

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

CRAIG G. BUCK

*Interviewed by: Mark Tauber
Initial interview date: August 3, 2017
Copyright 2020 ADST*

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.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Background

| | |
|---|-----------|
| Born in Jackson, Mississippi, 1944 | |
| BA in Government, Texas A&M | 1962–1966 |
| Fulbright Scholar, Universidad Mayor de San Simon | 1966–1967 |
| Woodrow Wilson Scholar, Stanford | 1968–1969 |
| MA in Economics, Stanford | 1979–1980 |
| Joined USAID | 1969 |
| Ankara, Turkey—Intern | 1969–1972 |
| Disaster relief | |
| The Turkish Red Crescent and dealing with earthquakes | |
| History of USAID in Turkey | |
| Turkish trainees and AID scholarships | |
| Political unrest | |
| Terrorist acts and student demonstrations | |
| Washington, DC—Latin American Bureau | 1972 |
| Cold War politics and supporting dictators to fight Communism | |
| Washington, DC—Turkey Desk Officer | 1972–1976 |
| Turkey’s “graduation” from AID | |
| Influences on the Green Revolution and other achievements | |
| The War on Drugs and challenges in supplanting opium poppies | |
| Washington, DC—Office of the Senior Adviser for Narcotics Matters | 1976–1977 |

| | |
|--|-----------|
| Washington, DC—Egypt Desk Officer | 1977–1979 |
| Stanford, CA—Professional Development (MA in Economics) | 1979–1980 |
| Kampala, Uganda—Acting USAID Director Insecurity and personnel depletion in Uganda Promoting investment in steel factories and farmland Dealing with mission management and security | 1980–1983 |
| Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic—Deputy USAID Mission Director Increased funds and free trade with the Caribbean Basin Initiative Power theft and alternative electricity generation Investing in the Central Bank, health care, and education | 1984–1987 |
| Washington, DC—Office of South America and Mexican Affairs Fund use and domestic perceptions in combating narcotics Inter-agency relations with the National Security Council and the Drug Enforcement Administration | 1987–1989 |
| Lima, Peru—USAID Mission Director Staff issues—position downgrades and walk-outs Local government—economic policy, inflation, and favored programs | 1989–1992 |
| Almaty, Kazakhstan—USAID Head of Central Asian Programs The wake of Soviet collapse—providing medicine and other basic needs Rising market forces—incoming companies and natural resources Liberal ideals—promoting rights and institutions Ethnic politics—language and social groups The state of the ‘Stans—Central Asian relative development | 1993–1995 |
| Sarajevo, Bosnia—USAID Mission Director New mission woes—staffing and agency regulations Rapid infrastructure—setting up banks and physical developments Post-conflict aid—necessary priorities vs. the AID rulebook Autonomous entities—AID relations with Republika Srpska Barriers to market development—the Payments Bureau and other vestiges Learning from Bosnia—the Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI) | 1995–1999 |
| Prishtina, Kosovo—USAID Mission Director Neighboring tensions—the Kosovo Campaign Post conflict development—the blank slate of Kosovo | 2000-2002 |
| Kabul, Afghanistan—USAID Mission Director Heavy funding—the challenges of a large budget Burgeoning education—getting girls into schools | 2002-2003 |

| | |
|--|-----------|
| Healthcare—reducing child mortality Economic policy—establishing commerce and taxation | |
| Retirement | 2003 |
| Post retirement activities | |
| USAID Private Contracting Company Profit over development—differing goals among contractors The contracting community—a small but diverse group | 2006–2010 |
| Bosnia and Kosovo—USAID Retired Annuitant Media and financing—supporting a new free press Communications technologies—web 2.0 and youth populations Lingering tensions—addressing Serbian enclaves AID as foreign policy—international comparisons regarding development | 2010-2011 |

INTERVIEW

Q: Today is August 3rd. We are beginning our interview with Craig G. Buck, whose career was in USAID. Craig, we always begin with where you were born and raised.

BUCK: Okay. I was born in Jackson, Mississippi, and left after kindergarten for Amarillo, Texas. My father was in the oil business at that time. I lived in Amarillo, went through the fourth grade, and then my parents divorced and I went with my mother and two brothers and we moved to a small town in east Texas by the name of Carthage. I basically grew up in Carthage. After high school, I went to Texas A&M.

Q: Now, before we go too much further, let's take a minute on east Texas. Amarillo, Carthage. First of all, what years were you there? Let's not lose the chronology.

BUCK: It'd be a bit difficult to remember the precise years, but I finished the fourth grade in Amarillo, which would have made me about 10 years old, I think, 10 or 11. Then we moved to Carthage, at that point, and I stayed there until I went off to college. So, if I was 10 or 11, that would have been 1954, and I stayed in Carthage until 1962.

Q: What was Carthage like? How big a town was it?

BUCK: Carthage was a small town by Texas standards. It was a little over 5,000 people. Deep east Texas, in an area where everyone knew everyone. There was very little crime. We never locked the doors, and we knew almost everyone in town. But it was the Jim Crow South. People talk of Mississippi and Alabama discriminating against people of color, but I think Texas was more ruthless. My mother had started work as a social

worker, with the Department of Public Welfare, and of course was dealing with people in dire straits.

Q: Now, just so I understand, in Texas, as in other states, the Welfare Bureau was county-wide, or was it divided up in another way?

BUCK: No, it was controlled by the state, but she was responsible for all of Panola County, she and several others.

Q: Was her commute very long? In other words, did she have to get up quite early and get out there before you guys even went off to school, or was it closer by?

BUCK: No, everything in Carthage was three to five minutes away---within bicycling distance for kids. But she took her job quite seriously. She got up and she worked incredibly hard, both on the job and raising three boys by herself. At that point, my older brother was three years older than me, so when we moved to East Texas, he would have been about 13, and my younger brother was five.

Q: So, there's three kids?

BUCK: Three kids. So, we had to, in many respects, look out for each other. My mother was quite demanding in terms of, "You need to cook, you need to clean, you need to make up your bed..." Quite a disciplinarian. We learned to take on responsibility at quite an early age.

Q: But, in terms of your, just, living as a kid there, you would just kind of go out and do what you liked until whatever curfew your mother set?

BUCK: Yes. I mean, we had plenty of friends in the neighborhood. So, we were always hanging out. They were at our house, we were at their house. I learned quite a bit from my older brother, and in fact, the school always tried to make a comparison between my older brother, who was a little more academically engaged than I was, and so there was always the challenge of being as good as he was, if not better. But, since at the school everybody always recognized the rest of the family, they always looked at me from the perspective of "Why didn't he know math as well as his brother?"

Q: Right. Now, was Carthage itself segregated? How did that work?

BUCK: Carthage basically operated under Jim Crow principles: Blacks lived in one section on town. There was no social interaction. The restaurants were segregated. Water fountains were segregated. Schools and churches were completely segregated by race. It was interesting, because I had grown up in a family that did not – I just had no interracial experience and certainly was never taught to practice or even understand this sort of thing.

One summer during grade school I went on vacation with a friend and his family. Before we went I had had it beaten into my head at school and by others in east Texas that you were supposed to say “sir”, or “ma’am” to people older than me, which I had never done before. But, so fine, I learned to do that. Then, I was with my friend on this summer vacation, and a black was helping us do something, and I said, “Yes sir,” and, “No, ma’am,” and the guy’s father pulled me over and was very stern with me.

He said, “You do not ever say ‘sir’ to a black.” So, at that point, I’m kind of like – You know, I was 10 or 11 years old, trying to figure out why. So, my first awakening to social issues. But, you saw it all the time if you began to look, and I began to do so and I was not pleased with what I saw around me. I think my mother had quite an influence in terms of learning that “This is an unacceptable practice.”

Q: Now, Carthage High School was also segregated?

BUCK: Yes. It didn’t desegregate until long after I graduated in ’62. It probably was another eight or 10 years, at least, before it desegregated. Open discussion in school of Brown vs. Board of Education and what it meant and how it would be accommodated was quickly shot down. I was reprimanded in speech class by a teacher for arguing that schools should be integrated (as well as abolishing the death penalty).

Q: Now, while you were growing up, did your parents, or then later your mother, also take you to the library or insist that you read certain things? Was reading a part of your growing up?

BUCK: Well, we spent summers with my grandparents up in Iowa, where my paternal grandparents lived, and they always had books available, and they encouraged us to read. My mother encouraged us to read. A library was opened while I was in Carthage, I think probably middle school, and we went there all the time. In school itself, there was a contest, with your name on the blackboard in the librarians’ quarters with how many books you had read, and who read the first ten books each year.

I was in I guess the fifth grade, and I didn’t realize until about a month or two through school that there was a contest. Very quickly, I think I got number four or five, but if I had known that there was a contest, I think I would have tried to be number one.

We got exposed to different geographic areas from an early age. My mother was from Colorado and I had paternal grandparents in Iowa, so every summer we would always try to visit relatives and get to see different parts of the country.

Q: That’s nice, to go from east Texas then to different parts of the country. It began to give you a wider view of how people lived elsewhere. But, now, in high school, were you also involved in any of the other – Were there extracurricular activities that were offered? I imagine the school was relatively small for a town of 5,000.

BUCK: My graduating class numbered a little over 100 which included students that were bussed in from basically throughout the county. I was a member of the debate team. In fact, my colleague and I won state championship in debate when I was a junior. Surprisingly, the debate theme that year was whether the United Nations should be significantly strengthened, and we won arguing that it should be enhanced by taking over management of international economic development assistance while terminating the U.S. foreign aid program. Little did I know that years later I would be responsible for U.S. foreign assistance programs. From debate I then moved on to extemporaneous speaking, and again won the state championship in that discipline my senior year. I was quite involved in “student council politics,” and that sort of thing including being class president my senior year. Most of the things I was involved in were more social than political by a long shot, including acting, school plays, student council, helping edit the school yearbook, Spanish Club, etc. I was quite active in almost all school activities except athletics.

I started work when I was in about the ninth grade. I worked first at a grocery store, and then at a Dairy Queen. I ended up basically managing it for my last three years of school. As soon as school was out every day and all weekend, I’d go and work until we closed it up late at night. The place happened to be the main after school gathering point for youth, and kids tended to socialize there all the time, so I got to see everybody and became friends with everyone. I made a little money, got a little bit of the work ethic, absorbed a bit about management, and learned you really had to work hard to get ahead.

Q: But you were still able to get your homework done?

BUCK: I never had homework when I was in high school that took up any meaningful time. Never. Not that I couldn’t accomplish in homeroom or some other venue in school.

Q: Were there any books or newspapers, magazines, that were particularly interesting for you?

BUCK: I read all the time, but I think what really influenced me were some books about the House Un-American Activities Committee, the McCarran Act, and McCarthyism. I read Henry Steele Commager’s book – At the moment, the title has slipped my memory [Freedom, Loyalty, Dissent]. But anyhow, all of them were focused on the issues of human rights, civil rights, the right of the individual to protest, and the freedoms that we have in terms of speech, organization, and press. I was bit rebellious, and I became quite different than most of the people in east Texas, who thought that the ACLU (American Civil Liberties Union) was a communist organization. You’d see signs with, “Get America out of the UN (United Nations)” all over. So, I thought I was a bit different than most of the people in the region.

Q: Wow. During this time, did you have any openings to knowledge of international organizations or foreign countries, any opportunities there?

BUCK: Very little, other than that I took Spanish for three years in high school, and became, to the extent that you can become fluent in east Texas culture. But I think probably one of the biggest eye-openers I ever had was, just after high school graduation, a group of us all travelled down to Mexico City and back in a school bus. It was a program organized by our Spanish language teacher and lasted for two weeks. I saw the destitution, the poverty, the problems that were quite obvious, and at that point I became quite interested in the whole issue of international economic development. That, I think, was the initial impulse for my interest in that area.

Q: That's interesting, because in essence this is happening while you're in high school.

BUCK: Just before I went off to college.

Q: There was one last question that I – Oh. In high school, aside from Spanish, sometimes there are also opportunities through a church organization or scouting or any of those things for interaction with foreigners or foreigners who might be visiting for some reason for another. Any of those connections?

BUCK: Very little. The only thing I had was the occasional Hispanic who'd drop through the Dairy Queen where I was working and I'd practice my Spanish with him. But, no. Relatives and friends would talk about having gone overseas, or visited there, but I had no friends or exchange students, nothing like that. I did have one disconcerting incident, however. Around 1960 when freedom riders trying to break the back of segregation became more vocal a church group I occasionally met with invited a black to come and chat with us. Later I heard that we were lambasted within the church for permitting this to happen on "their" property.

Q: Okay. Now, your older brother would have left high school before you. Was it understood he'd be going to college?

BUCK: Oh, yes. Implicit in our life was, "You're going to college." That was never an issue.

Q: How did you look at going to college? Did you have ideas about where you wanted to go, or a particular topic already in mind? How did you make that decision?

BUCK: I always thought that I'd probably go into law, and pre-law was what I was most interested in to begin with. I shopped around for colleges. I didn't give a lot of thought to it other than, "How much is it going to cost and can I afford it?" because we didn't have a lot of money. My older brother had gone to Texas A&M, and I decided that that would be the place for me. It was very inexpensive comparatively, and a relatively decent place, and relatively close to home. I will have to admit, also, that initially I was very impressed with the images of camaraderie, equality, energy, accomplishment, and importance that A&M fostered.

Q: How far away is Texas A&M?

BUCK: It was about 180 miles from home, basically a three hour drive south of where we lived.

Q: So, what year do you start college?

BUCK: I started in '62.

Q: So, you knew exactly where you were, in college, when JFK was assassinated?

BUCK: That's right. I was in the Corps of Cadets. ROTC (Reserve Officer Training Corps) was required your first two years at Texas A&M. It was a military college at that time. It was segregated, both by race and by sex. There were no females enrolled at that point; it was an all-male college, we wore uniforms 24/7, adhered to a rigid time schedule, marched in formation to all meals, and endured abominable hazing to imbue us with "the Aggie spirit".

Yes, I recall Kennedy's assassination quite vividly. We were having lunch in the huge dining hall seating more than 3,000 cadets in a 30 minute serving where we all ate military-style three times a day, and somebody said that the president had been shot. So, that's where we heard the unfortunate news. I think that most of the reactions around me were "Huh"?" I immediately ran out to find out more (when I could escape because as a freshman I had to wait for upperclassmen at the table), but news services in those days were very limited. I was about to start a critical weekend to finish a required accounting workbook activity so I spent my time looking for news while completing an exasperating homework experience.

Q: Now, talk about this ROTC aspect to it. Was the expectation that you would at least go into the reserves, or into the military? Or was it more just an aspect of the curriculum to discipline underclassmen?

BUCK: No, the expectation from Texas A&M was to produce military officers, as well as people that come out with the requisite academic qualification. Military discipline was required for your first two years. That is, living in dorms, wearing uniforms, joining formations, marching to meals, practicing military activities, taking a grade point military class, being in a system where your membership and adhesion as a class member was much more important than your personal achievements and abilities. The most important (or the worst) thing I learned at A&M was the importance of being a member of a group and supporting it and helping all the members so that the group itself could progress. The individual was not important. As an individualist and someone who has confidence in my own personal knowledge and abilities, I had major problems in overcoming this commitment to a group rather than to my own capacities, but I adjusted and I think I ultimately fit in.

When I was at A&M I would say probably 50% of the students continued their final two years in the ROTC program, and then became commissioned officers and did their

military service, your three or four years, and then you were out. The others, like me, after a personal brutal and agonizing decision process, opted to become civilians our last two years.

This was the beginning of the Vietnam War, so it was an issue and a topic and always uppermost in my mind. There was great pressure on me to continue in ROTC, and to go ahead at the end of my sophomore year and continue with the military and continue with ROTC, get a commission and go to Vietnam. I was offered the most prestigious position in the cadet corps if I continued in ROTC. I would have been the sergeant major, the highest ranked junior, and the obvious choice for Corps Commander of over 4,000 cadets my senior year. I ultimately decided that I would not take that route. So, it was an extremely difficult decision. Difficult from the sense of, at that point there was the draft to worry about, and you had to go, one way or the other. It was a critical decision.

Q: The only thing about the draft at that time was, you did have the exception for if you were in college, or if you were studying.

BUCK: Yes, it was what they called I think a 4-S or a 2-S for the student deferment. So, I was able to continue that for another four years. Actually, I continued it for another three years after that.

Q: Well, so, let's go back for a second to school. You arrived and you had in mind pre-law. Did that stay with you? Did you begin coursework towards that end and stay set on it?

BUCK: Yes, I did. I changed at some point from pre-law, which was a very general liberal arts series of courses, to get a major in government and minors in history, Spanish, and economics. But, basically it was liberal arts, and the minimum amount of math that I was required to take, something I forever regret. But I enjoyed government. It was easy. I graduated with a straight-A average from college, so, as I said, I did not study in grade school or high school, but I studied hard in college. I studied all the time.

Q: Wow. Did you also work, or basically the ROTC took up the rest of your time?

BUCK: No, ROTC affected your living conditions – you lived in a military dorm and you fell out for formation, situation and absence reporting, and breakfast every morning – but it didn't take a particular amount of time like during the freshman year when one had to endure hazing, endless preparations of uniforms, doing personal tasks for upperclassmen, room cleaning, and plotting and taking revenge on the worst upperclassmen. As I recall during my sophomore year, I became a teaching assistant, and I taught – well, I helped grade exams, monitor performance, lead lab discussions, amongst other things, in a sophomore class on Physical Geography. I did it later in Texas Government and I did it in American Government and continued as a teaching assistant in all of these disciplines until I graduated. So, courses that I'd taken and aced, the professors would recruit you to become a teaching assistant, which was always good. It brought a lot of extra income,

easy work, access to faculty, and consumed little time. I also learned a lot from the profs I worked for and gained an understanding and appreciation of the academic life as a career.

Q: Sure. At that time – It's a segregated campus, but did they have any international students?

BUCK: Yes, they had quite a number of international students, and I met a lot of them in my Spanish classes, because they always took secondary school level Spanish courses with me as “grade point classes”---that is, they would get an A without studying because of their fluency and it would raise their overall grade point average to enable them to graduate. Without having to study, they knew the language. I met quite a few of them there, and in my last two years I lived in a dorm that was only for international and graduate students.

But, at school, yes, I knew quite a number of internationals and I made it a point to become friends with many of them. For example, one Christmas, I invited a friend from India to come and stay with us and we travelled to Florida to visit my older brother---a trip from hell as my Indian friend was quite dark complexioned and we had to go through Jim Crow Texas, Louisiana, and Mississippi and Alabama. I really got to see racial discrimination first hand. So I knew the international crowd quite well. Texas A&M was then on the point of making some of the more momentous decisions in its history. In my freshman year it quietly desegregated. The university admitted women, and then also, without an announcement, they admitted blacks, so the school made drastic social changes.

Q: Interesting. How did the student body take that?

BUCK: The guys in the military thought that admitting women was not appropriate. I thought it was fantastic, because as it was, we all had to drive to one of the neighboring universities to meet up with the opposite sex. So, you know, you'd waste your weekend driving over, and if you didn't have a car, you were always looking for buddies to hang a ride with, so, you know, it was a real hassle. So, I thought it was great---apart from the personal satisfaction I just thought that women should be given equal treatment with everyone else at a public university, that is equal entrance, equal participation, and equal opportunity. Blacks, everyone that I hung out with thought it was great. But, there were a number of people, the Jim Crow folks, who were just rabid segregationists and wouldn't accept it. I found this hard to believe. By now it was the mid-60s, social change was everywhere, rebellion was rampant, acceptance of traditional beliefs was dying, people were standing up for their beliefs and willing to face down authoritarianism. I just walked away from the troglodytes.

Q: Now, how about politics on campus?

BUCK: I became actually a founding member of the Young Democrats organization while I was at school. We had an argument, a discussion, with the university, because we wanted to hold meetings on campus in university facilities, and the administration

refused, saying that that it would be a political act to provide university space for a political movement. And we said, “Of course it’s a political act. That’s the whole purpose of a university, to expose you to ideas.” They refused, and at that point, the university, even though we were 10-12,000 people strong, was still kind of a parochial institution.

I knew the president [Earl Rudder, and in spite of his conservative leanings, was one who moved Texas A&M into the 20th century in terms of race, women, relations with the Texas legislature, university growth, etc.] Because of the variety of extracurricular activities I was involved in, I was on a first name basis with him, and I talked with him, and I told him that refusing to allow political organizations on campus was a damn fool idea. And then I got the student senate involved since I was elected as the senate parliamentarian – and we passed a resolution condemning the administration, which was kind of viewed as an act of rebellion, which was quite common at other schools in the 60s. Other universities at that time were holding sit-ins and taking massive action against their administrations. So, this was a very small measure against the administration, but we took it.

Q: Did the administration finally allow you to meet as Democrats?

BUCK: No, they did not. They held firm, and we used every opportunity to make statements against the administration’s policy. It was an opportunity to express our concern with the kind of authoritarian, autocratic management that characterized the university. We used a number of other things to antagonize them. At that time, John Connally was governor and was running for reelection.

Q: And at that time a Democrat?

BUCK: And at that time, at Democrat. But a number of friends and I organized a movement against Connally, and Connally, of course, was a very close confidante and ally of the administration at the university. They did not take that on a positive note. So, anytime we had an opportunity – Oh, and then, several times, we had groups that got together and – I wouldn’t call them demonstrations so much as group meetings in public areas to talk about the horrors and how bad the war in Vietnam was, which the administration did not take positively, either.

At the same time I was the director of a very large school-sanctioned organization that organized an annual 3-4 day conference on national affairs. It brought together internationally recognized experts to discuss issues of national interest to the entire student body as well as student leaders we brought in from throughout the southwest as well as the other military academies. It brought Vice President Johnson down as a speaker my freshman year. My senior year the topic was Southeast Asia and I did my best to provoke controversy by engaging speakers that challenged the administration line. I think we were quite successful in getting folks to recognize that there were multiple sides to the Vietnam conflict and that we needed to question traditional views on our rapidly growing engagement, that would soon involve virtually all of my fellow classmates. In fact, more military officers from Texas A&M served in Vietnam than all

the service academies combined, and my class, that of 1966, had more than any other from A&M. Going to Vietnam was the topic de jure for all of us around graduation time.

Q: So, as you're proceeding now from a freshman up to a senior, and you're acquiring some political views and your horizons are broadening, what are you thinking about doing after college?

BUCK: That's an interesting question. I was trying to think about what sort of international work I might do because that was where my interest was. I looked at a whole variety of options, while I was at undergraduate as well as when I was a graduate. I had a lot of encouragement to continue on the academic route and go on for a PhD to teach. I continued that, I guess, for the first several years of graduate work, with the expectation that I would probably go on and finish a PhD. But, I was never clear about what I would do after getting a final graduate degree.

Q: Now, before we go too much further into the graduate work: You graduated college in 1966. How did you choose your graduate school? What was on your mind for that?

BUCK: Well, at that point, I had been quite interested in Latin America studies. So, what I was looking at were universities that were strong in graduate work in political science and Latin America. There were three: Columbia, the University of North Carolina, and Stanford. So, I applied to all three and was admitted. Then I had the good fortune of getting a full-ride scholarship from the Woodrow Wilson foundation, which would pay for my first year of graduate work. Then I was really fortunate in getting a Fulbright scholarship for a year of overseas research and college attendance. So, I postponed college in the United States and took the Fulbright, postponed the Woodrow Wilson gift, and went to Bolivia for a year. I actually stayed down there for almost a year and a half.

Q: Okay. How did you choose Bolivia? Or was that the country on offer?

BUCK: Well, I had become quite interested in the politics of agrarian reform, labor unions, the relationship of these groups to political parties, and Bolivia. At that time many of the Latin American countries, South American countries, and Central America, were ruled by these dominant elites---*latifundistas* (owners of large estates who often employed people who lived on their land as serfs or nominally paid laborers) and what have you. Bolivia had undergone a wrenching economic and social revolution in 1952, so I found that rather fascinating, and the fact that so few people knew anything about Bolivia. It seemed to be isolated, off the radar, and it just seemed like a great place to go. I was very pleased that I chose Bolivia.

Q: So, that would have been '63?

BUCK: No, in 1962 I left high school; in 1966 I left undergraduate college and in 1966-67 I was in Bolivia.

Q: And that was when Che Guevara was there?

BUCK: That's correct, yes. It was fascinating because I was in Cochabamba, Bolivia, and we learned from the media that there was a guerilla movement against the government. It was several hundred miles away in the Orient, or the eastern mountain ranges between the high altiplano and the eastern jungles. Neither I nor my university friends and other contacts knew that it was Che Guevara, or that it was a significant guerrilla movement at that point. I travelled all around the country, by hitchhiking, by bus, you name it and I wanted to get down there and see what was happening with my own eyes. By chance, – Well, I was quite close with the consulate there because they paid my nominal stipend.

One evening, just after learning of the guerilla group I happened to be at a social occasion, organized by the U.S. consulate and I mentioned to the consul general that I was leaving the next day for the eastern mountains to see what was with this guerrilla movement. And the consul general said, "Come in and see me tomorrow before you go, please."

So, I went in, and he said, "Craig, under no circumstances are you to go there." Fortunately, I took his advice, because God knows what may have happened had I ended up down there just as a student. But I did quite a bit of just travelling around as a student. I'd stop and talk with local political leadership, with union leaders, with peasant organizers, with miners, with students, etc. I think half of the people thought that I belonged to another government agency, of course, but I was young and innocent, I guess. One of the best journeys I ever had was a bus trip from Cochabamba down through the Bolivian Yungas or tropical mountains to Todos Santos, on the Mamore River, a tributary of the Amazon. There I met some men who were just finishing constructing a barge, and we loaded it several days later with salt, a Jeep, and barrels of petroleum, and for the next two weeks floated down through the pristine Amazonian lowlands to Bolivia's only major northeastern city close to Brazil. I worked the boat and helped swim and push it off sandbars as we hit submerged obstacles, fished for huge fish to eat, ate bananas we plucked from wild fruit trees, plundered turtle eggs to eat raw every morning from sandbanks where we overnights, drank the rotgut cana liquor from the few naked natives we encountered, and saw my first satellite passing over in a cloudless night that one of my Bolivian companions pointed out as we swatted mosquitoes. What an experience!

Q: Now, I imagine in this travelling around Bolivia you also saw very clearly the differences between the indigenous life and the more or less assimilated Hispanics. What impression did that leave on you?

BUCK: I guess to me, in many respects, it was a failure of the revolution that the Bolivians carried out in 1952 that nationalized the mining industry and redistributed land from the large landowners to the people that actually lived and worked there. The revolution ended up with the land less productive than when it had been run by large land owners. The mines were subject to political pressures, and were not operated in a financially responsible manner and were major drags on the economy rather than contributing to national wealth. The poor were nominally in charge and political rhetoric

reinforced this mindset, but in reality the country was controlled by the military, rapacious politicians, an emerging narco-trafficking elite, political lethargy, and economic interests that despised the uncertainty, but used it to advance their own financial interests.

So, it was a bit of a disappointment to see people who had the opportunity to advance but never did. The revolution was never fulfilled, and I guess being associated with Bolivian students showed me how hollow everything was. They were – it reminds me of modern day politics – filled with rhetoric, filled with shibboleths and slogans. But their realistic policy prescriptions were nonexistent. Or, their policy prescriptions were so idealistic, or so out of touch with reality as to be vapid. You had to dismiss them. I don't think I formed that opinion until years later. But, while I was there, I was really excited and had this adolescent impression that they offered sound solutions.

Not long after I started school at the Universidad Mayor de San Simon in Cochabamba in the fall of 1966, the university students declared a revolution, withdrew recognition of all the school authorities, and demanded that they begin teaching to orient students to the real world. What that meant was never defined. Of course, that gave us a three-month vacation, so I used it as an opportunity to travel around the country doing the research I was interested in concerning political parties, labor unions, and peasant associations.

I relished associating with the students in Cochabamba. They were my friends, we met every day, we drank chicha and beer together and raised hell and defied authority, we challenged the military during a state of siege and curfew declaration [and barely escaped from a group of soldiers shooting at us late one night after curfew], and debated U.S. and Bolivian political issues. While I suspect they all doubted my student bona fides and whether I was really a Fulbright scholar or a suspect U.S. Government agent, they were all accepting, friendly, and engaging. My professors were also very open and pleased to have an American exchange student even though many had written horribly uninformed political tracts against the United States and its policies. And, every Bolivian I met always began with the question about who really shot JFK.

But, I guess the bottom line to your question is that when we saw the poverty, and the fact that the government was doing very little in terms of seriously promoting economic, political, and social advancement, it was very disappointing.

Q: What was the topic of your Fulbright, or how did it come out in the end?

BUCK: Well, I was looking at the politics of agrarian reform, and how or why is it, that you have people that for centuries had lived as virtual serfs, who suddenly become able to participate in a social and economic revolution, and how did it impact them? Did it really benefit them? I used that as part of the basis for my thesis in my masters in Latin America studies at Stanford.

It was, I guess, incredibly disappointing that land was divided in 1952 from the *latifundistas* but there were not what we call now the value chains from production to

marketing to inputs to make these revolutionary changes impact on the intended peasant group. Therefore, people weren't able to benefit from now having their land. Besides that, a lot of land was then split up into small units so they were economically unproductive. And enormous amounts of capital were consumed by the truly needy or destitute, never to be recovered. But, that's a revolution!

Q: And once you got into the indigenous areas, people really did not speak Spanish?

BUCK: That's right. Most people spoke Quechua where I lived in the Cochabamba Department, but most of the areas where I lived and travelled around people spoke enough Spanish to get by. There would always be someone that would speak enough Spanish that I could get around. Besides I picked up a few words in Quechua, but I never learned any Aymara, the lingua franca of the altiplano area, except how to swear.

Q: Remarkable. So, as your Fulbright ends, and now you're going to graduate school, which of the three did you end up attending?

BUCK: I ended up going to Stanford, with probably the grand old man of Latin American studies, politics, and history at that time, John J. Johnson. He was the Director of the Latin American Studies program, an interdisciplinary program in Bolivar House. The political science faculty at Stanford was really at the forefront of what's happening in Latin America, so those were real eye-opener years of being exposed to some of the world's first-class thinkers on history, economics, and political science, so I was as excited as I could be.

Being in California was great. It was quite a change from Texas. I was as happy as I could be, but I was thinking about what to do after my year there was up, because the Woodrow Wilson scholarship I had only lasted for one year. I was uncertain about continuing for a Ph.D. or going into another discipline. A lot of us, in the same boat, were talking about what we wanted to do, and the academic route seemed to be, for many of us, the way to go. But, did I want to read and prep for doctoral exams for the next 3-4 years, go to a few courses, do some lecturing or paper grading, or find something else to do? Momentous decisions were required, but Vietnam was the elephant in the room. Like all my classmates we were united that we would find a way to avoid going into the military and being sent to Vietnam at all costs.

Q: And once again, this is now '68?

BUCK: Yes.

Q: So, with all of the uprisings in the U.S., and the assassinations, it was a big year. And of course, by continuing on a path of study and being a full-time student, you would continue to be able to use your status to avoid the draft.

BUCK: That's right. It was really funny; while I was still in Bolivia in 1967, I happened to get a letter by mail from my draft board, saying that since I had graduated from college

that I had been reclassified 1-A [the category meaning I was eligible for the draft and would be immediately inducted], and to please report for my physical. Oh my God, I was crestfallen. I wrote them a letter back, noting that I was in Bolivia doing graduate work. and they responded with the equivalent of “Oh, thank you very much for advising us. We’ve got other cannon fodder and we reinstate your student deferment.”

But, I was quite concerned about my draft status, because this was indeed right in the middle of the war. While at Stanford I had been working for the election of, I guess it was at that point Eugene McCarthy. Clean Gene. But, just about six weeks before Robert Kennedy was assassinated, one of my professors said, “That’s great, Craig, and I think that his ideas are great, but he doesn’t have a chance of winning the election. Bobby Kennedy will win the election if he’s nominated.” This was my most respected professor’s opinion, and I had to agree. So, I changed, started working for Bobby, and then of course you know what happened six weeks later.

Q: Before we go on from '68, during this one year in Stanford, what were the main currents of thought about Latin America, because obviously we're getting into the period of time now, in the '60s, where Dependencia theory begins to emerge. Liberation theology notions, all of the North-South rhetoric about exploitation, and the need for the North to transfer wealth to the South after this long period of colonization and so on. What were they – How were they approaching Latin America during that time?

BUCK: Well, I think that there was pretty much a divide within the faculty, like there was a divide within the overall academic community. There were those who viewed Latin America from a more traditional perspective, and they had a very traditional developmental and political perspective that the United States is basically calling the shots, and we'll allow them to do a few things with Fidel and company, but by and large they are owned by us, and that's the way we want to keep it.

And then another part of the academic community was calling for revolution, in the Che Guevara camp. There was quite a divide in the academic community. While we had plenty of speakers of very differing perspective came and talked with us, in the end I think it would be fair to say that the Stanford Latin American group was rather traditional and a fairly conservative group.

Q: So, let's continue then from 1968. Did the events of that year affect you?

BUCK: Oh, very much so. The assassination of Martin Luther King, Johnson's decision not to run for reelection, Bobby Kennedy's assassination, Watts and Washington DC burning, the Vietnam war expanding and continuing to go on. At school we had sit-ins, teach-ins, the occupation of the main school administration offices, the burning of the ROTC building, the ejection of ROTC from campus, Berkeley draft riots just across the Bay, draft card burnings by the dozen, the end of the summer of love. And for comic relief we had a topless dancer and a Libertarian vie for Stanford student body heads in the same position that David Harris had held a couple of years earlier. As Bob Dylan said, “the times they are a-changin’”. Again, I didn't know where I was going to head or what I

might do in the future. We were sitting around talking one night in the dorm, and somebody said, “Join the CIA and play with nations”. Another said “Take a room like this, line it with books, get to know the literature, take your orals, and they’ll give you a PhD. But that’s where your life is going to be: cloistered with books.”

I was not interested in that. I decided at that point that I much preferred being with people, and an academic career was not where I wanted to go. So I decided that I was going to go to Washington to see what Government was all about. Government seemed like the best place to go, because they were the purported fount of all knowledge at that point. So, I got an internship that basically enabled me to pass a series of exams, and then I could present myself to almost any government agency, and be prequalified for any position that might be available.

Q: And you hadn’t thought of Peace Corps, at this point?

BUCK: I’d thought of Peace Corps, but I had lived with Peace Corps Volunteers in Cochabamba, and they called it in Bolivia – Instead of the *Cuerpo de Paz* (Peace Corps) it was the *Cuerpo de Paseo* (Hanging Out Corps). There were a lot of well-meaning people that were escaping the draft, and they got their two years overseas and their deferment. I lived with a couple of them. They had a nice life, but their impact on development was minimal, so I didn’t have a fairly high opinion of the motivation of the volunteers or their qualifications. There were some real exceptions who I admired, but most were not impressive.

Q: That’s fine. Quite a number of students of that time did the same, looked for the opportunities in government through various portals that you could enter. This could have been a presidential management intern, or whatever it was called back then.

BUCK: Right. So, the Peace Corps would have been an option – in fact, I had called up a couple of friends in the Peace Corps to try to join staff in Washington, where I thought I would be able to have some sort of impact. But that never materialized. Then I joined the Department of Army for about nine months where I had a doozy of a time working in an obscure and remote office on counterintelligence analysis, which was a real introduction to the strength, the machinations, the teams, the abilities, the knowledge, and the bravado that the U.S. had overseas when it was needed. In the meantime, I had applied to USAID.

Q: How did you learn about USAID?

BUCK: Well, I had a law professor in Bolivia, Ramiro Villarroel Claire, who wrote a book. He was interested in the Alliance for Progress. The title was *Mito y Realidad del Desarrollo Boliviano*, or as it was better know, *La Alianza para el Atraso (Alliance for Regression)*. So, I learned a bit about what USAID was doing from his perspective. I had talked about how I saw the country’s needs with U.S. Ambassador Douglas Henderson when he came to Cochabamba, I met the USAID Director once in Cochabamba, and some people that I knew were contractors working with various USAID projects.

Q: In Bolivia?

BUCK: In Bolivia. A couple of Bolivian friends who were contractors to AID, doing road construction and so on, so I got to know a bit from the Bolivian perspective about what AID was doing. I thought that that would be a nice place I might want to end, so I went to Washington after Stanford, got a short-term sinecure to hold me over, and then finally AID came through.

Q: When you were hired – Okay, wait. What year was it when the USAID hire came through?

BUCK: It came through in April of '69.

Q: When they hired you, did they hire you as a particular kind of expert, or did they say, "Now that we've hired you, we're going to need to train you in a particular way"?

BUCK: Well, when they first called, they said, "We think you have a few of the assets we might need, so we're going to hire you and you're going to go to Afghanistan." Interesting, fine.

I was interested in AID, so I said, "Okay."

The next day, or several days later, I got a phone call saying, "Sorry, we're changing you to go to India."

At which point I said, "Have you read my bio or transcript? I have a degree in Latin American studies." So, I ended up in Turkey; there was no further discussion and so I began to learn how the personnel system worked. While I was in orientation in AID, we of course had all of the senior officials wander through our program and give us their spiel and tell us what they were doing and the priorities and what have you. One fellow from Personnel happened to drop by, and then asked, whenever you ask a question, please tell me your name and where you're going.

So, I did, and asked a couple of questions. A week or so later, I was at lunch in the State Department cafeteria and some older fellow walks up and he says, "Hi, Craig, can I join you for lunch?" I was pleased to have someone join me, but thinking like *Who is this guy?* His face was vaguely familiar, but I didn't know who he was. He said, "You recently joined AID, I think. Tell me what you think about the agency and in-processing". I said, "I think the personnel system is lousy. I just finished a degree in Latin American studies with experience overseas, and they're sending me to Turkey. I don't know what's wrong with the personnel system." At that point, I remembered who this guy was. He was USAID's Director of Personnel. [Craig Buck learns a hard lesson in being discrete]. And of course, after I had been out in Turkey for six months, who should come out as the AID Director, but the former AID Personnel Director. Fortunately, he quickly paid little attention to my youthful indiscretion, took me under his wing, and became the best mentor I ever had. His name was Joseph Toner and I never had a more

resourceful, respected, or imaginative professional or personal friend than Joe. His wife, Becky, was also a superb coach to junior officers like myself who knew little of the protocols of overseas living.

He pushed me to learn about networking, about learning about political objectives, about following new policy directives, about getting out and pushing people to perform, about making things happen rather than just shooting the breeze, about calling people 10-15 times a day until they respond to you, about how to advise their superiors they are unresponsive. He never said “Craig this is what you should do”, he just showed me by example or by suggesting I do something that taught me how to navigate the bureaucracy. I did not realize it but the many times that I worked with him in Turkey or later when I was back in Washington as Turkey Desk Office or in touch with senior officials he was always pushing me, but offering ways to work the system.

Q: So, before we go out to Turkey with you, what sort of training did they give you? How did it work? Because AID training has changed over time. They've done a variety of different things, depending on the era.

BUCK: The interns, we were all a class that went in together, probably 25-30 of us. I think we spent probably five or six months in Washington and then we all headed out to wherever we had been assigned overseas.

At that point USAID training was a lot of the touchy-feely stuff. It was how to be culturally sensitive. We had some off-site things where we had people ask, “How would you react in this sort of situation? How would you do it to not be insulting to local personnel?” Too much of a weeklong off-site group grope was learning how to hug each other and be nice. Quite a bit of that. Quite a bit of how to get along with your fellow workers and beneficiaries, how can you work together as a team, how you do team building and setting goals and working together. Very little on the nuts and bolts of economic development, strategic approach, development objectives, project development and planning. We had some introduction to the FAM (Foreign Affairs Manual) and the AID manuals and that sort of stuff, but very little of what you look at in terms of development policy and how you structure a program. But I thought it was adequate to at least get us started. I had an idea as to what the organization was and how it was structured, but not a very good sense of how one approaches development. We had very little training on the substance of development. But, these were the late 60s and we accepted what they gave us and few complained. I think we all thought that maybe we could be more effective development officers through the insights they were exposing us to.

Q: Did they give you any Turkish language training?

BUCK: Not a word, no. I tried to get it in Washington before I left for overseas, but they would not approve it, so once I got to Ankara I immediately enrolled, got into Turkish and I learned it.

Q: Where in Turkey did you end up? Was it the capital?

BUCK: Yes, I was in Ankara.

Q: Where were your projects located?

BUCK: Well, I was in the program office which was ostensibly trying to look at the broader picture of where we were going, strategically, and why. I had the good fortune of being associated with projects in all economic sectors. We had activities in agriculture, we had activities in family planning and education. At that point, we had some fairly large capital projects: dam building, hydro-electric power stations, things like that.

So, I had an opportunity to become acquainted across the board with all of USAID's activities. I was an assistant to my supervisor, the mission disaster assistance officer. There were quite a number of earthquakes while I was there, so I got sent out to take a look at what was going on, look at the relief activities, and recommend what the U.S. response should be. In the process I picked up Turkish fairly quickly, so that was a real asset in my disaster work.

Then, as I said, the AID Personnel Director came out as the Mission Director, and he never mentioned that he remembered my indiscrete remarks at lunch in the State Dept. cafeteria, but he took me under his wing and mentored me. Twice a week, we had what we called "vespers", which started at five o'clock in the afternoon after most had gone home. The senior staff got together with the Mission Director, and he went over what was going on in the mission and his priorities. He brought me on board as the one to keep notes for that meeting and to send them back to senior Washington officials, so it was an ideal opportunity for a junior officer to see what senior management was concerned with and how they acted.

Q: Did your job involve a fair amount of travel?

BUCK: I managed to get around the country quite a bit. I went to Istanbul quite a number of times. We had activities in Istanbul and then I would go out look at our agricultural projects outside of Ankara. With my disaster relief work, I got to the eastern part of Turkey bordering on the USSR, and to the Syrian-Iranian border.

Q: How did we handle disaster relief at that time? Did USAID hire U.S. humanitarian organizations? How was it run?

BUCK: We worked most closely with the Turkish Red Crescent, which was the organization that took to the lead in handling external emergency assistance almost as an arm of the Turkish government. Once there was an incident, an earthquake or whatever, we would meet with them, and ascertain their needs. In response we might provide clothing, we might provide additional food, cash, or whatever was appropriate. It would

either go directly to the government, or we had CARE, an NGO that had worked in Turkey for many years, and several other non-governmental organizations that we could use as distributors, those that had a presence in-country and an outreach capacity.

Q: So, you're there from '69 until when?

BUCK: '72.

Q: So, a good long period to really get to know the country and how the projects are carried out. Would you say that in their own terms, people felt that the projects were successful?

BUCK: Yes, I got to know the people, their rich and varied history, their language, their geography, their culture, their self-perception, their relations with the United States. I don't think a first term Foreign Service Officer could have ever had a better time than I did in Turkey.

It's interesting – the United States has a long history of our assistance program with Turkey, which started in 1947. One of the most important things we'd done is trained large numbers of Turks. Each time there would be a change in government, the first thing we'd do would be to consult our directory of former students to see whether they had had an AID scholarship in the past, and if so, where did they go and what did they study.

So, there was a coterie of senior Turkish public and private officials that we shared the same perspective on many issues with, and they were always a group that we could meet with. We had done massive road construction project in the 50s. A lot of it was focused on Turkey's military having access to the border with Russia, or to Georgia in that case, in the Soviet Union. We were doing hydroelectric production, transmission, and distribution projects. We'd done quite a number of land-leveling irrigation water management activities, so we had a very productive working relationship with Turkey. USAID was responsible for bringing the green revolution to Turkey and surreptitiously importing the seeds that were later to prove the key to growing water resistant low stalk but high yielding grains

Q: At that time, '69, '72, there was not, in my recollection, anyway, significant political unrest?

BUCK: Well, there were groups that somewhat mirrored what was occurring in the United States at the time: young people following concepts of, "Let's get rid of the Rulers," and they carried out a number of terrorist acts and murdered a few people, including a couple of U.S. airmen. There was quite a large U.S. military presence in Turkey at that time at various bases in Adana and other places. But there was, yes, infighting between the two main political parties with a small pinprick of a guerrilla movement on the side.

Q: Later on, of course, it would get much more violent, but for the period you were there, it was still –

BUCK: Relatively calm. While I was there, the military threw out the prime minister at that time, Suleyman Demirel. I don't know if it was his first or second time to be overthrown, but he had trod on military prerogatives, and the military threw him out, and basically everybody was very happy. But, no, there was not the political volatility that they had later.

Q: Okay, so as we're approaching the end of your tour in Turkey, how does it happen that you plan your next assignment? I mean, I imagine you have some preferences, but I also imagine USAID has some preferences for you.

BUCK: This was probably the first time and the only time in my career that I had an opportunity to select where I was going. I wanted to head back to Washington for personal reasons. I had really enjoyed life as a single in Washington, D.C., having fun, being on your own, etc., So I was sent back to the Latin America Bureau in Washington, which I thought was the ideal place to go. I headed off there, and I was in the Latin America Bureau for perhaps three to six months, and then I got an offer to become the Turkey Desk officer. Since I had a bit of an experience there, I thought that was ideal, particularly since the USAID Director I had worked for previously was still out in Ankara, so I would have a close relationship with him. I accepted the offer to move.

Q: In the end, you didn't go to the Latin America Bureau?

BUCK: I was there in Washington working on Latin America for perhaps three to six months or considerably less than a year, and that, I guess, was a real eye-opener. This was the height of the Cold War, and we were pumping money into dictators right and left. This is our only bulwark against communism or so everyone said. Having seen that this was money down the tubes, I thought that this was insanity. So, when an opportunity to get out of that cesspool arose, I left at the first opportunity. I guess I was disillusioned with what I found there.

Q: Okay. So, now we are in '72-'73, onto the Turkey desk.

BUCK: Right. So, I was on the Turkey desk, probably for several months. The U.S. Ambassador to Turkey [William Macomber], who was newly arrived, had gotten his feet wet, and he sent in a very terse, one-line cable along the following lines: "I reviewed the AID program, and I have decided that we need to terminate the AID program. We need to graduate this country."

And, you know. You give him a hearty handshake, and move on. Surprisingly, having been associated with programs that we have attempted to bring to an end in other countries, this was remarkable in how fast, how painless, how easy it was. The decision was among AID; we went through our portfolio, we looked at what we had on the books, what we had accomplished where we were, and we decided that this was probably in the

U.S. national interest . So, we very quickly took action as personnel assignments were completed or that could be ended early without prejudice to anyone.

Q: Let me ask you: as the decision is made, and you begin the ending of contracts, was any thought given to doing an article or a book or some kind of final piece of reflection on the period of time USAID was there and what it accomplished?

BUCK: We did some fairly small retrospectives on what we had accomplished, but given the enormous investment that we had, and the impact that we had, I don't think we ever looked at what a model this might be. When you compare it to Taiwan or Korea or other countries that have moved on and have benefitted significantly by the U.S. program, I don't think Turkey is recognized. I think our contribution to the Green Revolution and its success in Turkey is generally recognized, but beyond that, the other elements of our activities and the relationship that we established with the Turks is not particularly recognized.

On kind of a sidebar: While I was in Turkey, one of the main issues that we became engaged in was narcotics. Turkey was at that point the major source of heroin in the United States. The last part of my tour in Turkey, the embassy and the AID mission were concerned with what we could do to stem the flow of drugs. Under President Nixon's war on drugs, he sent the secretary of agriculture out, and a program that we all worked very hard on arranging –

We came up with a program for the Turks to stop the production of opium poppies, and for us to work with them on alternative crops. It never really panned out; the Turks always said that we promised them 35 million dollars, which we never promised, but it was perceived to have been a promise, and we were “slackers,” doing it on the cheap. So, our assistance program for some ended on a bit of a sour note, that we were stingy in the end. AID became totally consumed with what we could do to assist people in making a transition from growing opium poppies to something that was listed.

Q: But in the end, you didn't see much in the way of success in that . Or am I –

BUCK: Well, while we were there, the government did agree that it would stop the production of opium poppies and ban their production. It had been listed, and they had been using it for sale to the morphine industry, but a lot of it, of course, escaped into illicit channels. So, they had agreed, and I think basically the year I left they did not grow poppies. A new government came into power and overturned the ban, but I think the Turks did police it, so even though they overturned the ban and thumbed their nose to that agreement with the United States, they were able to control some – Turkey is, for all intents and purposes, not a major source for drugs like it was in the past.

Q: Yeah, it even got into popular culture, in a way, in Midnight Express and perhaps a few other smaller movies. Okay, now, to go back to Washington and the Turkey desk. You're sun setting the programs in Turkey. Are there any lessons learned for you that you would take with you, then, later into your career, based on your experience in Turkey?

BUCK: Well, I had such an association with the counter-narcotics time, that that then led to where I went on my next assignment. But I think that one of the things that I began to realize was that, being exposed to some of the people back in Washington, one, that I needed a better foundation for what we want to accomplish and how we should be trying to accomplish it. I mean, I had a smattering of economics as an undergraduate, but I did not think strategically, and getting back into Washington I became associated with some people who were looking not at individual projects and activities, but were thinking more country-wide, regional-wide, what are we trying to accomplish, what is the U.S. national objective, and how can we best –

So, I began to associate not just the economic issues, but also the political, broader public policy issues that we needed to address, and I did not feel particularly confident that I had a lot of good grounding. I should have recognized I didn't have a lot of good grounding, and that led to a later sojourn back to academia, but I think that was one thing that got me.

The other thing was, I really liked working with the Turks, because they were the sort of people who negotiated from an informed perspective. They knew the background, they knew the facts. They would argue facts, and you could discuss it, and then we would ultimately decide we would do A, B, and C. Some of the things they did not like, some of the things they did like. But what I really liked about them was that they kept to their word. Whenever you made a commitment of, "This is what we're going to do," you could expect them to fulfill it, and being in a lot of other cultures where yes means no, it was quite different. It was one of the things that I really appreciated.

Q: Alright. Well, let's pause here, because you'll be getting yourself ready for your next tour, and this is something we can take up at the next session.

Q: Today is August 15th. We are resuming our interview with Craig Buck as he goes into long-term training. What year was that?

BUCK: This was 1979, if I recall. I had been interested in trying to improve myself for the Agency for some time. I was quite fortunate to be approved for a year's long-term training, basically in the institution where I could find an appropriate fit. So, I found it in what is known as the Food Research Center at Stanford University, which was almost an adjunct of the Department of Economics. It was an interdisciplinary program, including anthropology, medicine, business, law, statistics, demographics, and other activities and disciplines that impact the food and resources of the world.

So, that was great. The Agency approved that to make me a better contributor, so I met first with my faculty adviser and told her that I'd like to take a course in music appreciation and art history and maybe a course or two in business, and a course or two in economics. She then told me that I had been admitted as a graduate student in competition with other graduate students and that I was expected to commit myself to getting a degree out of this program.

So, that led to a year of intense work to try to become familiar with the dismal science. So, I studied very hard learning econometrics, mathematics, calculus, and development economics. It was great. At the end of my year, having completed my degree, I was looking around, talking with AID about where I would end up next, and –

Q: Well, before we quite leave that, were all of those disciplines relatively easy for you? You know, calculus, econometrics, are relatively difficult subjects for a lot of people, including me.

BUCK: It was all extremely difficult for me. I studied probably 18 to 20 hours a day, and this was like seven days a week. It was extremely difficult. It was a reorientation of where I was as a liberal arts person, and so I had to discipline myself to understand a lot of these, what I considered, more esoteric disciplines.

Q: Did you do a thesis, or was it more just sort of term papers and oral exams?

BUCK: There was a core curriculum that we all had, and there were about 15 or 16 of us in this core group. We had these same – Well, we had lectures from all of the various disciplines that participated, and then we took additional courses outside the core ones. Mine was primarily in the Department of Economics as well as in the business school. Virtually all the courses we took required term papers or directed reading and discussions with graduate advisors. Fortunately there was no thesis requirement for the MA.

Q: Okay. Coming out of that in 1979, what would you say were the most important insights or tools that you then had that would subsequently be of value to you, later in your career?

BUCK: Well, I think – First of all, the professors at Stanford were extremely approachable. They were people that you could always call on to get their insights as to where one should be going with their career. The biggest lesson that came through to me was something that I really had not paid much attention to: there's no such thing as a free lunch. You have to look at the economic consequences of everything that you do. So, that, to me, was the most important thing coming out of that. One always needs to follow the relationship between politics and economics.

But another thing was, a realization, and this was coming from a lot of my fellow students – They looked to government as being the means of resolving problems. Having spent a little time working in the government, I did not believe that the government was a solution and that, in fact, the market, with appropriate discipline and rigor, was a more appropriate means of producing economic growth. So, I learned from the students that were there, and I began to try to get myself to sink in the mold of, when one looks at an economy or one begins to analyze a country, you need to look at economic forces as vital components of a nation.

Q: Just out of curiosity, were there any foreign students whose views or perceptions also helped give you a new insight into what you were studying?

BUCK: Yes, and a number became good friends. For example, one of our fellow students was a Tanzanian. He and I argued about the impact of and the need for family planning. To me, there was no question that family planning, or that large families, were an economic impediment, and that addressing the population problem was absolutely vital. He argued, from the African perspective, that large families were vitally important. They were the insurance, they provided the welfare, and also, he introduced the element of ethnicity to the issue, and that one's ethnic group needs to be large in competition with others.

So, that was another insight to it. Another colleague of mine worked for the Japanese International Cooperation Agency, and he was doing his year sabbatical out at Stanford. We oftentimes had the opportunity to discuss various approaches to supporting economic development, and what mechanism did we use and what mechanism did the Japanese use. Which were effective, which weren't.

Q: Right. And one last question about this: did you, in the end, end up taking anthropology, and was it also helpful as a means of understanding cultures and how you have to approach cultures with development?

BUCK: I never had any formal anthropological training. It's something that just becomes – By osmosis, one begins to pick it up, which later we'll talk about. When I got into areas of ethnicity, of skin color, of religion... All impact economic growth and political development, so it became important.

Q: Interesting, the year itself for you, I imagine, although it was stressful in terms of study was also pleasurable because of the local climate and the surroundings?

BUCK: Stanford is outstanding. I could never say enough positive things about it. I was trying to get my niece to consider going there and even offered to pay her tuition there. But I liked the physical atmosphere, I liked the academic atmosphere. It was rigorous, yet it was not too harsh, not too disciplined. I never encountered any martinets that were giving lectures or leading discussions. It was really people who were interested in their students.

Q: Now, from USAID's point of view, once you were finished, did they say, "Okay, now that you've had this additional training, we're going to use you in a given location?" or did USAID itself take account of the training you'd just gone through?

BUCK: I'm not certain that the agency really looked at that as an objective. They looked at it more as where they could place me and what skills did I bring, rather than, "We have someone who has just come out of training. Let's try to make the maximum use out of it."

For that reason, as we approached the end of the year, I started talking with Washington and they said, “Well, these are the sorts of skills you have and these are the openings that we have, and this is where we think that you will probably fit in.”

At that point, people started talking about maybe Uganda, where Idi Amin had just been overthrown, and our AID program, which had ended with Amin’s rule was being considered for reopening. In fact, our diplomatic relations had been suspended under Idi Amin. The more I discussed an assignment there the more appealing it was since it appeared that USAID would go in, and we would have a fairly large program there. But because of the violence that accompanied the overthrow, and the Tanzanian army that was there still, and the inability to establish law and order, the embassy remained quite small, and they wanted to hold off staffing up the AID program. This was a real bonanza for me since USAID said, “We’re holding off staffing up for three months, but can you stay in a holding pattern?” I used it as a great opportunity to spend three more months at school, auditing courses. So, that was great and I finally ended up, in September of 1980, heading off to Uganda.

Q: Now, you had mentioned also a bit of time in the State Department Anti-Narcotics. Where did that fit in?

BUCK: When I finished in Turkey, in 1972, I went back to Washington in the Latin American Bureau’s program office, for a while, and then I became the desk officer for Turkey. As that program phased out, I moved for a year and a half to the State Department with the Office of the Senior Adviser for Narcotics Matters. From that, I moved to the Egypt desk for a year and a half, before I went off to Stanford.

Q: Now, would it be typical to send a USAID officer on detail to the Anti-Narcotics office?

BUCK: This is quite interesting, because this was in the heyday of the war on drugs by the Nixon administration. The State Department was just beginning to address the international narcotics issue as a problem for foreign policy, so it established the office of the Senior Adviser to the office of the Secretary for Narcotics Matters, which was an office of eight or ten officers at the time. The purpose, of course, was to stem the flow of drugs, and to get other countries to collaborate on this effort. The programs that we carried out were executed or implemented primarily by USAID, so they wanted someone that knew how USAID operated and what levers to push to get things done.

At that point in time – this was ’76, ’77, ’78 – the main idea that people had to address was the production problem through crop substitution. That is, keep people from growing poppies or from growing coca or whatever by coming up with alternative crops. We very quickly had concluded, in fact we knew from my experience in Turkey, that crop substitution is a nonsensical solution. So long as there is the profit motive, people are going to produce what provides the best returns. You know, farmers are the world’s best economists!

So, if the market says, “You can make more growing this,” that’s what they’re going to grow. Now, crop substitution, if combined with an extremely heavy dose of enforcement, with interdiction, with demand reduction and control efforts on our part, might in combination have some impact. But it was a combination of interventions that are required. I think probably more important is a political commitment that producing drugs is not in the country’s national interest, and an agreement upon that concept by most people. That’s what stops production, and that’s indeed what happened in Turkey. The Turks made a decision that they were no longer going to produce or allow the production of poppies, or the export of heroin. But the Turks controlled their territory. In areas of Pakistan, in areas of South America where they grew coca, it was just lawless areas.

Q: And in some ways, still is.

BUCK: Exactly. So, I was there. We had a couple of AID officers to account for the funding and help develop programs, and that’s what I did, in terms of developing activities that we might be able to undertake to control the flow of drugs. So, I worked and spent some time particularly in South America – Bolivia, Peru, Colombia – working on the programs there.

Q: Okay. Curiously enough, I don’t want to pursue this topic too far, because, as you point out, I think it’s generally very well-trodden. I think a lot of people know the outcomes in that era, at least, of what happened, why it was successful and not successful, and you’ve mentioned all of the variables that come into play. Of course, the one last variable that also comes into play is, not having control over your national territory of course makes it easier for “narco” (drug mules) traffickers to grow and create drugs, and then ship them, but then also allow for the establishment of anti-government guerrillas.

BUCK: Which we’ll get into later, and which was indeed the case in what is known as the Upper Huallaga Valley in Peru, where you had the *Sendero Luminoso* (Shining Path) in control of the territory and controlling the production of drugs. The Peruvian Government was unable to control the territory and drug production and trafficking. I think one of the exciting things that comes out of this, is that I was there kind of at the birth of the international narcotics movement as a U.S. foreign policy component.

But it was interesting; it was something that was coming out of the White House, but it wasn’t something I think Secretary Kissinger would accept as being very high on his radar scope; in fact, the senior adviser was instructed not to attend the weekly or daily staff meetings. We were able to get the Secretary to become involved in narcotics with respect to Bolivia at one point, but that was the sum total of his involvement in the year and a half that I was there. So, I think that we went through an evolution of beginning to recognize this as a national foreign policy issue, but it took quite a while for it to grow from, you know, “Just let them grow alternative crops,” into what is now an extremely large international effort.

Q: Alright. So, we are now at the point where you've finished Stanford and you've been talking to USAID about your next assignment. Eventually, you do get to Uganda?

BUCK: Eventually, I do get to Uganda. As it turned out, the plans for having a large USAID program at first did not materialize because of the security situation and failure of the government to establish appropriate law and order. Subsequently, the outbreak of the guerrilla movement and a constantly deteriorating security situation led to a decision to keep a fairly small program. The person who had been designated as the AID director and in fact went there before me for a couple of months took off as soon as I arrived. I was left as the only AID person, and so I became the acting USAID director, a position I retained for three years.

Q: Fascinating. And, I'm sorry, what year do you arrive in Uganda?

BUCK: I got there in the fall of 1980, which was quite fortunate for me, because I was able to exercise a lot of the skills and the information that I had gathered while I was in training, in terms of assessing what was happening economically, and what instruments we could bring to assist in making it more effective, and how did we work with the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund and others in developing an economic structure that would be appropriate for, basically, a newly emerging economy and polity.

Q: Let's take a second on that, then. So, when you arrive in Uganda, it is a post-conflict country. To what extent did that impact what you wanted to accomplish as AID director? The fact that it was just post-conflict, and there were still signs of the conflict and perhaps ill will on various sides.

BUCK: Well, I think one of the problems was that, to some extent, Uganda had lost a generation of leaders during the times of Idi Amin, which only lasted six to eight years. But before that there had been a president, Obote, who had become increasingly authoritarian and many of the skilled people had left. So, when we arrived, there was a paucity of trained personnel to work with, although at independence there had been a large cadre of highly skilled people to promote development.

Previously, Makerere University had produced some of the finest people in all of Sub-Saharan Africa, but they had taken advantage of that, and they had moved on to the African Development Bank, or into other jobs, or they'd migrated and were reluctant, given the security circumstances, to return. So, one, we had difficulty finding government counterparts that we could relate to.

Secondly, the insecurity continued, and in fact it became increasingly difficult. The Tanzanian army pulled out four or five months after I arrived, and they, of course, had been one of the major causes of insecurity. But when they withdrew, there was no adequate police force to replace them. There was not a court system, there was not a capacity to enforce the rule of law. Subsequently, the government in power – Obote was reelected after Idi Amin's departure. His government became increasingly intolerant of other ethnic groups, and as a result, a guerrilla movement broke out, and that began to,

one, cause his security services to become increasingly authoritarian, and then they ended up with destruction. Again, property destruction, lack of a rule of law, and what have you.

So, this continued for basically all the time that I was there. I think one of the most important things was that because of the lack of security, people would not invest. Only people who could make a very quick investment, make their money at exorbitant rates, would put money into it. So, that was one of the problems. The insecurity, rule of law, lack of investment, lack of trained personnel, all were kind of factors that influenced what we were trying to do.

Now, another – Well, Uganda's economy, at that time, was primarily agriculturally oriented, and there was enormous potential. As we used to say, you could throw some seeds out and they would grow in Uganda. But it lacked markets, it lacked technology, it lacked processing facilities, it lacked market knowledge; all the things that one would need for a more modern functioning economy did not exist. The most elemental farm inputs were not available. Hoes that they used – they were not available.

So, we had a program in which we were bringing in steel and trying to resuscitate a steel manufacturing facility, and then selling the hoes through the cooperative movement. Resuscitating the cooperative movement was another element of our program. In retrospect, I think it was probably not wise – the cooperative movement was very paternalistic and was not market-oriented, but years before, in the '50s and '60s when AID was there, it had been perceived to be quite successful.

Q: Well, of course, times change, the market changes, world conditions change, and old forms of manufacture or production sometimes have to change as well. Cooperatives may no longer have been appropriate for a world that was becoming, not quite there yet but becoming, more globalized.

BUCK: Well, for quite a long time, many of the marketing functions in agriculture had been in the hands of Asian Ugandans. Idi Amin had expelled them all. Many of them hoped to return, but they were unable to reestablish any sort of relationship, so the whole system – the supply and marketing chains – were broken.

Q: It really sounds like it does not get much worse than this: great potential, but literally nothing to develop it.

BUCK: That's right, and the government became increasingly focused only on security and maintaining itself in power. Efforts to focus on economic reforms that were needed fell by the wayside. I will say, though, that initially, the government had adopted a very reformist IMF program that immediately resulted in the stimulation of investment, the stimulation of production, and the elimination of stultifying monopolies. But it quickly dissipated with the lack of security. But when I got there, the government, what government there was, controlled everything – prices, supplies, inputs. It was more of a command economy than probably the Soviet Union, but it didn't function. You'd demand

that somebody produce blankets. Well, if you can't produce the yarn and the electricity, forget it. But if you could produce it, you could demand monopolistic rents.

Q: Right, well, that's definitely a failed economic system, no question about that. But were you able, in a situation like that, to establish any sort of self-help groups for smaller, local development that were able to do things outside of the government structure?

BUCK: Yes. Several of the cooperative organizations at the local level did become quite successful, and a lot depended upon the quality of leadership they had, what sort of entrepreneurial spirit they had, what access to inputs. But if we were able to provide hoes, and if they were in areas where there was a reasonable amount of security and some transport, they could work quickly on establishing a chain whereby they could produce, sell, and improve the quality of life of the members of that cooperative. So, in some areas, particularly where security was good, it seemed to work.

Q: Now, you were there until '83? You were there for three years?

BUCK: Yes, from '80 to '83.

Q: And over the course of that time, did the mission grow? Did USAID Washington begin to feel more confident that more people could go into it?

BUCK: Yes. That was an interesting thing. Mission management was one of the things that I began to learn while I was there. It started out with only me and the secretary, and by the time I left, we had ten or twelve more Americans, some four or six other expats, and a fairly large contingent of probably 30 to 40 Ugandans. We spent a considerable amount of time training them, getting them to recognize the issues and help us in our implementation.

So, establishing the mission, trying to deal with all of the myriad issues of establishing our own administrative set up were challenging. The embassy had no capacity to provide us with any resources, and I guess it was just a fond vision in somebody's mind at that point; it did not exist. We were completely independent in terms of our administrative operation, which provided a major learning opportunity for me, because I was not familiar –

As you know quite well, the number of regulations that are in your administrative operations are endless, and one has to be very careful about how they procure things, how they implement things, how they manage their human relations resources. So, it was all a learning experience, but we developed and grew.

Q: Now, also, were you responsible for your own security? So, in other words, let's say you go out to a site. The embassy wasn't going to provide, let's say, DS (Bureau of Diplomatic Security) security. You would have to have contracted local security officers. How did that work?

BUCK: I hired our own local security personnel, which was basically like 24-hour guards around each house and our office. We “trained” them. At one point, the embassy had planned to provide a fairly large embassy-managed guard force, equipped with weapons. That did not fly well with the government, so that was cancelled. So, we were responsible for our security. There was a regional security officer assigned to Kampala, but we were responsible for taking care of ourselves.

Q: And to the extent that you got all of the security, it did not become an issue with the government? Because I imagine even your security people would have to have some arms at some point.

BUCK: Well, none of them were ever armed, other than with spears and the bows and arrows that our guards carried. We were issued, at one time, various types of tear gas. There was both indoor and outdoor tear gas; I mean, it was whole different varieties that I never really understood or learned about. The one thing that we found most effective were boat horns, because the real problem in Uganda was petty theft.

So, each house was a compound in and of itself, so as our staff grew, we had to get these compounds, renovate them, make them livable, and then hire guards. The problem was that petty thieves, as they called them, *panga* (machete) gangs – They carried their machetes and gangs would try to come in and take over a residence and steal everything they could.

We had adequate security to keep one safe within the residence, so we would have our guards with boat horns that would either frighten off potential thugs, or wake up the residents of the house. Now that I’m thinking about it, I remember that we were armed: We were issued arms by the embassy. We had a sawed-off shotgun and a .38 revolver. These were the law-enforcement type of shotgun. But, we were given no training on how to use them.

Every night there was shooting going on in Kampala, and some of my colleagues would go out and use their shotguns to shoot into the trees when the shooting became too intense or deafening. It was what we called “sky blasting”. Any of the people in the area would immediately stop shooting and take cover because the shotguns would ricochet and cause a terrifying reaction. It totally intimidated whoever had started the earlier random shooting.

Q: Wow. Did you actually carry those when you went out to –

BUCK: Never.

Q: More for home protection?

BUCK: Yes.

Q: Wow. Okay, now, as you look back on those three years, what can you say were the accomplishments in terms of the mission goals? What did happen, or what did you put in place that could eventually become successful?

BUCK: Well, you know, I approached this from a broader foreign policy objective. What we were interested in was having a government that had a positive image of and productive relations with the United States. By and large, through our contacts at senior levels with the government, we were able to do that. Our USIS (United States Information Service) programs were able to train people.

We had a whole series of cultural exchanges. We had interactions with senior government officials. So, you know, in terms of the positive relationship with the United States, I think that that, by and large, was accomplished. In terms of economics, I think we were able to establish some modicum of stability with the currency. We were able to begin some resuscitation of the cooperative movement. We were able to revitalize a number of health facilities, and things that were really critical. So, that was on the economic side.

Q: How well, as your AID mission grew, and it wasn't a gigantic mission, but as it was growing, how well did it lace up with the embassy itself, in terms of the activities that everyone was doing?

BUCK: We were physically separate from the embassy. We had everybody within a USAID compound. We all viewed ourselves as members of one team. We had great relations with the ambassador. Very accessible, very approachable. So, I think we all realized that we were living under difficult circumstances. It was a real team effort. No one viewed themselves as being more important or less important; we were all part of the same foreign policy effort.

Q: Great. Now, you had mentioned USIA (United States Information Agency) doing some training. As I recall, in that era, in the '80s, USAID also did some vocational training, or would have scholarship training for people in various fields to raise competency?

BUCK: Yes, sure. We had a considerable amount of technical training. Training on cooperative management, cooperative financing, agricultural production, market development, etc. We had training in family planning. We had whole training – A lot of stuff we tried to do in-country, so we could maximize the impact of it. We sent some people to regional training and some on short-term training programs in the United States. This was more technical as opposed to the cultural effort that USIS was focused on. We did have a significant training program.

Q: Were you able to see a difference as a result, while you were there? Sometimes technical training takes a few years before all of the benefits begin to show. Were you able to see some benefits from the technical training that some of the Ugandans had?

BUCK: Marginally, to be very honest. The number of people that we trained was not all that large, in terms of the size of the economy, but we did have some people who were able to take some of these concepts and apply it in their areas and, as I said, some of the cooperative societies at the local level became rather successful in terms of the training that they had received. Of course, the impact on health care of the health training and what we had done with family planning, I think you could see an impact.

Q: Yes. Had AIDS (Autoimmune Deficiency Syndrome) become a big problem while you were there?

BUCK: No. It was not recognized at that point. It was not even recognized as a public health issue.

Q: Okay. So, then, we are basically then coming to the end of this tour which, although it had its challenges and its difficulties, gave you three solid years of experience in running a medium-sized mission?

BUCK: Yes, and I am quite grateful that I had that experience. One of the assets that we had was a regional USAID support office in Nairobi. There were personnel in the technical disciplines, in agriculture or health or infrastructure, or whatever engineers we might need, plus the support staff in human resources and in our financial management or contracting and those things. They came over, as I requested them, or we went to Nairobi to receive assistance from them. So, that was a major asset that we had. But, nonetheless, we were a separate USAID mission. We were accountable, so we ultimately had to shoulder the responsibility for making it work.

Q: Did Washington understand all of the difficulties and why it was relatively hard to make progress, or very substantive progress, while you were there?

BUCK: We had sufficient communications with Washington. I went back to Washington every five or six months for consultation, or we had senior officials that would come out. We would take them around and they got to see the bigger picture. I think what they understood – The problem was that Uganda was the big disappointment. Uganda had been the pearl of Africa at its independence, and it went downhill from there. After Idi Amin's departure, there was this perception, back in Washington, that we could once again recreate the pearl of Africa.

So, I kind of started on – Well, even before I got there, people recognized, “Uh oh, it's not going to be as fast or as rapid as we had hoped.” And I think during my three years there, I think people realized that things were not getting significantly better, and in fact in some areas were just as bad, if not worse, as under Idi Amin.

Q: As you approach, then, the end of the tour, what are you talking about with AID in terms of your next post?

BUCK: I left Uganda with my next post to be determined, at that point. I had never been able to take home leave before, so I took off and managed to have an extensive home leave. Washington wanted to take advantage of my Latin America experience, and I was offered a position in the Dominican Republic as a deputy director there of a fairly large mission, so I jumped at the opportunity. So, off I went down to Santo Domingo for my next assignment.

Q: Had you been trained in Spanish for that, or had you spoken Spanish sufficiently?

BUCK: Well, I had Spanish in high school and Spanish in college, but during my year in Bolivia, I had become fluent. So, my experience there must have made me somewhat attractive to the Latin American Bureau plus the fact that I had set up an AID mission and managed a mission got me considered for another executive position.

Q: Okay, now, when did you arrive in Santo Domingo?

BUCK: Well, finally I got there, as I recall, right after the new year. That would have been 1984. The beginning of 1984. As I said, I was the deputy director for quite a large program, and this coincided, by chance, with the initiation of President Reagan's Caribbean Basin Initiative. So, the program, which had been marching along at near 20 to 40 million dollars a year, all of a sudden got this huge appropriation under this new initiative, and we had over 100 million dollars added to the program, in addition to large amounts of food assistance.

Q: Now, as I recall, there were other elements, too, of the Caribbean Basin Initiative. There were certain sectors of manufacturers or production that the U.S. would be willing to accept for a period of time either at a lowered tariff or zero tariff in order to encourage some production of these materials in Caribbean countries.

BUCK: Right. There was, I think, in broader terms, a free trade agreement for a number of products. But the important things were textiles, clothing, and fresh fruits and vegetables. So, this was something that met a number of our needs – the U.S. demand for large amounts of cheap clothing, and availability of resources there, of cotton and other materials, but more importantly, large amounts of cheap labor.

So, we, as well as a number of other countries, helped set up free trade zones that included infrastructure and then a close relationship with the shipping port. Then there was a large labor market that private companies could contract with. Then they were pursuing deals with U.S. firms that were interested in importing, and they'd basically tell them what the specs were and they'd produce and ship it immediately.

So, that was one element of it, but it was broader. There was also a continuation of the sugar regime, which of course was vital to the economy of the Dominican Republic. Then there was the enlarged appropriation of additional assistance, which we were expected to use for economic growth, and private sector economic growth. Heretofore, many of the AID programs had been public sector or working with government institutions, and this

was the first effort that I was associated with. I think, really, that AID began to be very closely identified with promoting the private sector.

So, there were a number of issues or problems in promoting the private sector. The issue of market access was resolved, or addressed, through the Caribbean Basin Initiative. But, there was a clear need for capital, which this appropriation would help us provide. There was a need for assistance in the broader technical areas of understand markets, of being able to coordinate demand with availability, of investment resources and with local – the need for change of local laws and local regulations to enable rapid response by the private sector.

So, we worked on all of these together, and indeed, during our time there, we provided significant resources to private investors. They took advantage of the capital that we provided, they invested it, and they came up with either manufacturing facilities, or a large number of them came up with agricultural activities such as watermelons and cantaloupes. These products had an enormous demand in the United States, for which the Dominican Republic was a major producer.

Q: Now, take a moment, before we go too deeply into each of the program fields, to describe the mission that you arrived in in 1984, how large and how it related to the embassy.

BUCK: Okay. Well, we were physically right across the street from the embassy and the ambassador's residence, and it was, by most AID standards, fairly large. We were probably 35 to 40 Americans, and probably 100 or more Dominicans. We were a vital element of our overall foreign policy with the Dominican Republic, and extremely close to the ambassador, the DCM (Deputy Chief of Mission) and the other members of the country team.

Because of the importance of getting economic signals right, we worked closely with the economic section in the embassy in working with the Dominican government in getting the economic policies modified and adjusted. So, I think that we were a significant component of the overall mission. We were located only in Santo Domingo, but the country being small, you could get almost anywhere, and we did a lot of traveling outside the city.

Q: One element of the economy has to do also with Haitian laborers. Did that, from a larger, macro point of view, did that affect your programs?

BUCK: Not significantly. One, because the majority of the Haitian workers were involved in the sugar production, in the sugar harvest, and sugar production was not an element that we, as USAID, were involved in. The one element of sugar production that we had any involvement at all with was energy efficiency. There were probably five or six large sugar cane processors in the Dominican Republic, and most of the sugar cane, which grew in massive quantities, was transported to these refineries.

They were very energy-inefficient, so we worked on programs to use the “bagasse” the remains of the crushed sugar cane, to convert that into energy to then run the plant. So, those were some of the programs that we became involved in in energy efficiency. Energy scarcity was a real problem in the Dominican Republic, and one of the problems was that it was a cultural issue; my AID director used to say that people were born in the Dominican Republic and thought that electricity came as their natural right, just like air.

Energy theft was rampant; one would see an electrical power pole with 60, 80, 100 different lines, all unmetered and flowing from them. The concept of paying for energy hardly existed. So, we had large programs trying to address issues of enforcement and payment and metering, but also adjusting energy prices. The government had heretofore subsidized the difference between production costs and how much was actually paid for, the government paid the difference and there was no incentive for people to become more efficient.

But the government began – We got them to increase prices. People began to say, “Maybe we should become more efficient.” So, those are areas that we worked in. A lot of plants that had fairly modest investments in insulation, in technology processes, were able to do what companies or firms in areas where energy costs were real had done years before. So, we did that.

Q: Was the program you had mentioned with bagasse using the waste of the cane, did that prosper?

BUCK: Oh, yes and quickly, because, heretofore, the stuff was just dumped and had no economic use whatsoever. I don’t know how they disposed of it before they began to use it as fuel, because there were such massive quantities of this stuff. But no, that turned out to be a real winner.

Q: Now, in general, we’ll once again take a look at all the different programs. But would you describe the general environment in Santo Domingo as open to USAID programming?

BUCK: Yes. Like several other countries they wanted to be the 51st state of the United States. Extremely positive towards the United States, and they understood the value of U.S. technology, U.S. entrepreneurial skills, U.S. investment, and they welcomed it and looked forward to it conceptually. When it got down to the point whose ox got gored, of course it was a whole different story, but philosophically, one looked very favorably on the United States and what USAID was doing.

The other thing is, as in Turkey, we had trained a generation of leaders, and in fact, while I was doing my undergraduate work at Texas A&M, it had a contract with one of AID’s predecessor agencies to work in the Dominican Republic to set up an agricultural school in the city of Santiago.

Fortunately for us, a lot of the professors at A&M used to leave for a few weeks, and we didn't have to go to lectures because they went down to the Dominican Republic for consulting, but they ended up with a first-class agricultural university there, with large numbers of people that had been trained in the United States, with PhD-level or post-graduate work in the United States. They quite favorably looked forward to the technological advances the United States could bring them.

Q: So, you were going into a very positive atmosphere for program adoption?

BUCK: Exactly.

Q: What were the main goals, then?

BUCK: Well, from our perspective, we were working on, one, improving the efficiency of the electrical power sector. Secondly, an improved agricultural production and investment in it. Then third, increase foreign exchange earnings. Then healthcare was another area, and finally the education sector.

Q: When you were looking at the agricultural sector, was there also an effort for diversification to higher-value crop?

BUCK: Yes. To some extent, the private sector took the lead in this. Surprisingly, one of the niche markets for the Dominicans in the United States is for okra. Okra is grown only in a few areas of, I think, Louisiana and Mississippi, and it's ideally suited for the climate and conditions in some areas of the Dominican Republic for producing it. It's interesting how this activity got started, and they were able to move from sugar cane or whatever to growing okra, which is apparently a fairly labor-intensive thing, for cultivating it and picking it and processing it.

So, yes, we did work on coming up with new activities. But I think most important was taking advantage of the capital resources that the United States – the entrepreneurial skills of the investor community that understood, “We now have a free market, and the Dominican Republic can produce things – oranges, tangerines, melons – that we have an enormous demand for. Let's capitalize on it.” So, we did get investors coming in in areas that were relatively new.

Q: You had mentioned the energy sector, the electricity sector. How much, roughly, could Santo Domingo generate domestically, and how much, roughly, did it have to buy?

BUCK: The country was self-sufficient in energy, but self-sufficient in the sense that it imported a considerable amount of fuel oil for running the power plant. One of the major electrical power plants in Haina, close to Santo Domingo, was a hydroelectric plant, but as a result of – I believe it was Hurricane David, several years before I got there--- resulted in such massive silting of the rivers in the port, that the flow-through and power-generating capacity had significantly dissipated.

So, anything that they could do to address this – As a result, it had to come up with alternative sources. We, the United States – Actually, the Corps of Engineers, 10 years before I got there, had brought in a power barge, and this was a massive floating structure that did nothing but produce electricity. We in USAID managed this on behalf of the Corps of Engineers for the U.S. government, and the Dominicans paid for it. But we had a number of our Corps of Engineers technicians there maintaining it and ensuring that it operated. The Dominicans then paid for the fuel and other maintenance costs, and we managed this.

Q: Was it believed to be relatively hurricane-proof? Was it safe-harbored somewhere?

BUCK: Well, it was brought in, I think, some 10 years before I got there, as a result of a lack of electricity because of a hurricane. It was such an asset that they didn't want to lose it, so they said, "We'll pay for it." And the Corps of Engineers didn't have need, at that point, for a floating turbine generator, so it was a happy marriage. I don't think it was more than six or eight percent of the total energy production, but it was enough to make a difference.

Q: And of course, as energy prices go up, they need to plan accordingly for energy savings throughout the economy, how to run things more efficiently. But I don't want to get ahead of your story. How did the electricity sector develop as part of USAID's program?

BUCK: Well, it had been an element before I got there, but as energy prices began to rise, it became an issue for almost everyone. There were periodic shortages and brownouts, blackouts, electricity cuts. So, everyone began to become concerned with the issue of energy conservation.

Q: So, from USAID's point of view, what was the outcome of those efforts while you were there? In other words, were they able to educate the public that there would eventually have to be some payment for electricity, for creating more trustworthy metering or so on

–

BUCK: I'm not certain that for the man on the streets there was really any greater recognition of the concept that electricity was a good you had to pay for. But for those companies that could indeed be charged, that could be metered, they began to recognize the importance of it, yes. The three years that I was there, I think that people really began to see how important it was to conserve and that they were going to be compelled to pay, and therefore they needed to take action to keep the cost down.

Q: Then, to move to the other sectors of your activities, the investment. How did that work out?

BUCK: What we did was, we worked with the Central Bank, and we were concerned about how to set up a program to channel funds to the private sector. Each bank had its

own coterie of owners and borrowers, and we needed an independent perspective on potential borrowers that would ensure adherence to criteria.

In other words, when we were promoting investment, it had to be activities that were labor-intensive, that used a maximum amount of local inputs, that were export-oriented, that were foreign exchange earning as opposed to utilization, that would have rapid impact... A whole series of criteria that we used.

So, we worked with the Central Bank to establish the framework with an investment facility that it had, to use these funds that we provided. So, I don't recall the exact amount, but we channeled many millions of dollars through that mechanism, which then had the resources repaid, and we were able to use those resources once repaid for other activities when we had local costs.

Q: Right. How about the health sector? That was also one of the key ones.

BUCK: Health sector activities were focused on extending primary healthcare out into the rural areas, and the training of lower-level officials in primary healthcare, preventive medicine types of activities. I would say that family planning was a fairly significant component of this. I have to question in my own mind – to what extent did we substitute for the government's unwillingness to use its own resources for investing in its own human resources?

Q: Speaking of that, education was one of the other areas.

BUCK: Right, yes. Education was focused almost exclusively at a higher level with the exception of rural schools. We continued our assistance to the agricultural university and to another university. We did have a primary education program for construction of rural schools in these basic one-room schools in areas that were not served. The government had to commit to providing maintenance and providing teachers. So, we were able to get a bit of an increase in government investment in the education sector through the program.

Q: Outcomes. Were you able to measure any outcomes in that sector, in terms of more student attendance, or better quality –

BUCK: Yes, in terms of the outputs on this, like the number of students that were going to schools that previously could not attend, the number of new teachers – This was, of course, combined with the teacher training program, so that increased the number of available teachers. The government's own resources increased investment in the agricultural sector, and improved performance by student graduates was another thing that they could measure where you could see the impact.

Q: How did tourism affect, if at all, the economy while you were there?

BUCK: Tourism was quite important. It was not an area that we were involved in for a couple of reasons. One, the private sector was already heavily involved in it, and two, tourism, particularly – The main issue in the Dominican Republic was the lack of facilities, and the investment in facilities per job created was extremely high. So, most of the investment came in the construction of hotels and resorts and related facilities. It turned out each job required a fairly large investment, compared to what you could get from agriculture or the returns on other things. So, it was not an area we took advantage of.

Q: Remittances. How important were they for the economy?

BUCK: Remittances as a percentage of foreign exchange earnings declined because by the time I left, the Dominican Republic was exporting fairly large quantities of cheap manufactured goods and primary agricultural products, and were fairly significant foreign exchange earners. The importance of remittances was an element, but not a terribly important one.

Q: The other thing about the Caribbean Basin Initiative, if I recall right, is that it would eventually sunset. In other words, some of the benefits offered to the Caribbean countries would begin to reduce over the years. Were they able to plan for that. In other words, the sustainability of some of these markets –

BUCK: I'm not certain that that – The time horizon for that was beyond the time horizon for most of the investors there. They were going to make quick returns, and I don't think people really looked at that as something to plan.

Q: So, as you wrap up in Santo Domingo as a deputy mission director, how would you characterize your growth as a professional, and the skills and the talents that you developed as you will now move forward to, I imagine, more challenging locations?

BUCK: Well, one, it was an opportunity to work with large resources in an economy where you could have an impact and an area where we had good policy dialogue, where we had good access to senior government officials. While it didn't always come without arguments, we were able to get them to adjust economic policies to the areas that we were concerned with. And the other thing is, I think I had enough experience there in developing large and important projects, which meant bringing together a variety of talents and skills and disciplines for developing new activities.

So, I think I developed in my capacity to understand projects and how they were implemented and how you put them together and how you negotiate them with the government and how you carry them out.

Q: So, you were in Santo Domingo from '84 to '87?

BUCK: Yes, for two and a half years. From there, I went back to Washington, and I went back as the head of the Office of South America and Mexican Affairs in AID's Latin America Bureau.

Q: Today is September 26th. We're resuming our interview with Craig Buck as he returns to Washington in the Latin America/Mexico Office.

BUCK: I started my work in Washington probably around the same time that the Congress and the administration were focused on South America and Mexico as both production and transit points for narcotic drugs. About the time I arrive, Congress had just adopted an amendment to the Foreign Assistance Act, Section 481, which required the administration to terminate assistance to any country that was not cooperating with the United States to end the production and transit of drugs to the United States. That was the main issue that I was concerned with for the next two and a half years, attempting to interpret how Congress wanted that to be implemented and conveying that information to our missions and working with them on developing programs that would try to meet the expectations back in Washington.

Another issue that was of great importance was that of structural transformation. Many of the economies, at that point, were moving towards adopting IMF (International Monetary Fund) austerity and structural reform programs. We were at the forefront of providing technical assistance and working with the World Bank, Fund, and others in carrying out these reforms. The third issue that occupied, unfortunately, an enormous amount of time was what I considered to be a strictly administrative issue, but it turned out to be more policy, and that was salary supplements. In Ecuador, we had a new USAID (United States Agency for International Development) director. In fact, it was someone who had occupied my position before I came into it. He went down, and the first thing he found was that his predecessor, a political appointee, had initiated a program of providing salary supplements to colleagues of the Ecuadorean president.

These were intended to induce action to support those activities we believed were important, but were an inappropriate use of funds. In fact, the use of these funds had been disguised and never openly acknowledged in any documents. So, of course, our investigators and inspectors became involved and, as it turned out, Ecuador was not the only post that had been engaged in that practice. There were quite a few others. This was raised at the very senior levels of the administration; they were quite concerned about this practice, so I spent a lot of time working on how we could address this issue and develop a policy so that this was prohibited in the future.

It was interesting to see the intersection between partisan politics and ideas or approaches to our foreign policy on the narcotics front with respect to the Section 481 determinations I mentioned earlier. At the end of the first year, when the administration needed to present a statement of which countries were cooperating, the House Foreign Affairs Committee held a hearing to go over the findings. The administration had found that all

of the South American countries and Mexico were cooperating. There were a number of congressmen who believed the United States should have taken much more vigorous action, and of course our activities were roundly criticized. There was indeed a focus on the part of a number of congressmen, as if our foreign policy were focused strictly on the issue of narcotics, to the exclusion of what I consider to be much more important and salient issues for our relations. But there were some congressmen who wanted us to terminate all assistance because one or two ounces of drugs from their country had made it into the United States.

I was quite pleased to see several congressmen, during this hearing, take great issue with their colleagues, and criticize them for not realizing that we had greater interests at stake between the United States and these countries. So, that was interesting, to see how that played out. As part of that effort, I went down to Bolivia, early on in my tenure in the Latin America Bureau, as part of an interagency team, to work with Bolivia and our AID mission and our embassy to come up with a program for reducing the production of coca and, of course, its conversion into cocaine.

This turned out to be an extremely difficult undertaking. A number of the members of our team wanted to pay coca producers to stop producing, and Section 481 specifically prohibited the payment of any U.S. government funds for producers of narcotics. So, of course, the government in Bolivia was pushing for that solution, and we had an extremely contentious finding from our group, which ultimately went up to the Secretary's level. The Secretary ultimately decided – or actually, Deputy Secretary Whitehead, at that point – that we would not push to change the legal requirements, and that we would not pay anyone for reducing their production of coca or other narcotics crops.

Q: Okay. I understand that, in respect to the policy, but at the same time, were we trying to invest in helping the producers to change to other kinds of crops that would give a similar return?

BUCK: We, of course, were heavily involved in alternative production types of activities, and in addition to that, helping to identify crops, to work on their marketing, to work on the inputs needed for production. We were also engaged in providing or helping to provide the infrastructure, the roads, the transport, the communications, electricity and other infrastructure needs, to enable these people to have alternative means of livelihood. But, of course, as we all know, without effective interdiction, without enforcement, and without a massive security presence – Farmers are the world's best economists. They are going to produce what provides the highest economic return. So, they were not about to start growing other crops, when they could make a living growing coca.

Q: And of course, historically they had grown coca that wasn't even necessarily being produced for drugs, or for illegal narcotics.

BUCK: No, historically, they had of course produced coca for chewing. It was a mild narcotic, and they used it to ward off hunger, to ward off cold. They used it on children when they were teething. So, it was a very traditional thing. When I was Bolivia, back in '66-'67, as a student, you would see people buying it in the market, people chewing it all over. It was very common.

Q: But now you've got all of these different countries, all of them involved in some way in the illegal narcotics production and shipment and so on, and each one, undoubtedly, with its own unique problems of crop substitution and security and all of that. As part of your job, did you go down there often? What were the methods that you used to sort of manage your portfolio?

BUCK: Well, being an office director or a desk officer is a difficult position, because you're supposed to be the representative of the administration and of Washington policy to the mission, and you're supposed to be the spokesperson for the mission back in Washington. So, you're caught in the difficult position of having to convey unwanted signals from both ends. That was one of the most difficult elements of my job. But, that's how the chips fell.

Q: Did you end up having a great deal of exposure to inter-agency decision-making or politicking, given all of the aspects of security and other issues going on?

BUCK: I had a considerable amount of inter-agency experience, because of, obviously, the whole narcotics thing and the fact that it had so much importance in terms of the Congress, in terms of senior levels of the administration. I was in contact, of course, frequently with the NSC (National Security Council). It was dealing with this issue. Then, obviously, with our colleagues in State, and we were also collaborating with the Drug Enforcement Administration; with Customs, and senior officials at various other agencies, and there were endless meetings on what more we should be doing.

But it seemed to me that we were always – We never came up with a solution to what the issue was. The problem was that demand for drugs in the United States was close to being unlimited, and economically rational people are going to produce, and they're going to take the risk of penalties if they are caught, but that is something that – We couldn't solve that problem. So, we were tinkering around the edges. We were dealing with micro-issues of what sort of crops would produce adequate returns, and how can we improve the transport to get them to market. Whereas, the gut issue was that there wasn't adequate control of demand in the United States, and unless you addressed that, your activities would come to naught.

On the other hand, both in Peru – and I went down later, as the USAID director – and in my experience in Washington, we used the additional resources that came to us for anti-narcotics activities for activities that would result in development. So, money came to us

to help finance alternative crops and other means of production to get the people out of coca or poppy production, which meant that they had to have roads, electricity, means of transport. They had to have an educated people. They needed to have an extension service. They needed decent health care. They needed to have an adequate means of transport and marketing. They needed to have means of providing inputs.

So, all of the activities that we were engaged in for purposes of developing alternative crops had an impact – in fact, a much larger impact – that kind of went unnoticed, but to me that was really – Every time that we talked about having anti-narcotics, I always tried to say, “Well, let’s look at this in a larger context.”

Q: Right. Now, that, I imagine, would have certainly made your missions in the field happy, because now they can do traditional kinds of development work. All of those things you mentioned would be the kind of things that a mission director in the field would typically do, even if it’s under the rubric of reducing, in some way, the production or the shipment of the narcotics. Do you recall any specific outcomes, as a result of this, that were noteworthy?

BUCK: I don’t have any of the specific data available, but you can talk about the miles of roads that were constructed, the number of areas that were opened to new marketing of existing crops, the number of people that became familiar with new market practices and that became familiar with new sources of financing. So, they were all very specific, unintended consequences – Well, I wouldn’t say unintended, because we all intended them to have a broader purpose. They were quite significant.

Q: Now, of course, this is also the mid- ‘80s, before the worst of the Latin America financial problem arose. They were on their way, but were you seeing any of those early signals of financial problems for these countries? Were they beginning to talk about being able to meet all of the financial obligations they were undertaking in the mid- to late- ‘80s?

BUCK: Well, I am most familiar with the case of Peru. At that point, President Garcia was embarked upon an expansive monetary policy, and a fiscal policy that wasn’t providing the resources that the country needed. It was heading towards an inability to finance its foreign debt, and in fact, Peru was not meeting its debt obligations to the United States. We had to go through contortions all the time to continue our assistance program, by getting them to make the necessary payments by drawing down on the IMF or the Inter-American Development Bank. They’d pay Uncle Sam, therefore for a period we could commit new funds, and then they immediately went back into default, but we walked through these sorts of measures to continue our assistance program.

So, Peru was in bad straits. Colombia, not nearly as much. Of course, its economy was much larger and stronger. It had a lot more significant depth, so it didn’t have anything

like the problems of Peru. Of course, Bolivia always had its perennial problems of debt and mismanagement. But at that point, Bolivia was under President Paz Estenssoro, who was in his second incarnation as president.

He had a team of very strong economic advisers, and they had in place economic policies that we found that we could support. They were focused on promoting economic development and promoting a strong currency, meeting their international obligations. We worked very closely with the finance minister at that time, who later became president. In fact, he was our main counterpart when we had this anti-narcotics team to work on coming up with a strategy. So, the countries varied in terms of how deeply they were into major economic issues. Peru, I think, lead the pack with the most distorted economy.

Q: Now, also, of course, in this period of time there were various guerilla movements, there were various even terrorist movements. Did that have significant effects on what you were doing while you were in this office?

BUCK: With the exception of Peru, where there were two movements – MRTA (Tupac Amaru Revolutionary Movement), which was an organization that was primarily an urban-based anti-government activity, with the usual anti-American, anti-Western orientation. Much more disconcerting was the *Sendero Luminoso* (Shining Path), which was based up in the mountains. It had moved into the Upper Huallaga Valley, where the main source of coca was. So, we in the U.S. government, Drug Enforcement Administration, State Department and Narcotics Control and all the others were heavily invested in this area. I would say that probably by the mid- to late-‘80s, the Sendero controlled pretty much the Upper Huallaga Valley, and we went in at our peril.

Q: Finally, this period was one in which at least some of the countries were beginning to think about trying to diversify in general. Did any of that become visible in a significant way? In other words, the bench of economic expertise was beginning to grow a bit –

BUCK: I would say that many people were paying attention to what had happened in Chile. Chile, at that point – I’m trying to remember when Allende was overthrown. It was the early ‘70s –

Q: Yeah. ’73-’74.

BUCK: Okay. So, by that time, you had 15 years of the good economic policies– I wouldn’t want to call it a “miracle,” but of free market economics in Chile. It had produced spectacular growth, and it was indeed something that the other countries needed and were paying attention to. Most of them, or many of them, had had their political issues, historically. With Chile, of course, we did not want to pay deference to them, but what Chile had done was nothing short of spectacular.

Q: And of course, this was still the Cold War. Was Cuba in any way, in the period of time you were in your office, a major source of problems for you for carrying out development activities?

BUCK: Not at all. And I contrast this with 1966, when I was there as a student. That was at the same time that Che Guevara was active in Bolivia, and the concern about Cuba was absolutely overwhelming within the State Department. But, by 1986, '87, it was not a major issue.

Q: So, now, as you're approaching the end of this tour in Washington, D.C., this is the first tour that you have where you're seeing both how Washington works and how USAID interacts with the other agencies, as well as Washington. What are you thinking about, in terms of a next assignment? Did this influence your thinking about whether you wanted to spend more time in Washington, or more time in the field, or particular areas of expertise that you wanted to follow?

BUCK: Basically, I did what the Agency wanted me to do. I've kind of viewed myself as being responsive to its needs. Later in my career, I became much more focus on wanting to be overseas, and I would do anything to avoid Washington.

Q: That's exactly what I was wondering about, because so many USAID officers say the same thing: "Oh, please get me out of Washington and let me get back to the field."

BUCK: But at that point, I was still in a learning mode. I was seeing the relationship between what we were doing politically and what we were doing that made sense, and how could you articulate this. I spent quite a bit of time up on the Hill, talking with staffers and getting their perspective and learning how they approached an issue, and I tried to give them our perspective. So, it was a communications issue. So, I felt it was a learning opportunity. But after three years, it was time for me to move on, and the Agency assigned me to Peru.

Q: To actually go out?

BUCK: To go out as a mission director there.

Q: Just a quick question, before you go out: Did you find that the professional relationships that you forged with the Hill staff continued? Because a lot of times those staffers remain in positions for quite a while.

BUCK: By all means, and many of the staff people that I met then followed me – Or, rather, I had later associations with them when I was in Bosnia, when I was in Kosovo,

when I was in Afghanistan. We could always recall the issues that we had dealt with in the past. So, it was great to make these professional relationships.

Q: Did it pay off for you later? Did you have more credibility, do you think, as a result of building them relatively early in your career, so that each time you went back, they said, "Oh, yeah, we know Craig Buck. He's a straight shooter," or whatever.

BUCK: I can't speak for them. All I know is that after that, almost invariably when we would have a CoDel (Congressional Delegation), in whatever country it is, I would find a staffer, or they would seek me out, and almost invariably we would be part of the briefing and be able to let them know what our perspective was. When they would come on various CoDels or StaffDels (Staff Delegation), I would spend a lot of time with them informally, getting reacquainted.

Q: Great. So, as you're preparing to go to Peru, what's going through your mind? What are the goals Washington's setting for you, and what are you thinking about in terms of preparing?

BUCK: Well, this was a well-established USAID mission. It had been there since 1947 or '48, something like that. It was a very large mission, and we had major issues. We had the issue of the Garcia government, which had nationalized the banks and had foreign policy issues with the United States; we had the terrorist issue; we had the narcotics problem; and Peru was a very poor country.

I look at Peru, and I think about how governments have managed to foul things up. In 1960, Peru and Korea had the same GDP (gross domestic product) per capita. I went to Peru about 29 years later, in 1989, and Peru's GDP per capita was maybe \$1,100. Korea's GDP per capita was 28 to 30,000. There are a lot of different factors, but I think getting your economic policies right, adhering to them, and letting people know that there is the rule of law, that contracts are honored, that people can count on the continuity, makes an enormous amount of difference.

So, anyhow, there were quite a large number of issues that we were dealing with in Peru. I was very fortunate. Just before I left Washington, I met the incoming U.S. ambassador, and he and I had a superb relationship, so I was quite pleased with that. In fact, they had a great country team, a very collaborative group of people, which meant a lot. But when I arrived in Peru –

Q: And this is now 1987?

BUCK: No, this was – By then it was 1989. Of course, we had a large and extremely disparate program. We had activities in education – primary and higher. We had health programs, we had family planning, we had agriculture, we had anti-narcotics, we had

administration of justice, we had HIVAID assistance programs, we had NGO (non-governmental organization) support programs. We had training, we had everything. And my concern was that we were not focused. We were all of the things to all of the people. We had an extremely large and capable staff, but our budget levels had come down quite significantly over the years, and it was difficult to sustain that number of personnel.

So, I spent quite a bit of time focusing on where we should be focused. Then I attempted to consolidate our program and rationalize our personnel. Well, that was an experience. As I said, we had a large number of personnel, and over the years, everybody had migrated into, in the AID direct hire category, an FS-1 or higher grade. Of course, we had employees who were FS-3s and -4s who came because they would occupy an FS-1 position. It was graded at an FS-1.

Well, dumb Craig brings in a colleague, a classifier, who went through the mission and reclassified all of the jobs to what we thought made sense. So, an ag officer who was an assistant ag officer became an FS-3 or -4. It was a blessing in disguise, I guess, because many people looked at their official grade as the most important thing, rather than what they were accomplishing and what they did in meeting our developmental objectives. So, a large number of people left.

Q: Wow, really? Just _?

BUCK: Really. People walked in and said, "My job has been downgraded from a -1 to a -4, and I'm going to go to another post." I said, "Well, okay, I'll be glad to give you a recommendation to move on." We moved out quite a bit of dead wood. So, it was traumatic, it was difficult. I don't know if I would do that again, but we focused on that. Then we had elections, and that was a real experience. Alan Garcia was constitutionally not allowed to succeed himself or to run again. The economy was in dire shape. The inflation rate was 7 or 800 percent. I guess I had been there for not quite a year-- I arrived in September, and the new government was to be changed in August of the next year. So, maybe we had 11 months of remaining in the Garcia lame-duck government.

I went to see the governor of the Central Bank to talk about economic policy, and he was the one that was one of the major problems in terms of economic policy. He said, "Look, I can guarantee you that we will ensure that between now and August, the inflation rate will not exceed 1,000 percent."

And I said, "Have you thought about doing the following X, Y, and Z measures?"

He said, "Oh, no, we just want to keep it down below 1,000 percent." At that point, I decided it was hopeless to deal with people that were not focused on solving the problem. So, we spent a lot of time working with a group of economists and political scientists on

developing structural readjustment programs that a new government might wish to consider.

By chance, one of the candidates for presidency was the head of an agricultural university that AID was supporting. I had become acquainted with this individual fairly early on. In what was quite surprising, he ended up – President Alberto Fujimori – winning the election. The embassy had had no contact with him, and I’ll never forget, election night, the chargé said, “Can you get me an appointment with him?” And I called him up, and managed to talk my way into an appointment so he could say, “I’ve met with the president-elect, and this is what he had to say.”

Q: Just a moment of context, I had left Costa Rica in '88, and I was in the Secretary's office as a staffer at this time, when Fujimori was elected. So, I was seeing all kinds of stuff coming through the Secretary's office like, "Who is this guy?" and the subsequent Fuji-shock that Peru would go through. So, at least in the international media, Peru was again getting a lot of attention.

BUCK: Right. In fact, when we met with Fujimori that night, he gave us a copy of *Time Magazine* that he had been reading that had an article on the election and what little they knew about him. He had added and underlined where they had quoted him. So, we had what turned out to be at least someone that we knew, and that we had had a relationship with coming into the presidency. But of course, I think most of the international community and many of the Western-oriented people were focused on, what's his name?

Q: The writer.

BUCK: Losada?

Q: Mario Vargas –

BUCK: Mario Vargas Llosa, In fact, he had been an acquaintance of ours, and basically everyone in the US community knew him. The expectation was that he would win the election, but he didn't. As it turned out, Fujimori brought in a group of technocrats, and a lot of the work that we had done in terms of what Peru needed to do to restructure its economy and move away from the crisis it was in towards growth, Fujimori adopted. One of my staff members – he moved him in as the assistant secretary of finance. Another one he moved in as one of the principal advisers working on debt issues at the Central Bank. So, some of our personnel went into this, but it was not all roses.

Q: One more quick second about Mario Vargas Llosa. The other interesting thing about him is that he's one of the very last of these Latin American figures who was believed to be, because of his intelligence, because he had a little bit of intellectual depth – he was a writer, and he had been well known in the world of arts and – He had a sort of reputation

as a thinker. This was the very end of those kinds of public intellectuals in Latin America, who just on the strength of their reputation and the respect that they got as artists or in these kind of public writing fields, could run for office seriously and be taken seriously. Pretty much after that, you didn't see these kinds of –

BUCK: The last of the Renaissance man.

Q: So, I didn't mean to direct your story, but he really was one of the very last who could claim to be that kind of person.

BUCK: Well, his loss of the election was very much like the recent election in the United States: everybody expected someone else to win. All of the polls were showing that he would win, and then election night – So, it has something to say about democracy. We might not like the results, but that's the way people have spoken.

Q: But you were saying that, happily, at least for USAID in Peru, you had ins with a number of the ministries and the individuals who were now going to be making decisions on the economy.

BUCK: That's right. So, we were able to assist in staffing up. We were able to provide them with technical guidance and technical assistance, and of course, I think everyone was glad that the Garcia years were behind us, and let's be supportive of the new president. So, during the honeymoon, things were working quite well. For the first year, the economy began to stabilize. The country began to stabilize. Inflation rates went down drastically. Terrorism continued to be an issue, but then, with respect to our relationship with Fujimori earlier there had been problems.

Some people in the AID mission had had problems with the president of the university. They had let their tongues wag a bit too much about their concerns about this president and how he would function as the president. I was very close to the minister of agriculture, who was an insider with the president, and I got along with the president's brother. They let me know that the president had concerns about the contracts that we had working with that university. A U.S. university had been working since 1954 with the Peruvian Agricultural University that Fujimori had headed.

The president wanted some of the people associated with that and that contract out. So, I was caught in a very difficult position. Ultimately, the head of that American university came down, and I took him in to meet the president. The ambassador was out of the country, so he was unable to be there. But basically, it was interesting – The president would not say directly, "I want this group out, and I want these people out," but he spoke in parables. He mentioned that one can only get a certain amount of juice out of a fruit, and after a fruit has been around for a while and you've squeezed it and gotten everything

out of it, then it's time to let it go. Similarly, with a university relationship, you get as much as you can, but after a while that is no longer productive.

So, I ended up having to go back and get rid of that U.S. university, which was quite difficult as they had strong Congressional backing. Then, not too long after that, I had – One night, the assistant secretary was coming down to Peru, along with the AID assistant administrator for Latin America and a group of other senior personnel. While they were en route, President Fujimori, who had been fighting with the Congress over passage of a number of the policies that he wished to adopt and they stymied him – He abolished Congress, in what we called the “self-coup.”

I'll never forget that night: When they landed, the news had just gone off. I mean, it was late at night when he announced this, and they got off the plane at midnight. So, there we were at the Ambassador's Residence, trying to figure out what to do with all of the meetings we had planned with senior officials and the president for the next day – We had to rethink. So, I was asked the next day to sit down with the AID assistant administrator and figure out what we would do, because we decided that night, and we sorted out the next day how to actually execute it, to terminate all non-narcotic assistance to the government of Peru.

Q: Because, again, this particular act was not constitutional. It's not like he's a president dissolving parliament.

BUCK: Right. No, basically he just got rid of it. He totally eliminated them, and did not call for any sort of election to replace it, so these were dictatorial sorts of controls. So, the next day, the assistant administrator and I sat down. At that point, our overall program – Sorry, we decided that we would terminate all assistance except for narcotics and those that had a humanitarian nature. So, when we looked at our program, we very quickly defined 95 percent of our program as being narcotics or humanitarian assistance-related. So, while we could say that we were terminating assistance, the actual impact was minimal.

Q: Interesting. Did you end up being able to get any meetings with significant people on that trip?

BUCK: As I recall, I think the ambassador and Aronson went in to see the president. I can't recall – Well, they decided after that to get back on the plane, and then they left. I can't recall for certain. I'd have to do some research. But I think they did meet with the president and explain to him that we thought this was an unconstitutional measure that was uncalled for and that he needed to take immediate action to remedy the situation.

Anyhow, as it turned out, the president continued to move on the economic reform front, and then he also had been heavily engaged in efforts to address the guerilla problem.

MRTA had been largely eliminated. Measures that they took to do this were not something that human rights supporters would look positively on. Similarly, against Sendero, they were quite ruthless in their efforts.

But several nights before I was to leave Peru – I'd been there not quite three years – the ambassador had a supper for me, and we had the foreign minister, the minister of finance, the government of the Central Bank, the ambassador, and three or four others there. The ambassador got up to take a phone call, and he came back, and he asked to talk with people. Everyone got quiet, and he said that Abimael Guzman had been captured. He had just gotten word from some of our personnel. So, I left on a high note, that the security issues were being very positively addressed.

Q: Right. Because once Guzman had been taken, it was only a matter of time. The Sendero were not like some other terrorist organizations, where they could regroup and create small cells and keep themselves alive. He was really the heart of the movement. Once he was taken, it was downhill from there for the Sendero.

BUCK: The thing is that Sendero had really stymied a lot of our activities, our agricultural development activities, our work on health care, it had all been held back because of attacks and, in fact, while I was there, the Sendero murdered three Japanese technical assistance people and MRTA was blowing up everything that they could possibly blow up.

I guess on the other hand, there were some fairly positive things that we accomplished while we were there. We were working very closely with the Ministry of Health in terms of improving the quality of their primary healthcare activities, ensuring that all children had immunizations, ensuring that oral rehydration salts were available. So, I think we were a very positive impact on the health care.

We had a massive food distribution program, Food for Peace, and activities supporting food needs of people. We of course had fairly large education and agricultural education activities. So, our program had an impact. I think it made a major contribution to development. But I really look at the efforts that we made on the economic reform side of things as being the most important critical issues that we were addressing. And basically, having a dialogue with the government, working with them on which directions they should go economically and why they should adopt market solutions.

Q: I would say that one indicator of your success in that overall sort of macroeconomic restructuring is that when Alan Garcia comes back to run again –

BUCK: He didn't bother to change any of those.

Q: In other words, it had really become part of the economy, and essentially there were more average people with a stake in the market economy from the time you left, as Peru slowly begins to grow again.

BUCK: And I think another thing that we worked on was the whole justice system. While I don't think that our efforts in terms of individual liberties were all that successful, I think the work that we did in terms of commercial law, being able to establish the rule of law, contract law, working so that people understood the legal system and could work within it –

One of the most, I think, unique things that we worked with was the Institute of Liberty and Democracy and Hernando de Soto. That was a relationship that we had established before I got there, but we really deepened it. We had a 10 or 12-million-dollar activity to support his work. As it turned out, initially he was an adviser to President Fujimori, and I spoke with him and met with him almost daily on activities that he was involved with.

I think there are two things that kind of impressed me that they were involved in: One was land registration and registration of your property. Heretofore, many people had looked at registration of land as being something that involved huge cadasters and measurements and doing plats and involving lots of government bureaucrats and lots of papers. Well, they had come up with a program that was simplified and met the real needs, because when people owned their property, they could borrow against it. They could invest in it. It was not something that could be taken from them. But if they were squatters, they could be moved out tomorrow. So, having your own property title was vital.

So, they came up with a program that just involved somebody walking around with an iPad and talking with people, like, “Your property stops here and where does your neighbor's begin?” And then they said, “Okay, fine. You own this plot from this tree to that creek. And the next guy owns it from that creek, over to that road.”

So, people then got titles and deeds to their property that they could then use. That was so vital and so important, and the way that they approached it in doing it in such a simple manner – Hernando used to say, “Every dog knows where his master's property starts and ends, so why do you need someone to measure it down to the last centimeter when everybody knows that at that tree is where your property stops?”

The second thing that we were supporting was called administrative simplification. In some of the research that Hernando did early on, they came up with 120 or 140 steps that were required to get a business license. Of course, at each point, there were people with their fingers out and their hands out. So, he came up with a system whereby every office needed to have an established set of procedures when they worked with the public and it

had to be published. If you want a permit, this is the form you fill out, this is what you have to pay, and we will promise to process it in X days.

Every Saturday, Fujimori would have a marathon open telephone program, whereby people would call in and say, “I went to the Ministry of X and tried to get a permit or document Y and they asked for X. And they didn’t have procedures.” And the next thing you know, you’d hear the president pick up the phone and call the minister of X and say, “What the hell is going on?” So, that’s a simplistic way of putting it, but it was an effort to try and make government transparent, make it predictable, and let people know they had a stake in it.

Q: Right. So now, you are in Peru from –

BUCK: ’89 to ’92. Then towards the summer and fall of 1992 – Well, the Soviet Union had collapsed in, I believe, ’91. The government was thinking about what we could do in terms of working with them on the economic front. I got a phone call from the assistant administrator saying they wanted me to go to Central Asia, and the only thing I remembered about Central Asia was a colleague of mine in graduate school who was doing demographic work on the Muslims in Central Asia.

Other than that, I knew absolutely nothing about Central Asia. Because we had a very close relationship with senior government officials, the ambassador and State made a major effort to keep me there, but I was advised to go to Central Asia, so that’s where I ended up next.

Q: Before we go on with you to Central Asia, did USAID provide you with any training or any preparation? Because the two areas couldn’t be more different, at least culturally.

BUCK: No, that was the unfortunate thing. The administration decided that we were going to have economic assistance programs in the former Soviet Union, and that we were going to initiate them immediately, and it was time to move on. In fact, the assistant secretary for Latin America tried to get the acting secretary to keep me there in Peru, and Larry Eagleburger said, “Peru is important, but the Soviet Union is our highest foreign policy priority. Tell Craig to get on the plane.” So, off I went. I had a couple of months of Russian language training.

Q: So, at least you could recognize signs and street names.

BUCK: Barely. So, I guess the first of 1993 I arrived in Almaty, Kazakhstan as the head of all of our programs in Central Asia. So, I had Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan under my wing.

Q: That’s a pretty big chunk of territory.

BUCK: It was. It was probably a third of the former Soviet Union in area, and we were enormous pressure to get activities started. When I arrived, and in fact, I give Richard Armitage, who was a deputy secretary at that time and the head of our assistance program for the former Soviet Union – He had come up an act that he had just managed to get through Congress, an amendment to the Foreign Assistance Act authorizing assistance for the former Soviet Union. That provided the legal basis for us to go in and work with them.

As an initial down payment on that, with the collapse of the Soviet Union, as you may recall, there was the collapse of the economies and many of the social services were no longer available; medicines were one of the primary shortages that they had. So, the United States had pulled together large amounts of medicines and drugs from the military, CDC (Center for Disease Control and Prevention) and other sources, and was shipping them, and that was basically the thing I got onto initially, was the distribution of these commodities.

Q: That's really remarkable. It's not a part of the assistance program that you typically remember, because so much of it ends up being economic in nature that you sometimes forget about some of the basic living condition issues.

Q: Okay. Today is October 11th. We're resuming our interview with Craig Buck as he arrives in Central Asia for the new portfolio in the former Soviet Union.

BUCK: I arrived in Almaty on January 3rd, 1993, one of the colder evenings of the year, and immediately met with Ambassador Courtney, the first US ambassador to Kazakhstan, to discuss what we might be able to do. When I was in Washington, I had met with Richard Armitage, who was the Freedom Support Act coordinator and its main author.

And while it was never clearly articulated, just from the discussions that I had had and the contacts that I had made, it was quite apparent that what we wanted to do was to ensure that these Central Asian countries continued as politically independent; that they became viable entities; that they became economically independent from the former Soviet Union, or actually from Russia, as it turned out; and that we worked on developing their movement towards democratic civil societies. It was never clearly articulated as such, but basically just reading through the Act and discussions gave me this background.

In the meantime, the United States had initiated a massive airlift of pharmaceuticals, drugs, and other urgently needed items to the countries of the former Soviet Union, and we spent a lot of time arranging for the delivery of these commodities. This was a supply-driven approach. We had excess commodities; we had things that were expiring; and we assumed that the former Soviet Union was like the United States, and would have the

need for drugs A, B, C, and D, although as it turned out, drugs A, B, C, and D were in many instances unknown in the former Soviet Union.

So, we had to do a lot of rejiggering of commodities and trying to get the proper ones delivered but I think the initial activities we were involved in were the delivery of these, and showing that the American people cared that these countries were new independent and we wanted to help alleviate their suffering. The health systems had failed, and we wanted to be of assistance to them.

Q: The failures of the systems at this moment after the Soviet Union collapses: Is it because it had been very centralized and, sort of, everything went through Moscow or through a few regional centers, and without those regional centers directing things, many smaller locations just didn't get commodities of all kinds? What was the principal collapse that that caused this humanitarian need?

BUCK: Well, I think it was the breakdown of the systems and institutions that had existed under the former Soviet Union. For example, health care had been by and large directed from Moscow. Budgets had been allocated by Moscow. And they met the needs as they were envisioned. But with the breakup and the need for these countries to develop their own budgeting systems, to understand that people in a village, with a certain hope lost, would need to have their hospital and their health care center budgeted for, and resources delivered.

The system failed to work, and that occurred not only, for example, in the health care but kind of across the board. The retirement system, the pension system – which had been quite adequate under the Soviet Union, and took care of the later days for people as they retired – broke down. And then we had massive inflation that ensued, and the budgeting system did not catch up with the rate of inflation, and people who had heretofore drawn an adequate pension to sustain themselves, found it was no longer sustainable. Similarly, government, or industries, that had not operated on the basis of efficiency but on the basis of what they were directed to produce, what their quotas were, were no longer given instructions. Furthermore, they lost their markets. As they lost their markets, they also lost their sources of inputs, and so it was a breakdown in all of the institutions.

At the same time, new market forces were beginning to become apparent, and many people, I would say, – particularly in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, where the government allowed this to happen – began to respond to the market forces. Whenever an industry saw that it needed inputs, a resourceful entrepreneur at that industry would figure out how to get it because the old source had broken down, no longer available. And they used economic power, corruption, and currency to pay for the resources if they need – Similarly, as their markets were lost, or no longer available, entrepreneurs look for new ways to get rid of their goods or to sell their goods, and for new markets.

Q: Did you find, as this is taking place, that this sort of became the wild East, in that entrepreneurs from other countries thought, at least, they saw opportunities to get in and

somehow get contracts with at least some of the larger production facilities and work out deals, legal or otherwise?

BUCK: Well, particularly in the case of Kazakhstan. Kazakhstan has enormous hydrocarbon resources, and US and international companies were in there even before I arrived, and I arrived probably six or seven months after independence had been declared. They were there, and quickly established relationships with Kazakhstani companies, which were re-creations of companies that had existed under the Soviet Union. They were very quick to sign deals for the exploration and development of oil and gas fields.

The same thing occurred, to some extent, in Turkmenistan which has quite large gas resources. But those are the only two in the hydrocarbons area. However, other companies came in and saw the opportunities that were there. In the agricultural field, a lot of – I was surprised to see a number of firms that were interested, primarily in selling farm implements, or selling new varieties of seeds, fertilizers, and these sorts of things, but people came in looking for opportunities. Other companies in, let's say telecommunications, established deals, and as we found out in the case of Uzbekistan, they were not exactly aboveboard transactions. But there was significant interest.

One of the interesting things were the Turks. Turkey looked back to the days of the Great Migration, in which the Turkish ancestors had come from the Ural Altai region, and had migrated through Central Asia, and had populated all of the countries except for Tajikistan. So, they were quite eager to re-establish their relationship, and show that they were, as they called themselves, the big brother now. This, culturally, did not sit well with the people who looked at the Turks as, “We made it successful here, and you wandered on because you couldn't hack it.” But, nonetheless, the Turks came in, and in a whole variety of areas, from consumer goods to construction and transport and a number of sectors, and very quickly tried to establish their power.

At the same time, Iran was also very heavily involved in Central Asia. The largest embassy in Almaty, when we started, was the Iranian embassy, and they were of course interested in exerting their political and religious influence. So, yes, people saw opportunities – or, other countries and firms saw opportunities. It was a Wild West atmosphere. The commercial codes, as we know it, hardly existed. The rules of incorporation, contract law, bankruptcy were relatively unknown. Trading procedures and training regimes were outdated, and people were making deals, and officials were being paid, and commerce occurred. Really, in my time, in the three years that I spent in Central Asia, in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, we saw a major transformation. Kazakhstan – When I first arrived, we used to talk about – The only thing that was available in the market were Snickers, Fanta, and vodka, and by the time I left there were goods that we would know – clothes, food, restaurants, cars, electronic goods, etc.

They were extremely difficult to secure early on, but very quickly, these economies became more open, and goods became available, and housing – which had been extremely difficult to secure initially – When I left three years later, the private sector

was investing in communities and new developments that they were financing. So, we saw a major sea change, and particularly in these two countries. We were – going back to what we as the United States were doing – very heavily involved initially in the health sector. But the developmental issues were energy, and we are quite involved in developing energy policy for these countries, helping them think it through and develop their own regulatory systems.

In the management of water resources – The countries of Central Asia had extremely distorted development because of the Soviet Union production quota system, and in the southern part of Central Asia, cotton was king, and the countries were expected to produce massive quantities of cotton and deliver it to Moscow. As a result, the water-use was distorted, and large, new areas were opened up where cotton would grow and water resources – which, for example, had flown into the Aral Sea – were depleted and used for irrigation. So, similarly, we had energy shortages in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, but the potential for hydropower, the development of greater hydropower. However, this required a balance between water usage for irrigation, and water for power, so we spent a lot of effort on this. And it required developing a productive working relationship between the countries of Central Asia. Heretofore, they had looked to Moscow to resolve these issues, but all of a sudden, they were having to deal with each other.

For example, Uzbekistan had extremely high demand for water. The source of that water was Kyrgyzstan. Kyrgyzstan had an energy deficit, and a water surplus. And so how did you strike a balance between that? So, those are the issues that we dealt with, as well as broader issues of economic policy; working with the Central Bank, helping train their people, helping understand their needs, or opening up their currency regimes. Those were the – I guess one of the other areas that we were heavily involved in – One was privatization, where in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, we had large teams working with governments to set up the privatization programs.

And the other concern was on the democratization, human rights, free press, civic responsibility – This was an area where the countries were very concerned about us working. A free press did not exist in any of the countries. Government-official news was the only news. So, I think the areas where we did have some success was in the development of civil society, helping develop organizations that would express the needs of people, and articulate their needs to government. The former Soviet Union controlled organizations by not allowing any organization to exist that was not official. We spent a lot of time, particularly in Kazakhstan, working with them to have a law to recognize non-governmental organizations.

I'll never forget trying to articulate the rationale and the need for this to the office director for the United States in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. I explained why they needed civic organizations, and what they could do to help make this a better country, and they said, “We can't have non-governmental organizations; here all organizations are governmental.” Conceptually, the idea of having a non-governmental organization, of space for civil society, was inconceivable. We finally were able to get them to articulate and to enact a law for non-governmental organizations, but this was difficult.

Organizations including the International Republican Institute and National Democratic Institute all had problems. They had problems with not being able to get registered, problems with bank accounts, problems with their personnel, problems with visas. We spent an inordinate amount of time trying to establish the conditions to enable civil society to flourish.

Q: Of course, because typically it's USAID (United States Agency for International Development) who works with IDI (Intercultural Development Inventory) and NDI (National Democratic Institute). Not so much the embassy.

BUCK: Well, this was, I would say, a – We were all part of the team. So, what we were doing was something that had broad endorsement by the ambassador, and by the ambassadors in all five of the countries. So, it was part of a broader country-specific strategy that we were helping to implement.

Q: Now, the other aspect of establishing, you know, a new country, is also the transparency in government, because that flows directly into establishing open markets and, you know, so on. How did that go in the period you were there?

BUCK: It was difficult. We worked in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan on the judicial system, trying to help the branch understand the need for independence, the need for transparency. This was difficult, because they were still top-down, executive branch-directed systems, and it was extremely difficult to change. We could get a lot of people that understood what we believed, and the system that we had, and how it had been so successful, but it was – We were moving upstream.

Q: Same with government procurement, I imagine.

BUCK: Government procurement... Yes. We never – We got involved in that when we were working on privatization, because by the time I got to Central Asia, Russia was fairly heavily involved in its own privatization program, which we all knew had major problems. So, we spent a lot of time in the privatization program we worked with in Central Asia to develop transparent regulations, to come up with systems that had the rule of law written into them, rather than of arbitrary decision making on the part of government bureaucrats. So, that was where we got involved on the procurement side of things.

Q: Were there other international players that also took roles? In other words, over time, as you began to see where your relative competitive advantage was as an assistance organization, did you also work with, you know, World Bank, or other donors?

BUCK: We, of course, worked very closely with both the Bank and the International Monetary Fund, and in all of the countries, the bank led consultative groups for these countries. In fact, the first one that I attended was in Brussels, even before I arrived in Kazakhstan. So, they – The Bank and the Fund viewed themselves as being responsible

for working with the countries on charting the economic policies and helping them execute them.

What we found in Central Asia, as in many other areas, was they were long on hortatory rhetoric, but short on specific guidance and assistance. The IFIs in most countries, they had a relatively small staff. They were unlike the U.S. government, which had a decentralized approach to development by giving the field autonomy and responsibility for developing and executing a program. Bank and Fund activities were directed from Washington, and executed by teams that would come out and spend two to three weeks on the ground and would not return for another four to six months. Without the constant oversight and prodding, it was difficult for them to provide the long-term continuity that was required. But to give them credit, I think the Bank and the Fund both – their policy prescriptions and their analysis was first class, and it was very helpful to us. I spent a lot of time with the resident representatives and with their staff when they came in from Washington.

So, we were in – at least in Central Asia – I think in lockstep with them. Although, I found there, and even much more so later in the Balkans, a reluctance to push for rapid economic reforms and change. I always – Many times, I felt that we in the United States government were out urging a modification of policies that the Bank and Fund would support, but they were more, “Let's take it easy. Let's not push. Let's not set as short a deadline as you want.”

Q: This is an interesting argument, because I can tell you, just from a very small experience that I had working at the OSCE while you were there in Central Asia, that our instructions – No matter what the detailed instructions were, the overall instruction was, “Do not let the collapse of the Soviet Union revert.”

BUCK: Right.

Q: That was the overall instruction. “Do whatever you need to make sure that the changes and the reforms are permanent.” And moving quickly was part of that. The notion in Washington, at least in those initial years, was move as quickly as possible, lock in as much as you can. We don't know if there will be a backlash. And so here you see this. And then, of course, with 20/20 hindsight, some people say, “Well, you moved too fast.” Well, it was. It was too difficult for these countries, these former communist countries or formerly centrally planned economies to move as quickly as you expected. Looking back, what do you think about that argument?

BUCK: Well, I think you've articulated it quite well. Our objective was to ensure that they do not revert to the Soviet Union style, and that they remain independent and autonomous entities, and that they cooperate with each other. So, I think that the pace that we moved at was consistent with our broader foreign policy objective. Now, one can argue that perhaps we should have pushed a lot harder on the area of human rights, and we should have pushed more – Well, I think the reality is, given our budget levels, given the staffing levels that we have, given the people that we had to work with – I think we

did about as good a job as one could expect. I mean, we could have flooded the country with many more experts or advisers, but would we have accomplished anything significantly different? I'm not convinced that we would.

Q: In Kazakhstan, was the beginnings of the notion of moving the capital – Did that affect any of your operations?

BUCK: Well, it did, ultimately. After I left, some of our operation moved with the Embassy up to Astana. But I think the interesting thing that occurred was, Kazakhstan was trying to cope, at independence, with the fact that less than half the people spoke Kazakh, and 40% of the population was of Russian origin. They had, potentially, a very large irredentist movement in, basically, the northern two-thirds of the country. Everybody had been educated in Russian and in the Soviet system, and there was a lot of nostalgia for things that did work under that system. But, on the other hand, they viewed themselves as independent and that now the Kazakhstanis were in control, whereas previously the Russians had been in control.

But because of the Kazakhstani people – I think the Kyrgyz, too – are pragmatic. They were of nomadic origin; they were unsettled. They never really bought into strong ideologies. While they were nominally Muslim, they never had mosques, because nomads don't settle down long enough to have the need for a mosque. So, their religion was certainly modest, I guess, if I had to characterize it. And so, at independence, they were trying to think of how they could best bridge the fact that they were now independent and in control of their national destiny. At that time, only some 60% of the population was of Kazakhstani origin, and yet they had had a good relationship with Russians, Germans, Tatars, Koreans, and others that made up Kazakhstan's citizens for over 50 years.

And so, in typical pragmatic fashion, for example, they developed a constitution in the first year I was there. And what do they do about the national language? Well, they declared Kazakh the national language, but since most people didn't speak it, they also named the Russian as the language of inter-ethnic communication. So, they said, "At some point in the future, Kazakh will be required for everything, but we'll decide when in the future." Now, still, here it is, 2019, and where will it be in another 20-25 years later? And people still continue in Russian.

So, that was an interest that we had, and one of the things that happened is that a lot of skilled people left. The Germans – Many of the Germans – In fact, virtually all Germans – Stalin had used Kazakhstan as a dumping ground. He had taken every group that he had a problem with and had shipped them to Kazakhstan, kicked them off the train, and said, "You're on your own." So, there was a large diaspora of Tatars, Ukrainians, Germans, Koreans, and others that he had suspected of conniving with the Nazis. He had moved them to Kazakhstan. So, many of them, at least from the European side, moved back.

Q: Yeah, that's a bit I didn't remember about Kazakhstan. Now, what about training? Did USAID undertake any training programs that either brought Kazakhs to the U.S. or brought experts to Kazakhstan in various fields?

BUCK: Virtually all the programs that we had were focused on acquainting Kazakhstan with Western practices and values. We spent a lot of time taking people to the United States for both short- and long-term programs. I give President Nazarbayev credit for recognizing the significance of this. And here, 25 years later, in the university that he has established in his own name, the language of instruction is English. The former communist party school in Kazakhstan became KIMet, the Kazakhstan Institute of Management's language was in English, and it had a Korean American dean.

The President established a scholarship program using Kazakhstani resources to send – I don't know how many, but massive numbers of Kazakhstanis to the West, for several years or more of training. So, it has had a very significant impact on changing the outlook of people, and how people perceive a modern market economy. It hasn't had so much impact on polity and the political side, but on the economic side, they were people that, basically, we could communicate with.

Q: So, did – During the period of time you were there, did things begin to get better? Was there a general feeling among the population that this was a good direction to go in, although, you know, there might always be fits and starts?

BUCK: If you were to measure by the election results, of course everybody was very much in favor of the direction Nazarbayev was headed. But no, I think what we saw is, there were a period of about 18 months of the real breakdown of the former Soviet Union, with high rates of inflation, with currency being devalued, with the government unable to deliver services, with people really destitute. But very quickly, and I don't know whether you could attribute this to the entrepreneurial spirit of the people, and the fact that the government really gave them a lot of latitude in solving problems – Uzbekistan, on the other hand, didn't do nearly as well. Its growth rate was not nearly as rapid as Kazakhstan, because they continued to attempt to control the economy. Industries were still subject to the quota system and production norms and production requirements, and unlike Kazakhstan, really allowed the market forces to develop. But in Kazakhstan, the transition was quite rapid.

Q: Since you were responsible for the five central Asians, and obviously Uzbekistan was sort of bottom of the five, how did you see the other three? I know Tajikistan had a great deal of internal unrest in that period and, you know, each one of them had, sort of, some unique aspect that affected how they were going to develop.

BUCK: Right. Tajikistan had had a quite large civil war just before I arrived there, and in fact, the embassy had been evacuated. Actually, the Ambassador was a resident in Almaty when I arrived. So, it was having its internal problems. Subsequently, Rachmaninoff came to power, and established quite an authoritarian regime, and we worked with them on health system reform. But I had very little impact on other areas,

because the government was focused on maintaining itself in power at the time I was there. They were really not concerned too much with developmental issues. The engine of the economy, in addition to cotton and to some extent power, was an aluminum plant that was an enormous, environmentally tragic thing. But it made use of the abundance of hydropower that Tajikistan had.

In Tajikistan, our ability to affect where things went was limited, just because of the political issues. Turkmenistan was probably the least reformist of all the areas, and it was able to capitalize on the very large natural gas resources that it had. I just noticed in the paper the other day that Turkmenistan has finally decreed that people must pay for water, sewage, utilities, and electricity, which heretofore had been, as in most of the other former Soviet Union countries, provided free. So, it was a long way from establishing a market economy.

Q: And of course, Turkmenbashi and that whole cult of personality that he developed couldn't have been a particularly helpful direction to go in if what you're trying to do is, you know, modernize the country.

BUCK: That was, I guess, one of the areas that I spent an enormous amount of time doing: meeting with the senior economic officials in these countries, discussing economic policy reforms and directions that they should consider taking to improve the lives of their people. And in some areas and sometimes, they would approach it taking ginger steps. In Uzbekistan, we did get to make some efforts at privatization. We did work with them to finally adopt an independent currency. They were still using the ruble, as many of the countries were, and until two years after the fall of the Soviet Union, when they established their own currency. So, I just think that – With the Bank and the Fund, we spent a lot of time talking with them on the need for reform. But they – In Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, and I also think Kazakhstan, the bottom line was maintenance in power for those who were there.

Q: What about Kyrgyzstan? You haven't mentioned Kyrgyzstan yet.

BUCK: Kyrgyzstan was one that had had “democratic elections”, and so it was the poster child of where these countries should be heading. We had a fairly large program with the Central Bank to develop the capacity to move on its new currency and to manage it appropriately, to establish a banking system that was independent and properly regulated and supervised, and I think that was one of the greatest success stories that we had. We had a significant privatization program, and so Kyrgyzstan moved very quickly to adapt many of the reforms.

The problem with Kyrgyzstan is that it is so isolated. It was just like Tajikistan. It was the farthest from Moscow, and it had very few indigenous natural resources. It had hydropower that it could sell to Uzbekistan and Uzbekistan would pay for it, but of course they didn't have any hard currency to pay with so, you know, they were up the old creek.

But Kyrgyzstan did undertake, economically, many of the steps that we were recommending. But politically, it had its problems, and President Akayev, the first democratically elected president, subsequently was overthrown. As it turned out, in terms of the traditional sort of corruption, that had been prevalent in so many of the other countries and had been there, too.

Q: All right. Now, you're there from '93 to '97?

BUCK: Yes.

Q: Okay, so –

BUCK: Oh, no. '93 to '95.

Q: Okay.

BUCK: In '95, I got a phone call from Brian Atwood, who was the AID administrator at the time. One of the things that we had been seeing in the news, but I had been paying very little attention to, was the wars in the Balkans, and the Serbs versus the Bosniaks versus the Croats. That was something that you kind of overheard on the TV or on the news, but I didn't pay any attention to it. At that point, they were negotiating the Dayton Peace Accords with Ambassador Holbrooke. Atwood called and said, "It looks like the peace accord may be signed, and we'll have peace in the former Yugoslavia. So, would you go there and do a quick assessment, and suggest what USAID and the U.S. government should do if peace breaks out?"

So, in all naiveté, I jumped on the plane, went to Bosnia, still in the middle of the war – even though they were negotiating a peace agreement, they were still fighting. Well, there was a ceasefire, but I got shot at out jogging one morning in Sarajevo. So, I travelled around the country, took a look, and three weeks later I went back to Washington and met with Brian and his senior personnel. I suggested a program that I thought would be appropriate, and which would require him coming up with some budget resources, etcetera. They say, in all my naiveté, Brian listened to this and asked a number of questions, and we spent a couple of hours there. And at the end of the conversation he said, "Well, I agree with it. I want you to go there and set up a program."

I said, "I'm sorry, I just went there to give you an idea as to what might make sense."

Then he said, "Well, this is really important."

"All right." So, I didn't return to Central Asia and went straight to Bosnia to set up our program there, and by the time I arrived, the Dayton Peace Accord had been signed about a week or so earlier. So, this was, administratively another nightmare. I did not discuss on the Central Asian side our administrative and management issues, but I think to understand what we did, one needs to understand the overall management issues that we had. We could not get personnel. It was only when –

Q: And here, again, you're going back to the mission in Central Asia.

BUCK: Central Asia, but also in in Bosnia and every other USAID mission that I opened. Our problem was that that AID did not have a system to recognize urgent priorities and mobilize resources to address them. And so, in Central Asia, just as in Bosnia, they said, "Craig, you set up a mission. You get it running. You make it work." Well, that's fine, but I need personnel. The personnel system says that most people turn over in the summer time, and I can't go and get people out of line. Which meant that I had to move heaven and earth, pleading and cajoling and urging other bureaus, and talking with senior management then. And of course, I couldn't involve the AID administrator in every single personnel decision, but in many instances, I did have to get him. You know, you have to break an assignment. "I need this person, and I need them now."

And so, fortunately, by the time I got to Afghanistan – or, after I left Afghanistan – AID did establish a process whereby they could more rapidly move people. But it's still broken. We are dismally deficient in being able to respond to national priorities. Similarly, personnel security was one of the major critical issues, but we did not have a capacity to provide our own security. We did not have a capacity to get armored vehicles. We couldn't get office space. We were supposed to abide by all the Foreign Affairs regulations, with respect to security and housing and office space, but, I'm sorry, where's your army to do all these things?

"You, Craig, are responsible for doing this, and you're on your own. And we will criticize you when it does not meet our standards, but we're not going to give you the personnel to set it up." So, in Central Asia, Bosnia, Kosovo, Montenegro, Afghanistan, I went through this five different times, being held responsible for doing something that, basically, Washington did not have the capacity to provide for. Anyhow, in Bosnia the most urgent issue was the humanitarian program, and the United States had, with UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees), really enabled large numbers of people to continue to live during the fighting. We provided the food, we provided the medical care, we provided the water; the real essential human needs. As with the peace process, we needed to ensure that people continued to have the humanitarian assistance, but they needed to move very rapidly towards independence and self-production.

So, we looked at the key issues. To me, there were three things that we needed to do: One, we needed to get people employed by the private sector as quickly as possible. So, to generate employment, there were large numbers of industries that had been private, or semi-private, or government owned but responding to market forces in the Balkans as opposed to responding to central government dictates. So, we worked on establishing private, commercial banks; providing them with credit resources; helping them analyze and make decisions on loans, and make loans with credit with resources that we provided to private entities so that they could get up and running.

Q: Let me go back and step with you. You arrived in – Is it Sarajevo?

BUCK: Yes.

Q: Okay. In 1995?

BUCK: 1995.

Q: Okay. So, right after the Accord. And now you are in a new country that was established by the Dayton Accord, with all of the issues of the different ethnic groups or the different communities, and you're now trying to get industries and the economy back on its feet, so that, you know, you can at least have employment, and begin generating regenerating the economy.

BUCK: Right.

Q: Okay. And on top of that, part of your problem is, you're doing this without all of the typical USAID expertise that you can lay your hands on as quickly as you need to. Now, those would be the direct hires. What about also some of the – Were you able to get in, you know, contractors and various others that USAID typically – ?

BUCK: Yes. I'll give AID credit. While I had problems institutionally, there were a number of individuals who understood the priority and the urgency of what we did. So, on the economic side, to get a contractor to work on the banking system, and credit to private companies, and generate employment, we developed a project and put it together – something that is a normal 18-month process within AID, we did in about three weeks. We put it together, and got our contract office to recognize the need for limiting competition, and we had a contractor on the ground, and we made our first loan, I believe, by the 1st of June of the following year. So, we went from our analysis and actually had everything, basically, in about three months' time.

Similarly, on the reconstruction side we recognized the need for a rapid infrastructure rehabilitation program to get the electricity, water, road, bridges, markets facilities, and power generation and transmission stations up and running quickly to get the economy moving. Again, just using good judgment about what would make sense and with the support of many radicals in Washington we were able to move the system and have a project for \$184 million signed with Bosnia, a contractor on the ground, and projects underway in less than four months. To avoid audit problems we built a concurrent USAID audit function into the program that USAID's Inspectors said after about a year that our controls and integrity was so effective there was no further need for them to audit on a day to day basis.

This activity was critical to getting fundamental infrastructure facilities back into operation quickly, to help address personal resettlement problems, or provide the resources fundamental to economic recovery.

Q: And that's definitely remarkable.

BUCK: I think a lot of that is due to some of the individuals in Washington who understood that Brian Atwood, who considered himself to be the Bosnia desk officer, said, "I want something to happen, and there's no excuse for holding back." So, the normal analysis that you do, the justifications that you do, we did not do. We did what, to me, was intuitively obvious. We're professionals, and we think we know what probably makes sense. And, in the end the activities we initiated had enormous impact on Bosnia's economic resuscitation, something we short-circuited by months or even years just by moving forward on what most would agree were the highest priorities.

But in all honesty, AID did not have a post-conflict capacity. AID was accustomed to working in developing countries, and was not accustomed to rapid post-crisis response. What do you do when you have a war, and you have an economy that is destroyed? When I first went to Bosnia, Washington asked all of its staff to give me recommendations of what we should do, and what they came up largely was the traditional AID approach: "Well, they need family planning, because family size is very important."

"Well, the education system is very important. We should work on education."

And, "Why don't we work on – Let's get preventive health care out there." Well, you know, the concept of, you know, hospitals didn't exist. Health care centers had all been destroyed in the war. So, we had to have a whole sea change in approach. I took most of the traditional recommendations and tossed them out the window.

Q: Before we go into the details, there were two other major players sitting in Sarajevo with you, which is the U.S. embassy, whenever it was finally established, and the administration established by the Dayton Accord. And that was quite a complex piece of negotiation, because you had the High Commissioner, and then the High Commissioner's various deputies, also doing all sorts of things. How did you lace up with all those different parts?

BUCK: First of all, we were there on the ground and working long before the UN had its organization set up. We were out making loans or, for example, in the other areas where we were working, we were way ahead, before they had their personnel on the ground. We were rehabilitating war-damaged infrastructure while the UN experts were still looking for their own housing and perquisites. However, we did make it a point that we would coordinate and work with them, that this was an international effort. We were one part of this effort – we obviously had our own particular interest, but we were all part of a broader international effort. On the economic sphere, the Special Representative quickly set up a weekly economic council, and the participants were the European Bank, UN (United Nations), World Bank, IMF, and USAID. We were all working together on the same broad economic policy basis.

Similarly, the OSCE (Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe) was responsible for the democratization side of things, and for elections. We seconded – AID seconded probably the best person that AID had, in terms of managing elections, to the OSCE, to help manage that process. So, you know, I guess we were all working together.

I believe another important factor to remember is that Ambassador Richard Holbrooke had authored the Dayton Peace Accord and had an enormous investment in making it successful. He came to Bosnia normally every 10-14 days after Dayton. In my first meeting with him he called me to the Presidency where he, Bosnian President Izetbegovic, the Foreign Minister, and many others were discussing immediate steps ahead. He asked me to explain what the USG would do for reconstruction, and I outlined the program I had discussed earlier with Brian Atwood. I also emphasize the conditions we would place on our assistance and the conditions they would need to meet. Holbrooke told the Bosnians to give close attention to these activities and to ensure they met conditions. He also told me that it was vital that the USG make these reconstruction efforts successful and that the US should look good by our performance.

Q: And then there's one other aspect of the relations that you're having, with the two autonomous entities within Bosnia. How did that work?

BUCK: Initially we did not work in Republika Srpska, and our approach was that Republika Srpska was not executing the stipulations in the Dayton Peace Accord, and consequently, we would not work with Republika Srpska. We had a fairly robust program working in the Bosniak and Croat areas. But because the RS failed to turn over war criminals, they were denying people the right to return, they were not providing evidence of war crimes, they continued to discriminate, we did not work there. However, about six months after the Dayton Accord the new president of Republika Srpska, Biljana Plavšić, began to break with the hardline – or hardliners, we called them – elements in Pale, which was the capital of the Republika Srpska at that time. She recognized, I think, that an approach of being hardline was going to isolate Republika Srpska.

She began to meet with us, and so with the agreement of the ambassador, we opened up our program to Republika Srpska. I drafted a very detailed cable for Washington that the Ambassador sent out that explained our rationale for moving into the RS, our expectations, the conditions we would place on our assistance, and how we would leverage it. On the ground in the RS as well as elsewhere in Bosnia we were very vocal and very open about where we had projects, why we were working there, we were only working in communities that are allowing refugees or internally displaced people to return. We're only working areas that were turning over indicted war criminals. We are not working in areas that actively promoted discrimination based upon ethnic or religious origin. We had a fairly rapid opening to Republika Srpska, with an effort to drive a wedge between hardliners in Pale and more responsible officials who saw the need for cooperation with the West. That proved to be successful, because ultimately Krajisnic, the prime minister and the various leaders – were ultimately isolated, and Plavsic who, at great peril and being under death threats moved the Serb Government to Banja Luka.

Anyhow, I think we, the United States, diplomatically and economically were able to support efforts to show that supporting the Dayton Peace Accords would bring tangible results to their communities.

Q: And that actually did slowly have an effect, both in Republika Srpska, and in the Bosnia-Croat Federation.

BUCK: In both areas, but in particular in the Federation areas, economic growth returned very quickly. I mean, here, you had, when we started, an unemployment rate of probably 80 percent, where GDP had was 1/4 of what it was when the war began. We had large numbers of people that were returning. There were many refugees that had gone to Europe or neighboring states, and they were returning.

But the economy began to get reactivated very quickly, and I think a large part of it has to do with the industrial sector getting going, along with the repair of war-damaged infrastructure that we were doing. The industrial sector had been fairly robust in the former Yugoslavia. They produced cars, they produced electronics, they produced a variety of goods. They were the main source of the Yugo Vehicle. We were able to get a lot of these industries running again. We attributed 25% of the GDP growth rate to the program that we had, and economic growth, as I recall, was nothing short of phenomenal. I mean, it doubled in the first year after the Peace Accord, and we had a major role in that.

As we began to open up to Republika Srpska, the economic and trading relationships that had existed before the war reopened. I'll give NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) credit for a lot of this because they were able to enforce freedom of movement across the IEBL – the Inter-Ethnic Boundary Line – which separated Republika Srpska from the Federation. Both sides, Serb and Bosniak, viewed the IEBL as a frontier, but NATO viewed that as simply a delineation between two entities as outlined in the Dayton Accord, and therefore NATO insisted on freedom of movement across the IEBL. For NATO, the IEBL was an imaginary line that they enforced freedom of movement across. So, businesses quickly resumed – The Bosnians were, like the Kazakhstanis, quite entrepreneurial, and they saw opportunities. They said, “I can go back to my old buddy up in Banja Luka and buy what I used to get and sell it down here.” Similarly, the Serbs saw the things that they could buy and trade in the Federation areas.

But one of the problems, for example, in this, was that each entity had a separate license plate. As soon as you would get across the line, they could tell, “Okay, you’re a Serb. You’re a Bosniak.” And wartime animosity could resume for some. One of the things that the UN did, was to ultimately say that there would be only a unitary license plate. They decreed that that would take place. Well, of course, the uproar in Republika Srpska was that you're destroying our independence... But, of course, now most of the entrepreneurs think, “Jesus. Now I can really do some business.”

Q: Yeah. What – Did you run into problems of what a typical, you know, move towards full market-driven economy, which is, you know, the scams and pyramid schemes and things like that – In other words, a bit of economic criminality, as well?

BUCK: We were heavily involved in promoting transparency in government. The third leg of our reconstruction program, besides getting credit out to private businesses and

repairing war-damaged infrastructure was to get the fundamental instruments of economic governance---of the enabling environment---established. We were heavily involved in setting up a balanced and fair tax system, in making it fair, transparent, and open. Similarly, we worked on helping establish a transparent and data-based budgeting system. We had a large program to set up a banking supervision and monitoring program as well as drafting the provisions that governed the functions of a private banking regulatory system. We helped set up the Central Bank in Sarajevo as it began to function as an independent authority. We worked with it in the issuing of its new currency, when it moved from the German mark to the convertible mark, which became the currency of the realm. But we set up the regulation for the banking system so that people would have confidence in it. And, we were key to providing assistance in developing a privatization program to get rid of a lot of old enterprises that had few assets and a few former employees that needed to be moved into more productive areas.

A very area that we worked in that I think was a singular success was called the Payments Bureau. When Yugoslavia still existed, the Payments Bureau was a government office that functioned as a bank and as a treasury, and industries, enterprises, and individual firms, each day, would turn their income over to the Payments Bureau, which they had to make payments to through the Central Bureau, much as you would do through a bank. But the Payments Bureau had a monopoly on information, and it had a monopoly on the monetary system as well as the fiscal regime information. You paid your taxes to it, and it paid government employees through it. As a result, the government knew everything that was happening. It was a mechanism of political, as well as financial, control. It was a virtual monopoly on public and private economic transaction information and a major impediment to rapid private economic investment and exchange.

For a market economy to develop, the Payments Bureau had to be abolished. We needed to have a banking system performing those functions. We needed a government treasury that was not monitoring what everybody did, but collecting and counting the amount of money coming in and putting it in the bank and making payments according to law. So, we, AID, authored a study of the payment system and the problems that it was causing and how it was detrimental to private economic growth and financial stability. We worked with the Bank and the Fund to carry out a program to dismantle it, and replace it with a government treasury and with the appropriate regulatory and supervisory framework for the commercial banking system.

We had enormous opposition to the speed with which we did this from the IMF. Fund staff and the UN High Rep's Office said it would take us 18 to 24 months to do it, and my staff and I said we're going to do it in three. We worked with the government, and the government bought into this, and it was replaced in the time frame we recommended. It had a massive impact on transparency, and people feeling that, well, you can operate now independently. You don't have to worry about Big Brother looking over your shoulder, monitoring everything that you did. So, that was a real success. But it's interesting: When the prime minister used this – He called me in one day, before we got around to dismantling the Payments Bureau, and he said, “I see that you've given a loan to company

X. Company X is –” He didn't say it, but we knew it was a political opponent of his. “You shouldn't do this.”

I said, “How do you know this?”

He said, “The Payments Bureau. I get a daily report on it, and I know you're doing it.” So, I could see how they were using it for their own political purposes.

Q: And yet, remarkably, you were able to convince him to let go of it and move beyond this sort of –

BUCK: I'm not certain what their motivations were. I think a lot of them had interest in the private banking system, and they saw that they could make more money there. The other thing is that they were genuinely interested in becoming part of the EU or a western nation. They recognized that this was part of being part of the international monetary system right. You didn't have a communist relic as you moved to become part of the West. And, I think they understood that when we demanded adherence to conditionality that we would enforce it. I would have brought the overall international assistance program to a halt if I could over this if I had to.

Q: Did you use that, or did the other entities that were sort of moving Bosnia out of the Civil War use, hang the possibility of becoming part of the EU (European Union) or, you know, part of the larger commercial networks? Was that effective?

BUCK: This was the stick and carrot that our colleagues and the UN (United Nations), as well as us, always used to do. You needed to do this to become a part of Europe, and of course, we use that in areas of, for example, when they initiated the unitary license plate. We said, “In European countries, people travel across borders, so you can't tell where they're from, unless they've got a little sticker that says, ‘I'm from Austria’ or ‘from Germany’ or what have you.”

This was always used as a means for getting reforms. The problem was that in Bosnia, even though there was a peace accord, the ethnic tensions were still there, and the people in power were those who were in power during the war. They were still focused in many respects on ethnic issues, rather than developmental and political developmental issues. The most important thing to them was their ethnic constituency. And sadly, to a large extent, that is still the problem with Bosnia.

Q: It's just it's still – There's still a lack of trust and a suspicion among the elements.

BUCK: Unfortunately it may take many generations of change. It used to be that you would start out a conversation with one individual, and the first would be, let's say, representing a political or economic position, and their conversation would begin with, “In 1389, we did this.” It would go on and on for another hour on how their ethnic group had been harmed and damaged and discriminated against. After, you know, hearing this a number of times, it like, “Sorry, let's move to 1995.”

Q: How long did you stay there?

BUCK: I was there from – What was it? '95 to '99. So, I was there almost four years.

Q: Basically, building a new state, essentially? Or, outward, you know, elements of a new state.

BUCK: Yes, and the Bosnians had effective government institutions during the war. To their credit, they were able to maintain an education system. They were able to maintain a modicum of a health system. They kept the transportation system, to the extent that they could, open. So, our efforts were taking existing institutions, modifying them to make Western, democratic, and free economic development criteria. We had a relatively trained cadre of people. It was fairly unlike Central Asia, where the concept of a market economy was virtually nonexistent.

Q: Were you able to hire local employees for your mission?

BUCK: We got we got really high-class people, people who had experience working in government or people who had had experience working in international organizations or overseas. Most Bosnians either had relatives that worked in Western Europe, or themselves had had been to Western Europe. They understood the ideas that we had of a market economy, of consumer preferences, of contracts, of the rule of law, of an enabling environment. These are concepts that were well-known to them. So, making the reforms and becoming independent and having this function from Bosnia, rather than directed by Belgrade, came to them very quickly.

Q: Now, you started out the conversation talking about administrative leave within USAID, and how difficult it was to ramp up and work in this immediate post-conflict, or near post-conflict, situation. In the four years you were there, did USAID evolve enough institutionally to be able to do it again when the time came, and when it was called upon to do it again?

BUCK: No, unfortunately it did not. I think that one of the – Because at one point, I think Bosnia was a fairly – It had moved from zero to a fairly significant percentage of AID's overall development budget, so people became acquainted with the approaches that we used, with the concept, and understood what was going on. I think the other thing is, the people that we were able to get moved up very quickly. I found that the people that we got to go to Bosnia, many were fairly junior officers who were willing to take a risk, who were pioneers. They were rewarded for that. I know all of them showed that they had talent and the capacity to do it, and people saw that going into these new areas had certain advantages.

But the system itself... I'm not certain has changed. One thing that AID developed was its Office of Transition Initiatives, which was an idea that Brian Atwood had come up with. OTI was one of the first entities that we had in Bosnia, and to me it provided a

model for the rest of AID. It was lean, it was quick, it was responsive. I had it in Bosnia, and it really was excellent in terms of giving me an idea and information on what was happening, where opportunities were, what they were doing, what could be done. They had a good sense of the political realities. And, OTI had developed rapid response mechanisms to enable it to address urgent needs quickly.

Q: But now OTI survived as an office, and we don't need to go into the future of OTI yet, but at least that element within USAID – And of course USAID also runs, more or less, the Foreign Disaster Relief.

BUCK: Right. Yes.

Q: So, there are there are pieces there that can respond quickly, but you're saying, sort of, more overall as an institution, this was not such a gigantic challenge that it felt it needed to change significantly internally the USAID side.

BUCK: You know, we didn't change our personnel policies; we didn't change our program development cycle, whereby you do your analysis, you identify the problem, you work with the government, you work by the community. You get an idea what you want to do. You go through this god-awful long 18-36 month process of doing papers and justifications, and – AID still does it. That's just to define an issue and how to address. Then add a year or so to contract and get people on the ground.

However, in the case of Bosnia, as well as later in Kosovo and Afghanistan, you have some people that recognize that this was not applicable to the realities of an urgent post-conflict thing scene, and so they allow for exceptions. But all of it was done by exception, rather than, "This is a preferred method of responding." However, I think in Bosnia, by the time I finished up in Bosnia, AID was beginning to see that post-conflict issues are something that that, developmentally and conceptually, AID needs to think about. Because this is where – Bosnia is not going to be the first, and of course it obviously was not the last. So, as a developmental issue, AID began to think about it.

Q: Interesting. Because all of this, of course, happens during the period of the Clinton administration, and, you know, it had its needs to respond urgently. You finish in Bosnia in 1999?

BUCK: Right.

Q: At that point, was USAID still planning to remain as large and as involved as it was, or were you beginning to see some sunsetting?

BUCK: No. Our program levels had come down, but then there were other opportunities. I'm trying to remember when Milosevic fell in Serbia, which gave new opportunities for us, for the United States. The international community in Serbia was one of the real factors, but, you know, we were continuing to have a fairly large and significant program when I left Bosnia. While I was in Bosnia, we were partially watching what was going on

in Kosovo, and even though Kosovo was part of Yugoslavia. Bosnia did not consider Kosovo to be a real close friend and still had more important issues to be concerned with then Kosovo. It had been like any other entity a republic within former Yugoslavia, just one of several. There was no special relationship, although as I left Bosnia, fairly significant numbers of people who had been expelled from Kosovo were settled in refugee camps in Bosnia, but they were discriminated against because of their ethnicity. This was disturbing since the Bosniaks had just suffered through a grueling war largely founded on ethnicity, and their lack of empathy was disappointing.

Q: Interesting. Okay.

BUCK: So, that's where I kind of became familiar, because our disaster assistance people had been so effective in Bosnia, but had phased out. They again came in to work on helping Kosovars who were in Bosnia. They'd come full circle.

Q: Did you stay in Bosnia long enough to provide any guidance or assistance for what was going on in Kosovo?

BUCK: Well, again I got the phone call in the middle of the night, and this is while the NATO bombing of Serbia, because of the expulsion of the Kosovars that was going on, was still occurring. I was asked to go and see if we could do something in Kosovo, so I went down there – and this is while the bombing was still going on – and tried to figure out what the United States might be able to do to help if the bombing campaign were successful and the Serbs pulled out and allowed the Kosovars to develop their own entity. Then, actually, for about a year and a half here, I was kind of dual-hatted: They named me as the director in Kosovo, and I continued directing the program in Bosnia, although I had a deputy that I had a lot of confidence in that really ran things in Bosnia. But for a good six to nine months, I would spend a week in Bosnia and a week in Kosovo, and then go back again.

Q: And even – I mean, this is while hostilities are still going on?

BUCK: Hostilities were on for about the first three to four weeks that I was there, and then there was the cessation of the bombing, an agreement with the Serbs. Immediately, what we saw was a massive return of displaced people and refugees to their homes in Kosovo. Of course, then there was the UN resolution setting up an administration for Kosovo.

Q: Now, what – So, let's take a moment then on Kosovo.

BUCK: Can I take a quick break?

Q: Okay.

Q: Okay. So, now let's return to what you're doing with Kosovo, because as much as it has the same sort of post-conflict situation, I imagine its needs and the kind of assistance USAID can give are distinct, in some ways, from Bosnia.

BUCK: In a way, Kosovo, to me, was the opportunity to set up a state, an economic entity, as you would like it, that is, to build your dream economic structure. UN resolution UNMIK Resolution 1244, that created UNMIK, or the United Nations Mission in Kosovo, was responsible for the province upon the conclusion of the bombing campaign. It had four pillars, or four areas of responsibility: economic development and growth, civil society, the humanitarian situation, and government administration. And each of those pillars, as we called them, had an organization that was assigned to carry it out. On the economic side, the European Union was to take the lead.

So, I think it's important to realize when, at the conclusion of the campaign, there was no government. In Bosnia, there had been a government at the signing of the Dayton Accords. In Central Asia, there had been a government and institutions that existed. In Kosovo, there was not. There was not a Ministry of X. There was not a power system. The Kosovars had gone through 10 to 12 years of apartheid. They had been thrown out of government jobs, and all formal employment, for 10 years. Serbs had carried out those functions. At the conclusion of the campaign, by and large the Serbs left. There were no institutions. So, the international community had the opportunity to work with the Kosovars in coming up with economic and commercial and political systems, and judicial systems, that would meet their standards.

In many respects, we had the opportunity to play God. As I said, on the economic front, the European Union was to take the lead. There was a deputy special representative, who was responsible for getting EU to set this up. Well, if I complain about USAID being slow, the pace of the European Union is glacial. So, very quickly I brought in a team of people. At one point, I had 65 contractors on the ground, and we established the institutions of economic governance. We drafted the law for the Central Bank, establishing a central bank, and we staffed it. I named the first governor of the Central Bank. I put a number of people to set up the banking system, to work for him. We set up the Ministry of Finance, wrote the law that established the Ministry of Finance. We set up a treasury function; we set up a budgeting function; we set up a taxation function; we set up an analytical function, analysis and a forecasting unit.

Then we brought the Kosovars in. First of all, we consulted with them on, conceptually, on what we were doing so that they bought into the process. Of course, the United States could do no wrong by the Kosovars. In a place that was putting up statues of Bill Clinton, and his picture everywhere, anything that we said was fine. But then we staffed these organizations with Kosovars, and we spent an enormous amount of time training them, getting them up to speed. Actually, it was not all that difficult, because Kosovars, like the Bosnians, were oriented towards – understood Western institutions. Many of them had either been expelled, or had been working in Western Europe. They were all quite well trained, literate people.

So, we really set up the organizations that were needed for a market economy, the foundation for the legal and commercial codes, contract law, the judicial system, and the rule of law.

Q: The one thing I'm most curious about, of all those market mechanisms or all those economic mechanisms, is the taxation system. Because you could have a failure more quickly than anything else if people feel that it's unfair, or they avoid it, or, you know, they don't understand it or it's too complicated. How did you develop the taxation system? Did it proved to have _?

BUCK: Okay. The taxation system, initially, as many other countries in these circumstances did, focused on customs revenue. It was the easiest thing to tax. It required not a lot of sophisticated machinery. You took what existed already within the European Union, took those systems, put it into place, trained the people, and *boom*: you can collect customs revenue fairly quickly. After doing quite a bit of analysis, we determined that the best thing – Now, customs taxes are good for quick revenue generation, but as a long-term means of collecting revenue, they are not efficient, and they are not progressive. There are a whole lot of problems with them.

So, we decided that the equivalent of a value-added tax would be the most appropriate thing. But that then required training personnel, and so we spent about two and a half years getting the system developed, refining it, getting people trained, and applying it. I don't have the precise data at hand, but in the first year that the United Nations Mission in Kosovo was in operation, it paid 100% of the costs of governmental administration. I mean, it paid for the police, it paid for the tax collectors, it paid for everybody. By the end of the – I think it was by the end the second or third year that we had mobilized sufficient revenue, so that Kosovo itself was able to pay for more than half of the cost of governmental administration and was set on a course to become a balanced budget within a very short period of time.

Q: Which, of course, any new nation needs, in order to establish, you know, a credit rating.

BUCK: One of the most interesting things that we did was, we set up a private bank, the American Bank of Kosovo, and this – As in Bosnia, one of the most urgent needs was employment, and through existing enterprises that either suffered war damage or loss of personnel or needed new technology. The bank became operational, and was so successful that three years later, an Austrian bank bought the bank from us, paid back Uncle Sam for more than USAID had invested in it, and enabled us to establish an endowment to train Kosovars into the future. So, it was a very successful activity that we had.

Q: That's remarkable.

BUCK: At the end the bombing campaign, basically, almost all of the Serbs left, except for about 10% who remained up north, and a few enclaves. We tried to work across

border, to work in Republika Srpska – I'm sorry, in the northern part of Kosovo. We found a few people that we could work with, and we did so, and worked in a number of areas where, as in Bosnia, we had certain stipulations that minorities had to be respected. Minorities had to be allowed to return, and they had to be protected. We found a couple of – Particularly in the north-eastern – sorry, the north-western – part of the country, we found a mayor and a few other people who would work with us very closely.

But there were the hardliners in the town of Mitrovica, up in the north. There was a deputy special UN representative I believe he had the title of deputy, or special representative there that was constantly frustrated, because Serbia was paying the salary of all the people, and it was, of course, calling the shots. And the mayor of Mitrovica said, “Under no circumstances will you allow Kosovars to return,” and so he continued to operate an apartheid city state. But we were in some of the enclaves, where they did allow traffic in and out. They allowed people to return.

We made a very special effort to work with those minority groups, ensure that they were protected, ensure that they had access to resources, particularly the work that we were doing of financing for private sector development, in terms of infrastructure repair, infrastructure development.

Q: Did all of the negotiations you did with the other major entities involved in Kosovo... Did that have an effect on USAID? In other words, creating new networks, at least in Europe, that could deal with similar situations – Was that at least an outcome of what you did in Yugoslavia?

BUCK: Let's take the area of democratic development and free press. In Bosnia and in Kosovo, we worked with organizations that were promoting free press, promoting laws that governed the broadcast and print industries, that ensured their freedoms. Our people worked with a variety of organizations in Holland and Austria that were promoting these democratic practices. Our people became familiar, I think, with what other organizations were doing internationally to promote these norms. We developed two independent television stations in Bosnia, and set up transmitters to transmit this throughout the province. We worked very closely with the OSCE in doing this, in the financing of these, and in trying to figure out how we could finance private print and electronic media in the future. They've got a very small market, and how could you come up with a means of making them financially viable. We didn't want to have official governmental news stations, but one of the ways getting revenue was to have the government collect a tax on every television set or every antenna or every receiver that you use. So, we hadn't come up with a solution to that difficult thing, but we worked with our OSCE colleagues.

Q: One other sector I'm curious about is telecoms, because once again, after a war, and when you're rebuilding a society, in a way they can leapfrog over many generations of developments of time and grab what is most modern.

BUCK: That, I think, is great – Kosovo is a great example of that, and during the bombing campaign, or while the Kosovars were out of the country in Macedonia, one of

the international telecommunications providers gave a number and a lot of equipment to some of the people that had been expelled from Kosovo, so they could make phone calls in these refugee camp. So, they had a set of equipment of antennas and receivers and what have you to enable families to try to find out where missing members were or to keep up with how things were where they were temporarily settled.

After the people that had been expelled returned to Kosovo, the organizations turned this equipment over to an individual who had happened to work for the U.S. office in Kosovo---when the embassy had had a branch office, attached to the embassy in Belgrade, which had a small branch office in Pristina. That individual took the equipment, moved it to Pristina, and very quickly decided that he could use it. Everybody could make their phone calls, let them know how the family was, if the house had been bombed out of whatever. He then got a group of entrepreneurs to invest, and using the knowledge that he had and the skills that he had, set up a mobile telephone company, which is, of course, the largest one now in Kosovo.

That individual, who I became quite close to, later became the First Kosovar ambassador to the United States. It's a real entrepreneurial success story. We didn't put any money into it. I mean, he used his own resources, his own ingenuity and intelligence to come up with the resources.

Q: Has Kosovo come along, as you would have hoped, based on the beginnings that you saw?

BUCK: Kosovo – I mean, the institutions of government, I think, have the sort of setting that we would like, and they're being exercised by and large in a fairly responsible manner. There's not the gross corruption there that you see in so many other countries. Not to say that there isn't, but it's not as gross and there certainly is no kleptocracy. They are relatively self-sufficient economically and because of the budgeting and taxation system that we established, don't have to depend on the international community to finance current government operations. The problem with – Kosovo's problem is that one, its greatest trading partner, Serbia, doesn't recognize its independence, and therefore external economic relations are difficult. But the other important thing is, Kosovo has very few economic resources. Its greatest resource were the people that it had exported to Europe to work, and remittances were the most important component of its economy. Kosovo has yet to find those sources of employment and use of resources that would replace, in essence, the subsidies that the remittances and the *Gastarbeiter* used to bring.

Q: Right.

BUCK: While I was there, we looked at the real potential, which was first agriculture. That had some potential, but you were competing with similar countries with similar agro climatic conditions. The other thing was, it had significant lead, copper, zinc, and other mines, but the mines were in the Serbian north. Besides that, the huge mining complex in Trepca, was a major polluter. A great environmental problem. It had had investment by foreign companies, at one time, but there was a very complex legal-financial balance

sheet, and so nobody wanted to put any money into something without certainty of title and no inherited environmental liabilities.

Of course, the Kosovars were constantly asking us to help them resuscitate this, but having the major ethnic issues and ownership issues, it was just something that we didn't get involved in. So, finding engines of growth, I think was one of the major issues that we never, while I was there, were able to satisfy.

Q: Was there any major concern about radicalization, you know, in this new world of online connections to all sorts of different kinds of Islam?

BUCK: No, not while I was there. The Islamic humanitarian groups were active there and we followed them closely. I think that they may have been responsible for the construction of some mosques, but nothing like what we saw in Bosnia, where construction and regular implementation of mosques was a major investment by Saudi Arabia, Kuwaiti, and other states. But they were done, there, on a very open government – Not government to government, but recognized as a government investment, as opposed to investment by people individuals or organizations doing it for religious purposes.

Q: So, at this point in 1999, looking back, would you say now that USAID was at least somewhat better prepared for what was to come? Because it's just a few years later when USAID is going to get tested again, very heavily, in post-conflict situations.

BUCK: Again, I think it's on an individual level and depended upon the talent, the skill, the strength, the absence of risk aversion, and the hutzpah of officers who were willing to push the system. There were people who understood what other international organizations, that there were other non-governmental organizations active in whatever their field might be, whether it's press, whether it's housing, whether it's governmental taxation and means of taxation and training abilities and technical assistance capacity, that they could draw on. But I don't really think that there was major thought given to how AID would respond to another post-conflict situation. Institutionally, it was not prepared.

Sometime in 2008 or 2010 a colleague of mine was commissioned to look at what economic issues USAID should address in immediate post conflict situations. It turned out to be a superb primer for officers going into the situations I had been faced with and gave them an overview of the immediate issues they should look at and the most urgent priorities for action. While this was great to guide economic programming, unfortunately our colleagues in the personnel, legal, management, administrative, or Washington organizational side of USAID have never done any similar systematic examination of “How to set up USAID Missions in 24 hours.”

Q: Later on, when we get to Afghanistan, we'll have a chance to look back and compare the experience you had in Bosnia and Kosovo to Afghanistan and think about that. So, we'll pause here and then pick up with the next post.

Q: So, today is October 17th. We're resuming our interview with Craig Buck in his tour in Central Asia. Now, what I wanted to do was ask you to reflect on how successful the programs were, and if they were, what made for their success or what made for their failure? Because obviously, this is the first time USAID had been in a situation like this.

BUCK: Let me speak first to Montenegro, which is a program that we passed on to the USAID (United States Agency for International Development) mission in Serbia, once that mission was established, or more than a year after we had gotten it underway. While I was in Kosovo AID/W asked us to get a program going in Montenegro. We invested in a comprehensive program of economic reform, and we had been working with the Ministry of Finance, with the prime minister's office, on establishing Montenegro's economic independence. We were pushing to ensure that Montenegro was not a stepchild to Serbia, and this was a part of our political issue of trying to separate Montenegro from Serbia and from Slobodan Milošević, who was still running Serbia.

I think that we were relatively successful in that, and there were a couple of things that influenced it. One, we had a good dialogue with senior leadership. Two, they understood – In fact, we were following their lead. They were the ones that wanted to have their independence from Belgrade – economic independence, if not political. They did not want to be pushed around, as they had been in the past by the Serbs. So, they were quick to adopt our reforms. They placed senior people in positions that could adapt the ideas and concepts that we had quite readily, and so when I turned over the – or we turned over – the program in Montenegro to the USAID Serbia mission after Milosevic fell, I felt that they were well on their way to achieving our political and economic ends.

The program we got going in Montenegro was mostly done behind the scenes. For a long time we did not overnight in Podgorica for security reasons. We were taken into the capital on a daily basis in Montenegrin secret service vehicles, and driven out to Kosovo or Dubrovnik, Croatia at night.

Q: One question. One last question for Montenegro before we go on: I had been serving in Vienna and one of the international organizations in the '90s, and then returned to Central Europe and various other jobs, and what I heard in Central Europe about Montenegro was, early in its independence it had become a kind of Russian enclave, where there where a lot of Russian mafia money was being laundered. Did you have any sense of that in the work you were doing there, or was that maybe perhaps an overblown reputation?

BUCK: Before we arrived there, that was a major issue. The United States and the European countries had a very distant relationship with Montenegro; I think cigarette smuggling was one of the major issues that they had, and I think one of the prime ministers or previous prime ministers had been indicted in Italy or one of the other countries. Fortunately, that epoch was behind us when I became involved in it in 2001-2002. Yes, there was a real concern about the level of corruption, but we did not get into

some of the things that were major issues of diversion of state resources, such as privatization. What we dealt with was the taxation system, the budgeting system, the treasury, the accountability of government funds and where they should be directed to achieve economic development and autonomy, and setting up an autonomous central banking authority.

So that's – it was an issue that we were concerned about, and so we deliberately did not get involved in those types of programs that would have presented major concerns.

Q: Okay.

BUCK: Then, in Kosovo, by the time I left, Kosovo had moved from the international community paying 100% of government costs, to using their own resources, which we had helped mobilize and for which we had developed a tax policy and tax administration systems that enabled them to cover more than two-thirds of their own costs – for operating expenses, not capital investment. They had trained people in place. We had Kosovars that had moved in to take over the Central Bank, where we had initially had the expatriate staff managing.

While the European Union was the titular head of economic policy, in fact, the U.S. government was the one that provided the backbone and managed to flesh out where these policies should be going. We filled in quickly with Kosovars behind it, and they had held an election, which they had managed. They had their own Parliament. So, they were, from a political perspective, beginning to show a bit of political maturity.

On the economic scene, while as a government they were capable of managing their own resources, economic growth was stagnant and continued, in that there were not major growth engines. We certainly did not find one, and as I say, at one point we tried in agriculture. They had some natural mineral resources, but they could not be exploited for reasons of title and politics.

So, Kosovo as I left was an independent state, but dependent upon the largesse of the international community, as well as the largesse, in the form of continuing to allow large numbers of guest workers in Europe, which were a major source of not only foreign exchange, but also extremely important in terms of creating a Western concept of both democracy and economic systems. They understood consumer wants. They understood efficiency; the sorts of things that you understand within a Western context, they understood and could apply within their own province.

On September 11th, I was in Sofia, Bulgaria for a USAID director's conference. So, the directors of all of the Eastern European missions were there – I think there were probably about 20 or 30 of us, plus a group from Washington, including the AID administrator.

Q: Holy cow.

BUCK: We all know what happened then. Andrew Natsios was the AID administrator. We talked about what the implications of this might be, and I anticipated what was going to happen, and not too much longer after I got back to Kosovo, I got the phone call from Natsios that said, “Go to Afghanistan.”

I managed to find a replacement for me in Kosovo, and shortly before the beginning of 2002 I headed off for Kabul, Afghanistan.

Q: Holy cow. Now, when you go out, what is the basic view that was taken by the administration at this time? In other words, what were you going out to do?

BUCK: There was never a formal letter, as most ambassadors get, that says, “This is what we expect you to accomplish, and these are the things you need to pay attention to.” I think AID was more concerned with what our budget levels were going to be, and where – You know, what does AID normally do? To its credit, USAID is a decentralized organization. While there are broad policy brushes as to what should be accomplished, the missions on the ground are given significant latitude in terms of program development, based upon local needs, upon the desires of the local personnel, and how you interpret it based on your experience, and determine what sort of strategy and development approach should be put in place.

So, I was sent out there to establish an AID program and given pretty much “carte blanche” (a blank piece of paper) in terms of recommending, within the country team and then with Washington, as to what we should be doing.

Q: Now, the Ambassador at that time – Was that Khalilzad at that time?

BUCK: No. The ambassador at that time was Bob Finn. Ambassador Robert Finn. He had been in there about, I would say, about a month when I arrived.

Q: So, also relatively new.

BUCK: He was relatively new. Zalmay Khalilzad was the point person for Afghanistan with the NSC (National Security Council) at that time, and Zal came out about every three weeks from Washington and kept his ear to the ground with his colleagues, many of whom he knew, either from the diaspora or meeting from his past. After I had been there for about a year and a half, I happened to be back in Washington. I kept my ear to the ground, and I found out that Khalilzad would be coming out as ambassador and replacing Ambassador Finn.

Q: And somewhat of a different era in USAID’s approach to things would come with Khalilzad. But before we quite get that far ahead, roughly, what was the budget size you had as you arrived in Afghanistan, and what were the major goals that you and the ambassador then set at that time?

BUCK: I think our budget levels, initially, were in the area of around \$400 million in the first year we were there, and then we got worried that these levels would be going up substantially, and so we were looking at a level of about a billion dollars that we had to program resources for.

Q: Sorry, one quick question here: a billion in the USAID budget for this particular country – What could – Could you make any reference to that relative size versus other places? At that time, was it the largest?

BUCK: Obviously, that was the largest USAID program. I think second would have been probably our traditional Egypt program, which was \$500 to \$700. This was clearly a major increase in the program, which would take the bulk of USAID resources that would need to be shifted to Afghanistan as the appropriations process was too slow. I think the first thing that we wanted to do was continue our work in humanitarian assistance. There were large numbers of people that were still displaced; there were people who were coming back from Pakistan. So, we had a very robust foreign disaster assistance program that continued functioning.

Q: I'm sorry; one last thing: The security situation at this moment was relatively good, in that, as I recall, once the Taliban were defeated there may have been small skirmishes or some insecurity in places, but you had relative security at that moment to go around the country.

BUCK: Yes. These were the halcyon days. We were able to travel around in non-armored vehicles. We could travel throughout the city unimpeded. We could go out to eat and go shopping. It was, pretty much, fairly open. After dark, of course, we had to be on compound, and we had to register when we were out after dark, but even then, we did not have to be in an armored vehicle. We did, and this was the first time in my career, live on the embassy compound. I arrived just as the construction of the hooches had been completed. The hooches were these prefabricated shipping vans. They had shipping vans that provided housing and office space, later, for most personnel.

Our office was in the embassy, and as everyone else, we were plagued for space. We had no space, and we had an urgent need for large numbers of people. That is a whole separate issue of the logistics, and the personnel, and the administrative buildup. But on our program, we wanted to take care of the humanitarian needs.

There were about five things that we focused on first: Most important to me was girls and education. We mounted a primary education program to get people back into school – primarily girls, who have been denied education under the Taliban. We estimated that, I think, the number of school children needing books would be about three and a half million students. We ordered primary school books or had them printed and distributed. We were off by a factor of 50%; as it turned out there were over 5 million students who actually showed up. But we were really pleased at our failure. So, immediately we placed an order for more books. But, getting girls back into school was critical.

Q: Was the belief that it was simply, you know, to kind of restore the status quo ante, or did the Afghans themselves wanted to see girl children go to school?

BUCK: Oh, I think the Afghans themselves wanted to give their girls at least a primary education. I think they all recognized the benefits of that even within the paternalistic society. Whether they want them to go beyond primary school was another issue, but most of them did want their girls to get an elementary education. Later, we had a school construction program, and virtually every village wanted to have its own primary school.

The second thing that we focused on was health care. One out of four children in Afghanistan died before the age of five when we started out in 2002, a really horrifying figure. We wanted to upgrade the skills of fundamental, basic health workers, get clinics reopened, get them supplied with pharmaceuticals and vaccines, and get the health system up and running. I'll have to say that that has been a really significant program success. Getting kids inoculated, providing urgent health care as needed, has led to a very dramatic drop in infant and child mortality in Afghanistan.

Q: In that program, what were the kinds of people who did the Afghan healthcare delivery? Was it, initially, mostly NGOs (non-governmental organizations), or were they training nurses? How did you go about setting up?

BUCK: We worked through the Ministry of Health, which was being re-established and bringing back people who had been laid off . Of course, all of the women had been laid off under the Taliban, and many of them were brought back. They, of course, were quite enthusiastic and eager to get started again. They, along with large numbers of non-governmental organizations, did the actual service delivery, did the training of lower level personnel – or re-training. So, it was a collaborative effort of both government and non-governmental organizations.

The third area that we focused on was economic policy, and I realized that it would be inappropriate, and we couldn't get the American people to go along with, paying forever for the cost of the Afghan government. So, we worked on establishing the Ministry of Finance as a viable institution. At that time, the Minister of Finance was Ashraf Ghani, now President Ghani. He and I met on probably a daily basis as we worked out a program for making the Ministry of Finance a viable institution. We worked in a large number of areas: in tax policy, tax administration, customs policy, customs administration, broad economic policy, establishing a treasury and the capacity to pay the bills, and in training staff. When we initiated our program, about 80% of the members of the staff of the Ministry of Finance were illiterate, and so trying to get them to be able to implement, for example, a taxation system, would be well-nigh impossible. So, we really started at the fundamental levels of bringing them literacy and numeracy, and helping train them so that they could carry out those responsibilities. I brought in a large expatriate team, but required that they immediately use Afghans that could carry out their functions once the expats left.

Another element of this program was establishing the banking system and getting that up and running. When we arrived, the Afghan currency, the Afghani, had been suffering from hyperinflation, which they'd inherited from the Taliban. We worked with the Central Bank in setting up the rules for a banking system, and setting up a banking supervision and enforcement function, and in issuing a new currency. They adopted a new Afghani currency, and we had personnel that basically flew large amounts of currency throughout the country so that it could be initiated. That was really one of the more successful programs.

Q: So, in essence, the Afghans would turn in hundreds and hundreds of the old currency for –

BUCK: That's right. And get the new Afghanis. Then, two other elements that we worked on: one was infrastructure.

Q: This, of course, would be relatively new, because USAID as an institution had drawn back from doing large infrastructure up to that point.

BUCK: We had done it in Bosnia and we'd done it at Kosovo, and so it was more or less now accepted as a post-conflict necessity. We had, at least conceptually, the ability, and we knew what resources we needed and how we could get contractors and how we should be managing them. At least the managerial concept, I think, we had in hand. But we had not counted on something, and that was the involvement of the White House. Early on, the president had talked with the ambassador, and he was very interested in our getting involved in infrastructure and in the repair of the systems that had deteriorated during the Taliban rule, or that had been destroyed by action in the war.

The Ambassador had urged me to take a look at what we could do in infrastructure. There were things like roads, there were markets, there were water systems, sewage systems, electrical power – all sorts of things that had deteriorated and needed investment. We were putting together a program to enable us to quickly move on repairing and rehabilitating existing infrastructure when I got word that the White House was interested, and that President Karzai had mentioned to the senior levels of the White House that we should focus on what is called the Ring Road.

That was a highway system that the United States had developed back in the 1950s, when the United States was involved there. It was, basically, a road that went from Kabul, to the south, to Kandahar, then to the west, to Herat in the northwest, then up to the north and east to Mazar-i-Sharif, and then back down to Kabul. There was real pressure on us as a symbolic investment, showing that we were coming back as we had been in the 50s. But it was something that – In many areas, the road hardly existed at all. It had deteriorated and been destroyed.

We had concerns, major concerns, from a developmental perspective. One of the most important transport issues is doing small farm-to-market roads, roads that enable people

to get inputs and to get their products to market. That does not involve movement of 300, 600, 800 miles; it involves roads that will get you 8 to 10 to 12 miles.

Q: Now, let me ask here: the farm-to-market roads, or the cottage industry to market roads, yes, those little pieces were short. But were the larger roads that could then get the goods to the larger cities or the places where they could be sold – Were those in place? That's what I'm wondering when I hear about the Ring Road. Sure, it's symbolic, but was it economic?

BUCK: It was important. Yes, let's not deny that there is some economic significance with having that road system in place. However, that road system is significant once you have commodities that are moving in to the system so that they can capitalize on the Ring Road. In 2002, there was very little commerce coming to that ring road. Now, as development took off, you were going to need that to move major goods to those major cities, but it was more important, from an economic perspective, to have smaller roads which would impact much larger numbers of people.

Anyway, I discussed this several times with Washington, and I got my instructions that, "The president has decided that we will do the Ring Road, and please get on with it." So, we then worked with colleagues in the government of Japan, which was interested, and also with World Bank and, of course, with the government. When I told Finance Minister Ghani, at the time, I asked him, "Well, I've got my instructions on the road, which one do you want to do?"

He said, "We want the Ring Road." And he said, "Work with the Ministry of Transport in terms of executing it." We moved quickly, and within four to six months, we were laying asphalt. The first 40 kilometers of road was reconstructed in about six months.

Q: Now, when you say laying asphalt and so on, this was, I imagine, a U.S. private company that had bid and was getting the contract, but was using local labor? Or how did that work?

BUCK: We had an overall construction manager, a U.S. firm. It, in turn, subcontracted with Afghan firms to do the precise engineering work, to hire the personnel, and to bring in the equipment.

Q: Okay. So, that there was enough equipment within the Afghan economy to do this level of work.

BUCK: It required a lot of entrepreneurial work on the part of Afghan companies. They managed to find the resources through their colleagues, from assets that were available in Pakistan, or from Iran or wherever they might get them. But they were an entrepreneurial people, and the profit motive was strong, and they managed to get the resources. But, I had real pressure from Finance Minister Ghani to give the money to the Ministry of Transport. Well, the Ministry of Transport was a subject of political and economic pressures, and it had suffered from the same problem as the Ministry of Finance. It had a

very large, illiterate, and untrained and incapable staff. We knew that the resources would go into inappropriate hands, so we had a very tight control on the use of resources to ensure the integrity of the work.

Q: Okay. Now, I'm sorry, I'll let you past the school building program, because I did want to ask one question about that. Did that also involve the local villages or the local towns as laborers, as well? So, in other words they would have pride of ownership.

BUCK: You know, on all of these, we wanted to maximize local employment, and so we used not only their unskilled labor, but also skilled labor that was available. The siting of schools was always an issue. We would try to use a local village jirga or local council, and frequently they made available land that was somewhere within the village itself. We used them, and one of the conditions would be that they had to provide maintenance, had to try to keep the place clean, had to provide security for the area.

Q: Had thought been given to ensuring electrical supply to the school and so on?

BUCK: While I was there, we realized the importance of electricity, but so much of our resources had been put aside for the road activity that we did not get involved. Although there was pressure on us, the Kajaki power system in the Helmand Valley was something that the U.S. government had funded back in the '50s, and again, there was pressure to rebuild something that had deteriorated under the Taliban and other misrule. But while I was there, we didn't have the resources to get involved in the power sector.

Q: Now, the other thing I recall about this early period as well was that there were other donors involved who were part of, you know, a donor group. Were there major aspects of the rebuilding or the re-creation of Afghanistan that other countries played a role in?

BUCK: Other donors were quite interested. I think that their most significant role, initially, was their help in financing the humanitarian emergency relief activities. They all expressed interest in getting involved in the development. However, during the let's two years that I was there, other donors lacked the ability to mobilize their resources. As slow as USAID is, I'll give it credit for being far faster than any other development organization and getting resources in place. I mean, the fact that six months after basically the White House said, "Move on that road," we were laying asphalt. Others were still debating within their own governments as to, did they have the resources, how they would execute it, etc.

But in the area of infrastructure, in the area of economics, education, health all were areas that other donors expressed interest in and committed themselves to, but actual boots on the ground was a different thing.

Q: Sure. Now, in this early period again, things are beginning to show development. You know, it's a relatively optimistic moment where things are getting better. They're more or less on track. But in order even for USAID to do all of this, did it have to begin changing its policies in the way it approached development, at least in Afghanistan?

BUCK: As an institution, managerially, some modest changes were made---the way that we acted as an institution. I would not say that there were at that point of major policy changes. Still, it took another 10 years before AID began to realize that post-conflict issues were an area that the agency needed to have a strategic framework for, and then it needed to think about how it approached it. Some ten years after we went into Afghanistan USAID commissioned a colleague to develop a policy paper, "Economic Development in Post-Conflict Situations," which I wish that I had had when I'd gone into Bosnia, or Kosovo, or Afghanistan.

But the philosophy and the guidance were not there yet. It took another decade before that came through. On the administrative side of things, AID had what they called Tiger Teams to assist in the administrative side of things, but they were short-termers. They would come out from regional offices and tell you that you had problems. Well, I understood that. I need people that can help solve the problems. They were well-meaning, and it was an effort to be helpful.

Later, after I left the scene, AID adopted a personnel policy that was long overdue, that required service in what we call critical priority countries and required that people bid on these and be prepared to move. When I was there, as in all of the countries that I served, I had to recruit the personnel. I had to convince people to release them for critical assignments, and I had to convince the system to create the positions and get them out.

Q: Thank you, because I that was something that you had mentioned earlier that I did want to ask you a little bit more about: how you went about building your team in the administrative environment you had at that moment in USAID, and what you're saying is it was basically just your muscle, you know, going around and making the argument that you needed all these folks.

BUCK: It was making the argument, and we got support from senior AID officials rhetorically, but them actually coming down and saying, "You will go there immediately..." It always took negotiations and a lot of discussion. I think one thing is that I had by the time I got to Kosovo and Afghanistan, I had a cadre of people who followed me, who saw that they could hitch their star and rise within the organization. There were eight or ten people who I had a lot of confidence who went with me to a number of places.

Then the other thing that we found appealing was that there are some younger pioneers in the agency, people who wanted to do something different, not anchored in the traditional AID approach, and eager to try out new things. In so many areas, I found people willing to take that risk. I did not find that in people who had worked in the same geographic area, or been in the same technical field, forever. They were happy where they were. But AID began to change its personnel policies. But that is still a major issue; AID lacks a surge capacity. If a new opportunity opens up, if North Korea opens, or other areas, unless things change, we don't have the ability to say, "We need 40 people in there, and we need them in there tonight." It has the inability to move.

Q: But for the moment, for the time you were there, you had, more or less, a sufficient number to at least begin all the programming and try to reach the goals that you had set.

BUCK: One of the assets that we had was our Office of Transition Initiatives, and the other final area that we focused on, in addition to education, health, infrastructure, and economic policy, was on the whole area of democratic development. That one included a development of civil society organizations, development of an independent press, and working with the Ministry of Justice.

Our Office of Transition Initiatives was able to put boots on the ground very quickly. They had resources, and they were able to establish contacts. They were able to carry, conceptually, what we wished to accomplish to our counterparts within the government or within the private sector when the broader USAID missions still lacked the staff to carry this out. So, they were real pioneers on the whole area of democratic development.

Q: You were there for the transition from Finn to Khalilzad?

BUCK: Finn left, there was an interregnum, and I left at that point.

Q: Okay. So, you didn't really see the difference in focus, or the difference in approach?

BUCK: I met with Khalilzad virtually every time that he came out, which must have been, in the time I was there, probably at least 20 times. I filled him in on what we were doing and what we thought were priorities, where we were going, and I never got suggestions on, "Wow, we should be doing things differently," or suggestions of any changes, and no virtual comments on a positive or negative on what we should be doing.

Q: Okay. That's fine. So, then, as we wrap up your time in Afghanistan, are there any other lessons learned that I haven't addressed?

BUCK: One of the things that was boiling over when I left was collaborative efforts with the military. The word from Washington were that they wanted to set up Provincial Reconstruction Teams, PRTs, throughout the country. These would be joint teams of U.S. government, through State, USAID, and perhaps other agencies, with the military providing security and providing its own resources. These would be set up in large numbers of provincial areas.

I was directed to find the staff to do that, and it was at the same time that I was directed to find the staff to set up an overall broader USAID mission. This was basically impossible to meet both priorities; I tossed that back into Washington's court. I had major concerns about the approach through PRTs as envisaged in Afghanistan

We had a very good relationship working with the military in Bosnia and in Kosovo, but these were programs in which we used the real assets of the military. They did have personnel that could provide us guidance in technical areas where we could not. For

example, in Bosnia they had people who understood poultry science and poultry development and how do you feed chickens. So, if we were making a loan to a chicken-making operation, military had the personnel that could say, “This is how you do it, and these technically – And this is what you should do.” So, we drew on those assets.

The problem that we had though was that they were itinerant. They would have a person that would be assigned for three months to four months, but then they would be gone. Many of these activities were developmental and required continuity. So, we had to have a relationship that understood the constant turnover and developed means of operating they would not fall victim to those issues.

Q: I have to say, I'm astonished that the U.S. military would have knowledge about poultry rearing. I would not be surprised that they have knowledge about all kinds of engineering and building and that kind of thing.

BUCK: They had a large cadre of people in the area of civil military relations, which was an area of the military that was, I think, an evolving and developing concept for them, just as AID was beginning to think about how you act in a post-conflict situation. So, in Bosnia and Kosovo and Afghanistan, they did have a large number of assets that we could draw on, whether it was poultry or whether it was mining or other areas where we might need some very quick assistance.

Q: These were full-time uniformed –

BUCK: Either reservists or regular military. They might be reservists who were called off their farm in Iowa or Arkansas and doing their six months overseas and then going back.

Q: And that was true as well with the PRTs in Afghanistan?

BUCK: Yes. But there, the military had a significant amount of its own resources, and I think one of the problems is that we – Given our development experience, we tended to look at issues associated with maintenance of an activity, and while a village might tell us that it wanted a school, we wanted to find out, well, was this indeed what the community wanted, or was this what the warlord wanted? If it was what the warlord wanted, was the land located so that it would enhance the value of the warlord's possessions, or was it so that it would enhance his relationship with the community, not fostering real democratic development, and was the community prepared to provide its own resources – to provide maintenance, security?

We tended to look into those issues, and the military had a very short-term perspective or time horizon. They would go in and say, “Well, we can ingratiate ourselves with this village. They will support us militarily if we build a school.” So, the school got built, and I had this, not in a military sense –

But one of the things that we did, very early on, was to construct or to rehabilitate facilities within government ministries, so that they would provide childcare and female

services, so that women could be encouraged to work. We'd take eight or ten rooms within a government ministry, fix them up, provide running water, provide environmental controls and security, so that women could go back to work. As soon as this was completed in one particular ministry, the minister said, "That's fine. Now that it's completed, I'm going to move my family in there." I had to go to the minister and explain to him that under no circumstances would that be allowed.

So, one had to look beyond just the completion of a facility.

Q: And, simply, also look where its location made sense geographically. In other words, not at the bottom of the valley, or not underneath a hill where there are rock slides.

BUCK: Each thing required – It was not a kind of snap decision, you know? Like, I've got a military commander and I've got, you know, \$20,000 in my pocket and I really need to do something, so I can show it to the general when he wanders by. It requires a dialogue and constant, ongoing attention. That, I think, was one of the assets that AID brought to this. I was concerned that, as the PRT concept developed and as they were given the mandate to show the flag, to produce results, to do something instantly, that our focus on development and on maintenance and a capacity to do this by the locals themselves without power resources would be diminished.

At that point, then, I left.

Q: Yeah. And so many other things then transpired. I understand that. Did USAID Washington understand the nature of this military-USAID relationship, which, the way you're describing it, is, at its root, USAID having a longer-term vision of development, and the U.S. military having a relatively shorter-term, simply because of the way it's staffed? I mean, you know, military officers and soldiers are not meant to stay in one place for, you know, years, to be sure that there's follow-up and sustainability.

BUCK: Very frankly, we got rolled on this. The White House basically said, "This is what it's going to be, and Craig, you go find the people to staff it and get it done." This was one of the areas where the field perspective was not appreciated.

Q: I see. Okay. Once again, as you end this tour and, I imagine, you're going back to Washington for at least a certain period of time, were you able to convey these basic lessons or this basic understanding that you had? Did anybody listen?

BUCK: I think people listened, but there was a mandate coming from the White House. I was not in direct discussions with them and, of course, there was always the, "Yes, we've explained that, but the White House has decided, so move on it." I think that, as an agency, the Agency understood these issues quite well. Then, after I left, the Agency did establish a very large program to help staff up these PRTs, and I think the lessons of that are that one needs to focus on getting community involvement, ensuring that what you're doing is something that they buy into, if they provide the resources that they provide the land, the labor, and the sustainability. And I think that lesson has been well absorbed.

Q: Okay. So, as this tour ends, you've been basically directed, the last couple of tours, as to where you're going. What happens now?

BUCK: Okay. At that point, then, I have been 35 years in the Foreign Service and I decided it's time for me to leave. At that point, then, I took off and later retired.

Q: And this is 2003 now?

BUCK: 2003, yes.

Q: So, you're back in Washington. You've debriefed and so on, and it's your choice to retire. In other words, USAID had not signaled, "Well, you know, you've done very good service, but really we need more positions at the top."

BUCK: No. I mean, there were lots of opportunities that I had. It was not like I just left completely. I mean, I had options, but I just decided I had gotten my ticket punched. Most of my career had brought a lot of psychological satisfaction with my work, but the last couple of years left me burned out. Time to move on.

Q: Alright. So, you choose to retire, but you have now a lot of, you know, accumulated knowledge about development and how development has changed and where it needs to go and the best way to do it, including assembling teams that work. Were you thinking about taking those skills to somewhere else, to NGOs or –?

BUCK: No. Personally, at that point I was recently married, and I had spent the last 20 to 25 years working 24/7 under an enormous amount of stress, and I just decompressed for a couple of years. I was starting a family, and so it wasn't until about three years later that I got a call from a private sector organization that asked me to do some work for them. I had had a number of calls from NGOs and from private sector before; I just, frankly, was not interested. I was interested in settling down for a little while, so that's what I did.

Q: I completely understand that. But when you did decide to become active again, what were your personal goals, at that point? What did you want to accomplish later on, after having retired and so on?

BUCK: Well, I went with a private profit-oriented company because, one of the things that I did when I was with USAID was, I demanded performance and meeting standards for the organizations. I found that far too often, our AID officers did not have a clear vision as to what they wanted to accomplish and the time frame that it could be accomplished in, and therefore contractors or NGOs or others who had U.S. government resources were not given sufficient direction and timelines and performance standards. To me, if you were taking Uncle Sam's, money you were expected to show results. I, in the course of my career, terminated or redirected large numbers of activities to get better results.

When I decided to go back to work, I joined an organization that primarily provided contracting for USAID, as well as the other development organizations, and I saw things from their perspective. I saw AID personnel that were directing, and from my private sector perspective, I saw that it confirmed many of the biases and prejudices that I had. These organizations would get by with what they could to make money. And while many of them had personnel that were committed to development, and were very interested in achieving results in helping to improve the lives of people, there were a lot of people who were in this for the money.

So, I saw both sides of the coin. But as I say, I did work with a lot of people who were really committed to development. But within the private sector, there was a lot of work done in trying to be competitive, but we were competitive with the same people. We all had the same rolodex. We all used the same personnel. To me, there was very little distinction between the contract groups that AID tended to use.

Q: Let me ask you something about these contract groups: when you say that, you know, they were in it for the money, I understand that. Were these relatively small contract groups, or were these publicly held corporations that, you know, had subcontractors and so had responsibilities to stockholders and bottom line and so on? In other words, the basic structure of these contractors that USAID turns to – And the reason I ask is, I'm thinking about the huge companies that can move things relatively quickly – Bechtel, you know, the others of that nature.

BUCK: The contractors ranged from, you know, one and two-person mom-and-pop operations, up to the very large, to the Bechtels. AID contracting provides some interesting data. I believe that if you take the top five or six USAID contractors, they would take 50 to 60 percent of AID resources or AID-contracted resources. So, there are a number that are really large. And if you take the top 20, you probably get 80 to 90 percent of AID contracting. So, within a group of 18 or 20, you get the bulk of our outsourcing for private contractors.

Then, it is quite similar within the non-governmental organization community. They, again, are probably eight or ten very large ones, and then others are much smaller. I'll give them credit: the NGO community I don't think are nearly as mercenary as the private sector, and many of them bring longer-term skills. They set up local units. They do a lot better than the private sector in terms of having local staff, and are not nearly as expensive as private sector organizations. They get good on-the-ground knowledge.

Q: While you were working for the private sector, were there any particular projects that you want to mention as particularly illustrative or effective that, from that perspective, would be interesting today for people thinking about how to improve USAID's overall efficiency?

BUCK: Well, I think two things: one, they initially employed me for working on an infrastructure activity, and AID was trying to get a contractor to work worldwide

handling infrastructure activities, because over the years, as AID moved away from large capital projects, it lost its engineering and its project management capacity. They realized that in many instances, we did need to work on power, water sewage, and other critical capital issues. AID was attempting to bring on board a contractor to handle that, and they wanted me to work on how we might best position ourselves for that.

Well, ultimately, I don't think the thing ever worked out while I was still associated with the company. The other thing is, the company that I was with had a contract in Afghanistan, working on economic policy.

Q: Which is, you know – No wonder that they were interested in you.

BUCK: I had been far enough away from it so I had no conflict of interest. I wasn't aware of what they were doing at that point

Q: How long did you stay with them? Were you were you satisfied with the period of time that you spent?

BUCK: I was glad that I was with the private sector. I saw the good and the bad, and I found a lot of people that I have real respect for. But I saw that that they spent an awful lot of time trying to guess what AID wanted, and trying to write proposals that they thought was what AID wanted. I did not find writing proposals for AID to be what I wanted to spend the rest of my life doing, and so an opportunity came to go back to USAID as a retired annuitant, as a returnee, and so I went back to Bosnia for a while as the acting director. Then, I went back to Kosovo for not quite a year's time.

Q: Well, this is a great opportunity now to reflect back on where it began, because you were there at the beginning, and where it was. Now, this is what year that you went back?

BUCK: I went back to Bosnia in 2010-2011, for about three months. At that point, the program was much smaller it had been. I think the main things that were still there were our work in democratic development. Our large programs on infrastructure and economic policy development had come to a positive end – the Bosniaks were either able to finance it themselves or were able to mobilize resources within the international financial institutions – but there was still work needed on the judicial system, working to make it more transparent, to make it more, how would you say, independent. Similarly, there were still issues with respect to freedom of the press, and financing was one of the major issues. I think that many people would conclude that one of the reasons that the war started was that extremely vitriolic, ethnic-based media was one of the contributors to the initiation of the breakup of Yugoslavia and the ethnic issues.

So, later, after Dayton, we wanted to try to develop professional media – non-ethnic, non-religious based. But how do you do that in the country with a couple of million people and the inability to finance it? How do you do it without putting up a governmental station which then becomes government-controlled and tries to slant the news in favor of the party in power? So, those are issues that we had to deal with.

Q: Yeah. And that was still true when you went back in 2010 and 2011.

BUCK: Yes. Still dealing with the same issues.

Q: Now, you went back to Kosovo, as well.

BUCK: Yes.

Q: So, earlier, of course, Kosovo has a relatively weak economy, not much domestic economic activity. Had that improved by the time you went back?

BUCK: No. When I was there, frankly, we had spent probably a couple hundred million dollars working on the agricultural sector and, frankly, I don't think we have anything really significant to show for it. I mean you could probably point to one or two success stories, but really we did not find any agricultural areas that would lead to rapid sustained increases in income or export earnings. One of the few areas where we had some success was in development of an independent judiciary with the OSCE (Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe) and setting up a system that was independent and professional and guided by constitutional norms. So, we were continuing to try to expand that and ensure that all of the people associated with the legal system were trained and aware are the new requirements and operating underneath them.

We had gotten out of infrastructure rehabilitation, as well as our work, by and large, in the economic policy sphere. So, democratic development. And then AID had gotten involved in primary education at that point – Well, not so much primary education as vocational education, and trying to train people for work within the private sector. Unfortunately, there weren't that many new jobs opening up, and the previous vocational education system had sent people out that were technically trained, but there were no jobs. So, why should you be focusing on that?

Q: Sometimes, for these small countries that have no other domestic sources of economic development, teaching a lot of English and getting them into things like call centers or, you know, online publishing and so on can be niche opportunities, but I don't know personally if that was something that Kosovo could even –

BUCK: That to me I think was one of the areas that we should have been focusing on. In fact, I talked about this when I was in Bosnia, that what we should do with our resources is to give every child or youth access to the Internet, because they become familiar with the world's literature. They learn that people make decisions not based on their ethnicity or their religion, but they make it based on economic efficiency and what is helpful to them, and I thought that that would do wonders in terms of reducing ethnic tensions and reducing the prejudices that people had grown up with.

I found that youth in Bosnia and Kosovo did not have the same biases and prejudices that older people had. Youth that had been exposed to international information – Everybody

in Bosnia, every child in Kosovo, had a Facebook account. So, they were part of the international information revolution. We should capitalize on that.

Q: So, when you go back you also still find that a fair amount of its foreign exchange is still dependent on remittances and, essentially, the economy had not changed that much?

BUCK: Not significantly, no. It was still based on low-productivity agriculture. Telecommunications had become more significant. As I said earlier, one of the previous people that had worked for the embassy set up telecommunications functions in Kosovo and that had become a real success story. By 10 years later, of course, the international financial institutions were heavily involved. World Bank, European Bank for Reconstruction and Development: all had major programs underway.

Q: Were the Serbian enclaves, at this point, at all reconciled and a bit less closed off?

BUCK: They were still totally closed off. We were going through our feckless efforts for the last ten years, trying to help bridge the two groups, enable people to return to their homes, but they were not successful. I mean, particularly in the north, the Serbs were continuing to finance the schools and financing security personnel and governmental personnel. They were all paid for by Belgrade. Obviously, these people were not going to reconcile themselves with the Kosovars. Now, there were a number of people that we had a relationship with it who understood that they needed to trade with the south or outside of their enclave, and they needed to have productive economic relationships, and many of them did.

I think one of the most interesting things that I ever did was get a Kosovar accused of war crimes to translate from Serbian to English for a Serb acquaintance. There was a mayor from the town of Zubin Potok, which was within the Serb-held north who was one of our good contacts. His English was not particularly good, but he was down in Pristina for a conference that was followed by a cocktail party. I was talking with a person who is now the prime minister, but had been twice indicted for war crimes and even held in the Hague until he was acquitted. He was a Kosovar, Ramush Haradinaj by name. He had been in exile and his English was fairly good. So, at one point that evening, I happened to be talking with the two of them---mostly separately but they were in close proximity to each other---when a visiting VIP from Washington came up and asked me to introduce him to them. I thought it was a real hoot because Ramush was such a gentleman that he gladly translated for the Serbian mayor so that they could all converse together. When I thought about that later it gave me some hope for ethnic reconciliation in Kosovo. Normally the Prime Minister would not have been seen with this Serb, and of course the Serb would not have been seen next to the “war criminal.”

Q: Wow. Now, you had come out at this point, in 2010-2011, in a new USAID sort of program of using retirees for these temporary duty things. Had that become a developed

—

BUCK: No, this was this was, I think —

Q: Just an individual contract?

BUCK: Yes, nothing new. They had always had what they call the STAR (Short Term Appointment Roster) program to bring back retirees on a short term basis. I can't remember what it stands for, but it was a thing to bring back people for a short period of time.

Q: Because I believe I heard that at this point, USAID is considering or thinking about a sort of reserve corps, but I'm not sure that it has taken any further shape other than what you were involved.

BUCK: No, I don't know either. But, shortly after I left in, what was it, 2004, 2005, the State Department began to set up its own surge capacity and its own ability to move into these new post-crisis situations. I can't recall what this department was called, reconstruction and what-have-you, but it never got significant funding. The idea was to set up a core of personnel that could draw from a variety of government agencies and people that had international experience and were all trained under the same approach, who could move into new situations, in Afghanistan or Kosovo, and help carry out U.S. government foreign policy activities. They could all be under the same conceptual approach. But it never, to my knowledge, got the funding that they had hoped for.

Q: So then, looking back, what closing thoughts would you like to share about what AID's mission is now, and the kinds of approaches or structures that it needs in order to meet those?

BUCK: I would say probably three things: One, you need to have the right economic policies in place, and if you don't, don't waste your developmental resources. We need to ensure that governments are making the proper, efficient economic decisions, and if that's the case, then we should be supportive. Far too often, we support policy frameworks that are inappropriate or that are not conducive to development.

Secondly, AID needs a surge capacity. It needs an ability to move quickly into new circumstances, and it needs a sea change in its outlook by personnel. They need to see that this is important; it is a national security issue, and people should be prepared to be supportive of that.

Third, we need to be very demanding of ourselves and of the people with whom we work and of the activities that we support. We need to demand accountability, and we need to set very high standards, and we need to ensure that both host governments and the private sector, as well as our implementers, carry out those standards. Those are the three key things.

Q: And with regard to all of these, to what extent does the interagency community need to be better laced up, because you had talked about the difference in outlook of the different players, at least in terms of length of time that projects or initiatives would need to be

followed in order to ensure sustainability. From the interagency point of view, what other recommendations would you have?

BUCK: Well, I would direct my thoughts to my AID colleague first: we need to realize that while we, AID, are a development agency, we serve our U.S. foreign policy objectives, and we can't lose sight of that. A colleague of mine in Pakistan said, "Uncle Sam doesn't give away a billion dollars just because we like people. We expect something to be accomplished that is in our interest."

The other members of the international community need to move faster. We're all subject to democratic processes and things that keep us from moving quickly, but they need to move with real alacrity, and in too many post-conflict situations, people are looking for urgent assistance and help immediately. The international community needs to react accordingly.

I think what we've seen in Bosnia, Kosovo, and Afghanistan is that the United States has taken the lead, even though other governments were expected to take the lead. For example, in democratic development in Kosovo, the OSCE was expected to take the lead, but we were the first on the ground. Similarly, we were the first on the ground leading economic reconstruction. In Afghanistan, we tried to mobilize other donors that said that they wanted to get involved in financing the Ring Road, but after 18 months, the Japanese funding still had not come through.

Q: Remarkable. And from within the U.S. interagency?

BUCK: Well, I guess I would say that AID needs to be able to reward people for breaking out of the mold and taking risks. AID can, when it wants to, move very quickly and can execute programs. It means taking a risk. It means people willing to put their name on the line. It means saying, "I'm going to do a contract in three months' time, whereas normally it would take two years, and I'm willing to take the heat for not doing it according to guidelines." And that means that you're going to have to waive some requirements, and you're going to have to put your reputation on the line.

Q: And then, Congress or the _needs to understand that this decision has been taken, and that there are going to be some irregularities as a result.

BUCK: Yes, but I think in the case of Bosnia, Kosovo, and Afghanistan, we did contracting well outside the norm. We signed a contract in Bosnia for 248 million dollars for an activity that it took about six weeks to contract. Normally, that would have taken more than a year or so, and end up with recriminations and contests and all sorts of charges of irregularities. But we did it. In all these situations where we move quickly, when we waive regulations, when we found exemptions, when we found ways to make our bureaucracy work, we did it and we never had questions about what we did. There may have been issues around the edges, there may have been talk, but no one ever said, "You should not have signed that contract."

I think one of the reasons this was successful is because we were transparent about it. I always explained what we did and why. I always met with potential rival firms and went over in depth our rationale for deviating from AID rules. No one can ever say that we were not fully open about the decisions we took and why. I spent countless hours with NGOs urging them to bid on contracts and then explaining to them why we went with contracts instead of grants to them, which is USAID's normal course. They were always critical of our actions, but never blocked our approach.

No one ever said that the process was flawed and the results that we provided in terms of reconstruction proved the benefits of our approach. Our bureaucracy can work when you make a policy decision that you're going to do it. In my case, basically, I was told by the AID administrator, "You make this happen." So, fine. Then you talk to the rest of the bureaucracy and make it happen.

Q: And they granted you the ability to override certain procedures in order to move quickly?

BUCK: Yes, and one of the great assets that we had is called the notwithstanding regulation. Particularly in the former Soviet Union, we used a clause in the act authorizing assistance that said, "Notwithstanding any other provision of law, you are authorized to provide assistance..." which means that you can waive virtually anything you need to achieve the policy objectives in the act. Sure, you've got to provide justification, and you have to be prepared to be transparent and let people know what you've done and why, but there are means of making the bureaucracy work.

Q: Good. All right. Well, with this, I think we've reached the end of the interview, and I want to thank you again for making the time. We will provide you the transcript for editing.

End of interview