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

# DAWN LIBERI

*Interviewed by: Mark Tauber*
*Interview date: January 13, 2017*


*This oral history transcription was made possible through support provided by U.S. Agency for International Development, under terms of Cooperative Agreement No. AID-OAA-F-16-00101. The opinions expressed herein are those of the interviewee and do not necessarily reflect the views of the U.S. Agency for International Development or the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training.*

## INTERVIEW

*Q: We always begin with the question, where were you born and raised?*

LIBERI: I was born in Brooklyn, New York and raised there as well. I stayed in Brooklyn through high school until I went off to college.

*Q: So did you go to the public school, or were you in a private school?*

LIBERI: I was in a private, parochial school during grammar school, and then an all-girls parochial high school in Brooklyn.

*Q: Okay, so tell us then a little bit about your family. Are they, have they been in the country for most of the time? How far back do your ancestors go?*

LIBERI: Well, like many New Yorkers, I come from an immigrant background, and fairly interesting in that my maternal grandfather was actually born and raised in the Philippines and had a very interesting life there. In fact, he was born in Leyte into-a reasonably prominent land-owning family, but they were politically progressive and the regime in place didn't like that very much. At a certain point, my grandfather's father said to him, "Since we're politically not in the same favor as some of the ruling elite, you need to join either the priesthood or the merchant marines." At which point my grandfather said, "I think I will join the merchant marines." He set off on many journeys around the world, and in fact traveled around the world four times, spoke seven languages, and eventually wound up in New York City where he met my grandmother and they married.

My grandmother comes from an Italian background and was a first generation born in the U.S. Her parents had come over from Italy. On my father's side there was also Italian background and a bit of German, so we're really a mélange of nationalities. So that's how I grew up, in a very large extended family, sort of mestizo, because there's both oriental influence as well as the Italian influence. We would have these very large Sunday afternoon gatherings after church. We'd all gather for the extended family meal, and it was very interesting. Most of the time we would eat Italian food but often it would be Filipino food as well. I got to see a lot of different cultures at an early age growing up, and (hear) many languages as well.

*Q: You mentioned the merchant marines. That's the Filipino merchant marine?*

LIBERI: Yes.

*Q: Did he ever talk about that?*

LIBERI: To a certain extent he did, and I think that's what sort of led to my early interest in going overseas. He would have what I call these Sunday afternoon little family seminars where he'd gather the grandchildren and would talk about his life, about his experiences, about his time in Antarctica eating blubber, Iceland, (and) in Alaska with the Eskimos. He would talk about his time in Saudi Arabia; he would talk about all his travels throughout Asia, the Middle East, and then he would bring out things like silks and say, "Here's the best silk from China; here's celadon from China." He'd bring out wonderful things, spices and lots of different things from around the world--carpets from Persia--and he would literally have tutorials for us grandchildren! And we'd sort of sit there at the bottom of his feet listening with rapt attention about the next great history we were going to hear. He would talk about running the bulls in Pamplona, being in Papua New Guinea, and he would talk about the aboriginals. He just had an extraordinary life. And one of the things that he always said to all of us, but I think particularly to me because I was one of the ones more interested in what he had to say. He said, "Promise me that in addition to your formal schooling, you'll travel around the world." He said, "That's the best education that you can get, live in different places, learn different languages. Know and understand what it is to be a citizen of the world, not just of the United States."

*Q: Just a quick aside, there's a saying ascribed to Mark Twain that "travel is fatal to prejudice, bigotry and narrow-mindedness."*

LIBERI: Absolutely, and I think that was one of the philosophies of my grandfather. Very similar in the sense of, you don't know what people experience until you actually live among them, and you don't know what they're going through until you actually see the conditions that they are in. Early on it led to a great fascination with the world, and a true desire to experience that and to spend time overseas and to travel. I started at a young age.

*Q: So now, talk about your immediate family. How many children (were there)?*

LIBERI: We are three, I am the oldest, I have two sisters, so we are three girls. There was a bit of a gap in between because unfortunately my mom lost two to miscarriages in between. So that's basically it, three girls. And we come from a family where like many, my parents worked hard to get what they had, and so I feel very privileged. We were middle class, my father had his own business and my mom also worked and was in TV production, which was interesting at that point in time. We had a house in Brooklyn, *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* (a novel), it's true. We had a front yard and a back yard, and my dad with the Italian in in his soul was a great gardener, so he grew extraordinary things. We had peach trees, apple trees, and cherry trees. He grew every herb: basil, thyme, mint, etc. We (also) had figs. So I grew up with a lot of natural, food literally from the ground. And being in New York, you can actually eat very well and very naturally, so that's how I experienced my early childhood. We also had a summer place out in Montauk Point in Long Island so we would spend our summers out there. It was great. It was a very full of life childhood.

*Q: What sort of business did your father have?*

LIBERI: He was a hair stylist and he owned a couple of salons. He had this great saying, that we always knew that fortunately he would never go out of business because some studies had shown "If women have to choose between the doctor or the hair stylist, they'll always choose the hair stylist!" Which was true, thank goodness!

*Q: And his shop would have been in the late '50s going through the '60s?*

LIBERI: Correct. That was also the era of Vidal Sassoon and that whole era where hair styling, etc. really became quite big actually, so I think he was able to ride the wave of that and that's how he established his couple of salons.

*Q: It's interesting that your mother was in TV production. Was she the child of immigrants?*

LIBERI: Yes, well mixed, because her father had come over and he was a direct immigrant and her mother was a first generation. On her mother's side it was her grandparents who had come over.

*Q: Nevertheless, it's interesting that as a woman in that era she was involved in TV production.*

LIBERI: Absolutely, and she was a producer who worked with Raymond Massey among others, and she actually beat out 40 men for her first job, which was really extraordinary. So from an early age I also got to see the role of women, and my mom was a role model--someone who had a responsible job, (who) went to work. When I was young I would sometimes go on the sets of some of the productions. Eventually she also owned her own business with another woman whom she had met professionally. They started their own

production business, and they did that for about five or six years. Then my mom went back to working in the high animation side of the business. This was when animation was becoming big, before computers, (when) people had to do this all by hand. She worked with some very brilliant people, and eventually she wound up being an executive assistant to one of the departments of BBDO [advertising agency] and wound up in advertising. She had a very full professional life. She did take time off when my two sisters were born. They were born very close to each other and she took time out to stay at home during their early days. There's a seven and nine year difference between us. I was the only child for my first seven years, and then became really the oldest, and slightly separated in terms of timing. It was almost two families, if you will.

*Q: But you were the older sister and so very quickly you took on babysitting and so on?*

LIBERI: Yes, absolutely. I was sort of the built-in babysitter.

*Q: Okay, so your parents were busy--they were active--but they also had time for family. There's a work-life balance that you got to observe. Did that stay in the back of your mind as you grew up--the notion that you also needed to maintain a work life balance?*

LIBERI: Yes, it did. What was interesting--again going back to my grandfather--I remember him saying, "Before you get married, travel around the world." So this led to me traveling around the world at a young age, which I can get into in a moment, but I think what it instilled into me was the importance of having family and of having very solid roots. Because I did travel at an early age when it was not the conventional thing to do, I always knew I had the support of my parents to do that. Even when some people questioned why they let me roam off to Africa or Nepal, or here or there, or places that people had never heard of--I started traveling when I was 16 and I'll tell you about that--but I always knew I had their support and I was always interested in a lot of hobbies that weren't the normal sort of hobbies. I was a student pilot at a young age, did martial arts, and did a lot of equestrian riding. I was on the swimming team and the volleyball team, so I was involved in competitive sports as well as a range of other activities. So you know you have to have family support to do a lot of those things.

*Q: Before we get to your international travel, which we will, talk a little bit then about your schooling.*

LIBERI: School was very interesting. Fortunately I was a good student. I think that going to parochial school you learn discipline at an early age, discipline in the sense of you were expected to work and to work hard, to learn your subjects, and do your homework. I remember the first thing I would do when I came home from school. My mom was home at that point and we would go through my homework. So the first thing, even before I want out to play was, "You finish your homework. Make sure all you have to do gets done first." She would go through the lessons, ask the questions, and do the drilling and all that. Then I was allowed to go out and play for the last two hours before we had dinner.

*Q: Roughly how big were your schools?*

LIBERI: Not that large. I would say that we had average classes of about 20-25, sort of normal for that time in New York City and Brooklyn. In grammar school there were eight grades and we had probably three or four classes (for each grade), so maybe (there were) 800-1,000 total in school. (There were much less in high school. It was a smaller, little bit more elite school and (there were) probably about 400-500 students.

*Q: Did your parents emphasize reading when you were a kid?*

LIBERI: Absolutely. In fact one of my early memories from even before I started school—(when) I was in preschool and kindergarten--my mom and I would read a book every single day. Before I went to sleep, that was our time together. You know when you're very young they have these little story books that are 5-10 pages. I would read (them) and that's how she instilled in me the act of reading, and then we'd talk about the story. I looked forward to this bedtime reading. That was the last thing we would do before I went to sleep. I still read to this day and it's one of those things that I think is important to get instilled at an early age.

*Q: Yeah, I think in general you're right. And it's certainly good that your parents did that. When did you begin reading stuff related to international or foreign things?*

LIBERI: From very young obviously you read lots of stories about the world overseas, etc. so when I started high school I knew that I wanted to travel when I was in my junior year of high school. So at that point I started reading things about Africa. In fact, one of the things my mom saved from when I was seven years old was an essay I wrote on Africa. One of these handwritten little (stories)--you do what you have to do, (by a) little seven-year-old, "I want to go to Africa, I want to go to the continent..." I don't remember all the words now but it was one of those early things that set you up. So I had that curiosity. I just started reading travelogues. I don't know if you remember them but some were written by Richard Halliburton, (about) his journeys around the world, and they were really captivating. (His) was sort of the serious but also interesting version of the *Road to Bali*, or the road to wherever. Because he had been a photographer, (had) worked with a journalism entity, I believe, his drive in life was to travel. The way he supported that was to then write travelogues and these books got published and so he went to many places around the world. I started reading these books (when I was) young

*Q: In high school were you were also very active in sports, you said. Were you also active in any other clubs or activities that would relate you to foreign things?*

LIBERI: Yes, I was a member of the speech and debate team. We competed around New York and around the country, you had to stay up on foreign affairs, foreign events. We (had) a category called extemporaneous speaking, and you were given a question and had two minutes to prepare a two-minute presentation. Often it was "subject of the day," so every week we kept up on what was going on in world affairs. I think that was a great way to stay current. I had been a part of the Girl Scouts, and again you do various things

as part of what your world learning is. I had gone to some Girl Scout camps, and of course, there was a mix of people from different nationalities.

To be frank, I think just growing up in New York City you are exposed to that all the time. Your neighborhood is a polyglot of languages. When I was growing up it was mostly Italian Irish Catholic, but then there were more Chinese that came in, (next) the Polish, and there were a number of Hasidim (Jews) so there was a lot of Hebrew spoken. Then of course more Hispanics came in, so as the waves of folks came in, you just heard different languages and related to what people were talking about--the different world events that were impacting on them.

*Q: But foreign languages were not spoken in your home.*

LIBERI: They were, (but) unfortunately I didn't learn them quite the way that I wanted to, so I grew up with some Italian spoken, some Tagalog on my grandfather's side, a little bit of German, because my father's biological father was part German. Unfortunately he passed away and then when my grandmother remarried she married someone of Portuguese descent who was first generation, so there was Portuguese as well. Because we were at the age (when) everyone needed to speak English, we were kind of funneled into speaking English, which was unfortunate because at an early age I could have learned Italian, and I think either Portuguese or Spanish, but I missed those opportunities then.

*Q: But of course, later opportunities. Now what was it in your junior year of high school that caused you to say, "I'm going abroad?"*

LIBERI: Well, you might recall what was going on in the world at that time was a lot of upheaval in education. *Deschooling Society* had just been written by Ivan Illich; (there was) Paulo Freire, there was a whole new focus on world learning that was outside of the classroom. There was a big debate in higher education and there were many programs at that time that focused on taking kids overseas. Some were Study Abroad, Operation Crossroads, The Experiment in International Living, all these programs spawned at that point in time. While I was on the younger cusp of that, I was exposed to it.

One of the things I did--speaking of reading--one of my early passions in life, and still is, I would read the *New York Times* every Sunday from a very young age. From the time I could read, I loved reading the Sunday Times. You may recall at the back of the magazine section of the *New York Times*, (there were) all these advertisements about educational study programs abroad. So I went through them, did a little analysis, and then I applied to a number of them. I thought I was originally going to go to Operation Crossroads because 1) I wanted to go to Africa, and 2) I wanted to do something that helped people, dig wells, or help build schools--some kind of contribution. So I applied to a few and then there was one that caught my eye. I thought, "Wow! This is interesting!" This was beyond Africa but (were) very interesting countries that I'd always had a desire to go to. And at first I thought that if you got accepted into the program you got to choose

one of the countries and study there. So I applied to several and I got accepted to a couple of programs.

I was just about to say "yes" to Crossroads Africa when I got a call from these other folks. They said, "We want to come and interview you for this program." I said, "Great!" So they called my parents and said they'd like to come and interview. It turned out that it was not one, but all of the countries listed in the description and it was essentially a four-month program to travel around the world. It was sponsored under the auspices of Harvard (University) and they were going around and literally interviewing and handpicking the individuals that would participate. The premise was, "Could you take a group of students, have them study subjects, do case studies, and then come back and present a case study--meaning a written paper and slide show presentation--and then have them, in a sense, teach their peers? And would that be more relevant than sociology textbooks that might be 30 years outdated?" It was the premise of some of the leading educators in Harvard who were looking at this, and the subject of a couple of masters' theses. They went around and fund raised and I was very fortunate that I got a scholarship. I was the youngest member of the group. I was the only high school student; everyone else was in college or graduate school. So, at the young age of 16, there I was with this group and it was the most extraordinary experience. It was very educationally based and focused on really important themes of the time, climate, the environment, demographics, etc.

*Q: What year was this?*

LIBERI: This was 1970.

*Q: And already they were talking about climate?*

LIBERI: Yes, and the environment. Not climate change per se but issues related to the environment, because if you will recall at that time there were a lot of issues (related to) pollution, industrialization, people were worried about the impact of fog, smog, etc. as cities industrialized and lots of coal was still being used. That was one element. And of course, in developing countries lots of wood being burned. So people had different subjects and I chose demography because that was the moment, you may recall, when Paul Ehrlich had written *The Population Bomb*, and this was the whole "What was going to be happening to the world as the population doubled and what was the resource base going to look like?" So I chose that.

And we went off. Our first stop was Mexico, and in Mexico we studied with Norman Borlaug who had just won the Nobel Prize for the "Green Revolution." We went to Chapingo (where) we studied on his farm. And we went to Cuernavaca to study with Ivan Illich who had just written *Deschooling Society*. We met briefly with, the Myrdals [Gunnar and Alva Myrdal] had just written Asian Drama [*Asian Drama: An Inquiry into the Poverty of Nations*] and later on I met Paulo Freire who had just written *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. So all these luminaries! When do you meet a Nobel laureate such as

Norman Borlaug or someone like Ivan Illich? As a 16-year-old I knew that this trip was special, but I didn't realize just how special it was.

Part of the trip was an emphasis on living with families. So in each place we actually stayed with families, and so we got to experience the culture of the country. We went to Mexico, then we went to Japan, where I was able to live with a family in Kamakura, just outside of Tokyo behind the Daihatsu Buddha. I was fortunate to spend my 17th birthday with them. Interestingly, the father and son were Buddhist, and the mother and daughter were Christian, so we had interesting dinner conversations! Our group got to study at Tokyo University. We also went to Minamata – a site of devastating environmental pollution. You may recall that was the age when mercury poisoning had just been discovered, and we actually got to meet and interview some of the victims--that was the environmental piece. So here was a case in point--the impact of environment on people--mercury poisoning. Went also went to Kyoto and stayed in a Buddhist monastery at the Myoshinji Temple and that was wonderful.

From there we went to India. Talk about demography and the population explosion! We started out in Calcutta, (then) went to Delhi. I mean it was just extraordinary! I got to meet with many of the ministry of health folks who were focused on demographic issues and family planning.

Then we went to Nepal and that led to me literally going out into the hinterlands of the Himalayas with the then Minister of Health Dr. Rita Thapa. I actually got to witness vasectomy camps. I wrote letters home telling about this and my mother tells the story (how) she was sitting on the beach--this was summertime--and she was reading my letters and then (exclaimed), "Dawn went to what? A vasectomy camp? Oh, my gosh!" And then she says, "Okay! I hope you are well chaperoned." I said, "No problem." But you can imagine, a Catholic girl from…Brooklyn witnessing a vasectomy!

Q: Stop one second. You are talking about these experiences with families and you felt perfectly comfortable with the different foods, the different cultures, how people related…I mean, you fit right in!

LIBERI: Actually, yes. It was great, because in Mexico people just sort of take you in, the Latin culture. And being an Italian, Italian-Latin, it's a very Latin culture. I was used to big families, and I was used to people gathering around the table and lots of food and discussion and it didn't matter if it was in Spanish or whatever, so when I went to Japan my Japanese family was shocked that I knew how to eat with chopsticks because my grandfather had taught me how to eat with chopsticks at the age of five. Coming from an Asian background he ate with chopsticks, and you learned the Asian culture, piety, fealty, respect for elders, etc. so I felt very much at home in a Japanese family. They were kind of surprised that I knew how to sit tatami style on the floor and eat. They put out a fork and I just reached for the chopsticks and they said, "Oh, you know how to use chopsticks? You're very comfortable eating with chopsticks!" I said "Yes, I've had to do it for a long time and told them my background.

And then in India and Nepal, particularly at that time, my first impression of India was the enormous numbers of people, and the enormous numbers of people in absolute poverty--I mean just absolute, destitute poverty. In one sense nothing quite prepares you for that. Things were still around like leprosy, so there were lepers walking around, and people begging. What it does is, it increases your gratefulness for where you've grown up and what you have. And I firmly believe every American should travel around the world and go to developing countries and see how much of the world lives. And I've always said to people, "Trust me, your worst day is so much better than their best day will ever be."

*Q: All right, so you left off in India and Nepal.*

LIBERI: The other big thing I got to experience in Nepal was a birth because we were in a village in the Himalayas. We had left the cars and we trekked two days so we were near nobody. There was no electricity, no water; it was really primitive, but I was with one of the leading doctors in the country who also happened to be the minister of health – Dr. Rita Thapa - who was brilliant! She was obviously from a very upper class family, very well educated, yet she really put women at ease and talked to them. She was focusing on family planning, contraception, and then one of the midwives came running up to us and said, "Please you have to come." There was a woman giving birth but the baby was being born breach and the midwife needed help. So we went running there and Dr. Thapa said to me, "Okay have you ever seen a baby being born?" (I said,) "No, I'm 16." She said, "Well get ready, you're about to!" I remember my heart pounding and thinking, "Oh my goodness!" But I have to say Dr. Thapa was the picture of calm. She walked into the room and understood this poor woman had been in labor for about two days. And in that minute you understand why childbirth is so dangerous and why so many women die in labor, particularly in those kind of circumstances. However Dr. Thapa walked into the room and she very calmly and quietly, but clearly took control of the situation. She went up to the woman and she started speaking to her and then I could see that she was sort of massaging her stomach and gradually she was just literally turning the baby (all the while) talking to her and talking to her, very calmly and softly. I can honestly say that this woman and probably the baby would have died without Dr. Thapa's intervention. So to make a long story short, she said to me, "Okay, we have to boil the water" and boiling the water meant we had to light the fire, and had to try to find clean rags (to) clean the mother and baby. So I was running around trying to help with that. Eventually the baby was born and, thank goodness, was beautiful and healthy. Dr. Thapa gave the baby to the mother so she could bond with the baby. The woman was really exhausted and needed to sleep, so she handed the baby to me! That was an amazing experience, to see life (begin) under those circumstances.

*Q: Especially at age 16.*

LIBERI: Yes, precisely. So that was an extraordinary time. After Nepal we went to Thailand, to Bangkok as well as Khan Kaen in the north. A couple of students were studying the Mekong River Delta as part of an environmental case study, so we were able to visit the Delta area around Khan Kaen. From there we did a little side trip to Taiwan

and that was just to regroup because we really couldn't go to mainland China at that point so that was the closest (we got).

Then we left Asia and we went to Ethiopia. That was really phenomenal. That was still during the reign of Haile Selassie. It was an opportunity to see a couple of things. One was to experience the extraordinary beauty of the Ethiopian culture, which was phenomenal. I remember landing in Addis (Ababa) and it was a little chilly. People don't realize how high up Addis is. So we wrapped ourselves in blankets and went to the market and I just got the sense of these stunningly beautiful people. It really gave meaning to the word blue-black. The coloring they had and their regal bearing…just looking at them was fabulous. So we spent time in Addis and then got to go out to where you see parts of the cradle of civilization, places like Lalibela--just remarkable.

Since then I've had an opportunity to go back to Ethiopia a couple of times, but it's always those first impressions that are really amazing. And I also saw what dictatorship is like. I got into a taxi once to (go) visit the hospital. I said (to the driver), "We're going to Haile Selassie I Hospital please." The cab had started driving off, so the driver slammed on the brakes and turned around and he said, "You will address him as "King Haile Selassie the First, Lion of Judah…" He went on and on with all these salutations and I thought, "Oh my goodness! He clearly had been drilled as to what to say and particularly with foreigners." It was a very interesting experience. At that time you could still hear the lions. I don't know if you know the story, but Emperor Haile Selassie kept lions on the palace grounds and he kept them half fed so that if anyone ever decided they wanted to get on the palace grounds to assassinate him or anything else, they would be met by the lions. More than one person was eaten by the lions, and you could hear them roaring. But it was also part of the lore of him being the Lion of Judah, and maintaining that legend. which was very interesting. You got to see the impact of that on people, of having rulers like that since unfortunately, there was still a presence of dictatorship throughout sub-Saharan Africa.

From Ethiopia we went to Norway. We were nearing the end of our time so we actually wrapped up our trip in Norway. That's when we did a lot of work on our case studies. All along the way we had been taking photos, and we actually had a professional photographer on the trip who helped us develop our photos. We learned a lot about photography, and of course a lot of it was in black and white at that time. We developed our photos, exchanged stories, wrote up our notes, etc. So that was my summer abroad at 16-17!

*Q: Holy cow! Remarkable, really remarkable! I have to say I don't know many people who had a similar experience at age 16. Plenty travelled as teenagers but not in quite such a whirlwind or to places that were quite as remote, or in the developing world. Most people would travel particularly to the more developing world. Places people would go would be Mexico and more than likely to vacation on the coast. So really for a 16-year-old that is quite something.*

*Okay, so you finished your written project. Did it fulfill the goals Harvard had hoped?*

LIBERI: Yes, and as a result there were subsequent trips, which continued for about another three or four years. Part of the agreement was that we would go around and give presentations when we came back. I did presentations to my high school and went to several other high schools, and I presented to my Girl Scout troop and a number of other Girl Scout entities, and Boy Scout entities as well, and for Rotary societies, too. So we actually did do this and my point was to show the impact of population, of demography, etc. on the world and interventions that were being done in different places that could help address this issue.

So the analysis is yes, this type of experiential learning and peer to peer teaching can work for people like myself, who participated. It was an extraordinary experience, and I think we produced some very extraordinary pieces of work and documentation for our level at that time. As I said I was only in high school. But others who were in college or graduate school produced more sophisticated types of analyses. In fact, one of our colleagues was from Dartmouth. He was actually French and later on he became the minister of agriculture for France. So it was these kind of people that were part and parcel (of the project).

*Q: Did you stay in touch with them?*

LIBERI: I stayed in touch with many in the group for a number of years, in fact, for many years. But over time, those ties diminished. I was in touch with my French colleague when he was minister (of agriculture) and I actually did get to see him in France. So that did occur.

In the final analysis, while the experiment could work, it turned out it was just too expensive. You just can't sustain that over time and unfortunately only a small pool of people got to participate on the trips, so to make it a critical mass would just be much harder to do. I'm not even sure that it would work in every community. It was very well received in New York, Boston, the Northeast, but I don't know that every place would see it as the same or embrace it in the same way. Unfortunately I think there were many other demands on Harvard and it was deemed a bit too expensive to try to continue over a long period of time. I was fortunate to have benefited from being among the first!

*Q: So did you continue on other trips in the future with them, because you mentioned that it did have several more iterations?*

LIBERI: I stayed in touch with the group organizers however I did not participate in subsequent trips. Because I had been on one trip and they wanted to "spread the wealth," I did not go on others. However I would go to where they were recruiting folks, and I would talk to people about my experiences or I would help interview. I helped in that way. We would have small gatherings in Manhattan and talk about our trip, and answer questions of potential applicants and their parents, etc.

And then I did other travel. What's great about a trip like that, is that it's an entrée to many other things. Because this trip was so unusual, it makes you a more interesting candidate for other opportunities. I got to do other travel as a result of what I had already done because I had a track record, I had been overseas, I survived, I produced something, I could articulate what I saw, etc. As a result of that I got to do many other different types of trips.

*Q: With companies that led them, or on your own?*

LIBERI: Both. I did some on my own, just travel the way normal kids travel, and went to Europe. Then I got to work at the U.S. committee for UNICEF (UN Children's Fund). I also worked at the WHO (World Health Organization) and spent time in Geneva (Switzerland).

*Q: Now this was while you were still in high school?*

LIBERI: That was as I was going into college. After this trip initial around the world, I did a summer abroad in Europe and then I went into college. I'll tell you about that because that was also interesting. Because of where I went to college I was able to do a lot of experiential learning, and so I got to live in Egypt…

*Q: Before we get to college, lets finish the trips in high school, because obviously these trips in high school are giving you basically all the information you need to know for the nature of your future ambitions. If your future ambitions are going to be in the international realm, you're getting just about the best possible experiences to make that decision. Then if you were continuing to do that in high school, how did you decide where else you were going to go? Where else you were going to travel to in high school? What was going through your mind at that point?*

LIBERI: Because I had been to many places in the developing world in my junior year, I decided in my senior year I would go to Europe. So then I actually traveled on my own with another one or two friends.

*Q: That would have been 1972?*

LIBERI: Yes, the summer of 1972. I traveled on my own and went to some of the typical Europe places and did that for the summer. That was interesting because I was on my own, still only 17, but everything I had learned from having traveled before I was able to apply. Similarly in many places I was in hostels but in other places I was with families, and again it broadens your horizons. However this time I looked at it from more of a roots standpoint. I spent time in Italy and went back to where my family origins were, so that was also great. Then I spent time in France (and) England, doing the typical sort of European travel.

*Q: At this time were you also studying foreign languages?*

LIBERI: I was studying French. (My French) was nascent at that point, but now I'm fluent.

*Q: Were you able to use it? Did your travel help you in language speaking or language learning?*

LIBERI: Yes, I think it did in a couple of ways. First, you're not afraid to try to speak--and I think that's key--because what you realize is that people love when you try to speak their language; they really do. And if you try, they're much more forgiving, and much more willing to interact with you, which is lovely. I think it's a great way to try to have an entrée into their culture. And then to just try the different foods, and you just really immerse yourself in the culture. I think the first trip really spawned that…because I had to! Obviously when you're off in the Himalayas somewhere you eat what's there and you live with the folks and often you don't have a common language. There's maybe one other person who speaks English, so when you're out in remote villages, you learn how to interact, and it's really communication at that point, it's not just language; it's making yourself understood.

*Q: Okay, so as you've done all of this travel, what are you thinking about in terms of college, in terms of your next step in life?*

LIBERI: Well, from a young age I thought I would go to medical school because I wanted to do something of service and always liked medical things.

*Q: You weren't squeamish? Of course you observed a birth, but a lot of times people imagine themselves as doctors and don't realize that it involves dealing with human bodies, that you may have to cut, or do various things, and many people change their minds very quickly.*

LIBERI: Right. I thought when I was young that I wanted to be a neurosurgeon, so I really wanted to do brain surgery. I wasn't really squeamish. At a certain point if you see too much stuff there's the shock, but I was more curious than squeamish. I taught myself, I did a lot of studying anatomy and physiology. I was always good in biology, always interested in the sciences. So I went to college with the intent of doing premed, which is what I did.

Because of the school that I went to, which was directly related to my original trip, I got to do a lot more than just book study. Because there was such an emphasis on education, and then higher education, a couple of the folks on the trip were from New College (and) some were from Oberlin, and one from Evergreen which had recently started--so there was a very interesting mix of folks on this trip. I got to basically learn about schools without borders. You know (about) Doctors without Borders, (well,) these are schools without grades, and borders, if you will. I became intrigued with that so I applied to the normal panoply…Wellesley, Skidmore, Columbia, the normal kinds of schools that certainly my parents were expecting me to go to…and I was too. But then I also applied to Hampshire College. I don't know if you know much about Hampshire College, (but) at

the time Hampshire had just started. Hampshire is a product of five colleges and also Rockefeller research and Harvard, etc. It is in Amherst, Massachusetts, and is part of the five college system which consists of Smith, Mount Holyoke, Amherst, University of Mass, and then Hampshire.

Hampshire was spawned as an alternative to higher education, so there was a lot of research that went into how students learn. At the time there was a lot of dissatisfaction with some elements of higher education. There were a lot of college dropouts, people getting to the first or second semesters, freshman or sophomore year, and then they dropped out. So one of the questions was: "What is happening and why is it happening?" To make a long story short, a lot of people felt that the education they were getting was not relevant to what they might do in life, and it was (training for) a profession that they wanted with more experiential learning. So Hampshire was birthed as an alternative. It was developed with no grades, no majors, you essentially designed your own education and instead of freshman, sophomore, junior, senior, you had Divisions I, II, and III. It was an experiment in higher education.

Because of the exposure that I had gotten to folks on my trip and everything else I had experienced, I thought, "Wow, this could be great!" So I went up to visit it. It's built on an apple orchard. The land was donated by Franklin Patterson who was one of the people who believed in the concept of experimenting in higher education--in a good way--trying to get the best for students. So I went to see it, and the school wasn't even finished building (yet); it has continued to be built over a span of time. There's a big barn, the Red Barn, and Stiles House, which was a little piece of the original farmhouse that was the original admissions area, and a whole lot of apple orchards, and just a couple buildings, and a concept--a concept that was brilliant. It was, I thought, very captivating. I remember going there and standing in the middle of the apple orchard thinking, "Yup, this is where I want to go to school." You could see what you could create.

*Q: Okay, at this point you're making your decision about college. What did your parents think?*

LIBERI: This is a funny story actually. You have to have your parents sign your applications and this and that, and they were saying Skidmore, Columbia, Wellesley…Okay, good, good, and this thing called Hampshire College?" I kept saying, "Hampshire, it's in Amherst!" "Oh, Amherst, well, okay." Not quite explaining the details of Hampshire College, and my parents said, "How come we've never heard of it?" "Well, it's new, it has Harvard behind it, and Smith, and Holyoke. "Well, okay." But they were still not quite understanding what it was. When I said, "I'll just go do my school visits and my interviews on my own," they said, "No, no, we'll come with you." "No, that's okay, I'll go. You're so busy." So eventually I was accepted into a number of places, but I say to my parents, "I really want to go to Hampshire College in Amherst." They were like "well, okay.." because they trusted me. And I said, "Oh it's great. You're going to love it, it's new, it's this, it's that and so on.

Just by virtue of the numbers, it was a fact that the year that I applied Hampshire College was the hardest school in the country to get into. Our rejects went to Harvard, Brown, Yale, and Dartmouth. Again it was because there were very few places so as the number of people applying for the number of places grew--because it had gotten this buzz... .the harder it was to get into. It had started in 1970 and I went in 1972, however it was not yet accredited. By the time I applied, it had really started to become very well known nationally and internationally because of how different it was, and who was going there. Some quite brilliant people went there, and did amazing things. People like Ken Burns was there. Shari Belafonte was in my class before she transferred out, as well as Christopher Stokowski, Anderson Cooper's half- brother--these were my classmates, really interesting people.

So we drive up there, and my mom came up with my aunt. My dad was busy working so couldn't come. I happened to be driving the car at that time, and we pull into Amherst, and my mother's smiling. Amherst town is beautiful, it's college town U.S.A. The Amherst campus is great, it's gorgeous! And my mother's fully expecting me to drive to Amherst College, so when I continued driving, she said, "The school's back there." I said, "No, we're going to Hampshire College!" "But you said it was in Amherst." "Well it *is* in Amherst, but it's Hampshire College!"

So we continued up Route 116 and there's this little sign saying, "Hampshire College" (much different from the other colleges: Amherst, Mt. Holyoke, Smith, which are ivy league, established a long time ago) and the motto of the school, *non satis scire*, which means "To know is not enough." I had gone to Catholic high school and had four years of Latin as had my mother, so I said, "See, Mom, To Know is not enough." She's looking at me, and she's looking at this little sign, then looking at this barn that's still being renovated. There was a long driveway and apple orchards, but no other buildings. She turns to me and says, "I have always trusted your judgment before, but where are we? Where is the school?" It (Hampshire College) was expensive for that time, and she said, "Where is the school? For $6,000 a year where is the school? What state are we in? Okay, we're in Massachusetts, Okay, Wellesley, you got into Wellesley, I'll cancel the check to Hampshire and we'll drive to Wellesley." "No!" "Call them up and say that you're going to Wellesley." "No, we're not going there." "Or Skidmore! Why didn't you just go to Columbia?" I said, "Mom if I had gone to Columbia I would have enjoyed New York with my friends, and I had to get out of the city. So I said, "No, I'm coming here to this school." So she was like, "Oh my God! All right!"

So we drove up and got the keys. The other thing was--there was another experiment--it was coed. My mother's concept of coed was there's a boys' dorm and there's a girls' dorm. We get the keys and we go to Dakin House and she said, "Ah, they've clearly put you in the wrong place."

I said, "Why?" She said, "There are only boys here!" I said, "Well… they're going to have their own room." Mom: "That's coed? Coed means boys in one building, girls in the other building." Me: "Well, Mom actually it's a little bit more "co." here at Hampshire. Mom: "What?! Oh my God. Well, don't tell your father. Oh my God!"

You know, Catholic Italian background. Mom: "I have to sit down," and she's like having a nervous breakdown, "Oh God no!" and saying, "Good thing your father didn't come. Don't tell him! We'll have to miss the first parent day because I don't know how I'm going to break this to him. By that time you'll be in Skidmore." And I said, "No, Mom, I'm not going to Skidmore. "We'll figure out something else because clearly you can't stay here." I said, "Mom, I'm staying here. So it was a shock, it was a big shock. Then my parents said, "Okay, wait minute, in addition to everything else, the school's not accredited?"

*Q: Yeah that might give a parent pause when they're paying $6,000.*

LIBERI: Hampshire could not be accredited until the first graduating class had matriculated.. So it couldn't be accredited until 1974 when they had the first matriculation. So the first two years were dicey because you just didn't know. But at the same time I loved it. It was great. It's not a school for everybody and some people just dropped out because they couldn't handle the lack of structure. And when they say design your own education--the first two years--you have to. They have four schools, language and communication, natural sciences, social sciences, humanities and arts, so you have the panoply of what you would do as a normal freshman or sophomore; you had to take a normal distribution of classes. Because I was doing premed--and the beauty of this is if you go to one of the five colleges, you can actually attend classes at any of the others--so even though Hampshire didn't have grades, I actually did a lot of my premed classes at Smith, Holyoke, (and) University of Massachusetts. I would get the grade so that I could apply to medical school. (Then) they wouldn't look at my transcript and say, "What was this?"

I did all the other Hampshire courses as well, which was great. They were really extraordinary classes, and you literally got to design your own education. You got to design your major. You had an academic committee that was very rigorous, even though we used to get these jokes like, "Are you majoring in basket weaving?" No, as a matter of fact. We had people at school as undergraduates doing quantum mechanics working at the Lawrence Berkeley lab in California. We had people doing quite amazing stuff and research etc. so I was able to do premed, but I was also able to incorporate my next round of travel because you could do experiential learning and then write it up as part of your academic program.

So that's when I got to go to Egypt to work at the American University in Cairo and study the Egyptian medical system. I got to live in Holland and study the Dutch health care system and look at socialized medicine. That's when I worked at UNICEF in New York, and then that also set me up for working at WHO in Geneva as I was graduating. I graduated a little bit earlier in three and a half years, so I was able to do an internship at WHO which, as an undergraduate, was not a normal thing you were able to do.

Being at Hampshire really formed my life at that point. One of the hardest things to do is to compete against yourself. Because you set the bar and your academic committee raises

the bar, and you set another bar, and they raise it, so you keep having to perform even though you're not normal premed where everyone does the same chemistry course…and then you do the GMATs and MCATs. I did all that, but that wasn't the most important part of my education. The most important part was really designing it and figuring out what it was I wanted to do.

Then I did an undergraduate thesis on the health care system in America. Interestingly one of the poorest counties in the country at the time was in western Massachusetts, in Greenfield. So here, next to some of the wealthiest (communities), you have one of the poorest places. I was able to look at the health care system there and write a thesis. Hampshire was a very fascinating and for me, a well-rounded education. I loved it, I thought it was great. I had the honor of being selected by my class to give the address, at graduation. My mother said, "So, you're valedictorian!" I said, "It's a little hard to be valedictorian when you don't have grades, Mom!" I was elected by my class to speak and to talk about the values of education and the values of learning, because it's not just book/classroom education; it is also self -learning, and experiential learning. As the motto said, "To know is not enough." We were always taught to know "why." So when you learn facts, you just learn facts. Beyond and behind the facts is the inquiry and we were taught to inquire. Why is this like this? And can it be different? For me it was great. As I say, it's not a school for everybody. What happened as a result it led me to realize that I wanted to spend more time doing international public health as opposed to clinical medicine.

*Q: A question on Hampshire before we leave it. How did you demonstrate that you had learned? Not the hard sciences where you got the grades, but in the classes where you did not have grades, how did you convince the teachers? Was it paper writing? Was it orals? What did you have to do?*

LIBERI: It was a combination of the above. It was paper writing, it was orals, it was actually something like a doctoral dissertation and you had to go before the committee and answer some tough questions to demonstrate that you had actually learned either the coursework or the body of work through the thesis. You had to produce something significant. In my case it was writing. Other people actually did experiments. In Ken Burns' case, he produced one of his first documentaries. So (you did) whatever your genre was, some people produced ballets, some people wrote new formulas for code. Whatever it was, that's what they did. That was the whole thing about the inquiry and about learning and demonstrating that you had reached a certain level of academic excellence that qualified you to go on to graduate school, if that's what you wanted to do.

*Q: When you got stuck, or when you had questions, or you experienced some uncertainty, you did go talk it out with?*

LIBERI: We had an adviser. We had both an academic advisor--my academic advisor was great--and you had peers. There were student groups, peers that you could talk to as well. And you could always talk to your greater academic committee. You had to have an academic committee, from one of each of the schools in addition to your academic

advisor. That's what a lot of it was, you had to go and talk to people, particularly when you got stuck. If you thought you were at a certain level and they didn't think you were, they then sent you back to the drawing boards. It wasn't like you decided on Tuesday you were going to produce something flim-flam and you presented it on Wednesday and they all clapped and said, "Great!" No, no, no. Hampshire had its own reputation to maintain and academic rigor. So you were often sent back to the drawing board and told, "No, it didn't pass muster, wasn't up to snuff, here's where you fell down, and you better hop to if you expect to pass out of Division II into Division III. It was not easy, (especially) when you were told in no uncertain terms, "No, uh-huh" or you were told, "Yes, okay this part is good, you can continue." In some cases, some people were absolutely brilliant, and did some extraordinary work as undergraduates, and then they went on to do great work as graduate students and as professors.

*Q: Now I think this is actually a good place to pause. Because you're beginning now to talk about forming your professional and career goals, and you are reaching the end of college, so I think if we pause here, then we can take the next step.*

LIBERI: Absolutely! And it's almost 5 (o'clock)! I've talked your ear off!

*Q: We're resuming with Ambassador Dawn Liberi, today is January 18, 2017. You had done many things between the ages of 16 and 22 that a lot of kids that age probably wouldn't do, or probably would not feel as confident to do on their own. The question I want to ask at the end (of our discussion of) your pre professional life is, was there something in your upbringing, or something just that you recognized early on that kind of made you more mature and more ready to be on your own?*

LIBERI: Well, that's a good question. I think my parents would say that I was always that way. My dad said from the time I was very young I was very focused, knew what I wanted to do. Others would say focused to the point of being driven, and you know I was very goal oriented, so if I was going to travel, I wanted to travel. If I was going to pursue sports or academia or whatever, it was very, very focused. And so I don't know I guess it was something innate and sometimes it's hard to describe.

*Q: Yes, I completely understand. You're right, there are some people who from very early age really seem to just be able to, are quite resilient and you know take many things in stride, and go right on to what it is the next thing that they want to do. Speaking of which, we just completed college, and I believe you're now looking at graduate school or graduate activity.*

LIBERI: Right. So as I indicated earlier, I had gone to Hampshire college and with Hampshire, since you can design your education, you're also not part of the specific class, so I was able to graduate early, six months early, so I did it in three and a half years. And I had applied to graduate school with a year delay, so I essentially had a year and a half in between college and graduate school.

*Q: What they call now a gap year.*

LIBERI: A gap year, exactly. So I used that time to again go abroad and do a number of things. One of the first things I wanted to do involved equestrianship. So I did the program at the British Horse Society. It's a fairly big thing in England where you apply and attend a 4-5 month program as part of the British Horse Society where you get to be an AI, an assistant instructor. It's fairly rigorous program. You have to go through basic equestrian ship, jumping, dressage, stable management, training, and you have to give instruction to students. You're graded very carefully because there's a whole profession in England which doesn't really exist here, of being professional grooms, professional trainers, etc. There are many professional stables that cater to this in Britain. So I went to a school in northern England, in the Lake District area, in Yorkshire. It was very fascinating because it was a real sense of upstairs, downstairs, because the people who owned the school lived basically a fairly baronial life. They were sort of landed gentry, and were fairly wealthy. They were farmers with extensive land, who also had an equestrian school. They had a very big house, and had 4 sons and 1 daughter who was the youngest. The mother was the primary trainer, a very accomplished equestrienne, who had trained her children, who were excellent riders. One of her sons was the European grand champion. They had spectacular horses, and they were one of the stables that catered to the royal family. So when members of the royal family would come up to Yorkshire they would stable at the school and sometimes stay at the house. So I got to meet a number of the royal family as a result of that.

It was very interesting because students came from all over England as well as Europe. I was the only American, and they didn't quite know what to do with me because I wasn't quite part of the British, system. It was very interesting, because Britain is fairly structured in terms of class and hierarchy and many of the people that were there were from working class families, and the family who owned the school was fairly wealthy however, they weren't royalty, that's what they wanted to be. They had considerable property assets, and so there was a real stratosphere there. I felt often like it was upstairs, downstairs. But a funny story is that during one of the training sessions I got a call from Mrs. Stryker (the owner) who said so and so is sick today can you take her lesson? So I said sure, okay. It was a private lesson given to a young girl, she was about 7 or 8. A good rider but very shy, and really needed a lot of attention to be brought out of her shell a bit. We worked closely together, got along well. Her mom was sort of sitting in the bleachers, and keeping a very careful eye. But we hit it off. So then afterwards I was asked if I could just take that lesson permanently. And I did. I had no idea who these people were. One day I get a call saying that after Louise's lesson tomorrow, her mom would like to invite you to tea. Of course I said okay, thank you. Previously when we had been riding out in the countryside doing the hunt and all that, every place we looked in northern England was basically owned by Lord Barnard. The little girl that I was teaching was named Louise Vane, so I kept calling her mom Mrs. Vane. As we were driving off to their place to go get tea, looming in the distance was Raby castle! We literally drove up to it, drove over the moat – imagine, this was a castle that had a moat, and they put it down so we could drive over it. All along the way people were sort of doing little curtsies and little bows and I of course was saying, oh it's so interesting to have castles and royalty, and I'd say, "In the United States we don't have that" and so on. Finally this very

unpretentious woman turns to me and said "Dawn, I know you've been calling me Mrs. Vane And that's Louise's family name, but really, and she was almost apologetic, but my real name is Lady Barnard and we're going to have tea with my husband Lord Barnard, and go on a tour of the castle." They didn't live in the castle because it was a mere 400 rooms, and it was too expensive to live in. They lived at someplace called Selaby house.

What was very interesting is that the other Brits were sort of trying to play a joke on me because they knew I had no idea who this person was, and they were just waiting for me to put my foot in my mouth, about whatever, but it turned out that the joke was eventually on them because I got invited to tea with Lord Barnard and got to spend time with them as a family. It gave me a glimpse into a part of British society that I think I could not have seen otherwise. So I stayed in England for a few months to finish my equestrian certificate.

I also did a longer internship at World Health Organization. I lived in Geneva because I was still very much interested in public health, international public health. I thought at the time that I had wanted to go to graduate school and then come work for WHO and it turned out after my experience in Geneva I didn't want to do that, at least not in Geneva, mostly because Geneva was a place that was very structured and where many professionals went essentially to retire. It was very clubby. I think if you worked overseas at other places for WHO it might have been more interesting. For me it was great because I was young and I was just experiencing things. I was basically an intern, and so it was a great experience. I worked in the Public Affairs Division, primarily on World Health magazine. I did some more travel in Europe and then I went to graduate school. After going to Hampshire the only grad school I thought that was appropriate was Berkeley, so I went to the University of California Berkeley, which had an excellent school of public health. It was a very small program, hard to get into. So I went there, and focused on international public health.

*Q: Now the gap year was what year?*

LIBERI: 1976-77

*Q: and Berkeley begins 1977…*

LIBERI: The school years of 1977 to 1979. To complete a Master's degree in Public Health at Berkeley you had certain class requirements, had to write a thesis, and do minimum six month long internship. So through that program I got to come to Washington and my internship was with the office of International Health at Health and Human Services and the internship was funded by USAID. So I was able to work on a number of very interesting programs. I got to go overseas, did my master's thesis on Burma and the health care system there. I spent a took a lot of time looking at eradication of schistosomiasis, lived in Zanzibar, and as a result of that, became acquainted with the International Development Intern program, the IDI. The IDI program has now been replaced by a number of other programs. So I applied to USAID, and was accepted. So as soon as I graduated from Berkeley I went right into the IDI program.

Q: And you were aware of it just from the fact that you had been in that gap year in international development, international health and so on.

LIBERI: Exactly. So I joined USAID in May of 1980 as an IDI (International Development Intern), which is similar to the A-100 class. You go through cohort training, project development, leadership, language training, etc. We had a small group; there were maybe 24-26 of us. So for the first year you do training, and then you go on your first assignment overseas.

*Q: Now I knew that within USAID there are certain streams or specialties. Which one were you thinking about or which one did they offer you? How did that work?*

LIBERI: Because of my background and my degree, I went in as what they called the Backstop 50 which was a health development officer. USAID had many overseas health programs at that point. So you went in with the concept that you would manage these programs at USAID missions overseas, and that's exactly what happened. And my first post was Senegal.

*Q: And that was…*

LIBERI: Great - we had at that time a number of primary health care programs, family planning programs, nutrition, and so I started as a deputy health officer.

*Q: This is now at the mission in Dakar?*

LIBERI: Yes, at the mission in Dakar My career started there in 1981. That's where I cut my teeth on what it means to develop programs, to oversee them, to be living and working in a different language, a different culture. Even though I had lived in a number of places overseas, it's different when you're really focused on your job and you really have to work in another language. And then do all the technical things as well. But it was great, I loved it. I had programs that I was overseeing in the middle of Senegal, in the Sine Saloum region as well as in the south in the region of the Casamance. From a tribal perspective the two regions are ethnically different. Wolof is the largest tribal group in and around Dakar. In the south around Casamance the Jola are the largest tribe and they're much more associated with Guinea and other countries south because it's below the Gambia. Even religiously the tribes are different- most Wolof and Serer are Muslim, and the Jola are primarily Christian. So it's very interesting to see the juxtaposition of the two.

And then to work on a lot of very important health issues.

*Q: What were the specific ones you worked on?*

LIBERI: Well we did a lot family planning, a lot of nutrition particularly looking at how to help with feeding practices, and worked a lot with our agriculture program as a result of that. A key focus was on basic primary health care, maternal and child health, etc.

*Q: How would you grade the IDI program in terms of adequate preparation for your first tour?*

LIBERI: I thought it was great, I really do. I think that what they tried to do is walk us through project development, project management, monitoring and evaluation, etc. Which in that sense is the sort of AID craft, coupled with your technical background, and the IDI training really formed a very strong foundation. I think like everything else however, there's also on the job training. So there's all the background training, but then the rubber meets the road and you have to deal with the realities of the political situation, the lack of resources, etc. etc.

*Q: What were the big challenges you had to overcome to accomplish your mission goals?*

LIBERI: I think a number of things. We were very lucky that in terms of technical capacity, we had excellent Senegalese counterparts. So that was terrific. They were very motivated, very focused on the program, and they really helped enable the process of getting things done. Like many things, there are cultural attitudes that can be impediments, so family planning wasn't particularly well accepted, especially by a lot of the Imams, and the Muslim hierarchy. So we had to work with a lot of religious leaders to overcome the stigma and frankly antipathy toward family planning. Then we had to overcome a lot of the political elements because there was a fair amount of focus on the tribal dimension, and ethnic distribution. We had to be careful not to be seen as though we were trying to "limit population" in one tribe vs another which is not at all what we were trying to do. In fact the focus was on maternal and child health and trying to have people understand that birth spacing would really enhance the health of mother and child and that the infant mortality rate would decrease dramatically as a result. So these are challenges that you have to face and politically that gets compounded along the way from the village level, to the provincial region, all the way to the capital. And of course just dealing with the lack of infrastructure, for example getting the drugs out to where they needed to be, getting the cold chain for immunizations, etc. So a big challenge is helping government put that infrastructure in place. These are not just technical or mechanical issues, they're also political issues as well.

*Q: Now there are politics with the local government, there's also sometimes politics within the mission or the mission's relation to the embassy. Was that at all salient while you were there?*

LIBERI: Yes, I mean what was interesting at that point is that we were just starting to get very heavy congressional earmarks. Prior to earmarks once we had an approved budget, we had a bit more discretion to determine what went into agriculture, health, education, etc. So in that sense there was a bit more elbowing between the sectors, and making the

case to the mission director about what was the most important project,, etc. We had guidelines in terms of sector allocation, but not the hard earmarks yet.

We also had something called the Development Fund for Africa, (DFA) which no longer exists. It was just starting at that point and I think it was a great piece of legislation. The focus of DFA was to enable policy reform and to use the budget as a lever to engage in conversation with the political hierarchy of the country about policy reform. For example to say: you need new policies, laws, etc. to enable family planning and help women gain access to contraceptives, by having nurses be able to distribute contraceptives, as opposed to just doctors because there were very few doctors. So if you work with us to help change that legislation, then we can help you and give you money for the budget to help train the nurses. So there was a real emphasis on policy reform. At my next post we actually did the first real big health policy reform program utilizing DFA. The legislation was just getting started and being developed while I was in Senegal.

Those were some of the salient issues. I would say at that point I think we had fairly reasonable relationships with the Embassy. We were almost two entities. The USAID mission was in a separate building and the mission director frankly was king of the USAID mission. Obviously he dealt closely with the ambassador, but that was way before the F bureau process, so we really did have a separate budget. We went up to the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) and the Hill and defended our budget separately. So really, there was much more autonomy.

*Q: And here you are as a first tour officer. Typically your first tour is two years?*

LIBERI: Yes it was two years, and here's where something interesting happened. Initially, on paper, I was approved for home leave/return to post for another two years, and I was very happy because I loved Dakar and I loved living in Senegal. It was a great life. Very hard to beat being on the ocean and having great Senegalese food and the Senegalese were really fun to be with. So for a young 1st tour officer it was wonderful. There were a number of other young people, not just at the mission, but in the NGOs, so we had a good group. So I thought I was going to be in Senegal for another two years, and then as is typical, I got a call from Washington saying, "Nope" they had changed my assignment because someone had to get medevac'd out of Niger and they needed to fill that post immediately. Since I spoke French, Washington said you're going there." I thought "No!" I was really devastated because I wanted to stay in Senegal. Plus I was learning from my supervisor who had a lot of experience, and I felt I still had things to learn. So I went to see my boss and the mission director, and I said, "I have a cable saying I'm staying another two years in Senegal, so they can find someone else for Niger." Plus Niger was a difficult country! I just thought "oh no, this is terrible " So we tried to fight it for a little bit but eventually the mission director called me into his office and said, "Look, they've convinced me and I think they're right that this is actually much better for your career because it's a step up in terms of running the office and it's a larger program – so you're going to Niger." That was my first experience understanding what it meant when you sign the "worldwide availability" clause. You'll just be sent somewhere according to the needs of the service, and you don't really internalize that until something

like this happens. Then you're indignant, saying "No, they can't just do that to me, I have a cable saying something else, so how can they change that?" Then you realize, well, they can change it! And they DO change it. So that was my first experience with the big Foreign Service machinery: that you don't get to decide; they actually get to decide. So then you have an existential conversation with yourself about well, do you want to stay in the Foreign Service or don't you? I actually did consider leaving at that point because I was just concerned about the way the decision had happened. There was no dialog with me. It was just an order that came down and I felt like I was a peg being told you now have to fit into this hole because we have an unexpected vacancy, and your life can just turn on a dime. So I had a bit of chafing about that. However, I did go to Niger, and I have to say in all honesty the first 6 months, I was just not sure it was going to work out. Because it was really 180 degrees from Senegal. Dakar is beautiful, fairly sophisticated, on the ocean and is considered the Paris of sub Saharan Africa. The people, music and culture are just wonderful. Contrasted with Niger in 1983, not to be disparaging, but it's landlocked, it's desert, and the biggest population in Niamey at that point were the camels. It's *also a* very, very closed society - much more, as we say in French, *enclavé*, just to themselves. Xenophobic. Seyni Kountché was president at that point, one of the big dictators of the time, vocally xenophobic against foreigners. So you didn't feel welcome, the same way you did in Senegal. Léopold Senghor [of Senegal] was the first African president to be admitted to *l'Académie française*.

*Q: He wrote poetry?*

LIBERI: He wrote poetry! Senegal had the first peaceful transition [of power] in sub Saharan Africa. Senghor stepped down, Abdou Diouf stepped in. So it was very different from other African countries, and from a democracy governance standpoint, they were doing the right thing. They had issues, but nonetheless doing the right thing.

Totally the opposite of Niger! Seyni Kountché, iron hand, dictator, no speech [freedom of], no human rights, certainly didn't write poetry, had more of a Communist background, with links to the Soviet Union, so it was a much different experience. However, what tends to happen in places like this, is that either you love it or you leave it. After six months people who really can't hack it any more just go. So what tends to happen is that the people who stay are very interesting. I wound up staying for four years and loving it after the first six months. You know it takes six months to adjust just about anywhere. So you just have to give it that much time. Then you find your group. I think frankly, though, what saved me was the fact that I spoke French, so I went out, and I had many Belgian, Swiss, French friends, lots of folks outside of just the pure U.S. community. That really helped a lot with integration into the greater society, a great international community, and then over time, into the Nigerian society, which frankly was a harder nut to crack because of the strong Muslim closed society. Women didn't mix with men and as a professional woman you're sort of treated as an "other". Even though you're a woman, you're the American woman who runs the program and so you're accepted at that level. However it's more because of a professional thing; and as a single woman it was still very hard to get invited to homes. Often what would happen is when we went to restaurants where, if I invited my counterparts, invariably they would

not come with their wives, so it was a very interesting kind of interaction. That said, Niger is very fascinating culturally. I was able to take trips up into the north to Agadez and Zinder, which was very exotic. I was able to stay with and live a bit among the Tuareg, and the Wodaabe, and got to see things that you would never see as a tourist. Fortunately I did that then because these areas are all closed off now because of security problems in Niger, Mali, etc.

So over time it got to be fascinating. The two things professionally that were good is that Niger had the largest USAID-funded national primary health care program, certainly in West Africa, possibly in sub Saharan Africa. So I got to manage a large program with a lot of funding.

*Q: So what was roughly the population at that time?*

LIBERI: About six million, in a very large land mass. The density was low but the fertility rate was high and of course there were the pockets where the population was concentrated - primarily along the river. Much of the population was scattered about in groups, since they were nomads, who would just follow the nomadic trading routes.

Niger was very good professionally because it was a national program which meant I got to travel a lot to oversee the program. We were training 10,000 village health workers, which was huge. It very quickly enabled me to get a management perspective, and deal with issues of accountability since was the program was so big. The second thing was as I mentioned previously, the Development Fund for Africa (DFA) did become legislation and Niger became one of the first, I think the first, fully negotiated program within that legislation. Over the four year period the aim was to segway from a project training village health care workers, into a program with emphasis on policy reform, to enable the government to implement these reforms, with technical assistance. The program had funding tranches. If the government did x, y, z, policy reform and passed legislation, they would receive funding to offset the costs, which was the incentive for them.

*Q: What was the ultimate expectation from the village health care workers? What did AID expect that they would be able to do once fully trained?*

LIBERI: We had a number of goals: x amount reduction of maternal and infant mortality, x amount increase in immunization coverage, x amount increase in nutrition coverage, and therefore, a concomitant reduction in malnutrition rates. Niger had some of the highest malnutrition and Vitamin A deficiency in the world, and a high number of communicable diseases. Every year, there were meningitis, malaria, and typhoid, etc. outbreaks. Then let's not forget the overlay of all of this was one of the major droughts that was occurring in the Sahel at that time. So we coupled with our Title II food distribution program and this was a very big deal to prevent people from starving.

*Q: And you were the mission chief, or the program chief?*

LIBERI: I was the health development officer in charge of the entire health office.

*Q: As part of the work you had to do, did you need to integrate traditional medicine or traditional medical care people with the training? Was there a problem, or was there was that a big issue for you as you began the program?*

LIBERI: You had to take traditional medicine into consideration because irrespective of the conversion to Islam, there's a tremendous amount of animism that still existed, and even in Senegal that was the case, where you had to deal with griots (storytellers) Children immediately got grigris (amulets) to ward off the evil spirits in Senegal and Niger. What you had to do more than anything was work through traditional practices that turned out to be harmful. Giving children carbon for diarrhea, or charcoal will not harm them, however there are lots of different practices that in fact were harmful, or not beneficial, let's put it that way. So working through that is important.
Then there was the real stigma of family planning and access to contraception. In fact, one of my big political experiences was we, USAID, funded something called the RAPID (Resources for the Awareness of Population Impacts on Development) modeling tool, which was ahead of its time in terms of taking a country's demographic profile and projecting scenarios.. For example, "if fertility continues at the current level, your population will double in X number of years, and this is what you'll need in terms of education, teachers, schools, health care, jobs, etc." It would show a graph of the current fertility rates, and how population would double in the next 20-25 years. It was an algorithm formula. Then different ways of intervening were demonstrated. For example if you brought fertility rates down to 4 children per woman instead of 6, and what difference over time that would make. The implication was, do you have enough money in your budget to be able to support population growth at the current rate? And the answer was invariably "No."

So it was a tool that we used for policy makers. We brought a team to do the analysis and make the presentation. The presentation, was shown to many policy makers, including the Minister of Health . At a certain point there we heard sirens wailing, and I thought oh no, they're going to come and close this down for religious reasons - this is going to be a disaster, because you don't quite know in societies like that what will happen. We had prepared people, I'd worked very closely with the Minister of Health who was very open to this analysis because he'd studied outside Niger and had s foreign wife who was also a physician. He was supportive, however there were many elements working against this. Well, much to my surprise, who comes walking in the door but the president of the country – Seyni Kountche'! At that point you know it's going one of two ways. Either you're getting on the plane and PNG'd (persona non grata) out of the country, and/or your programs may be shut down. I'm thinking "how am I going to explain this to the Ambassador and the Mission Director? "I had warned them of that 'there may be some political backlash'. There was silence in the room and everyone was sort of terrified. Everyone stands up thinking "Oh my god it's the president, what are we going to do?" I was sort of shaking a bit since I was actually speaking at that point, so I said "Bonjour, Monsieur Le President", thank you for coming, etc. and I'm saying to myself "what do I do now/" He said to me "Continue, continue", so I said "Okay", and I continued! It was very interesting because despite all of his xenophobia, and despite all of his fairly closed

way of thinking, he actually did understand that they did not have the resources to continue the current level of population growth, and the direction they were going. As he was leaving, he said, "Okay, I'm convinced. Right now I want this legislation to go forward legalizing contraception", and boom, boom, boom! Basically what he said was, we have a problem that we have to address. It's not just because the westerners are here showing us, we've all gone out to the villages, we've seen the suffering, we've seen the malnutrition. We've seen the problems people are facing and we have to do something. He focused more on the birth spacing aspect, and we put a heavy emphasis on breast feeding, and all the traditional practices that actually were beneficial. He said, "okay, continue on", and there was a collective sigh of relief when he left! I quickly wrote up a cable to Washington because the president had never shown up for anything except to close things down, and we thought it might be touch and go but in fact it turned out to be a successful moment!

*Q: In addition to the president did you also have to work with local religious leaders, or once the president was on board, the local religious leaders sort of got in line as well?*

LIBERI: It varied. It's interesting because there's the president and then there are the traditional leaders like the Sultan of Zinder, who's been there for a very long time in terms of his role as a traditional leader. The Sultan of Zinder basically had his own kingdom as part of the country for many, many years, for generations, so he's very powerful. You had to get those folks on board and I spent a lot of time traveling to meet with them because they can stop something on a dime if they don't want it to happen. If you roll into their area and they don't want something to happen, it doesn't matter what the president says, it's just not happening. So you have to spend a lot of time with them and that was another great lesson. You need to be very deferential and respectful, and travel to visit them. It's a lesson I learned about sub Saharan Africa, - you cannot sit in the capital and just wait for people to show up. No, no, no, no, no. You must go out to see them. You would think it's a fairly normal intuitive thing, but a lot of people don't do it. They're afraid to venture out, but to me it was a very big lesson that you have to go and spend time and it takes more than one visit. It's all relational so you have to build up that relationship. And I tell you it comes in handy.

In Niger there was a gas shortage, and I'd just been off on one of our big trips up country to monitor programs. As we were coming back toward Niamey we ran out of gas. You couldn't just pull up to a pump and get gas because there wasn't any. So we pulled into this little town, and I said, "Can I speak with the village chief?" When he came I said, "very sorry, we're here, we had taken some jerry cans with extra gas, but Niger is a huge country and now we're out of gas and need to get back to the capital. "I'm so and so with USAID and I said we support the health care program, and he said, "No problem". You people have helped us a lot! I know about your program and they do good work." He said to another villager "Go, get a jerry can of gas and bring it back." And I said "okay thank you very much. Please you must take money for the gas" No no, no money, so we left rice and sugar and tea to pay for it. Since he wouldn't take cash, I said well let me just at least give a donation but he wouldn't take it! Other people had gotten stuck there and you could see lots of cars by the road, because there wasn't any gas. So you know spending

the time building relationships is important when a village chief says “Yes,, I know about the health program and it’s good, and Yes, you get gas. Thank you!”

*Q: That’s lovely, yeah.*

LIBERI: So it pays off

*Q: So four years in Niger, and as part of the way you implemented the program, was there a big role for FSNs or what we now call locally employed staff?*

LIBERI: Oh absolutely. And in fact, they were the backbone, both in Senegal and in Niger, and actually frankly, all around the world, at all the missions I have been in, because they’re the continuity. They have all the local contacts. And let’s face it, the people who tend to work in USAID missions or for embassies, are from the upper strata, they are the educated folks which means they have connections. They are among the top families in the country so you often have to rely on your FSNs to make the contacts, to call people, to explain that a particular program is good, that we’re trying to be in partnership etc. So there’s a huge role for FSNs. Working with local counterparts is also important. One of my main counterparts in Niger could be very difficult, and was a very demanding person. While we were doing the negotiations for a health program under the Development Fund for Africa,(DFA), we had to negotiate the benchmarks. The Nigerien are very difficult to negotiate with. In other countries they’ll often negotiate just to get money for a program, but often don’t actually do what they agreed to. Then there’s a much longer conversation and you often have to stop funding until they complete certain actions. It’s different in Niger. It’s very difficult to negotiate up front, but once you agree to the benchmarks, they implement them. I remember one particular day during Ramadan we were conducting negotiations. Of course, they’re all used to not eating or drinking. Niger is 120 degrees in the shade, it is hot! I remember we had this 13 or 14 hour negotiation with nothing to eat or drink. really thought I was going to pass out because you are in a room with no air conditioning it’s just really as we say hotter than hades, and you’re sweating, and there’s no water, no food, and on top of that you have to keep your wits because you’re actually negotiating.

That was a big test- how long can the foreigners last? This was a real point of pride for myself, and I said to my team, look none of you have to stay as long, but I tell you I am not leaving, because , we really just have to show that we can do this! However, for health reasons, or family reasons if you need to get up and leave, you just let me know, and you can go. I didn’t want anyone else to be in danger. However I was just determined to stick it out. And pretty much everyone else did. A couple of people had to leave.

At one point in the negotiations, a very interesting thing happened. The senior person on the government side looked at me and said, “You know you westerners, you Americans, you think because we have nothing that we’ll accept anything. But you don’t understand. It’s exactly because we have nothing that we don’t have to accept anything”! So I thought to myself “We’re going to be here for a long time!”

It was a very good lesson. Because you think we're not asking the government to do anything contrary and in fact these were all things that the government said it wanted to do. So you think that the negotiation is going to go smoothly and it doesn't. It's another very important lesson. And I've always remembered that. You think you have the upper hand? Guess what? You do not. It's important I think particularly as Americans for us to understand that. We always think we have the upper hand, but in fact we don't. It was real lesson in humility, which was good. Negotiations went easier after that, once you get through that initiation process.

In the end, the program was successful. I think there was a good balanced negotiation in terms of the policy reforms and the level of funding. Unfortunately the whole DFA legislation program got caught up in the congressional concern of what they called fungibility. Because once the money went into the treasury it's hard to track and you couldn't determine whether it was going into defense, or for health. Part of the negotiation included increasing the amount of health care budget by X percent. As long as the increase was met, we would release a tranche of funding. However, we weren't tracking the dollars the same way we would track a program budget. For example if you're giving a government 100,000 doses of measles vaccine, you can track the measles vaccine. Budget support is a much different concept. So over time, Congress just couldn't support program, which was unfortunate.

*Q: This is the Africa Development Fund?*

LIBERI: Development Fund for Africa.

*Q: Yeah, I totally understand. They might very well take the money into the treasury and do all the magic you do with fake bookkeeping and who knows where they money could end up.*

LIBERI: Well, particularly because it was foreign exchange; that was the big deal and from a policy standpoint I understood it. However think that the incentives were in the right place, it's just that the mechanism was difficult. The incentive was to get the government to do the kind of reforms that they needed to do and to give them budgetary assistance to enable them to implement the reforms. For example they could use the money to buy vaccines instead of us giving them vaccines. They would do the purchasing with the budget support funding we provided.

*Q: And that alone is good because it then educates them about how they would need to do that kind of thing in the future.*

LIBERI: It's budget support and I was always a big supporter of it, but I understood the concerns.

*Q: So, over the four years how would you what sort of grade would you give the program, given the difficulties and the resistance that you sometimes ran into?*

LIBERI: Another interesting lesson. I think in terms of measuring the inputs and the outputs the program was good. Maybe we get an A, an A- It means we were able to track the money, to track the output, for example did you train 10,000 village health care workers. Yes we did. The issue is, how do you measure outcome? For example, as a result of the training did the health care status change? That was very mixed. It wasn't mixed because of the program, it was mixed because of the rest of what was happening. It's very difficult to have better health outcomes when people were starving. Very difficult to have better health care outcomes when there's a meningitis outbreak that's going across West Africa. You know, you can't control for those things, and so you know it's a false measurement because you can't control for all those variables. So your input may be 10-20 percent of the issue but the other 80 percent is beyond your control. So that is where it became difficult. It wasn't Ceteris paribus where everything was equal and you were just measuring your input. It's another big lesson in how we have to modulate our expectations.

*Q: And in some part, recognize that in order for your program to work, other related programs also have to fall in place, so feeding programs if there is a drought, and the crop that they usually rely on is no longer reliable, or if their herds can't find feed and they're no longer able to eat as well as they did in the past. And so on.*

LIBERI: Exactly, and that's where you get the whole interplay between the agriculture program, the Title II program, the pestilence program, there's things like post-harvest loss, etc. because all those things impact, the crops and also the nutritional value of the crops that they're using, which were often not [nutritionally beneficial]. For example, cassava. Cassava fills bellies but it doesn't provide nutrition. So if you're living only on cassava, you're going to have vitamin deficiency. That's all there is to it. But people have to eat, and that's what they do. So you try to mix that with the sorghum. In Senegal it's easier because they have peanuts and peanuts are a good source of protein. So you have to rely on what's there, but still it's hard. Also when we bring in our Title II program – foods - that's also what's very important. In lots of places we brought in oil, but in other countries we brought in sorghum. Well, they like white sorghum, they don't eat red sorghum. Red sorghum goes to the cows, and then you wonder why all the sorghum you bring into a country isn't being eaten, by people. It's because they don't eat it! So you also have to understand the culture. Unfortunately you don't have a choice because the Title 2 program is meant to take care of excess crops from US farmers and send it overseas. That match between that and the local culture doesn't always go swimmingly well!

*Q: Now so you're now approaching the end of the tour in Niger and really it sounds like you've picked up quite a bit of additional understanding about how to run whole programs and what the potential obstacles or drawbacks will be. How does USAID then take all these skills that you've developed and, background knowledge, into account for your next tour? Or does it?*

LIBERI: Well it does. Of course you're also doing your career advancement. What happened at that point because I had been overseas for six years straight and had been in

two hardship posts, they wanted me to come back to Washington. Part of it is to enable you to refresh your skills. I would have stayed overseas but a good position opened up in Washington and they said okay come back and fill that because of the management experience that I had gotten at that point. So I came back to head up the Family Planning Services Division, in the Office of Population because by that time I had worked on a lot of population programs in difficult environments. It was both a promotion into a managerially larger experience, and also to come back to HQ because they want you to do that.

*Q: Was there any formalized way of kind of debriefing you on all the ground truth you had accumulated in West Africa over this time, or did they just assume as you move around in USAID, Washington, the information and the knowledge you gained will simply be disseminated as you work with people there?*

LIBERI: It's a little bit of both. I mean you come back and you're actually asked to speak to the incoming IDI programs going on at that point though, frankly, it wasn't as formalized as maybe it could or should have been. A lot of it is the kind of interaction you have, but the rest of it is really how you apply it to the next position that you're in.

*Q: So now the Washington tour in population, was it regarding only one element of population or was it the full gamut of USAID population programs?*

LIBERI: Yes, it was the full gamut of USAID population programs. This was the division within the office of population that essentially managed the worldwide programs that we had in place like contraceptive social marketing, and other Family Planning services. There was also policy reform, like the RAPID analysis that I had mentioned earlier. It was a very large program, a very large budget, and a whole lot of very interesting policy issues. This was 1987-91, 92. During this time we had a lot of very big issues with the Hill, and senator Jesse Helms. The Helms Amendment got put into place which involved the first defunding for U.S. population activities, like International Planned Parenthood (IPPF), focused on the issue of abortion. The US did not fund abortions but Helms wanted to defund organizations which the U.S. was funding overseas, who also provided abortions as part of their family planning services. Unfortunately, that led to a lot of women not getting access to contraception because of their fear of lot of things. At the same time we funded a number of great research, a lot of good programs, and some of the big breakthroughs that were going on at that point in terms of contraceptive implants . People don't realize how much USAID has sponsored in terms of research for interventions in many sectors, including the green revolution people don't understand the role we had in that. But there are 2 or 3 things that USAID is really known for. In agriculture it was helping to fund the green revolution and varieties of seeds, etc. In training it was participant training we trained the largest cohort of senior foreign officials in technical areas, around the world, and in fact, when I first got to Africa, practically every minster I met had actually gone to a U.S. college or grad school and had a degree from the United States and it was a huge cohort of people. I think it was one of our best foreign policy initiatives. Because we had a whole lot of people who knew the United

States, who liked the United States, had studied in the United States and had ties with the U.S., if you will. Which is really not the case now.

And the third area and one of the most important, was Family Planning. That's when USAID established and did all the research for the demographic and health survey (DHS) which has become the gold standard by which fertility, population, etc. is measured throughout the world: it's been done in over 200 countries and in a timed series. It's been done in 5 year intervals so it is a way of measuring apples to apples, that countries can tell how they've been doing in terms of fertility, health status, etc. because the methodology remains the same so you can really measure progress over time. Or in some cases, stagnation. That's where we had the big gains, as I said, in long term contraceptive methods. Implants, depo Provera, sterilization, vasectomies, and the all the research that went behind their development; plus there was , a lot of the policy engagement, religious issues, etc. It was really a very important time, and I think a very significant time to be implementing these programs. Although it's hard to measure negatives in terms of impact, a lot of the DHS data indicate that USAID programs helped prevent millions of unwanted pregnancies which reduced infant and maternal mortality.

USAID was the single largest funder of health programs in general, in the world, and was the largest single donor, and also had the most number of trained technical people. We had a cadre of some of the world's experts in malaria, schistosomiases, in vitamin A, etc. This is when there were a lot of these discoveries, like the impact of Vitamin A on malnutrition. That's when we were starting to develop a vaccine against malaria. All the research that was done on HIV/AIDS at that point - much of it came out of USAID HIV/AIDS programs. Particularly research on testing, counseling, treatment, etc. so it was really very rich environment for research and evaluation. People don't really understand the kind of contributions that were made. The data indicate were it not for USAID programs, there would be now over 500 million more people in the world. Without these interventions, the health status would be much lower in many countries, and you can look at the examples of Korea, Thailand, India, and Colombia, many of the USAID programs that have "graduated "in terms of development. So I would say that USAID's input was really amazing.

So all that was the great side. I think the challenging and the difficult side was dealing with the Hill and keeping many of these programs going when there was some very hostile resistance. There was strong bipartisan support for a number of things, but there was a core of hostility on the part of certain people, particularly those on the religious right, who were just philosophically against what we were doing and didn't want to see U.S. government funding going toward programs like family planning. So there were a lot of battles that we had to fight, and I was up on the Hill a lot.

*Q: Briefing staff or also briefing members?*

LIBERI: Both.

*Q: Wow! That's remarkable.*

LIBERI: That was when the whole Mexico City policy continued to be hotly debated on the Hill and President Clinton revoked it in 1993. (The Mexico City Policy was enacted by President Reagan in 1984 and required non-governmental organizations receiving federal funding to agree that they "would neither perform or actively promote abortion as a method of family planning in other nations" – causing many organizations to forego funding, thereby reducing family planning and maternal health services in a number of countries).

*Q: You mentioned that the methodologies were comparable. Were they also taken by others to do perhaps more detailed systematic studies? I don't want to get too wonky, but obviously you can look at population control issues on the basis of just a few factors, fertility, and longevity, and infant mortality and so on. And then you can add in quite a number of more factors like climate, or you begin, in other words you begin modeling with many more variables and I just wondered if the USAID basic figures ended up also being used by all these other modelers who began looking at population in much more detailed ways.*

LIBERI: Yes In fact, a lot of research that started coming out about the impact of other sectors. We raised the issue of water, and levels of water scarcity, and the impact, not just that population growth would have on that, but also on security. It was one of the initial times when we had a whole program on population and the environment. It was a predecessor to a lot of the issues that are raised now about climate issues, and the environment in general. Urbanization, density, migration, conflict, - population and migration as a source of conflict. We studied all those issues and their impact on development. Some seminal research was done as a result of that. We worked closely, and funded programs with organizations like the National Academy of Sciences, which was very rigorous, as well as a lot of academic institutions, providing grants. People don't realize just how much we funded in terms of pure science, research, and their demographic implications.

*Q: And you're in the cockpit for all these things.*

LIBERI: Yes for many of them because we had a number of different offices. As part of the senior team you get to focus on a number of issues and to direct and identify key priorities. So when I came in, I said, we have to be able to look at our programs and determine if we can have a predictor of which interventions work best at different stages of the demographic transition.

While the Demographic and Health Survey measures progress of the previous five years, we needed to look forward as well and determine from a programmatic standpoint, what the levels, and various program stages that a country needed to go through in order to meet zero population growth (Total Fertility Rate (TFR) of two children per couple which is population replacement) – what is the best sequence of interventions that can help ?

The Family Planning Services Division which I was heading up, worked with analysts to help with some of the background modeling, however we actually wrote a paper on this called "Family Planning in the 21st Century "– looking out 10, 20, 30 years to model demographic transition and determine the stages of program development that countries needed to go through to achieve that transition. It was actually a seminal piece of research that was developed. It was done against a lot of skepticism, however that's what you do - you fight for it. And that's one of the things I really liked about USAID. If you had an idea and you championed it, in spite of skepticism and all the rest of it, you could push it through and that's what our division did. It was then recognized as a seminal piece of research information, and used a lot. USAID is now revising it; I just found out this past week, and want to do an update, 27 years later and assess progress.

*Q: You see I also see this as for you as a similar moment in your career because you are now pulling in many of your disciplines and learning how the disciplines interact themselves, just at the contextual level, but also how elements from those disciplines have to be applied in successful programming. And I imagine that something that you were also able to take with you as you move into management.*

LIBERI: Yes, that's actually true because even though this was a focus on a particular technical area, the managerial, personnel and the political issues were basically a stepping stone to more senior management and was a real lesson in how to pull those things together. When I finished the four years as head of the Family Planning Services Division, I was nominated to go to the war college, to ICAF, the Industrial College of the Armed Forces.

*Q: and this was …*

LIBERI: This was 1991-92, which was great because it was at a point after I had managed large technical programs, then went to what is essentially the senior service training for diplomats and military officers and that launches you into senior management. So I showed up for ICAF and two things happened on the first day.

I'm handed a piece of paper for orientation and there's this asterisk next to my name. So I think " Oh god, I'm already in trouble and I just got here, ut-oh." The person at the desk said, "you go over there". Okay. So I go over there and I'm told "okay, you're going to be the leader of your seminar." And I said, "Well actually, I didn't volunteer for that" to which I'm told "No you don't volunteer for anything here, we tell you what you're doing and it all goes by rank " At that point I was an FS-01 which was an 06 equivalent in the military to a Colonel and they said " You're the highest ranking person in the seminar so guess what, you get to lead it" Well that caused a big stir because I was civilian and a woman (only 20 percent of the class were civilian, and 10 percent female including military officers) so this initially wasn't sitting quite well with some of my male military counterparts - "How did she get to outrank us?" I didn't ask to be seminar leader, though clearly I was going to have to deal with it. _____

Then the second thing happened on that day. There was a class of 220 total students, and the first task was to stand up and introduce ourselves in the auditorium. So by the time it got to me, people had sort of gone to sleep. So I thought okay, I need to say something true but sort of shake this up a little bit. So I said, "I'm Dawn Liberi, a Foreign Service Officer from USAID and I am the world's largest purchaser of condoms!" You could have heard a pin drop. Then I said, "Not all for personal use…" and I sat down. Afterwards, there was a line of people to meet me – who asked, "What did you say you did?!" But it was true – USAID was the world's largest purchaser of condoms and I was responsible for approving that contract and assuring delivery of condoms around the world!

*Q: Beautiful! Lovely.*

LIBERI: So needless to say it got everyone's attention. It was a fun beginning of the year, and it was great; I loved my year at ICAF. It was terrific in terms of the academic discipline and rigor, and all the issues we studied. It's great to come out of the more technical context into studying foreign policy. Which is what you're there to study – national security, foreign policy, the larger interagency perspective. This was my first real interaction with the military. There were only about 40 civilians and only 20 women - 10% of the whole class. So collectively, both the military and civilians sides, the number of women were very small. That was another cultural experience. With ICAF everyone spends the first six months doing core academic classes. For the second semester you focus on areas related to national security. One of my focus areas was food security, food and agriculture. Then you travel in the U.S. and overseas to study these issues, so it was great! Our particular group went to California, then Canada and Mexico, to look at security issues related to just Western Hemisphere. Then we went to Europe. Others in the class got to go to different places, like Russia, Asia and Africa. There are a lot of writing requirements and you have to produce a term paper, basically sort of a thesis, and it's great.

It's very interesting how the background that you bring to the program enables you to look at these issues from a different perspective. One of the things that we were required to do was to write a paper on some of the big national security issues, what we saw as future challenges and to synthesize what we had learned. So I did a paper looking out into the future regarding the U.S. economy. That was 1991. I began the paper saying, "The year is 2010 and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (WB) have just met" (both have programs where they go and bail out countries financially) "and the senior managers have met and decided that they're not going to help bail out this next country". So that tagline was "IMF Board refuses to loan any more money to the United States." This was obviously before the financial crisis of 2008, which lasted years as we know now. However the direction the U.S. was headed in terms our economic situation was not great. In school we were studying countries that were sort of going down the tubes, meanwhile we were a little shaky ourselves. Looking at the data, my reaction was OMG (Oh, my God), but then it was possible to build up the analysis to support these observations.. At first, some thought the statement was a little bit outrageous, but in fact

there were a lot of signs pointing to a potential collapse of U.S. financial institutions. Not to say that it was prescient, however it was a different way of looking at the issue.

The academic committee met and they actually identified it as the best term paper for the school. It was the first time that a civilian had received that award - a civilian and a woman, so I said, "Okay, well that's not bad." I think it was the first time for USAID as well. I was also the first Distinguished Graduate from USAID. I think there had been another distinguished graduate from the civilian services, but certainly not from USAID. So it was good, because when you're the development agency and you're competing with the State Department and the U.S. military in a national security environment, you're always like the step child. In the interagency, colleagues don't always appreciate the contribution of development, so there was a certain amount of vindication that we can actually compete, and that we understand what national security issues are even from a development standpoint. You don't have to be from the political cone at State to understand these issues - or the [military]. because we had a lot of hot shot colonels. In fact, a lot of my buddies that I met from the military at that point, I stayed in touch with over time, and we served together in Iraq and Afghanistan. It was helpful to have remained in touch. It was good because I felt that it was important to show USAID could compete in the interagency and excel.

*Q: Was there any particular special recognition back in AID headquarters. Did anyone take notice?*

LIBERI: Yes, I think so, yes. I think it helped then get my next assignment, and not just that. I think it was noted because USAID didn't get many seats at the school -you know we only got two seats. Subsequent to that we fought to get four people into the program, that recognition actually helped us get two more seats at the table.

*Q: In other words, look, a USAID person can thrive here and can produce something that is recognized by the interagency as is represented at this school and shouldn't we, we as USAID, be taking a little bit more advantage of this. I mean it's a small organization, going from 2 to 4 is already a recognition.*

LIBERI: Yes a 100% increase. I thought that was good. I have to say that it was one of the best years of my professional career. What's great is that, every day I was saying goodness I'm actually being paid to think! How often does that happen? I mean you're getting your salary but you're going to school and you actually have time to think about issues and put them into perspective - a more global perspective which I think is important.

That became a stepping stone, because you're at the point where you're an FS-01 you've had all this management experience and now you've had this senior service training, so it's a grooming for the next phase, and for USAID the next phase is to become a mission director.

*Q: Wow! So you are ready from having gone in principle from going from a single area to being a full mission director.*

LIBERI: Yes and also from having progressed up the system. Because you come in very low. I think at that time we entered USAID as an FS-07. Then your first two promotions happen reasonably fast. Then once you become an FS-05 and FS-04, you have to get promoted through FS-03, FS-02, and FS-01. That sets you up, at least you HOPE it sets you up for getting into the senior Foreign Service

*Q: A very quick question about the promotions. Did the way that USAID evaluated you change over that time? Or was it basically the same evaluation practice?*

LIBERI: Right - until that point, when you're an FS-01, you essentially are evaluated according to your peers, your technical peers. So for health officers there are Boards - the Foreign Service Boards, so you basically get ranked according to your performance relative to your peers. This is similar to consular officers, econ and political officers.

*Q: Do you get much of a formal statement in that evaluation process, where you're addressing the board?*

LIBERI: There's a small piece. Essentially what happens is you have your evaluation portfolio - your supervisor basically writes your evaluation, at that point it was called the Employee Evaluation Report ( EER ) which is your core evaluation. Over time we changed the name a couple of times, AEF (Appraisal Evaluation Form) etc but it's the same thing. Then 360 comments were introduced. But basically, the evaluation is the key piece. Then yes you have an employee statement, small though. It's changed over time but at that point in time, if there was something that you felt wasn't quite covered in your evaluation -because they can't cover everything- then you would focus on another area. For example, you might say well, in addition to what's been covered in my evaluation I'd like to highlight x,y,z … But basically it's the Foreign Service precepts.

*Q: and they're the same precepts as the FS precepts nothing particularized for you as USAID.*

LIBERI: There's a section about your technical competence, but the rest of it is teamwork, leadership, etc all that good stuff. Then you're ranked. Within your backstop or cone. That's until you hit senior foreign service. Once you're an FS- 01, and get your promotion, you're evaluated across the board, mostly for leadership and management. So at that point, in 1992, when I came back from the program at ICAF, that's when all the assignment decisions go to the senior management group, the SMG, which is like the D committee, and that's where the decisions are made. It's a very similar process where it's chaired by the Deputy Administrator, like the Deputy Secretary, and it's the senior career folks, the Deputy Assistant Administrators – similar to the DAS level that make recommendations to the Deputy Administrator level, and that goes forward to the Administrator of USAID. So then I was very happy to be selected to be Deputy Mission Director in Ghana.

*Q: Okay! So now so far, all Africa, but let's continue. Because I know sometimes they move into other geographic areas, but sure, let's continue.*

LIBERI: In total I've had 6 tours in Africa and that's the majority of my experience and geographic expertise. We'll eventually get to Iraq, Afghanistan, and Libya. That's later.

Q: So you've gone to…

LIBERI: . So I went out as the Deputy Mission Director to Ghana and that was great, and I was there for 3 years.

*Q: That was 1993-1996?*

LIBERI: That was 1992-1994 - Some people, depending on where you are in your career, if you are already in the Senior Foreign Service, sometimes you can go from the War College/ICAF directly to mission directorship, but since I was one level lower as an FS-01, I went out as deputy mission . That was great because you're able to use all that experience and apply it to a higher management level. using all of disciplines and technical areas. It wasn't just health, it was agriculture, it was private sector, etc. and in fact, we were focused a lot on assisting Ghana to really focus its trade and nontraditional exports, to increase its economic productivity and job creation. When I arrived, Jerry Rawlings was the president, and so I had to work a lot with Nana Rawlings who had an NGO (nongovernmental organization) and she was always sort of frankly annoyed with us because we wouldn't fund her NGO because it didn't have the financial accountability structure in place! So I had very interesting conversations with her about how we could provide a consultant or technical assistance, however we were unable to give money directly to the NGO unless and until she had a system in place, which she was reluctant to do. So we had that dance.

However we worked with a lot of private sector entities. We had a program focused on Nontraditional Exports where there was a strategy of USAID support to help Ghana increase its nontraditional exports and a lot of sectors got developed as a result of that. We worked very closely with the Ministers of Trade and Finance, and the Governor of the Central Bank, and it was a real focus on economic development. It was a time when Michael Fairbanks had just written some key work about enterprise development and nontraditional exports. His book was called 'Plowing the Sea" which focused on public private partnerships, to enable countries to conduct sector analyses and identify areas of comparative advantage.. So we brought in a team to help Ghana look at that, and help them in a number of areas.

We also did some other very interesting things. We brought in the Smithsonian to help with the restoration of the former slave castles in Cape Coast and Elmina, to help their tourism. We also helped to increase their handicrafts which eventually got sold, [to] Neiman Marcus, Macys and Nordstrom's. This helped to put Ghana on the map economically and enable the country to increase nontraditional exports. Nontraditional

exports were about $15-20 million dollars in hard currency and USAID's program was helping to increase it to $80 million a year, and creating X number of jobs. So it was a very exciting time to be there.

*Q: In doing this, was there any significant interaction with either FCS (Foreign Commercial Service) or with chambers of commerce in the US, that sort of thing?*

LIBERI: Yes, there was. We actually had a lot of support from the Ambassador which was very important. It was Ambassador Ken Brown, who worked very closely with USAID and the Embassy on this. We did have interaction with U.S. chambers of commerce, the Rotary Club, etc. To bring in American businesses we worked a lot with the International Executive Service Corp (IESC), and brought over a lot of retired US CEOs to help us in certain specific industry areas, which was great. It was also culturally great because Ghana is a very open society. Ghana is home to the Ashanti kingdom, which was one of the oldest African kingdoms, and the Asantehene, is the king of the Ashanti. Kumasi is the seat of the kingdom and I went there several times to visit the then Asantehene. It was great because you go into the palace and you're looking around, and you see all these photos, and the king said to me "Yes, the Windsors have nothing on us! Queen Elizabeth comes to visit me." I asked him "How long has this been a kingdom?" "Oh, over 2,000 years." Like, Wow! So you really get - a tremendous sense of pride and culture, and that's what I love about Ghana - there was no chip on the shoulder, anything like that.

*Q: From colonial times*

LIBERI: Correct - From colonial times, none at all. That was great. So as a result of that we got to have a lot of interesting cultural experiences. I was made an honorary queen mother in the Ashanti Kingdom – in Apabame I and was given a big ceremony for this. I was given a Ghanaian name (Nana Nyarko Nkosuohema), and received a stool specifically carved for me, as well as special beads. This is actually not done that often, so even though it was honorary, it was still a very special event. During my time in Ghana I also got an opportunity to be acting Mission Director when the mission director was out of the country, so that was good experience.

*Q: One of the things I've found with some of the top USAID officials is they not only got their background in economics, but as they began to work with private sector, they also began to learn the big deal. How to do the big deal. Which is obviously something very different from just economics. And even just finance. In other words, you're learning the details of how to make, how to be a rainmaker. Did that happen as a result of what you were doing in Ghana with all of the economic development things? Because after all, you had to deal with the private sector in many ways and you had to think about how the private sector could be developed.*

LIBERI: Oh absolutely. It was a precursor to some other things that I did later on which I could talk about. One of the things we did was help Ghana set up an export zone - bonded warehouses. At the time textiles were a big thing. This was the beginning of The African

Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) being negotiated and we made sure that Ghana qualified and that became a big asset. At that time no country in Africa was competing with Bangladesh for export of textiles into the U.S. because of the sheer volume. We got Van Heusen to come in to develop and purchase shirts; we got Star-Kist to help develop the tuna industry, because they needed more places to purchase from and there was great tuna just off the coast of Ghana. We helped Ghana to develop a tuna canning factory, which was a big deal. We helped develop a number of different exports - the Body Shop owner Anita Roddick She started with Shea nuts and Shea butter. This led to putting Ghana on the map with some of the big companies, and that was important, a good lesson learned.

*Q: As you recall what was the most important element of economic development, or business sector development for Ghana? Because a lot of these countries may have small scale business people, or small scale entrepreneurs who can start very small businesses, but the next, to get them up to the next level, was that able to take place?*

LIBERI: The single biggest element in my experience is political will.

*Q: Yes, I totally agree!*

LIBERI: If you don't have the political will and don't have the senior echelons of the host government behind you to deal with issues like the investment code, foreign currency, export laws, export licenses, then the rest of it doesn't matter, because you can't entice the private sector if incentives are in the wrong place. Labor laws, rule of law for business is extremely important because businesses coming in want to know that their investments are going to be safe, and there is going to be some legal recourse in the event of a dispute. So there needs to be an arbitration process. That's one of the programs USAID helped to set up – an alternative dispute resolution process (ADR). There often aren't commercial courts so it's necessary to go through the ADR process to reach agreements. We had to work very closely with the various ministers, all the way up to the president. However, what I found - if you don't have champions - and this is a major lesson learned - if you don't have host government champions who are really willing to take these issues on and fight for them, then it doesn't matter. You can do things till the cows come home but it's not going to make the fundamental policy changes, and that's what's needed.

*Q: Did you have any?*

LIBERI: We did. The Minister of Trade was phenomenal. Actually it was the deputy minister. He was a real mover and shaker and cleared away a lot of the barnacles. Also the Minister of Finance as well as the deputy, they were both also very, very good. The Minister of Finance actually became the Governor of the Central Bank. It's also important to get some of the regional or state governors on board as well. For example, when we were restoring the castles at Cape Coast and Elmina, we had to have those regional governors on board. We helped developed Kakum, which was the first canopy walkway in sub Saharan Africa. It was USAID funding that helped develop that level of

tourism. Well if you don't have the governor and the local villagers on board, you're never going to be able to develop a canopy walkway in the forest! But then bringing in the tourists and bringing in the foreign currency and bringing in the jobs, people get to see the difference the program made. For me it was a very big lesson in really getting champions to move forward with programs. And that helped, as I said, later on.

I was in Ghana for three years; that was a great experience, and then there was a change in administration, to the Clinton era. President Clinton was elected and there were some changes in terms of the structure of USAID in Washington. Like the State Department, we had geographic bureaus; however we also had technical bureaus and whereas in the past, a number of the technical sectors had been siloed, under President Clinton they were pulled together into what was called the Global Bureau, and so it all technical sectors consolidated under one bureau.

*Q: Under G?*

LIBERI: Yes, under G- the Global Bureau. That's when Ambassador Sally Shelton (now Shelton-Colby) came in as the head of the global bureau and set up technical centers. The global health and population centers were all consolidated under one, and Dr. Duff Gillespie was head of that and Sally recruited me to come back. I didn't know her; she's since become a very good friend and colleague – however I didn't know her at the time. I was sitting in my office in Accra, and my secretary said , "Ambassador Sally Shelton is on the line!" I thought What? Oh my god, and she was great. She basically spent an hour on the phone with me. I said, "you know I really want to stay overseas," and she said, "I really need you to come back to Washington" because the global health bureau was huge, it was over $1 billion, maybe more actually, with worldwide programs. She basically wanted me to come back to be the deputy of the Global Health Bureau, based on the technical experience that I'd had, and to help manage a very large program. That provided another range of senior management, even though the focus was on technical issues. At one point I was brought over to the front office to serve as Sally's PA, her executive assistant and dealt with a lot of policy issues for a period of time. I was often acting head of the health center, when my boss went on leave or traveled.. That was another period of time when we were dealing with a lot of other very difficult issues with the Hill, and certain members trying to defund many programs. We were dealing with Jesse Helms and others who were really trying to tighten the noose around population funding, utilizing the Mexico City policy. That's when Brian Atwood was Administrator. I spent a lot of my time - in addition to the technical elements- really focused more on management. Management of political interference, dealing a lot with the Hill, going incessantly for briefings to members, primarily, as well as to professional staff committees. I spent a lot of time trying to make sure we were able to get funding for our programs and keep them going around the world.

*Q: Now so how long did you spend in Washington in this partially covering the health and population and partially covering what the other, as executive assistant.*

LIBERI: I spent almost a total of 4 years back [in the U.S.]. It was 1994 – 1998 and I went out as Mission Director to Uganda after that. Working in Washington was a great experience and added another higher senior level of management.. I dealt a lot with the State Department, and a lot of the interagency, because USAID was on a number of interagency committees. I was also the U.S. government's representative to UNICEF so I was on the UNICEF board, and went often to USUN (U.S. representative office to the United Nations) because we had quarterly meetings. That was a great experience, to participate at a senior level with assistant secretaries, our ambassadors serving at USUN, and doing a lot of interagency work at that time.

*Q: At that time of course Jesse Helms was trying to get rid of as many of the smaller pieces ____ of the foreign policy establishment, as he could, he wanted to get rid of this, _____ and he wanted to get rid of AID. Did that affect you, or were you pulled into that?*

LIBERI: I was pulled into it a lot! We really had to establish our allies on the Hill and this was where Senator Leahy was really very supportive, among many others. There were many others, however he was a real champion. It was really tough because what happened at that point is that the Hill, basically Helms, tried to squeeze us by limiting the amount of funding we would receive, limiting it to a quarterly allotment of funds. Essentially what this does over time is atrophy programs. The whole point of a 5-year program, even if you get annual budgets, is to be able to plan, establish a relationship with the host government, have stability, and have staff in place to work on the programs, etc. Well, when your funding gets reduced to just getting little dollops every quarter, it's essentially death by 1,000 cuts. Eventually they're trying to atrophy the programs, so that over time you can't continue the program because you're unable to keep staff that long, because you can't promise 2, 3, 4 year contracts. People have families, they want to be able to have stability, and it really was very very difficult trying to manage that. We had to play a very careful legal but creative game of making sure funding was where we needed it, to keep programs going. It was very challenging. Fortunately, I have to say, I worked with some of the most brilliant people I've ever known. I mean USAID has extraordinary people in terms of not just their technical capabilities, but programmatically, our ability to keep going. Basically, we had a whole formula set up to program who needed money when, and allocate funding as needed. We really had the pulse on everything every day. We were able to respond to the many crises that were going on and to keep the funding flowing. It was a real feat because that element of the Hill was just trying to choke us off, and hoping that we wouldn't be able to be one or two steps ahead!

And so much to their chagrin, we actually managed it! I mean it wasn't without difficulty, and without atrophy in certain places, and frankly I think the real toll that it took was that many people that needed access to health and family planning services didn't always get them on time. I think that frankly was irresponsible, and it was very real, so that made us all the more determined to keep programs going. It was very difficult philosophical debate with some members. I was the point person, along with a couple of others, and spent a lot of time up on the Hill defending what we were doing.

*Q: All right, so you basically won the bureaucratic battle of keeping USAID as an organization, and you're in, it's 1998?*

LIBERI: Yes, getting to 1998 now that's right when I finished my four years.

*Q: And now as you're approaching wherever else next you're going to go, what are the considerations or what are people saying to you about where you should be going next?*

LIBERI: Right, and now I'll resume where I had been before, where the conversation is about going out as a mission director, after having been a deputy, then coming back to Washington, and assuming a higher level of management. The question is basically, where? Nothing is ever a given because you have to go through the senior management group (SMG) process and there are a lot of folks wanting to be mission directors. However a lot also depends on what's available. It's similar to the State Department system. A position that was available and coming up, and I was very interested in was Uganda. So I was proposed and approved, to be Mission Director in Uganda. I was looking forward to it, and was going to build on a lot of the experience I had had in Ghana, even though Uganda is on the east side of Africa. At that point in time, President Yoweri Museveni was still in good graces and doing good things, he hadn't yet outlived his presidency. There were a lot of positive programs , and one of the defining issues for Uganda, that I worked on a lot and USAID really helped to put on the map working very closely with the White House was the whole focus on HIV/AIDS.

At that point in time, Uganda was one of the epicenters, probably THE epicenter of HIV/AIDS. Everyone, every Ugandan family had had someone either infected or affected by HIV/AIDS and there were over 1 million deaths over a period of time. The prevalence rate when I got there was about 30%

*Q: Wow!*

LIBERI: Which was huge. It was the number one health, and also economic and security issue. I will give Museveni credit that he recognized HIV/AIDS as Uganda's major challenge. I was there for 4 years, and over a period continuing for about 10 years there was not a speech that he made where he didn't address the HIV/AIDS issue and call it public enemy #1. We had a fair amount of funding for the program, and worked closely with the White House, Uganda basically became a showcase for what could be done with HIV/AIDS program interventions, both in terms of testing, monitoring, treatment, etc.

*Q: And destigmatizing*

LIBERI: Destigmatizing, exactly. And over that 4 year period prevalence went from 30% down to just under 5% which was huge. There were the components, there was political will which was key, and there was heavy emphasis on program focus, and we had a fair amount of funding for NGOs, and the leading NGOs were indigenous. The AIDS Information Center (AIC) and TASO (The AIDS Support Organization), were two of the largest. USAID funded it extensively, but it was a Ugandan entity and they were doing

great work. We worked with the White House office on HIV/AIDS. That's when Sandy Thurman was head of that, and they brought congressional delegation after congressional delegation to Uganda to sensitize the Hill to this huge issue. Think back to 1998 when this was really burgeoning; we worked very closely with the vice president's office, Vice President Gore who was extremely supportive of our programs, and of course President Clinton, really put the issue on the map.

That was one of the main issues but it wasn't the only issues we worked on. Another issue that we worked on was economic development. It was interesting because as forward thinking as President Museveni was on the HIV/AIDS issue, he was not so forward leaning on the population issue, and the fertility rate was very high and is still very high in Uganda. Museveni sort of saw a large young population as an engine for growth. And I said, "well only if you have the jobs, Mr. President!"

So we would go around sort of in this dance. He was very approachable, and at times I was chargé d'affaires if the Ambassador was out of town, so both because of that and because of the program element, I got to work a lot with Museveni. He would call me and say "My sista, you must come to the farm today". He called me once at 6 am in the morning on a Sunday. Argh! "The president wants to speak to you!" I was chargé and I thought "Oh god what happened." But he was a night owl. He would just work all night and be up in the morning and wanted the interaction. So, you had to be there, you know. "My sista, you must come to the farm." "Okay Mr. President, I'm coming." "Yes, we have to talk." So I'd go. He was a larger than life kind of personality.

We worked very hard on the HIV/AIDS issue, so two things happened with that. One is when Ambassador Holbrooke was US ambassador to the UN., he came with then Assistant Secretary for Africa, Susan Rice. They were actually coming to deal with the Congolese rebels.

*Q: Condoleezza rice?*

LIBERI: No, Susan Rice was the Assistant Secretary for Africa

There was the Congolese rebel issue with Jean-Pierre Bemba and Joseph Kabila, which Holbrooke and Rice had come to address; however they were also coming to look at the AIDS issue. It was my job to introduce them to the HIV problem, and the program interventions that we were doing. We drove in a small bus to The AIDS Support Organization, and my job was to brief them en route. They were still talking about the Congolese rebels, and at a certain point Holbrooke turns to me and said, "Oh I bet you're here to brief us about HIV/AIDS." And I said "yes, we're actually going to The AIDS Support Organization (TASO) there are just 3-4 things to remember - we need to test, treat, counsel and prevent HIV/AIDS which is what our programs focus on." They spent a couple of hours there, and at one point the Ambassador called me saying "I have the rebels waiting here. When are they showing up?" I said, Ambassador Holbrooke, Assistant Secretary Rice, the rebels are waiting. Holbrooke said " let them wait. I don't know if that's a fixable problem. THIS is a fixable problem!" As a result of that,

Holbrooke said, " I'm going to introduce this to the UN security council as a security council resolution for the UN to vote on." And he did! He went back, introduced it to the United Nations and it was the first time that a health issue was introduced as a security issue to the security council. The resolution was passed as a result of that. So that was great.

Then of course we continued to get funding for our programs. There were incredible testimonials on the part of Ugandans who had been impacted by HIV/AIDS and then as a result of the programs that we supported, were able to get treatment. Over time HIV/AIDS became more of a chronic disease as opposed to the killer it was for many.

These programs were a precursor of PEPFAR (President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief), and its eventual legislation, I think it's fair to say that Uganda was at the center of the sensitization of HIV/AIDS to our policy-makers. In fact, we flew a young woman to the U.S. to testify on the Hill. She was an AIDS orphan, whose mother had died of HIV/AIDS. She became infected after being abused by one of her uncles who was infected. She testified to the Senate, when Vice President Gore was present, and it really helped to educate many of the members who hadn't physically been to Africa to really understand the impact of the program. It was very, very powerful; it was really great.

That's again a case where trying to convince policy makers involves having enough of a program to demonstrate that there are interventions that work. Then being able to develop legislation that continues to move the program forward. That was, I would say, a huge success of the HIV/AIDS program in Uganda.

Then of course we worked a lot on economic development, similar to what we had done in Ghana and applied lessons learned to Uganda. This is where we talked about developing the Big Deal. We brought Michael Fairbanks over to do an analysis of, "Ok, what are the comparative advantages for Uganda?" At the time, we knew that Kenya had been focusing on long stem roses, and there was a huge demand for cut flowers in Europe, particularly in the winter months. So we worked with the private sector. We brought in the Dutch who are the largest purchasers of flowers in Europe. We brought in a research team from the U.S. to conduct trials on the soil to determine what would grow best. For irrigation, we brought in an Israeli group, who are the world's experts in irrigation. We put all of that together, and essentially helped Uganda to develop their cut flower industry using short stem roses, because that was what worked best there. Then we helped develop the whole supply chain, including a logistics industry, a refrigeration and transport industry. The fact that they were short stem roses made it perfect work for women. We helped to employ thousands of women in greenhouses to grow and pick the flowers. Now when you go to Sainsbury's, Carrefour, and all these other [retailers] in Europe and you see short stem roses, 9 out of 10 times they're coming from Uganda. It was a whole industry that got developed as a result of USAID's programs..

Those were among the programs that I felt were important, that we could help Uganda to establish. The vanilla industry was another example. McCormick became another Big Deal. Madagascar had been one of – is- the leading grower of vanilla, but they had a

devastating storm that wiped out the crop. So the next thing I knew I'm getting a call from the president of McCormick, who said "We'll buy all the vanilla you have." The quality was really good. It was small in terms of overall quantity but it was really good. That's again another case where it helped a number of women and young men, because everything is hand pollinated. It gave them employment, and that was along the border with Congo which had been ravaged by rebel wars.

We also dealt a lot with the residual impact of Joseph Kony, in northern Uganda. We had programs for the Aboke school girls who had been kidnapped. We brought in a number of NGOs including some of the Scandinavian NGOs and UNICEF who are very used to dealing with conflict and post conflict trauma with children. We had a whole program in northern Uganda on post-conflict reconciliation, which we implemented with the Acholi, the tribal group that Joseph Kony is from.

HIV/AIDS, population, nutrition, (we had a large Title II feeding program) economic development, microenterprise, and developing Public Private Partnerships were among our large programs.

One other thing in terms of the Big Deal. We were able to use Development Credit Authority (DCA) which is an authority that USAID can utilize through the U.S. Treasury, which is essentially a credit guarantee. As a result, we were able to convince 7 financial institutions in Uganda to do lending for small and medium enterprises. For small loans we funded a large microenterprise program. In fact we had the largest microenterprise program in east Africa. To take advantage of DCA, we utilized $1 million out of the USAID mission's budget to put into the U.S. Treasury as the guarantee, and then negotiated with seven institutions including CitiBank, Standard Chartered and other Ugandan banks, who then provided $30 million of on lending to small and medium enterprises. So it was a 30:1 leverage which is the highest that DCA has ever had. Then we did it a second time as well. So it was huge, and this is again, the Big Deal. We were able to use all of the instruments at our disposal to move the economy along and increase growth. So it was a very, very dynamic time. I loved it - it was s doing development at its best. Really trying to move things forward in all these different sectors, having enough time to do it over a four year period, and having the political will behind you with the government.

We also had a very large democracy and governance program, training parliamentarians, bringing them to the U.S., having study tours. We worked with a number of civil society organizations as well. Another large program was focused on the environment. We had a huge environmental earmark. So we funded a lot of the research on the mountain gorillas, and also helped Jane Goodall establish a sanctuary for chimpanzees on an island in Lake Victoria. I got to meet her and we have actually stayed in touch as friends and colleagues for years. Being Mission Director in that kind of environment was phenomenal. Absolutely phenomenal. It was a really great experience.

*Q: Just to mention one other thing. Since you were mission director and as well you were the most senior person at post, you also got to be chargé, and so through that experience*

*you also got to actually manage the embassy. Not for long periods of time, but for enough of a period of time that you got your feet wet! And not every mission director gets to do that.*

LIBERI: This is true. I was very lucky that I had supportive ambassadors who were willing to do that, and we had a couple of crises. Once when I was charge, there was an attack at Makerere University and there were a number of American students at the university. The next thing I know I'm getting a phone call because fortunately one of the students was able to call the embassy as the attack started. They weren't the target however it was the early days of terrorism when groups attacked places. I don't know if you remember, but there had been an attack against tourists in Bwindi national park and a number of tourists had been kidnapped including a couple of Americans. I think 1 or 2 foreigners may have been killed. I wasn't chargé during that crisis, but had to work through it with the country team. As mission director, you're a senior member of the country team so you need to deal with all this. When the attack at Makerere University occurred, with the American students there, we had to work closely with the Regional Security Officer (RSO) to whisk them out of there, and bring them to the embassy. No one was injured, but they were deeply traumatized, and we had to get grief counseling for the students, inform their parents and get them on next available flights to leave the country. You have to remember the timing. This was right after the 1998 bombings of the embassies in Kenya and Tanzania.. Uganda was actually number 3 on the list for that day but the perpetrators got intercepted, by the Ugandans, and were put in jail. It wasn't well-known at that point because officials didn't want that to get out. That's when a number of terrorism attacks started to take root so we had to be very careful from a security standpoint.

Another incident occurred I was coming back from an event on a Sunday evening, and received a call from one of my senior Ugandan staff saying, "Ma'am I don't know what to do, he's bleeding, he's bleeding!" "What are you talking about? What happened?" I asked. One of our contractors who was on TDY had gone with the Ugandan staff member to a seminar, and were on their way back when there was a bomb explosion. They happened to be sitting in a café near my house, waiting for traffic to clear from cars leaving a soccer game. A bomb went off and he got hit with a shard of glass that perforated his chest.. He was very, very lucky. Had it gone much further he would have been dead. The bomb was meant for the football stadium but traffic prevented them from reaching the stadium so they set if off along the road. I told my Ugandan staff I'd meet him at a clinic nearby, and in the meantime called one of the physicians we dealt with. By this time I was calling the Embassy getting a status report. We were trying to make sure that others weren't injured, particularly other Americans. My contractor was seriously injured and the clinic didn't have the necessary equipment so I took him to the hospital. I basically stayed at the hospital the entire night because it's necessary to triage. Many Ugandans were wounded, and the wards were full. It's difficult in the best of circumstances to treat people; with a chaotic mass casualty situation, forget about it. There's not enough blood, not enough transfusions, not enough surgeons, or staff to deal with a massive incident like that.

You have to be there to advocate. I was dealing with the surgeons the entire time. They said, he had to be operated on that night. We were trying to get him medevaced to Nairobi but it was just taking too long. Fortunately I'm a universal blood donor and said, "I'll be here and I'll donate blood - I'm staying the entire night." That's what you have to do sometimes as mission director. Meanwhile, I was working with my staff, the DCM (Deputy Chief of Mission) and the Ambassador to make sure others were not in other hospitals, and injured. The TDY contractor was the most affected, and we got him operated on that night and taken to Nairobi the next morning. The situation is up close and personal at that point. That's when you have to call families, and thank god, I could say that the contractor was okay, but it's still a very tough conversation. I'm calling from USAID in Uganda and telling his mother "I'm sorry to tell you that your son has just been injured in a bomb explosion." I mean, Whoo- that can be tough!

That's when you realize that the world has changed. So those were among the defining moments of Uganda.

*Q: Wow! and of course for you …*

LIBERI: Then 9/11 happened - I was in Uganda when 9/11 occurred. In fact, Uganda was hosting a worldwide HIV/AIDS conference. We had a ton of US folks there, including Helene Gayle from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), and researchers from the National Institutes of Health (NIH). I was hosting a dinner that night at my house and was getting ready to leave the office to pick up people from the hotel. One of my American staff, came running in saying, "They've hit the World Trade Center" "Who's hit? What are you talking about" she said a "A plane flew into the WTC" and because I had actually been a student pilot and flown from Flushing airport all around New York City, I initially said "Oh, that's really unfortunate, it must be a student pilot."

*Q: of course! That's what I thought!*

LIBERI: I said "probably the student pilot and instructor were impacted, and maybe if they hit an office whoever might have been at the desk… It's unfortunate, but hopefully the fatalities will be limited. She looked at me, she said, "No, you don't understand. It's a big plane", I said "like a jet plane, like an airliner?", she said "Yes." First words out of my mouth, "That's a terrorist attack." Because there's not a trained pilot that would willingly fly into a building. You are trained to ditch into the river, into the water, that's what you do." That's what that guy Sully did. But that's what you're trained to do. So as soon as I heard that, I ran and picked up everyone from the hotel. We went to my residence to watch the coverage and the first tower had just gone down, so we were there physically watching the second tower go down.

*Q: And, of course, it's at dinnertime because of the time difference.*

LIBERI: Exactly. And then everyone was hysterical, everyone was in shock, because you can't believe that you've just witnessed the world trade towers going down. Then you're hearing about what's happening in Pennsylvania, and the Pentagon, and we were all

trying to get through on the phones, but the lines were down. Fortunately my landline was going through so everyone was able to use that line and call loved ones. We were devastated and in shock the entire night. I'll never forget it. Everyone remembers where they were on 9/11. There we were, feeling helpless, 10,000 miles away, with all flights cancelled.

*Q: You don't know when you're going to be able to get back.*

LIBERI: Exactly. So much of a mess and then there's this huge issue in terms of grief counseling and dealing with trauma. It was a shock, especially for that part of the world where we'd been hit with the Embassy bombings, now dealing with this, and the other incidents that I've just described. You just have a steady flow, unfortunately, of dealing with terrorism.

*Q: Wow. Yeah. Literally like the change of an age.*

LIBERI: Totally. Like age of innocence just gone. So those were the unfortunate things that we had to deal with in Uganda. And it does mark you, because you know that things have changed. There were numerous occasions when we had bomb threats and the embassy was closed. When this happened and AID mission was closed, we had to do work out of alternative locations. We had a whole system in place for evacuation and we trained for it. There were a series of bombings in Kampala. It was very touch and go!

*Q: And how much of your time did you remain as mission director after 9/11?*

LIBERI: I left in 2002, so another year.

*Q: So you saw the full reaction and the full aftermath.*

LIBERI: Absolutely. So the punctuation points were the embassy bombings, followed by 9/11 and dealing with the aftermath of those events. That was also when the issue of the Al-Shabaab started coming into play in Somalia. You really got to see the security shift in east Africa.

*Q: During that year, in particular, did you have to implement new security protocols, then, that were different and more stringent than you had in the past? In other words, do what extent did that reduce your ability to carry out your mission?*

LIBERI: We had to institute protocols, particularly in northern Uganda where Joseph Kony was operating. Those trips always had to be approved, and when I first arrived we couldn't even go across the bridge to Gulu or Lira. There were also a lot of issues with the Karamojong, another tribal group in northern Uganda. Over time I was able to go to the region a fair amount because we had programs up there, however there was a heavy focus on security.

And in the eastern part of Uganda after the incident of tourists being kidnapped in Bwindi, that whole part of the mountain area from east to west was sort of like an accordion issue of security if you will. There were times when it was more liberal, and we were able to go there, but as soon as the security incident happened, it got more restrictive. So we had to do a lot of planning with the RSO, a lot of protocols were put in place, a lot of redundant systems of communication safe houses, along the way - that type of thing.

*Q: Did you have to switch to relying more on local implementers?*

LIBERI: Oh yes. Well we had a whole series of local partners, and that was one of the strengths of the program. We funded US NGOs and they in turn funded local NGOs. We had some direct funding with local NGOs if they had the accounting systems in place, that type of thing. We worked a lot with a number of the religious organizations, such as World Relief, Catholic Relief Services, and other church groups, that had networks out there. So many programs were able to go on and continue with implementation, which was good. So our big issue there was just making sure that we had enough program oversight and getting USAID officers out to the field. The whole life blood of being a USAID officer is to get out and see your programs. Staying in the capital, means you might as well be in Washington! I encouraged my team to get out into the field. So people got out a lot, but again we had a protocol in place about all trips' being approved, and certain things that we put in place, as I said, just to ensure that people would be safe and god forbid that if something happened that there was a protocol that would be followed, that people understood. Which you have to do.

*Q: Yeah. Overall, how would you say it impacted the success of the mission or the achievement of mission goals?*

LIBERI: Here again I would say that in spite of these issues we were able to accomplish a lot. As I said on the HIV/AIDS front, helping to develop a number of economic development programs, job creation, public private partnerships and bringing in the private sector- for example, this is when Western Union started operating in Uganda. We brought in a number of communication companies to develop the backbone for the internet, which is when all of that was starting There were a lot of private sector mobile phones, and we were able to use the mobile phones for banking, and technology actually helped us in that sense.

*Q: Ah, that's the moment of the introduction of… And once you've got those mobile phones, you really can in theory if everything else goes right you can leapfrog a couple of things.*

LIBERI: Absolutely microenterprise, small lending, and communication because that's where we were able to get prices to farmers so that they knew they weren't trading in the dark, and weren't being gouged by the middle men. Whereas before they were out in the countryside, and prices were determined in the capital, and all these people in between

were basically making up different prices. Now we were able to say, no, no, no, this is the price!

*Q: Yeah the sudden ability for transparency and access to information that you need, that business needs, in order to make the business decision.*

LIBERI: Exactly. We were able to facilitate and accelerate that as a result of the network that we had in place, which was huge. We were the largest bilateral donor in Uganda as we are in many places. We had a huge program, for sub Saharan Africa - about $100 million annually, so it was a big program.

*Q: Absolutely, because it's big in an absolute sense, but it's also big in a comparative sense to other aid programs around the world.*

LIBERI: So I felt, when I left Uganda, that we collectively had been able to accomplish a fair amount, that was really lasting. We also we had a huge education program, which helped to double primary school enrollment, particularly for girls. Then of course the big challenge is always matriculation and education outcome, however we had a big impact on enrollment, and literacy at that point. So that was great.

*Q: So in spite of these problems, Uganda still at that moment remained a success story, an AID success story?*

LIBERI: Yes.

*Q: That's great. So maybe pause here, and we'll pick up again on, as you move on to the next assignment.*

*Q: Today is February 7, 2017. We're resuming with Ambassador Dawn Liberi. As she leaves Uganda for her next assignment. And how did you or you and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID or AID) decide where you were going next?*

LIBERI: It's pretty much a senior management group--what we call the SMG-- decision-making process, and frankly, a lot of it has to do with what's needed in terms of what posts are open, and the timing of your tour. I was completing my four years in Uganda, which is a normal tour, and Nigeria was opening, which wasn't a super easy post to fill either, and the mission had just moved from Lagos up to Abuja.

*Q: Remind us, this is what year now?*

LIBERI: This would be 2002. I had actually spent time in Nigeria when I was head of the Family Planning Division, in Washington. I had gone out to Nigeria several times because we had a big program there. So I was familiar with the country, and while I hadn't lived in Abuja, I had spent a fair amount of time in Lagos. I think that was also part of the decision-making process. (I had) some previous experience, and the timing worked out. I actually was excited because, as I like to say to people, Nigeria is big and

Lagos is big and bustling, but I'm from New York City, so I liked the big and the bustle, and knew that you just had to treat Nigerians like Nigerians. You couldn't assume that they were going to change or be something different. They're larger than life but so are New Yorkers, and they're a bit loud, but so are New Yorkers.

I have to tell you a funny anecdote that happened shortly after I arrived. I was chargé d'affairs because we were in between one ambassador leaving and the other one coming in. I went to meet with (then) President Obasanjo. I said to him, "Well, Mr. President, I'm from New York, and I think that New Yorkers and Nigerians suffer from the same thing." And he said, "Oh, well, Madam Chargé, and what is that?" I said, "The same undeserved bad reputation!" He just rolled his head back and started laughing--he has a great sense of humor. Then he looked at me and he said, "Ah, but Madam Chargé I think New York deserves that reputation!" Laughter. "Not Nigeria, of course! But New York does!" I just howled. And I said, "Spoken like a true Nigerian!" It sort of cemented our relationship, and after that I was able to go and see him on short notice, because we had established that rapport.

Just to finish up one last anecdote on Uganda (where) something similar happened. I went to see President Museveni. I was with our ambassador, Ambassador Nancy Powell and the USAID Assistant Administrator for Africa Vivian Derryck. President Museveni had invited us up to the farm and he insisted on driving around the compound. He got into his car and had all of his soldiers and guards running alongside. As we started going it was a bit of a milkshake, you know ba-boom, ba-boom, and I said, Oh, Mr. President, I'm very honored; I haven't ever been driven by a president before and he starts laughing. We were really like boom, boom, boom back and forth and he was having a hard time with the gears. I said, "Mr. President, but don't give up your day job." He just howled; he thought it was so funny. He said, "Oh these cars, they don't keep them tuned up", and I said I was sure that was the case.

*Q: That is funny.*

LIBERI: But it just goes to show that there are human sides to presidents and everyone else. Those are my two of my fun anecdotes coming out of Africa.

*Q: It's wonderful also because humor is such a cultural direct thing, and yet you could still find the humorous thing that you knew would be appropriate, a little bit teasing but not so much.*

LIBERI: Right, and it wasn't disrespectful. It was funny. They knew I was just teasing, and they went along with it, and they appreciated it. I think that's what cemented the personal relationship because it went beyond just the business at hand.

And one more thing, sorry I'll finish with one more thing with President Museveni. Another time I was up at the farm--he'd sort of called on short notice--and he'd said, "I need to see you today; we need to discuss some important issues." I said, "Okay Mr. President, I'm coming." I was chargé at that point, and I took the Deputy Chief of

Mission (DCM). We started to have lunch. It was just the three of us--President Museveni, the DCM, and myself--so I started to engage in the business at hand. President Museveni looked at me and he said, "You Americans, you're always about business. We in Africa, when we want to eat, we eat! We'll do business after we eat!" I said, "Okay Mr. president!" He said, "Now we just talk about easy things." I said, "Okay." So (there were) good lessons from African leaders.

*Q: Absolutely. And once again, it's a talent to be able to employ humor in situations to break the ice.*

LIBERI: I think that was the purpose. I knew that they each (had) good senses of humor and (were) willing to have a little repartee. Again, nothing disrespectful, but just a bit of levity, a little personal touch.

In Nigeria we actually, at that point, became the largest mission in sub Saharan Africa. Uganda was quite large, I think Uganda was the second largest, (either) between it and South Africa. But because of Nigeria's size, we obviously had to have a fairly large budget, and that's when we were doing a lot in HIV/AIDS. We were also helping Nigeria prepare for the next round of elections, doing a lot of training of election monitors, (and) helping set up the electoral commission. We did a lot of work with economic development, and I worked closely with the governor of the central bank Charles Soludo, and the Minister of finance Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala We tried to have a fairly robust program (but) we weren't all over the country because there were still some security problems in the north. There were also problems in the delta because of the issues of oil (petroleum) and a lot of the delta communities. There was still a fair amount of kidnapping for ransom going on, so we had to be judicious in how we used our resources. Nevertheless, we were able to do some very interesting things, I think.

One of them was I negotiated a $20 million public private partnership (PPP) with Shell (Oil Company). The managing director of Shell in Nigeria came to me and said, "We need to really work with the community in the delta. We have money but we don't really have expertise." So I said, "Great we have expertise and if you have the money we can put those two things together." It actually became the largest public private partnership in Africa. There was one in Angola that had been done with Exxon. The purpose was to help establish community development programs in the Niger Delta and work with those communities and let them know that Shell was financing them, but that we were working directly with the communities to try and elicit their needs and respond to those needs.

*Q: Now as you're talking about these delta communities, were they also unique ethnic groups who had grievances?*

LIBERI: Yes. We had the Ijaw and a number of other tribes who frankly felt disenfranchised. Ninety percent of the government's revenue came from the Niger Delta, and less than 10 percent of the resources went into the delta. It was appallingly poor. The poverty and the environmental degradation were extreme. I did two things. I actually flew over the Niger Delta by helicopter with Shell to look at a lot of the oil (fields). There

weren't really refineries, but oil wells with a lot of gas coming out. The environment was really in a tragic state. I also went out with some of the tribal community leaders in dugout canoes up the little tributaries, and I have to say it was eye opening. It was really appalling and they certainly did have, I think, reason for their grievances. So part of what we were trying to do is help to respond to their issues and (provide) economic development, health, education, etc.

*Q: In the delta as a region, was there pretty much one distinct ethnic group or did you have more than one?*

LIBERI: There was more than one. As an aside, Nigeria has over 2,000 languages--not dialects--languages, and an extraordinary number of tribal groups. So while there were predominant ethnic groups in the south like the Ijaw, there were multitudes (of ethnic groups) and there were microcosms in small areas. They (each) had their intra-tribal issues as well as their issues with the government and with Shell. This was a classic case where the proceeds from the oil went to the central government and it didn't get redistributed. Shell's response was, "We give it to the National Petroleum Corporation, to the NPC, who in turn gives it to the government. We pay an enormous amount of taxes to Nigeria, but we're not responsible for the distribution." The government had to take its own responsibility as well. The budget was well financed, (but) the economic distribution was not.

It was what they call "Dutch Disease," where an economy is mostly or totally reliant on petrochemicals, but it doesn't create jobs. It's very technical and capital intensive, but it is not labor intensive. So the Nigerians that had jobs were highly trained engineers who had gone to England or the United States and came back with good degrees, but they were not the average person. The average person wanted a job, they wanted their farmland not to be engulfed with oil. They couldn't farm any longer and that was the struggle. Frankly, I think this still remains part of the struggle. So there was that issue there with the delta and then security issues in the north. This was prior to (the emergence of) Boko Haram, but they were starting to emerge.

*Q: Already back in 2002!*

LIBERI: Yes, there were little bits and pieces, and of course, there was the north and south divide between the Muslims and the Christians and some other groups, as well as the power struggle during the war years when the military ruled Nigeria. Most of the military came from the north, and came primarily generally from some of the Hausa tribes. And the south was the Igbo, Yoruba (tribe)s and others, so there was still that divide there. It was obviously much more complicated than that, but that was (the context) in a nutshell.

We were a bit limited in where we able to go and have programs. Even though we had a very large program by USAID standards in Africa, it was still very small compared with the budget of the government and the needs of the country. At that time Nigeria had (a population of) at least 130 million, (which) we thought was undercounted. We thought

there were actually 150 million people at that point. (It was) the most populous country in Africa and the second largest economy after South Africa. As Nigeria went, certainly so did all of West Africa, as did much of sub Saharan Africa. This was a case where it was too big to ignore, and because of the military dictatorship USAID had really limited our program for years in Nigeria and were just then restarting--particularly with the move from Lagos up to Abuja, which was the new political capital, although Lagos remained the economic capital. The seat of government had moved from Lagos but there was a lot of back and forth between Lagos and Abuja, very similar to (Washington,) DC and New York.

One of the things I learned that was not unique to Nigeria but I think was very Nigerian in scope, was that you really needed to spend time with the governors because it's a federated country and the states and the governors are very powerful. If you wanted your programs to work, you had to spend time with the governors. I made it a point to go and visit every single state and meet with every governor in their state.

*Q: Are the governors are elected within the state; they're not appointed there from the central government?*

LIBERI: Yes, that's primarily the case. There are times when there are appointments that are made, but generally speaking, they are elected. A number of them had been in power for a while so they had their own anchors of power--seats of power--and (had) their varying levels of economic base as well. Of course there were all the issues that you had to be careful about such as corruption, etc. We always had to be very focused on ensuring the funding for our programs was allocated to one of our implementing partners (and) not directly to the government. However we needed to work very closely with the government and the governors in each state to make sure the programs were able to be implemented.

*Q: Now your implementing partners, were they principally foreign who came in or were they Nigerian, or a mix?*

LIBERI: They were a mix. We had U.S.-based partners who came in who were generally prime contractors, and then the sub-contractors were often Nigerian. Even on the primes (prime contractors) we often had Nigerian staff because many of the Nigerian are very well educated. To the extent possible we tried to have Nigerian staff. But given the need for accountability and to have systems in place, (e.g.) auditable accounts, any entity that was sub had to have that in place as well. However the prime contractor was responsible. So there were a lot of fiduciary responsibilities.

Let me just back up. In HIV/AIDS. This was when the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) was just starting out so (it) was a big deal in Nigeria.. In fact, we actually had President George W. Bush visit. I was responsible for showing him one of the programs that we were implementing under the PEPFAR program--the beginnings of the PEPFAR program. (We were) funding a lot of Prevention of Mother-to-Child Transmission, and a lot of that was taking place at the hospitals. We were able to show

him where the funding had gone, what the program was doing, and of course, it was a big deal to have a POTUS (President of the United States) visit. That took up an enormous amount of our energy.

*Q: At the time the president visited, there must have been an ambassador?*

LIBERI: Yes, it was Ambassador Campbell who was in place at that time. After Ambassador Jeter left there was an interim charge d'affairs. That was quite the visit for all of us!

*Q: This was 2002?*

LIBERI: It was July 2003.

(The visit) was quite extensive, and we were able to show the president a fair amount of the PEPFAR program and also explain to him what we were doing in the rest of the country; where we had a lot of programs. This included programs in the north, particularly in education, with a particular focus on girls' education. We also funded maternal child health programs. And then of course the big issue was preparing for the elections. The POTUS visit was just after Obasanjo got re-elected. I think there were a lot of successful results that came out of the program in Nigeria however it was another complex dynamic program to manage, that's for sure.

*Q: So HIV/AIDS and PEPFAR were a big concern,(as well as) education and the upcoming elections. In managing the mission, how much of the personnel would you say were Nigerian in the USAID mission?*

LIBERI: Oh I would say the majority was [Nigerian] in the USAID mission. It's usually about a 1/3 to 2/3 ratio. About 1/3 are Americans who are directly at the mission, but the majority of the folks, those who run the controller's office, the voucher examiners, a lot of the program management staff, the administrative staff, and the motor pool, all of them were obviously Nigerians. We had a fairly extensive Nigerian staff.

*Q: Did they get along?*

LIBERI: They did, although there were some issues that transpired at times, and that we had to make sure didn't boil up beyond a certain degree. It was interesting to see how some of the ethnic issues played out even among the staff and even among some of the groupings of staff and the cliques that would occur. Yes, there was a divide in that sense, but it was never to the point where mission functions couldn't occur, but it was something that you always had to manage. We worked very closely with the local Foreign Service National Association(FSN)/locally employed personnel. I mean you have to work very much with the leaders of the group, and always keep tabs on what was needed.

For example, we were able to do something very useful for the staff--we were able to negotiate with the banks so that they would do loan mortgage financing.

In fact, two things happened. We were able to negotiate with the developer who was in the process of doing development in Abuja for government workers, as well as staff of international organizations like USAID or DFID (Development Fund for International Development), the development fund for the Brits, recognizing that this group had salaries, and so we were able to 1) work with the development groups so that they set aside some of their housing for our FSNs, combined embassy and USAID.

Then 2) we worked out a deal where the loan would go to the individual, but (they agreed that we) take a portion of the salary and pay directly to the bank as their mortgage payment each month. Because we had systems set up, and we had direct deposit into those banks for their salaries, they were able to actually (deduct) a part of it, obviously with the employees' approval. That was a win-win situation because the banks felt like they had a guarantee in terms of getting funding and knew that would come directly from the salaries.

*Q: Yeah, you're right! Did the employees also have their own credit union or their own joint fund that they could get small loans from if they wanted to buy an appliance or a car or something like that?*

LIBERI: It worked at different levels. Obviously the more senior FSNs were able to get bank loans. FSNs that were at a different socio economic level did some of this community financing, which works in other places as well. We were able to do that in Uganda, (where we) helped them get access to credit and loans. It helps when a bank knows that the person is actually being paid by the U.S. government.

*Q: In the course of the five years that you were there…*

LIBERI: I was in Nigeria for about three years, 2002-2005.

*Q: Oh, I'm sorry. What were the indicators that gave you confidence the programs were succeeding?*

LIBERI: Well, we had a fairly robust monitoring and evaluation system in place in each of the projects and then we brought in a lot of outside evaluators, which one needed to do. Not everything was perfect and everything was not always linear. We had to obviously oversee carefully a lot of the programs, particularly the ones in states that were a bit distant, to make sure that there was oversight. But I think we were able to keep reasonably good records of what was going on and certainly in terms of outputs, (e.g.) X number of girls being enrolled in school, which was an increase of X % from the base of who had been there.

One of the big things we were involved in then was working on polio eradication, which almost got eradicated during that time, but unfortunately some cases started to come

back. It was a huge endeavor where we were working closely with other donors. We were (providing) a lot of the training, working closely with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and supporting (the) purchase of vaccine. People don't realize what it is to try to eradicate a disease. Particularly with a population like Nigeria, it meant that every six months, more than 52 million children had to get vaccinated. It was huge. We weren't responsible for that alone, but we were a major contributor. (Another responsibility we had was) keeping track of infant mortality and maternal mortality. Nigeria had one of the highest rates of both at that time because of the large population, and also (because of) the big discrepancy in terms of health care, etc. We were able to monitor (our programs) but a lot of it was done by outside evaluators as well.

A couple of interesting developments were two programs that, through our implementing partners, we actually put on television. One was focusing on corruption, and it was a modern day law and order type of cops and robbers show where the theme each week was focused on corruption, and the script was written primarily by Nigerians. "Nollywood" was very big and (was) really burgeoning so we had some very good script writers. This became one of the big hits, as well as another program on election monitoring--making sure there wasn't election fraud--and civic responsibility. There was a big message about civic responsibility. These two programs- were like soap operas--became very popular. I think (they) were among the most popular shows and by many accounts had a big impact. We would do focus groups before and after, and it was interesting to see that people had gotten the message about corruption and about civic responsibility, etc.

*Q: It is interesting as well that enough TVs were now available for you to have an impact reasonably far around the country.*

LIBERI: Right, and there were a combination of things. One is that it was also being aired on radio.

*Q: That's what I wondered.*

LIBERI: So if you didn't have a TV you could listen to it (on radio) and people did. Radio penetration was 90-99%. TV obviously was in the big cities and in some villages. Actually it was in villages where people would gather around if there was just one [TV] and watch the programs – almost like a community event. Or as folks were doing with Nollywood, they would have DVDs and would show those. I was amazed at how much these programs got around in terms of media, etc.

*Q: Was it also a time when cell phones began to be used more?*

LIBERI: Yes. Cell phones started burgeoning and, as we had done similarly in Uganda, one of the big things we were able to do was help get farm prices out to the farmers in rural areas so that they wouldn't be cheated by middle men. The farm-to-gate is always a big issue and often the farmer gets the lowest price and the middle men get the higher

price before it gets to the retailer. The consumer pays a lot but the farmers see very little of it. I think that was a game changer in terms of helping a number of the farmers.

*Q: Okay. Now you were the head of mission.*

LIBERI: Yes, I was the Mission Director.

*Q: How much could you travel and to the extent that you traveled, what did that travel give you? What did you learn by going out, in addition to sort of keeping the governors happy?*

LIBERI: You always learn a tremendous amount by traveling, and it's really important for people to see you out there. It was very interesting because we often had news crews coming with us. We were or could be the big event in town so a lot of local reporters would show up and if some of the Lagos or Abuja papers or radio stations knew that we were going out they would send stringers along. We received a fair amount of press (coverage) just by going out and being in rural areas, so that was good. On one hand it was good to be mindful of the need to engage with the governors. Secondly it was very important to get the USAID brand out there and to just show that the U.S. government was supporting all these programs throughout Nigeria.

The other thing, for me, it was necessary to really see regional differentiation, in terms of the tribal, ethnic, religious, topographical, geographical differences, etc. Nigeria in terms of geographic size is not a large country, however because of the population density, it was very important to juxtapose regional differences with the economic situation, to understand what some of the challenges were.

*Q: (The years) 2002- 2005 were not wild in terms of internet yet, but it was getting there. To what extent did USAID begin to work with the embassy in terms of strategic communication messaging?*

LIBERI: One of the big things we did was work very closely with the embassy on the "American Corners," which USAID supported. It was a good partnership and I'm glad you raised this. We supported a lot of the inputs in terms of computers, training for internet, and the grants that would allow the centers to continue for a year or so until they were able to generate enough revenue. Students, business people, and average citizens loved having American Corners. People loved having access to the internet and loved the programs that came out of it. We worked closely with the embassy to bring speakers and thematic events. We also worked to bring sports entities. We had a Basketball for Peace program where we brought together Christian and Muslim students (who) engaged in dialogue around basketball. We brought in some heavy hitter coaches and some players from the United States to go on a little tour, working with the Public Affairs (PA) portion of the embassy. USAID funded it, (and) it was one of the first programs in sports specifically focused on religious conflict resolution. It got to be well known throughout the country because we had the imam from the north and one of the archbishops from the south (who) actually joined together to spearhead this program.

We were able to demonstrate in several instances, particularly when things were starting to heat up in the north in Kano and when conflict got bad, that intervention actually helped stave off not just very big demonstrations, but (also) prevented some people from getting killed. That was another very innovative program that we were engaged in at the time, and people loved it.

*Q: These are all positive things. Were there the usual urban myths or rumors that you had to fight against?*

LIBERI: Yes, unfortunately Nigeria still had a fairly dicey reputation on corruption issues--the "419 scams" were very prolific.

*Q: Can you explain what a "419 scam" is?*

LIBERI: A 419 scam is named after a statute in Nigerian law that people cite. Essentially it's people who try to contact you, most likely through the internet by sending you an e-mail saying, "Your long lost uncle just passed away here in Nigeria and left you $20 million and if you just send me your bank account number I'll deposit $5 million, etc." People got scammed, and in fact every day we had this wager over who got the most outrageous (scam) e-mail that day.

Around the world there were criminal rings that were doing this, so that was a big issue and we had a fairly significant FBI (presence) in Lagos that was helping to deal with that issue. People may not remember this but there was a whole emergence of counterfeit money at that point. Counterfeit $100 bills were circulating, so we had to focus a lot on that. Unfortunately there was also drug trade that was coming through as a transshipment from Latin America into Nigeria and often shipped on to Europe. So there were all those issues. And (there were) also political corruption issues in Nigeria as well, which unfortunately were significant.

Another thing we had to be very careful about was a lot of fake pharmaceuticals. They were either nominally manufactured in Nigeria or were brought from other places and basically replaced. The real drugs were taken out, fake drugs put in, (and) different labels put on. There was a huge trade in that. We had to be very careful that that didn't infiltrate any of our programs. Because as you can imagine it would be very devastating and we couldn't have the U.S. government (reputation) tainted with anything like that.

There was a lot of oversight that we had to conduct. Those were some of the many things that we had to deal with on that front.

*Q: That is remarkable. Once you began the education of girls and you began to get them actually into school, did they stay in school? Was it sustainable?*

LIBERI: In certain places yes, but not everywhere. I think we were one of the first groups (who looked) at this from a fairly a scientific (perspective). A big issue occurs when girls

reach puberty because they have to have separate sanitation facilities during menstruation, etc. Many girls just stay at home during that time. If you can't help address that issue, over time girls start dropping out since she can't catch up with her studies because she's out of school one week a month…and then you compound that over time. So (the result) was mixed, to be frank, and matriculation was an issue. I think in many places it remains an issue. Also education outcome is a big concern, because while you might get girls and boys into school, often the quality of education and the training of teachers is not that good. You basically have kids taught by "teachers" that aren't that much older than they are and (who) don't know too much more than they do. So the education outcome I think is one of the key challenges that remains in sub-Saharan Africa and other low income countries.

*Q: During this time did USAID as an institution change in any way that you felt in the field?*

LIBERI: Yes, during this time one of the big things that happened was the F Bureau was established. In addition to PEPFAR, which began (as) a very centrally managed program with a lot of decisions being made in Washington and not being decentralized, we went from a system, particularly within USAID that was fairly decentralized, to a very centralized budget system. Previously, once you developed a CDSS (country development strategy statement), you developed your strategy, you got it approved, you laid out a five-year plan of what you were doing, and then you went in for annual reviews. Once that occurred, you were pretty much able to make changes on the ground. If you saw opportunities you were able to have more flexibility to engage in those opportunities. You didn't have to consistently go back to Washington and ask, "Mother May I". As a Mission Director I had sign-off authority for up to $5 million before I had to go back to Washington. There was a lot of flexibility in the field because it was needed, because it was very dynamic, and we were arguably in the best position to be able to see and understand and to react to those opportunities. Or, conversely to see that things weren't working and turn those programs off and not have to go through a whole process back in Washington. However that started to change very directly, because PEPFAR became centralized, the whole F budget process (also) became very centralized.

*Q: Now just take one second, F had not existed as a separate undersecretary and as a separate locus of decision making for very long. When you first arrived it had all been under W, I think, the undersecretary for World Affairs. Then F was created separately and as far as you recall, what was its main purpose?*

LIBERI: I think a sort of agency-centric -viewpoint was that many in USAID saw it as an opportunity for the USAID budget to come under the State Department, because before that it had not been under the State Department. We were a separate agency. Even though it was sub -cabinet, USAID was a separate agency. We had a separate budget, we had separate Office of Management and Budget examiners, and we had a whole separate review process on the Hill.

What the F process did was essentially bring all of that under one umbrella, which was the F umbrella. It brought USAID and what had been the USIA public affairs budget, and some of the other smaller entities, all under one rubric. A lot of that then had to get reviewed through the embassy and then up through the F Bureau process. It added many layers and a much longer process to establish the budget, to defend the budget, to get the budget approved, and then to be able to actually obligate the budget.

That was difficult for program implementation, because September 30 is the end of the fiscal year, and if you haven't obligated funding, you lose it! So if you only get your funding in July or August, then you need major contracts to put your funding into. Because USAID funds programs through implementing partners and is mandated to go through the competition process, it leaves a very small window of time to go through that process. So we wound up having 80 percent of our budget process happening in 10-20 percent of the time, as opposed to being able to do it all throughout the year. It was particularly difficult because it fell during the summer, which is the highest turnover time of staff. People were leaving post and others were coming, and because school was out, most families wanted to take their vacations then. So it was very, very difficult to manage from a mission management standpoint.

*Q: You had it in many factors of millions of dollars more than I did as a PA (public affairs) officer. I had very small budgets in comparison to yours, but the same problems. I knew I had to spend most of my money before July because if I didn't, I would have to spend everything in July and August, otherwise it would simply go back. Even though it was a small budget, a lot of what I had to sign for would be something that would happen later. (For) a planned visit by someone you had to figure out how to spend at least some of the money in advance so you had the money obligated and available for use. When these last days arrive and you've got a VIP visit or who knows what, it was really awful. I had to sit down with my staff and say, how do we spend it in a useful way for the embassy, bearing in mind that if we wait, we may not even have that much because then when you're budgeted for the next year, "Oh well, you didn't need all that money after all." What a mess!*

LIBERI: Yes, exactly. So you can imagine doing that at the multimillion dollar level with many programs. That's what I mean by that process limited a lot of our flexibility in the field. Over time you obviously learned to manage it, but it's still challenging. And frankly I would say not optimal, certainly not for the U.S. government.

*Q: Did they ever grant you two-year funding?*

LIBERI: It depended on the "flavor" of money. Because all funding is earmarked, it depended on the particular legislation--and don't forget during this time we didn't have an authorization bill; we only had annual appropriation bills. So it was even more limiting and you couldn't say it was authorized for two years, because we just had continuing resolutions and an appropriations bill. It was like, tying your hands and your feet and asking you to run the race anyway!

*Q: We very rarely had an opportunity with some kinds of money for two year money. That was like a dream come true.*

LIBERI: Yes

*Q: Because then you didn't really have to worry that you would lose it if what you wanted to do was a very big event 13 months after you got your funding, that would be a perfect moment for an event, and that you wanted to save for that because it would be serving so many of the embassy's interests. Were there any benefits that came from the creation of the F Bureau from your point of view, working in the field and so on?*

LIBERI: Well, I think that the benefits were--and I think what the intent was--to give a much more holistic viewpoint to the budget, both at an international level where we were spending our money, and also at the mission level, not just with USAID. (It was) to help the Ambassador have an idea of all the funding at an Embassy, where that was going, and to avoid any duplication. If you have (different) spigots of money--things that are basically hived off--then you can't get a good picture. I think it did help in areas like democracy and governance where we had a combination of both USAID and Embassy funding, and in some of the election monitoring because we had different spigots of funding. If funding is siloed, you don't get a good idea of who's doing what to whom. So in that sense I think it helped. There is efficiency in that which I think is good, and it enables the Embassy senior leadership at large to see what is happening with the budget.

*Q: Let's go back to one of the programs you'd mentioned earlier, the economic development side for the (Niger) Delta. What did you see, if anything, that were indicators of improvement of some kind?*

LIBERI: One of the big things that we were looking at in particular, which is still an issue, was job creation for the youth, and economic empowerment in general. A few things that developed for example was the partnership, the PPP (public/private partnership) that we had with Shell. For example fish farming was developed, and we were able to help some women's groups do agricultural value added. (It was) kind of low level but (they did) some food processing--tomatoes and things like that. We were able to help with some small and medium enterprise development. This was really focused with the Shell funding entirely on the delta region. We had some other programs in and around Lagos, working with the city, and this is where the mayor of Lagos was very, very powerful because Lagos in and of itself is huge, 20 million people. We were able to work with communities (to) increase micro enterprise loans. Frankly I would have liked to do even more, but economic development as an earmark is a very low percentage of the entire budget, unfortunately. You have a lot of funding that goes to HIV/AIDS, health, polio, etc., but a relatively very small amount going into economic development. We did what we could.

*Q: Besides Shell, were there other opportunities that AID could take advantage of in terms of U.S. commerce? Not that USAID would typically be the agency involved in that,*

*but every once in a while some opportunity presents itself where a commercial venture also has the potential for parallel work in economic develop that you're trying to do.*

LIBERI: Right. We didn't really have a Foreign Commercial Service (FCS) based in Abuja. Those activities were based at the consulate at Lagos and we did work with them because that's where all the U.S. oil companies were based, as well as a number of U.S. service companies, and some of the big hotel chains. USAID funded the investment road map which outlined the number of steps that it took to actually do an investment in Nigeria, and then we worked with the investment authorities to try and reduce the number of steps and roadblocks that it took to get investment and licensing going. That's where we worked most closely with Department of Commerce to help streamline some of those processes and enable more American businesses to come in and operate in Nigeria. It's a very dynamic [market]. Nigerians are extraordinarily entrepreneurial. I've always said Nigerian market women in particular may not be literate but boy are they numerate! And they know their profit margins better than a hedge fund analyst!

*Q: And the interesting thing for them is the more information they get--like on cell phones about pricing, about middle men, about the entire farm to market potential--the more capable of being a small business person they are!*

LIBERI: Exactly. As well as getting training in financial literacy, etc. One of the other things that we did -as we do in many country programs--we funded the contraceptive social marketing program. Selling condoms and birth control pills throughout the country also helped to generate small entrepreneurs, which was very good. It helps on two fronts. One is small entrepreneurship but also very much on birth spacing and family planning.

*Q: While you were there did the election take place?*

LIBERI: It did take place, and we trained an enormous number of election monitors. Here again, people have to recognize the challenges of size. There were 110,000 voting precincts for people to go and vote, given the size of the population. USAID funded the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) and other implementing partners working through the Nigerian election commission, to train election monitors, both domestic monitors who were the key because that's where you get the most number, and then working with The Carter Center and others to bring in international monitors. I think that the election by and large was a success. There were a few anomalies here and there, but basically it was declared as a free and fair election. We had a lot of civic education and a lot of training of people, and the results (came) back in a fairly timely manner. So (while) it was a very large endeavor, it did come off more or less pretty well.

*Q: That's great. Did you actually go out?*

LIBERI: I did. I have gone out and done election monitoring in just about every country that I've served in, including Uganda, Ghana, Libya, Iraq, and Afghanistan.

*Q: In Nigeria what part of the country did you go to*

LIBERI: I was in the north, in and around Abuja, and up a little bit north of Abuja as well.

*Q: Any interesting stories from there?*

LIBERI: (There were) a couple of the interesting stories, and here again this is where training is important. I went to a couple of the polling stations to watch the count, which is always the important thing, and here is where cell phones come in handy. So there were counts in one or two places where it was very close and they had to do the count several times. Then all of the monitors from each of the political parties had to sign off, and the results were actually sent via telephone to the central election monitoring headquarters, to the INEC, (Nigerian electoral commission). It was very important to witness that process. There was one instance where the crowd was very animated about the vote count and just made sure that all the ballots were going in the right piles. There were a couple of challenges to the count, and monitors helped make sure that things were on the up and up. So in that sense I think it was positive.

*Q: In the time you were there, it sounds like you had very good working relationship with the embassy. That the integration of your work with the embassy's was pretty smooth.*

LIBERI: Yes, I would say that in Nigeria it was by and large. Working with Ambassador Campbell was very good; he was there for the majority of the time that I was there. When I came in Ambassador Jeter was there but he was in the last part of his tour. When he left as I said there was a bit of a hiatus during which I was actually charge d'affairs for a reasonable period of time.

*Q: One thing you were lucky about in the mission in Nigeria is the country is so big that the embassy really couldn't follow USAID terribly closely.*

LIBERI: Right and what was interesting in terms of the embassy operations was what was going on between the consulate in Lagos and the embassy in Abuja. To be perfectly frank, that's where there was more friction, between the consulate general and the ambassador, particularly I think when Ambassador Jeter was there. I believe he had some concerns about reporting and different issues emerged regarding autonomy of the consular general and who's on first. Because of the distance between Lagos and Abuja I think there was more tension. That was something that had to be watched. The other point I would say was the budget and operations of the Interagency Cooperative Administrative Support Services (ICASS)

*Q: Just take one second to explain what ICASS is*

LIBERI: ICASS is basically the interagency administrative system for managing the embassy at large. It involves all of the agencies within the embassy who are under chief of mission authority, it's basically the operational and functional budget. This includes housing, motor pool, the maintenance of houses, and all those administrative functions.

Ambassador Campbell came to me and said, "The chair of ICASS rotates." I think it had been under State (Department) the previous two years and so the Ambassador said, "I think that USAID now needs to chair this." I said, "Okay, yes sir." So in addition to all my other responsibilities, I became the ICASS chair and basically stayed in that function for over two years.

*Q: It's not an easy job*

LIBERI: Not only is it not an easy job, it's a thankless job. It's a very difficult job because--well just to back up for a second--when I became the ICASS chair, the ICASS budget in Nigeria was one of the top five in the world. Basically only London, Tokyo and a few of the other big missions were more expensive than our budget. Part of the reason it was so expensive was because we had two very large cost centers, Lagos and Abuja, and the budgets had to cover for both, but not everyone was participating equally in both. You had very large agencies like State and USAID and then you had smaller agencies like the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and the Federal Aviation Administration, Treasury, etc. We had 22 agencies, I think, at the embassy. And so I think one of the hardest things I did during that time was to be the ICASS chair. I had been on the ICASS council before at other missions, because as an agency head we had to. In Nigeria the meetings had primarily been chaired by State and had always been held in Lagos. I indicated we needed to alternate meetings between Lagos and Abuja, and do it consistently. But I remember when I first took over as chair, you could really cut the tension in the room with a knife, and it was like piranha in terms of going over the budget and people were very contentious.

*Q: One of the big problems is that if you have anyone new, they don't really know how it works. They very quickly become suspicious, can easily get angry, and it takes a while simply to learn how the ICASS system works.*

LIBERI: Oh absolutely. It's a real learning curve and you're right; when people don't have experience and they are suspicious, they also think that they're paying disproportionately to what they're getting in terms of services etc. and believe some people are getting more of a free ride. So trying to explain the process, trying to explain the cost centers, and the ratios, and the service providers (was a challenge.) For certain things, State is the service provider, and for certain other things USAID became the service provider. There were a number of things that were difficult. For example there were certain things that USAID was doing, where frankly I think we were being more efficient. We were handling our own housing maintenance. This was before we had the joint housing pool; it was just on the cusp of that. So on one hand you want to streamline, you don't want to have two maintenance and two GSOs (general service office), but when you have two different locations or many different locations you have to (provide) services in your locations. I found myself being the ICASS chair but at times as the head of an agency, writing to the ICASS chair and opting out of certain services, saying that USAID would handle it ourselves because we could do it more efficiently. In certain cases USAID then became the service provider for the Embassy. It was very interesting. However we did streamline. I think our budget when I first started was something like

$17 million--I'd have to check the figures--but we streamlined and cut off $5-7 million, while not cutting off any of the benefits and services. We really put in a lot of rigor and a lot of efficiency. A number of costs had been not been constructed properly, and there were a lot of legacy issues. Often people don't look, and continue doing the same things, etc. I do think that having had a very strong USAID budget analysis and program management background, it forced (me) to look into many of the details and to do the calculations and then to propose changes.

*Q: Being head of the AID mission and its multimillion dollar program and the ICASS chairperson with its multimillion dollar budget, did you have even a few minutes to do anything fun in Nigeria?*

LIBERI: Yes I continued my art collection! I also think one has to always stay fit so I continued my exercise regime--swimming and going to the gym--and that was good. But to be frank, you are engaged 24/7 so it was very time consuming.

*Q: Interesting thing about art--talking about art for one second--a lot of times you can learn a lot about a country from the artists. So I'm just curious in the times you had to go out and look at art and talk to the artists, were there any instincts that you got by doing that?*

LIBERI: Oh absolutely. Nigeria has an extraordinarily rich culture a lot of which is defined by art. The beautiful Benin bronzes, Yoruba sculptures and some of the most magnificent Igbo headdresses are extraordinary art. You do learn a lot about the culture; particularly the hierarchy of the many different kingdoms that there are. There's a whole tradition in Nigeria called Oga. Oga is the chief of the kingdom. So that was one of the key things that I learned, that a culture defines itself through its art, and (I learned) what some of the various artifacts mean. There's a certain cloth, for example Kente cloth in Ghana, (and) indigo cloth in Nigeria. There's a certain headdresses, there is certain jewelry, certain amulets, that are only worn by the royalty, so if you're not part of the royal family you can't wear those pieces. Then there was a slave caste, and certain things accrue just to that caste, and then there's the majority of culture in between. I really learned an enormous amount, and this is when a lot of the Nigerian artists had become, or were continuing to be, very well known. Bruce Onobrakpeya, produced magnificent pieces before he passed away. El Anatsui, who's now is one of the most famous artists. He along with Ablade Glover in Ghana, and others, like Geoffrey Mukasa in Uganda, Twins Seven Seven, in Nigeria etc. and others There are a number of artists that are very famous now and their particular style of art is well known. I had the opportunity to collect both modern art as well as tribal art pieces that I was able to find.

*Q: In any of the programming that you did, were you able to get any local stars to participate? Like, "Let's conquer polio," or "Let's clean up the Delta," or that kind of thing?*

LIBERI: Yes, to a certain extent we were able to get some of the personalities, if you will, for different events - it wasn't universal, all the time, but it happened on certain

occasions. Of course I would often host events at my house, cultural and art events, etc. That's how many of the artists got involved which was great. Nigeria really was extraordinarily rich in terms of the art that was there, and I enjoyed going to different parts of the country and learning about the artists and different types of art.

*Q: And the other fascinating thing for an outsider like me, I've never been to Nigeria, is just when you hear about how they are taking other art forms even music and so on and mixing it with their own local traditions and coming out with all kinds of new, interesting things that get world attention!*

LIBERI: Oh absolutely. And again just too also reiterate, there was tremendous music coming out of Nigeria at that point. Famous writers, of course, like Chinua Achebe, Ken Saro-Wiwa, just extraordinary. And Nollywood was burgeoning as an art form in and of itself, having a real captive market, not just in Nigeria but around the world. It was really amazing reaching hundreds of millions of people.

*Q: Okay, well we've I think we've covered just about all of the key aspects of a typical tour in Nigeria, but what have I missed that is an important aspect that you still want to reflect on?*

LIBERI: I think that we've covered most of it. I would say that there are elements of the political system there that perhaps is a little bit sensitive to talk about. However there were instances where you could get a very deep and close insight into some of the political personalities, some of the challenges that they face, particularly issues related to corruption, etc. You also get to see people who are real heroes. So I'll talk about one person.

As I mentioned earlier there were lots of fake drugs going around. The head of what is basically the Nigerian equivalent of the Federal Drug Administration (FDA), was a woman and she was fearless in terms of fighting corruption. She basically put the gauntlet down and told the drug manufacturers as well as the importers that she wasn't going to tolerate fake drugs and she raided many places when she found out that there were fake drugs and confiscated them and had people locked up, etc. to the point where she was car bombed, her home was set on fire and burned down. Her office was set on fire and burned down. Her children were threatened and she had to send them out of the country, and she had not one, not two, but three assassination attempt on her life, but she kept going. Doris was her name and she was just extraordinary. I remember her as being one of the heroines of (Nigeria.) But the pressure that she was under was absolutely extraordinary. She just did some great things. I remember once we were having trouble getting our HIV/AIDS drugs out of customs, because people wanted something (a bribe). I said, "We are not giving anything! This is USG property and know that we're very clear about this. It's tax exempt and it's everything else exempt." Of course people have ways of dragging their heels, and so I called her and I said, "I really need your help because we're not getting anywhere with this". And good enough, she used her pressure and influence, and even though people didn't like it, we were able to get the drugs out and to continue to save peoples' lives which was what the purpose of that was. But as I say, she

was fearless, and she was one of the people that really gave me hope for the future of Nigeria.

*Q: Sort of one of your champions in the Nigerian government, the Nigerian bureaucracy, and the kinds of people that you have to cultivate in order to make the programs work.*

LIBERI: Absolutely. Similarly if we had problems in any individual state, I would often call up the governor and say, "Mr. Governor, we seem to have an issue in your state." Because I had visited them and had that relationship, I could do that. And they would say, "Oh no, madam director, we'll solve the problem." And I would say, "Please do because we're trying to implement a good program in your state and we seem to have a problem on the ground." Of course they wanted to save face and they knew that the impediments were not correct!

*Q: Well, all right, so then as you approach the end of the tour.*

*Today is July 25, 2017, we are resuming our interview with Dawn Liberi as she prepares to go to Iraq. This is 2004 now.*

LIBERI: It's the end of 2004 and I am still in Nigeria as the USAID Mission Director. I guess beginning of December or so and I got a phone call from the then USAID Deputy Administrator Fred Schiek who called and asked me how I was doing. He then said that the agency was very interested in giving me an opportunity that in their minds was a big promotion, and thought that I would be a good candidate.

So I said, "Thank you, Fred. I'm not sure what that is, but I already have one of the most challenging jobs in the agency as USAID Mission Director in Nigeria, and there aren't really a whole lot of people lined up behind me to take this position."

He said, "Well, we'll work on that." (Then) he said, "But really you have to think about this, because this is the largest program not just in USAID but possibly in the history of the agency since the Marshall Plan."

Immediately bells started going off and I thought I knew what it was. And he said, "We want you to go and be Mission Director in Iraq."

There was some silence on my end of the phone and I said, "Um, not sure about that!"

He said, "Well I'm calling on behalf of Andrew Natsios."--who was the USAID Administrator. "Andrew wanted me to just have an initial conversation with you. Think about it. Don't say a thing now…just think about it. Andrew will give you a call back in a few days." Sort of testing the water. Well, it didn't take me that long to think about it and decide I wasn't interested in going to Iraq. Sure enough, in a few days Andrew Natsios called me and said, "Dawn, so I hear that you're interested."

And I said, “Well, wait a minute! I said, “Fred called me and talked with me about the possibility” and I was very frank with Andrew He and I had a good open relationship. I said to him, “You know, frankly, honestly, I never agreed with the policy of going into Iraq. I have a lot of concerns about us being there…the U.S. government to begin with, but USAID in particular.” And I said to him, “I have to be very honest about that because frankly I’m very reluctant, because I do have serious policy disagreements.”

“Yes, we understand. A number of people have issues, etc., but don’t say no, think about it. Take some time to think about it.”

By this time it was literally just before the holidays and Christmas and he told me to just think about it over New Years and then get back to me with a response. And he said, “You know we really need you there.”

I said to him, “You know, Andrew, I’m an Africanist, my entire career pretty much has been spent in sub Saharan Africa. I’m not a Middle East expert. I don’t speak Arabic. Why do you want to send me there?”

And he said, “Because anyone who can manage the Nigeria program is set up to manage something in Iraq!” He said, “We need someone who has strong management skills, who can operate in a very intense and diverse environment, and a complex environment.”--which Nigeria was.

It certainly was at that time…there were a lot of issues in Nigeria. Even at that point in time Boko Haram was very nascent just in the delta, at the time just a fly-by-night bunch of hoodlums--we thought--but in fact (were) also starting to gain some steam. And there were issues in the delta, there were lots of problems that we had to deal with and lots of security issues, lots of North-South issues, which I’ve gone over in other statements.

Andrew reiterated, “We need someone who can handle a complex environment.” So I thanked him and said, “Thank you for the confidence. I really do need to think about this. Because it wouldn’t be my first choice.”

Over Christmas I was already scheduled to visit some friends in South Africa and then I decided to do an excursion just by myself into Botswana to the Okavango, which I’d always wanted to do anyway. But now there was a reason to just sort of go and contemplate and just be by myself and really do some soul searching because I think it’s the kind of thing that you don’t take lightly at this level. You’re honored in a way that you’ve been asked, (but) at the same time I also knew that a number of people in the past had resigned rather than go to Iraq…not even as Mission Director, just to go serve there. They were so dead against the policy.

And, (after) a year in (by U.S. forces), there were a lot of issues and there were a lot of concerns. The Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) was just finishing its tenure, the mission in Iraq was moving into a more normalized embassy. John Negroponte was there as ambassador and so they were trying to be on more of a normal footing. Nevertheless,

USAID was still really involved in reconstruction and a lot of post-conflict reconciliation trying to do a lot of rebuilding the country. So I did a bunch of soul searching and in the end decided that: 1) the program was happening whether or not I went there, and 2) given both the complexity and the level of the budget, there really was a necessity to have someone (there), even if it weren't me. (They really needed) someone who understood USAID functioning at a fairly high level and who had been a Mission Director in a number of places. (Someone) to really 1) manage the program, and 2) probably more importantly, to deal with the interagency, which was a very big process at that point I time. So while I disagreed with the policy--and I was very clear about that--my essential feeling was I had signed up to serve my country and you do say when you sign on the dotted line that you'll serve anywhere.

When you join USAID you don't anticipate going into a war setting, which was what this was. That's not initially what you sign up for, but at the end of the day, my basic feeling was that we were there to try and help the Iraqi people. That was our mission. And that basically the Iraqi people should not suffer because of the issues involved in U.S. government policies, and politics. That we had an obligation and a responsibility to make our programs be as good and as strong and as responsive to the needs on the ground as we possibly could. So in the end, when you really sign up for that, I decided that I would go ahead and do it.

*Q: When they offered it to you, did they have a period of tenure that they said you would be expected to be there or was it open ended?*

LIBERI: I think at that point in time, the normal tour was about a year. Obviously if people could extend a bit and have some built-in overlap with their successor, then they were obviously very happy to have that. And in the end I actually wound up staying--I'll get to this in a minute--but I wound up staying much longer than my initial tour for a variety of reasons. So when Andrew called me back again in January right after the holidays, I said, "Well, after giving it much thought…" I said, "I'll go, but I want to finish out my tour in Nigeria because my predecessor in Iraq was scheduled to leave in April-May. My tour was ending in June and I wanted to be as close as possible to finishing up my three-year tour in Nigeria.

And there was a, "Oh yes, yes, yes." We'll see if we can work this out." About a week later a cable came and said, "You've been assigned as new Mission Director in Iraq. Pack your bags, because you have a whole lot of training to do before you get there, and we need you out of Nigeria within 30 days or something."

And I was like, "Oh excuse me, that wasn't the deal, you know."

The response back was "Well this is very fast moving, you know." So that was my first clue about how things were going to work!

The next thing I knew, I was very quickly back on the plane to Washington…like end of February-ish, because then I had to do the FACT (Foreign Affairs Counter Threat)

training, which was the conflict zone training that you have to do that's necessary to go into Iraq. I had to also update my medical clearance, and then introduce myself to the interagency, because of the very big role that USAID was playing in Iraq at the time. Then I tried to get as much briefing as possible on the USAID programs in Iraq.

Here's where I have to say, Iraq was *sui generis.* I mean we had never seen anything like this since the Marshall Plan. My budget in Iraq was $5.2 billion, (that's billion with a capital B.) That was more than what we were spending in all of sub Saharan Africa—where we were in over 35 countries--so the budget in Iraq was enormous. There were very high expectations and a lot of pressure to implement these programs quickly. By that point in time, we were living (with) the Powell Doctrine: If you break it, you fix it! You own it and so we collectively, as the U.S. government, were trying to rebuild the country as quickly as possible. The impetus was to get a lot of the infrastructure up and running, and about half of the total budget was related to infrastructure, and oil, roads, hospitals, schools, etc. Just getting as much rebuilt and continuing to work.

Here's where unfortunately, the lack of knowledge about Iraq really hindered us, because to be frank, our assumptions were wrong. Maybe not all, but a lot of assumptions (were) based on the concept that once Saddam Hussein fell and the country was "free," we could start rebuilding and build up democracy; that the country would just get back on its feet and start running itself, because after all, the Iraqis were educated and they had been running the country, prior to Saddam Hussein. Well, the fact of the matter is, all of those assumptions turned out to be incorrect. We weren't starting at zero and trying to work the country back up. We were starting at about -200 and trying to get the country up to zero to where it could then launch and go from there. And because of the sanctions on Iraq that had been in place for years, things had been held together within the country by "gum and glue and rubber bands," because there were not a lot of items being imported due to the lack of being able to sell oil, etc. The country was at least 20-25 years behind technologically, and so everything was antiquated. I mean all of the infrastructure was antiquated, all of the systems were antiquated, and a lot of the educational system. People just weren't up on the latest technologies, etc. So we were shocked to see how bad everything was, and (at the same time) amazed that things ran at all, because there was such a state of decrepitude.

So whereas we thought we would be able to start at a certain level and go from there, we really were just back to basics with everything. Even to the point of supply systems. When I say back to basics I mean even in agriculture. People didn't realize just how bad certain things that Saddam Hussein had done had impacted the country, for example when he drained the whole fertile swamp area (marshes) outside of Basra. Let's face it, this had been Mesopotamia, the cradle of wheat growing for civilization in that area and when he drained the region, it just denuded everything and set agriculture back in the country by 50 years. His intent was to starve a lot of the Shia population unfortunately. So many of these policies really had an impact on how we were trying to conduct business, get the agriculture up, get the educational system up, the health system, all the engineering, all the infrastructure.

*Q: …And at the same time, regional or sub cabinet government organization.*

LIBERI: Absolutely. We were trying to help build up the organs of government so that they would function, because it had been a dictatorship and the way that he (Saddam) had ruled was to divide and conquer. Many people who weren't Baathist *per se* joined the Baathist party because that was the only way that they could survive. So there was a lot of smoke and mirrors in terms of people's true allegiance, and, most people were just trying to survive. Because he (Saddam) was ruthless. His two sons were psychotic in addition to being ruthless, and so most people tried to keep their head down, out of the fray, so that they could keep their head on! It was really a question of survival for most people. If you spoke up, you knew that was it. You knew those were among your last moments on Earth. That's how the country functioned - on fear. People just had to figure out a way to survive in that environment.

So several things happened. One is they lost a lot of the knowledge of how things work and so trying to find people who knew how anything functioned was hard. As I may have said previously, there were decisions that were made under the CPA to disband the Iraqi army and the police, two of the functioning entities – consequently you had a whole lot of angry young men with guns who were on the street with no jobs, and that was a very big issue. I think (that) was one of the worst decisions that was made and it's been documented. A lot of the country's brain trust had already left the country. Anyone who was able to get out during the Saddam Hussein era, got out. If they had any means and any opportunity or any family overseas, they just left. So you had people remaining that hadn't benefited from what had been a very good educational system in Iraq. Some of the best engineers in the world. They had a lot of good schools previously with trained doctors, etc. So the country was trying to build all this up.

Another key piece was to try and get local governance established because everything had been centralized. All decisions had been made in Baghdad, so everything came to the center, nothing had been decentralized, including budget. People had no clue where the money was, how it got doled out, which was as Saddam wanted it. There were no systems in place for budget decentralization, for payments, for any sort of operation. So USAID along with the military, the interagency, treasury-- were trying to build up those incredibly important systems to make the country function again. One of the key elements was helping to build up local governments as well as community participation. The local community program (LCP) was one of the big programs that USAID funded. The intent was to have local participation on the part of people and local structures. The point was to instill a sense that things had changed, that people had a say in what was happening, particularly their future.

Meanwhile, this was all being done in a very hostile environment. At this point we. had 100,000-150,000 U.S. troops trying to fight what by then was building up as an insurgency. Muqtada al-Sadr was heavily engaged in commanding a militia at that point. Sadr City was a place that USAID had some programs through OTI (Office of Transition Initiatives), that had been successful, which were then taken over by Muqtada al- Sadr, and soon we weren't able to go there because of security reasons. We had to counter a lot

of misinformation since the militia were taking credit for our programs of providing services to the population.

*Q: That's an interesting point. So in the South you had USAID projects going on. Were they managed by direct hires or U.S. contractors or by local contractors? The ones down in the South?*

LIBERI: Well, they were a mix of all of the above.

*Q: I'll tell you why I'm asking. Because I am curious about what happened that would more or less allow al-Sadr to take them over. Given that that probably wouldn't have been U.S. preference or policy.*

LIBERI: Oh no, absolutely. And don't forget, Sadr City was part of the Sunni triangle. That was not all the way down South. At that point in time--this was prior to the PRTs (Provincial Reconstruction Teams) being established--USAID had three regional offices. We were basically in Baghdad, Basra, and Erbil. We had a small presence as well in Kirkuk because that office was getting set up. One of my major responsibilities as Mission Director was trying to make sure that we had USAID staff in each of these offices. There were a mix of U.S. direct hires, contractors, personal services contractors.

*Q: And the situation was still tolerant enough so that Americans could be in these places.*

LIBERI: Yes, at that point in time we had a lot of security. People always say, "Why are programs so expensive in Iraq?" Because the security overhead was enormous. We had PSD (personal security details) who were contractors.

*Q: And USAID was paying for its own security through its own budget.*

LIBERI: Correct. We were paying for our own security because we had three regional offices as well as 700 contract entities, international, local, regional, etc. Because of the enormous spread of programs that we were implementing, it was actually more cost effective for us to rent an airplane that we then used to travel around the country and go back and forth to Amman, Jordan. That's where all the back office administrative functions were handled. A lot of our contracts, financial management, etc. had to be handled out of Amman because we could do that there virtually, which kept our footprint in Iraq smaller--although frankly it was still very large. There were more than 300 people just on the USAID compound in Baghdad, and then 50-100 in each of the other regional offices.

Here is where I think it's very important to talk about what had happened to USAID over time. It's sort of an interesting parallel to what potentially may be happening now in terms of budget issues. In the 1990s there was a big impetus to make systems more efficient within the agency and there was something that was called the New Management System that was being developed. The cost of that system turned out to be much higher than anticipated and in order to pay for that, there was a RIF (reduction in force) and a number of people got laid off. So we lost a lot of our brain trust in the mid to

late 1990s. By the time we got into Iraq, we had--count them --about 1,000 U.S. direct hire American foreign service officers in the world. Everyone else was either a Personal Services Contractor or one of the other mechanisms that we use to hire people.

*Q: And in essence, that was about half of what you had in the 90s.*

LIBERI: Less than half. I mean the normal, the status quo, had been 2,500 to 3,000--more or less. That was about the range. And then it dipped down to 2,000, but to have 1,000 American foreign service direct hires, it was just impossible. There was, unfortunately, a hue and cry from the military (and) from the State Department about how come USAID wasn't staffing up fast enough? How come we weren't getting out there and doing XYZ fast enough? Well one of the key reasons was because we basically had denuded our work force. We just had nobody.

*Q: Was the original RIF and the change in the management style part of the reinvention of government or the notion of the peace dividend and that now we didn't need to invest as much as we had?*

LIBERI: It was a combination of all the above - reinventing government, making things more efficient, and relying more on systems rather than people, etc. Look, I'm all for efficiencies, (and) I wouldn't say that USAID was a well-oiled machine. There certainly could have been efficiencies in many things, but at a certain point in time, similar to the U.S. military, who have done many studies on this, you have to grow your managers and your brain trust, and your experience.

I mean the U.S. military can map out an officer's life span starting from when someone is a Major, and they invest in education, training, mentoring, etc. The military can tell you what that whole career trajectory will be 20 years in. Maybe you'll become a Colonel and then move up to a General officer, if you make that cut. Similarly with the normal entry into the Senior Foreign Service, it takes a good 20 years to actually mentor someone to be able to manage the level of complexity that we're managing. Let's face it, at $5.2 billion, I was managing a program much larger than many of the Fortune 500 companies who had thousands and thousands of employees. I had 300! There were some staff quite frankly who should not have been in Iraq because they didn't have the experience. We had this saying that, "We had the needy, the greedy, and the speedy!" (These were) people who needed to be there because their careers had started to go off track and now they were trying to get back on track. The greedy, people who quite frankly were there because of the incentives for money were good. They were making 100% more of their salary because they were in a danger zone, etc. So they were there because that was their goal. And then we had the speedy, who were young people who wanted to get ahead very quickly and thought that this would be a way for them to get promoted quickly by serving in a hard to fill post.

I'm not saying this was everyone's modus operandi, but we had a number of people that frankly really should not have been there. They were not suited for the work. They didn't have the experience. They were not suited to be in that kind of an environment, because it takes a huge psychological, emotional, and physical toll on people to be in a war zone day in and day out. It is extraordinarily stressful. So if (you) don't have the skill set to begin with and then you have this kind of environment… I as a manager had to deal with many issues, including alcoholism, erratic behavior, and wound up sending some people home for their good and for the agency's good. Otherwise people stay and they hurt themselves, or they hurt others, and you have casualties, you have issues. So managing personnel was a very big deal as well.

*Q: The personnel difficulties, were they mostly direct hires who were just placed there and without a lot of thought, or was it a mix?*

LIBERI: No, it was really a mix. I have to say for most of the direct hires, the real issue for them was dealing with the separation from their families, because they were uprooted from their family, and that was very difficult. I think had we been able to have more families stationed nearby--in Amman, in Cairo, in other places it would have made it easier. Folks were supposed to be getting out every 6-8 weeks for at least a week at a time just to have a break. If they could have gone to see their family at that point, at a location close enough to spend some quality time and come back, I think that would have alleviated many of the stresses and the issues. Family separation was one of the big concerns. On the other hand, a lot of foreign service officers and contractors were really great. Some fit in well and did their jobs, and it was terrific, so I'm not saying this was everyone's issue. But you know what they say, it only takes 10% of the personnel to cause 1,000% of the problems, and that's what you wind up managing. It's sort of the tail wagging the dog because that's what you have to spend your time on. For many of those

folks, they just did not have the background and they should not have been out there. This (problem) was across the interagency.

There were other hiring mechanisms, of course, like the 3161 hiring authority. Some folks hired under that special hiring category never been out of the United States, and they thought because they were a city planner in city X in the United States, that they could come and transfer that skill set to Iraq and very often it just didn't work. Many people--not those necessarily working with USAID—many throughout the interagency were working through these contracts. They had no overseas experience, and quite frankly, they just should not have been there because it was not the place to cut your teeth as a first overseas experience.

*Q: And this was still (during) the CPA.*

LIBERI: It was the tail end of the CPA now moving into the normal embassy structure. When I got there, Ambassador (John) Negroponte was just finishing. He was about to leave, and Ambassador (Zalmay) Khalilzad had been named, but hadn't yet gone through his hearings and confirmation. So Ambassador Jim Jeffrey who was the DCM (deputy chief of mission) was the acting ambassador for a number of months, and then Ambassador Khalilzad came. Here again Iraq was *sui generis* regarding the interagency process, where every section at the embassy was headed by an ambassador. We had the chief of mission, the deputy chief of mission, and then we had seven ambassadors, all of whom headed up a section at the embassy. Iraq is one of the few places in the world where you could walk into a room and say "Ambassador" and half the room would turn around. Then you would say "General" and the other half would turn around! We were very top heavy, shall we say.

Someone said that at that point in time we had more generals and colonels in Iraq than we had around the rest of the world and I would say similarly we had more ambassadors in Iraq than we had collectively in many other places. Part of that was needed because of the level of experience needed. You had to have people who had the gravitas and could deal with our counterparts, not just the Iraqi counterparts but our NATO allies, and colleagues, the international community, colleagues from the United Nations, etc. So it was very important to have people at that level. We had some very terrific expertise. At the same time, it was top heavy and so while you need expertise, you also need a lot of people in the ranks who can actually implement programs.

This was compounded by the churn of the revolving door, because every entity and agency had different tours of duty. Some were six months, some were nine months, some were a year, some were more. It varied, so you sort of had whiplash because every few weeks you were dealing with someone new now managing a portfolio who you had to interact with at that point in time. It was the adage that particularly in Afghanistan, we were fighting 15 one-year wars as opposed to one continuous (war). That is true in many ways, because the learning curve is steep and if you keep changing personnel over and over and over again you lose the institutional memory- it just keeps walking out the door. So those were some of the big challenges.

On the positive side, USAID was able to build a number of schools throughout the country and help increase girls' enrolment. We worked very hard to re-fill the swamp area (marshes) around Basra and to see agriculture start coming back. We were able to get a number of the oil pumping stations up and running, and worked on one of the big oil refineries, to get it functioning. I'd say that we also helped train a number of Iraqis in local governance, and that was one of the key results we were able to leave behind in certain places. Now, of course, over time some of that has eroded, however it was a huge effort to get all even started at once.

*Q: Let me go back for a second to that issue where USAID basically had to give up on the al-Sadr programs, just to wind that up. Because I think that's an unusual thing that you saw happen.*

LIBERI: Right. So what happened was that through the OTI, the Office of Transition Initiatives, we were able to go in to Sadr City and get things started, like cleaning the garbage up, getting things looking right.. We organized neighborhood clean-ups and people paid for garbage pick-up, because they had some income. We also tried to get some of the electricity up and running, as well as water and the plumbing - just basic human services up and running.

We were able to do a lot, and then the insurgency started, and interestingly enough, Muqtada al-Sadr turned things to his advantage. Every place where we had a "USAID--From the American People" sign, he would take it off, put his sign on, saying, "Brought to you by Muqtada al-Sadr." Over time the Iraqis started believing that this was all coming from him. Basically he hijacked a lot of the work that we had done and turned it to his advantage. Because the security situation was getting more and more difficult, we weren't able to go back in for a number of months. Services changed hands two or three times from when we went in and took it over, they took it back, etc. We were working very closely with the U.S. military, to get into and out of Sadr city, and also had our own security detail; however security was a big challenge.

A key event that happened during this time was the election. A main focus we were working on was getting educational materials out about elections, particularly "Why participate in an election?" People hadn't had an election in years, so there was a whole generation of folks who really had no clue about what an election was, or what participatory democracy was, including who was being elected , and how elections were conducted. There was a huge educational process to get people to understand the process, what ballots were, how they were supposed to be using the ballots to vote, etc. Then physically to get the ballots out to polling stations in a conflict environment, get the election monitors trained. (It was) a huge deal.

There were a couple of key elements of the elections that we were dealing with.. One was trying to get the government and the population ready for the elections. People were very excited. They were excited just by the concept of being able to "elect" leadership. A lot of them weren't quite sure what it fully meant, but they really wanted things to change, at

least feel like this was a participatory process, etc. We wanted to make sure that they were educated and knew what the electoral process was. However, I think in many ways there was too much of a high expectation that things would change overnight and that "Boom!"--everything would just be rosy and fully operational - all services would be there, the budget would flow, etc. It was difficult in many ways, because there were many unmet expectations--some of it was very unrealistic.

The other issue on the U.S. government side, was that everything was focused toward the elections. From a policy standpoint, I think we were erroneously thinking, "Okay! Great! We help Iraq have elections, and then we can turn the country over to them, as we try to exit." So then it would become Iraq's issue to take over the institutions of government, provide services, security etc. as the U.S. started to retreat. We could focus our efforts on advising the Iraqis, but start making our way out…all of which didn't happen.

In terms of the political situation, things were evolving particularly in terms of candidates, etc Don't forget, this is when Ahmed Chalabi was still a player. He was trying to influence things. I think he thought he was going to become the next president, and that didn't quite work out. We also had the Kurds who were obviously pushing for their seat at the table. There were a lot of different factions vying to ensure that there were Shia, Sunni, and Kurdish (representation.) That power sharing was a very important step, and frankly, very tenuous at times.

So fast forward and what often inevitably happens is that the least controversial person gets elected. In this case (Nouri) al-Maliki was the candidate they could agree upon, however he did not have a lot of experience, in fact almost no experience at all. Basically (he) was put there because he caused the least amount of waves, which is not a great harbinger of terrific leadership, because he really didn't have the experience and he didn't have the personality for it either.

The first time I met al-Maliki he was answering his own cellphone as we went into a room to meet with him. He was confused, like he didn't really know what this meant, how he was supposed to act, who was doing what to whom. There was no infrastructure. There was no set up for him. He had his family members surrounding him because these were the people that he could trust; he really was floundering. We, the heads of agencies, were there with Ambassador Khalilzad. We were one of the first delegations to go and meet with him, and I went as head of USAID. I remember at one point during the conversation al-Malaki got really flustered and confused because the phone kept ringing and he kept having to answer it. He finally just handed it to his cousin who looked like he was about 12 (years old)! All the rest of us were sitting there dumbfounded saying, "Okay, this is the new leadership! We have a lot of work to do here to help him with the governing process!" Needless to say, there were a lot of fits and starts to begin with and it was not a smooth, well-oiled machinery.

At that point, now moving into 2006, the insurgency really started heating up. The level of violence, the level of attacks we were coming under, the shelling that occurred--mortars incoming every day--was really, really intense.

*Q: Before we get too much further, the actual election itself. To what extent did USAID support it? In other words were there programs of _____ education and so on that AID was responsible for or was that more a State Department…*

LIBERI: No, it was almost completely USAID. We had the program to do voter education, voter registration, training of election monitors, and then many of us went out and actually participated in the international election monitoring process. That was actually one of the most satisfying activities, to go out and actually see Iraqis vote, leave the polling booth with their fingers that had been put into the purple ink. There were many scenes of that sort--"I Voted"--and people brought their families with them. I went to the polling stations in and around Baghdad and a little bit further up north. I got to about ten different polling stations that day. What was just heartwarming was to see people bringing their families, their children, to show them that this is what democracy is about. This is how you elect and choose your leadership - to really see the parents trying to give their children a lesson in civics. That was great, really heartwarming.

*Q: And based on your experience with democracy programs in other countries, were you more or less satisfied about the outcome of at least the education and the outreach that you did before the election.*

LIBERI: Yes, I think that our teams got out--again with the help of the U.S. military-- to transport materials around the country. In fact, getting the ballots out was a huge logistical process, because ballots had to first be printed up. The process of who's running, who were the candidates, what are the party logos, all that had to be sorted out ahead of time. That was an involved process to say the least--lots of politics. Then just the sheer logistical element of getting ballots printed, and distributed to each of the polling stations, was enormous. Those logistical issues, frankly, in many elections--as we've seen even in our own--make or break the process. I felt that at least we were able to get (election) educational programs distributed throughout most of the country.

*Q: The contractors that did it, were they IRI (International Republican Institute) and NDI (National Democratic Institute)?*

LIBERI: Yes, all the above. We needed lots of people to get out and to help with the process. We had a huge election portfolio.

*Q: And the sense before the election was that you had pretty much reached….*
*…a critical mass of voters, and maybe not every single one, but that the feeling in Iraq was that enough people would get a chance to vote that they would feel that it was legitimate.*

LIBERI: Right, and I think people were generally pleased with the process, if not with the outcome. I think most people thought that the process went reasonably well, and it was deemed by the U.S. and the UN to be "free and fair" and that there didn't appear to be major irregularities. There was concern, of course, that there would be ballot stuffing,

particularly in certain areas. I'm not saying that nothing happened. There's always room for issues to occur and I think logistically a couple of errors occurred where some ballots didn't get where they needed to be. I think some people felt that the election register wasn't complete in many places, etc., but there didn't seem to be any massive fraud. Logistical issues and errors, yes, but no grand manipulation of the outcome.

*Q: Okay. So we get al-Malaki and he's got a rather a steep ramp-up and plenty of difficulties in putting his team together.*

LIBERI: Yes. So for USAID, and obviously the U.S. government, a key piece of the next part of the program was to help a number of the ministries. USAID developed a program to provide assistance to the new government, to the new ministers. The purpose was to help them put systems and processes in place that didn't exist so that they could manage their ministries, and discharge their duties. We couldn't do this with every ministry but we did it with the planning ministry, the ministry of finance, the ministry of local governance, agriculture, health, education, those key ministries. We worked hard with those teams to try and help them to get up and running.

*Q: Now similarly based on your experience, were there any other times in your career when you faced a similar situation where ministries were maybe in existence but not functioning in any reasonable way, and you had to do this as well in Nigeria or some other place?*

LIBERI: Yes, you name it. Nigeria, Uganda, to a certain extent Ghana, because countries have different levels of operational implementation, etc. For example, in Uganda we helped the Ministry of Education dramatically, as well as the Ministry of Health, and that served to do tremendous things in terms of helping increase enrollment and education, particularly for girls, etc. So we had huge programs there.

Similarly, we worked with the Ministry of Health, particularly in Nigeria, and helped them get their program up and running to face certain challenges like the polio epidemic, and focus on its eradication.

Also in Uganda, we worked very closely with the parliament and with the legislature to really help train legislators. We had exchange program where we'd send lawmakers over to the United States and then bring teams to Uganda to help (with training).

We did something similar in Iraq where USAID worked with the legislature as well. We had a number of these kinds of programs, so a large piece of my day was meeting with ministers to work out what kind of program would help them the best, what their priorities were, and how we could enable them to do their jobs. With the planning ministry, the Ministry of Finance as well as with the Central Bank, one of the key things USAID did was help set up the budget. The budget is huge, obviously and yet when the systems are not in place, it is extremely difficult to manage. In Iraq parts of the population felt disenfranchised, particularly in certain parts of the country where there were three very distinct, competing ethnic groups. Groups felt like they were being

disenfranchised, yet it was not always a political issue. It's a logistical issue (just) as much, so you have to get over that hurdle very, very quickly and put systems in place.

There were issues with Iraq because a lot of the oil, the new oil reserves, were in the Kurdish area, particularly Kirkuk, and that was starting to get very contested politically, because new oil fields were starting to be pumped. So the question was, "Well is that all going back to Baghdad – how is the revenue going to be shared? Don't forget at this point in time, we were also trying to help with the oil refinery process, because although Iraq had oil, there were really no refineries in the country and they had to send all the oil out to be refined and then import it back into the country. So that whole process was very much at play as well.

On the U.S. government side, I would say that one of the key issues that we faced--and that I faced—was not having a full blown strategy in place post-elections. Everything was leading up to the election, with all efforts focused on the election and then somehow magically there was this sense that the wand would be waved and everything would fall into place and we could start retreating, which of course didn't happen.

I remember distinctly thinking, "Well, we really need to have a strategy in place, an interagency strategy, one that included how USAID was working with the military with state, treasury, etc." Because many of USAID programs operated on the ground, I thought it was very important to lay that out some operating assumptions going forward. So myself and my team developed a strategy-- a two-year strategy--to see how this process could work, and what were some reasonable goals.

I remember inviting General George Casey, who was the commanding general at the time, to come to the USAID compound so we could present the strategy to him, because I wanted to get his buy-in. Good enough, he accepted and came. Normally you go to see the four star general, they don't normally come to see you. However I said to him, it would be a good opportunity for him to interact with us, and he did. He came with just a couple of aides, which was great. Then I said to him, "This is going to be a very, very small meeting. It will be myself and one or two members of my team. I'd like to have a dialogue directly with you." So he turned to his staff and said, "Wait outside" and he came into the conference room. It was a very small group, and (we) walked him through the strategy. He asked some very good questions, excellent questions, and then at the end of it, he sat back and he said to me, "You know, Dawn, I've been here for 14 months and this is the first time that I've seen any strategy that goes past the elections."

On one hand it was a compliment, on the other hand, a bit terrifying. I don't want to over reach and say this was hyperbole, however it was actually the case that the U.S. didn't quite have an exit strategy. We wanted to be out of Iraq -but what (did) that mean, and what would be left behind? What were we trying to achieve and what would it look like? What would be the process of turning things over, etc.

So, (we) got General Casey's buy-in and that helped when we presented the strategy to the interagency. Eventually we did send forward cables to Washington with the blessing

of Ambassador Khalilzad outlining our strategy as a way forward; on how we could move. I think it did help to orient us, particularly with the resource allocation, budgeting, etc.

Unfortunately as 2006 continued, the insurgency just kept getting worse and worse. While a fair amount of what we had outlined in the strategy was put in place, eventually the insurgency and the fighting just started taking over more and more and U.S. policy started to shift.

One of the key issues we had was the impact of " the 8,000 mile screwdriver" and oversight from the national security council (NSC) - not all of which was productive or helpful. I think people thought they were trying to be helpful, however there was a little bit too much second-guessing at times, and getting mired in detail. There should have been more of a focus on the strategic elements, and less of the tactical. A focus on the larger policy issues and what an NSC should do as opposed to getting into the weeds, would have been more helpful. There were different levels in terms of the machinery of the U.S. government that just weren't working effectively.

*Q: Interesting. And this was still late 2004-2005?*

LIBERI: No, this was 2005-2006.

*Q: Because, I mean essentially what is happening is the erosion of State and USAID in the interagency process if you are being given tactical orders from the NSC because that is the traditional role of State Department Washington and USAID Washington. They're supposed to get the strategy and then devolve it on to the field and if it's coming from the NSC, you've got more than one master then.*

LIBERI: Yes you then have many different masters--trust me--there were many, many masters and that I think was part of the issue that led to dysfunctionality because it was, "Who's on first? Is it the military, because they're always the 800 lb. gorilla in the room?" However it shouldn't be just military strategy because we can't fight our way out of everything. State needed to also weigh in very heavily along with the rest of the interagency. Here again the question was "Who's on first? Is it the NSC or is it State? Is it the Embassy?" etc. So it was a very difficult environment to work in.

As I've said before, the situation was *sui generis*. It was so huge – for example a pared down country team meeting consisted of fifty people sitting around the room. It was just enormous, and difficult to keep track of all the bits and pieces…

I haven't even gotten into SIGIR and the IG oversight. We had a Special Inspector General for Iraq (SEGIR) and then USAID had its own Inspector General. I had eight USAID IG staff sitting in the office at all times--I was there almost 18 months. There were 53--count them--53 program audits during that time, which meant that there was a full blown audit every 10 days…every 10 days to two weeks during my tenure. So not only are you trying to implement a $5.2 billion program, but then you're also having to

respond to all the IG requests, internal to USAID, in addition to the SEGIR audits. It was massive, so when I say we worked 24/7, it's not an exaggeration. Particularly with the time difference with Washington you often worked 15-18 hours/day.

*Q: This may be a good place to pause.*

*Q: Today is December 21 and we are resuming our interview with Dawn Liberi in Iraq.*

LIBERI: Let me talk a bit about the Basrah Children's Hospital, because it was such an important issue, certainly during the time that I was there. Just as way of background, there had been a very large contract for reconstruction projects that Bechtel had gotten. They had about one hundred items in their Scope of Work (SOW), I'm not sure of the entire number. One of the last things that came up was renovation of the Basrah Children's Hospital. It became known as the Laura Bush Hospital because it was something that the First Lady wanted, to ensure that there were facilities for children. This was all done with good intentions, however, it became very political.

Plans got developed way beyond what really could have been done in terms of the engineering, sophistication, scale and type of equipment wanted. Frankly, it was a bit beyond what the real epidemiology of the disease issues were, which were similar to what we see in many other developing countries: pneumonia, upper respiratory, diarrhea - primary care kinds of illnesses. The model for refurbishing the hospital was a very advanced, tertiary care type of facility. In November 2003 (before my arrival) $50 million was allocated out of IRRF funds (Iraq Relief and Reconstruction Fund) which was way under budget for actually accomplishing the task order. It couldn't have been done in the United States for $50 million, with access to materials and engineers. The project was behind schedule due to security issues, which remained in 2005-2006, plus we didn't have all the materials and architects/engineers needed. Technical experts had to be flown in along with materials. The site had to be secured while construction was going on, and so the premium in terms of security costs was enormous.

*Q: Why was Basrah chosen?*

LIBERI: Basrah was chosen for a variety of different reasons. From a health standpoint, a 2003 study on leukemia in Basrah found an increase among children. From a political standpoint, Basrah was the center of the Shi'a population. There weren't medical facilities there similar to what was in the Sunni triangle. Under Saddam Hussein, the Sunni were favored, so it was an opportunity to provide resources to the Shi'a population. Basrah was heavily populated, there were issues of children's illnesses related to when Saddam Hussein had drained the floodplains and the area could not grow crops. There were a combination of reasons, and there wasn't a signature project in Basrah the same way there were in the Sunni triangle and up in Erbil. So there was a sort of partitioning out of projects both geographically and tribally.

*Q: Had there been consultations with the local authorities or local population about what they needed or wanted?*

LIBERI: Here's where local authorities and the Ministry of Health want state of the art, bright, shiny objects for political reasons. In July 2005 the Ministry of Health asked USAID to modify the scope of work to increase the number of beds to 94 and upgrade the facility to include an oncology center.

*Q: But were all of these different authorities beginning to understand that under the existing plan that you couldn't do it for $50 million?*

LIBERI: People were beginning to understand it but many were not willing to accept it because there was a political imperative to get it done and to get it done fast. There was an emphasis on having a ribbon-cutting ceremony and even bringing the First Lady out. Primarily due to security challenges the completion date slipped several times and in March 2006 Bechtel informed USAID that the hospital couldn't be completed until July 2007. An assessment identified several options for completion ranging from $90 million to $131 million, not including medical equipment. Bechtel's original overall contract completion date had been December 31, 2005, so the interagency recommendation was to assign responsibility to USACE-GRD (the Army Corps of Engineers). Behind the scenes there had been some interagency rivalry and one-upmanship, with the Corps indicating they could get the job completed quickly. In reality it took six years to complete at a final cost of $166 million (more than three times the original $50 million).
As the Chinese saying goes, 'be careful what you wish for….'

*Q: Was there certainty that there could be sustained with electricity, with water, with all the other things it needs?*

LIBERI: That was one of the first issues that USAID raised, since sustainability was very difficult. Technicians were needed who knew how to operate the kinds of equipment they wanted to install—very sophisticated CAT scans, diagnostic machinery. Most technicians in Iraq were not trained for this. At the beginning of the project in 2003 USAID entered into an Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Project HOPE, who were to provide a significant portion of the hospital's equipment and assume responsibility for training medical and administrative staff.

*Q: It did get built, but was it used as originally intended, or do you know?*

LIBERI: It was opened in 2010 to focus on pediatric medical services and oncology – again much later and much more costly than originally anticipated. There were SIGIR and IG audits regarding the delays and additional costs – in some ways it was a case of no good deed goes unpunished. You try to do the best and it often turns into a never-ending Sisyphean kind of problem.

*Q: Throughout the whole thing, no matter how many changes, Army Corps of Engineers, no one ever said that this really can't be done, they just said barrel ahead and we'll find the money?*

LIBERI: We had said that it couldn't be done for the $50 million, particularly given the security costs associated with the construction. At a certain point it became "USAID can't do it, but WE can." Then in fact, it turned out the Army Corps couldn't, not for that price. Something similar had happened with agriculture, in fact. Under our agricultural program we had rehabilitated hundreds of tractors and had a program in place to train local mechanics to do the repairs so it could create jobs. As that project came to an end, a maintenance program needed to be put in place to enhance sustainability. I had written a very long memo to then-Ambassador Khalilzad pointing out what was needed for the maintenance program to remain sustainable, and outlined the reasons why. If those things weren't put in place, the program wouldn't continue working. A year or two later when Jim Bever was heading up the Iraq office, he was asked by the Embassy why the maintenance wasn't working and why USAID hadn't said anything. Bever went back and looked at the records and afterward he came to me and said, "thank God you documented everything, because I was able to bring your memo and show all the reasons why USAID had said this wasn't going to work!" Everything that I had put in the memo actually came to pass. It wasn't clairvoyance on my part, we just understood the issues and what was going to happen, so we documented it. We documented a lot of things. The Basrah Children's Hospital was documented as well, because the stages of a project are such that at the last stage fingers get pointed if things aren't completed.

*Q: If you're caught flatfooted and you don't have the background, you're stuck.*

LIBERI: You're stuck if you haven't documented it. A lot of things that were put in USAID's lap were impossible, very difficult to implement. Certainly during my tenure I was very clear with my staff what we had to document and why, and if we *didn't* do something, why we didn't, so there were records. Jim Beaver came to me and said "thank you so much, I was able to show them exactly what had happened!

*Q: This may not apply to USAID, but I haven't asked anyone with experience there, did USAID take on any of the antiquities issues, the protection or renovation of antiquities?*

LIBERI: Interestingly, not per se in terms of renovation, but one of the things that we were responsible for trying to ensure, wherever we were working, was that historical building were protected. If we were doing roads or dams or whatever it happened to be, there was an analysis to try to make sure that none of those buildings were damaged. If my memory serves me right, we did do a small grant to help ensure that the area of original Babylon was protected. People don't realize this, but there was a woman there, Myriam, who was literally the keeper of the treasury of antiquities. We had given her a grant to help ensure that certain antiquities could be taken care of and put in a safe place. When USAID administrator Randall Tobias came to visit, one of the things he wanted to do was go to Babylon. Saddam Hussein - on the site of the original Babylon - had built this sort of ersatz, Disney-like Babylon, so we went to that. However, the original area

that is part of Babylon is there, and we actually have photos of it. There was also a little hidden area where you could only get to if Myriam let you in, since she was the only one with the keys. We had sent forward a request, and she actually let us in to go see some of the antiquities that she had guarded. She was very, very protective, shall we say, of all that. She said, "you've helped us maintain this." So we weren't directly involved, we didn't bring the Smithsonian over, we didn't do that kind of assistance like we did in Afghanistan, but I think we had provided her enough to help keep things from getting ruined. She was able to put things away in certain places to ensure that they were ok. That didn't prevent all of the looting - people were still trying to find some of those artifacts. We were among the few, handful of people that got to see that part of Babylon.

*Q: Is this a good moment to wind up your tour in Iraq, because you have talked about now the size, the scope, the expenditures, the difficulties of working in the interagency where authorities overlapped and so on, and the example of the hospital. But I don't want to leave this particular tour if there's another example you have in mind that would also demonstrate the difficulties of working in this kind of post-conflict environment.*

*Let's turn to the next phase of your work, which ends up being in Afghanistan. How did that happen?*

LIBERI: The precedent to working in Afghanistan was very interesting. I left Iraq and I came back in Washington. While I was in Iraq I got a call from one of my buddies whom I knew from the War College/ICAF (Industrial College of the Armed Forces), Admiral William Fallon, who was at that point the COCOM (Combatant Command) commander for PACOM (Pacific Command). I think he knew he was being tapped to become the COCOM commander for CENTCOM (Central Command). He and I had stayed in touch, like many of these connections you make during War College, ICAF. He contacted me while I was still in Iraq just to ask me how things were going, etc. To make a long story short, he then got named to be the CENTCOM commander, so as I finished my tour in Iraq he was confirmed, and called me and said, "how would you like to be my development advisor." He said he had a political advisor (POLAD), who is usually an Ambassador who has served as Chief of Mission in one of the countries in the region. Fallon said, "you know, you've just come from Iraq, and many of the issues we are facing are post-conflict, development and economic issues. So while I have a senior political person, I don't have a senior level development person." So he asked me if I would become the "DEVAD" - Development Advisor.

So I became seconded to CENTCOM from USAID to become his DEVAD. It's the first time this had happened in both USAID and COCOM history, so I was the first "DEVAD." It was because Bill Fallon understood the importance of having someone with that skill set, and I really do think that's one of the benefits of a senior-level program like ICAF/War College, because those connections are made and people from different agencies really do understand the importance of other agencies. I understood much better the importance of having the military/defense piece, and he understood much better the development piece – all as a result of the interaction we had during our time at ICAF/War College.

COCOM commanders carry a lot of authority coming into a country, particularly the CENTCOM commander. We were fighting two wars at that time – Iraq and Afghanistan,- plus the 21 other countries CENTCOM worked in. That was before AFRICOM (African Command) had been established, so the Horn of Africa was under CENTCOM as well—Djibouti, and all of Northern Africa. These were 21 of the most difficult countries in the world, so it was huge to be the U.S. military commander for the region and to be managing two major wars simultaneously. I traveled a lot with Admiral Fallon and his team. There are only two COCOMs that have their own plane, PACOM and CENTCOM, so we were on the road all the time. A lot of it was spent building relationships, and dealing with the economic, social and political issues.

One of the key areas he asked me to look at - which became very important for the future- were the energy and water issues that related to the conflicts in the Middle East region in addition to what was going on in Iraq and Afghanistan. This was important from an interagency standpoint and it gave USAID a seat at the table that was equivalent to political and military issues. It was one of the times when the three "D's"—defense, diplomacy and development—came together on pretty much an equal basis.

Fallon was very, very clear that the three of us went to meetings—he went, Ambassador Roth (POLAD) and myself. Whenever we came into a country team meeting, he would say to the Chief of Mission, that we were there as a triumvirate, and all three of us were going to the meetings. So I met all the heads of state in every country we went to and got to sit at the table with all the senior decision makers. It was very interesting in terms of force projection. When the COCOM commander comes into the country, they ARE met by the senior government officials of that country. Often we didn't stop at the Embassy first, and were brought directly to the Presidential office/palace, because people understand the importance of the U.S. military. It was an interesting lesson in how that process works.

*Q: But the U.S. ambassador for the country would meet you or at least be present in these meetings?*

LIBERI: Often but not always, because don't forget, the U.S. military does have its own relationships. It was not meant to bypass the Embassy or Chief of Mission, however there were often meetings set up that the COCOM commander and we, as his team would attend, and the Ambassador was not always present. There was generally a representative from the Embassy, although not always. There were times when it was strictly a military discussion, so only CENTCOM staff attended. That happened on a few occasions. There was a lot of coordination and no attempt to usurp anything, however there was an agenda that had to be managed, and the COCOM commander certainly had separate access to decision makers in the country. That became very apparent.

When Admiral Fallon finished his tour and General Petraeus came in as CENTCOM Command , I was finishing my assignment as DEVAD. Petraeus wanted to have a CENTCOM assessment, which was managed by an interagency team with four directors:

myself from USAID, a representative from Treasury, a representative from the Agency/CIA (Central Intelligence Agency) and one from the State Department.. The person managing the CENTCOM assessment was Colonel/General H.R. McMaster, he had just gotten his one star but he hadn't been pinned on. I had already worked with him in Iraq when he conducted the Tal Afar offensive. It was very interesting, I went from being the DEVAD to the CENTCOM commander to one of the agency representatives for the CENTCOM assessment under Petraeus.

The CENTCOM Assessment led to many, many briefings, particularly of our NATO allies. At that point General Eikenberry was at NATO and I was briefing him on a number of issues. In my last briefing he had just been named Ambassador to Afghanistan, and he asked me what I was doing after the Assessment. I said I'd gotten my assignment to be the USAID head of the economic development program at the War College. Karl Eikenberry said to me, "no, you're not, you're coming to Afghanistan and you're going to head our civilian uplift program." I said, "no, but I've already gotten my assignment," and he said, " I'll make a phone call and that'll get changed." And he did. (*laughter*) The next thing I knew I was on an interagency assignment at the Embassy in Afghanistan. It was still very "fluid," shall we say, in terms of the scope of work and what I was meant to do.

*Q: What year was this?*

LIBERI: I was DEVAD 2008-2009, and now I was going to Afghanistan from 2009-2011, so two years. This is when the Embassy was building up and developing the civilian uplift.

*Q: Take a second to describe what the general goals were.*

LIBERI: Similar to how there was a military uplift in terms of the troop levels in Afghanistan, when they went from 40-50,000 up to 150,000 troops, the civilians basically at that point only had a handful in the provinces. When I arrived there were about 40 or 44 civilians in 14 PRTs, Provincial Reconstruction Teams. What Eikenberry and the country team wanted was to build up the civilian presence so that we could have a lot more emphasis on governance and interaction with local leaders and expand presence from an interagency standpoint. By the time I left two years later, we had over 400 civilians in about 73 locations throughout the country, including provincial reconstruction teams and district support teams, DSTs.

My job was to head up the Interagency Provincial Affairs Office, the IPA, to scale up and make the civilian uplift happen.. This had not been done before, there was no blueprint for how it was going to work, so we had to develop it. That's what I was asked to do, and I was seconded from USAID to the Embassy. I was a senior member of the country team, working alongside my USAID counterparts, but I was not managing a USAID program. I was basically managing the interagency civilian uplift that was run out of SRAP, the Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan. That's when Richard Holbrooke was in charge of that office. Ambassador Eikenberry was Chief of Mission, and over time

General Petraeus went from being head of CENTCOM to commanding general in Afghanistan. When I first arrived, Stanley McChrystal was there as commanding general, and when Stan left Petraeus came in. We were dealing with a *huge* military/embassy/interagency apparatus, and my job was to make sure we had the kind of civilian teams that could interact with military teams on the ground and more importantly develop a civilian presence to deal with the Afghans—the governors, provincial leaders, district leaders.

The whole point was to have a mirror image of civilian teams that would focus on the governance, economic and social issues all the way down the line and get as far out into the population as we possibly could in a secure environment. That means we had to send civilians out to live on the PRTs, on the district support teams (DSTs) and on FOBs (Forward Operating Bases), which was the smallest unit the military had and the smallest unit where we were able to put civilians safely. The goal was for them to be able to go out, sit in meetings with village councils, district councils, municipalities, and with the provincial teams. It was a huge endeavor, and it was a monumental effort to get that many civilians in that many places safely, working with both the embassy and the military teams.

*Q: That's remarkable. At this moment the provincial governors were still being appointed by Karzai from Kabul. You have all the problems of corruption—I wouldn't even say corruption at this point, but competence.*

LIBERI: Right. This was an issue where frankly even more than Iraq, tribalism in Afghanistan was key. Karzai spent a lot of time doing a balancing act in terms of offsetting tribes, if you will, and tribal leaders. And yes, appointing the governors and provincial leaders - unfortunately corruption was very high and remained high. There was a lot of training going on of the "ANA," the Afghan National Army, trying to build up the security. That was taking a very, very long time, but was totally necessary and is still necessary. The equivalency is that we were really trying to build up the capacity of local entities to govern. One of the key things we worked on was to help the decentralization of the budget. Together with the ministry of planning and the ministry of finance, we helped get those laws in place to start with the decentralization of the budget because, don't forget, like Iraq, Afghanistan had had a very, very centralized budget. Getting funding out to the provinces and then to the districts and municipalities, was a task. That's often where corruption comes in, because obviously the further out things go the less there is often less accountability. That's why it's so important to set up systems and a process of transparency and accountability.

In Iraq there was oil to help propel a national budget. In Afghanistan, there was not, and so we had the huge U.S. reconstruction budget, much of which was under USAID. Then the military came in with its budget, the civil affairs program but also the counterinsurgency budget, the commander's funds (Commander's Emergency Response Programs, CERP). The military had their own money that they were doling out in little bits. There was a lot going on, and unfortunately not all of it was coordinated from an interagency, government standpoint.

As we know, USAID programs go through very specific contracting processes, long bidding criteria, even though there are efforts to streamline the process. There are very specific accounting, IG (Inspector General) regulations, etc. Then you have the commander's fund that the military used as it wanted, and it wasn't always clear how it was being managed and what the decision-making process was, since much of it was fairly decentralized. Then there was the budget process we were involved in through IPA, which was to engage with ministries themselves to help them establish priorities and a process for decentralization of the budget to deliver services. Obviously, we hoped that was complementary, or at least parallel to other development programs going on, not just from the U.S. Our NATO allies had smaller budgets, but nevertheless they had their budgets and were implementing programs, some of which were geographically focused. We had the Germans in the north, the Indians doing certain programs, and of course the British, French, Italians, and Poles So a lot of our NATO colleagues were engaged in activities in their geographic regions.

*Q: At this point, just in a general sense, how was Afghanistan earning hard currency?*

LIBERI: Officially or unofficially?

*Q: Well, I guess both! I think we all know what the unofficial is! Were there any industries or agriculture or anything that was beginning to pick up?*

LIBERI: A bit. Obviously the unofficial was all the opium, and that was very unfortunate, and was fueling a lot of the corruption. It wasn't happening in a vacuum, it was happening with a lot of tacit or illicit support of many of the political figures, at different levels. Afghanistan is very rich in terms of mining, minerals, natural resources, etc., and there were certain areas where this was beginning to be mined and exported officially. There was a bit of agricultural production that was being developed, however most of the budget was reliant on outside donor support, since the country didn't have the kind of oil revenue that Iraq had. The national budget of Afghanistan, in terms of its own resources was pretty small. Nevertheless, there was the equivalent of what we would consider budget support coming into the government's budget that was meant to support programs and develop the provinces, districts and municipalities. Getting that process established as a system was one of the key goals.

A key focus of the civilian uplift program was to get experts to provide guidance and expertise to local leaders who wanted to do development programs. Each of our teams was supposed to have someone with expertise in health, agriculture, governance. If they were in a particular technical area (e.g. where a dam was located) sometimes engineering expertise was required. These programs were meant to complement other things that were going on, like USAID programs. The civilian uplift program was specifically focused on local entities, local governance, and helping units of Afghan decision-making. The emphasis was on budget allocation, governance and accountability particularly in the rural areas of Afghanistan. People don't understand how geography affects these issues. You could go to hamlets in Afghanistan where people had never travelled outside that

hamlet. They didn't even know what was 20 miles away from them. When we say, 'all politics is local,' there it was *very* local.

The geography was such that you couldn't travel easily from one place to another, depending on where you were. That's one of the other reasons why governance and decentralization of the budget is so hard, given the sheer physical challenge of getting out and interacting with the population. We had to work very closely with our military colleagues because there were many places we could only helicopter or fly into. That, of course, added to the security issues. That is a major impediment in Afghanistan, even more so than in Iraq. That's why education is so important in Afghanistan and why women are so cut off from so many things, because of the geography. It was eye-opening, to be frank. Some of the poorest areas I've ever been to. It helps you understand why there is no electricity, no water – because of the geography.

*Q: Yeah, very challenging for anyone to come in throughout time, Afghanistan's geography has always been a challenge.*

LIBERI: Always, from Genghis Khan on it's been a challenge. Genghis Khan couldn't rule, the Russians couldn't rule. We didn't want to rule, and it was very challenging for us to even help. Given the altitude and snow passes, you couldn't get into many places.

Let's talk about the challenges of the U.S. trying to assist the governance process and setting up these teams. The concept was reasonable in terms of bringing in expertise and interacting with the local population, helping them to understand and prioritize projects. Often our own systems make it difficult in terms of trying to find that level of expertise. People don't realize how hard it is to get that many civilians, many of whom have never been outside their local areas in the U.S., to come and serve in a place like Afghanistan. It's the sheer machinery of the bureaucracy. The goal is to have experts assist with post-conflict reconstruction, however everyone has to have a security clearance, a medical clearance, and everyone has to go through FACT training to come to Afghanistan. Additionally, matching everyone's skill set to a region, not to mention language, because almost no one speaks Pashto or Dari. There's always a translation issue, so we have local translators, or hope we do. The lesson here is the sheer machinery needed to identify, clear and place experts in the field. I think frankly we did it in record time, to go to a ten-fold increase from 44 people to over 400, from 14 locations to 72 locations, and to do it safely. We didn't have any casualties. We had near calls when there were attacks and some close calls from a security standpoint, but fortunately we didn't have any fatalities. Trying to manage that and actually have all the pieces come together is huge.

I got to Kabul and was there for the first few months trying to put the blueprint together with the interagency team we had at the embassy. Ambassador Eikenberry said "I want you do a proof of concept, and be based in Bagram so we can establish this in eastern Afghanistan and the provinces in the east. The country was divided into four regional commands—north, south, east and west, from a military standpoint, and each had their command headquarters. Bagram was the largest because RC East (Regional Command East) had the highest population, provinces where the U.S. had been working consistently

since 2001. We had more military operations there, from a governance standpoint, there was more going on—in places like Nangarhar, Jalalabad, etc. In the west, north and south we hadn't had as much military presence previously, and there had been heavy Taliban presence for example in Kandahar. We were building up in those regions. I went to Bagram and worked with General Scaparrotti, who was the RC (Regional Command) East commanding General I spent about nine months focused on getting things set up in RC East as the proof of concept, and then we took that model to each of the other regional commands.

This is where I have to say that working with the military is so important. Had it not been for them buying into our concept and supporting it, particularly from a security standpoint it would have been very difficult. Let us not forget, you're asking regional commanders to have civilians on their teams in PRTs, district support teams (DSTs), and the FOBs (Forward Operating Bases) They want civilians however it is a security issue and they have to protect all the civilians that are under their command. Getting all those pieces to work together was a key lesson, and for me it was so important to have commanders who understood and were supportive. If that didn't happen, the whole system would unravel.

For civilians, it was also necessary for them to understand that, while they were in a civilian chain of command that led up to the embassy, in fact, on a day to day level, they really were under the military command. That often had its challenges, because from a professional standpoint they were answering to the embassy and their respective agencies. We had representatives of USDA (U.S. Department of Agriculture), USAID, Treasury, State etc. Civilian experts had higher headquarters in Washington, their heads of agency at the Embassy, and then you also have the military commander saying, "No, you don't just get to go to any meeting that you want because I have to provide the force protection for you!" Meetings had to be cleared ahead of time and you can't decide to wander off and visit the governor. All of that has to be coordinated.

It's a steep learning curve on all sides, and that's often what produces interagency friction. My job and the job of the senior members of my team--who were responsible for each of the regional areas—was to make sure all those relationships can fit together, and when issues arise, try to adjudicate them. Sometimes you have to pull people out because it just doesn't work, either from a personality standpoint, or people can't deal with the security issues, or they just have health issues. It's a constant job, being in touch with everybody and understanding what's going on with the folks that are under you purview.

*Q: I totally get that. How do you measure success in a situation like that?*

LIBERI: The first level is "output," can you get people there? The first metric, frankly, was sheer numbers. Can you develop the structure, can you get the numbers out there? We did, and every single week we had to report back to the Embassy, to the National Security Council, to the Deputy Secretary of State. We had SVTS (secure video teleconferencing) every single week and reported out our numbers and where people

were. So the first thing is the structure. As the numbers get built up, it's a good sign that you're trying implementing the civilian uplift.

The second metric is "outcomes" - what's happening in terms of assistance with governance, budgets, projects on the ground, council meetings – substantive measures. We developed a whole monitoring and evaluation system to measure these outcomes. It's really hard to measure impact, so you have "outcome," which are immediate indicators—do you have projects on the ground, do you have provincial council meetings that you can point to, do you have these activities going on? "Impact" takes much longer. I think one of the key impacts that we had, and it exists to this day, is helping Afghanistan establish an NGO (non-governmental organization) watchdog capacity for the budget. That actually exists to this day.

*Q: How does that work?*

LIBERI: That's where you have to bring in some very particular people. I recruited people with this experience that I had worked with in Iraq. Specifically I brought in the former Treasury attaché to work on this program. It's necessary get buy-in from the ministries of finance and planning, and we also worked with the NGO sector that was in Afghanistan.

*Q: And I imagine most of the people in the NGO sector are either Afghans who've returned or others who are working in Afghanistan from outside.*

LIBERI: That's right, and we wanted to ensure that the core group we were working with were Afghans, either living there or those who had returned, and that's exactly what happened. In fact, our key counterpart was a woman heading up a particular Afghan NGO which is very good and is still there. The goal was to set up a process whereby the NGO could follow the budget - follow the money- make sure that the budget was posted and that the allocations occurred. It became a watchdog function, which helped to reduce corruption. This doesn't cut out all corruption, but at least identifies where the money is supposed to be going and tracks if it's getting there. And if not why not and what the impediments are. The process has gotten very high marks, and from an impact standpoint was one of the key programs to be implemented and one of the most rewarding things to help set up.

*Q: It has continued to this day as far as you know?*

LIBERI: Yes, it has, and I think it's one of the success areas that we can point to. It's important because, with the change in policy, as the military de-escalated, the civilian structure also de-escalated, so the whole civilian uplift structure we put in place is not there anymore. Having this kind of ongoing impact is very important. The key is that it became institutionalized within the Afghan system, that's what made it last.

*Q: In this budget system bottom-up, or at least in principle is it bottom-up?*

LIBERI: I'd say it's both. The budget is still fairly centralized. I think the bottom-up piece is the prioritization of programs that occurs. There's still a tug of war in terms of allocation of budgets to provinces, or to a particular area, and of course everyone always wants more. Getting the programs and the money out to provinces/districts is a huge feat, as is making sure expenditures are monitored. I don't know that each particular municipality or province would say that all their needs are being met, not by any stretch of the imagination, however they now have input into the "rack and stack," prioritization of programs.

*Q: Was there a measurable, or up until now to the extent that you know, a measurable reduction in corruption with the budget. Did that help reduce some of the corruption?*

LIBERI: I think it did, because more of the budget could be accounted for. Obviously, the more you can account for the money the less of it can disappear. It doesn't cut out the corruption at the local level of who's getting the contracts, who's being hired to do the work—build the road, the dam, the school building. I think that's where some of the corruption still is, in terms of who's being given the contracts.

*Q: Other than this budget process, where there other successes in the time you were there that you could at least see getting off the ground?*

LIBERI: I think there were modest signs of success. In terms of provincial councils being established, the number of female representation on these councils really expanded, as did the number of programs that were focused on education or health, girl's education, etc These were very modest but important signs of progress and of success. Also, there was much more of an awareness of people's ability to participate. Prior to these municipal councils and village councils there were traditional systems. A previous program that preceded this, was the National Solidarity Program (NSP), a successful Afghan, home-grown program that had been put in place by Ashraf Ghani when he was minister of finance, working closely with outside experts.

I'm not saying that there weren't local entities that had existed, but I think that the formalization of the councils and getting more private sector participation, was important as well. Local Afghan companies were being developed, which we assisted by helping to establish an enabling environment. Other things were happening simultaneously that assisted with private sector expansion. Similar to Iraq we expanded the mobile phone system, and this assisted programs like microfinance which enabled people to participate in the economy. These were all elements that helped to expand economic participation and in that sense were successful. Again, the U.S. can't take credit for all of this, but once you open up the process of participation, a lot of other things start to occur organically. For example by providing assistance for financial analysis or help with identifying priorities, people are better able to articulate their needs. So, if there is a council meeting and a system of criteria to determine most important needs, this serves as a counterweight to the political process of "I'm the big person in the room and I want this to happen." This makes a huge difference and promotes objective decision-making. This was a key contribution to the governance structure and shifts the conversation to " you have X

amount in the budget, how would you prioritize your programs?" Using criteria like the number of people being impacted the need, etc…if you help that process of decision-making, in theory it becomes more objective, you have more people speaking to the needs, and fewer people saying, "this benefits my tribe, my region, my whatever, therefore that's where it's going."

*Q: Interesting! So, you're creating a new framework for approaching governance.*

LIBERI: Absolutely, and that's the long-lasting impact, and why it's important to have a watchdog function, including the importance of more female participation.

*Q: Ultimately, this kind of participation, since it's based on general needs and not simply what a tribe or clan wants, needs that cross clan loyalties, you're slowly creating a national sense, or at least a regional sense of joint activity that hopefully crosses clan boundaries.*

LIBERI: Over time, that's obviously the intent, so that you start looking at the country as a country…

*Q: Right, instead of just my patronage group.*

LIBERI: Absolutely, because we know all these systems have existed until now on patronage which is not uncommon in many parts of the world. It is trying to equalize things to a certain extent and create that sense of national identity. And it does require people—civilians on our part--to complement the U.S. military in order for that process to take place, so that we weren't simply being seen through a military lens, which was very, very important. That is where a lot of the impact was. The lesson there is that it is an enormous undertaking to put in place. Over time it's clearly not sustainable for us to have that number of people out in places without a security infrastructure, so you hope that you're setting in place indigenous, national systems that can take over.

*Q: Today is March 2, 2018. We're continuing our interview with Dawn Liberi as she prepares to go to Libya.*

LIBERI: So when I left Afghanistan in August/September of 2011, I came back to Washington and took a little bit of leave. I wasn't able to speak about my next position because one doesn't during this process, however I knew I was in line to be nominated for an ambassadorship. You can't speak about it, and there's only a small circle of people that do know about it, including some of the human resource staff at the State Department, and a very limited number of senior staff at USAID. Because of that, and the timing of my return from Afghanistan after the summer rotation, it didn't make any sense for me to have another full assignment. So, I was asked if I would be a senior advisor of some sort. That was the nomenclature used when you are waiting for other things to happen.

*Q: Yeah. Between tours.*

LIBERI: Yes -between tours.. Because I had been in Iraq and Afghanistan, I was attached to the Middle East bureau in USAID. I was working with the AA (Assistant Administrator) and the senior deputy. I was advising at that level, and USAID was going into Libya after Gaddafi had fallen and been killed. The U.S. was helping with some of the rebuilding and reconstruction. So USAID was there essentially to handle all of the assistance programs. The Assistant Administrator asked me if I wanted to go initially on TDY (temporary duty). They needed a senior person to set up the whole USAID mission apparatus. At that point we had OTI (the Office of Transition Initiatives), who were the first ones on the ground as they often are in these situations, who were assisting with training and some governance programs.

One of the big things we were trying to do was help the Libyans prepare for elections and to do training of the electoral commission. We were also helping to set up NGOs (non-governmental organization) focusing on community development. So I was asked to go out and to help start that process. I went out in the late fall October/November, for a six-week TDY. Part of it was to meet then Ambassador Gene Cretz, before Ambassador Stevens came in. I outlined what USAID's role would be, how the assistance program was going to work, etc. I then came back to the U.S. for the holidays, and subsequently was asked if I would go out for a longer term TDY, about nine-months.

The timing was in anticipation of setting up the program there, and then, assuming I was nominated to be Ambassador, to come back for my hearings. Frankly, I had always wanted to go to Libya, and I thought it would be a much better than "walking the halls" back in headquarters.

*Q: Right.*

LIBERI: Because no matter how much you're "advising" at headquarters, you're still basically walking the halls.

*Q: Right.*

LIBERI: So it was great. Great in the sense that it was an easy transition for me because having been in Iraq and Afghanistan -these war zone, conflict/post-conflict situations - it was easy for me to slot right in to living on a compound. At this point, people may not remember, but the U.S. Embassy had actually been burned in Tripoli when everything was happening with Gaddafi.

*Q: Right.*

LIBERI: The embassy building itself was unusable and in fact DS (Diplomatic Security) was looking for a site to build a new embassy. Meanwhile State identified a compound on which we could do embassy business. Diplomatic Security approved a living compound, a set of villas. Initially we worked out of there. We set up offices, so it was literally a live/work compound.

*Q: And security for the villas was adequate, or how did they assure you about security in that particular instance?*

LIBERI: It was mixed, to be frank. We had a combination of things. We obviously had DS security. But we also had the MSD (mobile security deployment) team that was sent out. Because there wasn't an official physical Embassy, we couldn't have marines.

*Q: Right.*

LIBERI: With the MSD teams we did have the expeditionary arm of the State Department Diplomatic Security (DS). Most of them are former marines and very well trained for these kinds of expeditionary security situations. So we had 24/7 protection. The villas were in a walled compound, in a residential area of the city close to the airport. So we had a lot of egress in terms of being able to get out.

*Q: Oh, okay.*

LIBERI: That said, it wasn't fortified in the same way an Embassy would have been, or a compound. So the potential for it to come under attack was there. There is always a potential for something like that to happen. We had very clear security protocols. We didn't leave the compound unless we were out with the MSD team, so it wasn't like you could just go off and do anything. We were always under armed security control, armored vehicles, etc.

What eventually happened when I came back for the nine-month tour, we then used the Ambassador's residence as a makeshift embassy. So we had the villa compound where we lived, and then we turned the Ambassador's residence into offices where we worked. It was about a five to seven minute ride away, so not that far, and the residence itself was big enough that we could carve out offices. The ambassador's previous bedroom turned into his office suite because it was large enough. It had bathroom facilities, etc. We literally just divided up the space into different offices. We brought a lot of the Libyan staff back who had worked for the embassy, because we had never let them go.

*Q: Let me ask you a question about the Libyan staff. To the extent you knew, because Libya, like the other two countries you had served in in the Islamic world, Afghanistan and Pakistan, Libya is very clan oriented. Or divided on various patronage lines. Were the FSN (Foreign Service National) staff representative of different groups within Libya, or were they principally from one group?*

LIBERI: They were representative of different groups. And there were members of the staff who came from Benghazi, so they were not just from the Tripoli area. However, it was becoming clear that outside the Embassy, lines were being drawn more and more by different tribal factions.. However, it was not something that you felt necessarily within the Embassy, and local staff were cognizant of the fact that while working at the Embassy, their work was for the Embassy, many had been long-standing employees. The

issue always is, however, what their family and tribal affiliations were. I never felt that this was an issue for work that went on within the embassy. However, you just didn't know what people were engaged in outside. So I think none of the Americans were naïve enough to think that there weren't other things going on. Not that our staff was involved in any covert activities but people have family and they have affiliations.

*Q: Okay.*

LIBERI: What was good was that you could engage staff to try and keep an ear to the ground to understand what was going on in the various parts of the country. So in terms of USAID and the assistance program writ large, we were trying to have relationships with the government at the time and the new Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister. The Deputy Prime Minister was actually a U.S. citizen, who had emigrated to the U.S. and he had come back. He was a professor at either UCLA (University of California, Los Angeles), or one of the schools out in California, a very nice man. You know, a lot of Libyans, as a lot of Afghans, and Iraqis in the diaspora wanted to come back, and they wanted to help rebuild their country. Plus they had good skill sets. He was an engineer, and a lot of similar folks wanted to come back and help. So our initial interactions were with a number of Libyans from the diaspora, who came back from the U.S., Europe, and different places in the Middle East. They were trying to fill some of the key positions in the government.

Don't forget, like Iraq, the stronghold that Gaddafi had was similar to what Saddam Hussein had. Their way of ruling, as we all know, was to keep everyone else off balance, keep power very centralized. Centralized decision making and centralized resource distribution, so that no other part of the country could have enough resources to rise up against, in this case, Gaddafi. It was really an iron hand kind of rule similar to Saddam Hussein. So if you were in Tripoli and you were a member of the inner circle of Gaddafi, you were okay. It's like the Baathists. Even if you weren't philosophically a Baathist, if you pledged to be a Baathist, and pledged that allegiance to Saddam Hussein, your life was much better. Well, similarly in Libya. If you pledged your allegiance to Gaddafi, your life was much better. But outside that circle life was not good obviously.

There was the same sort of profile of poverty, disenfranchisement, lack of resources, basic lack of services like water, electricity, etc. Many areas of Libya were totally underdeveloped, or undeveloped as a result. That's the situation that we came into, where the assumption again, was that the infrastructure was better than it actually was, that the communications were better than they actually were, that the resource distribution exists when it really doesn't, and so on. That was the situation that we faced. Again, similar to Iraq, because of sanctions, and the pariah state that Libya was, people didn't get out for training so technologically they were behind. You think you're starting at zero, and then building up. But no, you're actually starting at about minus 100, or 150, and having to help the country build up to zero, then go beyond.

*Q: So there was basic capacity building even among the people there, not to speak of rebuilding the infrastructure.*

LIBERI: Exactly, including just basic training. For example, on the finance side, decentralizing the budgets, and getting resources out beyond Tripoli. Because everything had been so centralized. All decision making, all budget funding was doled out depending on the political patronage system and depending on Gaddafi's mood, whether or not you got anything. So the process of decentralization, and basic functions had to get established for people to have access to resources in different regions.

That was where a lot of the tension started to build up between Tripoli and Benghazi. Because of the way the process had worked, and because of the geographic separation, Benghazi was really the home of much of the private sector in Libya. They prided themselves on essentially establishing their own systems, and didn't rely on the center. They didn't rely on Tripoli because if they did they would have died on the vine. So they built up the private sector even in spite of sanctions and other difficulties. Let's face it, Middle East trade routes have existed for thousands of years. So they were very good at getting things in and out of the country. They were very good at keeping their businesses going, and essentially establishing their own revenue generation. Their own system of keeping the lights on and keeping things going. They really did have an economic counterweight to Tripoli. Consequently, they had a political counterweight to Tripoli as well.

*Q: Interesting.*

LIBERI: They had to be careful during Gaddafi's era how they did that, but he also recognized that he needed the business, the private sector, to work in order for the country to exist. Because again, even though they had oil, oil does not produce jobs - you need businesses to produce jobs. So Libya was facing the same profile as most countries in the Middle East. High population with 70% of the population under 25 or 30. There was lots of unemployment, lots of disenfranchised youth who didn't have the skills because they'd been left behind. You have that same profile, with a need to start developing an infrastructure for jobs, etc. So with the overthrow of Gaddafi, it was like the lid got taken off, as in Iraq. The lid got taken off and now all the issues became manifest very quickly.

*Q: You know, I was about to ask you, how did you determine what the need was? Because in essence, now you were lifting the top of the box after it had been closed for so many years. But you've just described basically that the situation was that they needed everything.*

LIBERI: They needed everything, they did. They needed everything, and they were impatient for everything too, as people would be. Because let's face it, the thought process was "Okay, we got rid of the bad guy, now everything will flow. Now we'll have jobs, now we'll have the infrastructure. Now we'll have water, and electricity, and transport, and this and that." When it doesn't happen in six to nine months, people get impatient saying "Well, what's happening with the new government? And why?" In the meantime people were preparing for elections for the first time in years. So again, similar

to Iraq, it was a very galvanizing force because it was the sheer act of being able to vote that galvanized people at least a brief period of time. It pulled the country together to focus on the elections.

*Q: Interesting.*

LIBERI: Particularly a focus on getting the ballots out, and making sure that there were candidates, and that candidates got vetted to a certain extent. The whole point was just to be able to vote for a representative. So people voted and put up their finger showing they got the ink to indicate they voted, and there was a national ululation, if you will. Everyone just being so happy that yes, finally, they were able to participate in democracy. As usual, the system wasn't perfect, and there were inconsistencies in places, etc. However on the whole, people were so focused on having the process of elections that they were willing to overlook some inconsistencies. I don't think there was major fraud. Given it was the first election in 30 years, there were issues because the machinery wasn't set up.

*Q: Right.*

LIBERI: People sometimes don't know what they're supposed to be doing to vote. A lot of people were still basically not that literate, and so they didn't know what a ballot was. Who'd ever seen a ballot before?

*Q: Right.*

LIBERI: They didn't know the different parties - what are parties? What's the party symbol? So there was a tremendous amount of education that took place which USAID helped to fund to train people, and to train workers in the electoral commission.

*Q: A very quick question here. Was there enough literacy in the country to be able to read ballots?*

LIBERI: It was a generational thing. Basic education was there. There was basic literacy however it was interesting. There was a whole older generation that had missed out on education because under Gaddafi many could no longer go to school, so they had missed out on basic literacy. A lot of that also fell along gender lines, so you had many women, particularly older women, who hadn't been out of the house who didn't really know how to read or write. But I have to tell you, they were determined to go to the polls. You couldn't hold these women back. It was great. We would go into polling stations on election day and they would say, "I'm voting." They were just incredible! You knew they didn't quite understand everything. They knew that they were voting, so there were a lot of people at polling stations who had to explain the ballot to them, without trying to influence them. They didn't ask "Well, who are you going to vote for?" or "Who did you want to vote for?" Basically they helped them understand what the various symbols were.

It was an imperfect process in terms of wanting things to be as accurate as possible, but it was a wonderfully participatory process. 90% of everyone who was eligible to participate, participated. So in that way, it was a huge success because people felt that for the first time in their adult life, that they were actually able to make a choice about representation. So that was really great.

However, it set up the expectation that okay, now things will happen. So when things don't happen, that becomes a real issue. Unlike, Iraq, the U.S. government had a very small presence and not a big budget. In Iraq I had a $5.2-billion-dollar USAID budget for 18 months. In Libya there was a USAID budget of a few million dollars. We were among the major donors, and we had our coalition partners, so it was a combination of resources. The UN (United Nations) was there, along with the British, the French, and so on. Together we were a presence, but the U.S. was by no means dominant. So that was interesting and a big change from Iraq and Afghanistan.

What wound up happening was that we all focused on activities that were in our respective, comparative advantage. So the U.S. did a lot of work in post-conflict transition issues through OTI (Office of Transition Initiatives). We did a lot of work in the electoral process, training election workers and helping them get the ballots out. We worked very closely with the UN because it was really the UN that was overseeing the election process with the government. We worked a lot with the planning ministry and the finance ministry, along with our UN colleagues, to get a five-year plan established.

One of the major areas the U.S. focused on where we had a comparative advantage, was help with the war wounded. There were many young men who had fought during the liberation process, who were now wounded. When the new government was elected, they said to these men "Okay, we will pay for your medical expenses and even send you abroad to get treated." There were particular injuries that it turns out the U.S. military was very well suited to engage in, because of trauma and because of all the lessons we had learned in Iraq and Afghanistan. In particular - I want to be very careful about this - there were a whole group of Libyans who had suffered injuries to their ability to reproduce.

*Q: Oh.*

LIBERI: So there was a lot of reconstructive surgery that had to happen, and a lot of very, very sensitive, kind of surgery. So we brought in Walter Reed Army Hospital, and the top reconstructive surgeons for these problems to help these men deal with these issues. We worked very closely with the Prime Minister's office, because unfortunately, a lot of promises were made, and Libyans were sent to certain countries like Turkey, and wound up overstaying. In many instances, a lot of the money that was supposed to pay for their care and rehabilitation, turned out to be spent on other things. In some countries like Turkey and Morocco they made themselves unwelcome guests.

*Q: Wow.*

LIBERI: So many of these men got sent back to Libya and that prevented the next cohort of people from being accepted into those countries. At a certain point countries like Turkey and others said, “We really can’t have 100,000 young Libyan males running around and wreaking havoc because they’re using their money for other things (including drinking, etc.” So there were big issues.

Similarly, we had to be careful about the selection process for anyone who was going to be receiving reconstructive surgery from the U.S. Because that can be very political in and of itself to determine who is selected and where they’re sent – because many men wanted to go to the U.S. Given these sensitivities, we wound up bringing the team in from the U.S. because it was easier to do the surgeries in Tripoli where more people could be treated. Of course, many of these people wanted to go to the U.S. and saw it as their opportunity to not just get the surgery, but maybe stay in the U.S. - Who knows? Many men had wound up staying in places like Turkey until their money ran out, which was another issue.

So it was a very dicey political situation. At the same time, it was political for the newly established government because a lot of these men said, “Look, we fought for the liberation of Libya, and now you owe us because we’ve been injured. We’re war wounded, we have both physical, emotional and psychological trauma, and you, new government, have to make things right.”

*Q: Yeah.*

LIBERI: It wound up being a very dicey situation at times. A frightening example is when I was leading a meeting at the Prime Minister’s office with the Deputy Prime Minister. Fortunately, our Libyan driver waiting for us, happened to notice that young men with weapons were scaling the wall of the compound and placing it under siege because they had been promised certain things that they weren’t getting. So they were really up in arms protesting, and literally stormed the prime minister’s office, while we were inside. Fortunately, our driver alerted embassy security.

We were on the opposite side of where this was happening so initially we didn’t hear it. I got a phone call and it was the Ambassador. I said, “ I have to answer this, excuse me Mr. Prime Minister, when the Ambassador calls I have to answer.” And he said, “Dawn, are you okay? You and your team have to get out.” I asked, “ why? – what’s happened?” And he said, “We’ve gotten word (from our Libyan driver) that the place is being stormed by the war wounded.” I said, “OK let me go check.” As I got up to look out the window the whole place was under siege. I said, “Oh, yes, they’re here!” He said, “You have to find a way to exit out.” “Right!” I responded. So they sent an MSD team to essentially egress us. At that very moment someone came to inform the Deputy Prime Minister that the place had been taken hostage. Unfortunately the Prime Minister’s office had no protocol in place for this kind of situation. I thought, “Oh, great.” I said to him, “Where is your safe haven?” He responded with a blank look. I said, “Oh, this is not good!” “Okay Mr. Deputy Prime Minister, first of all we need to get you to a safe place, and then we need to get out of here fast, like pronto.”

*Q: Uh-huh.*

LIBERI: They had no clue what to do. I had been trained for situations like this because of serving in Iraq and Afghanistan, I'd been in the building enough times to sort of know the layout. I said, "Okay, we can't go here and there." We could now hear all the noise and everyone charging in downstairs. We were on the second floor. There were armed security guards, but they weren't actually trained. Some guy came and started leading us into a room. I said "Don't. This is where they make the coffee, we're not staying in this room. No, this is not where we're going." In the meantime, I had called the MSD team to ask them "Okay, where are you?" We could not get out of the building the way we had come in. All that was blocked.

*Q: Right.*

LIBERI: The mob had stormed that part of the Prime Minister's compound. I said that we had to go to the opposite side. The whole time I was on the phone, saying to the MSD team "Okay, we're walking to the other part of the building." Eventually I got the Deputy Prime Minister sorted out in a safe haven for him, but it was chaos. It was really chaos because there was no protocol in place. Again I thought "Oh, this is great." However we were calm (the two colleagues I was with) and I said to the MSD team "Okay, look, we're going downstairs to the far corner of the building and you have to stage the cars because we have to get out there" We finally get into this room we thought we could exit, however the guards had put the x-ray machine up against the door and were blocking the exit against the mob coming in. I said, "Oh Lord, have mercy." Everything was locked, except for the high windows. While technically on the first floor, it was still 10 or 15 feet above the ground. You had go down steps outside the building to reach the sidewalk. So we were a good 10 or 15 feet up. I said to the MSD team "Look, everything is blocked, we may have to jump out the window. You may even have to catch us or be prepared for broken ankles or something." Because that was the only way it seemed we could get out.
.
*Q: Right.*

LIBERI: The doors coming into the room at the opposite end were locked and as I was talking to the guards, I could hear the crowd getting closer and closer. Literally they were storming the entire building at that point with guns. So the lead guard said, "Okay, we're going to try to bang the exit door open, and as soon as we do, you just have to run out." They literally started using the X-ray machine as a rampart, banging the door because it was locked from the outside at that point. They banged it to see if it would pop open. It was like being in the medieval ages you know,

*Q: Yes, like a battering ram.*

LIBERI: A battering ram, exactly. On the last heave-ho, thank goodness, the door popped open, and I said to my two colleagues "Team, go. You go first, obviously I'm going to be the last one out." As that happened, the far door was opened with a boom, and guns

started shooting. I mean, we just got out in the nick of time. We got into the vehicle and sped away. Of course our MSD guys were all armed to the hilt in the event they had to shoot our way out. There was a lot of gunfire and unfortunately, the guard who helped us get out was killed that day. We literally just got in the car as all the shooting was happening. It was a very bad scene.

That was one of my close calls. There were others in Iraq, but that was a close call. We were not the target, it was just another case of being in the wrong place at the wrong time. We had done all the security checks for that day, there was no protest that had been planned, it was a totally spontaneous thing where people showed up at the Prime Minister's office because they wanted payment, and they wanted to know when they were going to be put on the next plane to be treated. This was the next group of people who were supposed to be going overseas to get their treatment. But of course everything got delayed because of the bad behavior of some of the other guys. Not everyone, however there was enough bad behavior that the receiving countries in Europe (and some in the Middle East) said, "No, we're not so sure about this." However because of the violent protest, we could have been harmed that day.

So when people say, "Oh, what happened in Benghazi with Chris Stevens?" Obviously, that situation was much more complicated, However I know what happened in my situation - it was a spontaneous mob attack. It's not that we didn't do our job, or that we didn't do the security check, or whatever. But in those kind of environments, spontaneous stuff happens. And then boom.

*Q: You don't know how big the crowd will get. In other words, it's mob rule, at least at that moment, and you don't know how ugly the mob's going to get.*

LIBERI: It is mob rule.

*Q: Wow, that's remarkable. I mean, if this were a movie you couldn't have scripted it better.*

LIBERI: Exactly. It's so surreal that it did feel like it was a movie. As we sped away we just heard more gunfire, and saw smoke, and of course I was on the phone with the Ambassador who was asking, "Are you out of there?" I said, "Yes! We just got out." We were all pretty shaken up. As I said, we were not intended victims, we were not the target I should say, but we could have been victims because of just being there. So we stopped meeting at the Deputy Prime Minister's office after that, for a while. Just because it was too unpredictable. That was one of my close calls in Libya.

*Q: And just to recap a second, this was on your first three-month TDY, or was this now into the nine-month one?*

LIBERI: This was during the nine-month TDY.

*Q: Okay, okay.*

LIBERI: We had an established relationship. I went to the Prime Minister's office every week. Not the same time, not the same day, we varied our movements. However, we were trying to assist with this very sensitive issue, and we knew how politically charged it was because you had angry young men saying, "We were injured and we need to get fixed," Then there were issues about payments, they weren't getting the payments that they were promised.

The payments had nothing directly to do with us, however we were trying to assist with the operations, and eventually we did. The U.S. medical teams were able to identify the most severe cases among these young men who needed particular kinds of surgery, and we did bring a surgical team over to help many. I think the U.S. was seen as really trying to assist. Some people wanted to go overseas so they didn't necessarily appreciate that they were being operated on in Tripoli. However, their issues were being addressed by some of the best surgeons in the world. It was just becoming too politically difficult on both sides to identify people to say, "Okay, you'll go to the U.S. and you won't." It was a medical decision anyway, but it could have easily become a political issue for us. These are many of the unsung contributions that people don't know about that the U.S. government did. And it did help.

*Q: You're right. This did not get into the media. This did not play in western media, which is a pity.*

LIBERI: Right, it is a pity. A lot of it was because of the sensitivity of the types of injuries, and no one wants to admit to being impaired in certain ways. So it was not something that purposely got played up. However it was a tremendous intervention that assisted a number of people, and I think helped the Libyan government to show good will that they were trying to deal with these issues. We also helped with a lot of youth groups, including training in areas of vo-tech (vocational/technical) skills. We helped establish a media center through the Public Affairs division and USAID, which had not existed before in Libya. It was a combined program to do media training, and have a media center established. It was great because there were these young people who did a great job. It was a type of citizen reporting to identify issues and go out to do interviews. We basically gave them training, cameras, and recording equipment, and they set up a little studio. They really did help to get out a lot of information that the citizens wanted to learn about, know about, and hear about. It became an independent media center which had never existed before. They did all sorts of subjects and interviewed lots of different people.

*Q: But it was not under any particular news organ? Or how did it organize itself, in other words?*

LIBERI: The Ministry of Public Information obviously knew that they were doing this, but it was private. Essentially they got licensed as a private entity with our assistance. We helped in terms of the training. However, they applied for the licenses and got the approvals. The U.S. did the official dedication and opening ceremony, which received a

lot of press coverage. As they started doing more and more programs it became very listened to.

*Q: Interesting. So were they able to get on television and radio and in print? Or what were the principle media tools that they were able to use?*

LIBERI: A lot of it was radio, some TV, internet, and print to a certain extent. It started small and then grew organically. There was a whole portion of it that was focused on the youth. They had a lot of young people as citizen reporters who would go out and interview people about subjects. The garbage pickup, the water, health care, other basic services etc. It gained a lot of traction, certainly during that period of time. It became known as The Media Center for independent newscasting. One of the key areas we helped them address was how to become self-sustaining because it was hard. They initially had U.S. funding and some UN and other country funding, but over time they would need to branch out and get private funding, or donations. I'm not quite sure what happened to it since then, but hopefully there are vestiges of it that still exist. That was in Tripoli. We were trying to set something up in Benghazi as well.

*Q: Well, you know, the great thing about media centers and the kind of training you did, is that even if the center itself as an organization didn't survive, the trained individuals do. And then they can go out and join other news organizations than may crop up in Libya, and who knows. But the amount of training, the skill sets of basic investigative journalism, in a country that did not have it for 30 or 40 years, even that was an element of sustainability.*

LIBERI: Absolutely. It was a big contribution and people recognized it as such. Which was good. And you're right, once things happen like that organically, then they tend to stay around in one form or another. Of course, this is a self-select kind of group. Because these are the people who are already leaders in their own right, and then they develop a platform, and this helps them to get out there and to have some recognition. So it starts to form a movement in certain ways. Not necessarily a political movement, but to get the information out.

*Q: Transparency.*

LIBERI: Transparency, yes. They had themes, like corruption - where has the money gone to? And what about X, Y, and Z? Which is great, because then they become watchdogs.

*Q: Exactly.*

LIBERI: That I think was key. This is obviously what you want things to lead to in terms of transparency and having citizen oversight of activities, which was great. I have to refresh my memory about all the many activities we were involved with in Libya, however those were some of the highlights.

I'll just end on one note which is very personal. Very emotional. Chris Stevens came in as Ambassador, since the previous Ambassador, Gene Cretz finished his tour and became the Ambassadorial nominee for Ghana. I had met Chris in Washington and worked with him a bit. I wasn't in Libya when he was our envoy to Benghazi since I was in Afghanistan. He then was going through his nomination process the majority of the time I was in Libya. However we overlapped for a month or two toward the end of my tour. When I was leaving it was not publicly known I was going back for hearings - I just said I had to go back to the U.S. The night before I left, Chris had a little nice farewell, a wine and cheese kind of party. It was very, very sweet, and he thanked me for my service and what we had done in terms of USAID, and the whole assistance program writ large. Everything had come under me as the assistance coordinator, whether it was in Public Affairs, or the State Department, or AID, it was all under my umbrella, basically. So it was a very lovely send off. The next morning, I saw Chris again at breakfast at the communal dining table and we chatted since he quietly knew about my upcoming nomination. He was the last person I saw when I left the compound. We gave each other a farewell hug and I said, "I'll look forward to seeing you at the next Chief of Mission conference." He said, "Yup, good luck with everything, good luck with your hearings." That was the last time I saw him. And then a month later. Boom.

*Q: Wow.*

LIBERI: So, you know, when people start talking about Libya, and Chris, and Benghazi, there was a lot of finger pointing for the wrong reasons. People have extraordinary opinions without any facts behind them. I know just what a great person he was, and what a public servant he was. The fact was he was doing his job and doing what he loved to do. At the end of the day, no one knew Benghazi better than he did. He had lived there as our envoy.

*Q: Yeah, yeah.*

LIBERI: So in that sense it was a very unfortunate consequence, and I was personally very, very saddened, as were many who had worked with him.

*Q: Sure. Yeah, what do you say? I think a lot of people don't realize just how close you can get to being seriously wounded or killed. Just your story of being in the ministry, on the wrong day is enough of a cautionary tale to anyone thinking about what it takes to do assistance in a post-conflict zone. We say post-conflict because the majority of the fighting is done. But that doesn't mean that there isn't still reprisals and little uprisings and things like that that can still be deadly.*

LIBERI: Absolutely. Chris had gone to Benghazi, yes, just after the anniversary of 9/11, to open up an American Center. He was doing his job as Ambassador, representing the United States, dedicating something that the Libyans wanted. The Libyans knew the American Center in Benghazi was similar to the Media Center in Tripoli and people wanted this. They saw this as a beacon. It was something that I know he had been looking forward to opening. We discussed what activities would be coming up in the near future

when I left. So plans had already been underway for this to take place. The timing and the date hadn't been established yet, but the fact that he would be going to open it as a real symbol, was there. It was clear. But look, our Ambassador in South Korea, one of our biggest allies, was at a public discussion in 2015 and a guy who was crazy attacked him and cut his face open with a knife. Attacks like these unfortunately happen.

*Q: Yeah.*

LIBERI: This was one of our closest ally countries, where there's no unrest. This was a public forum where the Ambassador was scheduled to speak. And then some crazy person comes and attacks him. This kind of stuff just unfortunately occurs.

*Q: Right.*

LIBERI: Because we are representatives of the U.S. Government, if someone doesn't like our policies, or frankly even for no good reason at all, they see us as symbols and we can become a target.

*Q: Yeah. That's very rough. Well, to not close on an entirely sad note, during this time you were there TDY, you were also under consideration to be ambassador, and where is that now at the end of your TDY in Tripoli?*

LIBERI: Right. So the ambassadorial selection process is very, I don't want to use the word obtuse, but it's very closely guarded. Particularly if your parent agency isn't the State Department. So it's much harder for senior officials from USAID Agriculture, Commerce, or Treasury, and other agencies, to become Ambassadors. It's not a clear path. A normal path for a State Department person, not always but generally speaking, is that they come from the political cone, or from the public affairs cone, and work their way up and eventually become deputy chief of mission, and then get nominated through that process.

When you come from a different agency there's no clear path and you need a lot of support. In my case what had happened, which was interesting, is that I had gotten a lot of support from the Ambassadors I had worked with in Afghanistan, in particular. So even though the Chief of Mission in Afghanistan was not a career State Department person, Karl Eikenberry, he obviously had been a three-star general. He headed our military program in NATO, an was someone who was very supportive, as were several of the other Ambassadors there such as Frank Ricciardone, Anthony (Tony) Wayne, Joe Mussomeli, and Bill Todd. So I had good strong support from the Ambassadors that I had worked with, as well as support from some of the military officials I had worked with, such as General Petraeus, General Rodriguez, and General Dempsey. I think these senior officials were very instrumental in supporting my nomination through the process.

It's an interesting process because I actually was put forward more through the State Department than USAID. Obviously I was put forward by USAID - your parent agency always has to agree and put you forward. It's different for everyone I think, however in

my case I did have a fair amount of support from senior State Department Ambassadors. The way the process works is that you have to be put forward to the D Committee, which is the Deputy's Committee, chaired by the Deputy Secretary of State. Sitting on the D Committee are all the Assistant Secretaries for the geographic bureaus, who are the main people on the committee. There are also members of the functional bureaus as well, those Assistant Secretaries. But it's primarily the geographic bureaus who weigh in. Because obviously, you're going to be an Ambassador in one of their countries, so they have a fair amount to say about this.

*Q: Sure, right.*

LIBERI: I was also very fortunate there that the Assistant Secretary of State for Africa was Johnnie Carson, Ambassador Carson, and the PDAS (principal deputy assistant secretary) was Ambassador Yamamoto, Don Yamamoto. I had worked with both of them in Africa when Ambassador Carson was Ambassador in Kenya, and he had been in Uganda as Ambassador as well, though we didn't overlap. When he was in Kenya and I was USAID Mission Director in Uganda for four years, I would see him at regional meetings in Nairobi. Martin Brennan was a very strong supporter of mine too, and he was the Ambassador in Uganda when I was there. However Johnnie (Carson) was head of the Africa bureau as the Assistant Secretary. He and Don Yamamoto were very, very clear they wanted to bring in USAID people, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, because the portfolios involve such development related issues. They wanted to bring in folks who had spent a lot of time in Africa and had geographic experience on the continent. What often happened, and again, not to cast aspersions on anyone, but there is a hierarchy, a pecking order, in the State Department. So everyone wants to be Ambassador some place in Europe, in EUR. Then it goes to Latin America, and Asia, and Africa is always sort of the last bureau.

*Q: Uh-huh.*

LIBERI: To a certain extent, while they didn't say this explicitly, I think that they were concerned that they were getting the also rans, the people who didn't make the cut for Europe and other places. It was sort of, well, the Africa bureau will take them. Meanwhile, they didn't have any Africa experience. So they were European specialists, or they were Latin American specialists. But they didn't make the cut for those countries, so they got moved into the Africa bureau. I think Johnnie and Don were quite concerned to have Ambassadors with good Africa field experience. I don't want to cast aspersions, however I think that they did have concerns that they were getting a lot of "potential candidates" who had never set foot in Africa.

*Q: Right.*

LIBERI: So while, in theory, you can be trained to be an Ambassador in any country, it does help to have a background, particularly at this point in time, in sub-Saharan Africa. Because of the kinds of issues that are coming up there. They're not political in the same

sense as what we're doing in Europe, or Asia, or Latin America. They are development related issues.

*Q: Absolutely.*

LIBERI: Like HIV/AIDS. There are other mega-programs and issues that USAID frankly, is much more suited to, in terms of the interagency. USAID has the largest budgets in sub-Saharan Africa relative to State Department programs. So that made sense to have nominees with development and Africa field experience. So to make a long story short, I think that Johnnie and Don Yamamoto really lobbied for me as a USAID person, because they both knew me and we had worked together. Don was the Ambassador in Djibouti when I was the CENTCOM (The United States Central Command) development advisor, and that was before AFRICOM (The United States Africa Command) got established. So Djibouti and northern Africa still came under CENTCOM.

*Q: Right.*

LIBERI: I had been to Djibouti several times when Don was Ambassador with Admiral Bill Fallon as CENTCOM commander, and then with General Marty Dempsey acting CENTCOM commander, who later became Chairman of the Joint Chief. Then I worked with General Petraeus. So I had worked in the civil military arena, and they both knew t I had development expertise, in addition to defense, and diplomacy. So they were very strong proponents. But even with that, I have to say, it wasn't easy. I think that if Johnnie Carson himself had not personally pushed, there would have been more of an effort to nominate a State Department person. I really do thank both of them, as well as my other colleagues who supported me within the State Department. Because the Assistant Secretary (AA) for geographic bureaus, really does have a lot to say, and I think Johnnie was very persuasive. I had worked also very closely with Jack Lew, who was the Deputy Secretary of State and had been the key point person for Afghanistan. I had worked with him during my entire tenure in Afghanistan and had a lot of meetings with him, so he was also familiar with me and my background. Fortunately those stars aligned for me to be put forward by the D Committee. Otherwise it's few and far between because only about 10 people in USAID history have ever been named ambassador.

*Q: Right, right. Exactly.*

LIBERI: Becoming Ambassador is not a clear path. All of this process takes place within the D Committee and it takes a while. It takes a long time before you get through the D Committee and before you get put on the short list to be sent to the Secretary of State The respective bureau contact you to discuss potential countries. A lot depends on what's coming up and available, and which Ambassadors are nearing the completion of their tours.. Then it becomes a matter of lining you up with a country that makes sense.

*Q: Uh-huh.*

LIBERI: In my case, the bureau knew that Burundi was coming up, Ambassador Pam Slutz who had been there, was leaving, and it made sense for someone like me to succeed her because I spoke French, had been in post-conflict countries, and I had already served five tours in Africa. This was not an unknown entity for me, particularly since I had served in Uganda, close to Burundi and had traveled in central Africa. So matchmaking occurs in terms of trying to line you up with the right country. Then you still have to go a process of being interviewed, making the case why you're a good fit for the country. Meantime, all of the additional checks and balances are being conducted - IG (Inspector General) clearance, a much more intense security clearance, scrutiny of all of your financial disclosures, in short, everything is looked at.

*Q: Uh-huh.*

LIBERI: So it is a very intense process, a very intense process. Then you still have to go through White House review. Once you go through all of the initial vetting, the Deputy Secretary brings the list that is recommended by the D Committee forward to the Secretary, and at that time Hilary Clinton was the Secretary of State.

*Q: Oh, wait. You're in 2012 here?*

LIBERI: 2012.

*Q: Wasn't it Kerry?*

LIBERI: No, I came in just under Hilary - she left in 2013.

*Q: Ah, okay.*

LIBERI: So my first eight months as Ambassador was still under her. I'm not sure if it was known yet that she was going to be leaving, that she was going to go on to other things, as we know. However she was the Secretary when I went through the process.

So, as I was saying, the Secretary vets the list, and then sends it over to the White House, to the President. then you have to go through the White House vetting process. So people say, "Why does it take so long?" Well, it does because it is a very long process, and people want to be sure, because then you're nominated by the President of the United States to be his personal representative to the country to which you have been identified. Once nominated, you have to go through Senate confirmation hearings. Anywhere along the way, the process could get derailed, frankly. Once it goes over to the White House obviously the White House vetting process occurs with their team of attorneys. That takes a while, because it's not just you, they're looking at all these other candidates as well. So, it's a thoughtful process as it needs to be.

Eventually, if you are actually going to get nominated, the White House, through the State Department, does contact you. The White House sends word over to the office in State that deals with Ambassadorial nominations, who in turn informs you that the

President is going to nominate you in a day or so. Prior to being nominated you also have to get Agrement or approval from the country you'll be serving in. During this time you have to be very, very quiet. The whole process is very mum, you do not speak about it, you don't even intimate that this might be in the works. Because until you are nominated it could derail.

*Q: Sure.*

LIBERI: Then, even once you are nominated, you still have to go through the Senate. So while it has taken months and months to get to this point, in reality, it's like the clock has only just started ticking. Once you get nominated and it's public, all of your paperwork has to go over to the Senate. Then you start doing informal sessions, meeting with the Senate Foreign Relations Committee (SFRC), usually at the staff level. Then you meet with members so you get a sense if there are any concerns they have about the country or your nomination. Certain senators -because they have done CODELS (congressional delegations) - may have a particular interest in your country, so they ask you to meet about their particular issues.

Essentially that's what happens. Eventually, the clock starts ticking in terms of scheduling your hearing. Once you get nominated, which often happens during the summer because of turnovers, they try to time the process so that there will be a smooth transition between Ambassadors, to avoid too much of gap. However that doesn't always happen. Right now we have big gaps, dealing with the summer Congressional recess.

*Q: Ah, of course.*

LIBERI: So the real issue is having your hearings scheduled not only before summer recess, but also in my case and for others too, before that Congress ends. Because there's a term for the Congress.

*Q: Wow.*

LIBERI: Otherwise you have to go back and get re-nominated.

*Q: No, I didn't know that aspect of it. Holy Cow.*

LIBERI: Yes. So you try to get everything done because there's the summer recess, which is the long recess. Then when people come back you hope hearings get scheduled between September and November, because nothing happens in December, everything closes down, they don't schedule hearings. There's a short window of time when the Senate schedules hearings. Once the calendar year ends and a Congress finishes, you have to get re-nominated. Sometimes it's pro-forma and the White House just re-nominates you. Usually it's more of a timing and calendar issue than a political issue, although sometimes it can be a political issue. Not necessarily for you, but because of what might be happening between the legislative and the executive branch. The Senate

can hold up Presidential nominations because they want something to happen in terms of the legislative calendar. Anything can happen, as we all know.

*Q: Right.*

LIBERI: Many Ambassadors are held up and it has absolutely nothing to do with them. It has more to do with the political impasse that's going on. I was lucky in that I got nominated on July 10, 2012 and had my hearing September 13. I was also lucky because Senator Durbin chaired my hearings, even though he wasn't the chair of the Africa sub-committee. He was the highest-ranking member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, and there was a scheduling issue with Senator Coons, the chair of the Africa sub-committee who was unable to at my hearing. It turned out that I had hosted Senator Durbin in Uganda and he remembered it. After I had made my initial introductory remarks, I reminded him that when he had come to Uganda he was particularly interested in seeing some microfinance programs, so we took him to a woman's microfinance program. It happened to be women who were given grants to start a chicken co-op to raise chickens and eggs and to sell them. He really wanted to get out into the field, which was great, good enough for him. So we showed up and the women said, "Great, we hold our meetings in the chicken coop." So here I was with Senator Durbin, sitting on this little bench, literally inside a chicken coop, with these women while they were conducting their meeting. You can imagine that it was a very colorful experience

*Q: Oh yeah.*

LIBERI: With sights and sounds and smells that one has in a chicken coop. He was a great sport, he went right along with it. I said, "Well Senator, they say this is where they have their meetings." He said, "Okay." I said, "You're sure?" Because it was hot, and it was very closed in. The chickens were doing their cock-a-doodle-doo, and laying eggs, so as the temperature rose, the smells got more and more intense in the chicken coop as well. But good enough, we stayed there for about an hour and he asked questions and they answered. I reminded him of this and he said, "Yes, I do remember that meeting very well.

*Q: Oh yeah.*

LIBERI: He was impressed with the program. It was very interesting because you never know what people are going to take away from these kinds of meetings, especially Senators or Congressmen. They're doing it because they do want to know about programs, but some have more interest than others. This was a particularly interesting but challenging environment to have a meeting in. Senator Durbin said to me, "You know what I came away with? That meeting made me the single largest supporter of microfinance programs." He had asked the women, "What difference has this made in your life?" One woman looked him in the eye and said, "I can be free and independent. I don't have to rely on my husband now, and I can send my children to school and give them healthcare and other things they need."

*Q: Wow.*

LIBERI: She reiterated, "I don't have to ask my husband for money." Senator Durban said to me, "I have never forgotten that." So whatever legislation comes up for microfinance, he's a very big supporter. All which is to say, you just never know throughout your career, how certain experiences will impact something else totally differently.

*Q: Right.*

LIBERI: As a result of that, it obviously helped me that the Senator knew me, and had been in the field with me. He asked me questions about Burundi, but I think in his mind he had already field tested my abilities. It was a good hearing, in that it was a very friendly hearing.

*Q: Uh-huh. It wasn't adversarial.*

LIBERI: It wasn't adversarial at all. I was very grateful for that because you never know how they're going to go.

*Q: Of course.*

LIBERI: You never know what Senators have on their mind that might have nothing to do with you, however they become adversarial because they don't like something the Administration is doing, and you happen to be in front of them so they take it out on you. That didn't happen to me which was great. I was approved by the Foreign Relations Committee, confirmed by the full Senate on September 22, 2012. and sworn in on October 19, 2012.

This is actually very prophetic that we're talking about this. I had my swearing in ceremony, my entire family had come and of course it was a very big deal for my family. I think I set the record for the most number of family members at a swearing in ceremony. Then I was packing out, preparing to leave. As I was packing out watching CNN, suddenly I'm looking up and all the newscasts are talking about storm Sandy and how Seagate in Brooklyn, NY was being evacuated. Seagate is where my parents lived. My dad had already passed so my mother was there at 80, by herself. I called her saying, "Mom, you have to get out of there," seeing everything on the news. They knew it was going to be bad and she was preparing to evacuate, however the storm came up so suddenly. It started getting worse, getting very bad, faster than they anticipated so she had to leave sooner than anticipated. Literally in one hour with the clothes on her back and a few things. It's a good thing she did because she would not have survived the storm. Then, lo and behold, overnight, at 80, she was homeless because our house got sucked into the ocean. It was one of those houses that was completely destroyed because my parents lived right on the ocean. Seagate is the last beach community in Brooklyn, leading into NY harbor. There's Sheepshead Bay, Brighton Beach, Coney Island, and

then Seagate – which is a gated community. It was very much impacted and devastated by storm Sandy, so it was very debilitating.

*Q: Wow.*

LIBERI: I was very fortunate in that Assistant Secretary Carson and Ambassador Yamamoto were very understanding. I literally dropped everything and ran up to New York. Actually, I had to wait a day or two because we couldn't physically get in to Brooklyn since everything was closed – bridges, tunnels. It was terrible, the roads were closed, there was no gas, and I had to actually take gas on the Jersey Turnpike in a jerrycan. It's the only time they've allowed that because it's so dangerous, however there was no gasoline in New York City. Many parts of the city were still out of power and it was like a scene from Mad Max or something.

*Q: Right.*

LIBERI: Trees were overturned, cars were overturned, and there were literally dunes of sand washed up by the storm. It was just extraordinary. When I arrived in Brooklyn to pick up my Mom at my cousin's house, they were finally letting us back into Seagate. It was really heartbreaking to see the house literally sucked into the ocean, with very little left of it. You can replace furniture, however you can't replace the photos and all the memories.

*Q: Sure, my gosh.*

LIBERI: Particularly the photos. In fact, at my swearing in ceremony my Mom told our family at lunch that her winter project was pulling all the family photos and memorabilia together to make boxes for everybody. This was for myself, my sisters, my nephews, and her godchildren. She was sorting through so that she could give everyone items she had kept to chronicle family memories. Well, boom, it was all in the ocean. It's just extraordinary. I was scheduled to be out in Burundi by the end of October or beginning of November, however I had to stay back and help my Mom find an apartment and start the process for the insurance claims. I wound up not getting to Burundi until just after the new year, around January 4 or 5. So it was a bit of a traumatic beginning, and diplomatically it was a bit of an issue as well, since I had been sworn in as Ambassador and instead of arriving in a week, I didn't show up for almost two months.

*Q: Yeah, yeah. Well, what can you do?*

LIBERI: What can you do? My mother was 80, and I have two sisters - one in California, and the other on the end of Long Island who's a nurse, so they weren't in a position to just drop everything. I had to stay and help my Mother.

When I arrived in Burundi I needed to present my credentials. It's a big deal to present your credentials as is the political process in terms of timing to do it. The Burundian government had already set a date set when they thought I was originally arriving, so that

had to get renegotiated. Fortunately it did happen relatively quickly on January 18, 2013 about two weeks after my arrival. Until then, you actually can't go out of the Embassy. That's another process that people don't understand.

*Q: Oh yeah.*

LIBERI: Until you have actually presented your credentials to the President of the country to which you have been assigned, you can't conduct any business outside of the U.S. Embassy. You can have internal staff meetings and briefings, but you can't meet your other diplomatic colleagues or attend diplomatic meetings, or functions, and you can't engage with any government counterparts because you're not yet official.

*Q: Right.*

LIBERI: People sometimes wonder about this however it's a very formal process. You literally have to present your letters that come from the President of the United States to the President of the host country - in this case, President Nkurunziza. The host government has to accept the letters officially and sign them, even though it's a formality. Then, and only then, can you actually engage in diplomatic functions.

*Q: Wow.*

LIBERI: In my case I was anxious to get started because I was already almost two months delayed. There were big political issues, and there still remain big political issues in Burundi, given its history. To try to synopsize this, Burundi had gone through a very long civil war lasting 12 years, and had undergone its own form of genocide in terms of inter-tribal issues between the Hutu and the Tutsi. While not as intense as had happened in Rwanda in a short period of time, it was about as bloody during the longer 12-year civil war. It started in 1993 and continued until a peace agreement was signed.

*Q: In that case, take a moment to describe who the warring factions were, and if there was something in particular that they were fighting over, or, as civil wars sometimes go, it takes on just a life of its own. You killed my relatives, now I'm going to kill yours, and the original reason for the war is no longer even a part of what's going on any more.*

LIBERI: Right. It's a bit of a long history, but I'll try to condense it. Originally, Burundi was a kingdom, ruled by a series of kings, and then became a Belgian colony. Eventually it moved to a system of leadership that was variously governed by military, and then civilian leaders. A lot of its history involved the Tutsi minority being in power over a Hutu majority. Eventually in 1993 there was a democratic election. President Ndadaye was the first democratically elected president, and the first Hutu. Unfortunately, about three months later he was assassinated, and that sparked the civil war. There was a big outcry of the Hutus saying, "Our president had been killed."

*Q: Uh-huh.*

LIBERI: The civil war began and continued for 12 years. Many of the Hutus who were rebels went into the bush (countryside) and began a guerrilla warfare. There were a lot of reprisals back and forth on both sides.

*Q: Yeah.*

LIBERI: A lot of Tutsis were then targeted for assassination because it was felt that they had caused the assassination that sparked the civil war. During this 12-year period there were atrocities - a lot of atrocities on both sides. Many of the educated Tutsis started leaving because they felt they were being targeted. The Tutsis were the more educated group and they were the more economically prosperous in business. At one point, if anyone was seen wearing glasses, it was just assumed that they were intellectual Tutsis and they got attacked. Reprisals escalated back and forth. It became a very bloody civil war. Many Hutus were killed in the process because they were assumed to be rebels and hunted down. The military was basically governed by the Tutsi at that point.

This is a very synopsized version. The layers and layers of history and background are so deep it would take a while to go into all of it, but that's basically what happened. During this time there were various efforts at peace accords and they kept falling apart. Then finally when Nelson Mandela became president of South Africa, and subsequently stepped down, he became the "eminence grise" on the continent and the broker of peace in different countries. He, and the government in South Africa served as a mediator, and established a dialogue in Arusha, Tanzania, the headquarters of the East African Community (EAC). Burundi is a member of the East African Community and eventually an accord was signed in August 2000, which was called the Arusha Peace Accord. Nelson Mandela and President Bill Clinton were signatories. So the United States helped to mediate the Accord, as a direct response to the genocide in Rwanda. The atrocities in Rwanda left many people - particularly the U.S., and President Clinton - feeling like not enough had been done to intervene in the 1994 genocide. So President Clinton was instrumental in helping to broker peace in Burundi.

After the Accord was signed, a determination was made by Burundi to have democratic representation. There were several transitional governments between 2000-2005 and one of the leading rebel figures at that point - who turned into the key civilian leader - was Pierre Nkurunziza, who subsequently became the Presidential candidate of least divisiveness. He had become leader of the CNDD-FDD (National Council for the Defense of Democracy – Forces for the Defense of Democracy) rebel group turned political party, and was a candidate that people could agree upon, let's put it that way.

*Q: Uh-huh. The least objectionable.*

LIBERI: The least objectionable, that's a good way to put it. Burundi established a constitution in March 2005, which was important generally for the country, and specifically because it established a two-term presidential limit. Local administrative and Parliamentary elections took place between June-September 2005, and CNDD-FDD won both elections. Nkurinziza ran unopposed as a Presidential candidate and was elected to

the position by the Parliament. This was subsequently used as an argument to say that wasn't a direct election, and that Parliament had selected Nkurunziza as the leader. In 2005 he had one term, and in 2010 a second term. As 2015 elections approached, he claimed, that, "The first election was not direct, so I really have only served one term directly elected in 2010, and 2015 will be my second actual direct election." All along there had been an interpretation that he had already served two terms, and the western world maintained that interpretation, contrary to what he was now claiming. In fact, Senator Russ Feingold, who by that time had become the Great Lakes Envoy under President Obama, was shuttling back and forth for discussions of the 2015 election. At a certain point he said to Nkurunziza, "Yes, but Mr. President, how many times have you been sworn in as president? Twice. Which by definition means that this would be a third term."

*Q: Right.*

LIBERI: That didn't go well with Nkurunziza. This issue had been brewing for a while, and when I arrived at post, I had to deal with circumstances that had already occurred. The opposition parties had boycotted the 2010 elections, because they thought the elections were not going to be free and fair. They felt they didn't actually have an opportunity to campaign and that the odds were stacked against them. They claimed that Nkurunziza had blocked any opportunity for a real opposition candidate to campaign and build up a constituency. There were a also lot of parties vying for the election. To counter this proliferation, some in the ruling party claimed, " Of the 22 'political' parties, there are really only five that matter," and tried to disenfranchise the rest. They further claimed that not all parties should have equal access to government funds to carry out campaigning and hold rallies – as had been designated in the constitution, to establish a level playing field. Political parties protested. My predecessor, Ambassador Slutz, had correctly pleaded with the opposition, as did many others, to say, "You've got to stay in the game. If you boycott, then by definition there's only one candidate and one party"

*Q: Right.*

LIBERI: Unfortunately, they protested, then boycotted the elections. So from 2010 on, there was basically one ruling party. The opposition had essentially exiled themselves.

*Q: Right.*

LIBERI: So in the lead up to the 2015 elections, there was not a level playing field because opposition parties were not really present. There was also a concern that elements of the civil war would emerge because the population felt their needs were not being represented and might start to factionalize. All of this was the background for my four-year tenure in Burundi. I, along with the rest of the international community, inherited a political situation where there was no sitting opposition, and it was very clear that the organs of democratic institutions were not really in place because there were essentially no checks and balances. Given the lack of opposition parties, the Parliament wasn't fully representative of the population. There were certain elements of

representation, but essentially the political process started consolidating to become a one-party state, and the ruling party was getting used to its control. No one wants to give up power, I don't care where you are. No one wants to give up power.

This was the backdrop to starting my tenure in January 2013. We, the donors, the international community, were trying to establish a political dialogue or "Road Map" that would enable opposition members to return from overseas and start engaging in the political process. The emphasis of the political road map was to establish "terms of engagement." How could political parties come back without repercussions? How could they be reestablished? How could they gain access to some funding to enable them to get out to campaign?

The UN sent the Secretary General's envoy, the senior representative of the Secretary General (SRSG) who was Parfait Onanga-Anyanga. He was from Gabon and had worked with Ban Ki Moon in New York. As the SRSG representative in Burundi, he helped lead negotiations for many of the political issues. We in the international community collaborated to help ensure that a genuine political process would take place. Unfortunately, things started to go awry because the process broke down. First of all, many in the political opposition started crying foul, stating they were being closed down and not able to meet or assemble. Anytime they tried to gather, the police would come and break them up. There was some violence, and candidates of opposition parties as well as their supporters felt like they were being targeted. There was often evidence that targeting was occurring. The government, of course denied all of this, saying that the parties were not adhering to the rules, that they hadn't asked for their assembly permits in time, etc. The usual back and forth.

*Q: Yeah.*

LIBERI: During this time, the international community was trying to convince Nkurunziza that the right thing for him to do was step aside. The argument was that the CNDD-FDD ruling party should have another candidate, since he had served two terms.

*Q: Right.*

LIBERI: There was a very long excruciating process of Nkurinziza essentially saying, "No, I wasn't elected directly the first time, this is my second election." He got the Constitutional Court to side with him even though their original vote was to uphold the Constitution and vote against a third term. I'll talk more about that because I had a lot of personal interaction in terms of what really happened and how the decision got changed. The African Union became involved in the issue as well as the East African Commission. One of the reasons this was so important was that Burundi was the first test cast for upcoming elections in the rest of the Great Lakes.

*Q: Ah.*

LIBERI: In terms of timing, Burundi was the first election. Shortly thereafter would be Rwanda, Congo, Uganda, and then Kenya. Kenya had its own political issues. Tanzania was in the process of going through elections, which turned out to be a good process.

*Q: Uh-huh.*

LIBERI: In Kenya, there were concerns because of the violence that had taken place in the previous presidential election, so everyone was watching that very closely.

*Q: Yeah.*

LIBERI: In Burundi, everyone was very concerned because of the precedent that it set, and because of the potential for violence. There was a real potential to spark off violence in the rest of the region. We know from our history, the Great Lakes, the civil wars in the Congo, etc. are the longest running civil wars, certainly in sub-Saharan Africa, and in recent modern history.

*Q: Right.*

LIBERI: The United States, was leading the charge to guard against violence. It was very clear under the Obama administration, under National Security Advisor Susan Rice, and Samantha Powell, who was U.S. Ambassador, to the UN, that everyone was very, very concerned about the potential for ethnic violence.

Prior to my departure for Burundi, when Samantha Powell was still at the NSC, she asked if I would work with the Atrocities Prevention Board (APB) to have Burundi serve as the first case study to analyze the potential for mass ethnic violence. I agreed and a team came out to conduct an in-depth analysis of potential triggers for violence and identified elections – particularly Nkurinziza running for a third term – as a key trigger. As a result of this analysis Burundi remained a priority country for the NSC, more so than it would have under normal circumstances. Consequently, we were also able to petition State Department and USAID for additional democracy and governance funding. This included support to the Electoral Commission and other election related activities, training for journalists and civil society organizations, and monitoring of violence against opposition parties/candidates, including ethnically based hate crimes. Prior to working with the APB, there had been little to no funding allocated to these activities.

*Q: Sure.*

LIBERI: The U.S. policy was clear in terms of the two-term limit, and not supporting a third term for Nkurunziza. We weren't saying that the CNDD-FDD couldn't run. Obviously they could, by selecting a different candidate. That would maintain the integrity of the democratic process, and avoid any ethnic violence that might occur.

*Q: Right.*

LIBERI: At this point the Tutsis were feeling very disenfranchised, and many started to leave the country. Interestingly however, over time the majority opposition to a third term became Hutu. Even within Nkurunziza's party, within the CNDD-FDD itself.

*Q: Interesting.*

LIBERI: A main reason for internal opposition was that in places like Burundi there is almost no private sector, so the only way to have a job is to work for the government. The only way to have power is to be part of the ruling party.

*Q: Right.*

LIBERI: The only way to have a patronage system is for you to be in power. So even if you personally want to leave an elected position, your family, your tribe, your clan, does not want you to, since they are on the receiving end of the benefits. There became an internal struggle because at that point many members within his own party thought, "Okay, Nkurinziza and his family have benefited long enough, now it's our turn." We were cognizant of the fact that a lot of the opposition weren't there because they were becoming the George Washington's of the country, favoring democratic representation. They also wanted power. An interesting anecdote is that at one point when I was meeting Nkurunziza I said, "Mr. President, please understand, this is not a personal issue. The U.S. isn't against you. However, you're at a moment in time where there are two models to follow in Africa. Either you can follow the Mandela model (stepping down after one term). Or the Mugabe model (remaining in power for over thirty years)

*Q: Uh-huh.*

LIBERI: He looked at me and said, "Mandela is dead, Mugabe is still alive and ruling." (Mugabe was subsequently overthrown in 2017).

*Q: Oh my goodness.*

LIBERI: I thought to myself "Well, I guess that answers that, doesn't it?"

*Q: Wow.*

LIBERI: So that's the attitude we were dealing with. There was also a real sense on the part of the CNDD-FDD that they were not getting the respect that they deserved. In their minds they had fought the civil war and believed remaining in power was their just reward. Interestingly, even though Nkurinziza became the leader of the party during the peace process, the CNDD-FDD actually didn't sign the Arusha accords. They were one of the rebel groups that didn't sign. Their attitude was, "You know what? That wasn't our agreement." However, it was the internationally sanctioned peace accord and the agreement that brought them to power. I would point that out to them and say, "Well, technically you didn't sign it, however it is what brought you to power."

*Q: Right.*

LIBERI: We had some very frank discussions about this, which they didn't want to hear. Of course, all behind closed doors. I would say to Nkurinziza, "Mr. President the U.S. policy is not a personal issue against you. It is for the process of democracy in your country. If you feel that the party is so strong, and that you have delivered all the benefits to the population that you say you have, then the party can identify other leadership."

*Q: Right, and you'll contest the election and win again.*

LIBERI: Exactly - but no, he didn't want to hear that.

*Q: Yeah.*

LIBERI: The process of convincing Nkurinziza to step down wasn't going very well. At one point, Assistant Secretary for Africa, Linda Thomas-Greenfield and Ambassador Samantha Powell (at that point U.S. Ambassador to the U.N.) came to meet with Nkurinziza. We discussed the third term and other issues with him for a long time, very diplomatically. At one point Samantha said to him "Mr. President we've been here for two hours listening to your point of view, however, have you heard anything we've had to say?!" He replied "Tell President Obama it was good of him to recognize Burundi's contribution to the AMISOM peace keeping process in Somalia" – essentially dismissing the U.S. concerns about third term issues. It was a diplomatic insult, and they were both furious! I said to them afterwards "Welcome to my world – this is often the kind of tone deaf response Nkurinziza gives when he doesn't want to hear something." I had been reporting on my meetings with Nkurinziza that had similar outcomes, however until they experienced it firsthand, I think leadership in DC thought I may not have been delivering the U.S. policy message forcefully enough. Witnessing his response directly put things in perspective!

*Q: Right.*

LIBERI: There were founding members of the CNDD-FDD who had been fighting together in the bush. On one hand they had this real bond. On the other hand they all also knew where the bodies were buried, literally, and had a lot of dirt on each other. Things sort of came apart at the seams when members of the ruling party, including founding members started to turn against Nkurunziza. They tried to use their own internal process to move him out, but it didn't work. Eventually they all wound up fleeing, essentially leaving the country, because Nkurinziza saw them as traitors and went after them. His own vice-president and other senior, founding members of the party left.

It became pretty ugly rather fast. It started resembling a dictatorship rather than a participatory process of government. From January to mid-April 2015 radio stations were shut down, the independent press was muzzled, human rights activists and political opposition members were imprisoned, and some even killed. Throughout this period there were mass demonstrations against Nkurinziza's third term. Then a couple of crucial

events happened. Nkurinziza was nominated on April 25 as the CNDD-FDD party candidate for President. There was an immediate challenge to this and the case was referred to the Constitutional Court for a ruling.

*Q: Uh-huh.*

LIBERI: The Court was meeting secretly, however leaks were occurring and we had heard that the initial majority vote was that Nkurinziza wasn't eligible to run for a third term. Even though the decision was "secret," everyone knew. That decision was made on Thursday April 30, and was scheduled to be announced Friday May 1, however it got delayed. The trajectory of events over the next two weeks was extraordinary.

LIBERI: There were demonstrations on Friday May 1 in anticipation of the Constitutional Court's decision and the University was immediately closed. Students started getting harassed by the police and several were arrested. I had Assistant Secretary of State Malinowski visiting from Washington to meet with President Nkurinziza and reiterate Washington's concerns about human rights abuses and the potential for ethnic violence leading up to the elections. He was the head of DRL (the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor).

*Q: Wow, just as this was happening?*

LIBERI: Just as the student issue was developing I was hosting a dinner for him at the residence. This was all happening very fast.

*Q: Uh-huh.*

LIBERI: There were various ministers there, and we were discussing democracy and human rights issues with some of the key leadership of Burundi. Then the RSO (Regional Security Officer) appeared in the doorway. She was a former Marine, very professional. I had an all-female RSO security team. She knew I was hosting an official dinner with the Assistant Secretary and would never show up unannounced unless there were a major issue.

*Q: Yes, of course, right.*

LIBERI: As soon as I saw her I thought, "Oh, this is not good. Whatever it is, it is not good."

*Q: Right.*

LIBERI: She came in very quietly and said, "Ambassador, I really need to speak with you." I said, "I'm sure you do." So I went outside, and she said, "The students were disbanded and chased out of the university." I said, "Yes, I heard" Then she said, "Well, they are all at the Embassy seeking asylum."

*Q: Oh, my God.*

LIBERI: I said, "How many?" She said, "Oh, about 600, at least." They had shown up at the Embassy because they were being chased and persecuted and we found out later that some were being followed into their villages, and a few of them had been killed. It was a very unfortunate issue. The Embassy was not that far from the university so they came to the Embassy for safety. At that point I was thinking, "Great - I have the Assistant Secretary here, and 600 students are outside the Embassy gates all clamoring to get in!" The students weren't putting a siege on the Embassy, however it was a pretty big gathering. I immediately got on the phone to alert Washington. As I was dialing, the RSO said "The press are also starting to show up."

*Q: Oh, my God.*

LIBERI: By this time everyone was starting to report the issue and it was already on BBC, and Agence France-Presse, and then CNN. I went back to the dinner and pulled the Assistant Secretary aside and said, "Look, I have to go to the Embassy." He said, "Oh, I'll come with you." I thought that this was going to be very, very dicey but he wanted to join me so I agreed. I also told the RSO "we have to have increased security. Let the marines know in case we have to get into the Embassy very quickly and close the gates behind us. "I need you guys to be ready." I told Malinowski, that I had to go immediately, because as Ambassador the best thing I could do now is be with the students.. Linda Thomas-Greenfield, the Assistant Secretary of State for Africa, was the first person I alerted in Washington "Listen, so that you hear it first from me, we have 600 students outside the Embassy." She asked, "What are you going to do?" I said, "I'm going to go meet with the students." "Well, are you sure that that's safe?" I said, "No, I'm not sure it's safe, but I have to do it."

*Q: Right.*

LIBERI: I emphasized "I have to do it. I have to meet with the students and listen to them." I went to the Embassy, and of course by now there were a lot of press, and it was pretty chaotic. I went in to the middle of the crowd and started shaking peoples' hands, and said, "I need to speak with your leadership. Who organized this?"

*Q: Right.*

LIBERI: I told the students, "No one will be hurt, you have my word. I've already spoken to the Vice-President, the Minister of Education, and the Minister of Foreign affairs." I had called the officials and said, "You have a problem on your hands." Every one of them said to me "No, you have a problem." I said, "Oh, thanks very much."

*Q: Wow.*

LIBERI: Yes. They weren't happy with the U.S. policy, and they said, "Well, you're always talking about democracy, so now this is what happens." "You can have the

students on your doorstep." They, unfortunately were no help whatsoever. I thought "This is great." So I said, "Well, look, if you're not going to help that's fine, but do not come near the Embassy with police force, military force, or anything." The students were basically on the perimeter of U.S. government property even though they were outside the gates. I told the government "you will have the biggest international incident if anything happens to them." "I'm going to meet with them now, so keep all of the security forces away." Which they did, since I also called the chief of police directly and said, "Do not show up, because this could be a blood bath."

*Q: Oh, easily, easily.*

LIBERI: At least I got that much of an agreement from the government and was able to let the students know. I met with the student body leadership and said "I understand your concerns. You're safe here, however the U.S. can't offer you asylum, that's not how this works. However, you can stay here while we try to find out what the next steps are." Then I said "You see all these security cameras here? These cameras will make sure that you're kept safe because everything is on film. It's being recorded. At the same time, these cameras will tell me if you do anything to anybody. So the only way that you're staying here is if you are peaceful, if you don't harass anybody, if there are no issues." "Because if there are issues" I warned "The normal diplomatic protocol for this kind of situation is for me to call the military or the police and have you rounded up and arrested."

*Q: Of course, right.*

LIBERI: I said, "I'm not going to do that, I don't want to do that, but if anything gets out of hand I might have to. So please stay peaceful."

*Q: Uh-huh.*

LIBERI: And they did remain peaceful That was the good news. The not so great news was they stayed for about six weeks!

*Q: Wow! Oh my God.*

LIBERI: Getting back to the Constitutional Court decision, the justices of the Court "got visited" by members of the ruling party over the weekend We started hearing rumors that the vote had changed and the Court would rule that running for a third term was legal. In the meantime a number of us were trying to find out what was going on.

I had heard that the Vice-President of the Constitutional Court – Sylvere Nimpagaritse was in hiding, so I called him and he secretly came to the residence on Sunday May 3. He said to me "I voted no from the beginning, as did most of the other members of the court. Then members started changing their votes, because they were being threatened by the ruling party. If we did not give the third term a green light, we were going to be in

trouble. But I kept to my vote. In my soul and conscience I decided not to put my signature to a ruling, a decision which is clearly not lawful that would be imposed from the outside, and which has nothing legal about it." Eventually he became the only person who voted no.

*Q: Wow.*

LIBERI: Then he looked at me. He was a very brave man, a very good guy. You can imagine the extraordinary pressure that he was under. He just broke down in tears and said, "Oh, my God. I don't care about my life, but they're going to come after my entire family now." He was visibly frightened.

*Q: Sure.*

LIBERI: The weight of everything was just overwhelming for him. I told him "You're on U.S. Government property here in my residence. We can't give you asylum or anything like that, however you can stay here for the next few hours until we get this organized and have a plan to get you and your family out of the country." It was like a movie, figuring out how to get him into different cars and whisk him to certain meet up places. That's what you have to do. In the end, he bravely fled late that night with his family and escaped over the border into Rwanda, just before being recognized and pursued by Burundian border guards – it was a close call.

*Q: That's a cut and dried case. I mean, I can't imagine anybody is going to say, "No, you don't really sound like somebody who has a reasonable expectation of persecution in your native country."*

LIBERI: The case was clear.

*Q: Yeah.*

LIBERI: Even prior to his visit, I had worked closely with Assistant Secretary Malinowski and his staff to assist human rights activists and others who were being targeted. Without getting into all of the details, there was a mechanism in place we could use to help get people out of the country. Since we had a great relationship with DRL, we were able to call on their assistance.

*Q: Ah.*

LIBERI: Under pressure from the ruling party, the remainder of the Constitutional Court ruled on Tuesday May 5 that it was legal for Nkurinziza to run for a third term. Tensions remained high, violence and protests continued with severe crackdown from the police.

On May 13, Nkurinziza traveled to Tanzania for the East Africa Commission (EAC) 13th Extraordinary Summit of Heads of State. While he was out of the country, there was an attempted coup d'état!

The coup attempt was led by General Godefroid Niyombare, who had been a member of Nkurinziza's coalition serving as the Army Chief of Staff, and most recently had been the Burundian Ambassador to Kenya. He was brought back to Burundi to head the intelligence services (SNR – Service National de Renseignement). SNR kept tabs on the population and was believed to be in charge of the Imbonerakure – technically the youth arm of the CNDD-FDD. In reality they were a militia responsible for torturing and killing oppositions members and human rights activists. For years, the population feared the previous head of SNR - General Adolphe (Nshimirimana) - which was the perfect name for him.

*Q: Beautiful.*

LIBERI: He was the muscle, the man behind the scenes responsible for ordering many of the assassinations. Political opposition members and their families were targeted, and either jailed or killed. It became a very difficult environment and the violence went on for months. Shockingly, General Adolphe himself was assassinated, prompting General Niyombare's return.

*Q: Wow.*

LIBERI: Everyone thought General Adolphe's death would take the lid off and the political situation would unravel, because he had been the enforcer in chief, keeping the political opposition under control. There was a concern about significant ethnic violence erupting. While that didn't happen at the levels anticipated, there were lots of cleavages. Opponents to Nkurinziza even from his own party, started to go into different camps. Over time, this included General Niyombare who publicly opposed a third term and consequently was fired by Nkurinziza.

*Q: Ah. Okay.*

LIBERI: Around noon on May 13 staff came running in to my office "Ambassador, Ambassador, you have to listen to what's going on – what's being said on the radio." So I went to the lobby and joined staff who were listening. General Niyombare had taken over a radio station and was saying "I have dismissed the President and the Government has been dissolved. I am calling on citizens to remain calm, and urge all to respect the lives and property of others. The airport and all borders of the country have been closed." I thought, "Oh, my goodness." It was clear what was going on, even though he was not calling it a coup. If it walks like a duck and quacks like a duck, it's a duck.

*Q: Yeah.*

LIBERI: When he got off the radio station I called him on his cell and said "General Niyombare was that really you making that announcement? What is this – what are your intentions?"

I said to him very specifically, " General, let me be very clear about this, under U.S. law, if this is a coup of any sort, not just a military coup - any taking over of power non-democratically - all U.S. assistance will stop immediately. That includes everything. All the military assistance, all the equipment, all the training, all the education, all the health care." I said, "Everything. Our budget will stop immediately. So think very carefully about what you are doing." He said, "Well, um. My sister, I haven't called it a coup…. Yes, this is a movement…" And he said something to the effect that the people would decide. In other words, it would be a popular groundswell.

*Q: Hmm*

LIBERI: Then he said, "Everyone now knows it was me making the announcement – the military and police are storming the radio station and I'm about to get shot, so I have to go!" He was now on the run, it was a shootout. Then of course, it was chaos. Things can go bad very quickly.

At this point it wasn't clear what the outcome would be. From a security standpoint we had to be very careful, and I had to close the Embassy immediately. All security measures had to be taken.

I then called the Army Chief of Staff General Prime Niyongabo, as well as the Vice-President, and asked both of them "So what are you going to do?" I added "You have to be very careful because if you start killing citizens, this will not end well." It was clear they had been caught off guard, and were evaluating what steps to take next.

Meanwhile, we could hear celebrations going on in the streets. People were dancing and in fact many were happy to have Nkurinziza overthrown, because there was widespread opposition to his running for a third term. General Niyombare had said he was advocating for peaceful, positive change in Burundi, hoping to put an end to the violence. He hadn't used the word "coup" at all. I think he thought that there would be popular support for removing Nkurunziza in a non-violent way,

*Q: Right.*

LIBERI: Because something similar had just happened in Burkina Faso.

*Q: Uh-huh.*

LIBERI: In Burkina Faso there wasn't a coup, but rather a popular uprising to oust the former president and have a new leader come in. Essentially the popular support was so strong that the military didn't have to crack down. It was a transition process that took place. I think General Niyombare believed the same would happen in Burundi. In fact, for the first 12 hours it seemed like it might have gone that way. However, people still weren't sure, and the Army Chief of Staff General Niyongabo, was quite good and well respected. I think everyone was trying to see where loyalties were going to fall, within the power struggle When the dust settled, which side were you on? Everyone knew there

were going to be repercussions, one way or another. I also think there hadn't been enough preparation for a popular movement. People were very suppressed and had been living in fear because of the targeted killings I think the potential coup/takeover took everyone by surprise. Even though there was a lot of jubilation in the streets, I would say the machinery for such a popular movement was not quite there.

*Q: Un-huh.*

LIBERI: Unfortunately innocent lives are lost in that type of situation, and it is very easy to lose international support. The key issue and priority for me was security. At this point bullets were flying in the city and I had to make sure everyone was safe. As Ambassador you are responsible for the safety and security of everyone under Chief of Mission authority

*Q: Sure.*

LIBERI: It was very hard, particularly for families with young children because we had to pull everyone out of the schools immediately. We had to literally round up everyone in armored vehicles, do a head count, make sure everyone was safe and accounted for. Obviously I was on the phone very quickly to Washington waking everyone up because of the seven hour time difference.

*Q: Right.*

LIBERI: By this time it was all over CNN and the international news. It was being reported as a fluid situation, unclear who was in charge. The international community had hoped there was still an opportunity for the leadership of the East African Community to strike a deal, find a soft landing and convince Nkutinziza to leave the Presidency and not run again. A key purpose of the Heads of State meeting was to outline alternatives that would be better for him and the country. Unfortunately that didn't happen.

*Q: Right.*

LIBERI: The coup attempt, violence, and rapidly declining security situation called for evacuation of the Embassy ASAP, working very closely with Washington. It was no longer safe for the majority of staff and families to remain in Burundi. A special task force was set up at the State Department to coordinate efforts. We identified Embassy Rwanda as the closest safe haven to evacuate to, and I worked closely with Ambassador Barks-Ruggles to synchronize efforts. Since the airport and all the borders were closed, we had to determine the safest way to evacuate. Working with Washington, we determined that as soon as the airport was open, we would have charter flights come in.

A major concern was the escalating fighting between government forces and General Niyombare's group, which continued between May 13-15. I had closed the Embassy

since it was near the epicenter of the fighting and dangerous to attempt going in and out. All families were sheltering in place at their homes, and we maintained continuous security checks. I was conducting EAC (Emergency Action Committee) meetings at my residence as we planned the evacuation. However, the Vice-President lived in the house next to me, so I had to be very careful. My compound was surrounded by military at all times, so I could be very protected or in the line of fire!

*Q: Wow. Wow.*

LIBERI: We were the first ones to declare that we were evacuating. Everyone follows the U.S., so as soon as we make a determination, everyone else says, "We're evacuating as well." The UN and most embassies were now trying to get their people out too.

*Q: Right, right.*

LIBERI: The U.S. also has international agreements for evacuations. So, I was getting calls from Ambassadors in surrounding countries. In addition to the Canadians and Australians who we have agreements with, suddenly we had the Turks and the Japanese as well. Many nationalities showed up to get evacuated, after we prioritized getting all Americans out. My team was great, they were just terrific. Because it's exhausting.

*Q: Oh, of course.*

LIBERI: On Sunday May 17 we took six planeloads of people out on chartered flights, and only one and a half of the planeloads were U.S. citizens. We really worked to assist people to evacuate since it's very disruptive for everyone. There were families with babies and animals, and we wound up driving the animals separately to Rwanda. It was an extraordinary process. If you haven't been through an evacuation I can tell you, this is very difficult - extremely difficult. We were lucky that it went smoothly. I worked very closely with Burundian authorities to ensure security because anything can go wrong, particularly in a fluid situation like that.

*Q: Absolutely.*

LIBERI: The security situation remained very, very tense as the fighting continued. By this time Nkurinziza had returned from Tanzania and was trying to re-establish control over the country, and arrest the coup plotters. However there was a big black eye for the country, because the international community was evacuating.

*Q: And you get a travel warning issued by the State Department.*

LIBERI: Yes. The UN and the EU were concerned about the travel warning, since they often use different decision making processes. For me, the biggest issue was the security of the staff and their families and getting everyone out safely,

Post-Benghazi, the attitude is very, very conservative. Washington wants everyone out now, that's it. I was on the phone to Undersecretary Pat Kennedy and it was very clear, the National Security Council was very concerned about the situation.. All eyes are on you because even though Burundi was a small country it was very volatile. No one wants, God forbid, a casualty of any sort.

*Q: Right.*

LIBERI: So it was a very tense and difficult time, particularly after the evacuation trying to run the Embassy with a very reduced staff, where everyone was doing two or three jobs, and we didn't know how long working with reduced staff was going to last. In addition, we still had hundreds of students camped outside the Embassy gates!

*Q: Yeah.*

LIBERI: I met with the students all the time and they continued to have very unrealistic expectations. Having witnessed the evacuation, they were still hoping I would put them on a plane for the United States, and then their families would join them. They had all these scenarios in mind. I kept saying diplomatically, but clearly, "Read my lips, that is not going to happen. This is not the way the situation works. You all really need to be finding alternatives at this point, because you can't stay here indefinitely." Of course, we sent out water and helped them from a humanitarian standpoint. Interestingly, in the middle of the night people would come and leave them food and help support them. Officially however, I couldn't get the government to do anything.

*Q: Right.*

LIBERI: We worked with the Red Cross, and our UN colleagues to assist the students. While sympathetic, my ambassadorial colleagues would look at me and say, "Better you than us! How's it going? Oh, we hear you've become the chancellor of the university now!"

*Q: Right.*

LIBERI: It remained a very dicey situation. Of course when it first happened, leadership in Washington was very concerned and said, "Fix this." I said, "I'm trying to, but I don't have many options."

*Q: Right.*

LIBERI: It was a very interesting lesson in diplomacy and how to defuse a situation. Several times it could have gotten out of hand very quickly. The main reason it didn't I think was because of the understanding on both sides. I met with the students continuously, reiterating my message: "Look, I'm not disbanding you because I

understand the predicament that you're in." As I've explained, disbanding them meant bringing in the police and that would result in a lot of violence. Basically they were staging a protest against human rights abuses and Nkurinziza running for a third term. I said, "We understand that you want democracy. But you have to be looking for alternatives to just staying here outside the Embassy." They were young and naïve thinking if they stayed there long enough something would be done for them to be granted asylum – even if not in the U.S.

*Q: Right.*

LIBERI: They always had a long list of issues, however one was actually very important. They said, "We can't go anywhere because all of our stipends have been cut off. We can't get back to our villages because we have no money and we can't contact our families." So I negotiated with the government to have their stipends reinstated.

*Q: Okay.*

LIBERI: It took a while for that to happen and when the stipends were reinstated I pointed out they could leave "Okay, now you can go."

*Q: Right, you've got your money back.*

LIBERI: Yes - you've got your money. Unfortunately, it wasn't that simple. It never is in these situations, because they still felt physically threatened. I was very clear with the government saying, "You will not cause them any harm if they remain peaceful outside the Embassy." So the government did have to stay away. However, once some students started leaving, the security forces did try to go after them – particularly some of the student leaders. They were all being watched, and the intelligence service (SNR) was trying to infiltrate the ranks to get information on them. The students were concerned about their families being threatened, so it was not a pretty situation.

LIBERI: At a certain point registration for the election needed to be done, and the government didn't want the image of the students protesting a third term to continue. I received a call from the Ministry of the Interior and the Chief of Police saying, "The students have to go and tomorrow we're coming to disband them." I replied, "Oh no you're not, I didn't request this" "Oh yes we are." I went out to the student leadership and said, "You have to go, because I cannot protect you and you've been here almost two months at this point. The police are showing up tomorrow." There was nothing I could do if the police were out in the street shooting. I said to the government "Look, if you start shooting, and if it's perceived that any piece of this, is against the U.S. government, against the U.S. Embassy, against any of my staff," "we will protect ourselves." By that time we had an additional MSD (Marine Security Detachment) to protect the Embassy.

*Q: Oh, woe be tied.*

LIBERI: By then there were a number of rumors going around because of the additional Marine detachment that had arrived at the Embassy. Some were saying we had thousands of Marines and a tunnel going from the Embassy to Rwanda, and Congo, and that the U.S. was bringing in an army. You can just imagine what was being said.

*Q: Right. The urban mythology just gets embroidered every day.*

LIBERI: Every day, every day. Extraordinary stuff. Truth be told we had about 20 Marines, all of whom were very well trained for the situation.

*Q: Yeah.*

LIBERI: We had a pretty impenetrable fortress in terms of the Embassy. It was a new Embassy, built to the highest security specifications, and we had lots of provisions. We made sure that we had diesel fuel for generators, water, food, and gasoline for vehicles if we had to drive across the border. If we had to be under siege for a period of time, we could do it. That was obviously not my preference at all, however we were prepared if we had to. The following day when the students were to be disbanded, the Minister of Interior and Chief of police assured me that they would not shoot. I said, "Make sure, because as I said, if it's perceived that any of this is against the U.S. government, we'll protect ourselves." It was very, very dicey. My orders to all the Marines were to stand down. I said, "Unless people are coming over the walls with guns shooting and attacking us, the protocol is to stand down. However, be ready."

*Q: Uh-huh.*

LIBERI: We were all in body armor to be protected in the event of violence. I went up to the roof so I could watch everything along with the Marines and it was a very, very tense situation. The police came with tanks and guns and lots of police officers.

*Q: Wow.*

LIBERI: The students had already sort of organized themselves. With new Embassies there is an outside perimeter and a parking lot, then there's another fence before entering the inside of the compound. A number of the students ran, while a bunch of them climbed over the first fence to come into the parking lot, and others went under the fence where they had dug fox holes to fit through. They were young skinny students.

*Q: Right. Right.*

LIBERI: I was watching this thinking, "Oh, this is great." While they hadn't breached the Embassy compound at all, the students were now physically in the public parking lot. They were lying down and many were wearing white, so there was a sea of students lying down on the parking lot ground.

*Q: Beautiful. Beautiful.*

LIBERI: All of this was being filmed because of course, the press were there. I'm thinking could it get any better?

*Q: Right, right, exactly.*

LIBERI: Can it get any better than this? I thought "Ok, once again I have to go out and meet with the students." The police did fire shots in the air a couple of times, however they didn't attack anyone. They did chase some students and there was a lot of scurrying going on. In the meantime my staff and I were calling church leaders and others to see how we could safely place students. I went out and met with them in the parking lot. We had to do some medical treatment for broken bones and dislocated shoulders because some had injured themselves when they scaled the wall. After we provided medical assistance, I said to the rest of them "Okay, look, you cannot stay in the Embassy parking lot. Because now you are trespassing. It was one thing when you were outside the perimeter, but you are now actually trespassing on U.S. Government property. You cannot stay here, so I am beseeching you to go peacefully."

*Q: Right.*

LIBERI: Quietly we told them, "Look, you can stay here until dark, when it won't be so easy for the police to follow you." At dark, without getting into the details, we found safe havens for them.

*Q: Okay, uh-huh.*

LIBERI: For instance, churches and other groups were willing to open up their doors, places that they could go to for shelter. I said to the students "We will help you get to these places. I can't give you armed guards, so you will need to use your discretion." I thought, "I will pay for all of your taxis, I will personally do it."

*Q: Right, right.*

LIBERI: You need to find ways to get people safely to where they need to go. And we did. There were a couple hundred of them left at that point.

*Q: Oh my God.*

LIBERI: Everyone on my team was exhausted. For hours we had to cajole the students to leave peacefully. Not to negotiate, because I said, "Look, the answer has not changed. There are no visas, there are no passports, there is no asylum. There is nothing we can offer you. You're now putting yourself in a worse situation because you are trespassing. If you don't move I have to get the Marines to come move you. That's not going to be very nice for anybody, but they will physically move you off of the compound."

*Q: Right. Oh, you don't want to be moved by marines.*

LIBERI: No. I said to them, “This is not a pretty picture if it becomes necessary. It will be done within international law, and we have very specific protocols for this, however you will be moved physically.”

*Q: Yeah.*

LIBERI: I continued, saying “At that point you will get turned over to the police because that is the protocol. I don’t want to do this. Please help me not to have to do this. The only way that that can happen is if you take advantage of the safe havens that we have quietly enabled you to go to.”

*Q: Right.*

LIBERI: So finally during the night, we got the last students out of the parking lot to safe havens. The students had been at the Embassy from May 1- June 25, 2015 - almost two months, so this was a very long arduous process. The good news is that not one student was hurt by security forces while they were either on the perimeter of the Embassy, or as they left that evening. The safe havens were kept pretty quiet.

*Q: Okay.*

LIBERI: We did the maximum we could to help save them.

*Q: Exactly.*

LIBERI: At that point I said, “We have done what we can.” That’s not to say that a few weren’t followed later on as they tried to make their way back to their villages. Some students were picked up by the intelligence service. A few were killed or tortured, which unfortunately would have happened to them irrespectively.

*Q: And many more, if you had not organized the departure the way you did.*
.

LIBERI: We continued working with UNHCR (the United Nation High Commissioner for Refugees) because as I had told the students “We can’t grant you asylum, but you can go to UNHCR and request assistance - there is a process.” We walked them through the process many times.

*Q: Uh-huh.*

LIBERI: Eventually a number of them did go to Rwanda or Congo or Uganda. They left Burundi and sought asylum.

*Q: Oh beautiful.*

LIBERI: This incident was another big lesson in dealing with a volatile political situation. This was all happening while running an Embassy, engaging in diplomacy and working with the international community to address the violence and human rights abuses. At the same time, a whole political process was occurring in terms of the elections. I was meeting with all of the political parties, and the Embassy was engaging in training programs for political participation. There were a number of issues we were engaged in.

*Q: And a powder keg sitting just within your area of control. It is a powder keg because every single day you don't know what will happen with those x-hundred people sitting there.*

LIBERI: Yes, it is a powder keg. It was a big deal. Unfortunately political assassinations continued in the lead up to the elections. Human rights activists, journalists and others sought assistance from the U.S. As I indicated, we were able to use the mechanism established by DRL to assist many of those targeted, to flee the country.

*Q: Yeah.*

LIBERI: . We did this many, many times for a number of people to get them safely out of the country. I believe this was one of the biggest contributions the U.S. made to save people's lives.

*Q: Yeah.*

LIBERI: The leading human rights activist, an incredible man, had been imprisoned. He was a political prisoner for years and eventually got out, then organized an NGO to help investigate the plight of political prisoners. There were a number of political prisoners, and once you're in the system you can get lost bureaucratically, or something physical can happen to you. The activist was Pierre Claver Mbonimpa. He was targeted by the ruling party, but he was fearless. The man was arrested so many times, but remained fearless, and had strong popular support. During the lead up to the elections, he survived an assassination attempt and was shot through the cheek on his way back from his office. His driver tried to take him to a clinic but he said, "No, I have to go to my home because if I die I want to be with my family." He went home and his daughter called me and was hysterical, "Ambassador, Ambassador, my father is wounded and we need assistance." By that time I heard he had been shot. I told his daughter "You have to get him to the clinic and get him medical attention immediately."

*Q: Right.*

LIBERI: So his family brought him to a clinic. She called me again and said frantically, "He's getting medical attention, however the intelligence service, the SNR, are here, they're here. They're going to kill him, they're going to finish him off. Please come." I said, "They're not going to finish him off," and told her I would come there shortly, however you have to be very careful doing that, since you are the U.S. Ambassador. I

called Washington and explained the situation saying “I’m going to the clinic. I just want you to hear it from me. I am going.” “Well, it’s not safe.” I said, “Of course it’s not safe, but it’s what I have to do.”

*Q: In that moment nothing else is going to work.*

LIBERI: Nothing else is going to work. I said, “I’m not going to take unnecessary risks.” By this time we had an enhanced DS (diplomatic security) contingent. The extra MSD Marine detachment had left. However we had the enhanced DS team and I said to Washington “The DS team is coming, with some of the best sharp shooters, and they’ll protect me. I’ve been in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Libya. I know what these situations are like. I’m going in full body armor.” I had a jacket on, so it didn’t look like I had full body armor on, but I did. I said, “I can’t let that man die. As soon as I show up, others in the international community will show up.” Which they did - the other Ambassadors.

*Q: Right.*

LIBERI: It was another interesting night. I showed up and poor Pierre Claver was there with a bullet through his cheek. He had lost so much blood he couldn’t talk. He was barely conscious, however he knew I was there. It was clear that without intervention the SNR would finish him off. Once it was known I was at the clinic, other Ambassadors started arriving. We had a protection vigil. I said, “None of us can stay here forever, so we’ve got to get him out.” And we did. We made phone calls and worked with our Belgian colleagues to fly him to Brussels for medical treatment and made arrangements to accompany him to the airport the next day. Of course, a number of intelligence agents were hanging around the clinic and I said, “This man is not going to be harmed. He’s leaving the country alive. That’s the best thing you can do - let him go alive.”

*Q: Right. Uh-huh.*

LIBERI: I said, “We’re all going to be there at the airport, so there will be many witnesses if something happens to this man. International witnesses. International Ambassadorial witnesses.”

*Q: Right.*

LIBERI: The next morning we got all the arrangements done, and that afternoon, we went out to the airport.

*Q: Wow. You’re running a rescue service, basically.*

LIBERI: Yes, basically. For a period of time that’s exactly what it was.

*Q: Good Lord.*

LIBERI: So that was the last time I saw Pierre Claver, until this fall (2017) at the Train Foundation in New York, where he was given their human rights award. Every year the foundation gives out a human rights prize. After being evacuated to Brussels, he had to undergo numerous operations to reconstruct his face. It was obviously very hard, but God bless him, he's a survivor. The man lived through all of this.

*Q: Incredible.*

LIBERI: He became stronger physically and was able to come to New York to receive the award. I was contacted by the Train Foundation to meet with Pierre Claver a couple of days before the awards ceremony. It was a wonderful reunion when I saw him. We were both in tears because of the last time I had seen him. He said to me "Oh, you helped save my life, thank you." Antione Kaburahe was also there, and had accompanied Pierre Claver from Brussels. Antoine was the head of IWACU, the only private press in Burundi. He had also been threatened by the ruling party and came to meet me at the Embassy shortly after the attack on Pierre Claver. It was so dangerous for anyone who was in opposition to the ruling party, particularly journalists who reported anything against the ruling party. Antoine and I were meant to attend a previously scheduled American Corners event that day. However, he said the security services wanted to meet with him. I said, "Antione you have to leave the country." "I know." I said, "How about this - how about we do our program at the American Center and then you continue on to the border where we'll have another car waiting for you to cross over to Rwanda?"

*Q: Wow.*

LIBERI: We did the hand off at the border and he called me when he crossed into Rwanda and said, "I'm safe." I said, "Thank God. Get on a plane and get to Brussels fast now!"

*Q: Right, exactly.*

LIBERI: I said, "You're not staying in the region because their reach is long."

*Q: Oh yeah. Absolutely.*

LIBERI: So Antione told the Train Foundation and Pierre Claver " The last time we both saw the Ambassador she was getting each of us out of the country." He said to me, "I owe my life to you because they (security forces) were waiting at my house to get me." I didn't know that at the time, but I knew that they would be coming for him. It was only a matter of hours before that was going to happen.

*Q: Right.*

LIBERI: I highlight these cases because that really is what punctuated my time in Burundi. You can recount all the normal things in terms of diplomacy and running an

Embassy, however those are not the priorities during times of political crisis. What I was spending most of my time on was what I was just recounting. My priorities focused on trying to preserve democracy, trying to help people preserve their lives, and showing what the United States stands for. That human rights, rule of law, and freedom of speech are our values. We will risk a lot to make sure that happens. All within law and a legal framework. For me these were the most meaningful events as the U.S. Ambassador in Burundi. Ribbon cuttings, opening projects, giving speeches - all of that is wonderful. However, representing the foreign policy and values of the United States through action, is why we're really there.

*Q: Right.*

LIBERI: It was very challenging, and there were very difficult times during my tenure in Burundi, however it was a very, very rewarding experience knowing that we had actually made a big difference in many people's lives. Unfortunately, it didn't change the course of what happened in Burundi. Nkurunziza ran for a third term and won, since he was essentially unopposed. He is changing the constitution so there are basically no term limits in Burundi, as there are none in Uganda, Rwanda, and Congo. Unfortunately, in the end while we were able to help people save their lives, it wasn't enough to change the electoral process. That will remain our challenge.

*Q: Right, right.*

LIBERI: After the elections in July 2015, we monitored the security situation, hoping to have families and departed staff return to the country. On November 3, 2015 we lifted the ordered departure and families and staff were allowed to return to post. Unfortunately that posture was short lived because of resurgent violence, including grenade attacks and exploding bombs. While foreigners were not a target, it was possible to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. The violence was difficult to predict, so keeping everyone safe became more challenging. The economic situation was also declining rapidly, making it difficult to obtain goods and services. The Embassy instituted a curfew for all employees, and travel to the interior of the country was greatly reduced. After a particularly intense bout of violence, Washington mandated all staff and families to shelter at the Embassy one weekend. Shortly after, we executed our second evacuation and on December 13, 2015 all dependents and non-emergency personnel were ordered to depart. Burundi once again became a non-accompanied post, with a very reduced essential staff level. There are very few Embassies that have had two ordered departure evacuations in one year!

During my last six months at post, the Embassy continued working with NGOs (non-government organizations) to implement programs in health, HIV/AIDS, democracy and governance, training, and other activities to assist the population and civil society in Burundi.

In the end I left on very, very good terms with the population. I believe many Burundians recognized the important assistance the U.S. had provided, during difficult times. However I left on probably the worst terms that we've ever had with Nkurunziza.

*Q: How could it be otherwise really?*

LIBERI: When I was leaving, Nkurinziza and I did not have an exit meeting. Not that I was surprised, obviously. I still maintained good relationships with my other Burundian interlocutors. The Minister of Foreign Affairs, Alain Nyamitwe, was my main interlocutor. He was the one who did the official farewells for departing Ambassadors. Privately he admitted to me: "Look, I might not have used some of the language that you used." We were pretty strong in the language representing U.S. policy. "But you weren't always wrong." I said, "I'll take that as a compliment."

*Q: Right. The backhanded compliment is still a compliment.*

LIBERI: Yes, it's still a compliment. So I believe I left with respect, even if we didn't agree officially on policy. I said to him "Alain, this is not anything personal, we can agree to disagree. We disagree because we have different policies. It's not that the United States is better or trying to dictate policy. That's not the issue. The issue is that what is happening in your country is crippling your people, economically, politically and morally. You have a million refugees outside the country. You have an economy that has tanked. You have people who are starving. Is that really the country that you want? It could be different. You have sanctions against you, you have the International Criminal Court against you, so there are all these issues. It could be different. It's not just the U.S., it's the international community, including the African Union. The AU didn't rule against a third term, because none of those countries want a negative ruling on third terms coming back to haunt them either." There was some sentiment that the African Union could have been stronger dealing with Burundi, regarding the third term issue. They didn't condemn, they didn't condone. The AU deemed it to be an "internal political decision for Burundi to make." The international community wished they had been more forthright than there they were. In the end you can only do what you can do. After four years my time was up.

*Q: Right. We're not going to invade Burundi and do nation building. So there's only so much you can do. Wow.*

Q: Okay, today is May 2nd and we are concluding our interview with Dawn Liberi with her reflections on her career and the recommendations she would make based on her experience over several tours as USAID Mission Director and having been an Ambassador.

LIBERI: If I were to look back over the totality of my career there are several things that stand out. While not an exhaustive list, I'll highlight some key thoughts:

With regard to USAID, it's important to reiterate that development is a discipline with a body of knowledge and applied experience that needs to remain the core mission of the Agency, as a key part of U.S. foreign policy. While this might seem obvious, over the years there has been skepticism expressed by some Administrations and Congress about

the continued need for USAID to exist. Great strides have been made to reduce poverty around the world and address key development issues. However, almost a billion people still live in extreme poverty and many millennium development goals have not been met. Access to water, electricity, sanitation, basic health care, food and other necessities continues to be a challenge for many. Certainly in places like sub-Saharan Africa where I've spent most of my career, the need for USAID programs remains key. By 2030, 9 out of 10 extremely poor people will live in sub-Saharan Africa, and by 2050, 2.2 billion will live there – one-fourth of the world's population. Half of that population will be under the age of 25, creating an extraordinary need for essential social services as well as jobs. In the absence of programs to address these needs, there is a potential for humanitarian crises, as well as security threats due to violence or migration.

Consequently, the development expertise and innovation that USAID brings to the table is essential. USAID has been responsible for great contributions including agricultural research to support the green revolution; educational training of generations of leaders in countries around the world; and key health innovations including the implementation of oral rehydration and Vitamin A programs to decrease infant mortality, establishment of the Demographic Health Survey (DHS) to measure health status over time in most countries around the world, and social marketing of contraceptives and other health products at reduced prices to increase accessibility for the poor. In economic development, USAID has been a leader in expanding microenterprise lending particularly to women, and streamlining investment regulations in emerging economies to increase private enterprise development and job creation. Many of these countries are now major trading partners for the U.S. In democracy and governance, USAID has helped develop civil society and human rights organizations, and helped train electoral commissions around the world to conduct elections. USAID's role as a leading development agency and crucial member of the USG foreign policy apparatus cannot be overstated.

In order for USAID to maintain its leadership and innovation, I believe it's important for the Agency to have more flexibility and fewer budgetary earmarks from Congress. Often our funding is mismatched to the challenges that need to be addressed. The majority of USAID funding is earmarked into specific areas, leaving little discretion to respond quickly to emerging opportunities on the ground. For example, changing political environments often call for modified electoral calendars or a need to support civil society and human rights organizations. Without budget flexibility, USAID is at a disadvantage to assist such efforts in a timely manner and the consequences can be significant.

In the area of conflict and post-conflict environments, there are a number of observations I would make based on my collective experience as USAID Mission Director in Iraq, State Department head of the Interagency Provincial Affairs (IPA) office in Afghanistan, U.S. Assistance Coordinator in Libya, and Chief of Mission Ambassador in Burundi.

Countries experiencing conflict and post-conflict challenges will continue to exist, if not increase in number, for the foreseeable future. While certain conditions may be similar, each situation will require us to define the U.S. foreign policy objectives, and the specific role of each agency in a given situation. While this may seem obvious, experience in

recent years has shown that this has not always been the practice, leading to policy, program and implementation challenges on the ground.

Developing assumptions based on empirical data and information is key. History indicates that USG assumptions going into Iraq, Afghanistan and Libya were flawed and had significant consequences. For example in Iraq, there was an assumption that shortly after invading the country and toppling Saddam Hussein, the Iraqi government would be able to take over and run the country, economic development could expand based on oil revenues, basic services could be delivered to the population, and the U.S. could exit relatively quickly from the country. Of course, none of this proved to be case, leaving the U.S. to spend years rebuilding the country while helping the government fight an insurgency, all at a tremendous cost in lives and treasure.

Having the necessary personnel, systems, and mechanisms in place is also necessary to address challenges in these situations. USAID, State and other civilian agencies were not readily equipped to surge and place personnel in-country with the necessary skill sets. Hiring mechanisms were often cumbersome, and regulations to award contracts also caused significant delays. Creating a balance between swift implementation of programs, and necessary oversight particularly in insecure environments, remains a challenge. We often addressed issues depending on the mechanisms we had in place, rather than adapting mechanisms to address the issues. While developing new mechanisms and systems is not easy, having flexibility is key - if the only tool you have is a hammer, then every problem is a nail.

In this regard, it's also important to recognize that development, capacity building, institutional development, all take a long time. Other responses like military intervention, and diplomacy can be done on a different timeframe. In conflict and post-conflict environments we have to be very clear that the USAID role needs to continue for a much longer term and often in a more hands-on manner..

To apply this to Iraq, the budget I had was $5.2 billion dollars, which was enormous over a 16-month period. This was greater than what USAID was spending in all of sub-Saharan Africa, in 30-plus countries. While much of the budget had been programmed, implementation of projects proved to be complex and time consuming. Challenges included constant changeover of staff, resulting in an overall lack of personnel with necessary skill sets, in addition to a lack of systems being in place. There had never been a USAID mission in Iraq, so developing the necessary management systems to oversee this large program was challenging. Though on a different scale, a similar situation existed in Libya where there had never been a USAID Mission, and the U.S. Embassy presence had been limited.

Regarding our counterparts, the erroneous U.S. assumption that Iraqis, Afghans, Libyans or others are able to immediately implement and sustain programs, has proven problematic. In Iraq and Libya, both countries had lost twenty years due to sanctions and being isolated, so there were whole elements of technology, communications, training and capacity, that they lacked. Trying to compress training given this lack of knowledge

is daunting. While our counterparts are smart people often with good basic education, expecting them to master certain knowledge in a short period of time is unrealistic, adding to implementation timelines.

Similar issues exist regarding budget management and decentralization. Enabling host institutions to get up and running quickly is a key goal. Allocating national budgetary resources, delivering services to the population, and establishing a system of rule of law, are all functions of an operational government. However, building capacity and enabling decision making and oversight at all levels, are long term processes. Consistent U.S. policies and program assistance to support institution building can enable sustainability.

To assist implementation, I believe greater 3-D integration is needed (Development, Defense, Diplomacy). While identified as a key part of U.S. national strategy, synchronization of development, defense, and diplomacy at an institutional level has been mixed. I think the benefits of synchronization are understood on an intellectual level. However, at an institutional level there's not enough horizontal integration and agencies remain siloed, often duplicating rather than optimizing efforts. These are recurring interagency challenges that need to be addressed.

We need to apply lessons learned from past experiences to any new conflict or post-conflict environments, and not repeat the same issues. If we are able to adapt these lessons, we can have much greater, faster impacts with positive results.

With regard to the Foreign Service writ large, I believe we need to focus on recruitment to replenish our ranks and place an increased emphasis on training. How we recruit, train and assign personnel are building blocks of readiness and success over time. I believe civilian agencies can learn from our military colleagues, who map out a soldiers' career with technical, management and leadership training at each step of their career advancement. It takes over 20 years to groom a general officer and prepare them for senior level responsibilities, with commensurate steps along the way. USAID and State Department need to develop a similar concerted process, rather than the ad hoc system currently in place.

Finally, with regard to U.S. leadership in the world, I believe we need to place increased emphasis on building our bilateral and multilateral relationships to forge new partnerships and reinforce existing ones. Advancing U.S. national security and foreign policy priorities will become stronger through this process.

While not exhaustive, these are some of the key areas that I would highlight in terms of overall lessons learned based on my experience.

I am honored and grateful to have served our country, and experienced such a rich and rewarding career in the Foreign Service.

*End of interview*