic skills, and spoke Portuguese. I was very excited to have the opportunity to do this. Happily, the DR Mission Director, Jack Robinson, was willing to release me for the five weeks or so I would need to be away.

For the Guinea-Bissau task, the Africa Bureau had put together a team of five of us. There were two AID direct hires, myself and an engineer and three others, one from the University of Wisconsin and two from Purdue University. Recall that Wisconsin and Purdue were two of the universities involved in the Brazil higher agricultural education program, although one of those on the team was an education specialist. I had not previously met any of the team members.

The pre-trip instructions we received from the Africa Bureau were minimal. We were just told to go to Bissau, develop a portfolio of projects and bring it back. The content of what would be in that portfolio was not defined. The decision on that would be ours. We were to be on the ground for three weeks. The war for independence between Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde against Portugal, the former colonial power, had just ended, perhaps six months earlier. At the time Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde were one country. There was no U.S. embassy in Bissau, let alone a USAID mission.

Up until that time, the Guineans had not really seen any official Americans other than a few drop-ins. To suddenly have me in Bissau for several weeks, junior as I obviously was, I was still the American government to the Guineans that we met. However the most exciting thing for me (and, to this day, an important career experience) was to have my own blank piece of paper on which to design a USAID program from scratch. Our team spent the first week meeting with a wide variety of people trying to understand the country and determine what its most urgent development needs were. Arguably, that was not a very long time to do such an assessment. However, during that period, Guinea Bissau was at the bottom of the list of the world's least developed countries. Thus, defining urgent needs – especially in the apparent absence of other donors, was a fairly straightforward exercise for us. Based on that initial understanding, we developed some project concepts (two in agriculture and one in primary education) and ran them by the Guineans that we had met the previous week. We then spent the following two weeks writing the preliminary project design papers. These Project Identification Documents (PIDs) basically set up the projects' structure and purpose and indicated who the counterparts in the Guinean government would be. It was a great experience.

Q: Did the Guineans know you were coming?

COHEN: I don't think they did, as there was nobody there to tell them, and telecommunication in Bissau was rather primitive. Really, we just arrived, introduced ourselves and explained what we were there to do. We were received with enthusiasm and were given good support.

Q: You met with the various ministries?

COHEN: We did. And they took us out on several field trips. We got into the interior of the country. It was an eye-opener for me. This was my first experience in Africa. Guinea Bissau was then at the bottom of the UN's Human Development Index. It was interesting for me, a guy from the Latin American Bureau, to see what such a really poor country looked like. Guinea-Bissau compared with the Dominican Republic? – oh my goodness! In the DR, we sought participants to attend graduate school in the U.S. In Guinea-Bissau, it was hard to find anyone educated beyond grammar school. I encountered development issues I had not considered previously.

Q: Right.

COHEN: It was truly a growth experience.

Q: So, David, you did that what, a three-week TDY?

COHEN: Well, three weeks in Bissau, plus a week of prep in Washington before our travel to Bissau and another week of debrief on our return. We also debriefed people at the West Africa regional office in Dakar, Senegal, who would become engaged in the Guinea Bissau start-up.

Q: What an introduction to Africa!

COHEN: Yes. That was my first time in Africa; it was very exciting.

Q: So, anything else about the DR? How long were you there?

COHEN: Three years.

Q: And, as it happened near the end of your Brazil tour, somebody called you again and, without a truly operational bidding system, suggested your next assignment?

COHEN: Not this time. I had discovered that at least two, maybe three people who had served in the Dominican Republic before me had been approved for Agency-financed long-term training. I was immediately intrigued with the thought of spending a year at a university, learning about some career-helpful things that I wanted to know better. At the completion of my first two years in the DR, I was ready to leave – not because I was unhappy there, but I was ready to move on. However, the Mission Director firmly

disagreed with my wish to depart. He said that he would firmly support me for whatever I wanted to do after the DR assignment if I would stay another year. I agreed and told him that what I most wanted next was a year of long-term university training. With some ultimately inconsequential bumps along the road, the Agency assigned me to a year at Cornell University in Ithaca, NY.

Q: What did you study at Cornell?

COHEN: There were analytical tools that colleagues sometimes cited that I did not always understand as well I wanted. These included such things as cost benefit analysis, rates of return and other statistical tools. Also, now that I had good field experience as a hands-on development practitioner, I wanted classes and time to better understand and think about the process and how it functioned.

Q: Were there many USAID and State Department people at Cornell?

COHEN: There were two AID officers and one State officer. The other AID person and I were backstopped by the University's Department of Regional Planning and Architecture. This may seem a strange place to house a Master's program in International Development, but that was how the University had structured it. The program gave me ample latitude to cobble together the courses that I wanted. It was a great experience. While I already had a Master's degree from NYU, I participated in that program immediately after my Bachelor's degree. However, as I started out at Cornell, I had been out working for AID for nearly a decade. I had amassed a good amount of relevant real world experience to draw upon to enhance my understanding of what was being discussed. My perspective increasingly became very pragmatic, i.e. my principal question to myself was "how is this information usable to me?" This was really exciting. The questions I was able to ask in class were different from many of my fellow grad students because I was so focused on application, a difference between development theory and development practice. I had a really good year at Cornell. I had some first rate professors, both people who taught me in classes and others who were my advisors.

Early on, my main advisor said to me that I needed to be certain to do all that was necessary to complete the requirements for receiving the Master's degree. I replied that to get a Master's degree, I have to spend too much of my time in Ithaca writing a dissertation. What I really wanted to do during that period was to focus on taking advantage of all the different courses the university had to offer. My thought was that I could write any time I wanted, but wouldn't have the same chance to learn all that I would in the classroom. His response was that the department really wanted me to get the Master's degree; it would be good for the university to have someone like me do that. I thought that over and made him an offer. If the university/department would let me write exactly the dissertation paper I had in mind, I would go for the degree. I told him what my idea was, and he quickly agreed.

Q: What was the idea?

COHEN: In one of the organizational planning courses I took, we were assigned a book by a fellow named Graham Allison called “The Essence of Decision.” Do you know it?

Q: I haven't read it, but I know of it.

COHEN: It was one of the most insightful books that I have ever read. Graham Allison was a highly regarded Harvard professor and political scientist.

“The Essence of Decision” offered a means of analysis for understanding strategic decision making, especially during times of crisis. It established a framework to help understand why people and organizations did what they did on the international stage and presented three different models for analyzing how and why those things happened. He explained each of his three models and how it functioned. Then he took the Cuban Missile Crisis and analyzed it through each of the three models. The way Allison structured his book was different from anything I had previously seen. Indeed, I admired it so much that I adapted that structure for my dissertation. It was a very effective analytical methodology.

Briefly (perhaps too briefly) Allison’s three models were: 1) The Rational Actor, under which governments are considered to be the primary actor, with an established set of goals; 2) The Organizational Process, which posits that in crisis, government leaders do not look at the situation as a whole, but break it down along pre-established organizational lines (e.g. Departments of Defense and State, CIA); and 3) The Governmental Politics Model, which considers that actions are best understood as the result of politicking and negotiation by top leaders.

What I wanted to do in a dissertation was to analyze the history of the evolution of a USAID development project and to understand that process through Allison’s three different models.

Q: And you made it into a thesis and you got your degree?

COHEN: I did. Being at Cornell was such a good experience for me. It was exciting to gain new perspectives on both the bit of the world I had started to know and on my job and career in USAID. It re-energized me in a way that I needed following nearly 10 years in the Agency. Still, by the time my year at Cornell was complete, I was ready and happy to go back to being a USAID officer.

Q: Were you mostly in seminars?

COHEN: It was a mixture of things. Some of my classes were in large lecture halls, others were small seminars. The faculty and students I got to know at Cornell were a good and very diverse group of people. They provided essential input to the greater diversity of thought and perspective that I wanted from that year.

Q: Right. You mentioned an advisor; but you didn't mention his or her name. Who was your advisor at Cornell?

COHEN: My main advisor was David Lewis. At times, especially in the review of my dissertation, another first-rate professor, John Cohen, also was involved. I truly enjoyed working with them – especially the great conversations that we had.

Q: So, as you were finishing your academic year, what happened next in terms of your career?

COHEN: As I was now in the States, I was told that I needed to finish out three years in Washington. I did not really want to serve in AID/Washington, but “people” said I that I should. The conventional wisdom was that, if you wanted opportunities to serve in levels of greater responsibility, it would be helpful if Washington people knew you and what you could do. I came to view a tour in Washington like a prophylactic trip to the dentist – that is, while it might be a bit painful, ultimately I would be better off for doing it. That said, it was a challenge, especially from Ithaca, to find a Washington job that I wanted.

I wound up working for the person who had been my direct supervisor and the Deputy Mission Director in the Dominican Republic, Mike Stack. Mike was in PPC, the Agency's policy and budget bureau. I really did not want to work in PPC, the heart of much of the Agency's bureaucracy. But Mike was there; he was a known quantity; and I respected him.

So, I went to PPC, and hated it. My responsibility was to oversee the Middle East Bureau, which, at the time, was run by Joe Wheeler, one of the most outstanding officers in the history of USAID. I thought, what was someone like me doing hovering over a legend like Wheeler? It felt so arrogant. Regardless, I can say that the Mideast Bureau treated me very well. I was never made to feel like an outsider or an intruder. Perhaps (I don't really know), they were just happy that I wasn't the pain in the ass presence that might otherwise had been assigned to be PPC's watchdog on their Bureau.

Nevertheless, I didn't feel that I was doing anything constructive. After a month-and-a-half in that job, I began to look for something that I would like better to occupy my time in Washington. I had quickly learned that an advantage of being assigned to headquarters was that you did not necessarily have to remain in the job where you initially had landed. That is how I ended up working for Roy Stacy in the Office of Southern African Affairs.

Roy was leading a thorough development analysis of Southern Africa, an exercise known as SADAP, the Southern Africa Development Analysis Project. I had some of the analytical and program design skills he wanted. As Mozambique and Angola were part of the region, the fact that I spoke Portuguese also was of interest. At first, I worked in a tight knit analytical group that included Mike Feldstein, Charlie Blankstein and me. Someone saw the sign on the door to our office and said, “Blankstein, Feldstein and Cohen – it sounds like a Jewish law firm.”

Q: Right. What year would this have been?

COHEN: 1978. The Fall of that year.

Q: Why had the SADAP group been formed?

COHEN: This time period – the late ‘70s – was when most of the African independence movements were at or near resolution. It was also in the middle of the intense East-West competition of the Cold War. Both the Soviet Union and Cuba were active in Southern Africa. The U.S. strategic objective of that time was to reduce and eliminate conflict and to keep the region in the camp of the Western democracies.

Q: What were your initial responsibilities?

COHEN: Aside from working on putting together an overall regional analysis and strategy, I became fully responsible for the element focused on Angola. The Agency and the State Department were trying to better understand Angola. It was a resource-rich country (especially in hydrocarbons) that had fallen under the control of an ultra-left wing communist group that was in conflict with South Africa and, at some levels, represented a more global threat.

I wrote a long paper assessing the country and its politics. It also assessed its impressive variety of economic resources, e.g. oil, hydro-power, diamonds, gold, iron, agriculture. In essence, Angola was an extremely poor country that had suffered greatly from the violence and destruction of war, first for independence from Portugal, and later in a struggle for who would rule the country. Despite its poverty it was clear that if Angola were to have strong stable governance, it had enormous potential to succeed and become one of Africa’s wealthiest, most successful nations.

For about six months, I was Washington’s greatest expert on Angola. I really liked the challenge of learning about someplace that was completely new to me. At last, I had a Washington job I actually liked.

Q: Did you ever get to go to Angola?

COHEN: I never did have that opportunity, which was frustrating. Cold War politics of the time had not evolved to a place where USAID types could get directly involved on the ground. I was very disappointed.

Q: When you were working on this, I think the civil war was still going on, right? You had South Africa supported UNITA and the MPLA as an opposition group.

COHEN: Yes. Actually, I believe that war continued through the early 1990s.

Throughout most of the war, to the MPLA’s advantage, petroleum continued to be extracted in the enclave province of Cabinda. The irony was that it was an American

company (I believe that it was Gulf) extracting the oil under the protection of Cuban troops, who did this as part of their effort to support the MPLA.

Q: That was ironic. So, you were doing work on SADAP and then...

COHEN: And then things sort of evolved. The SADAP strategy exercise was completed, and I ended up spending the remainder of my two years in Washington in the Southern Africa office. For half of that time, I was the acting deputy director. I also managed our initial AID activities in Mozambique, before a mission was established there.

Q: And Roy Stacy was the head of the office?

COHEN: Stacy had moved on shortly after SADAP wrapped up. Marty Dagata, who also had spent much of his career in LAC, replaced Roy.

Being in that office was a good opportunity for me in terms of getting more experience in Southern Africa and more mainstream Africa programs. My knowledge base expanded beyond just the continent's Portuguese speaking countries.

Q: Are there any interesting experiences you would like to recount?

COHEN: There is one.

Before USAID had a Mission in Mozambique, I was sent to Maputo with a Food for Peace Officer to negotiate a PL 480 Title III program. Our principal negotiating counterpart was Janet Mondlane, who was then the Minister for International Cooperation. Mondlane, an American by birth, was the widow of Mozambique's first president, Eduardo Mondlane. The negotiation was quick and easy. Title III programs, as I knew them, always had policy objectives to spur improved food self-sufficiency. Thus, such provisions were included in the draft agreement. All of these objectives were fully within the Minister's comfort zone, i.e. they were things to which the GOM already was committed.

When I returned to Washington, the draft agreement was circulated for clearance. When it got to the Assistant Administrator for Africa, Goler Butcher, I was immediately summoned to her office. Clearly not a happy person, she waved the pages with the policy objectives at me and demanded to know what that was all about. I responded that these were all things well within Mozambique's comfort zone and that all Title III agreements had something on food policy commitments. She threw the papers down and said was not the case in the Africa Bureau and that they should be removed immediately. And so they were.

To me, this was a huge example of the culture clash between USAID's Latin America and Africa bureaus. No lasting harm was done. But it was a lesson that truly got my attention.

Q: Right. So you spent three additional years in Washington?

COHEN: Just two.

Q: Just two.

COHEN: My year in Ithaca counted as one of my three stateside years. I did my best to be certain that I wasn't going to stay a day longer than that.

Q: How did you find your next job or how did it find you?

COHEN: I had some back and forth with the Africa Bureau about being a deputy director in that region, but it never seemed to come to fruition. I was at the point in my career where I wanted to have a different development experience. Even though I really liked Latin America and the Caribbean and would not have minded being assigned there again, it would have been nice to have the experience of serving somewhere else. Then, one day, I got a phone call saying Donor Lion, who I had come to know and respect in Brazil and who was the Mission Director in Guyana, really wanted me to go there as his deputy.

Q: Guyana?

COHEN: Yes. Truth be told, it was not a country that immediately intrigued me or captured my imagination. But then I thought if I was going to be a senior manager in the Agency, having my first experience doing that at Donor's side would be an excellent opportunity. There was so much for me to learn from him. Having that experience with Donor would certainly be worth a tour in Guyana. So, that is what I did.

Q: Tell us about Guyana.

COHEN: Guyana was one of three Guianas – Dutch, French and British – that were located along the northeastern coast of South America. The Dutch and British both granted independence to their South American colonies. British Guiana became Guyana. Dutch Guiana became Suriname. Much of that happened in the mid '60s, the same time many African countries were granted independence from their former colonial rulers.

There were some similarities with what I had learned about Angola. Guyana was a country that was ideologically and ethnically divided. It also had a great depth and breadth of natural resources. Guyana had excellent possibilities for petroleum and gas exploitation, incredible hydropower potential, rich saltwater fisheries resources, extensive forestry development opportunities and proven, but underexploited, gold deposits. They also had large deposits of a unique kind of bauxite that is used in the production of industrial ovens and enjoyed a reliably stable and strong international market. It was said that only China had a similar kind of ore. In addition, there was lucrative agricultural potential that was barely developed.

The racial divide in the country was between black Afro-Guyanese and East Indians. The blacks were descendants of Africans brought in as slaves during one period of history and the East Indians who were brought in as slaves during another. For most of the years since independence, the blacks had control of the country and ran it mostly to serve their own interests and ideologically leftist orientation. An especially important priority of the government was to prevent the East Indians from succeeding in gaining more power and influence. Economically, the East Indians were the far more dynamic group. As a result, the government's political-economic point of view was that if development was allowed to happen in this country, it only would happen to the benefit of the Indians. Therefore, from the Guyanese government's perspective, any development outside their own direct control was to be considered a political threat to be severely limited or destroyed. Given this context, it is easy to see that Guyana was not the most propitious environment for a development entity such as USAID.

But all that said, as I had hoped, being Donor's deputy was the rich learning experience that drew me to the country. I never regretted that decision.

Q: Yes, say more about that.

COHEN: I was Donor's deputy, and I was also his next-door neighbor. I learned how he did and did not work well with the country team. Also, I saw, for better and worse, how he worked with AID/Washington on substance. In so many ways, Donor was brilliant. Perhaps his greatest weakness, though, was his limited patience for those weren't as gifted as he was. As someone once put it, he didn't suffer fools gladly. Still, even though all of this happened nearly forty years ago, I have such clear images of me sitting in a chair in front of his desk. We talked about everything. He was the esteemed professor and I was the enthusiastic student. What a great opportunity I had!

Being a first time deputy, I got a good education on areas of mission management that I had never really considered previously.

Q: Can you give an example of that?

COHEN: I had managed my office in the Dominican Republic as Program Officer and now I was supervising a dozen Americans and twice that number of Guyanese Foreign Service Nationals - FSNs. That was a very different experience for me. I learned things that were to serve me well throughout the remaining years of my USAID career.

While we had some first-rate American officers, some of the others were not among the Agency's brightest stars. As an example of the sometimes bizarre people issues that came to my desk, a newly assigned agriculture officer said that, from then on, when he went on field trips, he was going to demand double per diem. When I asked why, he said that the reason was that his shoes always got too dirty. At the same time, our Guyanese FSNs were some of the very best I ever worked with, be it on program or administration issues. When the British departed Guyana, they left behind elements of an outstanding educational system. Many of the products of that worked for USAID.

Q: It wasn't the kind of mission that attracted the best staff. Can you say some more about that?

COHEN: While I was the Acting Director during my second year, Washington nominated someone to fill a long empty position. When I looked over that person's performance record and verified what I had learned from people who had served with the nominee, I called the LAC Bureau in Washington and asked that the position be eliminated. I really didn't want yet another supervisory challenge. The person I spoke with – a Deputy Assistant Administrator – told me that they were aware that the person being assigned had a record of being problematic, but that I had to accept him/her anyway. To quote the DAA, "Every geographic bureau has a dumping ground for poor performers. Georgetown is it for LAC."

Q: For how long did you serve as Donor Lion's deputy in Guyana?

COHEN: Donor was transferred to Pakistan before I had completed my first year at post. Still, that was a good experience for me. Following Donor's departure, I served as Acting Director for the remainder of my tour in Guyana. At the Mission's going away party for Donor, my Guyanese secretary noticed my poorly concealed emotional reaction to his departure. The next morning, she came into my office and closed the door. She said, "I have to tell you that you chose the wrong career." I was rather amazed at her bluntness and asked why. Her response was that I obviously formed close relationships with people and was deeply saddened when one left. Being a USAID Foreign Service Officer, I was always going to be in a position where people came in and out of my life with great frequency. To avoid such situations, I would be better off in a more stable kind of job. I thought about that for a minute. Then I told her that I thought that she was wrong, that if you didn't feel an emotional tug when you separated from places, responsibilities or people, then you probably never cared for any of them. If that was the case, then the job probably wasn't worth doing. I still believe that.

Q: So, you were the Acting Mission Director for about a year. What was that like?

COHEN: On so many levels, it was a great opportunity. For example, this was my first real experience in being a member of the Country Team, that is, the Ambassador's senior staff. In the dozen years I had spent in USAID, I had heard very little about the Mission Director's role on the Country Team. Yet, this is one of the most significant things he or she does. The USAID Mission is a part of the whole of the USG presence in any given country, there to advance our country's interests by the things that we do. Substantially, it is in Country Team where we learn what is happening in the country that is of importance to the USG, how we as sections of the Embassy are addressing our priorities, and how, if possible, we can better coordinate the use of our resources to maximize their strategic impact and success.

I served in Guyana under two ambassadors who were quite different from one another. One was a very formal, career State officer and the other was a former Navy admiral who

had supported Reagan and, as his reward (!), was appointed as the U.S. Ambassador to Guyana. It was good for me to experience two such contrasting types. I also developed a close working and personal relationship with the DCM. We could be frank and disagree with one another, and still be able to walk away with a sound collegial relationship.

Q: Tell me more about your disagreements with the DCM.

COHEN: The DCM really disliked the corrupt and cynical government in charge of Guyana. He strongly objected to the fact that the U.S. gave the country any aid assistance. In my opinion, he wasn't wrong. However, it was a Washington level policy decision that we continue to implement our modest agriculture and health portfolios. This took place at a time before USAID was engaged in democracy and governance programming. This situation occasionally became a topic of a somewhat heated debate between the DCM and me. Despite some of the passion of our conversations, I think that we both appreciated the vigor of our exchange. Note: About two years later, when I was assigned to Bolivia, AID/Washington took the decision to shutter USAID/Guyana. When the program there was deobligated (that is, the various projects were de-funded), the newly freed resources were directed toward drought disaster assistance in Bolivia. I loved the irony of that.

Q: So, you finished two years and were again at the point of reassignment?

COHEN: Even though there were numerous hardships (e.g. violence and food shortages), we had a not unpleasant – if different – life in Georgetown. The small U.S. Embassy was an integral part of a small diplomatic community in a very small town. Because of the violence, people – foreign and Guyanese – did not go out much. Television broadcasting still had not arrived in the country. So, the international community made its own life, playing softball on Sunday afternoons, having disco parties under houses on stilts, darts and movie nights at the Marine House, and evenings of whist. While that might not have been the environment we would have chosen, there was a community closeness that was truly pleasurable.

However, that notwithstanding, on many levels, we indeed were ready to leave Guyana. There was little to attract us to extending our time there. Because the country was so poorly governed, there was little USAID could do with our program to improve the lives and futures of an otherwise very sympathetic population. Food was in scarce supply. There were chronic bread shortages. Potatoes were declared contraband by the GOG. A gift better than a bottle of wine to bring to a dinner party was a baking potato. There were ever more frequent power outages. The rate of emigration of the country's best human resources was alarming. And random violence affected the lives of nearly everyone.

Q: So, what transpired next?

COHEN: The Deputy Assistant Administrator for Latin America and the Caribbean, Buster Brown, phoned me and asked if I would like to be the Deputy Director in Bolivia.

Q: Buster was number two in charge of the Latin America Bureau?

COHEN: He was. I had served with him in Brazil.

Rita and I had visited Bolivia when we lived in Brasilia. We were instantly attracted to it. As a result, an assignment to Bolivia had been on my wish list for quite a while. When Buster asked me about my interest in serving there, he did it in a way that seemed to assume I was not going to be happy with the idea. Instead, I replied, “Bolivia, that’s where I most want to go.” He said, “You’re kidding, right?” Thus, in the summer of 1982, Rita and I took a direct transfer from Guyana to Bolivia, deferring home leave for later in the year. The Bolivia Mission had requested my immediate arrival to help with the completion of all they needed to accomplish by the end of the fiscal year.

Q: You went to Bolivia as the Deputy Director?

COHEN: Right. When I arrived in Bolivia, I was Hank Bassford’s deputy. Working for Hank – with Hank – was great. People often say that being deputy director is a terrible job. I was very lucky; I had two great deputy experiences with two very dissimilar individuals – Hank Bassford and Donor Lion. In quite different ways, both were extraordinarily effective managers. I learned a great deal from both of them.

Hank and I worked extremely well together. Years later, when I returned to Bolivia in my consultant afterlife and spoke with some of the FSNs, they said, “one of the best times for us FSNs was when you were Hank’s deputy. Everybody in the Mission knew that the two of you got along really well and nobody could play one of you off against the other. It made life so simple for us. Everyone worked well together, and we accomplished important things.”

Q: How do you do deputy directorships when you’ve got two different personalities? What roles did you play in those two different situations?

COHEN: Arguably, I am a very different personality from either Donor or Hank. Both were much more extroverted than I am. Nominally, I was the inside person and Hank the outside. However, there was a lot of very comfortable overlap. In effect, we were partners. That was similar to the way it worked with Donor. We managed the Mission and its program together. While it was clear who the senior partner was, that never seemed to come into play very often. Donor was much older than I was, and I was a first time deputy when I was working with him. My relationship with Hank was different because of both my experience with Donor and the protracted period that I had as “acting” in Guyana. Also, not that it was terribly important, Hank and I were about the same age.

In both instances, from the very start, we talked about the Director/Deputy relationship, who would deal with what. We also agreed that “inside” and “outside” were primary, not exclusive, designations. Each of us would be fully knowledgeable about the details and happenings of the other’s role. We would keep one another fully abreast of what we were

doing and engage one another when we needed to do that. That is what Donor and Hank did with me and that's what I did with the deputies I subsequently had over the years. As Director, I got a great deal out of having a fully engaged deputy who could be my sounding board and could serve as my alter ego when required. We had very open communications. I was fortunate that, in both my incarnations as Deputy and as Director, we were all (with one exception) compatible personalities, with similar objectives, who could speak openly with one another.

Q: So, you weren't Mr. Inside and Mr. Outside? It wasn't as simple as that?

COHEN: By and large, I would say with Donor and Hank it was like that. I was more inside and they were more outside. But that didn't mean I never went outside and that key host country contacts, for example, didn't know me. They did. We knew each other well. But while he was there, Hank was their significant someone. Then, when I took over from Hank, I was that person. But because of the way Hank and I worked, we already had established relationships; and there really were no "hand off" issues.

One of the most useful aspects of being Deputy Director was the opportunity to be the "fly on the wall," the observer. I learned a great deal doing that. Here is an example that has stayed with me all these years. I once went with Hank to a meeting with the Minister of Finance who was not necessarily one of the stars of the then Bolivian government. We were meeting to discuss a policy issue related to the implementation of one of our programs. After describing our concerns and getting little reaction, Hank became visibly agitated, speaking in a loud voice, gesturing with his arms, and pounding on the table. Ultimately, the somewhat shocked Minister agreed to do what Hank wanted. As we were riding back to the Mission, I said to Hank that I was amazed at what he did in that meeting. Hank laughed and said that something he had come to appreciate was that one of the most useful experiences he had had as an undergraduate was the result of having joined the university drama club. He admitted that what he had done with the Minister was pure performance. He knew the Minister and knew that being dramatic with him would produce the desired result. I thought damn, that was really good. But I also recognized that, being a very different personality from Hank's, I could never get away with anything like that. Still, it was a great experience to have been a fly on that wall.

Q: Bolivia was a much larger program than Guyana?

COHEN: Substantially larger. It was a great assignment. In the two years prior to my July 1982 arrival, Bolivia had had 6 military presidents. The military had overthrown the elected government in 1980. The country's past was rife with military interventions. Indeed, in its 200 year history, the average length of time for a presidency in Bolivia was less than three years. The country had just entered into a period of hyperinflation that ultimately exceeded something like 25,000 percent over an 18-month period. In a way vaguely similar to Guyana, Bolivia was a resource-rich, but not overly populated, country. It had the basic elements required for economic growth and development. Still, it was the second poorest in the Latin America and Caribbean region, behind only Haiti. Certainly, much of Bolivia's poverty was the product of its hyper-political instability.

Because they were never sure about the risks of the future, most Bolivians only did what was necessary to meet their immediate economic needs. To do otherwise would assume a level of risk that was worth neither their money nor time. Rational people from the bottom to the top of the economic scale were reluctant to invest in anything that would promise more than a nearly immediate payoff.

Because of the hyper-inflation, there was little bread or other staples available on the market. To buy these things, one needed to have a special relationship with the seller, to be their *casera*. Commodities retained their value; cash did not. As a result, vendors only sold enough of their stocks to meet their cash needs for the next day or so. For the average Bolivian, the situation was horrible. In their discussions with the World Bank, the IMF and the USG, the military people in charge of the GOB began to understand the harshness of the measures they would have to take to stop the inflation. They recognized how widely unpopular that would be. Ultimately, the military came to the conclusion that they did not want to be responsible for doing what it would take to fix the economy. As a result, they decided to return the government to civilian hands. For USAID – and the broader donor community, our job was to help make the ensuing economic recovery program succeed. USAID designed what came to be known as our 3D strategy. The Ds were democracy, development and drugs.

Q: What do you think the budget was?

COHEN: It was a fairly robust budget, one of the larger ones in the LAC region, though I am no longer able to recall the dollar amounts. Aside from the technical assistance programs we implemented, there was also a very large PL480 program that included both Title II and Title III food commodities. Title II was a direct feeding program implemented through U.S. non-governmental organizations, such as CARE and Catholic Relief Services. Under that program, vulnerable women and children received nutritious meals. We also had a large “food for work” activity, which paid needy individuals with food commodities for work they did on local, short term infrastructure projects. In addition, we administered a Title III program that, for all intents and purposes, was a budget support activity. Title III food was provided under very generous loan terms, that is, a long grace period for payback, a very low interest rate, and something like a five-year hiatus before the first repayment was due. Under Title III, we supplied Bolivia with basic food commodities, such as wheat and rice. Title III agreements usually had substantive policy components, usually in the area of agriculture. One of the goals of the program was to encourage greater food production that, ultimately, would eliminate the need for future food aid. Often, the program’s policy components would be the lead-in for more expedited assistance from the World Bank and/or the IMF.

The commodities provided under Title III would be sold on the open market, and the local currency income from those sales would go into a designated development fund administered by the Government of Bolivia with the advice and consent of USAID. Disbursements from the local currency fund would be spent on development programs agreed upon by both countries.

I believe that some of the best development we achieved in Bolivia was through the use of PL480 Title III local currency. In effect, the local currency component potentially could double the size of the assistance being provided under a given Title III program. Just to illustrate, say that \$1m in food came into country under that program. Then say that the \$1m in local currency generated from the sale of that food was used to support development projects. In this scenario, the food plus the development input would be worth \$2m. In sum, there was a triple bounce to the Bolivia Title III program: A, they got the food; B, they got the development impact from the local currency programming and C, there were policy objectives that, in many cases, helped expedite critical financial support from the IMF and the World Bank.

Q: These local currencies were trust funds, right?

COHEN: Not exactly, as we did not directly hold them. The local currencies were deposited into a Bolivian owned and administered account. Its uses, the specific parameters of which were described in agreements, were for development activities supported by both countries. Because these local currencies were not subject to the same bureaucratic regulations as USAID dollar-funded programs, we could respond on a timelier basis to previously unanticipated program needs and opportunities. In terms of our previous discussion of USAID being most effective when it is serving as a catalyst to local efforts, Title III local currency was a godsend.

It should be noted that this was a time when USAID as an agency pretty much stopped doing programmatic development loans worldwide. On an overall policy level, the U.S. government had come to the conclusion that adding to developing country debt, no matter how concessional the loan, was making things worse, not better, for the countries where we worked. Roughly from this point on, nearly all USAID assistance, with the exception of Title III, was provided on a grant basis.

In addition to the more traditional technical assistance projects, USAID/Bolivia did sector grants as well. While providing balance of payments support, these programs focused on specific sectors (for example, agriculture or health) and were offered in exchange for specific policy actions on the part of the Government of Bolivia. Most frequently, when we did these policy-oriented programs, elements were developed with some collaboration with the World Bank and/or the IMF. This was done with the blessing and participation of the Bolivian government, which was anxious to get Bank/Fund assistance as quickly as possible, so as to overcome the country's grave economic crisis. Our close coordination with the Bank and the Fund was clearly welcomed by the GOB.

Q: Talk a little more about those sector programs and what kinds of policy changes you were seeking.

COHEN: A good illustration was the elimination of price controls for food products. For example, such controls largely favored urban consumers by putting a low ceiling on the price of bread. However, that same price ceiling also limited what farmers might receive

for domestically grown wheat. This discouraged them from adequately responding to local demand to grow more, thereby reducing food supply and increasing import costs.

Q: How big were these programs?

COHEN: I'm sorry. I don't remember exactly.

Q: About \$5m?

COHEN: It was quite a bit larger than that, I believe.

Q: So, these were rather big programs?

COHEN: Bolivia was a significant focus of U.S. policy interest at that time. It was a leading producer of coca leaf and coca paste, a precursor of cocaine. It was broadly understood that final "manufacture" of cocaine mostly took place in Colombia. Despite the emphasis that we in the Embassy and the USAID Mission gave to concerns about democracy and urgent development needs and their relationship with the drug issues, the clear priority for those in the Congress and many of our Washington colleagues was drugs, specifically the cultivation and marketing of coca. It should be recalled that this was the period of First Lady Nancy Reagan's "Just Say No" campaign, a very high profile and politically strong anti-narcotics movement.

About half way into my five year tour in Bolivia, the Director, Hank Bassford, was transferred to the Dominican Republic. When I became the Director, I spent a great percentage of my time with the Embassy and the various U.S. agencies that were engaged in implementing anti-narcotics policies and programs. It quickly became clear to me that Washington and the Congress would not give our Mission the funds we needed for our development programs in agriculture, education, health and the private sector, if we could not demonstrate strong engagement and progress in our anti-narcotics activities. We in the field saw the vital interrelationship that existed between progress in drugs, democracy and development; but that was not an easy sell with Washington.

Once, on a visit to Dakar, Senegal, I saw a sign in someone's office that said "hell hath no fury as a vested interest masquerading as a moral principle." I became instantly enamored of that quote. As it now applied in Bolivia, the Mission had a highly vested interest in seeing the country make tangible progress on democracy (political stability) and development (resolution of the economic crisis), but was focused substantially on the moral principle of drug policy and anti-narcotics performance.

The U.S. Embassy in La Paz had one of the most coherent, collaborative country teams I ever experienced during my career. An important part of that derived from the good, well-integrated work that we did as a drug subcommittee of the Country Team under the direction of Jeff Biggs, the Deputy Chief of Mission (DCM). Institutional components of the Narcotics Control Committee included the Office of International Narcotics Matters

(State Department), USAID, the DEA (Drug Enforcement Administration), representatives from several branches of the military, and the intelligence entities.

As individual agencies, we each had our own narcotics control responsibilities. Under the DCM's leadership, all of us also had a strong grasp of the larger picture of the overall USG anti-narcotics strategy and where each of our individual pieces fit into that. Because we as a committee operated as a "big picture" organization, we arguably were much more effective than might otherwise have been the case. On one occasion, the Embassy drug team attended a regional conference in Panama. During that event, an AID colleague from Peru pulled me aside one evening and said that he found it really interesting and noteworthy to observe the Bolivia Embassy's narcotics control group. I asked why. He replied that we all seemed to really like each other and got along well, and said that was definitely not the case in Lima. He was right; the La Paz team worked very well together. It was a very positive experience and made our program much more effective as a result.

Q: Tell me about USAID's programmatic role in the anti-narcotics strategy.

COHEN: The largest element of the USAID anti-narcotics oriented development programs worked with farmers to provide them alternative crops (for example, citrus, macadamia, pineapple, palm hearts) to replace the coca that would be eliminated through USG/GOB forced or volunteer eradication efforts. This crop substitution program took place in the Chapare region, Bolivia's main coca growing area. The Chapare was located in a valley a couple of hours by car from Cochabamba, the country's third largest city. The program offered seeds, plants, technical assistance, farm loans, marketing information and infrastructure and other inducements for farmers to abandon coca cultivation. It also improved farm to market roads and services to poor farmer (*campesino*) communities.

While the U.S. anti-narcotics community believed strongly in crop substitution, we in USAID were skeptical. The economics said that no matter how successful a given replacement crop might be, it could never produce the lucrative income that came from growing and selling coca leaves. The irony was that if eradication efforts experienced a period of success, the price of available coca would increase substantially as the result of market scarcity. The traffickers always had the money to cover the price rise. The increased price usually was sufficient incentive for many farmers to accept the risk and return to growing coca. Virtually all of USAID/Bolivia's program documentation in the mid-1980s clearly emphasized that any crop substitution effort could only succeed in the context of sustained, successful crop eradication. Generally, coca farmers were very poor people who had migrated to the Chapare after losing jobs when tin mines closed in the highlands (*altiplano*) south of La Paz. They were not evil traffickers; they were just desperate people looking to provide for their families.

Q: Were other donors also engaged in anti-narcotics programs?

COHEN: They were. For example, the Inter-American Development Bank financed a project that put in a paved road from the Chapare to Santa Cruz, Bolivia's commercial

center and second largest city. The reason for supporting the road was that it would permit farmers who grew the kinds of substitution crops that we and other donors supported to more easily access the best markets. Unfortunately, it also made it easier for the traffickers to move their product, which they did. As one might imagine, that caused a good deal of controversy.

We also worked with the United Nations mostly through the local UNDP office. Their narcotics activities were implemented through a UN agency, UNFDAC – the United Nations Fund for Drug Abuse Control. They did narcotics education and engaged in policy dialogues with the government about restricting production.

Q: Was local consumption of cocaine an issue?

COHEN: As I mentioned, Bolivia's roles in the cocaine marketing process were the cultivation of coca leaf and the initial processing of that into coca paste. The coca paste would then be trafficked to Colombia for final processing into cocaine. While there was some cocaine consumption in Bolivia, it certainly was not epidemic. Bolivian consumption mostly involved the coca paste, which is a precursor product that could be rolled into cigarettes. These often were given or sold to children. Sometimes, the kids who would stomp coca leaves would get paid in coca paste. Stomping was an early step in extracting the active ingredients from the coca leaves.

Because of the impurities in it, coca paste was potentially more dangerous than cocaine itself. I still have a painful mental image of a 12-year old boy, a coca leaf stomper, whose bent posture, grayish hair and gravelly voice made him seem like a withered old man in his '70s. This was the result of his addiction to the smoking of coca paste.

Q: Were there other program activities in the USAID anti-narcotics portfolio?

COHEN: USAID supported school development in the Chapare, which was integrated with some of our other education programs. We certainly supported community development activities. Notably, we used food for work programs to improve drainage and avoid flooding, to fill in potholes on market roads, and to provide potable water closer to where people lived. These activities were very successful. They brought communities together and provided them things they needed. It was "value added" to their participation in the eradication/crop substitution program. They also made these communities more accessible for some of the other alternative development programs that we carried out.

One of the most interesting programs that we carried out was a narcotics education activity. There was a great deal of misunderstanding concerning why the United States was so bothered about Bolivia's cultivation of coca. Many Bolivians would point out that the people who grew coca were extremely poor *campesinos*. At last, these people had something that allowed them to make a decent living. Why take that from them? Many would add that, if Americans would stop using cocaine, then no one would want coca, the price for it would drop sharply and Bolivian farmers would grow something else. The narcotics education program would provide a response to such issues and explain what

the actual “threats” were to all Bolivians. For example, it would describe what happened to *campesino* children who smoked coca paste cigarettes in communities where the crop was produced and processed. It discussed how people no longer felt safe leaving their families alone at night because of the dangers posed by drug traffickers and users. It also highlighted how, in many places, legitimate local businesses were forced to close because of competition from drug money launderers.

We had some excellent people working on narcotics education, including Bambi Arellano, who, at the time, was a personal services contractor with the Mission assigned to the education portfolio. As you know, Bambi ultimately joined USAID, became a Foreign Service Officer and, after being mission director in a number of places, served as the Agency Counselor.

Q: How interesting. Anything else to add regarding the anti-narcotics assistance?

COHEN: One of my major goals in being so involved with the Embassy narcotics team was to serve as a buffer for the rest of the Mission so that the politics involved in the narcotics issues would not unduly interfere with the implementation of the mainstream development program. On the whole, that management approach seemed to work pretty well. The Embassy understood what I was doing and why. But they were getting what they needed from USAID and were very supportive.

Q: And what was it they needed from AID?

COHEN: A politically stable, economically sound Bolivia was fundamental to the sustainable success of the narcotics strategy. Following the 1985 election of Victor Paz Estenssoro, there was a sudden, unanticipated opening to stabilize both the country’s economy and its politics. The Paz Government immediately identified a core group of individuals to be its “economics team.” (Note: Some members of this team later went on to serve as cabinet ministers; one of them, Gonzalo Sanchez de Lozada, eventually became president). The USG, primarily through USAID, did all that it could to help them succeed.

USAID had several things to offer that substantially helped the International Financial Institutions (aka the IFIs – that is, the Bank and the Fund) expedite their assistance to Bolivia. First, strategically, USAID had a relatively large, on-the-ground Mission in La Paz. We had a first rate staff of Americans and Bolivians implementing programs in nearly all of the country’s key development sectors. In terms of nearly all these sectors, we understood who the important players were and their effectiveness, credibility and reliability. We also had an in-depth comprehension of the vital issues and had strategic ideas on what could be done to address them. The Bolivia resident personnel of the IFIs tended to be very small in number, with one or two international staff at most. When they brought assessment teams (“missions”) to Bolivia, USAID was usually one of their first stops. This helped to expedite their important work and, ultimately, our close collaboration with them.

Second were our Title III and sectoral grants. As I have noted, both had policy directed conditionality elements. Most commonly, many of these conditionalities reflected key areas of IFI interest. Thus, when IFI programs were fully designed, signed and ready to implement, they could disburse more rapidly because of progress that had been achieved with USAID assistance.

Third was a USAID program that created an entity known as UDAPE, the Bolivian acronym that translated into the Economic Policy Analysis Unit. As Bolivia was making the transition to a civilian government, USAID sought to help put into place a programmatic element that could serve as a catalyst to facilitate effective and timely policy-making to help the new government deal efficiently and effectively with what was a raging economic crisis driven by hyperinflation. A USAID dollar grant, supported by salaries funded with local currency input, helped establish a small office with a role somewhat akin to that of the Congressional Research Service. UDAPE reported to the Office of the President, but was loosely tied to the Ministry of Planning. It was staffed by a core group of a half dozen or more very bright, young Bolivian university graduates, with expertise in a variety of key areas, such as economics, the social sciences and agriculture. The central idea of the UDAPE project was that its staff would be available to respond to policy related inquiries from the most senior levels of government. They would help to define issues and their significance, to identify potential options and their consequences, and to offer a menu of possible program responses, describing the pros and cons of each of the responses. The purpose of doing this was to enhance the speed and quality of GOB decision making. Brief analysis papers also would identify UDAPE's own recommendations of the best decisions to take – and why. The USAID UDAPE Project had begun toward the end of the Siles presidency, before the Fund and the Bank got more actively engaged in addressing the Bolivia economic crisis. Thus, it was fully operational when the GOB was ready and eager to move ahead with an aggressive economic recovery program following the 1985 election of Victor Paz Estenssoro.

Shortly after they began their work, the Economics Team asked us to bring down a group of graduate students and their professor, Jeffrey Sachs, from Harvard University. They had offered to come to Bolivia without any compensation except for travel and related expenses (that is, per diem). We were able to do that using program development and support funds (known in the Latin America Bureau by its acronym PD&S) plus local currency. The Embassy was very supportive of our doing this as it strongly supported our 3D strategy (drugs, development and democracy). Economic Team members Goni Sanchez de Lozada and Ronnie MacLean (later to become mayor of La Paz) had met Sachs in the States several years earlier and had been in contact with him. While the Team's plan basically was in place, they liked the idea of having Sachs available as a sort of sounding board, while his grad students would work with UDAPE crunching numbers that would prove exceptionally useful to the IMF. The Sachs team was quite helpful; although, in my view, Jeff Sachs took more personal credit than he deserved for the ultimate success of the economic recovery program. To me, that belonged to the Bolivian team that put it together and made it work.

Q: Would you say a bit more about the relationship with the Bank and the Fund?

COHEN: On an operational level, I already have mentioned the close working relationship that we in the USAID Mission had with the World Bank and the IMF. With the advent of the Paz Estenssoro government and its economics team, there was an unanticipated opportunity to end Bolivia's economic crisis and return the country to growth. As I said earlier, foreign assistance works most effectively when it functions as a catalyst in support of what people in the country themselves genuinely want to do. All of the donors were concerned that the Paz initiative received the assistance they needed to succeed, before the opportunity was lost. The donors worked closely together with the GOB to make this happen.

Largely, though not exclusively, because we were field based, USAID was able to get its programs up and running somewhat more quickly than the IFIs could. Some of the policy conditionalities we were able to include in our Title III and sector grant agreements were negotiated with the Bolivian government precisely with an eye toward facilitating more rapid IFI disbursements. In addition, and very significantly, the IFIs were delighted with UDAPE. UDAPE's team of energetic, bright specialists greatly expedited the kind of analysis and policies the Bank and the Fund needed to move forward.

Permit me to insert a brief anecdote here. On a visit to Washington, I went to the IMF offices to attend a meeting. Walking with a senior Fund official as I entered the building, he said to me (in a rather heavy German accent), "You know, this program that the Bolivians have developed is amazing. It is much stricter than the Fund ever would have requested. However, because we are the Fund, we will be telling them that this is not good enough." Happily, he was kidding. In fact, the donor group unanimously agreed that what was on the table merited immediate and full support.

Q: You have mentioned collaboration with the World Bank and the IMF. Would you talk a bit more about donor coordination?

COHEN: Among the Bolivians, there was a great deal of sensitivity to the political consequences of some of the rather harsh economic steps necessary to curb inflation. It was very evident that these actions had the potential to hurt people, especially the poor who were already suffering because of the economic crisis. As a USAID Mission and as a donor group, we discussed what could be done to ease some of that pain and to let people know that what they were suffering wasn't being ignored. We discussed that with the broader in-country donor group convened by the UNDP. In that context, we developed "safety net" activities that would help ensure that the poorest had access to food to eat and occasional employment.

Q: Over time, how successful was the Bolivian economic plan?

COHEN: The demonstrable fact is that the plan was very successful. Inflation dropped from 14,700 percent in 1985 to 14.7 percent in 1987. After years of being in sharply negative territory, the Bolivian economy started growing again. People and companies,

actually began making investments. Foreign investors started coming into the country to look at its potential. For a while, the economic sun began to shine again on Bolivia.

Q: Tell me more about these in-country donor coordination meetings.

COHEN: In Bolivia, as in some other countries where I served, we had good and regular donor coordination meetings. For the most part, the meetings were informational. We sought to avoid program overlap, while making sure that critical issues or opportunities didn't fall through the cracks.

There was no government participation in the UNDP-chaired donor coordination meetings held in Bolivia, although the government certainly was aware that we met. To the best of my recollection, their actual participation in the meetings was never raised. This was hardly a sensitive issue as the GOB knew as a certainty that they had full donor support. The donor forum where the government did take a very active role was the World Bank-chaired Consultative Group (aka the CG). Held at the Bank's Paris headquarters, the CG was a forum for the Bolivian government to present its achievements, plans and needs to the broader international and development communities. A highly successful Bolivia CG was held in late 1986 or early 1987 to garner additional assistance in support of the economic recovery plan.

Q: I take it that this aggressive economics program was quite a surprise to you?

COHEN: It really was. Following the military handover of the government in 1982, Hernan Siles Zuazo became President. The economic crisis did not improve under Siles. Indeed, following an abortive coup attempt, he decided that he would resign and call a new election. That resulted in the presidency of Victor Paz.

The experience of that election generated a series of events that had an important and lasting impact on my view of development and the role of USAID. Until the early 1980s, USAID did not get involved much, if at all, in programs related to democracy and governance. Then, especially in Central America, in places such as El Salvador and Honduras, the Agency became engaged in supporting the conduct of elections as a means of ending conflict and fostering peaceful change. When the Bolivia election was called, the LAC Bureau in Washington strongly encouraged the Mission to offer assistance to ensure that what was to take place was conducted in a manner that was free and fair. My first reaction to this possible involvement of the Mission was discomfort. Over the years, especially in the Americas, there had been a stream of accusations that USAID and its programs served as a cover for activities of the CIA. I was very concerned that, instead of helping the Bolivians in the conduct of their election, we might risk becoming an excuse for hostile political groups to disrupt or block it. I was afraid that if we got engaged in that sort of thing, it could risk tainting everything else we needed to do in the country in the more traditional USAID sectors such as agriculture, education and health.

For a week or more, I thought about this quite intensely. Like many others, I joined USAID because I thought it would offer me an excellent opportunity to contribute to

bringing about positive change in the world, and improving the lives of the world's poorest people. In that sense, direct engagement on governance issues did not seem to be consistent with the work of a development agency like USAID. However, after a great deal of thought, I arrived at a conclusion that very much surprised me. I saw that, in the Mission's programs in sectors such as health, education and agriculture, we could provide all the essential training, technical assistance, and equipment necessary for success. However, this, in itself would not guarantee the sustainability of the development changes we sought beyond the horizon of our immediate assistance involvement. If we truly wanted change to be sustainable, there needed to be a decent, stable accountable government – for example, one that supported teachers and maintained quality standards that provided blackboards and books, and had a health minister who actually knew something about health instead of being the son-in-law of the president or some guy who was generous with bribes. Governments needed to be accountable to those who elected them. In addition, violent and/or frequent non-electoral changes of government, such as those Bolivia had chronically experienced through its many military coups, were fatally disruptive to development progress and sustainability, that is, they made poor people's lives worse.

The bottom line of my thought process was that, not only was it okay for USAID to be engaged in activities in support of democracy and good governance, but also it was absolutely essential that we do so. I was truly surprised by that conclusion. It was not what I had expected. I reconsidered it again and again. The clear conclusion was that accountable, responsible, stable democratic governance was a virtually essential precondition to truly sustainable development. While one might point out exceptions to that hypothesis, they would be just that – exceptions. People who have hope for a future where they and their children can live in peace and security, where their children can have better lives, where they know they will have a job, where someone will not arbitrarily seize their property, and where they do not live under constant threat of experiencing physical harm – such people don't get induced into going to war and don't become terrorists. They also don't become illegal migrants. They have a vested stake in a credible future that can be better for them and their children. Generally speaking, people with such hopes and aspirations live in countries with democratic, accountable governments where people's rights are respected and they can live and be successful on their own terms.

I learned all this in Bolivia. It substantially impacted my thoughts and decisions during subsequent assignments, as well as activities I have been engaged with in the years since my retirement from USAID.

Q: Did you talk with anyone while you were thinking about these things and reaching these conclusions?

COHEN: Initially, the one who I most engaged with my thought process was my wife, Rita. Verbalizing my thoughts with her – putting them into words – was vital to making sense of what was bouncing around inside my head. I always have sought her input on such things. Once I had a better grasp of what I was thinking, I discussed the ideas with

my first-rate deputy George Wachtenheim and a few others on the Mission staff. We had some excellent people, whose ideas and opinions I greatly respected and who I knew would not be reluctant to stand up and push back on me. So, we had those conversations. We especially spoke about the impact of this on the future implementation of our project portfolios. As we talked through it all, they basically agreed with my conclusion – democratic, accountable government was essential to achieving our sustainable development objectives.

And then came the great irony. The kind of electoral assistance that we had to offer was in areas such as the development of a reliable voter registry and training for poll watchers. It turned out that the Bolivian government did not want USAID assistance of any kind in the conduct of their upcoming election. As it turned out, the election was conducted without incident and was broadly considered to be free and fair. The product of the election was the presidency of Víctor Paz Estenssoro. So, all of the churning that I did regarding USAID democracy and governance assistance meant very little in terms of what we actually did in Bolivia. However, the experience gave me a much broader definition of the development function and USAID's role in the pursuit of U.S. national interests.

Q: In some countries where you had economic problems and you also had drugs available for export there were large cartels that influenced the politicians. Were there similar cartels in Bolivia and did they try to influence politicians and the leadership of the government?

COHEN: During the period that I'm talking about, when Paz Estenssoro was the President, it was broadly agreed that the Bolivian Government had solid, credible integrity, as well as some incredible talent. I personally never had a sense that there was ever any concern about corruption or criminality in that government. Goni Sanchez de Lozada's brother Tony, who was the Controller General, was our principle counterpart in one of the earliest anti-corruption programs to have USAID assistance. The Sanchez de Lozadas came from a wealthy family. They owned tin mines. For decades, tin virtually defined the Bolivian economy (though that has not been the case for the past nearly forty years). One day, I was speaking with one of the brothers, I believe that it was Goni. He was venting his frustration regarding public reaction to the economic plan. I commented that this was exceptionally difficult and mentioned that I was impressed that he and his family took such risks and endured all the related stress. The family had a lot of money and lived comfortable lives. He responded that his motives were purely selfish. I asked him to explain what he meant by that; I did not understand. He said that several years ago he was thinking about his family and his grandchildren and realized that he wanted them to grow up to be Bolivians. He did not want them to have to flee the country. At that moment, it occurred to him that if he wanted to be sure there was going to be a Bolivia where his family would want to remain and live their lives, he had to do something about it; he had to take responsibility. To me that is exactly what an AID mission director wants to hear as the best kind of motivation for his principle counterpart.

Q: What were the non-narcotic-related elements of the program? Did you see much success with those programs?

COHEN: We did. We worked a lot with local communities, helping them come together more coherently in articulating what they needed and organizing how to do that through what were called Departmental Development Corporations (Note: Bolivia's states are called departments). USAID provided them with technical assistance, training and small loans that they could use to help people improve the production and marketing of local crops. In addition, we had one of the most innovative health programs that I have seen in USAID. This program, known as Pro Salud (For Health), was formulated by two outstanding health officers, Lee Hougen who was followed by Jerry Bowers. This program was the first poor people-based Health Management Organization (HMO) in the developing world. It provided a self-sustaining way for people who lived in poor, mostly rural communities to receive the basic health services that they required. Previous attempts by the Bolivian Government to provide such services had not succeeded.

Pro Salud began by working with a large agricultural cooperative in the Department of Santa Cruz. In the original project design, the thought was that health services could be provided through medium-to-larger-scale private enterprises. In short, the program did not get off to a good start. The people managing the cooperative were not the same as the beneficiaries of the health services. They had their own ideas of what they did and did not want to do, without reference to their workers. As a result, almost no progress was made.

Shortly after his arrival at post, Jerry Bowers went to Santa Cruz to speak with the cooperative director. The director, the brother of an ex-military President, took out a small silver-plated pistol, put it on the table in front of him and said, "Okay, I'm ready to talk about the health program." That was a strong indication that we needed to transfer implementation of the program elsewhere, to more rural, smaller, more beneficiary directed cooperatives. That turned out to be a very good decision.

More than thirty years later, both Pro Salud and UDAPE, organizations formulated and established with significant USAID input, are still in operation. Both have been used as models for replication in other countries.

Q: It sounds like a good tour and were you enjoying it? And how long were you there?

COHEN: I was there five years. It was the dream development opportunity to make an important, sustainable difference. Bolivia was eager to move in directions that would lead to a better future for the country. And USAID was fully prepared to be the catalyst to help them succeed.

On top of that, we had an incredible staff, people who were smart, innovative, and motivated. They worked incredibly well together as a highly committed team.

Q: Who were some of those people?

COHEN: I've already mentioned my then-deputy George Wachtenheim, who was just great. Jerry Bowers and Lee Hougen were two incredibly able Health Officers. Bill Garvelink, an Assistant Program Officer, who later became a star in OFDA and ultimately became an ambassador, cut his teeth on disaster assistance during his time in Bolivia. We had an exceptionally able Agriculture Officer in Rob Thurston. We had two consecutive Controllers who were some of the very best I ever worked with, Joe Hill and Steve Liapis. Bob Asselin and Bill Kaschak were two Project Development Officers who were both outstanding. Tim Bertotti, our Executive Officer, was one of the finest ever to work for the Agency. Finally, we had an outstanding staff of FSN professionals. Many had worked for USAID for more than ten years and were recognized throughout the country for their expertise and ability to get things done. It was exciting to work with such talented and able people every day. The Bolivia Mission was a great team and had incredibly high morale, something that visitors noted almost immediately as they walked through the door. Lucky me.

Q: You traveled all over Bolivia?

COHEN: All over. We had activities throughout the country. To be an effective senior manager, it was essential to have a good firsthand knowledge of what we did, the people we worked with and the local context. Bolivia was an amazing, geographically diverse country. La Paz, the political capital, was in the heart of the Andes. The downtown offices of USAID were at an altitude of 12,000 feet, while my home was at 11,000 feet. Driving out of La Paz on the high plain (known as the *altiplano*) at 13,000 feet was like being on another planet. The land was flat, with little plant life; but in the distance were the snow covered Andes. Those tough individuals who lived out there were mostly Aymara Indians. Meanwhile, the Bolivian northwest was in the Amazon region and was very hot and humid. Santa Cruz, the country's most economically dynamic city, was at about 1400 feet, with a population that looked more European than indigenous. In short, traveling in Bolivia and experiencing its array of geography and people was one of the real perks of the job.

Q: Is there anything else that you would like to add?

COHEN: One "war" story.

This is about the time I was "kidnapped." It happened while I was still the Deputy Director. Perhaps once a year, the Washington-based Bolivia desk officer, a very able woman named Penny Farley, would visit Bolivia. She was the Mission's greatest asset in Washington, the one who would expedite our necessary program clearances, tell us who was saying what about our program, and serve as our most reliable AID/W advocate. Having her spend some time on the ground with us was an important opportunity for her to get a more comprehensive, nuanced perspective of who we were and what we were doing.

One year, we decided that a visit to the town of Tarija would serve our purpose very well. There, she could see programs to aid schools and agriculture, along with some PL 480

Title II feeding activities. On arrival at the Tarija airport, a leader of a local farmers union met our group of five. His cooperative had been slated to receive fertilizer under a USAID El Nino drought assistance program, but the shipment had been delayed. The man was very upset. He told me that his cooperative had voted that my travel companions and I should be “kidnapped” (*secuestrados*) until they received their fertilizer.

Kidnapping has a long tradition in Bolivia as a means of negotiation, but was an act that generally implied nothing violent or otherwise threatening. He said that if I would accept that we were “kidnapped” and promised to not leave the area, we could go visit our programs as planned. I quickly agreed. This really was not anything to be concerned about. During the day, I happened to be speaking with Hank Bassford by radio about something else and, in passing, for the humor of it, mentioned our status as kidnapped. Hank certainly understood what that was about and was not concerned. Still, later that day, he happened to mention our “situation” to someone in Washington. Chaos broke out! Suddenly, there was widespread concern about the “Tarija Five.” Hank radioed that Washington insisted that we had to return to La Paz immediately, which didn’t make any of us very happy. At the Tarija airport, just as we were boarding our plane, the fellow from the farmers’ group reappeared. He was very unhappy – more sad than angry – that we were departing. He reminded me that we were *secuestrados* and couldn’t leave. What would he tell his cooperative members? I offered my most sincere apologies (seriously), but said that we were ordered to return to La Paz immediately and would see that his fertilizer was delivered as soon as it reached the country (which happened in about another two weeks). Reluctantly, he accepted this and departed. Washington was elated at the release of the notorious Tarija 5.

Q: Alright. Five years came along, and you were told you needed to move or you said maybe it’s time to move?

COHEN: Yes, maybe it was time to move.

Q: But not to Washington.

COHEN: No. At the time, I had this idea that if I played my cards right, maybe I would never have to do another Washington tour. More on that later.

As it happened, I was assigned to become the USAID Director in Panama. Panama was one of the older programs in the Agency. Since the building of the Canal, the U.S. has had a special relationship with Panama. The country is considered the crossroads of the Americas. If you have been involved with Latin America for any period of time, on one occasion or another, you have spent some time in Panama.

Q: What year would this be that you went to Panama?

COHEN: This would be in May 1987. Panama was an interesting experience. Spoiler alert: I only spent six months there.

Before getting into what happened in Panama, I would like to offer an observation concerning the nature of a career in USAID or, more broadly, the Foreign Service.

I had been in Bolivia for five years and I was on top of every nuance of our program; I had solid relationships with most of the key people in the government and the private sector; I knew who did what, when, where, and how. I was just really at the pinnacle of the knowledge curve for being able to manage the U.S. development program in Bolivia. I'm not saying that as a matter of ego. This comprehensive information resource is the product of being in a place and in a position for a long time.

Once again, I took a direct transfer (that is, without home leave) from Bolivia to Panama. From Friday to Monday, I went from the very apex of the informational curve down to almost the very bottom. I understood relatively little about Panama. I didn't know key people – Panamanian or U.S., and I had relatively little understanding of the USAID program in that country. It was very intimidating. But, I would say emphatically, this is also one of the great things about being a Foreign Service Officer in general and a USAID Foreign Service Officer in particular. You never get stale or bored. There is always something new and interesting to learn, and it is always a challenge to learn it. Upon transfer, you find yourself immediately in an environment of people who care about the same things that you do, which offers an optimal learning environment. While I had had this experience in other transfers I had never had the Friday to Monday experience equivalent to the one I had between La Paz and Panama City.

Q: Great observation. So, tell me about the USAID/Panama program.

COHEN: One of the principle objectives of the USAID/Panama program was to ready the country for its assumption of full responsibility for the Panama Canal in 1999. The decision to do this was the result of a 1977 treaty signed by Presidents Jimmy Carter and Omar Torrijos. The same treaty would also transfer sovereignty of the Panama Canal Zone, a strip of land that extended five miles either side of the Canal. Among other things, the Zone was home to the U.S. military's Southern Command and a number of Army, Air Force and Navy bases. Except for those bases, most of the Zone was undeveloped tropical rain forest, a place of incredible beauty.

The Zone was several other things that were objectives of the USAID program. Critically, it was the watershed that fed the enormous needs of the Canal. A major concern was that when the Panamanians took over the Zone, there would be rapid, disorganized development that would substantially undermine the hydrological power of the rainforest. We did extensive work, both technical assistance and training, with the Government and an impressive local NGO to address these issues.

Our highest profile Canal-related effort was a very large training program. The participants in this effort were the people who would be taking over the many highly skilled jobs essential to the continued efficient and safe operation of the Canal. Many of the trainees were sent to attend degree programs at U.S. maritime academies.

Other Mission programs focused on the development of the country's private sector, especially in agriculture. We also had activities in banking and education. I won't go into discussing any of these, as, for reasons that you will see, they were not very relevant to what was really to define my Panama experience.

Q: I'm intrigued. You have my attention.

COHEN: Four weeks after my arrival, there was a large scale "popular" attack on the Embassy. People were marched down from a local slum, surrounded the Embassy, chanted anti-American slogans and threw rocks - doing moderate damage to the Embassy. Finally, after about an hour, the PDF - the Panamanian Defense Force (that is, the Panamanian Army) - came in and gently disbanded the mob. Of course, it had been the PDF that had encouraged and facilitated the mob in the first place. The head of the PDF was Manuel Antonio Noriega.

Shortly after I arrived in Panama, Noriega's number two, a Colonel named Roberto Diaz Herrera, had what some called "a religious experience" that provoked a need to confess. Others said that the problem was more of a falling out with Noriega, who had promised him that he could take over the Panama Defense Force when Noriega was gone; but, apparently, Noriega had backed away from that deal. I always liked the religious experience version better. Anyway, Diaz Herrera went on television and basically confessed the sins of Noriega's Panama Defense Force. He mentioned the people they had killed (for example, the late President Torrijos), the bribes they had accepted (most prominently those received from the Shah of Iran so that he would be granted political asylum in Panama), and some "problematic" Panamanians who had been thrown out of helicopters in mid-flight. In addition, there was mention of the involvement of the Panama Defense Force in drug trafficking. Panama, substantially because of the Canal, was in a potentially highly lucrative location to "benefit" from the transit trade of drugs moving to the U.S. and Europe. Panama's other asset for the facilitation of the drug trade was its role as a regional banking center. It was commonly believed that much of the money laundering from the region's drug trade was going through the banks of Panama.

Diaz Herrera's confession produced a huge public outcry. Daily protests included women standing out on the balconies of their apartment buildings banging pots and pans. USAID was located in a building just across the street from the national university. We had daily front row seats to confrontations between marching students and the PDF riot police, known as "the Dobermans." The curiosity of the reaction to the Diaz Herrera revelations was that the things he confessed were largely known by the Panamanian public, even though they may not have been widely discussed or acknowledged. My thought at the time was that this was akin to Hans Christian Anderson's "The Emperor's New Clothes;" in the sense that now that these "sins" were out in the open, people just could no longer tolerate them, even though they previously had known about them.

Q: Alright.

COHEN: The Noriega mob that had attacked the Embassy did something like \$50,000 worth of damage – not a lot of money, but symbolically a shockingly negative occurrence. I believe that someone in the Embassy or Washington had pointed out that the only comparable event was 1979 attack on the U.S. Embassy in Teheran, Iran.

Q: Was the USAID mission in the Embassy?

COHEN: No. Per the normal practice at the time, the USAID office building was about a five minute drive away from the Embassy.

The morning following the demonstration, I went over to the Embassy for the usual country team meeting. Before the meeting, I went in to see the Ambassador and the DCM, Arthur Davis and John Maisto, respectively, two people I had quickly grown to like and admire. Davis, a Ronald Reagan political appointee, had previously served as the U.S. ambassador to Paraguay. In discussing the previous day's events, they mentioned that the figurehead President of Panama, Arturo Del Valle, had apologized for the attack on the Embassy and said that the Panamanian government would pay for any damages that had been incurred. In the flow of our conversation, I mentioned that, under one of our projects with the Panamanian Government, our controller had payment vouchers that more or less equaled the amount the Government of Panama had said they would reimburse us. I suggested that we could delay processing the voucher payment as a means of keeping the GOP honest. The Ambassador and DCM really liked that idea. We would do this, but only behind the scenes, that is, without making it public. The U.S. ambassador in Bolivia when I first arrived there was fond of saying that in Latin America one never says no, you just put a slow man on the job. That was how I saw this concept with the voucher as a means for encouraging the Government to move quickly with damage reparation. We were just going to put a slow man on the job. Nevertheless, the GOP would understand exactly what we were doing and why. When I returned to the Mission, I instructed the USAID controller to quietly sit on the processing of the voucher payment.

That evening, Secretary of State George Shultz had a press conference, the main focus of which concerned some other crisis in the world. This was around the time of the Iran-Contra affair.

As the press conference was wrapping up, someone shouted out a question regarding the previous day's attack on the U.S. Embassy in Panama, asking what our response would be. Shultz said that we had suspended aid to that country and that he felt that had been the right thing to do. Actually, there had been no suspension of aid; there had only been the slowed down processing of that voucher. That afternoon, following the Country Team meeting, the Ambassador or the DCM had been on the phone with a desk officer in the State Department and, along the way, explained how we were doing this "slow man" thing on the voucher payment. Somehow, a version of this got up to the seventh floor of the State Department. As in the game of telephone, the message didn't get transmitted exactly right. This slight misunderstanding had resulted in the Secretary's aid cutoff comment. The following day, when we explained what we really were doing and why to Washington, they said that they understood what our actions and intent had been.

However, since the Secretary had said what he did, that was now the policy and that all aid to the GOP was now to be suspended. And that is what we did. All projects that provided any kind of assistance to the Government were halted. Technicians and any equipment were immediately withdrawn. I still have a clipping of a political cartoon from a Panama City newspaper featuring me holding a paper roll in my hand with the caption, “We’re even taking back the toilet paper.”

It should be noted that two kinds of aid were permitted to proceed. The first was any assistance in support of the transfer of the Panama Canal (most significantly, large amounts of training). Secondly, any activities that we had with NGOs were not interrupted.

Q: How did the Panamanian Government react?

COHEN: Not surprisingly, and certainly for public consumption, the reaction of the GOP was aggressively negative. In a way, the suspension played nicely into their hands. As the daily student protests and nightly pot banging proceeded, the Noriega crowd turned to a time-honored practice in the Americas – placing the blame on the “colossus to the North.” They said that all those protests were fomented by the USG and that we were manipulating Panama and its people. Of course, most Panamanians knew that this was not true. All that said, the aid freeze nicely served the GOP’s victimization ploy.

Several weeks later, with virtually no notice, the Government of Panama announced the expulsion of USAID from the country. They gave us two weeks (later modified to three) to close most of our operations, with the exception of the Panama Canal transfer assistance.

I used to jog in the early morning. During the period of our closeout, during my run, I met a very senior member of the Panamanian government who had been on the Noriega side of a number of meetings that I had attended. He said something like, “Well, you know very well how displeased I am about the American government and its opinions about Panama. But throwing out USAID, that makes no sense; it’s like killing Santa Claus.” However, like it or not, a USAID program that had been in Panama for something like 30 or 40 years was at an end.

Q: Tell me about the closeout.

COHEN: This was one of the most comprehensive, stressful administrative things I have ever been involved with. The Mission had so many to-do lists of things that needed to get accomplished for us to be able to leave the country by the deadline that we had a list of all our lists so that we didn’t lost track of any of them. Illustrative of kinds of lists we had were: program termination, personnel actions (both U.S. and Panamanian), building lease termination and closedown, etc.

One of the most painful things that we had to do was the severance of our large staff of Foreign Service Nationals (FSNs), many of whom had been employed by USAID for

decades. All received severance pay, per the Panamanian labor law. This substantially eased the blow of the prospect of sudden unemployment for many. Another task was finding ongoing assignments for the U.S. Direct Hire Foreign Service officers on our staff. At the end of the day, we found jobs for just about everyone in the Mission except for me.

Finally, we needed to plan for the part of the program that would remain, specifically the large training program in support of the Canal transfer. We identified a much smaller office in which to house the remaining staff (the office previously had been the home of the regional housing program). We also had to do what was necessary for the one USDH who was to remain to oversee that program.

All of the above and many other things were done in slightly more than two weeks. My excellent deputy (Ray Rifenburg) and I left the Mission just about fully closed a few days before Christmas 1987. What an experience that was!

Before wrapping up my comments on my brief Panama experience, I want to mention the incredible Embassy Front Office we had in that country. The Ambassador and DCM really stood by us in words and deed. Not many people would say this about their Ambassador, but Arthur Davis was one of the sweetest people I've ever known. In our final days, he came over to the USAID Mission and addressed our entire staff. The man was in tears while expressing his feelings about what had happened and the impact this was having on people's lives. His obvious care for us was widely appreciated.

Ambassador Davis and his DCM John Maisto had one of the finest front office relationships I ever experienced. One evening before we entered into the closedown crisis, Ambassador Davis had a cocktail party at his residence. In the middle of the event, he stood up and said that he wanted to share a story. As I've mentioned, Davis was a political appointee of President Ronald Reagan. He had been a supporter and contributor who had built shopping centers in Colorado. Also, he was a good friend of Holly Coors of the Colorado Coors Beer family. Apparently, she had recommended that Davis be given an ambassadorship. So, at this cocktail party, with a large group of Panamanian businessmen and government officials present, he described how his appointment had come about. After he had been alerted to the phone call that he would receive from the President, Davis sought the advice of a friend who previously had served as an ambassador. He said to his friend, "You know, I'm intrigued by this; but I build shopping centers; what do I know about being an ambassador?" And his friend replied "I'll give you the advice that I got and has served me very well: Find yourself a really good DCM and then stay out of his way." And then Arthur Davis turned to his DCM and said, "So I picked John Maisto." I was nearly floored by the integrity of that statement. I especially admired the close and mutually respectful relationship of those two men.

Q: Was Peace Corps there? Were they kicked out as well?

COHEN: USAID was the only United States Government agency to be expelled. The Peace Corps no longer was in Panama. Panama was truly a lower middle income country

at that time. USAID was there most importantly for the Canal transition. However, we also were there as a reflection of the country's strategic importance to the United States, both for the fact that we had a large amount of military people and assets stationed there as well as the country's strategic importance as the definitive crossroads of the Americas.

Q: So, you packed up everything in two weeks and departed Panama?

COHEN: Indeed we did. Closing down the Mission and shipping out all our expatriate staff was, as I have mentioned, a gargantuan task. The LAC Bureau offered me any resources I wished to tackle the job. I asked for Albert Caldeira, the FSN GSO we had in Guyana, who then was working as a PSC (Personal Services Contractor) in Barbados. When I made that request, I was concerned that people might be offended that I hadn't asked for a USAID direct hire Executive Officer. However, everyone, without exception, nodded their heads in agreement that Caldeira was the perfect choice. And he was.

Q: So everyone and everything was put on ships and planes?

COHEN: That is exactly what happened.

Q: When was that?

COHEN: Late December 1987.

Q: Is there anything else you would like to add regarding Panama?

COHEN: There is. Shortly after the Mission was closed, things politically in Panama became ever more confrontational. Ultimately, this led to the December 1989 U.S. invasion of Panama, otherwise known as Operation Just Cause. The result of that was the arrest (and eventual trial) of Manuel Noriega and the restoration of democratic civilian governance, something the country had not had for a very long time. In June 1990, I returned to Panama as one of several interim mission directors before a fully functional USAID operation could be restored. At the time, the USAID priority was the conduct of a large temporary displaced persons relief operation, mostly operated by OFDA, the Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance. This program made shelter available to the hundreds of poor people made homeless as a consequence of the violent conflict. As I already had an ongoing assignment, there was no thought of my returning to Panama on a more permanent basis. I was not unhappy about that. Still, I very much welcomed the opportunity to be a part of the effort to restore the country to a better kind of normalcy.

Q: So, you suddenly found yourself unexpectedly back in Washington. Was that a difficult transition?

COHEN: It was very difficult. Just before Christmas 1987, Rita and I arrived in Washington, refugees from the sudden closeout of USAID/Panama. For the better part of six months, I didn't have an ongoing assignment. For the most part, days in the office seemed very long. Although Rita and I owned a house in the DC area, I was reluctant to

take it back from my tenants because I didn't know that we weren't going to just turn around and leave again on another assignment abroad. For much of the time, there was the idea that I was being held in reserve to return to Panama. The more time passed, however, the more a return seemed to be an unrealistic expectation in the immediate future.

Ultimately, in May, I was offered and accepted a Washington-based job as the Director of the Office of Caribbean Affairs. For a Washington job, it was something that offered some interesting challenges. With my tours in the Dominican Republic and Guyana, I already had served in two of the office's constituent Missions. At that period of history, the Caribbean was of substantial strategic interest to the U.S. Government.

Q: Who was head of the Latin America Bureau at the time?

COHEN: That was a person named Dwight Ink. Ink was a political appointee who had had a long career in the United States Government, none of it in foreign affairs. He had visited Bolivia several times while I was there, just before he was scheduled to testify to the Congress on the Bureau's anti-narcotic efforts.

Q: Were there major issues in the Caribbean at that time?

COHEN: Most definitely there were. Despite what many might think, the Caribbean is a very disparate region. While the many small countries all offered beautiful beaches and scenic panoramas, they had a great variety of issues and problems. The 1983 invasion of Grenada was still fresh in policymakers' minds, as were the related concerns about the destabilizing role of Cuba in the region. Also, Haitian dictator Jean Claude (Baby Doc) Duvalier had been overthrown in 1986, and presidential elections were shortly anticipated. Finally, there was implementation of the USG's Caribbean Basin Initiative (CBI), a high Reagan White House priority to fortify the region's economy and stability, especially through private sector development. All of our USAID Missions in the region were expected to support CBI success through various programs they were implementing.

That said, the largest attention magnet in the Caribbean then, as now, was Haiti. This was the era just after the encouraged departure of "Baby Doc" Duvalier. The Haitian interim government had a stated goal of holding free and fair democratic elections. Not surprisingly, this did not happen smoothly. Part of the problem was that much of the nucleus of the vested interests that sustained Baby Doc was still there. This included the legendary *Tonton Macoute*, Duvalier's violent paramilitary enforcers. Also, there were elements in the private sector who had had their way for a very long time and were very concerned that any kind of democratic government, one that governed by the rule of law, would be contrary to their interests and a threat to their comfortable lives. While the stability and economic growth such a transition would bring would, no doubt, have benefitted them, they were lifelong monopolists and feared anything that was not an environment fully under their control. With all of this and more, Haiti captured the largest amount of the energy and time of the Office of Caribbean Affairs, as well as the front office of the Latin American and Caribbean Bureau.

Q: Did you travel to Haiti as the Caribbean Affairs office director?

COHEN: I did. I visited all of the countries covered by my office. Being able to know the people in the Missions, see and better understand the programs, meet some of the counterparts, and have contact with the Embassies were major assets for me to be able to do my job. I tried very hard for Caribbean Affairs to be the kind of AID/Washington backstop office that I had wanted for my missions when I was posted overseas. Being well informed about our constituent missions was fundamental to achieving that goal.

Q: Were there any specific events that happened while you were in this job?

COHEN: There were a number of things. Our work was focused on making sure that our missions had the policy and program support they needed from Washington in order to succeed. There was great interest among some members of Congress – particularly the Black Caucus in the House – regarding events in Haiti. We updated them frequently on progress toward elections and how USAID was preparing to be able to support that process. That said, Haiti’s progress toward elections during this period was negligible. Meanwhile, a major hurricane – Gilbert – struck Jamaica. In response, we worked closely with OFDA to support a substantial humanitarian relief effort. Also, to repeat, the White House was very interested in what the region was doing in support of the CBI. For our part, much of the responsibility was in facilitating actions and reporting. I was a featured speaker for several years at an annual Miami-based conference on the CBI.

Q: So, two years had passed. You weren’t anxious to stay longer in Washington I gather?

COHEN: That truly would be an understatement, even though I liked the Caribbean Affairs job. Being engaged on the various regional issues was interesting. We had a good staff, and I greatly enjoyed working with our missions in the field. However, I was very ready to move on. Generally speaking, I didn’t join the Foreign Service to spend time in Washington. My passion was for making development happen in the field.

Q: And somebody approached you and they said...?

COHEN: In a way. By this time (1989-90), the Agency had started moving to a more structured personnel system where jobs were posted and people could put in bids for what interested them. However, that still did not apply to the senior management group (SMG). For us, the old informal ways of getting considered for jobs seemed to be the way things worked. As I (still) was in the LAC Bureau, I knew best what that region’s upcoming openings were, and the people in that bureau knew about me.

I got into discussions about several Mission Director possibilities. Up to that point in my career, probably the most exciting thing I had experienced was being a part of the effort in Bolivia to make the transition from political and economic chaos to democracy-driven stability and growth. To me, this is what we join USAID to experience. It was almost a narcotic-like feeling to witness the incredible transformation that took place in Bolivia

and how relatively quickly that happened. It was so exciting to contemplate how many millions of lives would improve as a result.

With a big election coming up in Haiti, I thought, even though it would be a long shot, if that took place successfully, there was good potential for an historic positive transformation. How could I pass up such an opportunity? Thus, much to the dismay of some friends and colleagues, I volunteered myself to be considered for the Haiti Mission Director job. I certainly did this with my eyes open. From a Washington perspective, I had worked on Haiti and its many issues for the past two years. I understood well what I was getting into. I knew the players, the issues, and the pitfalls. Certainly, I had a comprehensive knowledge of the weaknesses and the threats. With all of that, it was an opportunity I could not pass up.

I also thought that if I was going to remain in the Latin America Bureau, having a tour in Haiti was, in many ways, tantamount to taking a tour in Africa, something that had interested me over the years. In saying this, I am certainly not talking about the fact that the population and the culture there were substantially African. Most significantly, the economy and the political and social institutions in Haiti were very similar to those of Francophone West Africa. Indeed, some of the Haitian public and private sector leadership attended some of the same schools as their Francophone African counterparts. This would be a very different experience for me. On the institutional bureaucratic side, I also would be only the second (as far as I ever knew) traditional LAC person to be the Director of the Haiti Mission. Most of the other past directors had come from the Africa Bureau. Perhaps my comprehensive knowledge of the Bureau and its culture would be assets to me.

Anyway, I was nominated to become the Haiti Mission Director and arrived at post in July 1990.

Q: What about learning French? Was that something you really wanted to do?

COHEN: It was. And it was a challenge. While I spoke both Spanish and Portuguese quite fluently, learning a new language in my late 40s was a different kind of experience. At any rate, I got an FSI two-plus in French before leaving for Port au Prince. However, when I got to Haiti I discovered that French was not really the main language of the country. What most people spoke, regardless of socio-economic class, was Haitian Creole. Haitian Creole is a mixture of French, English, Spanish and Papiamentu, which is the language of Aruba. It was a fascinating and rich language. Thus, not long after I arrived at post, instead of continuing French lessons, I got a Creole teacher. That was a good experience. Eventually, I got to the point where I could do some public speaking in Haitian Creole.

Q: Really?

COHEN: I could do some minor meetings, though I would certainly say that I never achieved the level of fluency that I wanted. Part of that was, as we will discuss, things fell

apart in the country. There was a coup d'état, and I had to stop taking language lessons. Of course, aborted language classes were the least of my problems and concerns.

Q: Before we talk about the coup, tell me a bit about the USAID/Haiti program as it was when you arrived.

COHEN: I arrived in Haiti and took the opportunity to become more familiar with the program, the USAID staff and the Embassy. It was a good start. Compared with my previous assignments, because I was coming from the Caribbean Affairs job, on my arrival in Haiti, I began at a much higher place on the learning curve.

Haiti was (and is), by far, the poorest country in Latin America. One day, during my assignment in Bolivia, a very frustrated staff member came into my office complaining that the country was an utter “basket case.” I strongly disagreed with him, citing the country’s wealth and diversity of natural resources, outstanding agriculture potential and relatively small population for its geographic size. With political stability and improved governance, I pointed out, Bolivia had an outstanding potential to prosper. If one wanted an example of a basket case in the Americas, I said, my choice would be Haiti (not having any idea that I would ever serve there). On top of the country’s chronic fragility, Haiti had exceptionally little in the way of exploitable natural resources and its agricultural potential was legendarily poor. Then there was the factor of the country’s substantial overpopulation. Even with the best governance and economic policy, I argued, it was hard to envision Haiti as a self-sustaining prosperous country any time within the foreseeable future.

Haitian Creole is a language very rich in proverbs. The one most people know is *Dèyè mòn, gen mòn* – beyond mountains, there are more mountains. It very much describes life in the country and its history. Once any problem is resolved, others appear immediately beyond it. It feels cynical to say this, but reality supports the proverb’s essential truth.

The USAID/Haiti program portfolio had a substantial humanitarian emphasis, which was not surprising given the country’s extreme poverty. There was a large U.S. NGO-implemented PL 480 Title II program that was primarily focused on the alleviation of malnutrition in both children and pregnant women. The Mission also had a Title III program, not unlike what I already have described in our discussion of the Bolivia USAID program – including the generation and use of local currency. Our health program had an extensive HIV/AIDS prevention effort. Haiti had been the first country in the hemisphere to have an identifiable AIDS crisis. Not only was it a focal point for USAID assistance, but it was also the location for a number of important (but not USAID funded) research efforts.

Our large agriculture program included a major effort to improve environmental practices. All around the country, because of the extreme poverty, people used wood to fuel their cooking stoves. This meant widespread tree cutting and consequent erosion. Indeed, not only were trees cut, but people were so desperate that they also dug up the roots to use as fuel. Haiti is a very mountainous country. When the steep slopes were

denuded of trees, rainwater would come pouring down them, taking with it whatever topsoil that existed. This meant that any land that might be available to poor, largely subsistence farmers would suffer from extraordinarily low productivity. On several occasions, I had the opportunity to fly along Haiti's coastline in small aircraft. For about a mile out, one could see a ring of the soil that had washed into the sea. Similarly, years earlier, while I had been posted in the Dominican Republic, flying along the border between the two countries, the demarcation between them could not have been clearer; any trees to be seen ended on the Dominican side. Over the years, USAID and other donors have tried to introduce new incentives and technologies to keep Haitians from cutting trees. To my knowledge, none has been very successful.

Permit me to insert a story here about an irrigation program financed by the Interamerican Development Bank (IDB). As mentioned, for a number of well understood reasons, agricultural productivity in the country is chronically low. Simple, low cost irrigation could be of great benefit. To implement its program, the IDB selected an area that had good potential for increased rice productivity and was largely cultivated by poor farmers on smallish plots of land. The Bank decided that it would be a positive thing to hire the beneficiary farmers themselves to dig the irrigation ditches, providing them with employment to augment their agricultural income. For a short while, this scheme worked well. However, the Bank began to notice that, increasingly, when supervisors arrived in the morning, they discovered that the previous day's work had been destroyed – the canals collapsed and filled in. Ultimately, they found out that the culprits were the farmers themselves. When asked why they would destroy something that would clearly be of great value to them, the farmers had an amazing, but very Haitian, response. They said that if the irrigation project was successfully completed, the land indeed would produce much more rice and become more valuable. Once richer, more powerful people saw that this was happening, they would come and take the land away from the farmers, who would be helpless to resist. In the end, they would end up even poorer.

Q: Were there other components of the USAID program that you haven't mentioned?

COHEN: Yes. An additional element of the USAID/Haiti portfolio that merits mention involved efforts to strengthen the private sector. Aspects of this were quite relevant to the overall strategy and objectives of the Caribbean Basin Initiative. For example, it was ascertained that certain crops, such as mangoes and peppers, might find good "off season" markets in the U.S. while bringing jobs and foreign exchange to Haiti. Similarly, technical guidance was provided to other export industries that were largely reliant on an abundant supply of quality, low cost labor. Such foreign enterprises often were referred to as "suitcase industries." They involved relatively low levels of investment, so that, if things turned violent and they needed to get out of the country quickly, all they had in Haiti could be quickly packed in "suitcases," and they could flee with minimal loss. U.S. labor unions complained loudly about these industries. They claimed that they exploited their poor workers, paid them very low wages, and had unacceptable working conditions. By U.S. standards, the wages were, indeed, quite low. However, they were excellent for Haiti. There must have been many more than fifty applicants for any available factory job. Regarding conditions, many of us in the Haiti mission and others from the Embassy

often visited these factories (most often unannounced), and there was no noteworthy evidence of poor labor conditions.

Q: So you mentioned a coup d'état. What exactly happened?

COHEN: Let me set the political scene. Incredible for some to know, Haiti was the second country in the Americas – after the U.S. – to win its independence from a European colonial power. In the case of Haiti, that power was France. This happened in 1804 following a successful slave revolt led by Toussaint L'Ouverture. Between 1804 and 1915, more than 70 different dictators ruled Haiti. US troops occupied the country between 1915 and 1934. From 1957 to 1986, the country was under the brutal dictatorship of Francois (Papa Doc) Duvalier and, following his death, his son Jean Claude (Baby Doc). Life under the Duvaliers was brutal and enforced by the vicious *Tonton Macoute*, while the level of corruption was incredibly high. Jean Claude's ouster in 1986, helped along with some assistance from the USG, provided an opportunity to put Haiti on a more solid political, economic and humanitarian course.

In the aftermath of Jean Claude, there were a number of interim governments. Setting up a credible election proved challenging, as interests, including many from the Duvalier past, vied for advantage.

About two months before the election itself, there was an attempted coup that was aimed at thwarting the candidacy of the leading candidate, a charismatic ex-Catholic priest, Jean-Bertrand Aristide. As a priest, Father Aristide was a high profile champion of the poor. He ran for the presidency on an agenda of what he would do to make their lives better. If elected, the masses of Haiti's poor, for the first time, would have a president who would represent and care about them.

Fortunately, the coup, carried out by elements of the Haitian Army, was put down by other elements of the military, along with some strong words and effective diplomacy from the U.S. Ambassador, Alvin Adams. Adams, also known by his Haitian nickname *Bourik Chaje* – the loaded donkey, had been in the country for about a year. [Note: Adams was quite fluent in Haitian Creole. On his arrival in country, he quoted a Creole proverb: *Bourik chaje pas kampe* – a loaded donkey never stops, alluding to his (Adams') singular focus on bringing about a successful Haitian election.] Adams was quite high profile, very effective and extraordinarily impassioned about achieving a better future for Haiti (that is, a smooth democratic transition). From day one in the country, I admired the passion and drive that defined Al Adams. He was an interesting man, fueled by large quantities of cigarettes and coffee.

This coup attempt had a profound, enduring impact on Aristide. He had run a good campaign up until then. When the coup attempt took place, it seemed clear to me that Aristide had concluded that he would not survive it. Once the coup ended, he became a lot more guarded and defensive, much less democratic in orientation and quite a bit more threatening to his enemies. The reason I am mentioning these things is because it was this more defensive and threatening Aristide who was elected as president of Haiti.

Q: And that brings us up to the election. Was USAID engaged with that at all?

COHEN: In the run-up to the late 1990 presidential election, the USAID Mission staff was very focused on working with the donor community which was then, in this particular context, led by the UNDP. The shared goal was to assure a high quality free and fair election. The multilateral component of the donor group included elements of the UN, the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), the World Bank, the IMF and the Organization of American States (OAS). The prominent bilateral components included the governments of France, Canada and, of course, the U.S. Each donor brought different or complementary resources to the table. USAID provided technical assistance through grants and contracts with such entities as IFES (the International Foundation for Electoral Systems) and the international assistance programs of the U.S. Republican and Democratic parties (IRI and NDI, respectively). For one politically sensitive element, USAID provided a grant to the UNDP itself for something that it could uniquely accomplish. Among the areas addressed by USAID assistance were: voter registration, political party building, Election Day observation, ballot printing, and logistics.

The good news was that the election was a great success. Turnout was high; violence and intimidation were minimal; and observers from all around the international community were pleased with what they witnessed. I, myself, spent part of Election Day as an observer. I cannot remember ever seeing people as happy and jubilant as the hordes of Haiti's poor that turned out to vote that day. Some people danced while waiting in the very long lines to vote. Others carried roosters, a symbol of Aristide's Lavalas (Creole for "flood") party. Aristide won with 67 percent of the vote.

Q: What happened following the election?

COHEN: When Aristide was elected, donors in general, but especially the United States, were extremely forthcoming in trying to provide the support that would be needed to ensure the success of new government and democracy. Our program budget soared.

However, President Aristide seemed less focused on moving forward with the kinds of things that would make the economy grow and maximize benefits to the poorest than had been the passionate agenda of Father Aristide, the poor parish priest. As a candidate, he had been very effective at running against the sins and corruption of the past. His vision of the past was very clear. But now, as president, he offered very little in terms of a plan of action for a better Haiti for the future of its people. That malignant vision of the past, that aggression towards the individuals and institutions involved with that were a centerpiece of his "dialogue" with the people. Aristide, a man who was so articulate and soft-spoken in the many meetings we had with him, would become a raging demagogue when out speaking with his constituency. Increasingly, the military and the rich, who had prospered greatly under the Duvaliers, saw Aristide as a threat that needed to be eliminated. And that, I believe, was the core of what generated the coup by the military that overthrew him in October 1991.

Q: How long was he in power?

COHEN: About eight months.

Q: Less than a year?

COHEN: Correct. That was all he lasted.

When the coup took place, Rita and I were on R&R. We were on our return to Haiti and were in London. When I awoke, I turned on my radio and heard about the coup on the BBC. I woke Rita and told her about the coup. We packed and immediately left for the airport. Flying to Haiti under most circumstances required a transit in Miami. When we arrived in Miami, all flights to Port au Prince had been canceled. I called people in AID/Washington, who suggested that I go there. Their situation was somewhat chaotic and having someone from the Mission would be very helpful. Under the circumstances, that seemed to be the best decision; thus, we bought tickets and flew to DC.

After my first day there, I decided that I would work the overnight shift in the State Department Operations Center that was managing the overnight aspects of the Haiti crisis. I thought this experience would be useful and would better help me to understand the roles of the different agencies involved. About 3:00 in the morning, I was talking to a military officer. He said, "Do you want to see something incredible? Look at all of these bombed out roads near Gonaïves." Gonaïves is a large-ish city north of Port-au-Prince. I asked why anyone would bomb the road to Gonaïves; nothing remotely strategic was located there. The officer then showed me a satellite photo as undeniable evidence of the bombing. I looked at it and I laughed. I told him that what he was seeing were not bomb craters, they were potholes. I had been on the road less than two months prior to that evening. At one time, the road had been smooth asphalt. However, tropical rains and the absence of maintenance resulted in the "craters" depicted in the satellite photo. The officer was incredulous, but later verified what I had said with his colleague in Port au Prince.

Q: Did you get back to Haiti?

COHEN: I did, just a few days later. A negotiating team had been organized by the Organization of American States to engage the Haitian military officers responsible for the coup. The senior USG official on that delegation was to be Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Robert Gelbard. I had previously worked with Bob both in Brazil and Bolivia. One evening, he phoned me at my hotel room in Washington and said that, if I wanted a ride back to Haiti, I could get one on the OAS delegation's plane that was leaving Andrews Air Force Base at 10:00 the following morning. He said that he would give them my name, so that I could board the plane. I asked if he could give them Rita's name, too. Much to my delight, he agreed to do that. The next morning, Rita and I boarded the OAS plane and, at long last, flew back to Port au Prince.

Q: Then what happened?

COHEN: In all, we didn't spend more than three or four days in Washington before returning to Port au Prince. The path forward was unclear. At the time of our return, a State Department mandated voluntary departure evacuation was in place. Some staff and family already had left the country. "Critical" personnel were to remain at post, which resulted in a curious exercise of determining who was critical and who was not. Some people asked to be categorized as "not critical," a wish we complied with.

One evening, at about 10 pm, I was called to attend a suddenly convened Emergency Action Committee meeting at the Embassy. An armored Chevy Suburban came to my home to drive me there. The streets were totally dark due to an ever-more common power outage, and one could hear occasional gunshots. The purpose of the meeting was to decide whether to declare a total evacuation of the Embassy. We were told that U.S. Navy ships were just over the horizon, prepared to take us all away the next morning. Happily, the Country Team consensus was that we did not feel that the situation had reached a level of danger that would require such an action. Indeed, doing this could result in some identifiable consequences that could be of significant harm to U.S. interests.

About a week later, State upgraded the evacuation level to what is called a directed departure. Part of the timing for this determination rested on a negotiated "decision" with American Airlines to reestablish service to Haiti for one day, thus saving the USG the high cost of chartered or military aircraft to transport its employees, their dependents and any U.S. citizens who wanted to leave the country. At the "directed" level, only critical staff could remain and all dependents had to leave. This was a major step that resulted in the departure of a large number of people, including my wife, Rita.

The evacuated USAID/Haiti staff set up a mission in exile office in Washington. We had regular staff meetings with them two or three times a week using speaker phones. My main objective in doing this was to keep these people in the informational loop. These staff members were more than just our eyes and ears in AID/W, they were people who could get done the things we needed to get done up there. Having Mission staff on the ground who were knowledgeable was an extraordinary asset to us during this period.

By this time, all USAID assistance to the Government of Haiti had been suspended, leaving active our still quite large portfolio of grants through both U.S. and Haitian NGOs (Non-Governmental Organizations). Haiti long had been noteworthy for being a country of NGOs, both large and small. Not only were there huge organizations like CARE and Catholic Relief Services, but many churches in the U.S. had "adopted" a local Haitian village or church. While the motives of these tiny NGOs were undoubtedly generous, the usual result was not anything that could be labeled sustainable development and could, at times, be distractingly chaotic.

A principal reason why NGOs were so prevalent in Haiti was that the Government, because of its chronic chaos, corruption and fragility, was generally unable to provide the basic services needed by the country's large population of extremely poor people. By

“basic services” I am talking about health, education, feeding and similar programs. As it was, even with the cut-off of U.S. and other donor aid to the Government, the most vulnerable people, by and large, still continued to receive a moderate trickle of vital services through the various NGO channels. In terms of the rapidly evolving USG policy regarding Haiti, this was not totally a bad thing, as we did not want to make or be perceived as making innocent people suffer as a result of the embargos.

From its perspective, the Government of Haiti typically was not happy about the vital role of foreign NGOs. This was because either *they* (the GOH) wanted to be viewed as the benefactor of their citizens in need or they wanted direct access to the resources themselves so that they might have the chance to divert them elsewhere for corrupt motives. In any case, even when the country was not in crisis, the GOH was not organizationally capable of providing the necessary level of essential services.

In the meantime, the Embassy and the rest of the diplomatic community were trying to convince the military government, headed by Army General Raoul Cédras, to hand back power to the elected civilian government. Cédras was warned that, if he did not do this, there would be an imposition of ever more severe sanctions against the country. He was told that, if the military and its supporters had grievances against Aristide, there were more effective ways of pursuing those that did not involve a coup.

The gossip (*zen*, in Haitian Creole) around Port au Prince had it (and I certainly believed) that the coup was encouraged and financed by the local business class that had benefited greatly from the corruption of the Duvalier regime and was mobilized by the threats that Aristide had directed at their privileged community. When the coup took place, Aristide was taken out of the country. While he left on a French military aircraft, he ultimately ended up in the States – despite State Department efforts to the contrary. Aristide was not an easy guest to have. His access to the media and his ability to stir up the Miami-based Haitian diaspora risked making an already challenging situation even more impossible.

Q: What kind of guy was Aristide?

COHEN: That is a question that very much gets to the heart of the situation. Aristide was a complex personality. The Ambassador and I would, from time to time, go over to the national palace and talk with him while he was president. Aristide, I think, spoke something like seven languages quite well, including English. For example, he was said to speak fluent Hebrew, a capability he acquired from time spent studying in Israel. As I mentioned earlier, he had been a Catholic priest. When we spoke with him, he came across as a highly intelligent, thoughtful man who was very soft-spoken, reasonable and logical. In such conversations, there always seemed to be a good amount of constructive give and take. However, if you took that same man on the same day and put him in front of a crowd of 100 or more people, he would be transformed into a forceful, mesmerizing demagogue – a tyrant and rabble rouser who could transform a crowd of humble, peaceful supporters into a threatening mob, ready to take to the streets in large, ominous tire burning protests. Aristide’s two personas were so remarkably different from one another. This rabble rousing personality, however, was the one that ultimately provoked

into action those who carried out the coup. Aristide's complexity was also a factor that complicated, indeed made much more difficult, negotiating his return to the presidency.

Q: So, by the time you had returned to Haiti from Washington, Aristide was already gone?

COHEN: He was.

Q: Describe the situation in the country at that time.

COHEN: In the Americas, the early 1990s was a period of ascendancy for democratic governance. For decades, the region had been marked by military coups and the related instability. A good illustration of this would be the scene I described upon my arrival in Bolivia, the poster child for such behavior.

The coup in Haiti was not welcomed by any of the countries in the region, or by any international organizations. The spread of stability and economic growth in the Americas through stable, democratic governance had long been a leading policy objective of the USG. Indeed, the possibility that the coup in Haiti could be allowed to stand was considered a threat to the stability of the others. Their concern was if the Haitian military could get away with something like this, would their own militaries be encouraged to try something similar?

There was another factor among the Latins, mostly observed behind the scenes because of its perceived "incorrectness." Haiti's population was black and non-Hispanic, unlike the majority of the other countries in the more broadly defined "Americas." As a result, coming down hard on Haiti in the name of democracy would be easier and, perhaps, less precedent setting for the others. Thus it was that, in September 1991, the Organization of American States (OAS) and its constituent members imposed a strict embargo on Haiti. Along the way, there also was a UN embargo. But the one that seemed to make the most significant difference was that of the OAS.

The embargos impacted the country in a number of important ways. However, two elements were the most significant. First was the virtual cut-off of fuel imports. Electricity supply in Haiti long had been seriously deficient. Now, it became abysmal. It touched almost every aspect of life in the country. Second was that a good number of those "suitcase" industries that I mentioned earlier packed up and left. Garment markets depend on reliable, timely shipping. Between security issues and the effect of the embargo on shipping, not to mention totally unreliable electricity resources, Haiti quickly became totally unsuitable for this kind of manufacturing.

The new Government of Haiti featured a number of civilian faces in key positions. They would try to negotiate with elements of the international community to no real effect. They were roundly recognized as being place-takers for the military thugs who were really in charge, people that we in USAID never saw. Disappointingly, some of USAID's best regarded counterparts took on some of the "ministerial" roles, their hunger for the

prestige of the title stronger than the obvious immorality and futility of what they represented.

As we neared the end of 1991, two political realities were becoming clearer. First, the situation in Haiti was not going to be resolved as rapidly as many in Washington thought. As a consequence, strategic thinking about the situation was moving to a moderately longer term horizon. Second, the United States was entering into a more intense period of a presidential election cycle. The George H. W. Bush White House did not want Haiti to become a major campaign issue. For USAID, we were pretty much told that Washington did not want photos of embargo-caused dead and dying children on the front pages of the New York Times and Washington Post.

Several weeks after our dependents left post, the State Department opted for a more bare bones evacuation. Accordingly, all of the expatriates in the USAID Mission, except for our Executive Officer, Chuck Drilling, were evacuated. The Embassy wanted Chuck to remain to protect our building and physical assets. Essentially, the Embassy targeted having a staff size that could live and work in the Embassy chancery.

Departing country was a bit of an adventure as there was no longer any airline that served Port au Prince. To be able to maintain program operational capability, once we had approvals, we decided to move our Controller's Office (and our Controller) to USAID/Dominican Republic, which had agreed to the arrangement. This allowed us to continue to make essential program and housekeeping payments and gave us a quick re-start capability should that be desired. We put all the essential financial management files and equipment in a large Executive Office truck and took off in a caravan for the border. That morning, before we departed, one of our PSC health officers was asked by her hair dresser if she was going to be travelling across the border with the rest of the USAID group. The word had leaked out. Arriving at the Haitian border control post, we all were rather tense and feeling vulnerable. And...nothing happened. Happily, our crossing turned out to be uneventful.

Thus, with the exception of our EXO and Controller, all of the Mission's American direct hire and contract staff – including me – joined the evacuation group in Washington. As it was near the end of the year, things in DC evolved at a comparatively slow pace. At one point, I, along with our health (David Eckerson) and food (Peter Goossens) officers, was designated to return to Port au Prince with an OAS team to assess the degree of humanitarian crisis. To get there, we travelled in a small chartered aircraft. In all, we spent about four nights in-country. The fact is that we did not learn anything we did not already know. The embargo-enhanced fuel and energy crises were greatly exacerbating Haiti's already dismal humanitarian situation. Given the White House mandate to avoid those photos of starving children, State Department and the senior ranks of the LAC Bureau were increasingly uncomfortable.

With the turn of the New Year, the pressure to do "something" greatly increased. At one of the many meetings on the subject, I said that if Washington wanted more things to happen on the ground, they would need to return at least a core group of us to Port au

Prince. Much to my surprise, both State and LAC leadership quickly agreed that we should do precisely that. State checked with Ambassador Adams, who strongly supported the decision. Indeed, I had had the impression that he did not support our leaving in the first place. Within a week, five of us (including our Controller from the DR) arrived in Haiti to step up the USG humanitarian response. I had been gone from post approximately two months.

Our challenge was to feed the neediest, to keep track of what the disease vectors were in the country and to work to prevent those from getting worse. Through the entire time of the embargo, I would say that USAID and its partner NGOs were extraordinarily successful in keeping those photos of dead and dying children off the front pages.

Q: Because they weren't happening?

COHEN: Not much worse than normally occurred in Haiti. A legitimate question to ask would be: how can I say that with any degree of certainty? In one of our evening geographic bachelor conclaves, we devised an innovative monitoring system that worked magnificently well under the circumstances of widespread insecurity and very limited fuel supplies.

The challenge was to gather reliable, credible data under those challenging circumstances. Obviously, academically acceptable collection methodologies would not be an option. Our objective was to have a system that helped us to target food and health assistance.

What I suggested was a humanitarian data collection model based on a methodology that we had briefly used in Bolivia. The system would track key disease and hunger vectors along with other elements that we might identify as useful (for example, fuel availability). The goal would be to have the knowledge that could help us target our food and health crisis assistance. The collection of accurate, pragmatically useable data in Haiti at any time was never easy. To do something similar during this crisis, when there was not only a scarcity of the fuel necessary to manage the logistics of data collection, but also a risky security situation for people travelling in the field, would, by a substantial magnitude, be even more challenging.

We came up with an outstanding idea, one that well met our needs, was fully feasible, and would be qualitatively credible. As I have mentioned, USAID/Haiti worked with numerous U.S. and Haitian NGOs all around the country. We developed a simple questionnaire that was to be submitted weekly to us verbally by phone or radio by a sampling of these and other NGOs. The person who oversaw and had a major hand in the design of the system was USAID PSC John Currelly, a Canadian citizen and long-time resident of Haiti. John and his family had moved to the country about a decade earlier. They were devout Baha'i; their objective in coming to Haiti was to do what they could to help the poor. Over his time in the country, John had owned several small businesses and had, in recent years, been employed as a private sector advisor for the USAID Mission. To put the final touches on the data gathering system, we also brought in a World Bank

economist and data expert. He was someone I had known and respected in Bolivia. The Bank was very interested in what we were assembling and was happy to offer help in optimizing it.

We were quick to acknowledge that our nascent data system would not necessarily provide a statistically perfect sampling. However, it was a useable sampling because any flaw in the data would be a consistent flaw from week to week. Because we were using the survey to target assistance, we were not necessarily as focused on the absolutes of the extent of any hunger or health issues; we wanted most to know whether such problems were increasing or decreasing. With the data that we began to collect, we could quickly view the ebb and flow of the indicators that most drove the targeting of our emergency assistance. For example, we could rapidly review which vectors of disease were on the rise and affecting children and their mothers. With this information, we could focus assistance on the places that most urgently needed feeding or immunization programs. We also provided our data to the other donors in Haiti so as to facilitate their programming. Our data system worked magnificently well. Looking at the database, one could really see from week to week and month to month how we were able to stop incipient bad situations from becoming worse because they were identified and acted on promptly.

Indeed, our humanitarian monitoring system was so widely valued, it became somewhat involved in the political debate. There were those elements, both within and outside of the USG, who thought that their political interest was best served by showing a population that was suffering more than was actually the case. Those who felt this way, including some people in the Embassy, did not particularly like Aristide and believed that it would be better not to support his return. It served their purpose to depict the embargo as inhumane and to have it lifted. Our data monitoring system was not helping their cause.

Q: Were you allowed to travel outside of Port-au-Prince?

COHEN: Both because of the security situation and scarcity of fuel, any travel outside of Port au Prince was rare for me or for the rest of the skeleton USAID staff.

On the fuel situation: As mentioned previously, our Mission had an outstanding Executive Office and Executive Officer (EXO), Chuck Drilling. When he arrived in Haiti, he was a first tour IDI – a new entry FSO. Chuck took over the Executive Office when his predecessor, Pam White, was transferred. While it was rare for someone on his first tour to be moved into such a pivotal position, it was clear to all of us that Chuck was a star. He was incredible working with his outstanding FSN staff and providing the rest of us in the Mission with the things we needed to be able to do the program and live our lives without being distracted. One of the things he did was to dig up the USAID parking lot and bury a noteworthy number of storage tanks beneath it. He then proceeded to form close relationships with the petroleum companies that were permitted to import fuel for the conduct of humanitarian programs and diplomatic missions. USAID had so much stored fuel that many of us observed that we lived on the shore of Lake Chuck. That our

EXO was able to accomplish this greatly facilitated our provision of assistance. Still, even though we had this resource, we were careful not to squander it. Thus, as I mentioned, our travel to the field was rare.

Q: Wow! No assistance to the government? All assistance went through local and American- international NGOs?

COHEN: Every bit of it.

One of the more memorable programs that we supported with PL480 local currency was called *Aba Fatra*, which in Haitian Creole meant “down with garbage.” This program was created and managed by our Health Officer, David Eckerson, who later became a Mission Director and Counselor of the Agency. Partially because of the fuel shortage, but substantially because of its own disarray and lack of organization capacity, the Haitian Government was not collecting garbage. There were mountains of garbage all over Port au Prince, especially in the downtown streets. Some of those “mountains” were higher than 10 feet. They attracted numerous vermin and, in the tropical heat, emitted a powerful odor. At the very least, they were a major menace to public health. The Food for Work effort that Eckerson and his team put together greatly improved the health situation, as well as the transit situation in the city and people’s perception of the quality of their lives. It was an awesome program.

Q: How did that work? Did somebody bring in trash trucks or carts or how did it work?

COHEN: All of those things you’ve mentioned, yes.

Q: Normally a municipal government would perform this function?

COHEN: Not “normally” for Port au Prince. Even when there was no fuel embargo, garbage often would pile up on the streets – though not to the extreme I have been describing. Even though the embargo was very explicitly not targeted at the poor, it still made life even more difficult than their usually dismal norm. As the situation dragged on over the months, dealing with the garbage mountains made it look like something good was happening. It gave people a glimmer of hope. In a minimal way, it improved their spirit. So, on several levels (but, most importantly, the humanitarian situation), *Aba Fatra* was a great program.

Q: Did the military government come to you and say that they wanted you to re-start assistance to them?

COHEN: Yes. From time to time, we would get such requests from their civilian surrogates. But it was never a very long conversation. In the first place, they knew that we agreed with the freeze and did not recognize their legitimacy in representing the GOH. They also knew that the freeze on aid to the government was a Washington policy, not one that originated in Port au Prince. Overall, there was no doubt that we fully

supported both the OAS and UN embargos. Such impassioned pleas were theater: they knew it and so did we.

Q: Who were the people that came to you to make this case?

COHEN: Probably the most prominent was Marc Bazin, a well-regarded economist who had held a senior position at the World Bank, and who was now acting President. Marc had had a close working relationship with the Embassy and USAID following the departure of Baby Doc. He had harbored a dream of becoming the country's president. For a while, it looked like that might happen. However, with the advent of the Aristide candidacy, Bazin's prospects faded sharply. In the 1990 election, he only won 14 percent of the vote (versus Aristide's 67 percent). So, when the Haitian military was looking for someone credible to act as president, Marc saw his chance. During his brief tenure, he used all his contacts (and credibility) to try to reverse the embargos. I am sure that he knew he wouldn't succeed, but he gave it his best shot.

Lily Tomlin once said something like "no matter how cynical you are, sometimes it's hard to keep up." Haiti was such a toxically cynical environment. It ate at your soul 24/7. The "haves" would express great concern about what that horrible embargo was doing to the poor and questioning how the USG and the OAS (the OAS was more prominent in this than was the UN) could possibly do this to them.

Q: But you and your staff kept your cynicism at bay and had a lot of work to do. You felt comfortable that you were being reasonably successful in saving lives under the challenging circumstances of the country?

COHEN: We did. Day by day, in an abnormal way, we established our new normal. We were part of a sharply reduced crew of Embassy and USAID people. Long hours and chunks of weekends were integral parts of our very stressful environment. It was always clear that we greatly missed our still evacuated families. We were what the military calls geographic bachelors and bachelorettes. Still, at least within USAID, morale was quite good. Without exception, we worked well as a team. On the weekends, when time permitted, we (elements of the Embassy community) would get together and have pot luck dinners, play cards, and sometimes hike. It was good mental health practice.

Q: And you would cook something for that?

COHEN: No, I participated in other ways. On one occasion, a consular officer, a fellow from Minnesota, offered a luncheon of what he declared to be the typical cuisine of his state. The main criterion for his selection, he said, was that no natural ingredients were used. Thus, the meal was rather heavy on Jell-O molds.

Often, Sunday potlucks were preceded by group hikes in the hills outside of Port au Prince. Sometimes, after work, we would get together and have a beer at a place located in front of the Presidential Palace. There is a reason that I am mentioning these things here. The State Department continued to maintain the post's evacuation status based on

their stated perception of continued unacceptable security conditions. However, if we were able to go hiking in the hills and to have a beer in front of the Palace and the Embassy security people (of whom there were quite a few) voiced no objection, the basis for continuing the evacuation appeared to be ever less justifiable.

When this was pointed out to the relevant folks at State, their response was that a lifting of the evacuation would send a political message that the USG considered things in Haiti to be back to normal – a signal they did not wish to convey. Our response was that evacuations were not supposed to be used for sending political signals. The fact was that we all were missing our families, and there was no apparent significant risk in allowing them to return to post. Day by day, this factor was dragging down morale. Also, our workload had increased substantially. We very much needed the remainder of our staff (more than half our total) to be back in country and at their desks.

By regulation, we were told, evacuations could last no more than six months. If the defining situation lasted longer than that period, then the post would be categorized as “unaccompanied,” that is, no family members would be permitted to accompany those officers assigned there. We were getting very near to that six-month deadline. By phone, I discussed this situation with the LAC Assistant Administrator, Jim Michel, describing the case and need for lifting the evacuation. Since the coup took place, Haiti had been the Bureau’s flashing red light. It was widely acknowledged that, under very trying circumstances, the Mission had put together and run a world class humanitarian assistance program. Were the post to become “unaccompanied,” I could give him a list of the key staff we would lose through curtailment of their tours. If we were to lose those people, the Mission’s continued ability to carry out those programs would be substantially reduced in a way that would have strategic implications to USG interests and policies in Haiti.

I cannot say if it was because of that conversation, but, in any case, State lifted the evacuation within 24 hours. Our dependents and our colleagues were given a green light to return to Port au Prince.

The night before our families were to return, I had a dinner at my house for all of the AID geographic bachelors. During our three or four months together, we had become quite close and supportive of each other. In addition, we felt good about what we had accomplished under extraordinarily challenging circumstances. Over the years, the word “team” has been widely used and abused in USAID; but that group we had in Haiti was, in every sense of the term, a truly great team.

While the team would still be moving forward just as effectively, it felt like the return of our families would mark the end of a brief era that would stand out in our lives. Even though we were really looking forward to having our families with us again, there was a bit of nostalgia for what we had been through together. Peter Goossens was our Dutch PSC food officer. Peter was a natural curmudgeon and a highly notable connoisseur of beer. With a long wistful stare into the amber of his glass and his noteworthy accent, he

said, “You know, for a really shitty time, this has been a very great experience.” While it was very funny hearing it put that way, all of us knew exactly what he meant.

In another conversation that evening, we talked about the things we had missed with the absence of our families. One person spoke of missing his child’s first words, another the company of his spouse. Our Controller, in a quiet voice, spoken from his corner, said, “I just want my credit card back.”

Q: So, Rita came back. How much longer did you stay in Haiti? Did you stay for the full tour of two years?

COHEN: No, we stayed a bit more than three years.

Q: And the military government was still in power?

COHEN: Yes. It was still in power. Negotiations to reinstate Aristide took place periodically, but they were not successful. About ten months after my departure, in October 1994, Aristide finally was restored to power.

Q: Had you thought about leaving Haiti earlier?

COHEN: It was a toxic environment. However, for the most part, I was so immersed in what we were doing that leaving was never really something I thought much about - certainly not after I had completed just two years. I liked my team and was dedicated to the really hard task we had been given. Leaving at that time would not have felt right. But to return to the topic of toxicity: I have already mentioned about Haiti being such a cynical place. Over time, that environment began to eat at your soul. Every day, you were exposed to the most incredibly cynical, two-faced statements – caring about the people and being totally uncaring. And the people who were the most noble through this were the poor people who were suffering the most.

Q: Did you have to go up on the Hill when you would come back to Washington? Did you go up periodically and brief people and were there Congress people who were particularly involved and interested?

COHEN: I went up to the Hill frequently and the Hill, especially the Congressional Black Caucus, came down to visit us. A lot of that was information sharing. For the most part, it was a constructive relationship. There was one person who was an assistant to Walter Fauntroy, D.C.’s representative at the time, who had a special interest in Haiti. I greatly appreciated his understanding of the country and the exchange of ideas that we had. It also was useful for us to have someone on the Hill who could explain what was happening in Haiti to colleagues.

Representative John Conyers once led a CODEL (Congressional Delegation) that particularly focused on trying to find problems with our humanitarian assistance effort. As you might imagine, this was not a pleasant experience. He requested a meeting at a

local hotel with me and a group of the American NGOs working in Haiti. After about 15 minutes of back and forth about their programs, he said to them, “So, here’s David Cohen, he’s the Director of the AID Mission here. Has he done everything you want, given you everything you need, has he treated you right? And I thought, “Uh, oh. This can’t be good.” It is not unusual for there be an occasionally adversarial relationship between USAID and U.S. NGOs, mostly on issues of funding and the attribution of funding. So, much to my very great surprise, in response to Conyers, they said, “You know, he has a tough job, and he doesn’t always say what we want or provide the resources each of us would like. But we understand why he has to say that. It wouldn’t be possible for him say yes all the time. So, we actually have no complaint about him.” I was amazed, not to mention very appreciative.

Q: That was a loaded question. It put you on the line there.

COHEN: It most certainly did. And I am sure that was the intent. I think he probably was as surprised at the response as I was.

Q: So, Conyers and Fauntroy were the Congress people who were most involved?

COHEN: And others in the Congressional Black Caucus. There was a Representative named Jim Oberstar who was not in the Black Caucus, but had spent time teaching English in Haiti. He was one of the other very interested and knowledgeable people. Engaging with him and his staff was always quite substantive.

Q: Anything else with the Congress?

COHEN: Not with the Congress, per se, but there is another subject I would like to mention. A major thing that was happening at that time was a large explosion in the number of boat people – people who got into rickety craft in Haiti with the idea of making it to Miami. Dealing with this became another priority Haiti issue with great impact for U.S. policy and interests – both foreign and domestic.

I have already mentioned my thoughts on the importance of hope in people’s lives. People who have hope do not take enormous risks to become illegal immigrants. Getting into a boat in Haiti was extraordinarily risky. The boats the Haitian refugees used truly were very rickety. The Haitians who boarded them were certainly desperate. They were people who saw nothing at all in their future that was good and offered promise. The risk that they were taking by getting into boats, certainly at the outset of this period, so clearly represented to them a hope for a better life where there was no other hope for themselves or their children. Over time, because the danger to these people had evolved into such a politicized issue in the States, the Coast Guard moved their vessels closer and closer to the Haitian coast, such that one could actually see (I was told by people in the Embassy) their ships off the shores of Haiti. So, as things progressed, getting into a rickety boat for Haitians became less risky, because people knew they would probably not spend much more than an hour or two at sea before they were picked up by the Coast Guard craft. The

Coast Guard then delivered them for processing to camps at the U.S. naval base in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.

Q: Oh, really?

COHEN: After the initial waves of Haitian boat people, some of whom landed in Florida and the Bahamas, the American Government struggled with finding a humanitarian way of dealing with this crisis away from U.S. shores. With some renovations that were quickly accomplished, the Guantanamo Bay naval base offered a ready solution. The shortest distance between Guantanamo and Haiti is less than 200 miles. This substantially simplified the logistics of managing the flow of “rescued” boat people.

On arrival at Guantanamo, life for the would-be refugees almost immediately got much better. They had a safe, dry place to live, three square meals a day, health care, and basic education for their children. Meanwhile, they were processed by State Department and immigration authorities to verify if they merited refugee status, which in most cases, they did not. The process could take several weeks to complete. Those who did not merit refugee status were sent back to Haiti, which, by an agreement that the USG had with the de facto Haitian government, we were allowed to do. Returned boat people were given money, food, and clothing.

To review: 1) Because the Coast Guard was so efficient in quickly picking them up once they set sail, there no longer was significant risk for potential boat people to fear. 2) Life in Guantanamo provided safety, food, shelter, health care and other benefits – a quality of life much better than anything the refugees ever experienced in their home country. 3) Being returned to Haiti offered a departing package of cash, food and clothing. 4) Finally, for those very few who, in effect, “won the lottery,” there was the remote possibility of being granted official refugee status and the opportunity to begin a new life in the States. In short, the U.S. program for dealing with the outflow of boat people, in all likelihood, actually incentivized more people to get into boats. This situation endured for quite a while. To the best of my knowledge, it was only really resolved once Aristide returned and people thought that maybe they would have more of a chance for living a better life in Haiti.

The question one might ask is: in what way, if any, did the boat people situation relate to USAID’s role in Haiti. The answer is clear, if not entirely satisfactory. We had a very large humanitarian assistance program. One of the objectives of that effort was to keep people from becoming so desperate that the risk of getting onto one of those unsafe boats was not worth taking. However, as the incentives shifted with the advent of the Guantanamo Bay operation, though we could never know for certain, it was increasingly unlikely that our emergency food and health efforts were keeping people from getting into those boats.

Q: Were there Haitian-American interest groups that tried to influence the program and policies?

COHEN: Not so much, at least as far as USAID was concerned. There clearly were Haitian groups in the fairly substantial Haitian diaspora community in Miami. They were very pro-Aristide. The main focus of their lobbying was for a strengthening of U.S. efforts to restore him to Haiti and the presidency, something that was not achieved until nearly a year after I had moved on to my next assignment.

Q: Is there anything else you would like to add regarding Haiti?

COHEN: Yes there is.

There was a conversation that we occasionally had within the Mission during the different phases of my tour in Haiti. This concerned our role as a “development agency.” Throughout the post-coup period, we were proud to acknowledge that, under very difficult circumstances, we had been able to provide an outstanding relief program. Arguably, many people, especially young children, survived that period because we were able to get them the food and preventive health care that they needed. Still, what we – USAID – did was not development, what we all had signed up to do. What we did have was a Haitian population that substantially was not able to provide for its own needs in any sustainable way. No real jobs were created nor did a government collect revenues to pay for road maintenance or a reliable power supply. The disruption caused by the coup set back Haiti’s already severely retarded development. In essence, the relief aid we provided could be viewed as a bridge to the development that might come later. However, that we were not able to contribute to the country’s sustainable development during our involvement with the country was frustratingly disappointing.

Q: Alright. Your next assignment was Sri Lanka, a change of great magnitude both in geographic bureau and pace. How did that happen?

COHEN: We have spoken several times about the informal system for searching out and consummating Senior Management Group (SMG) assignments. That mode of operation continued to play a role. The Deputy Assistant Administrator for the Asia Bureau at that time was Linda Morse. Earlier in her career, Linda had served in Haiti and got fascinated by the country as many people did. Whenever I went back to Washington on TDY from Haiti, I would stop by and share with Linda the next chapter in the soap opera of that country. I had no ulterior motive in doing this. Linda was an attentive, knowledgeable audience for a tale I wanted to tell. She was a great sounding board for me. I definitely learned things in those conversations.

Anyway, in her role as the Asia DAA, Linda learned that the Mission Director job in Sri Lanka would be open. She knew that I was getting near to the end of my tour in Haiti, and, after receiving a green light from the LAC Bureau, asked if I would be interested. As I have mentioned earlier in this conversation, I had long wanted to have the experience of serving outside the LAC region. The possibility of an assignment in Asia was very attractive to me. I was quick to agree.

The actual USAID assignment system is not a rapid process. It can take months between verbal agreements and the employee actually stepping onto an airplane. Indeed, just because someone in authority may indicate that the assignment is a done deal, it frequently can be undone. In between, there will be inevitable hallway gossip about who will be filling which job. It was during this “interim” period that I was on a Washington TDY from Haiti. One morning, in the hallways of the State Department (which was where USAID was headquartered at that time), I ran into a fellow that I had known for a number of years. He said that he had heard that I was going to Sri Lanka. I replied that although Sri Lanka was in the mix, it was not yet a done deal. He said, “Yes, yes. You’re going to Sri Lanka. That’s not the issue. I just wanted to ask you one question.” I asked what the question was. His reply was “Who likes you?”

Q: Who likes you?

COHEN: I said, “What?” He replied, “Sri Lanka! I served there. It’s a really great place. To be sent there as Director, someone must really like you.”

Anyway, it turned out that I actually was assigned to Sri Lanka. It was to be my last overseas post.

Q: Somebody up there liked you.

COHEN: So it seemed Certainly, Sri Lanka was a major change of scenery from Haiti.

Q: Did you have a home leave before you went?

COHEN: No.

Q: You never seem to have had home leave between posts.

COHEN: I believe that happened about three times for us, looking at our direct transfers to Bolivia, Panama and Sri Lanka. In thinking about it, I would have to say that direct transfers worked out well for both the Agency and for me. Knowing your new post before you went on home leave made settling into a new job and home much better. Home leave consultations with Washington certainly were more substantive when I had direct knowledge of my new country, program and staff.

In the case of Sri Lanka, I arrived in January and waited until the end of the fiscal year (October) before going on home leave. Doing that enabled me to fully engage in the policy and programming cycles, providing me with a solid grounding in the substance of the Mission. It also was good for the Mission, which had been without a Director for a number of months. To steal the notion from Donald Rumsfeld, it was better for the staff to confront the known than to concern themselves with the known unknown.

Q: Now, Sri Lanka - were they about to go into civil war? Had they finished the civil war?

COHEN: You are referring to the conflict between the Government and the Tamil Tigers. More than anything, this was an ethnic conflict. I'm not certain that is the same thing as a "civil war." That said, does choosing a label really matter? The main point was that there was an active, rather bloody conflict under way. To answer your specific question, the conflict, civil war or not, had been going on for almost a decade. It never actually came to an end until 2009, more than a decade after I had left the country.

We can say I arrived in the middle.

Q: What year is this now again?

COHEN: That would be January 1994.

Q: What were your initial impressions?

COHEN: What a contrast with Haiti! In Haiti, we had electricity maybe two or three hours a day; Colombo had it 24/7. Haiti had few consumer goods on the local market; Colombo stores had fully stocked shelves. In Haiti, there was a health catastrophe defined by very high infant mortality and HIV prevalence rates. The public health situation in Sri Lanka was so good that the USAID Mission didn't even have a health program because the government already was doing a very good job of dealing with people's health needs.

And there were such cultural differences! Remember that this was my first ever experience in Asia. Women wore saris, men sarongs. The predominant religion was Buddhism, evident from the temples and monks that seemed to appear around every corner. Sri Lanka is such a visually rich country.

I also was immediately struck by the bureaucratic cultural differences in the Asia Bureau of the State Department and USAID's Asia Bureau. There were some significant contrasts from what I had known in LAC and ARA (the State Department's LAC).

Q: I'm intrigued. Tell me what you saw as these "bureaucratic cultural differences."

COHEN: Let me start with an example. In both in Haiti and Bolivia, I had fairly routine working relationships with cabinet ministers. We had regular conversations on the issues, objectives and programs that we shared. As an example, I would refer you back to our conversations on the Bolivian economic recovery program. In essence, the ministers and I were counterparts. As I always understood it, all my Mission Director predecessors at those posts had similar relationships, all of which were fully within the comfort zone of the Embassy.

In Sri Lanka, I was proscribed from meeting with any ministers without getting a formal clearance through the Embassy. When the Ambassador or any of the other officers at the Embassy were scheduled to meet cabinet ministers, let alone the president of the country, it was treated as a major event; that is, such occurrences certainly were not routine. I was

amazed. It was such a different culture. I suppose my surprised reaction was not well concealed. Of course, I learned all this after I had unknowingly sinned, that is, after I had met with a minister, without first having obtained Embassy clearance. I was asked how I could have done such a thing. My response was that we see the Minister of Planning as a matter of having a planning project in his ministry. Likewise, we spoke with the Governor of the Central Bank when we were discussing a program related to economic policy matters. The bottom line was that, as an Asia Bureau cultural innocent, I just had not known any better. It was really quite different. While what I just said may sound like it was a major conflict between the Embassy and me, it was not. It was a “cultural” learning experience. We adjusted accordingly and moved on.

Q: Right. Just a little background: Sri Lanka had a very vibrant USAID mission for many, many years. Then, when the civil war started, the program was ramped down, and I believe even closed for a period of time. It was probably a fairly small program by the time you were there. Is that correct?

COHEN: Actually, I was never aware of that mission having closed down. The program, when I arrived, was what I would characterize as mid-sized. We had a substantial portfolio of projects in the agriculture and private sectors and, later on, made inroads in the area of democracy and governance. As I have mentioned, the country’s overall health and nutrition status, compared with others in its low income range, was quite good. Accordingly, we did not have much of a humanitarian program. Our most salient projects were in irrigation, agricultural technology, agri-business and community development, which at the outset served as a surrogate for engagement in the areas of democracy and governance.

In fact, in the late 20th century, Sri Lanka had two internal conflicts, one that pre-dated me with a Marxist movement known as the JVP and the other with the Tamil Tigers. I suspect you’re referring to the one with the JVP.

Q: Yes. So, Sri Lanka is an island about the size of Haiti or, maybe, the island of Hispaniola, right?

COHEN: Correct. Not so different.

Q: About seven million people?

COHEN: Actually, it was something like 18 million. Part of my “cultural” adaptation to Asia had to do with size. In Asia, Sri Lanka’s population was considered tiny, in a neighborhood that included such behemoths as India, China, and Indonesia. From my Latin America perspective, however, it was nearly three times the size of Bolivia and about two and a half times as large as Haiti.

Q: And divided between the Tamil minority and the Sinhalese who ran the government at that time, right?

COHEN: Correct. The basic division was between the largely Buddhist Sinhalese government and the Tamils, who were a mixture of Hindu, Christian and Muslim. However, not all Hindus, Christians and Muslims were Tamils. Though there is a large Tamil population in southern India, Sri Lankan Tamils are largely native to Sri Lanka, going back many centuries.

In the case of the conflict, the Tamils also were, in part, defined geographically by the land they held which was largely in the north and the east of the country. Jaffna, the Tamil *de facto* “capital,” is located on the northern tip of the country.

Q: Which is close to Tamil Nadu?

COHEN: Correct. Quite close.

Q: Briefly, what was the main issue in the conflict?

COHEN: The most salient concerns involved ethnic issues of language, religion, education, and economic discrimination. The combatants were the Sinhalese Buddhist Government of Sri Lanka and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, otherwise known as the LTTE. The Tigers were officially listed by the USG as a terrorist group. As a guerilla operation, they were brutally effective. For more than three decades, they held off a much better trained and equipped Sri Lankan military. By my guesstimate, they were able to seize and hold more than 20 percent of the country’s landmass. The goal of the Tigers was the establishment of an independent homeland.

While the Tamil people certainly shared the cultural and economic grievances of the LTTE, many did not embrace the brutal violence of the Tigers. The existence of such potentially moderating elements offered an avenue for a possible peaceful resolution of the conflict. Indeed, over the years, there were a number of opportunities to do this. A phrase that one frequently heard in this context was “devolution of power.” In essence, this meant decentralization of overall governance in the entire country, giving communities more say in many of the things that affected their daily lives.

However, it was not only LTTE intransigence that interfered with the peace process. An equally aggressive disruptive force interfering with any steps toward resolution of the conflict was the country’s Buddhist monks. The monks and their followers saw any possible tolerance for the Tamils having a more equal role in governing their lives as unwanted competition for the Buddhists and their influence in the country. Thus, when subjects such as possible steps toward devolution or greater Tamil participation in governance were discussed in the parliament, they often were undermined and defeated by those who were at the service of the Buddhist monks. This came as such a surprise to me. Having been in my 20s during the 1960s “decade of love,” I had understood Buddhist monks to be about peace, kindness and acceptance. This was not the revised image I formed during my tour in Sri Lanka. Several years ago, Rita and I went on a tourist trip to Burma. What we saw and understood there regarding what one might call

political Buddhism, particularly with regard to the Muslim Rohingya population, was disturbingly similar to what we had witnessed in Sri Lanka.

Q: This was in the 1990s?

COHEN: Yes. Our tour in Sri Lanka was from early 1994 through March 1997

Q: Am I correct in thinking that you were not allowed to travel to the Tamil area in the north of the country?

COHEN: I did on one occasion.

Q: You did?

COHEN: There was a window of opportunity where the Embassy agreed that the security risk of travelling in an LTTE zone was less of a threat. At the suggestion of the director of the World Food Program Sri Lanka office, he and I travelled north to the town of Kilinochchi, which is a little bit south of Jaffna. We were driven in an Embassy armored vehicle. At the mandate of the Embassy security officer, I was to wear a bulletproof vest, which I soon removed because of the very hot and humid climate.

Being in the North gave us a good opportunity to talk with UN agencies and NGOs who were implementing relief programs in the area. The visit gave us a much better sense of the region's security and humanitarian environment. What we learned was consistent with the understanding we had before leaving Colombo. The UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) had a resident representative there, an American woman. In fact, we overnighted in her home the two nights that we were in Kilinochchi. The purpose of our visit had been to get a better sense of program needs and opportunities should the attempts at conflict resolution succeed. While the visit had been a very interesting experience and we learned what seemed to be useful things, in the end, we found ourselves frustrated by knowing better the urgent actions we would not be able to do.

Q: What was your program like? What were the major sectors of the program?

COHEN: The Sri Lanka Mission, as I mentioned, worked in several key development sectors, among which were agricultural production and irrigation, the expansion of private enterprise, and work in communities.

Q: By agricultural production and irrigation, you mean the famous Mahaweli Project?

COHEN: Indeed, that was what I meant. In a number of ways, the Mahaweli effort was what, at one time, we called an integrated agricultural development project. It increased both agricultural production and productivity and expanded the variety of crops grown in a relatively drier zone of central Sri Lanka.

Q: Tell me about the other programs.

COHEN: In other programs, we collaborated with district organizations and NGOs that worked with small scale producers and entrepreneurs. We also were involved with larger entrepreneurs and business chambers, as well as with the banking community. Another USAID effort helped in the start-up of a Colombo stock exchange. A broader activity on planning support resulted in collaboration with the Ministry of Planning and the Central Bank.

In general, Sri Lanka was doing many of the right things necessary to spur long-term economic growth and sustainable development. The factor that was most threatening to that was the “war” with the Tamil Tigers. In the Mission’s strategic discussions, we sought ways that our programs could support a peaceful, lasting resolution of the conflict. In support of the notion of the devolution of power and authority, we tried to get engaged in issues of democracy and governance. One option was finding and supporting means of having Tamil and Sinhalese groups work together on issues of local governance. While we had some latitude for doing that through some excellent local NGOs, it never reached a scale that might have made a meaningful difference. Thinking about this in hindsight, while the front office of the Embassy never objected to the USAID Mission making this effort, they also never really supported it with any level of enthusiasm. That said, even had they been more engaged, the Sri Lankan Government’s own limited support for devolution of power was more about words than deeds.

Q: Was there a donors group in Sri Lanka?

COHEN: Yes, there was. The Colombo-based donors met regularly, though the group was not quite as active as I had experienced in Haiti and Bolivia. It was convened by the UNDP. Though it lacked a degree of “spark,” I still found it useful to have the contacts and the broader understanding of what all of us donors were doing in our programs.

Q: Did you have a good staff there?

COHEN: By and large, I would say that USAID/Sri Lanka had a fine staff. It was very beneficial for me to have a core group of people with experience working in Asia. Also, as I had in other Missions, we had an outstanding staff of FSNs, several of whom I have worked with during my post-USAID years.

Q: Did you bring people over from the Latin America Bureau?

COHEN: Just one, an agriculture officer who had been in my IDI class. We also had served together in Bolivia and Panama. He (Gary Bayer) was an excellent officer and a superb individual.

Q: Was the Sri Lanka Mission also involved with the Maldives?

COHEN: We were not. That engagement came about well after my departure.

There is one circumstance that I wanted to mention that pertains to the conflict with the Tamil Tigers and relates to the macroeconomic situation of the country. This was when the LTTE bombed the Central Bank of Sri Lanka.

Q: I remember that.

COHEN: This perhaps was the largest act of terror ever experienced in Sri Lanka up to that time. The bombing of the Central Bank caused numerous deaths of Bank employees and people in adjacent buildings, including the Hilton Hotel.

Something that caught my eye soon after the explosion was the fact that all of the Central Bank computers and, therefore, their recordkeeping, were destroyed. The absence of such assets threatened to substantially disrupt the entire economy and to do it very quickly. This would have undermined the political stability of the country.

At the time, USAID had in place an economic planning program in the Ministry of Planning. It was a project that pre-dated my arrival in Sri Lanka. A component of the activity was a major computer procurement element. The procurement had not gone forward previously for reasons that I suspected involved corrupt motives. During my early months in-country, I had developed a rather close working relationship with the Governor of the Central Bank. I called him and confirmed that the Bank's computers had, indeed, been destroyed. Then, I verified that the Bank had maintained a daily off-site data backup of their computer system. However, without the functioning sophisticated computers, the Bank's operations would be paralyzed. Checks could not be cleared and other actions vital to the basic operation of the country's economy would be paralyzed. The resulting panic could cause chaos, exactly what the bombing had been targeted to accomplish.

I suggested to the Governor that, working together, we could quickly modify the planning project so that it might help respond to the current crisis. With that in hand, I could sign a "foreign policy interest" waiver, which would enable USAID to make an expedited emergency procurement of the necessary replacement computer equipment. As I mentioned, this was fairly sophisticated equipment, less than a mainframe, but much more than a desktop. Not surprisingly, the Governor was very relieved and excited to hear this. We made an immediate decision to proceed.

As I mentioned earlier, another element in our program portfolio was an activity to develop a Colombo stock exchange. As it happened, that program had in country, on a long-term TDY, an American technician who was an expert in sophisticated computer procurement. I called him (and his boss) and explained the situation. Not surprisingly, they were excited to be able to help. We immediately put our specialist together with the Central Bank's experts. In surprisingly short order, they developed a list of the specs they required. Our technician then did a phone solicitation around the region (e.g. Hong Kong, Singapore, Taiwan). They found what they needed and did an emergency procurement out of Singapore.

By the time the Central Bank reopened a week later, we had the computer equipment in place that allowed them to operate normally. In doing that, the country was able to avoid the economic chaos and panic that would not have served the interests of Sri Lanka, the region or the U.S. In terms of moments of career satisfaction that I have felt, this was one of the big ones.

Q: What a timely, immediate action!

COHEN: There is an additional point to make here, something important to note. USAID/Sri Lanka was able to accomplish what it did with the Central Bank because of devolutions of authority from Washington that empowered mission directors to move expeditiously when there was a demonstrable foreign policy need. This authority allowed me to issue a waiver of the usual procurement procedures for the purchase of the Central Bank computer, based on the national security interests of the U.S. Government. Of course, I was very open about doing the waiver and consulted early on with both the Ambassador and the front office of the Asia Bureau in AID/Washington. But the salient fact is that, without my delegated authority to issue a waiver, what took days to accomplish might have taken weeks or months and might have thrown Sri Lanka into state of political and economic chaos. I do not believe that current mission directors have the same waiver authorities. If I am correct about that, it is indeed unfortunate as that would hamstring the effectiveness of our field missions to accomplish important objectives when time-limited, program critical opportunities may occur.

Q: Interesting. Anything else about Sri Lanka? It's a very different post, a very different culture. You mentioned the differences in how the embassy functioned with local counterparts. Anything else that would be of interest?

COHEN: Sure. Here is an interesting vignette.

Shortly after I arrived in the country, I started receiving notes that said so-and-so, an FSN, is doing such-and-such and should be punished accordingly. The notes were unsigned. Without going into specifics, I mentioned the notes to one or two of the FSNs that I had come to know and trust early on. I described to them only the general nature of the notes. Their response was that this kind of character assassination was not unusual and was a means to try to right a perceived wrong to the sender of the notes. During the next all-Mission staff meeting, at the very end, I mentioned the anonymous note I had received the week before. In a quiet voice, I said that I did not appreciate or respect anonymous notes and did not want to receive any more of them. Then, with a degree of dramatic flair, I took out the note, held it up and tore it into little pieces. I then got up and walked out of the room. After that, I never again received another anonymous note. This was a minor element of my cultural immersion in Sri Lanka in what was an otherwise delightful experience.

Q: Did you get to know the Sri Lankans on a social basis?

COHEN: Most definitely. It has been twenty years since I left the country. There still are Sri Lankans that I count and value as close friends.

Q: So, you liked the country and its people. Sri Lanka was a good experience?

COHEN: Absolutely. Where else can you go out of the capital city and almost be assured that you're going to see elephants, peacocks, monkeys or other animals in the wild. These were not the kinds of creatures one commonly saw in un-remote areas of Latin America. Everywhere one looked, there were beautiful tropical flowers. And, despite the history of warfare, I loved the gentleness of the people. To answer your question: yes, I liked the experience. I absolutely did.

Q: Great. Were you thinking about retirement at this point?

COHEN: It is interesting that you pose that question just at this point. The time we are discussing now is 1996-97. This was during the Clinton Administration, the period during which Brian Atwood was the USAID Administrator.

Many of us come to USAID and a career in development as a sort of calling. It is not just a job. We consider what we do to be important. Every day, we have the opportunity to do positive things for people who are genuinely in need. When it all goes right – not something that happens all the time, we can make a lasting positive change in their lives; we can offer them and their children hope for a better, more secure future. Being a USAID Foreign Service Officer was our identification, who we were, something that we truly valued.

During this period, however, the Agency was changing in ways that were increasingly discomfiting. It was becoming more bureaucratic and centralized than ever before. Development itself seemed less of a priority than the new bureaucratic jargon of strategic objectives and the like. I remember once phoning our ag office and having a person pick up the phone and say "SO 5" (Strategic Objective #5, whatever that was). I found that to be very bizarre. Just before I left Haiti, a consultant-led Washington team came to teach us the "new" way of developing a program strategy using the newly introduced jargon. One evening, the consultant came into my office and said, "You know what is wrong with this Mission? Everyone is too committed to your current strategy." I replied that may have been one of the best complements I had received in a long time. For him, the jargon was more important than the strategic substance.

During the same time period, there was a major push in the Congress (led by Senator Jesse Helms, I believe) to shutter USAID as an independent entity and move whatever remained inside the Department of State. Clearly, an important element of Brian Atwood's mandate (and, he might say, legacy) was to prevent that from happening. This was an era when foreign aid advocates were not numerous on Capitol Hill. An exception was the community of U.S. NGOs that benefitted mightily from USAID grants to fund their overseas programs. Missions were told that all program needs, where possible, were now to be steered to grants with NGOs, vice private contractors. Also, we were given the

instruction that, once grants were signed, Missions were not to have any (or much) say as to how the resources were used. Still, Missions were held accountable for program results, that is, we had accountability without any management authority. To say that was frustrating and, at times, aggravating would be an understatement. It put achievement of the goals of our program strategy into extreme jeopardy.

Then there was the New Management System, which was known by its acronym, NMS. Shortly after I arrived in Sri Lanka, there was an NMS training course to be held in Bangkok. Washington mandated that two people from our mission had to attend the course, generally speaking, the Mission Director and the Program Officer. I was surprised that the course was being held just then, as people in Washington had told me that the NMS was not yet operational. At best, we would only be able to see screen shots of the system. However, as the software was not working yet, we would not be able to have any hands on training, per se. I phoned the person responsible for the Bangkok event and suggested that the “course” be postponed until the NMS was truly operational. That was the time when we really would need to train people in how to use it. I was quickly rebuked and told that, if Washington heard what I was suggesting, I would risk getting fired. It was a clear-cut case of the Emperor’s New Clothes: everyone knew that the NMS was nowhere near being operational, but it was perceived as dangerous to say so.

This just did not seem like the Agency that had earned my pride and affection for all these years. All of this started me in a spiral of thinking about how much longer I wanted to work for USAID. Even though I was eligible to retire under the Foreign Service system, it was not something I had spent much time considering.

I had started down the path of falling out of love with the Agency. Given my long-standing affection for it, that was very hard for me to do. I used to commiserate about this with my then-deputy, Terry Liercke, He was a first-rate sounding board and very patient with me as I found myself beginning to pass through some of the classic stages of grief: denial, anger, bargaining, and depression.

Q: The NMS was the baby of the then Deputy Administrator, Larry Byrne. Is that correct?

COHEN: Correct. It was Byrne; but I believe that he was the political appointee Assistant Administrator of the Management Bureau.

Q: And he was also responsible for 100 Senior Foreign Service officers being kicked out to pay for it over a period of 18 months.

COHEN: I believe you may be talking about the RIF, the Reduction in Force that took place in 1995. I don’t recall the number who left the Agency, but I am certain that they were not all SFS. The overall impact of that action on morale was really negative, particularly among the more senior people.

Q: So, did something push you over the boundaries to say that you were ready to retire or did somebody offer you a nice job?

COHEN I was lucky enough to get the one assignment in USAID that I most wanted: USAID's representative on the faculty of the National War College (NWC). There were other possibilities offered to me, but none was as intriguing as the War College.

Q: When did you actually leave Colombo and did you start immediately at the War College?

COHEN: I left Colombo in the spring of 1997. There were some family concerns that needed my attention, and it was good to get Rita and me settled back in our house in Arlington before I began my new assignment.

I started that job in July or August. My title at the War College was to be Professor of National Security Policy. Impressive, right? There had been a number of things that attracted me to the position. One of those that I had considered was, after retiring from USAID, teaching at the university level. This assignment would be a great opportunity to have a teaching experience before retiring – kind of like renting a car before making the decision to purchase it.

I had always heard very positive things about the War College program. Indeed, after being expelled from Panama and finding myself on the internal USAID job market, I had, for a very brief time, been assigned as a student to the War College. However, I felt strongly that going there at that time would not be the best thing for my state of mind. I wanted something that was inside USAID. However, in that small window while I was assigned there, I learned a good amount about the NWC and was quite impressed. Having that background, I thought, in addition to being on the faculty, I would learn a great deal just by being a part of the university. Also, given the various opportunities that I had had to work with the military in some of my previous assignments I looked forward to gaining greater insight on military culture and how it and USAID could better collaborate in addressing issues involved in national security policy.

Q: Would you explain what the National War College is and the type of program that it offers?

COHEN: The National War College is what the military calls a “joint” entity. On an organization chart, it reports to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. The War College is run by and for all the military services – Army, Navy, Air Force and Marines (which, as I discovered, is a part of the Navy). Its student body also includes senior personnel from the Department of State, USAID, the intelligence agencies, and the Department of Defense, as well as senior military officers from other countries (who are funded through U.S. military assistance programs). The purpose of the NWC is to educate future leaders of the Armed Forces and the other entities in the formulation and conduct of national security strategy. The objective of the curriculum is to prepare students to assume high-level policy, command and staff responsibilities

The student body was comprised of the military officers believed to be the most likely to become the next leaders, that is, the senior generals of the future. To use the military term, these officers had spent their careers as operators, with senior level responsibilities in manning tanks, flying planes or “driving” boats. However, this vital technical background did not necessarily provide them with the broader national security orientation they would need as this country’s senior military leadership. At the time, the poster child for the kind of student that best typified the NWC student body was General/Secretary of State Colin Powell, who had attended the program years earlier.

The program curriculum included several core elements. First was a definition of national security policy and a related historical perspective going back to the early days of the Republic. Second was an overview of the USG military and civilian entities involved in the formulation of the strategy and its achievements. This, for me, was a fascinating course. A good part of it was an analysis of the institutional cultures of these organizations and how that impacted on the nature of their participation. The third core element of the program was a strategic review of the regions and countries of the world as it was then. The curriculum is a fully accredited Master’s degree program that takes place over the space of one year.

Q: You implied that the CIA was part of this?

COHEN: I did. The CIA, DIA, NSA and other intelligence agencies all were participants. They are certainly engaged in a wide variety of actions basic to the achievement of our national security objectives. Having a broad base of participation in the NWC is one of the great strengths of the institution, providing it with both depth and breadth of perspective.

Q: You were the USAID member of the faculty. Were other agencies similarly represented?

COHEN: They were. One of the real strengths of the War College is the diverse composition of the program’s faculty. All of the U.S. organizations that had students in the program provided one or more faculty members. In addition, the faculty included members who were more typical of what one might expect to find in any graduate school. These were career professors with many years of experience in teaching and writing in an academic setting. A number of them had been on the War College faculty for more than a decade. Quite a few were recognized experts in their fields, the type of people one could expect to hear being interviewed on NPR or cited in other news outlets. This also brought a wide perspective to the experiences and points of view that students experienced in the classroom, another major asset of the program.

Q: Describe your day-to-day job.

COHEN: For the most part, the core of my job at the War College was to run seminars. There would be about 15 people in each of the seminars, roughly comprised of two Air

Force, two Army, two Navy, two Marines, two Foreign Service, two intel people and one of the officers from a foreign military organization. The seminars would follow and discuss lectures that all the students attended – plus about 100 pages per night of assigned reading. (A not uncommon thing one might hear from students was that it was a lot of reading – if you actually did it. To my mind, most of them actually did do the reading.)

The lectures that were a part of each of the core courses were extraordinary. We heard speakers two or three times a week. Some of them were very famous people, renowned experts in their fields, be they military, political, cultural, or the media. They were experts on their topics and, in general, highly engaging speakers on the topics we were talking about in the classroom.

My job as a seminar leader was not to stand in front of the group and lecture. My task was to make sure that the topic of the day was fully discussed. In doing this, I mostly asked questions. In preparing for each seminar, I usually came up with a dozen or 15 questions that I thought covered the material that we were talking about. Most often, I did not have to ask more than half of my questions, as the conversation naturally covered those topics well. It was so exciting to see that happen. One of my objectives in coming up with questions was to make sure that the people in the seminar understood where this information fit, why it was important, what it might mean to them as operators in the policy field. The seminar discussions were really exciting for the quality and insight they offered. Even now, twenty years later, in reaction to a news item, I find myself saying to my wife Rita, “I wish I could go to a War College seminar today just to hear what they might have to say about this.”

Q: You mentioned having foreign national students in the program. Can you say something more about them?

COHEN: There are several reasons for the inclusion of foreign military among the student body of the National War College. What are called “mil to mil” relationships are highly valued among U.S. military leadership. The close relationships formed between senior officers sharing the one-year National War College program are widely said to pay significant benefits when classmates meet again in their lives after the program. Also, foreign participation in the program provides senior military officers in the field similar ways of thinking and talking about strategic challenges. This is invaluable when the occasion arises. Finally, as I have mentioned, having a diversity of perspectives around the seminar classroom sharpens the thinking of all of the participants. In that sense, having an African, a Frenchman or a Brazilian in the room can be very worthwhile.

One of the delightful things I did during my tenure at the War College was to be the faculty advisor to both an Argentine colonel and a Polish general. It was great fun to share with them their discovery of the various elements of life in America as well as hearing their views as they experienced the program. They and I learned a great deal from one another.

Q: Did you only teach in the seminars of the core program that you mentioned?

COHEN: Several members of the civilian faculty and I were talking one day. In a discussion of the otherwise excellent core curriculum, we noted the total absence of focus on economics. Economics, we agreed, was at or near the heart of most international issues and fundamental to U.S. national security objectives. Based on that conversation, two of us met with the Commandant of the school (an Admiral) to make the case for including a short course in macroeconomics in the next year's core curriculum. Although we could see the pain in his eyes (economics was not in his comfort zone), he agreed. I was tasked with developing the course.

Reflecting on the Admiral's discomfort, which I knew would be shared by others, I put together a course that was titled Economics for Strategists. One of my goals was to keep the class as un-technical as possible. Economics is widely known for its myriad of graphics. My course only had one, a simple supply/demand graph. Classes went through the most basic economics principles, the ones that would be most applicable to the analysis and planning related to likely national security and policy concerns. At the end of each classroom session (of which there were seven), we would talk about how the principles discussed that day might be relevant to the strategist, that is, how the students might apply the information they had just learned.

As the course chair, I also was responsible for holding weekly faculty prep meetings. For the other core curriculum courses, these sessions provided a summary overview of the material and guidance on the main points to be made to the students. There were approximately ten sections of the economics course. Of those selected to teach them, only two of us had any real economics background. That meant that faculty prep meetings became classrooms. While I found that a bit intimidating at the outset, it all seemed to work out well by the end. A mark of the course's success is that it was continued to be taught beyond my tenure at the War College. At the end of the day, this was a good experience for me.

Q: What were some of the things that you learned during your time at the War College?

COHEN: I arrived at the War College without ever having done classroom teaching at any level. Also, during my lifetime, I had had relatively little exposure to the military.

For most newly entering faculty, the NWC had us attend all the core curriculum courses. The first semester, none of us were assigned our own seminars. Instead, we attended classes run by experienced faculty. In essence, we were additional students in the seminar. Doing that, we learned two things: how experienced faculty ran the seminar and the substance of the program. In terms of didactics, that was very useful for me.

As a de facto student attendee, I also learned a great deal. Those who run the NWC will say that one of their main products is to teach students new ways of strategic thinking and analysis. I learned that, too. As a career FSO, I had spent much of my adult life out in the field working in places that were often at the forefront of U.S. national interest, such as Bolivia, Panama and Haiti. We lived national security policy every day. Rarely, though,

did we ever get much opportunity to back up and view the whole picture and its context. We were too involved in the issues and concerns of the day. In discussing strategic applications at the War College, we sometimes spoke about places where I had served. That was so very interesting to hear and think about – especially using my newly acquired strategic skill set. Honestly, it was exciting.

Q: What did you learn about the military?

COHEN: The military is really a training culture. Officers and the enlisted spend so much of their careers in training, from the most basic “how to” courses to PhD programs – and it shows. This definitely is not the way it is in the rest of the USG, certainly not State and USAID. It is a fact that the War College is unique in the military – a sort of pinnacle institution. But there are many other examples of U.S. military educational entities that are educating our armed forces such that the good are getting better all the time. I did not know this about the military, but I find the fact of it encouraging.

Something else I had not thought much about previously is that, politically, the military is rather conservative, i.e. Republican. My time at the War College was during the Clinton Administration. Many of my students (and, actually fellow faculty members, as well) were not tremendous fans of Bill Clinton. During the course about the instruments of implementing foreign policy, when we arrived at the day where we talked about foreign aid, I was a bit apprehensive at presenting the seminar on USAID. I thought that my students would consider foreign aid to be just another case of fuzzy headed liberalism. I was not looking forward to the ensuing “conversation.” Still, I came into the room and gave them the briefing about what AID was, what it did, why it did it, how it did it. To my enormous surprise, they said that what USAID did was really great and asked why, at such a low cost (as compared with the military), didn’t the U.S. do much more of it?

I told them that I was surprised at their positive reaction and asked for more explanation. They pointed out the potential for aid to prevent conflict. What USAID did, they said, was similar to what some of their civil affairs programs did. The other thing they mentioned that I especially liked was that, if foreign aid efforts were successful, they – the military – would not get deployed, a high order concern of theirs. Thus, instead of the hostility that I expected, what I got for USAID was a great embrace. As that always quotable Marine, Gomer Pyle, was fond of saying: surprise, surprise, surprise!

Q: You seemed to have liked your experience as a War College faculty member. How did this impact your thoughts about becoming an academic in your post-USAID life?

COHEN: I discovered that, although I found teaching could be interesting, it was not something I wanted to do longer term. While I certainly liked the time in the classroom and the interaction with the students, I felt that I spent too much of my time just sitting in my office by myself preparing for classes. In USAID, I had been in a career where collaboration and group interaction in the generation of ideas was a core part of the enjoyment I found in what I did. I missed that in the teaching experience.

Q: Do you want to mention your interactions later on with the military?

COHEN: Sure, though it is certainly a leap forward in chronological order.

On January 12, 2010, Haiti suffered a magnitude 7.0 earthquake. While the country has a history of disasters, both natural and man-made, it had not been a place prone to earthquakes, even minor ones. Reports on the number of deaths varied from 100,000 to more than 300,000. The country's already miserable infrastructure of roads, electricity, water supply, etc. was devastated.

The U.S. response was immediate and massive, involving multiple government agencies and the military. President Obama designated USAID to be the overall coordinator for USG assistance. Not much more than a week prior to the earthquake, Rajiv Shah had assumed duty as the USAID Administrator. Obviously, the relief program in Haiti would be a high profile challenge for him.

Providing any kind of help in the initial days was exceptionally difficult. The Port au Prince airport and port facilities were not operational. Hundreds of thousands of people, if not more, were homeless and had no means of meeting their basic needs, such as food, shelter and medical assistance. In addition, for several weeks, there was the continued threat of aftershocks.

Typically, in the early days following a disaster of this magnitude, the one organization that can begin to turn things around is the U.S. military. They alone have the resources – the manpower and equipment – to establish the essential conditions that would permit the inflow of the kind of help that entities such as USAID and other donor organizations can provide. As an aside, also on the ground immediately was a USAID Disaster Assistance Response Team (DART) to do a rapid reconnaissance and assessment so as to prioritize and coordinate initial emergency assistance.

Because of my knowledge of Haiti and (I am guessing) my War College experience in working with the military, I was rehired by the Agency to be the USAID Administrator's liaison with the commander of the U.S. Southern Command (aka SOUTHCOM), a four star Air Force General. SOUTHCOM is responsible for all U.S. military engagement in South America, Central America and the Caribbean. For the military, SOUTHCOM had the lead for the Haiti earthquake recovery effort. In addition to doing the necessary to make the airport and port operational (FYI: the airport was reopened within 24 hours of the earthquake), the military did the logistics of delivering emergency shelter tarpaulins, clearing main roads of rubble, and medical rescue and triage. For the latter, a Naval hospital ship, the Comfort, was immediately posted in the Port au Prince harbor.

For a number of years (but after my retirement), USAID had been assigning officers to tours of duty as advisors to the military regional commands. Indeed, in its Washington headquarters, the Agency had established an Office of Civilian-Military Cooperation. When I arrived at their Miami headquarters, SOUTHCOM already had three USAID

officers in place: the AID Advisor and two people from the Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA).

One of my first questions on being asked to accept this job was: why did the Agency need a special liaison to SOUTHCOM if they already had a resident direct hire advisor in place? Part of the response was that the earthquake resulted in a massive workload that would not be reasonable for one person alone to manage. Second was that they needed someone who was more senior in rank. The current Advisor was not Senior Foreign Service, and the military (surprise, surprise!) was very rank-oriented. My personal grade at retirement was Minister Counselor. For the military, that translated into being a two star general, which allowed me (that is, USAID) to sit at the SOUTHCOM senior management table with all the other generals. Another advantage of having me there was that I was about the only person present who had spent much time in Haiti and had an on-the-ground understanding of it.

Much more than the War College, this experience for me was a total immersion in military culture. The War College was somewhat hybrid as it was really an academic institution and (mostly) felt that way. However, SOUTHCOM was military on military turf charged with carrying out military missions. That said, my bottom line opinion on the military remained mostly the same. Our military has some extraordinarily smart and dedicated people.

There was one other element that caught my attention this time that I had not noticed as much previously. That element was scale. USAID counts the numbers of its employees in the thousands, the military in the millions. The comparison is even more lopsided when comparing the size of budgetary resources. When the military was ready to do a second stage plan, twenty of its people showed up; USAID could only designate two. When the military decided that they wanted to build schools, their budget person said “okay,” and that was it. USAID, in a similar circumstance, would have to jump through numerous budgetary hoops and send a notification for Congressional approval before being anywhere close to being able to do something on the ground. If there ever was a clearer clash of cultures between USAID and the military at SOUTHCOM, it was for this sort of thing. It definitely was a learning experience for me.

The usual workday for us in Miami began with a 6 am status update meeting. This included everyone involved, including those in Port au Prince (via video teleconference). A similar meeting was held early in the evening. Everyone worked seven-day weeks, 12-15 hour days. I have never participated in a better coordinated complex operation. People of all ranks were very focused on getting the job done.

Speaking of coordination, there is something else I want to be sure to mention. On the ground, in situations like this, the United Nations is usually the coordinator among donors for major disasters. In Haiti, the UN did a very fine job in accumulating data and information on what the issues were and how the various donors were addressing them. Of course, there were criticisms, but there always will be in complex, high profile

situations such as we had in Haiti. However, from what I witnessed, the UN did a great job under especially trying circumstances.

Q: Did you actually travel to Haiti after the earthquake?

COHEN: I went to Port-au-Prince a couple of times. This was not my first natural or political disaster, and I know the way the media can hype such situations. Often, what you might see on the news were the “oh my god” scenes that, perhaps, exaggerated the horror of the actual situation, while two blocks away everything looked closer to normal. In Port-au-Prince, utter disaster was everywhere. No matter in which direction you looked, there was an incredible amount of rubble. Collapsed buildings, including the White House-like Presidential Palace, were the norm. Across from the Palace, at the old civil airport, on the city’s only golf course, and in multiple other locations were tent cities housing the thousands of displaced people. Seeing all those blue tarps from a helicopter view of the city brought home the extensiveness of the disaster and the enormity of the required response.

During a late February visit, we flew by helicopter out into the countryside, into the areas that were nearest to the epicenter of the quake. While the situation was dire, it also was very clear that many more people would have died if assistance by the international community, in general, and the USG, in particular, had not been as effective as it was.

One of the criticisms of the program was that so many of the displaced people tended to stay in the temporary camps, resisting resettlement in those communities where restoration of homes was possible. Many in the media would attribute that apparent lack of progress to the ineffectiveness of the disaster recovery program. What I understood was somewhat different, something that more factored in the “normal” Haitian reality. Most Haitians are extremely poor. To more accurately comprehend what most likely was happening, it was important to know how these people lived before the earthquake. In the poor slums of Port-au-Prince, people lived with leaky roofs, vermin, violence, open pit sewage, and the unavailability of adequate schools and health facilities. In contrast, the temporary tent villages offered tarps that did not leak, portable toilet units, available potable water, and drainage for water when it rained. People got fed wholesome meals every day, and children and adults got health treatment as needed. Also, importantly, the camps were well policed; life was much more secure for people who did not normally enjoy such a level of safety. In this context, those “tent cities,” that were considered horrors by the media, very likely represented qualitative improvements for many of their residents. As a result, many people were reluctant to move out of them because they believed that, no matter how good it might be to go back to their homes, what they probably would have there was not going to be equal to the quality of life they had in the temporary encampments. Every time I have explained that to people, it comes out sounding really cynical – even to me. But as I said earlier, the Haitian reality included a heavy dose of cynicism..

Q: How long did you work in SOUTHCOM?

COHEN: Just shy of three months.

Q: So, the Haiti earthquake was a leap forward from where we were in your career progression. Let's return that point. You spent two years at the National War College, right?

COHEN: Yes.

Q: What happened then?

COHEN: I retired from USAID.

Q: After how many years of service?

COHEN: A little over 30.

Q: Did you have a plan for what you wanted to do after retirement?

COHEN: Though we have always talked through important decisions, Rita generally doesn't tell me what to do (nor do I tell her). In this case, what she said was that I could do whatever I wanted in retirement, but she really did not want me take a job where I would just go to some other office the morning after I was retired from USAID. She urged that I take some time off and just feel what that would be like. After that, I could decide what I then wanted to do. And so, that is how I proceeded, which actually turned out to be a good thing. It was a time to let the dust settle in my head.

Q: When that initial cooling off period ended, what did you decide to do?

COHEN: While in USAID, I pretty much had come to the conclusion that I did not want to do consulting work. My real pleasure in working in development was to analyze a problem, develop a strategy and program to respond to it, and to carry out the assistance. The "fun" was in seeing things through that process. In that context, consulting seemed like it would be too episodic. You dropped in, did what was asked and left. You rarely had any relationship to what happened as a result.

However, the democracy officer in USAID/Moscow, an amazing young woman (Susan Reichle) who had worked as a Presidential Management Intern in Haiti, convinced me to participate as a consultant in an assessment of the political process in Russia and USAID's past and potential contribution to that. I was intrigued by the idea of working in Russia and thought it would be an interesting assignment. The Mission had assembled an assessment team that included a fellow who had been one of the most senior people in USIA (United States Information Agency), had served many years in Russia and was fluent in Russian. Also on the team were two individuals from the National Democratic and Republican Institutes. As I said, I did not think that I would like being a consultant. It turned out that I was wrong.

What I discovered on this TDY and others that were to follow in other countries was that, after having been a mission director for so long, it was challenging and fun to have my own blank sheet of paper again, as opposed to editing and raising issues regarding other people's work. To be sure, that blank sheet also could be very intimidating. However, I really liked going out and doing the research, gathering the opinions, and coming up with our own conclusions and recommendations. It was so interesting to sit down and write the paper. At the outset, I usually had in my head what I thought I was going to say. But I often found in the writing process other conclusions and nuances that were revealed to me as I was laying out the facts and the logic of the given situation. What I sometimes discovered was something different from what I originally had thought. That process was really exciting for me; I learned a great deal. No doubt, it was hard work. But what I also discovered about consulting was that when I was finished I was totally done – free to do anything else I might choose. As a consultant, I was getting all of this great mental and professional stimulation plus leaving time for Rita and me to do things that we wanted to do.

Accordingly, after the Russia experience, I began to seek out opportunities to do more consulting. In the beginning, it was a bit of a challenge because, as some people would tell me, I had been a mission director for too long and “everyone” knows that mission directors don't go out and do real work; they just sit and look at things and pontificate. However, I got to do enough consulting jobs that people soon recognized that I was a good writer who actually liked to write and produced things that they found worthwhile.

One of the other things that struck me at the outset of my consulting days was the presumption of going into countries (e.g. Russia) where I never had served a day, that were outside of my geographic area of expertise, where I was only going to spend two or three weeks looking into a subject and then, at the end, have something to give to the Mission that they did not already know and would find of value. It turned out, in fact, that it was possible to do that. The advantage of the consultant over the officer in the USAID mission was that consultant was there to do one thing and had the enormous advantage of being able to focus without distraction.

For several years, I really enjoyed being a consultant. It was an exciting job that I enjoyed doing.

I got to work in a lot of places where I had never served, such as Macedonia, Paraguay and Nepal. For the most part, my area of focus was democracy and governance because I saw that as being fundamental to any other sustainable development.

Along the way I got introduced to USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives and became a member of the OTI bullpen and helped develop and administer programs in such places as Venezuela, Bolivia and Haiti.

Q: Would you explain a bit about OTI and what it does, along with the role you played?

COHEN: OTI was created in the mid-90s. For the most part, it is a quick response mechanism aimed at avoiding or recovering from conflict. Its primary operational mode is small, short duration grants that almost always are made with local non-governmental organizations. OTI is different from the rest of USAID. The legislation that created it includes what is called a “notwithstanding” provision that frees OTI from some of the usual contracting and procurement rules that slow down the provision of assistance in the rest of the Agency. OTI is fast. Its grants do a variety of things, such as public education, the creation of short term employment, improvement of local infrastructure, etc. An important objective of this is the engagement of people who are threatened by conflict in activities that provide them with a measure of hope for some kind of better future.

The OTI Bullpen, of which I was a member, was a group of people experienced in working in the field and available to be mobilized for short term tasks on very short notice, taking advantage of in-place contracting mechanisms.

My initial work with OTI was in Venezuela. This took place at the beginning of the Hugo Chavez era in 2002. The country was increasingly unstable, and its long-standing democratic institutions were showing signs of decay. I was part of an assessment team to better understand the nature of the problem and to determine if there was a role for OTI to play utilizing its unique program mechanism. It was a good experience, and I liked what OTI did.

Over the 2-plus years that I was part of the Bullpen, in addition to Venezuela, I worked in Bolivia and Haiti. Interestingly, I was once tasked by them to write a “what if” strategy for a program in North Korea.

OTI had a culture that was distinct from the rest of the Agency. They saw themselves as separate and better, an attitude that many of its staff made little effort to hide. In some of its earlier programs in the field, OTI did little to involve the local USAID mission – including keeping them informed. Not surprisingly, this was not well-received by missions, and there were instances where missions resisted OTI programming in their countries. Over the years, I believe this situation has improved; but it also has not entirely disappeared.

Still, I really liked working with OTI. I was enthusiastic about what they did and why. It was a good experience. Also, the Bullpen arrangement did not stop me from doing the other consulting assignments that I was asked to do.

Q: Did you decide with Rita how many months a year you wanted to be doing this?

COHEN: No. There was no real plan. Neither of us felt that we needed one. We were happy with the way all this was evolving naturally. Invariably, I would not know about consulting assignments much in advance. If an assignment came up and we had something planned, I would just say that I was busy or try to negotiate a more workable schedule. In essence, my response regarding a job inquiry was not much different than it would have been if I had a conflicting consulting assignment.

As I mentioned, in the beginning, I actively sought consulting jobs. Then there came the day when I realized that I was not looking for work anymore; work actually was looking for me. I had basically established myself as a consultant. I also found that I was working on a variety of topics, which meant less of a concern about getting stale with any one of them. I was learning a lot about things I had not known so well, and I liked that. Also, I found myself working with some people that I liked and respected. In this, I was truly fortunate, as I knew other consultants who occasionally worked with people who could be difficult and/or lazy. That never happened to me. How lucky!

Q: Did you find yourself in little niches where you became the person to go to on certain kinds of evaluations or assessments because you had done it and there weren't many people who had a good background in that sort of thing?

COHEN: Finding a niche is a good way to say it. The preponderance of the consulting work that I did was in the area of democracy and governance. Within that broader area, I developed a more focused expertise in anti-corruption, a topic we had begun to address during my tours in Bolivia and Haiti.

Under a regional program in Latin America, I began doing anti-corruption assessments for USAID missions considering doing programming in that and related areas. My employer was Casals & Associates, a small consulting firm known for its expertise in anti-corruption matters.

I was teamed with two other people, a Mexican woman and a fellow who was Bolivian-born, both of them PhDs. We were a great team. Each of us brought different assets to the task. Altogether, we did three of these anti-corruption assessments – in Ecuador, Panama and Paraguay. By the time we finished our first assessment, we had developed an analytical structure, a methodology for defining conclusions and a framework for presenting conclusions and recommendations. Our client missions all seemed enthusiastic about our work. I believe that the main reason for that was that we paid an unusual amount of attention to the way we offered pragmatic program options to go with every conclusion – similar to what I described was the *modus operandi* for UDAPE, the policy planning body USAID put together so successfully in Bolivia.

At the time (2002-2004), corruption was an emerging field of development focus. These were the early days of Transparency International, with whom we had contact on several occasions. This was helpful in terms of having different perspectives on how to think about the problem and how to understand it. One of the lessons derived from something I had started to learn during my time in Brazil: to be successful in any development endeavor required people and institutions in the government and/or civil society who had a genuine priority and commitment to achieving the same goal that you had. Our strategic goal was to be the catalyst to help these people succeed. Indeed, sources for such interest and commitment (allies, if you will) were something we looked for carefully during the analytical phase of our assessments.

The person who was my deputy in La Paz, George Wachtenheim, had joined Casals as their Vice President for International Programs, which, in part, is how I came to do consulting for that company. Sadly, George died suddenly at the end of 2004,

Q: 2004.

COHEN: Yes. That was such an unexpected tragedy. George, in addition to having been a great colleague, was a really close friend. His loss was devastating.

Beatriz Casals, who owned the company, asked if I would take George's place. I told her that I really was not interested in having a full-time job. She responded that I could take the position part time and that she would find someone else to do whatever was left over. I agreed, but Bea never did find that someone else to do the rest. I toggled between working more hours than we had agreed and not fulfilling my bargain with myself and Rita, and working less hours than I thought were really required to do the job adequately, and not doing what I knew really ought to be done. The struggle between the consequences of putting in too much or too little time each week was increasingly unpleasant.

I stayed in the Casals job for three years. One of the things that kept me there so long was the exceptionally talented group of young people, largely in their 20s and early 30s that worked for the company. As I had found with young staff in USAID, it was exciting and fun to see new professionals discovering what they could do and becoming better and better almost overnight. That was such a good part of that job. There also was the fact that I liked the work. I strongly believed in the anti-corruption work that we did. We had some good programs in the field, and I felt closely tied to them. For the most part, I liked the relationship that we evolved with most of the missions we worked with. Having an outsider perspective of USAID also was an interesting experience.

When I left Casals, I helped Bea recruit Bill Jeffers, an extremely able USAID Mission Director, who I had come to know when he was the Project Development Officer in Sri Lanka. Being recently retired, Bill was enjoined by USAID ethics regulations from direct contact with the Agency for two years. As a Vice President emeritus of sorts, I basically continued to do the travel part of the job, which almost definitionally required some contact with our partner Missions. I did this for two years. I finally separated myself from Casals when I went to SOUTHCOM to work on the Haiti earthquake. That separation took place roughly at the same time Bea Casals sold her company to DynCorp, a large defense contractor that said it was interested in getting involved in the development business. Without going into detail, that takeover was not something that worked out very well.

Afterward, I continued to do some consulting, but less and less. There were things Rita and I wanted to do and places we wanted to see. I also wanted time to focus on and experience some volunteer activities. My first such experience, and one I continue to be engaged with, is the Arlington Free Clinic, a great organization that provides free basic health care to poor, uninsured people, many of whom are Hispanic. My other volunteer

activity required much more of a time commitment: this was when I became very engaged with the relatively new USAID Alumni Association (UAA).

Q: What is the USAID Alumni Association and how did it come about?

COHEN: The UAA began in 2009. While there had been some false starts at forming an alumni group prior to that, this iteration had the strong support and encouragement of the then-USAID Administrator, Henrietta Holsman Fore. The Association allows its members to stay current on topics in the development community, to use their vast experience in ways that are supportive of the Agency and its goals, and to have an entity that will bring friends and former colleagues together socially. Currently, the UAA has an excellent speaker series, a widely praised mentoring program for overseas FSOs, a foreign assistance outreach program, and regular social gatherings.

As I've mentioned earlier, I have long thought that working in USAID is a calling. It becomes part of our personal definitions, something that is a matter of pride of association. To stop working for AID does not mean that one ceases to care about the things that have been important and fascinating for most of one's adult life. The UAA provides us with a way of continuing to connect with all that.

Q: What has been your involvement with the UAA?

COHEN: Almost from the Association's outset, I had it in my head that, if I wanted the organization to succeed, I should get myself more fully engaged with it. As I ratcheted down my consulting life, I became more active in finding a way to work with the UAA. One day, I was called and asked if I would like to be co-chair of the Association's Strengthening USAID Committee.

The main task of the Strengthening Committee was to put together a program reflective of an idea that was there from day one of the Association, which was the establishment of a mentoring program between alumni and Agency employees in the field. Between the 1995 RIF (Reduction in Force), retirements, and the long standing freeze on new hires, the Agency had lost a large number of employees. This need for more manpower began to be addressed through the 2008-12 Development Leadership Initiative (DLI) program. While the new hires underwent comprehensive training when they came on board, there was little in place to support their needs once they were posted overseas. Typically, Mission staffing levels were much lower than was more common through much of the 1990s, which, along with larger workloads, meant fewer people available to mentor new employees.

Every time the UAA spoke with people in USAID about starting a mentoring program using volunteer retirees, there was great enthusiasm. However, for whatever reason, we could never get the program off the ground. No one in the Agency took responsibility to help make it happen. Dave Eckerson was the Agency Counselor at the time. One day, while I was talking with him over beer, I mentioned in passing that getting this mentoring activity launched was being inexplicably hard, that the people we had spoken with in the

Agency had very good intentions and seemed enthusiastic, but we could never get to the next step of implementation. This was just a conversation, not a sales pitch. But Dave became seized with getting a UAA-USAID mentoring program up and running.

In short order, Eckerson identified the Europe and Eurasia (E&E) Bureau as a good place for a pilot effort. My Committee Co-Chair, Pam Mandel, and I met with Roberta Mahoney, the DAA for the E&E Bureau, who was enthusiastic about participating in the pilot. Roberta designated Ann Patterson, the head of the Bureau Program Office, to work with the UAA to make the program operational. Without any significant delay, we had a number of people in the Bureau who were seeking mentors who were paired with a group of UAA volunteers who were generally matched in such things as areas of expertise (that is, backstop codes) and geographic experience. Indeed, the very first pairing involved me and a lawyer posted in Budapest who had just been designated as Acting Mission Director to oversee the mission closeout. Three posts and five years later, that woman and I still speak almost weekly via Skype.

After the first year of the pilot experience, we did an evaluation and substantially expanded the program. One of the findings of that evaluation was that most of those interested in having mentors were more senior than the recent DLI grads we had anticipated. Indeed, several of our mentees have been Mission Directors. To date, we have had seven cohorts of mentors and mentees. Our mentees have come from all of the Agency's geographic bureaus as well as PPL (policy) and Global Health. Demand for UAA mentors continues to be strong. Two years ago, we had another evaluation and the feedback continues to be very positive. Being involved with the UAA mentoring program has been a great experience, one that I am still engaged with.

Q: What else have you worked on with the UAA?

COHEN: When I began engaging with the Association, I started paying more attention to their website, which I discovered had not changed at all for many months. I strongly believed that a credible, modern organization needed an informative, living website, one that had useful, current information that was refreshed often. I mentioned this to alum Gary Merritt, who was on the UAA Board, who quickly agreed.

With the Board's approval, Gary and I, along with Sean McKee, who became our webmaster, took the steps necessary to put together a completely new website. While I have always liked computing, I was not very knowledgeable about it. Thus, the redesign and implementation of the new UAA website was a major learning experience for me, one that required many, sometimes frustrating, hours of engagement.

In putting together the new site, we went through various designs and technical issues. My conversations with Sean often began with: "How do I...?" Happily, Sean was very patient with me, though he wasn't always happy with my wanting to dumb down some of the technical quirks of the basic WordPress program. The new website has been up and running since 2012. Though I never intended it, I continue to manage the site, being responsible for finding and posting much of its content.

Q: Anything else re. the UAA?

COHEN: Twice I was elected to the Association's Board and served in that capacity for four years. Working with the UAA has been a great experience. Once again, I am engaged with something that I consider important. At the outset, my goal was that we have a viable alumni association for USAID employees. We have achieved that. Now, my focus is on how we can make what we have sustainable, that is, to live and prosper beyond the participation of its creators.

Q: Is there anything else you want to say about your post-AID life?

COHEN: In a Baptist mission in the hills outside of Port au Prince, I saw a really great sign. It said, "Grow where you're planted." I thought that was such good advice.

For Rita and me, that always seemed to be true. As we went from post to post and job to job, we made ourselves an incredibly happy and productive life. It also has been that way in our post-USAID lives. As much as we loved our USAID years, the time since then also has been magnificent. There is still so much in our lives that is interesting, stimulating and fun. We are truly lucky people.

Q: If somebody, a researcher or a student or someone, comes across your oral history and gets in touch with you and says, "Well, David, things have changed in the world. I'm looking to figure out what I'm going to do with my career," would you recommend going into international development now? What would your answer be? The short version.

COHEN: Unquestionably, the short version answer would be yes. That said, I feel very fortunate to have been in USAID when I was. These days, life in USAID missions seems to be so much more bureaucratized than ever before. As junior staff, my generation did sector assessments, wrote strategies, and designed, implemented and evaluated projects. Many of these tasks are now farmed out to grantees and contractors, companies like Casals. Today, I would miss all that hands on experience that served to make me a much more complete and capable development officer.

Several times when I was travelling for Casals, a mission would ask if we would do a strategy for the democracy and governance portion of their program. I would respond that we, of course, would do what they wished, but then asked if they didn't want to do that for themselves. How else could they really own their program? Most often when I said that, people would just look at me in puzzlement. That is not the kind of thing USAID missions do for themselves anymore. How unfortunate. That was a job I loved; it was part of the meaningful role that we played. While I am certain that I would greatly miss this as an officer in the 21st century USAID, I still would not dissuade anyone from a career and a life in development.

Q: Alright. Any last comments you would like to make? This has been an excellent series of interviews.

COHEN: I really appreciate your having given me this opportunity. I hope that people find what I have said to be useful.

Q: Thank you, David.

End of interview